

2

Marlborough Country: Britain and the Empire, 1697–1714

A monument designed to perpetuate the memory of the signal victory obtained over the French and the Bavarians near the village of Blenheim on the banks of the Danube by JOHN, DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH, the hero not only of his nation but of his age . . . Who . . . broke the power of France: when raised the highest, when exerted the most, rescued the Empire from desolation, asserted and confirmed the liberties of Europe.

Inscription on the Column of Victory, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire

Nobody epitomized Britain's eighteenth-century commitment to Europe more than the supreme commander of the coalition forces on the Continent during the War of the Spanish Succession. The Duke of Marlborough was not just a brilliant tactician, but also a consummate master strategist and diplomat. In a series of stunning victories from 1704, he checked the French advance into Germany and the Low Countries. He maintained good relations with Britain's prickly Austro-Dutch allies, and in 1707 he pulled off perhaps the greatest coup of his career by persuading the Swedish king, Charles, to withdraw from Germany rather than pressing on and causing a fatal diversion to the allied war effort. He became a new type of English European hero, whose image was carefully burnished by Whig propagandists, and whose exploits fired the elite and popular imagination. Even though his war was ultimately waged to secure English liberties, it was principally fought not in the British Isles, on the high seas or in the colonies, but in the Low Countries, the Rhineland and South Germany. The Bavarian town of Blindheim – from which the more familiar name of Blenheim derives – was geographically remote. It was the furthest from the sea that English troops had ever been deployed in Europe – but strategically close to the minds of

Englishmen. In short, the 'Empire' whose rescue was later celebrated on the Column of Victory at his palace of Blenheim, was the Holy Roman Empire, not the British Empire. This chapter is thus the story of the development of Britain's eighteenth-century imperial mission: to maintain the balance of power in the German Empire, upon which the security of the Barrier in Flanders and the broader European balance depended.¹

By 1700, the Whig project to contain the threat of French universal monarchy to the European balance and their own liberties was firmly established in England. Its roots, however, were still dangerously shallow. Much remained to be done on the near side of the Channel. The failure to grasp the constitutional thistle with Scotland in 1689 by pushing through an Act of Union there and then soon came back to haunt London. It led to a crisis in 1698, when the Scots embarked on their disastrous colonization of Darien on the Isthmus of Panama. This not only cut across William's pro-Spanish policy, but also conjured up the possibility of Anglo-Scottish colonial rivalry. At the very least, English and Scottish strategy was not yet 'joined up'. Nor was the fiscal-military complex firmly entrenched. Englishmen had made great efforts during the Nine Years War which followed the Revolution, but after the Treaty of Ryswick Parliament insisted on the disbandment of the standing army, even though the national credit was strong. Those who paid a land-tax specifically designed to pay for the war were heavily represented in both Houses, and it was natural that they should seek to slough off the burden as soon as possible. Moreover, it was feared that a permanent national debt would strengthen the executive and accentuate its tendency towards despotism. It was not only Jacobites and crypto-Catholics who believed that a large military on a permanent footing posed a greater threat to English liberties than Louis XIV.

William disagreed strongly, the more so as the question of the Spanish succession now loomed. The death of Carlos II without an heir was imminent; the most plausible candidate to succeed him was the French Bourbon, Louis XIV's grandson Philip of Anjou. This conjured up the spectre of a union between the French and Spanish crowns in due course. Not only would this add Spain itself to the Bourbon powerhouse, including her Mediterranean lands in Sicily and Naples, and her overseas empire, but also the all-important Spanish Netherlands. It would create an empire more formidable than that of Charles V, just across the

English Channel. The alternative, which was the Austrian Habsburg candidate, the Archduke Charles, was better, but by opening up the possibility of a reunification of the Spanish and German Habsburg lines, it too presaged a massive conglomerate inimical to the European balance. The logical solution was a partition of the Spanish empire in Europe and overseas, which was agreed with Louis XIV by treaty in 1698. A compromise candidate for the Spanish throne, the Prince of Bavaria, was found. Yet William's activism over the Spanish succession proved highly controversial in English politics. On the one hand, he was criticized for any solution which resulted in an increase of French territory: the three Whig peers involved in the partition were promptly impeached for neglecting their duty to the European balance. On the other hand, there were many who felt that they were being obliged to prepare for a hypothetical eventuality. They blamed William for creating problems where none really existed. In any case, the partition plan unravelled. The Bavarian died before it could be implemented. Moreover, Carlos himself and Spanish opinion were strongly opposed to any such division. His will stipulated that the entire Spanish Empire should fall to Philip of Anjou in the first instance; if he refused to accept it as a whole, the lot would pass to the Habsburg candidate. It was winner-take-all, and the Spanish king's death in November 1700 duly set the cat among the pigeons. Rather than risk losing the entire inheritance to Charles of Habsburg, Louis advised Philip to accept. '*Il n'y a plus de Pyrénées,*' he boasted ('There are no more Pyrenees').

Even then, war might have been avoided. There was still no majority in Parliament for another conflict. It sought to hobble William by demanding that his diplomacy, such as the partition treaties, be subjected to Parliament's approval. 'Out of doors', however, it was another matter. Many in the political nation and public sphere now believed that the final showdown with French universal monarchy was at hand. They were convinced that the failure to prepare for war and seek Continental alliances reflected a misguided strategy at best, and treason at worst. A wave of petitions now hit Westminster. The famous Kentish Petition of May 1701, for example, demanded that England aid her Dutch ally in good time; Parliament struck back by imprisoning the five gentlemen who presented it. Much the same argument was made in the 'Legion' memorial – Daniel Defoe was to write 'Our name is legion for we are many' – which claimed that Parliament no longer represented the will

of the people in foreign policy. A struggle for the executive erupted, in which Parliament sought to slow down the slide to war through detailed scrutiny of royal policy, while extra-parliamentary opinion generally demanded more direct action to contain Louis. The old debates of the late Stuart period were thus reprised, but with the roles reversed: the King and popular opinion now supported the containment of France, while many in Parliament counselled caution or remained unconcerned. One way or the other, competing views of foreign policy once again threatened to tear the country apart in a constitutional crisis.²

William despaired at English indifference to the collapse of the partition treaties. 'I am troubled to the very bottom of my soul,' he wrote to a Dutch confidant in late 1700, 'to find . . . that nearly everybody congratulates himself that France has preferred the will to the treaty, insisting that it is much better for England and for the whole of Europe.' He went on to lament that 'people here are perfectly unconcerned, and turn their thoughts but little to the great change which is happening in the affairs of the world. It seems as if it was a punishment of heaven that this nation should be so little alive to that which passes outside of its own island, although it ought to have the same interests and the same anxieties as the Continental nations.' William was not exaggerating. As the French threat loomed once more, some Tories did indeed cultivate an air of ignorance and insouciance. 'I am commenced so violent a Sportsman,' one Tory squire wrote in December 1700, 'that my satisfaction to continue in the country two months longer than usual has not been interrupted by the death of his Catholic majesty [the Spanish King], nor am I a jot concerned whether the widow accepts the handkerchief of Monsieur le Dauphin to dry up those tears [i.e. whether he is succeeded by a French candidate].' Indeed, he added, 'whether the original papers for partition of the Spanish monarchy be allotted to the politicians or to the tobaccoists for the use of their best Virginia does not trouble my head'. The 1701 election, in which the Whigs called for war against France, produced a Tory majority still opposed to an intervention.³

Gritting their teeth, England and the United Provinces recognized Philip of Anjou as king of Spain. They were rewarded with economic decrees from Madrid directed against English and Dutch commerce. The lucrative *Asiento*, the right to trade in slaves with the Spanish New World, was awarded to France. In September 1701, James II died.

Despite his renunciation of the Jacobites at the Treaty of Ryswick, Louis recognized his son 'James III' as the rightful king of England. Of course he also occupied the Spanish Netherlands on behalf of Philip of Anjou. Dutch troops were expelled from the Barrier fortresses, and no compensation was offered to the Emperor. That was the last straw: the enemy was now once again in the counterscarp of England. Even if Louis had not intended to provoke, the threat of Europe's domination by a single power now loomed large once more. One pamphleteer wrote 'that the Succession in Spain is not a particular controversy between the Emperor and most Christian King, but a business of the utmost importance to all Europe . . . on which her liberty and slavery entirely depends'. He went on to claim that 'there is no way of restoring the balance of Christendom, which is so necessary for the common good, but by settling the whole monarchy of Spain' on the Austrian candidate. Finally, the author insisted that 'any kind of dismembering whatever', even if France did not directly profit, 'would prove sufficient to advance that crown to the universal monarchy'. Charles Davenant, who had only a few years earlier advocated an exclusively maritime strategy, argued in his *Essay upon the balance of power* in 1701 that the prospect of 'holding the balance of Europe . . . will make us patiently endure the Bloodshed, hazards, losses and expences of Treasure' necessary to maintain it.⁴

England now committed itself to a far-reaching geopolitical reordering of Europe. In June 1701 the House of Commons undertook to support William of Orange's efforts 'in conjunction with the Emperor and the Estates-General [the Netherlands], for the preservation of the liberties of Europe, the prosperity and peace of England, and for reducing the exorbitant power of France'. The terms of the Grand Alliance of September 1701 between England, the Emperor and Holland now committed the parties to 'use their utmost endeavours to recover the provinces of the Spanish Low Countries, that they may be a fence and a rampart, commonly called a barrier, separating and distancing France from the United Provinces.' It also envisaged the same role for 'the Duchy of Milan, with all its dependencies, as a fief of the Empire and contributing to the security of his Majesty's hereditary countries' – that is, as a rampart for Austria. Lastly, the Grand Alliance stipulated that 'the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily and the lands and islands upon the coasts of Tuscany in the Mediterranean that belong to the Spanish dominions' should also be constructed as a constraint on French power in Italy. One

way or another the Grand Alliance was to shape not only British strategic discourse, but also domestic politics for much of the century.⁵

The approach of war drove the search for dynastic stability in England itself. For in July 1700, Princess Anne's last surviving child, William of Gloucester, died. As William and Mary had had no children, this threw the succession wide open once more. In order to forestall the return of the Stuarts, and the removal of England from the anti-French front, Parliament passed the Act of Settlement in 1701. This effectively excluded the Stuarts, even if they abjured Roman Catholicism. Instead, the succession was fixed on the Electress Sophia of Brunswick-Lüneburg (Hanover), and her descendants, so long as these were Protestant. Though only fiftieth in line to the throne, she had the indisputable merit of being a Protestant. She was also the daughter of James I's eldest daughter Elizabeth and Frederick Elector Palatine, the man for whom the Stuarts did not go to war in the 1620s and 30s. It was a neat symmetry. William III died in 1702, and was succeeded by Mary's sister Anne. She had little affection for the Hanoverians, and was upset by public discussions of her mortality, but there is no evidence that she ever wavered in her commitment to the settlement of 1701. The succession was secure.⁶

Thus began the last of the three Wars of Grand Alliance against Louis. It was the second struggle which England waged against the threat of French universal monarchy, though by no means the last. It was very much a national rather than a dynastic contest, which was 'owned' by the political nation. Parliamentary authorization for war was sought and obtained, on the grounds, as the supreme commander the Duke of Marlborough put it, that otherwise 'we shall never see a quiet day more in England'. English diplomats were once again dispatched to pursue the 'Protestant interest' in Europe. They fanned out across the Continent, and especially the German Empire, in search of allies and mercenaries; in October 1702, the Empire declared war on France. The Duke of Marlborough was sent to Germany and Flanders to confront the French armies. Most of the funding came from London, but at the beginning only about a fifth of his force was English; the rest came from across the coalition arrayed against Louis. Two-fifths were Dutch, the other two-fifths German mercenaries paid for by both England and the United Provinces. An allied army was also dispatched to Spain in order to press the claims of the Habsburg candidate, Archduke Charles, to the throne.

England recognized his succession to the whole Spanish Empire, partly because this was necessary to sustain his claim in the eyes of Spanish opinion, but also because it was believed to be the only way of dealing with an overmighty France. A strategy of encirclement was devised, to contain France on all sides of the compass: in Spain, in Flanders, in Germany, in Italy and on the high seas. The allies also stirred domestic unrest in France and Bourbon-held Spain: the Protestant Camisards rose in revolt in the Cevennes region of southern France, as did the Catholic Catalans against Philip of Anjou. Most Continental Protestants looked to Britain for leadership, and voluntary groups such as the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel lobbied strenuously on their behalf, effectively becoming an arm of British foreign policy.⁷

At first all went well. Attacks on French commerce and colonies were launched, primarily to serve European purposes. Their aim, as one set of Admiralty instructions made clear, was to 'depriv[e] them of the supply of money and plate which they seem to rely on for the support of the war'. In 1702, for example, an Anglo-Dutch fleet attacked and destroyed a Spanish plate fleet in Vigo harbour, thus reducing the flow of New World silver to England's enemies. The orders for an attack on Havana in 1703 spoke of the intent to 'prejudice the family of Bourbon and advance the interests of the House of Austria'. In Europe itself, English arms, gold and diplomacy worked together in apparently unstoppable synergy: leadership of the Grand Alliance fell to London, not Vienna. The Methuen Treaty of 1703 initiated a long-standing alliance with Portugal; a year later English forces captured Gibraltar. But the main effort was made in Flanders and Germany. The first priority was to prevent Austria from being knocked out of the war at an early stage by a Franco-Bavarian-Savoyard pincer movement through South Germany and North Italy. Marlborough therefore struck south from Flanders into Germany, in order to establish a line of communication with Vienna. In 1704 he smashed a French army at Blenheim, and administered a decisive check to Louis. It was truly, as Marlborough's descendant Charles Spencer was later to write, a 'battle for Europe'. Not long afterwards, the Emperor rewarded Marlborough for his services with the Swabian territory of Mindelheim, taken from the vanquished Elector of Bavaria; on the strength of this Marlborough was subsequently made a prince of the Holy Roman Empire. The great English

victory of Blenheim, therefore, was won in Germany, by a largely German army, under the command of a man who was to become a prince of the Holy Roman Empire, in order (ultimately) to place a German prince on to the throne of England.⁸



2. Marlborough was not only a British but also a European hero. The Emperor made him a prince of the Holy Roman Empire.

Meanwhile, the war drove the process of state formation in the British Isles. Clarifying the relationship between England and Scotland now became imperative for strategic reasons. English strategists sought to forestall attempts by foreign powers to deal directly with the Scots – or the Irish, for that matter. The danger of a separate Scottish path in foreign policy had been raised by the 'Act Anent Peace and War', which the Edinburgh parliament passed in 1703. It stipulated that after Anne's death, the consent of the Scottish parliament to treaties and declarations of war would be required. The Scots had been dragged into the Nine Years War and the War of the Spanish Succession without being consulted. Now they were signalling that they could not always be taken for granted. The implications for English grand strategy were potentially

enormous. Moreover it became a matter of urgency to regulate the succession, which the Act of Settlement had decided for England, but the passing of which had reopened the Scottish debate. Offended at this unilateral move, the Scots had passed their own 'Act of Security' in 1703. Unlike the English measure – which by explicitly settling the succession on the House of Hanover had effectively excluded the Stuarts, even if Protestant – the Scottish Act left open the possibility that the Pretender might return if he abjured Roman Catholicism. England had retaliated in 1705 with the Aliens Act, which declared the Scots to be aliens unless they repealed the Act of Security. This reflected anxiety in London that the Act not only provided the Pretender with a base from which to unravel the English succession, but might also revive the 'Auld Alliance' between France and Scotland and thus the encirclement of England, which Elizabeth had banished in the sixteenth century.⁹

There was also a much broader strategic consideration. The war made ever greater demands on English and Scottish resources; it required more and more coordination. In this context the continuing colonial and economic rivalry with Scotland – which manifested itself in the continued application of the Navigation Acts to that country – was profoundly counter-productive. The Darien fiasco had shown that Scotland was a potential colonial rival; and in 1703, in the middle of a common war against Louis, the Edinburgh parliament legalized the wine trade with France. It therefore made sense to weld both halves closer together into a commercial and political whole. This would achieve imperial economies of scale to mutual benefit. The Scots would gain access to the burgeoning British overseas trade; in return they committed themselves completely and in perpetuity to the Protestant interest and the Liberties of Europe. If the coming together of England and Scotland was a 'union for Empire', it was still more a union against universal monarchy. The empire that was at stake here was the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁰

In April 1706, English and Scottish commissioners convened in London to discuss the terms of Union. Agreement was reached in July, and in January–February 1707 the measure was passed by both the London and the Edinburgh parliaments. Henceforth, the Scots would participate as equals in the English colonial trade, were granted generous representation at Westminster, and retained their separate legal system and religious establishment. In return they gave up their parliament, agreed to pay a proportion of the land tax, and – above all – they agreed

to subsume their foreign policy into that of the new composite state. Some far-sighted observers recognized this as the start of a virtuous circle of Anglo-Scottish co-prosperity; most traders south of the border at first saw only the arrival of unwelcome competitors. They knew that the Union was not an economic proposition but a strategic gambit. The United Kingdom of Great Britain, as the new state came to be known, was thus a product of the European balance of power.¹¹

Other attempts to bring the constitutional architecture of Britain and its dependencies into line with strategic imperatives were less successful. To be sure, the Protestant Succession had been secured in Ireland in the 1690s, and was not seriously contested during the War of the Spanish Succession. All the same, Ireland remained a worry, and its parliament a distraction. Plans for a Union in 1703 came to nothing. It would take another European conflict, a century later, to effect the Irish Union in 1801. Moreover, few had even begun to think of the constitutional architecture of the overseas empire and its strategic dimensions. For the moment, the American colonists were left to fend for themselves, paying for fortifications and levies out of their own revenues, under the direction of governors appointed by London. On the other side of the world the English East India Company, which was increasingly a branch of the state, paid for common defence out of its own budget. In time, London statesmen would regret this neglect. If the pressures of the European state system had forged the Union with Scotland, they were later to drive Britain and its thirteen American colonies to war and separation.¹²

War and foreign policy were also central to the burgeoning early-eighteenth-century British public sphere of pamphleteering, books and coffee-house debate, in which the nearly 50 per cent of the population who were literate could participate. Foreign news – often translated French or Dutch reports – generally took up the first page of a newspaper, and indeed dominated the press in general. Partisan sheets such as the Tory *Post Boy* (circulation of 4,000 per issue), and the Whig *Flying Post* (400 per issue) and the *Post Man* (3,000 per issue) widely disseminated news of the latest diplomatic and military developments. Most appeared three times a week. It is estimated that each issue was read by about 100 people after being displayed in coffee houses or handed around between friends. This means that there was a critical public of perhaps hundreds – certainly of tens – of thousands in Britain who followed developments in Europe very closely, partly in order to

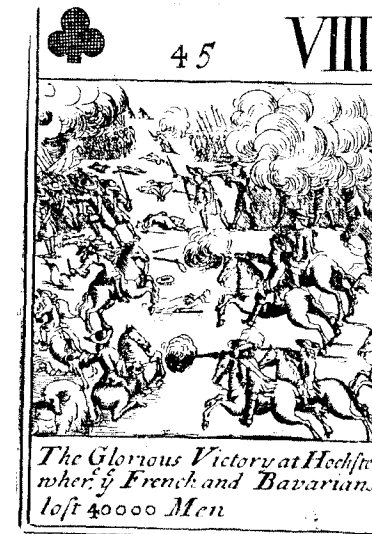
make informed decisions about trade and investments, but principally because of the national obsession with containing Louis and his designs for universal monarchy. Nowhere else in Europe, with the exception of the Dutch Republic, was there such a vibrant public sphere in which questions of foreign policy and grand strategy were the subject of intensive discussion. Joseph Addison satirized these obsessions in 1709, when he remarked that the situation of these armchair strategists was:

more hard than that of the soldiers, considering that they have taken more towns, and fought more battles. They have been upon parties and skirmishes, when our armies have lain still; and given the general assault to many a place, when the besiegers were quiet in their trenches. They have made us masters of several strong towns many weeks before our generals could do it; and completed victories, when our greatest captains have been glad to come off with a drawn battle . . . It is impossible for this ingenious sort of men to subsist after a peace: every one remembers the shifts they were taken to in the reign of King Charles the Second, when they could not furnish out a single paper of news, without lightening up a comet in *Germany*, or a fire in *Moscow*.¹³

All this mattered, because it placed English – and after 1707, British – politicians under an obligation to justify their foreign policy to the public; and because foreign policy and grand strategy became the primary motor of party-political polarization under Queen Anne. Where one stood on the great strategic issues of the day tended to determine party-political allegiance.¹⁴

This public sphere was international, and thus also global in scope, but it was primarily European. At this point, it was still a commonplace that the main theatre of war was Flanders and Germany; it was there that France would primarily have to be contained. The Spanish and Italian theatres of war were also considered far more important than the naval and overseas struggle. It was not a time, therefore, of great English naval heroes. The captor of Gibraltar, Sir George Rooke, was reasonably well known, but Sir Cloudesley Shovell, the commander of the Mediterranean was hardly a household name. Most English observers, by contrast, were familiar with the great allied commanders such as Louis of Baden and Prince Eugene of Savoy. The darling of most Britons, of course, was the Duke of Marlborough. His cause was actively promoted by Whig pamphleteers such as Francis Hare, who from July 1704 also acted as chaplain and confidant to the Duke. Everybody knew about the

victory at Blenheim, and at Ramilies two years later, but Marlborough was also famous for his diplomatic triumphs. The most spectacular of these was in 1707, when the Swedish king, Charles XII – fresh from triumphs against the Russians and Poles in the Baltic – threatened to burst on the western and central European scene. He had just worsted the King of Saxony-Poland and imposed the humiliating Treaty of Altranstädt on him. It appeared as if the Great Northern War was about to merge into the War of the Spanish Succession and thus into one great European conflagration.



3. A playing card depicting the great victory that became known as Blenheim, which banished the French from the Holy Roman Empire.

Marlborough recognized the danger at once. His fear was that Charles – who was an ally of France – might press on into Germany in support of Louis. In order to persuade him to remain neutral towards the Grand Alliance, Marlborough travelled in person to the Saxon town of Altranstädt in order to reason with Charles XII in 1707–8. To London's immense relief, the Swedish king was persuaded, leaving Germany in 1708, never to return. Here Marlborough showed himself as the consummate grand strategist with a view of the whole chessboard, not simply the military theatre for which he was immediately responsible. It was one of many educations which the War of the Spanish Succession offered to Britons in the interconnectedness of various parts of the

European state system. The lesson of the past century, and especially of the 1690s – that English security depended on an integrated understanding of the European system as a whole – was resoundingly confirmed.

For various reasons, 1706–7 proved to be the high point of Britain's war effort in Europe. Things began to go wrong thereafter. The Rakoczy rising of disaffected Hungarians, which had begun in 1703, continued to divert Austrian efforts from the main front against France. But the real bone of contention was the fate of British armies in Europe. Oudenaarde (1708) was a victory, but not a decisive one. It had been preceded by a crushing defeat of the Archduke Charles's forces at Almanza in Spain. Peace feelers were put out. While flexible in general, Louis remained stubborn on the Spanish question. The allies, in turn, were determined to unbolt Philip from the Spanish throne. In December 1707 the arch-Whig Lord Somers carried a resolution stipulating 'that no peace could be honourable or safe . . . if Spain and the Spanish West Indies were suffered to continue in the power of the House of Bourbon'. 'No peace without Spain' became henceforth the watchword. Peace negotiations at Gertruydenberg and The Hague in 1709–10 therefore petered out. This was partly because the Whig negotiators pitched their demands of Louis too high. He offered to surrender Alsace, and to recognize Charles as King of Spain; but the allies remained unpersuaded. They were mindful of Louis's bad faith on earlier occasions. They insisted on the immediate ejection of Anjou by French troops – an impossible demand – and the evacuation of Mons and Namur in Flanders as pledges of good behaviour.¹⁵

The continued determination to contain France was reflected in the Barrier Treaty with the United Provinces in 1709, which was designed to bolster Flanders against French incursions. The commercial terms, which allowed the Dutch a share of the South American trade, were not favourable to Britain. The strategic benefits, however, were massive: the Dutch agreed to garrison a string of fortresses in the Low Countries – including Maubeuge, Charleroi, Namur, Dendermonde, Ghent, Nieuport and Tournai – in order to deter a French attack on Flanders. The Dutch also promised to supply troops to defend the Protestant Succession in Britain itself if needed. These were the prizes to which economic concerns were sacrificed; indeed, the commercial clauses of the Barrier Treaty were primarily designed to put the Dutch in the financial position to fulfil their military obligations. The Whigs were thereby continuing the seventeenth-century Protestant and patriot discourse,

which had always been prepared to forego commercial gain in search of ideological and strategic common ground with the Dutch. At the same time, Whig strategists looked beyond the Low Countries to the German Empire, in order prevent the barrier from being outflanked. As the western principalities of the Empire never tired of pointing out, Germany itself required a barrier, perhaps pivoting on the Alsatian fortresses of Schlettstadt, Colmar and Bitsch. This was the impulse behind Marlborough's efforts to keep the 'imperial' contingents in the allied armies up to strength. The Whigs were thus putting in place another key pillar of Britain's eighteenth-century geopolitical architecture in Europe: a holistic view of British security based on an interlocking series of barriers across western Germany and Flanders.¹⁶

Most Tories remained unconvinced by this strategy; in that respect not much had changed since the 1690s. Because many of them remained deeply sceptical of the Glorious Revolution, or at least of the entourage which had accompanied William to England, they were naturally inclined to despise the Dutch anyway. Their leader, Robert Harley, dismissed the Whig obsession with the Barrier as a 'remote' rather than an 'immediate' issue and considered the land war a waste of men and money. Tories were also outraged by the Barrier Treaties of 1709, which granted Holland important trading privileges at Britain's expense. Moreover, it was becoming clear to them that Louis XIV would not buckle under the allied assault, and that victory in Spain was a chimera. During the early years of the war, the Tories had fallen silent: they had been comprehensively discredited by their failure to anticipate the Spanish Succession crisis, and many of them agreed with Marlborough's Continental strategy. As British military fortunes in Europe waned, however, the Tory strategic analysis waxed. In September 1709 the hard-fought Battle of Malplaquet convinced many that a decisive victory in Flanders was remote. Its impact was more political and psychological than military. English casualties were not particularly high – some 600 fatalities and 1,300 wounded – but a public spoiled by a diet of victories now despaired. In November 1709 Henry Sacheverell gave a provocative sermon in St Paul's, attacking the government for tolerating Dissenters, a recognized code for a general assault on the ministry. His subsequent trial by Parliament inflamed the London mob, which rampaged through the City attacking the Bank of England and Dissenting meeting houses to cries of 'Sacheverell and peace'. Moreover, the war in Spain now

began to go seriously wrong. In late 1710 the allied cause there suffered a double defeat: a British force under General James Stanhope was defeated at Brihuega and its commander captured; the Austrian expeditionary force of Archduke Charles was worsted at Villa Viciosa. But by then a war-weary public and monarch had pulled the rug from under the Whigs and their Continental strategy.¹⁷

Fed up with the mantra about staying the course against Louis, Anne sacked her Whig ministers and turned to the Tories under their leader, Robert Harley. If her hope had been to construct a more pliable ministry of moderate Whigs and Tories, she was sorely disappointed. In October 1710 Tory extremists formed the 'October Club' for a quick peace, even at the expense of Britain's allies. At the subsequent elections in late 1710 the Whigs were routed; withdrawal from the Continent was more popular than the Whig determination to fight on. The 'moneyed interest', by which Tories meant the fiscal-military complex supporting the war, came under sustained public attack. A blizzard of parliamentary enquiries into the conduct of the war, and even impeachments, seemed likely. The Tories were determined to wind down the land war and give greater priority to naval and colonial expansion. The new Secretary of State for the Northern Department, Henry St John, was a confirmed opponent of the war in Flanders, hated the Dutch and was a vocal Austrophobe to boot. A bitter high-political and public debate about the British commitment to Europe now erupted which was to set the tone for the rest of the eighteenth century.¹⁸

The first priority for the Tories was to knock Marlborough, the hero of Britain's European policy and the avatar of the Protestant cause, off the pedestal carefully constructed by Whig propagandists. There were to be many assassins, but none more effective than the writer and Tory polemicist Jonathan Swift. In his famous diatribe, *The conduct of the allies*, first published in November 1711, Swift sought to discredit both the course of British foreign policy and the domestic structures designed to underpin it. His work had the support not only of Henry St John, but also of the new chief minister Robert Harley, who was busy mobilizing the press against war and the former administration. It made an immediate impact. Like a handful of other eighteenth-century pamphlets on foreign policy, *The conduct of the allies* was not only the subject of general public discussion but was also frequently cited in parliamentary debates on grand strategy. Swift himself boasted that 'the House of

Commons have this day made many severe votes about our being abused by our allies; those who spoke drew all their arguments from my book, and their votes confirm all I writ.'¹⁹

Swift lampooned the idea that Britain was primarily responsible for the European balance of power. If the balance mattered as much as the Whigs claimed, he asked, why were its Continental beneficiaries – and here he had the hated Dutch specifically in mind – not pulling their weight? Surely there was nothing at stake in the war – apart from repelling the Pretender – which did not equally or more obviously concern other European powers. Why should Britain have to act as their advocate, and pay them for what they should be doing on their own account in any case? 'If a house be on fire,' Swift reasoned, 'it behoves all in the neighbourhood to run with buckets to quench it; but the owner is sure to be undone first, and it is not impossible that those at next door may escape by a shower from heaven, or the stillness of the weather, or some other favourable accident.' This was classic strategic Micawberism: there was no need to take a decision or to expose oneself for the common good, because something might turn up.

Moreover, Swift completely rejected the prevailing preoccupation with the security of the Low Countries. Of all of Louis's provocations in 1701, which included Philip's acceptance of the Spanish crown, and the occupation of Milan and Flanders, he would allow only recognition of the Pretender as something 'directly relating to us'. It was an astonishing statement which made sense only within a strategic framework in which the principal threat to British interests came not from France but the United Provinces. Indeed, maintaining the 'barrier' against Louis, Swift argued, only caused further damage. He wrote that making 'the Dutch in effect . . . entire Masters of all the Low Countries' would enable them to turn it into a trading and manufacturing powerhouse. 'And as they increase their trade,' he continued, 'it is obvious they will enlarge their strength at sea, and that ours must lessen in proportion.' Swift – and the Tories – were reverting to classic Stuart grand strategy. Because they conceived of Britain's national interest in primarily commercial terms, they saw the Dutch as mortal rivals, not partners against French universal monarchy. The seventeenth-century arguments about the right balance between ideological, economic and strategic considerations were being waged anew.

Swift attacked not only the substance but also the tone of Britain's

European policy. The early successes against France, he argued, had produced a fatal hubris among the Whigs. Swift lamented that '[O]ur victories early only served to lead us on to further visionary prospects, advantage was taken of the sanguinary temper which so many successes had wrought the nation up to; new romantic views were proposed, and the old, reasonable sober design was forgot.' Rather than settle for the excellent terms on offer at Gertruydenberg, he complained, Britain – at Dutch behest – had elected to fight on in the hope of total victory. Moreover, he argued, the consequences of this failed strategy for British domestic politics were wholly negative. The land war was being paid for by taxes on the landed interest, while the commercial lobbies linked to the ministry made fat profits. Swift lamented that 'the grossest impositions have been submitted to, for the advancement of private wealth and power, or in order to forward the more dangerous designs of a faction, to both which a peace would have put an end.' Swift, in fact, was fundamentally dismissive of the idea of public credit, which he thought specious insofar as it was not based on 'growth and product of land'. He therefore took aim at the fiscal-military complex: 'that set of people who are called the moneyed men; such as had raised vast sums by trading with stocks and funds, and lending upon great interest and premiums; whose perpetual harvest is war, and whose beneficial way of traffic must very much decline by a peace'. The classic Tory link between funny money and foreign war was thus made explicit.

Furthermore, Swift saw in the London public sphere simply an echo chamber in which arguments in support of Britain's true interests resonated unheard. 'It is the folly of too many,' he remarked, 'to mistake the echo of a London coffee house for the voice of the kingdom. The city coffee houses have been for some years filled with people whose fortunes depend upon the Bank, East India, or some other Stock.' In short, for Swift the whole fiscal-military complex which had developed to support the wars against Louis XIV was a racket designed to enrich foreign carpet-baggers and shady financiers. It was a system weighted against the 'landed interest', and perhaps less intuitively, Britain's maritime mission. He accused the ministry of spending 'all our vigour in pursuing that part of the war which could least deliver a decisive result, that is the land war in Flanders. The naval war, he insisted, was 'the part of the war which was chiefly our province', and it was there that Englishmen could 'enrich' themselves; 'the sea,' he claimed, was Britain's

'element' and the 'perpetual maxims of our government' should be to privilege sea warfare over that on land. According to Swift's reading, the recent history of England was a retreat from her naval and commercial destiny. During the Nine Years War, he complained, 'the sea was almost entirely neglected, and the greatest part of six millions annually employed to enlarge the frontier of the Dutch, for the King was a general, not an Admiral, and although King of England, was a native of Holland'. There was, in short, something foreign and suspicious about the commitment to the European balance, at least if it involved Britain in a land war on the Continent; and perhaps even about land warfare in general.

Many rose to Marlborough's defence and that of the ministry, but none more doggedly than his chaplain, the Whig apologist Francis Hare. He argued that only the maintenance of a European balance of power would deter Versailles from overturning the Revolution settlement and restoring the Stuarts. This principle underlay his rejection of peace negotiations in 1709–10 with a French monarch whom he regarded as simply untrustworthy. Anyone who was familiar with Louis XIV's volte-face on the Spanish Partition Treaties and the Pretender in 1700–1701, the argument ran, could not regard his assurances with anything other than deep suspicion. 'France,' Hare wrote, 'has been guilty of the Breach of Publick faith on so many occasions, that it is hard to find an instance to the contrary.' Like many Whigs, but in contrast to Swift, Hare saw Britain not as a property in detached splendour, but as an end-of-terrace house whose tenants could not be indifferent to events next door, or even a few doors down. In *The allies and the late ministry defended*, Hare wrote that

'T'would be a pretty sight when a house is on fire, to have a consultation held in the neighbourhood what each should do towards extinguishing it, and if it should be seriously debated how many buckets and hands each should employ, and the council should in the end in this wise resolve, that the number of buckets and the hands should be in exact proportion to the nearness each was at to the house where the fire began.

The Channel, in other words, could not be relied on as a firebreak. The conflagration would have to be dealt with well before it had got out of control. But if Hare and the other Whig propagandists could soften Swift's blow, they were unable to parry it. *The conduct of the allies* – and its many imitators – had inflicted intellectual, rhetorical and political

damage from which the interventionist camp never fully recovered before the end of the war. Marlborough himself, fearful of impeachment and for his personal safety, fled England for the United Provinces at the end of 1712.²⁰

From 1710, the Tories put their alternative strategy into operation. Salvation would be sought not through European alliances or Dutch finance, but by concentration on overseas expansion and naval activism, a strategy later described as a 'blue water' policy. St John showed a profound interest in colonial and commercial matters, often consulting the Board of Trade on diplomatic issues. Because his ministry could not rely on credit from the Whig-dominated Bank of England and East India Company, Robert Harley encouraged the creation of the South Sea Company in 1711. For all the Swiftian rhetoric about the moneyed interest, the Company was actually much more of a governmental and monopolistic enterprise than its Whig rivals. The basis of its operations were trading privileges within the Spanish colonial empire, rather than European and Indian trade. This sent a strong signal of where Britain's strategic priorities would henceforth lie. A vigorous attack on Bourbon colonial possessions would now be the order of the day. The war and British finance would continue to work in synergy, only now the focus would be on maritime and colonial expansion, rather than the European balance.²¹

To Tory strategists, the security of the North American colonies was the pressing overseas concern. Here the French stronghold of Quebec on the St Lawrence River had long been a bone in the throat, which an attack in the 1690s had failed to dislodge. This was also the view of the nascent American and transatlantic public sphere. For the moment, this spoke with a faint voice, but its views on grand strategy were to become ever more important as the century progressed. In 1708 the Scottish-born Boston grandee, Samuel Vetch demanded the capture of Quebec in his memorandum to the London government, 'Canada Surveyed'. It was, he argued, the 'new Carthage'. A few years later the Bostonian Jeremiah Dummer, who resided in London as Agent for Massachusetts, called upon Britons to secure North America once and for all. He wrote of the 'necessity there is for dislodging the French at Canada, to secure our commerce and colonies on the northern continent'. Only this would secure New England from daily attack by the 'the French and Frenchified Indians'. Otherwise, the British colonists were 'in danger of being driven

out of the country, if the French power increases'. All this was bad enough, but the even greater risk was that French penetration of the North American interior would allow Louis to link up his Canadian territories with French settlements on the Mississippi, thus encircling the twelve British colonies. By the construction of the settlements at Detroit and Mobile, Samuel Vetch warned, the French 'have surrounded and hemmed in betwixt them and the sea all the English governments upon the [American] continent'. This would sooner or later lead to the expulsion of the British. After the triumph of the Tories in 1710, these lobbyists saw their chance. In early January 1711 Dummer repeated his call for Canada – 'the American Carthage' – to be 'subdued'.²²

For all these reasons British strategists turned their attention to the reduction of French Canada during 1710-11. The instructions for Robert Hunter, the Captain General and Governor, in February 1711 show just how successful American and Tory lobbyists had been in persuading the ministry. These noted that the French 'encircle all our plantations on the continent of North America, by which (if not prevented) they may in time dispossess us thereof'. The purpose of the expedition, therefore, was to 'remove' the French and secure to Britain a 'nursery of seamen' through the Newfoundland fisheries, and 'naval stores sufficient to serve all Europe'. Here colonial expansion was not simply an opportunistic programme to enrich Tory cronies, but a forward-looking strategy of pre-emption to secure the future of British North America. The old Stuart policy of forestalling French 'encirclement' was about to experience a revival. But the option for America was also a decision against Europe. In a separate letter to Hunter, St John set out the broader strategic framework within which the Quebec operation was conceived. He complained that Britain had 'exhausted itself' financially and militarily in defence of the Spanish crown and the Dutch Barrier 'as if we were defending provinces of our own'. It was 'now high time,' he said, 'to do something in particular for Britain'. The colonial vista which St John set out was to remain a staple of Tory strategic thinking and rhetoric for the rest of the century. 'If one supposes the French driven out from Canada,' he enthused, 'and the Queen mistress of the whole continent of North America, such a scene opens itself, that the man who is not charmed with it must be void of all sense of the honour, of the grandeur, and of the prosperity of his country.'²³

The ground had been prepared carefully enough. A Mohawk

delegation of the 'Five Nations' Indians to London in 1710 was treated with great seriousness. They were courted by the government; treated to a performance of *Macbeth* at the Haymarket; had a copy of the Bible individually thrust into their hands by the Archbishop of Canterbury; and generally caused a popular surge of interest in all things American. The purpose behind this charade, of course, was strategic: to persuade the Mohawks to open the land corridor for an attack on the French colony of Quebec from the south. That was the easy bit: the operation itself, which went ahead in 1711, was a total disaster. The naval commander, Sir Hovenden Walker, blundered on to the rocks in the approaches to the city, lost hundreds of men through drowning, suffered an attack of nerves, and turned back. The land force under General Hill, hearing of this, did likewise. It was to be by no means the last eighteenth-century colonial and amphibious military fiasco. The whole episode did nothing to shake the Whig conviction that wars against European powers were to be fought and won in Europe.²⁴

This was a bad start for Tory grand strategy and the 'blue water' policy, but it was in Europe that the impact of the new ministry was to be most lastingly felt. In 1710 Parliament for the first time refused to congratulate Marlborough on his campaign that year. In January 1711 the House of Lords censured the previous ministry and its commanders for the disasters in Spain. The war in Flanders was progressively starved of men and supplies; five battalions were withdrawn in order to support General Hill's attack on Quebec. In February Parliament repudiated the Barrier Treaty with the Dutch; the new treaty negotiated in January 1713 involved fewer fortresses and was commercially less beneficial to the United Provinces. The retreat from Europe had begun. That said, Tory policy towards Europe was not simply one of disengagement; it also reflected a profound shift in the balance itself. For in mid April 1711 the German emperor, Joseph I, died unexpectedly. He was succeeded as Holy Roman Emperor in October of that year by his brother Charles, the allied candidate for the Spanish throne. The Tories now saw the spectre of a united Austro-Spanish bloc which would certainly wreck the balance of power in the Mediterranean and might even lead to a revival of the empire of Charles V. 'By this accident,' Swift wrote, 'the views and interests of several powers and states in the alliance have taken a new turn.' He explained that 'To have a prince of the Austrian family on the throne of Spain is undoubtedly more desirable than one

of the House of Bourbon, but to have the [German] Empire and Spanish monarchy united in the same person is a dreadful consideration,' and contrary not merely to the spirit but the letter of the Grand Alliance. As St John observed in 1711, 'If the Empire and the dominions of Spain are to unite in the person of this prince [Charles], the system of the war is essentially altered.'²⁵

Conveniently for the Tories, it was now plausible to leave Philip in Spain and bring the war to a speedy conclusion. Something had indeed turned up: this was the 'shower from heaven', the 'favourable accident', to which Swift had referred. The arch-Whig Daniel Defoe, for one, was persuaded. In a pamphlet of May 1711 he warned 'of the injury a too great accumulation of power to the House of Austria may bring upon us in ages to come'. He now brought his organ, the *Review*, which had been founded in 1704 with the express purpose of scourging Louis XIV, over to the cause of peace. Defoe also tried to rally moderate Whigs and religious dissenters behind Harley on the new danger of a Habsburg preponderance. He did this not because he was an opportunist who set his sails according to the prevailing winds, but because the changes in European politics warranted a rethink in grand strategy. But many other Whigs disagreed. To them, French power was so enormous that it required an equally powerful Habsburg bloc to balance it. For this reason, they had accepted in 1703 that the Austrian candidate to the Spanish throne should succeed to the entire inheritance; this bullet had already been bitten. Hare argued in November 1711 'that the Emperor, with all his hereditary countries, and the entire Spanish monarchy, would not yet be equal, much less superior to France alone'. One way or the other, the divide between Tories and Whigs in 1711-13 was not simply one between navalists and Continentalists. It was also about differing conceptions of the European balance and how it should be upheld. In the end, the argument for peace became irresistible because it appeared to satisfy those who believed that the original aim of upholding the balance had been achieved; it appealed to the large number of Tories who wanted to humiliate the Whigs, and those who were simply weary of war. Britain began to bail out of the war, and abandon her allies, not because she had been militarily defeated, but because the strategic paradigm with which she had begun the conflict was believed to have failed.²⁶

Harley had begun secret talks with the French as early as the autumn

of 1710. In April 1711, the Tory negotiators agreed the outlines of a peace, according to which Philip would remain King of Spain, Charles and the Austrians would be compensated with territory in Italy, the 'barrier' would be maintained, but the Dutch excluded from all South American trade. In order to strengthen his negotiating position, Harley stepped up the tempo of military operations. Ironically his pet project, the Quebec Expedition, was a complete fiasco, whereas the despised Marlborough secured some notable successes in his remaining months as supreme commander in Flanders. By September 1711 the 'preliminary articles' of peace were public. It now became clear that Britain would secure the *Asiento* for the slave trade to the Spanish colonies, vital to Harley's own economic and fiscal vision. She would also retain her colonial gains in North America. From the colonial or 'blue water' perspective, therefore, it looked as if there would be much to celebrate.

Among those concerned with the European balance, and Britain's Continental 'counterscarp', however, there was profound alarm. It was only with some difficulty that Harley managed to secure the vital Barrier in the Low Countries. Louis had wanted the Elector of Bavaria to exchange his territory for the Spanish Netherlands. This would have paid off a luckless ally and given Louis a clear run against the Dutch. The barrier eventually secured was less satisfactory than the treaty of 1709, but better than Ryswick. In general, the Tories showed themselves much less concerned about the security of the Low Countries, and St John, or Viscount Bolingbroke as he had now become, even showed himself willing to let Louis have the bitterly contested fortress of Tournai in Flanders. Moreover, the Whigs complained that the guarantees concerning the separation of the French and Spanish crowns were far from watertight. They were not reassured by the rapid demise in 1711-12 of the French princes in the line of succession; with each of Louis's bereavements, Philip of Spain seemed to edge closer to the French succession. The Whigs would have been even more aghast had they known for certain what they then only suspected: that Britain was in the process of a unilateral withdrawal from the war. Right at the end of December 1711 Marlborough was sacked as allied supreme commander. His replacement, the Duke of Ormonde, effectively wound down the war against France from January of the following year. He did not, however, deign to inform the Austrians and Dutch, who were thus left to twist precariously in the wind. In May 1712 Ormonde was issued with the

subsequently notorious 'restraining orders', by which he was instructed to desist from combat operations against the French. As a result, the Austrians and Dutch were beaten two months later at the Battle of Denain. Harley would have preferred to act in tandem with the allies, but his fellow Tory Bolingbroke positively revelled in Britain's new unilateral course. When the French asked him what they should do if they encountered the imperial commander – Prince Eugene, a hero second only to Marlborough for many Britons – Bolingbroke replied brutally: 'Fall on him and cut him to pieces.'²⁷

Not surprisingly, the Dutch and Austrians were aghast at these negotiations when they learned of them. So too was the Elector of Hanover, who was only one heartbeat away from the English throne. He protested vigorously that the preliminaries of peace were a breach of the Grand Alliance which would allow Louis to impose the Pretender on Britain. He wrote in November 1711 that 'The most solid foundation, upon which the present and future posterity of Great Britain, and indeed of all Europe, can be established, is to humble France.' It was, of course, in George's interest to oppose a separate peace, in order to maintain the diplomatic isolation of the Jacobites and the upkeep of an army which could be used to enforce the Hanoverian succession. Moreover George himself had been present at the Battle of Denain – where he had nearly lost his life to Bolingbroke's treachery. It gave him a personal object lesson in the dangers of British disengagement from Europe. The Hanoverians therefore began to take a very keen interest in British politics. George repeatedly floated the idea of sending his son, the future Prince of Wales (and George II) ahead in order to secure the succession. Perhaps understandably, Queen Anne balked at this blunt anticipation of her own mortality. Undeterred, the Hanoverian envoy to London, Baron Bothmer, tirelessly reminded the ministry of Hanoverian concerns, so much so that Harley complained to George about unwarranted meddling. The main concern of the future King of England was not just to safeguard his inheritance, but also to ensure that Britain could continue to play a positive role in the maintenance of the European balance of power. It was for that reason that the Whigs had invited William of Orange to take the throne, and for that same reason that he had accepted. In short, the Hanoverians would ascend the throne in 1714 not just to secure English freedoms, but to defend the 'liberties of Europe' against France.²⁸

The final Treaty of Utrecht, which was concluded in April 1713, reflected Tory concerns. Philip was left in Spain, but the two royal houses were never to be united; many doubted, however, whether Philip could be made to renounce a fundamental right to the French throne. Britain's Catalan allies were not only left to their fate, but the Royal Navy was sent to bludgeon Barcelona into submitting to Philip. Charles was compelled to surrender his claims to the Spanish throne, and was confined to his Austrian possessions. In compensation, he was awarded the former Spanish Netherlands, which would serve as a renewed barrier against French expansion; Dutch troops would man the border fortresses. Britain won monopoly rights to trade with the Spanish Empire, especially the coveted *Asiento*. These commercial benefits were exclusive to Britain, unlike the treaty of 1709, when Townshend had granted the Dutch a half share in order to keep them in the war. Britain's naval position in the Mediterranean was buttressed by the retention of Gibraltar and Minorca, which had been captured during the war. For the first time since the reign of Charles II, Britain now had a foothold in southern Europe. Yet the Treaty was to come under ferocious attack, not just for partisan reasons.

The Whigs condemned what they regarded as the high-handed betrayal of Britain's allies in the negotiations that had led up to the Treaty. As Hare wrote to the Duchess of Marlborough in October 1713, 'Tis the cause of Europe you have made your own . . . The [Tory newspaper] *Examiner* would not have us look abroad or trouble ourselves with foreign affairs.' 'Some of us,' he continued, 'can't help pitying the Catalans & the poor emperor, & . . . the Dutch.' He finished by remarking that 'Heaven can only clear up this dark scene, or knows what it will end in. Nothing human can deliver people from the dangers that threaten, who seem to think of nothing less than delivering themselves.' Hare and most Whigs believed that the Tories had put the European balance, the crucial Dutch Barrier, and thus the security of Britain in mortal danger. Indeed, the determination not to repeat the mistakes of the Tory administration was to underlie much of British policy towards Europe after 1714. When the Whigs returned with George I, their first priority was not to demand more on the nation's behalf, but to try to rebuild her battered alliances. Their critique was not that Britain had not secured enough for itself, but that the Treaty had not secured enough for her allies. 'Utrecht', indeed, was to have

a long afterlife in British political polemic well into the eighteenth century.²⁹

During the strange strategic interregnum between the signing of Utrecht in early 1713 and the death of Queen Anne a little over a year later, the Tory ministry discovered how difficult it was to manage Europe without effective allies. For example, Bolingbroke was much concerned to shore up Sweden against Russia in the Baltic in order to maintain the balance of power there, and safeguard the supply of vital naval stores from the area. Here the help of the Austrians and Dutch, in the Holy Roman Empire and in naval matters respectively, was crucial, and withheld. Bolingbroke also ran into difficulty in Italy, where he was determined to contain Austrian power. In order to do so, he promoted the Duchy of Savoy as a counterweight, and even sought to join them with the French into a triple alliance against Vienna. As a true Tory, Bolingbroke put his faith in the Royal Navy, 'instead of running into the extravagant ruinous schemes of maintaining armies on the Continent'. This was all well and good, as far as the defence of the new Savoyard territory of Sicily was concerned, but it was of no use at all with regard to Savoy itself, which was where the main Austrian blow could be expected to fall. In spite of these problems, Tory diplomats remained relatively unconcerned about Britain's isolation. In March 1714 Matthew Prior, the envoy to the French court, rejoiced that 'England is once more free from foreign entanglements, and in a possibility of being a happy nation.'³⁰

It was only as Queen Anne's health progressively declined, and the prospect of the Hanoverian succession moved ever closer, that some Tories began to realize that their grand strategy was leaving them dangerously exposed politically. Harley made a last ditch attempt to rebuild relations with the Emperor. The veteran diplomat Charles Whitworth was sent to Germany in July 1714 with the instruction to seek connections with 'those princes and states who were confederated in the last war'. This transparent attempt to escape nemesis at the hands of the reversionary interest – the expectation of compensating for disfavour under the reigning monarch by a privileged position under his son and heir – got nowhere. The worsening decrepitude of Anne now paralysed the Tory ministry. By the summer of 1714 Harley had lapsed from opportunism into apathy. In late July his envoy to France had been left uninstructed for so long that he wrote to Harley, asking him to clarify

whether he was still 'the minister of Great Britain'. He pleaded that 'Matthew should be writ to, his conduct . . . directed, and his actions justified before he leaves this court by the person who sent him to it.' For it did not require much imagination to see that the resurgent Whigs accompanying George would initiate a spate of impeachments. In the meantime, Bolingbroke ploughed on with the quest for a grand alliance between France, Savoy, Spain and Britain against Austria, and seemed on the verge of concluding it that summer. He knew that only a rapprochement with Louis or a return of the Pretender could preserve him from the terrible wrath of the Whigs. In the end the clock simply ran out.³¹

For the Dutch and the Austrians were not the only aggrieved parties at Utrecht. Another was the Elector of Hanover, Georg Ludwig, who had been one of Louis XIV's most determined adversaries. He never forgave the Tories for abandoning the common cause, and was further repelled by Bolingbroke's support for Savoy, whose prince still entertained a claim to the throne of England. George also fell out with them in 1713-14 over the future of Sweden, a French ally, which the Tories wanted to preserve as a Protestant bastion in the north, but which he planned to despoil first. The winding down of the war and the unravelling of the Tory administration thus moved in tandem throughout 1714. The Dutch had folded at Utrecht itself; the Emperor fought on until March, when he concluded the Treaty of Rastadt with France. The Empire itself, and thus the Elector of Hanover, finally buried the hatchet at the Treaty of Baden shortly after, in September of that year. By then Queen Anne and the dowager Electress of Hanover were both dead a month, and George had been proclaimed King of England.

Queen Anne's ministries had achieved much. They had seen off the challenge of French universal monarchy, pushed through the union with Scotland and secured the Hanoverian succession. All the same, the issues which confronted their successors after 1714 were very similar to those which had dogged them. The Stuart pretender to the throne, 'James III', and later his heir Charles Edward, the 'Bonnie Prince', remained a constant presence for the first sixty years of the century. It was already obvious that French power was still formidable, and France remained, with the exception of a lengthy interlude between 1716 and 1731, Britain's main enemy throughout the century. There were also emerging

threats to the east and south in the shape of Russia, a resurgent Spain, and in the 1720s even Austria. The forces available to repel these threats were stretched to the limit. The Whig executive and the monarchy had difficulties in persuading the political nation to pay for any sort of standing army, at least in peacetime. Whereas Parliament had agreed to pay for nearly 150,000 soldiers at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1712, this was down to some 16,000 in 1714. Only half of these had been British; the rest were mercenaries or subsidized allies. The numbers mobilized in Britain itself - some 75,000 - compared poorly to the wartime performance of France, with some 350,000 men under arms; the Habsburg monarchy with 100,000; Russia with 220,000; and Holland with 130,000. Moreover, even if all the stops were pulled out, Britain simply did not command even the potential manpower to match France: it had some 6 million inhabitants in 1715 (excluding Ireland) against some 20 million in France. In an age which still measured state power largely in terms of population, as well as financial muscle, this was a sobering fact.³²

On the other hand, the men who ran British foreign policy inherited the most advanced national security apparatus of the time. In the course of the late seventeenth century England had developed the most powerful navy in Europe. This was paid for through an unrivalled system of public credit. The Bank of England was the most visible sign of this; but the real strength of the structure lay in the efficient and largely consensual relationship between the political nation as represented in Parliament, the bureaucracy collecting the taxes voted, and the population as a whole. No other European state, certainly not her shambolic French rival, achieved such a degree of internal cohesion and financial rationality. It was a polity programmed for commerce and war.

More important still than this apparatus of credit was the strategic culture inherited by British statesmen after 1714. Most of them were profoundly convinced of the need to prevent the emergence of a single hegemon who might threaten their naval position, the integrity of the Low Countries and thus their own security. Britons referred not just to the 'balance of power', but to the 'Protestant interest' or 'the liberties of Europe', as well. The 'Protestant interest' came to mean less the fate of Protestants everywhere in Europe (a plausible interpretation for the sixteenth and early seventeenth century) than the containment of Roman Catholic designs on universal monarchy. The language of the 'Protestant

interest' thus became a means of defending intervention in Europe. The 'liberties of Europe' referred not to the constitutional rights of all Europeans, but to the balance of power essential to English and later British liberties. At the same time, the liberties of Europe were believed to depend on those of England/Britain, because – paradoxically – the absolutist Stuarts were seen as weak tyrants, terrible to defenceless subjects but a laughing stock to the other European powers. The 'balance of power' was the secularized 'Protestant interest'; the two terms were used interchangeably at first, until the latter fell into disuse. It was a creed to which almost all strands of British political life subscribed, with Whigs believing that it could be maintained only by direct and sustained – often military – engagement in Europe, while Tories generally believed that naval measures would suffice and would countenance the dispatch of land forces only with the greatest reluctance.³³

This grand strategy was not a charter for Protestantism and constitutional liberties across Europe. To be sure, British ministries and monarchs defended their co-believers where they could, and they often sympathized with the victims of absolutism. But the 'liberties of Europe' often required Catholic alliances and the suppression of individual liberties in other European states. Thus England's principal hope of containing universal monarchy before 1660 was France; thereafter it was Austria. At the same time, England and later Britain was quite prepared to ignore the plight of oppressed subjects or fellow Protestants. This was demonstrated by the short shrift given to Hungarian Protestant dissidents under the Habsburg monarchy in the decade after 1700, and by the attempts to persuade German Protestants to play down their religious grievances against the Emperor so as not to distract him from the war against Louis. Nor was the balance of power a self-righting mechanism; it needed constant maintenance. Sometimes, this had meant taking pre-emptive and even preventive action. Pre-emptive measures were standard practice and designed to forestall an imminent threat; preventive action involved anticipating possible dangers down the line and was considered legally much more dubious. Contemplating the growth of French power and the need for a European alliance to contain it around 1700, the *Observer* claimed that 'the head of such an alliance may be compared to a pilot of long experience at sea [who] knows how to discover the storm before its coming and to prepare whatever is necessary to resist its violence.' British statesmen, parliamentarians and

the public respected the norms of interstate behaviour as much as they could, but they never fetishized legality at the expense of security.

Military action was not embarked on lightly. Wherever possible, British statesmen tried to avoid the expensive, domestically unpopular and risky deployment of British forces abroad. They were particularly cautious about committing themselves across the Atlantic. If it took about two weeks for instructions to reach central Europe, it took two months to contact commanders in America. Just how badly things could go wrong had been demonstrated by the Quebec Expedition of 1711. For this reason, British statesmen far preferred to use diplomatic leverage, subsidies and alliances with other powers. During the War of the Spanish Succession, for example, Britain concluded some 130 treaties with other powers. In the course of the eighteenth century many more agreements were entered into. These arrangements required not only deep pockets to finance coalitions or mercenaries, but also an informed engagement with European states and their ways of doing business. The British diplomatic service was still highly rudimentary, but already in the early eighteenth century it could command detailed knowledge of local rivalries and structures. The public looked to the government for guidance and information; it wanted governments to anticipate crises, not merely react to them. As one prime minister, Robert Walpole, was to lament later in the century, British statesmen were expected to be 'ministers of Europe'.

For this reason, those running British foreign policy were familiar with the outlines of western and central European politics. They followed the ups and downs of court intrigues at Versailles very closely, and as we shall see they despaired of the state of Dutch domestic politics. British statesmen, particularly the Secretary of State for the Northern Department, were also profoundly conscious of the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire. But the position in Germany was also very much the province of the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, responsible for France, Spain and the Mediterranean generally. This was because the main threat to the integrity of the Empire usually came from there, and because relations with both France and Austria could not be understood in isolation from Italy or the southern balance of power as a whole. The British elite therefore knew about Europe, and particularly about the German Empire. A considerable number had fought there during the war of Grand Alliance against Louis XIV, and more would do so in the 1740s and 1750s. British statesmen frequently accompanied

the King to Hanover. Embarrassing gaffes or manifest geographical ignorance were rare in the parliamentary sphere, at least before 1760. The importance of Germany was also reflected in language. To our protagonists, the 'Empire' was not a place where the sun had yet to set, but the Holy Roman Empire, that is Germany. Likewise, to eighteenth-century British statesmen the 'Electorate' was not something whose votes they periodically sought, but the Electorate of Hanover, to which Britain was bound by dynastic union and to which their monarch regularly repaired. The world British statesmen inhabited – certainly before 1760 – was still a firmly Eurocentric one. And at the heart of that world lay Britain's relationship with the German Empire, the principal bulwark against French expansionism.³⁴

The eighteenth-century public sphere was also dominated by concerns about Europe, though less with the German Empire specifically. The order in which the *National Journal* directed its printers to place news items was highly revealing. In the case of 'foreign news', articles from France should be placed first, those from Spain second, Portugal third, Italy fourth, Switzerland fifth, Austria and Hungary seventh, other parts of Germany eighth, and so on. Articles from Africa were last on the list, at number fifteen. 'London news' was to be presented with 'foreign articles' in first place, and 'Articles dated from the Plantations, Gibraltar or Port Mahon [Minorca]' last, at eighth place. This was as true for the provincial as for the London press, so much so that the *Grub Street Journal* jibbed at 'the great impropriety to begin with foreign news and end with domestic . . . like travelling into foreign countries before we have taken a survey of our own'. Moreover, colonial issues tended to be seen as part of a wider European framework: even as late as the American War of Independence, the yearly digest, the *Annual Register*, recorded transatlantic developments under the heading 'The history of Europe'.³⁵

In part, the centrality of Europe in British debate reflected the balance of trade. In 1711–15, Britain exported £942,000 worth of goods to the East Indies, the British West Indies, North America and Africa; exports to Flanders, France, Germany, Holland, Denmark and Norway, Poland, Prussia, Sweden, Russia, Portugal, Spain, Constantinople, Italy, Turkey and Venice were worth £5,520,000 – more than five times as much. These proportions remained more or less unchanged for the first half of the century. Even in 1736–40, at the height of public enthusiasm for colonial war and expansion, exports to the colonies amounted to

£1,819,000; those to Europe, including re-exports from the colonies, were valued at £6,838,000, more than three times as much. At mid century, when the Whig orthodoxy was beginning to disintegrate, trade with Europe was still twice as important as that with the colonies: £8,557,000 as opposed to £3,086,000. This had not changed much by 1771–5, on the eve of the American War of Independence and at the height of Britain's disengagement from Europe, when trade with Europe at £7,725,000 was still double that with the colonies (£3,939,000). It was only after the loss of the American colonies, in 1786–90, that the colonial trade drew level with that of Europe. None of this meant that British policy was driven by commercial factors. Usually the two were conceived symbiotically rather than adversarially, but when in conflict, strategic considerations almost invariably prevailed.³⁶

Maritime affairs were also important in eighteenth-century Britain, but in a European rather than a 'global' context. The main priority for the Royal Navy remained home defence, with most vessels stationed in the Narrow Seas to deter invasion. Beyond that, the Navy was used in the first instance to uphold the balance of power on the Continent. In the early eighteenth century, for example, the Baltic was a far more intense focus of British naval activity than the colonies. The same is true of the Mediterranean, where there were many more British ships and men stationed than in America or India, at least prior to 1750. Moreover, naval and colonial expansion was pursued not as an end in itself, but in order to secure the resources for European power projection or to deny them to rivals. Finally, until the mid eighteenth century at any rate, British statesmen were painfully aware that the Navy was not technically in a position to blockade enemy harbours on a permanent basis, or to guarantee that an invasion force would be intercepted in time. Naval power was still a very imprecise instrument. This meant that the enemy would have to be stopped before embarkation – in short, through an active policy of diplomatic and military intervention in Europe. Sometimes this could be done far from Britain's shores, as in the preventive campaigns against Russia in the Baltic and Spain in the Mediterranean. More often, as in the case of France in the 1740s and 1750s, and Austria in the 1720s, it meant confronting the enemy in the Empire, or even in Flanders. One way or the other, the first and most important lines of defence were still on the far side of the Channel.³⁷

*

Before 1760 Tory heresies were – with difficulty – contained. During this period Britain built an empire in North America and India, not at the expense of her European commitments but in harmony with them. Thereafter, buoyed by the apparent success of the ‘blue water’ strategy in the Seven Years War, triumphant at the exponential growth in overseas trade, the British elite increasingly turned its back on Europe. The result – as we shall see – was isolation in Europe and disaster in America. The first British empire was built by Whigs; it was lost by Tories.

II

Imperial Opportunities

3

Imperial Restoration, 1714–1715

My lords, I am now to take my leave of your lordships, and of this honourable house, perhaps for ever! I shall lay down my life with pleasure, in a cause favoured by my late dear royal mistress [Queen Anne]. And when I consider that I am to be judged by the justice, honour, and virtue of my peers, I shall acquiesce, and retire with great content: And my lords, God's will be done.³

The Earl of Oxford, 1715, in response to charges of impeachment against his role in the abandonment of Britain's allies at the Treaty of Utrecht

The elevation of George Louis (formerly Georg Ludwig), Elector of Hanover, to the throne of Great Britain and Ireland in 1714 was both a strategic restoration and a geopolitical revolution. The commitment of the Whigs to European alliances was resumed, and the Holy Roman Empire – the Barrier and the Habsburg alliance – was soon restored to its former importance in British grand strategy. Dissenting Tories, especially Harley (now the Earl of Oxford) and Bolingbroke, were completely marginalized. The territorial context in which this took place, however, had been fundamentally transformed. The focus of British foreign policy shifted some 300 miles eastwards. Britain's horizons were now delineated by two German rivers, the Elbe and the Weser, as much as by the English Channel, the North American Ohio River, or any other more obvious natural boundary. The mental map of British statesmen and the British public had to be redrawn or at least enlarged. To the already extensive and far-flung British possessions in America and India, the Personal Union with Hanover added a substantial slice of Northern Germany. The Union flag – scarcely seven years old – remained unchanged, but the White Horse of Hanover was to become a distinctive

feature of eighteenth-century political polemic and iconography. In short, by virtue of the Hanoverian succession Britain, or Britain-Hanover, as she might now be called, lay, whether she liked it or not, at the heart of Europe. For the next forty years or so, Britain became indisputably a German power, reigned over by Germans.²

Some of the Germans were already there. The most powerful man in London between the death of Queen Anne and the arrival of George was the Hanoverian envoy, Hans Caspar von Bothmer. He stood by the grate burning secret letters left by the late monarch; it was he who travelled in the second carriage at the procession to mark the proclamation of George as King, just behind the Lord Chancellor but in the company of Lord Buckingham, the President of the Privy Council. Bothmer advised on the knotty question of whether George's estranged wife, Sophie Dorothea, who was under house arrest in Hanover, should be remembered in prayers every Sunday; he thought not, and she wasn't. It was Bothmer who liaised with the Whig grandees and the minority of cooperative Tories on the Regency Council to prepare for any challenge to the succession. He considered mobilizing the Royal Navy to escort George to Britain, and calling upon the Dutch to enforce the succession in accordance with their treaty obligations. And it was Bothmer who was to advise George on the composition of his first administration, together with the Whigs who had rammed through the Hanoverian succession. With the new wind from Germany at their backs, they could now shrug aside domestic obstacles to a more interventionist policy in Europe, and they could make that strategy a loyalty test with which Tory opposition at home could be neutralized.³

George took his time about coming to Britain. This was not – as his detractors were quick to claim – because of any reluctance to claim his inheritance. Instead, the delay resulted from his desire to make adequate provision for the governance of Hanover in his absence. This was settled through the *Reglement* of 1714, which left the day-to-day running of the Electorate in the hands of a committee of councillors. The son of the Prince of Wales, young George Frederick, the darling of his grandfather, remained in Hanover, but the Prince himself came over to England, along with his wife, the formidable Caroline of Ansbach. George now made his way across the Channel, about a month after the news of Anne's death had reached him. His appearance was greeted with popular



4. Count Bothmer was George's ambassador in London before 1714, and a powerful figure in British politics after he became king

enthusiasm, though there was some momentary slapstick when the crowds, who had mistakenly hailed the Prince of Wales's boat, drifted away just as George himself was arriving.

Along with the new monarch came more Germans: family, advisors, soldiers, servants, pages, doctors, mistresses, cooks, confectioners and the court dwarf. They totalled no more than about seventy – far fewer than the aspirant Scottish retinue which had accompanied James I in 1603. Their number paled into insignificance beside the thousands of Dutchmen who invaded England in 1688 in order to put William III on the throne. Many of those arrivals were absorbed into the English establishment. The vast majority of George's Hanoverian entourage, on the other hand, left within two years, once he had settled in. Only about twenty-odd Germans remained; they were eclipsed in numerical terms by the King's English household, which was nearly a thousand strong. By contrast with the Dutch, none were to found enduring major landed or political dynasties like William's close crony Bentinck, who became Earl of Portland.⁴

All the same, the impact of the German connection on British politics was enormous, if often misunderstood. The sometime doyen of British popular historians A. L. Rowse wrote that 'George I and George II were

Germans: their contribution to English history was a negative one, but none the less useful.' This was because 'Since neither of them spoke English, and neither was a man of much ability, the business of the state was conducted by the cabinet without the advantage of their presence.' It is true that the new King was in many obvious ways a foreign body. The Earl of Clarendon, who as British envoy to Hanover was in a good position to judge, doubted whether George knew much about his new kingdom. He had not used the decade since the Act of Settlement to learn English, and it was only with difficulty that he managed to negotiate the coronation. Unable to make the speech from the throne, he had to call upon the Lord Chancellor to do so. His knowledge of the language did improve slightly towards the end of his reign, by which time he stopped demanding that reports from British diplomats be translated into French. It is also true that the new King – born a Lutheran – was an uneasy convert to the Church of England. Nor can it be denied that George's instincts were a great deal more monarchical than the Whig lords would have liked. He claimed to rule not by any form of contract but by a hereditary right which the Stuarts had forfeited only by virtue of their Catholicism, not their alleged despotism. This was a precarious argument, of course, since it suggested that all it would require from the Pretender, 'James III', to regain the throne was a renunciation of Rome.⁵

Yet in other ways George was well suited to his new role. He had never been, as his critics were to claim, a despotic ruler in Hanover, where he collaborated closely with the local nobility. Besides, as a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, with its panoply of imperial courts, Imperial Diet, and (at the least notional) supremacy of the Emperor, George was quite used to irksome constraints on his power; he also proved a quick learner. He worked with and through Parliament. After all, the Civil List paid only for the rudimentary civil service, the royal household, the diplomatic service and the secret service. Most other important expenditure – especially on the army and Navy – had to be approved by Parliament. Remarkably, his rule – and that of his son George II – was not marked by the destructive confrontations with Parliament that had characterized the Stuart era, and indeed characterized the relationship between many eighteenth-century German princes and their representative assemblies. No bill that had passed both houses of Parliament was refused Royal assent after 1714.

In any case, George's freedom of action had been severely limited by

the Act of Settlement in 1701, the same measure in which Parliament had stipulated that the succession after Queen Anne should fall to the Electress Sophia, and thereafter to her heirs, 'being Protestants'. Article three laid down that 'no person born out of the kingdoms of England, Scotland or Ireland', even if naturalized, 'shall be capable to be of the Privy Council, or a member of either house of Parliament, or to enjoy an office or place of trust, either civil or military.' This measure was specifically designed to prevent the favouritism which had made William III's entourage so hated. Other clauses compelled George to 'join in communion with the Church of England, as by law established'; and he was even forbidden to leave Britain 'without the consent of Parliament'. This was also designed to avoid a repetition of William's military and diplomatic peregrinations through Europe. In theory, at least, George and his Hanoverians had very little room to manoeuvre.⁶

The impact of the Germans on British politics was felt elsewhere. George broke with tradition by not appointing an English nobleman as new Groom of the Stole with direct access to the royal bedchamber. His two Muslim servants, Mehmet and Mustafa, captured by him during his spell fighting the Turks in the 1690s, were charged with protecting his privacy. Both men were unusually close to the King, although there does not seem to have been anything vicious in the connection. The seventeen English Gentlemen of the Bedchamber were not, in fact, admitted there. Courtiers and others were received in the Presence Chamber; diplomats and ministers were met in the Closet, at one remove from the inner sanctum. Moreover, George liked to spend his evenings with his German family and Hanoverian entourage where his feeble English was no handicap. They all resided at St James's Palace during the winter, moving to Kensington Palace in the spring, and to Hampton Court for the summer. Apart from George himself, the major figures in the royal household were the royal mistress Melusine von der Schulenburg and her three daughters, and – for the first few years – the Prince and Princess of Wales and their three daughters.

All this led to the formation of an antechamber of power around the King in which the Germans figured prominently. Many of them fitted into their new environment remarkably well. As the Hanoverian envoy who had mediated the succession, Baron Bothmer was already well established before 1714 and was on terms of intimacy with many leading English figures. He was a regular and welcome guest at dinners with

such diverse individuals as the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Berkeley, the Archbishop of Salisbury, the Duke of Roxburgh, the Marquis of Annandale, and many other aristocratic luminaries. Likewise, Count Friedrich Wilhelm von der Schulenburg, *Kammerherr* (chamberlain) to the King, was a popular figure in society: one dinner with Lord Halifax lasted eleven hours so that 'the pleasant evening and the good company induced me to go beyond my usual sobriety, and amused me for a long time'. His close friend and correspondent, Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Görtz, who returned in 1716 to head the administration in Hanover, was respected by many Whigs and Tories alike.⁷

Some of the Germans, however, were quickly recognized for their influence and ambitions. Thus Andreas Gottlieb von Bernstorff, the most senior Hanoverian minister to accompany George in 1714, soon emerged as a key figure in the new dispensation. His English social circle – which largely consisted of staunch Whigs such as Lord Cadogan, the Earl of Sunderland and William Stanhope – was limited and soon shrank. Much of the time, Bernstorff worked in close collaboration with another 'German', the King's secretary, Jean de Robethon. Robethon was, in fact, a French Protestant – or Huguenot – by descent. His influence is still the object of some dispute, but was certainly considerable. He acted as a conduit in all major negotiations, and was generally regarded as a sinister power behind the throne until his fall from grace in 1719. Jonathan Swift, admittedly a biased observer, spoke of 'a little Frenchman, without any merit or consequence, called Robethon', who had tried to blacken the Tories with George. The 'Germans' drew their authority either from their proximity to George in the King's household, or their position in the German Chancellery, in London. This office was created to conduct the Hanoverian affairs of the King from a distance, but during the first decades of the Personal Union at least, the Chancellery took on a much broader function as an additional royal executive which was frequently mobilized in support of the King's European policy.⁸

The arrival of the Germans provoked an instantaneous xenophobic reaction among sections of the British public. They had already been irritated by the influx of destitute Palatines from south-western Germany fleeing overpopulation, bad harvests, religious discrimination and French oppression around the turn of the century. There were about 15,000 of them, but at least the vast majority moved on quickly to

Ireland and America. The Hanoverians were far fewer in number, but gave much greater offence. The anti-Dutch rhetoric of the Williamite period and the later stages of the War of the Spanish Succession was dusted off and adapted to George and his Hanoverians. A flood of popular pamphlets, ballads and broadsides now attacked the Personal Union as a threat to British political and religious freedoms. The sophistication varied but the same themes recurred over and over: the Germans were ungrateful, despotic and ubiquitous. Popular riots called 'Down with foreigners!', 'Down with the rump and the German!' and 'No foreign government!'. All this was garnished with xenophobic allusions to the obesity, gluttony, rapacity and impotence of the new King and his Germans. The image of George hoeing turnips in a field as he heard the news of Queen Anne's death proved particularly enduring and was clearly designed to ridicule the monarchy and undermine its legitimacy.⁹

One of the more effective attacks on the new monarch was launched by Francis Atterbury, the strongly Jacobite Bishop of Rochester. It appeared anonymously in 1714 under the title *English advice to the freeholders of England*. He argued that as a German and a Lutheran, George lacked all understanding of England, the constitution and Anglicanism. He even alleged, quite falsely, that the Prince and Princess of Wales had not taken Communion in the Church of England. In fact, the King and his family were careful to fulfil their obligations under the Act of Settlement, as well they might be, given that every church service they attended was conducted under close scrutiny. Perhaps in response to the Atterburys of his new home, the Prince made sure he was seen taking Communion 'publicly' in the parish church of St James. It was true, of course, that George was confessionally schizophrenic: he was an Anglican in England, a Presbyterian in Scotland, and became a Lutheran again on his return visits to Hanover. This was an unusual arrangement, to be sure, but one which – as far as Scotland and England were concerned – William, Anne and other monarchs had successfully negotiated. There was therefore some mileage in the religious argument against George, but not much.¹⁰

Many of Atterbury's other claims, such as a Hanoverian plot to expand the standing army in order to suppress English liberties, or to use British military assets for purely Hanoverian ends, were to become staples of anti-Hanoverian rhetoric for the next forty years or so. To many critics, the terms 'Hanoverian' and 'German' became synonymous

with Continental European absolutism and even oriental despotism. Great play was made of Mehmet and Mustafa, whose exotic appearance and Mohammedanism suggested more than a whiff of the east. At one level, this was simply political opportunism: stressing the foreignness, despotism and religious heterodoxy of George was an effective antidote to Whig propaganda, which made very similar claims about the Pretender. Yet most of those playing the anti-Hanoverian card were not saying very much about George or even the Pretender. Instead, they were saying something more profound about the way in which they viewed themselves.

The Hanoverian succession was in fact a major step in the development of a British national identity. This identity was originally moulded by the sixteenth-century struggles against Spain, and reformed during the wars with Louis XIV. Fear of universal monarchy and anti-Catholicism were thus important factors in welding English and Scots together, as was – increasingly – imperial expansion. The German connection shaped this identity in two complex and contradictory ways after 1714. To what was still a significant minority, the Hanoverians replaced the Dutch as a rallying point for national feelings. The popular hostility towards the north German Protestants shows that the French and Catholics were not the only bogeys to trigger xenophobic exuberance. The Hanoverian connection thus also needs to be taken into account as a significant ‘other’, which served to define the nature of English and British identity. Moreover, Hanover provided a useful rallying point for these feelings in the period 1716–31, when Britain and France were actually in alliance. To many, probably the majority, the Hanoverian connection reaffirmed the sense of a common European project to defend their own freedoms and the ‘liberties of Europe’. On this reading, George was a British warrior-king, the vindicator of European Protestantism and thus the defender of the balance of power. He and the Prince of Wales had, after all, served in the War of the Spanish Succession, and he was a direct descendant of the Elector Palatine of 1620. Indeed, many popular heroes were foreigners, for example William of Orange after 1690, and Louis of Baden during the War of the Spanish Succession. Some, such as the imperial commander Prince Eugene, were Catholic, though politically ‘Protestant’. For many, perhaps for most, ‘Britishness’ was voluntary and open, not essential or inherited.¹¹

To be on the safe side, some leading Whigs actively sought to generate loyalty. A few years before George had arrived in England, the Duke of Newcastle co-founded the Hanover Club. Its membership ranged across land and learning, and included such aristocratic figures as Lords Lincoln and Castlecomer, Whig cronies such as the younger James Craggs, MP and Cofferer (treasurer) to the Prince of Wales, distinguished diplomats such as Lord Methuen, major Commons orators such as William Pulteney, and the literary luminaries Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, who had founded the (shortlived) *Spectator* magazine. A Hanover Society was founded in the City of London in support of the succession. Pamphleteers spoke of the ‘Hanover garland’, and posited a choice between ‘Hanover or Rome’. There were two Hanover coffee houses in London: one in Pall Mall and the other in Finch Lane in the City. Streets in the capital and across the country were named after German towns, provinces and figures throughout the eighteenth century. In the heart of Edinburgh’s New Town, for example, lies Hanover Street, linking Princes, George’s and Queen’s Street, the three main avenues on the grid plan. To this day, London’s Hanover Square, Mecklenburgh Square, Brunswick Place and many other addresses testify to the strength of the German connection long before Queen Victoria set her eye on Prince Albert.¹²

Across the Atlantic, the Hanoverian connection was also reflected in the naming of towns, counties and provinces, sometimes spontaneously, sometimes by state action. The Hanoverian succession was widely welcomed in British North America as a defence against popery, absolutism and French or Spanish aggression. By the mid eighteenth century, there were Hanover or New Hanover counties in Virginia and North Carolina, and Hanover townships in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. There were counties named after other Hanoverian links, such as Lüneburg and Brunswick – a whole province in Canada was named New Brunswick. All this was in addition to those counties and places named after the royal family more generally. So perhaps it is appropriate that the London base of the *New York Review of Books* should today be in Hanover Yard. George I, after all, ruled three kingdoms, twelve colonies and an Electorate.¹³

If the German presence furthered the process of English self-definition, the Hanoverians had their own views on the identity and character of their hosts. Friedrich Wilhelm von der Schulenburg, who served the King as *Kammerherr* for the first five years of his reign, was a particularly

close and wry observer of the English scene. What stands out in his accounts is the perceived impulsiveness and emotionalism of his hosts. The John-Bull-like stolidity and reserve of later myth were not much in evidence. Schulenburg repeatedly refers to '*la chaleur angloise*'; he found James Stanhope, the chief minister, particularly hot-headed. He also considered the English congenitally fickle. He believed that the 'humour of the English' was such that 'one cannot count on them from one day to another'. On another occasion, when discussing the Earl of Sunderland, he refers once again to 'the inconstancy of the English, on whom one cannot count from one day to the next'. Later he attributed the English taste for masques to their '*changeante*' disposition. This picture of a garrulous and fickle English elite casts an interesting light on widespread contemporary English perceptions of English taciturnity and stolidity.¹⁴

Two other characteristics struck the German arrivals very forcibly. One was the deep and acrimonious rage of party. When describing parliamentary debates, Schulenburg was overwhelmed by 'the spirit of party in this country to which all else is sacrificed'. The prevailing spirit was so contrary, he noted, that 'one party has only to suggest something for the other to oppose it at first'. Indeed, he was to write a few years later, 'it is very difficult to keep three Englishmen united over a longer period'. The second characteristic was the related propensity for religious polarization, something which enlightened Germans were already putting behind them and which the consensual structures of the Holy Roman Empire were designed to contain. They were particularly shocked by some of the barbaric punishments directed against Roman Catholic priests under the Irish penal laws. Thus one Hanoverian report spoke of a 'remarkable clause' threatening all priests who fail to register with the authorities with 'castration'. A month later it applauded the 'repeal of the odious clause for the castration of priests'. The Hanoverians were also profoundly depressed by English cooking. The head of the Hanoverian administration back in Germany, Baron Görtz, was no doubt gratified to hear that at Hampton Court his rival Bernstorff 'feeds himself by an English *traiteur*, not having his household with him. The *traiteurs* are the *cuisiniers* of the King who sell dishes which one orders from their kitchen. I doubt if your excellency [Görtz] would be there at that price.'¹⁵

*

The most profound impact of the Hanoverian succession was on British foreign policy. To be sure, British statesmen had been intimately involved in the European balance of power ever since the Wars of Grand Alliance against Louis XIV. Moreover, Personal Unions were not uncommon at the time, particularly in Germany. Saxony and Poland had been joined since 1697; Hesse-Kassel and Sweden were similarly yoked for a while. Likewise, the emerging British state had long been a composite construction. Wales had been conquered by England, and therefore did not count, but Ireland was linked to England by a union of crowns. So was Scotland, which had also been welded closer through the Act of Union in 1707. Very recently, of course, England had been linked through William III in Personal Union with another European state, the United Provinces. Strange as the ramifications of the Personal Union might seem to modern eyes, they were not uncommon for early eighteenth-century Europeans, including Britons.¹⁶

All the same, the Hanoverian succession led to a fundamental change in Britain's role in Europe. She was now effectively a European power in territorial terms, and – unlike the relatively short interlude under William – remained so over a long period of time. If George continued to sign treaties as Elector of Hanover to which Britain was not a party, there was no such thing as a Hanoverian foreign policy separate from the will of the British monarch. There was no British diplomatic representation in the Electorate after 1714, and the few Hanoverian diplomats in foreign courts served the King in London rather than the caretaker government in Hanover. Whatever Parliament might say, British ministers knew that an attack on Hanover was usually intended and always perceived as an attack on the King of England. The two halves of the Personal Union were unequal in weight and ambition, but they were jointly and severally liable for the foreign policy of His Majesty's administration. This was nothing less than a geopolitical revolution for Great Britain.

As we have seen, British statesmen and diplomats had taken a keen interest in the affairs of the Holy Roman Empire for some time. Now the territorial and dynastic implications of the Hanoverian succession plunged them even deeper into the maelstrom of imperial politics, which often dominated British debate in the early eighteenth century. They knew that the Holy Roman Emperor was chosen by eight Electors – the Electors of Bavaria, the Palatinate, Brandenburg (Prussia), Saxony,

(Habsburg) Bohemia, and the three Archbishop-Electors of Cologne, Trier and Mainz. His power rested in large part on his personal territorial holdings – for most of the eighteenth century, the Habsburg monarchy – but the Emperor could command some legal and even military instruments which were not to be despised. He dominated the imperial machinery – especially the Imperial Aulic Council (*Reichshofrat*) – that provided a sheen of legality to interventions in the affairs of smaller and middling principalities. Moreover, the Empire was divided into ten ‘circles’, the westernmost of which were still politically and militarily vibrant. Each circle had a director whose task it was to convene the representatives of the circle in time of war in order to vote men and funds to support the Emperor against external or internal violators of the imperial peace. In political and legal terms, for example, the defence of the Austrian Netherlands was an imperial matter, and thus a factor in British calculations.

All the major and many middling and minor princes sent representatives to the Imperial Diet at Regensburg, the *Reichstag*. This was in some ways merely a talking shop, but London knew that its endorsement was extremely useful in mobilizing public opinion against violators of German and European stability. British statesmen were keen partisans of the Protestant caucus in the Reichstag, the *Corpus Evangelicorum*, which was afforded equality with the more numerous *Corpus Catholicorum* in matters of religion. After 1714, the King-Electors of Britain-Hanover and their ministers sought effective if not formal leadership of the *Corpus Evangelicorum*, which rested somewhat uneasily with Saxony, whose Elector was in fact Catholic. If British statesmen sometimes claimed that their lives depended on these matters, that was because they did. If the Empire fell into the hands of a hostile power it would not only undermine the vital Barrier system, but also unhinge the whole European balance of power on which British security ultimately depended.

If the resulting picture of the mechanics of British diplomacy was complex, it was far from impenetrable. The question of whether or not Britain and Hanover were one or two states was not clear in the emerging system of international law; interestingly most informed legal and historical opinion now believes them to have been one state. The public symbolism of the monarchy reflected this ambiguity. Thus the personal flag of George I included not only the arms of England, Wales, Scotland

and Ireland, but also a distinctive white horse, the symbol of his Hanoverian lands. Some foreign diplomats and statesmen therefore professed an understandable bemusement about the King’s two bodies – Frederick the Great of Prussia once famously asked whether he ‘should consider the King of England as one or two persons’ – but they were generally able to make the distinction when it suited them. For example, the minister of the middling German state of Saxony once asked for a Hanoverian envoy to be sent instead of a Briton, as he would not be ‘*purement anglois*’.¹⁷

Most of the time, British monarchs simply used whatever tool seemed



5. George I's flag, illustrating his dual role as King of Great Britain and Ireland, and also Elector of Hanover (the white horse).

most suitable for their purpose, employing Hanoverian avenues where these promised most success, or enabled them to bypass some ministerial or parliamentary constraint in London; but when these Hanoverians spoke for George, they generally did so in his royal and Electoral capacity combined. As we shall see, Hanoverian and British interests could clash, sometimes spectacularly so, but this happened less frequently than one

might imagine. The generally symbiotic relationship between the two halves was epitomized by the figure of François Louis de Pesme, Seigneur de St Saphorin, the British envoy at Vienna. A Swiss Protestant by background, St Saphorin held the rank of Lt. Gen. in the British army; he had also served as military advisor to the most senior Hanoverian minister, Count Bernstorff. At various points he was to be instructed both privately and officially as a British envoy, and secretly by Bernstorff as a Hanoverian envoy. But the principal element of cohesion was supplied by the monarch himself. Much more than Queen Anne, the new monarch was right at the heart of the decision-making process in foreign policy: all the threads came together in his hands.¹⁸

The second change wrought by the Hanoverian succession was a restoration. Both George and his Whig backers were determined to revive the interventionist and Eurocentric orthodoxy abandoned by the Tories during the last years of Anne's reign. Their task – as they saw it – was to rescue what they could from the wreckage of the Treaty of Utrecht, the compromise peace by which Bolingbroke had brought the War of the Spanish Succession to an end. They also looked forward to a domestic settling of accounts with those Tories who had fled the fight in Europe and left Britain's allies to their fate in 1712–13. A wave of pamphlets and books now welcomed the Hanoverian succession, not only as a vindication of British liberties and Protestantism, but also as a blow against the prospect of French universal monarchy. Louis XIV, after all, still lived. As the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht demanded, he demolished the fortifications at Dunkirk, from whence French privateers had harassed British shipping in the last war, only to start construction of bigger and better facilities at nearby Mardyck. He recognized the Hanoverian succession but continued to maintain close links to the Jacobite court in exile under his protection in France. Relations between Philip V of Spain and his Austrian Habsburg rival, Charles VI of the German Empire and sometime 'Charles III' of Spain, also remained unresolved. Moreover Philip, despite his protestations, had clearly not given up hope of succeeding to the French throne on the death of Louis XIV, reviving the very Franco-Spanish power bloc which the war had been fought to frustrate.¹⁹

Nor was the situation much better in North America. Here, on the face of it, the Treaty of Utrecht was a triumph for Tory colonialism over Whig Eurocentricity. France was forced to cede Hudson Bay, Newfound-

land and Acadia (present-day Nova Scotia and eastern New Brunswick). The population of her remaining North American territories was vastly outnumbered by the growing number of settlers in the twelve British colonies of Pennsylvania, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Delaware, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maryland and Massachusetts, which totalled about 360,000 by 1713. The Spanish promised not to surrender their empire to the French. In strategic terms, however, the outlook was rather different. The French had held on to Cape Breton, and thus control of the St Lawrence River. Thousands of well-armed and ill-disposed French settlers remained in Acadia. Many more were to the west in Quebec, the bone in the throat of British North America. The French also claimed all the lands between French Canada and their foothold on the Gulf of Mexico at Louisiana, which was growing since its foundation in 1698. By 1713, the French had founded Biloxi and Mobile. Four years later Louis XV gave the French Mississippi Company a monopoly of trade in the area, thus signalling his intention to mount at least a commercial challenge to Britain. Not long after that – in 1718 – the French founded New Orleans. If the threatened Franco-Spanish union in Europe came off, the ring of encirclement would be extended to include Florida, part of the Vice-Royalty of New Spain.²⁰

Moreover, despite their growing numbers, the colonists themselves seemed incapable of providing much for their own defence. During the Tuscarora War against the Indians in 1711–13, for example, Virginia gave the worst-hit colony of South Carolina virtually no help. This earned them a stinging rebuke from the Carolinians, whose assembly pronounced themselves 'sorry and amazed that they to whom God has given great power and opportunities should be so deficient in giving that assistance'. Likewise, when some suggested the elimination of the Spanish fort at St Augustine in Florida, which would have eased the threat from the south, John Ash of the South Carolina Assembly condemned this as 'a project of freebooting under the specious name of war'. There was no overall strategic vision among the colonists themselves, and little common ground between the twelve assemblies beyond a determination to evade taxation for as long as possible.²¹

Some of the royal governors were men of vision, but their hands were tied. Thus in August 1718 the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, Alex Spotswood warned of the French advances to the south and west, in tandem with their very active Indian policy. He spoke of the 'progress

made by [the] French in surrounding us with their settlements'. The only solution, he argued, was to 'attempt to make some settlements on the lakes, and at the same time possess ourselves of those passes of the great mountains, which are necessary to preserve a communication with such settlements'. Spotswood was articulating a concept of security through expansion, which was to catch on much later. For the moment, his proposals echoed unheard. The colonies themselves were under the formal direction of the Secretary of State for the South, but the day-to-day running of them was left to the Board of Trade. Very little was done in the two decades after 1714 to defend them. It would be up to British policy in Europe to secure the safety of the overseas empire. For what was at stake in America was much more than a few homesteads and animal skins. Everything that happened there mattered because of its potential impact on the European balance. The colonies were an actual or potential source of revenue and recruits; Britain had great hopes that North America would in time serve as an alternative supplier of naval stores. For this reason, the Great Powers sought not merely to aggrandize themselves overseas, but to pre-empt others. Thus in 1716, a memorandum of the French Council of Regency described Louisiana as an 'advance guard' against Britain. It expressed the fear that Britain would seize first British Canada then Louisiana, the Spanish lands and ultimately the entire commerce of the Americas. 'But what would be for Europe,' it asked, 'the consequences and the shock of such a revolution?' It would be, the memorandum concluded, a body blow to the balance of power there.²²

As far as the Whigs were concerned, the European balance of power was still in grave danger from France; it would not right itself without active British intervention. The Grand Alliance would have to be reconstructed. George agreed. As Elector of Hanover, he had not only been a staunch member of the coalition against Louis XIV; he had also been a loyal partisan of the German Emperor, both against France and within the Holy Roman Empire. On the journey over to England, he had conferred with the Dutch on how to repair the links broken by the Tories. Likewise, his Hanoverian advisors were almost to a man supporters of an interventionist policy in Europe. All this chimed perfectly with Whig strategic doctrine. The Earl of Sunderland told the King that 'the old Tory [notion] . . . that England can subsist by itself, whatever become of the rest of Europe . . . has been so justly exploded by the Whigs, ever

since the Revolution [of 1688]'. The question of European policy, in fact, was to prove crucial to George's choice of his first ministry. This was decided not by the largest group in Parliament, which was still the Tories, but by the monarch himself. Indeed, some contemporaries still referred to the government as the 'court' not the 'ministry'.²³

The composition of the Regency Council which governed in the interregnum between the death of Anne and George's arrival provided some straws in the wind. It included no supporters of the Treaty of Utrecht or opponents of an active British role in Europe. The King still kept an open mind on the question of party, however. To be sure, he took advice from Bothmer, who in turn was heavily influenced by the eminent Whig, Earl Cowper. All the same, George had originally intended to construct a mixed ministry, albeit one with a preponderantly Whig flavour; there had been, after all, four loyal Tories among the seventeen members of the Regency Council. This is not in the least surprising, for Tory opinion shaded into many different stripes. Jacobites and Jacobite sympathizers, of course, were beyond the pale. But there were plenty of anti-oligarchic, High Church 'Hanover Tories' who were not *per se* offensive to the new regime. Indeed, to some prominent Hanoverians, such as Görtz, the monarchical fervour of the Tories was positively attractive, and Schulenburg freely admitted that 'there are some extremely capable men among the Tories'. More than that, he thought that 'it is incontestable that . . . maintenance of the two-party [system]' was 'of great utility to the service of the King', because it enabled him to play one off against the other. In short, while faction, patronage, religion and party were all important factors, it was foreign policy which remained the constitutive force in British domestic politics after 1714.²⁴

This was reflected in the composition of George's first ministry in 1714. It contained very few Tories, partly because they refused to serve on any basis other than parity with the Whigs, but primarily because they failed George's test on foreign policy. Bolingbroke was summarily dismissed as Secretary of State for the South. On the other hand, Tories who had distanced themselves from Utrecht could still find a berth. The most prominent example here was the Earl of Nottingham, but the young Lord Carteret, later one of Britain's most gifted and Eurocentric statesmen, also fell into this category; it is no accident that he was also close to the Hanoverian chief minister Görtz. In general, George favoured statesmen with a tried and trusted record in European politics.

Those Whigs who favoured Continental engagement – the Earl of Sunderland, Lord Somers (the former Lord Chancellor), the Duke of Wharton, Lord Cowper (the former Lord Keeper) and the Earl of Halifax – were rehabilitated. A younger generation, especially Robert Walpole (who had been Secretary at War at the height of the War of the Spanish Succession), James Stanhope (Earl Stanhope from 1717) and Charles, Viscount Townshend, who had come of age during the last war, gained high office. The King chose – with Bothmer's support – Townshend as Secretary of State for the Northern Department. Townshend was a friend to the Dutch and had been instrumental in negotiating the first Barrier Treaty in 1709. George's new Secretary of State for the South was Stanhope, an experienced general and diplomat with strong links to the Austrians, who had served on behalf of the Grand Alliance in Spain. Walpole was made Paymaster of the Forces, and from 1715 Chancellor of the Exchequer. His steady hand was critical in rallying the support of financiers to the Hanoverian succession. The equally staunch William Pulteney became Secretary at War. By contrast, George kept the more extremist Earl of Sunderland at arm's length, even though he was an ardent partisan of the Hanoverian succession, had served as ambassador to Vienna, and could converse in German. He had pointedly excluded Sunderland from the Regency Council which governed during the interregnum, and did not relent after his accession to the throne. The King thought him too weak and excitable on foreign affairs. Instead, Sunderland was nominated as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the graveyard slot in British politics.²⁵

The first task facing the new government was securing the Hanoverian succession domestically. It threw itself into the elections to a new Parliament in January–February 1715. George's Hanoverian entourage also took a close interest in the contest, which formed a staple part of the news being relayed back to the administration in Germany. They were particularly interested not only in the party affiliation of the candidates, but also in whether they were 'moderate' or not. The result was an overwhelming victory for the Whigs. The Tory majority, which had been increased at the last election in August–September 1713, was completely overturned. With this thumping endorsement, the ministry was well placed to move against the domestic enemy, that is against the Tory leadership of Oxford and Bolingbroke. The principal, indeed often the only, instrument which it deployed in Parliament was the alleged

failure of Tory foreign policy in the period leading up to the Treaty of Utrecht. George set the tone in his opening speech to Parliament in late March 1715. 'It were to be wished,' he announced, 'that the unparalleled successes of a war, which was so wisely and cheerfully supported by this nation, in order to procure a good peace, had been attended with suitable concern.' The address of thanks in the House of Commons, drawn up by the arch-Whig Sir Robert Walpole, echoed this disappointment at the 'unsuitable conclusion of a war'. The peace treaty had, the critics claimed, neither protected trade, nor was 'care taken to form such alliances, as might have rendered that peace not precarious'. Walpole's address promised to 'enquire into these fatal miscarriages'.²⁶

About a fortnight later, Stanhope brought forward a 'Motion for committee to inquire into the late peace, and the management of the late queen's ministry'. He presented 'all the powers, instructions, memorials, papers, etc., relating to the late negotiation of peace and commerce and to the late cessation of arms'. Nothing of importance, he told the House of Commons, had been excluded. A select committee of twenty was set up to examine the material, which would include such Whig stalwarts as Stanhope, Robert Walpole and the Secretary at War, William Pulteney. It would meet in secret. The intention was to pin the blame for the 'betrayal' of Utrecht on the outgoing ministry. Even the Hanoverian Tory John Ward, MP for Newton-le-Willows, agreed that 'though his principle was that kings can do no wrong [Queen Anne was in any case dead], yet he was of opinion, that ministers were accountable for their mal-administration'. The atmosphere became increasingly embittered and partisan. In early June Walpole expostulated in the Commons 'that he wanted words to express the villainy of the last Frenchified ministry'. Stanhope wondered aloud 'that men who were guilty of such enormous crimes had still the audaciousness to appear in the public streets'.²⁷

Within a week the secret committee presented its report to Parliament and Walpole moved to impeach Bolingbroke for 'High Treason, and other high crimes and misdemeanours'. There was a stunned silence in the Commons when Walpole called upon dissenters to speak out, broken only by two feeble interjections in Bolingbroke's defence. Similar charges were laid against the Earl of Oxford (Harley) and the Duke of Ormonde, the former Commander-in-Chief. Every single one of the sixteen articles of impeachment against the Earl of Oxford, and the similar charges laid against Bolingbroke, concerned their alleged mismanagement or

betrayal in foreign policy; almost all of them pertained specifically to the European balance rather than colonial or naval issues. Oxford was accused of having subverted the Treaty of Grand Alliance of 1701, the founding text of eighteenth-century Whig foreign policy, and thus exposed Europe to 'the heavy yoke of universal monarchy'. There then followed a repetitive catalogue of accusations that he and his cohorts had 'set on foot a private, separate, dishonourable, and destructive negotiation of peace' with France (Article I); that the Duke of Ormonde had been instructed not to press his military advantage in the field (Article VIII); that 'the good friends and ancient allies of Her Majesty and these kingdoms' were abandoned and that the 'Protestant Succession' was endangered (Article X); that he had conspired 'to dispose of the Kingdom of Sicily to the Duke of Savoy' at Austria's expense (Article XIV); that he had misrepresented 'the most essential parts of the negotiations' to the Queen and Parliament (Article XV). The punishment for these crimes, at least in theory, was death.²⁸

As if all this were not bad enough, six further articles were laid against Oxford at the very end of July. Among other things he was now also accused of 'abandoning the Catalans to the fury and revenge' of the new Bourbon King of Spain, after Britain had incited them to revolt in the first place. A 'free and generous people, the faithful and useful allies of this kingdom, were betrayed, in the most unparalleled manner, into irrevocable slavery'. The most interesting additional article, however, was that concerning the mismanagement of colonial affairs. The original charge sheet had already accused him of sacrificing British commercial and colonial interests, in particular the Newfoundland fishery, 'the great support of the naval power and the chief nursery of the seamen of Great Britain' (Article XIII). Now the abortive expedition against Quebec of 1711 was alleged to have been a 'design' for 'weakening the confederate army in Flanders, and dissipating the naval force of the kingdom'. The diversion of forces from the Low Countries to America was said to have been undertaken on his advice. A similar train of thought underlay the Speaker's speech to the King on the money bills a few months later. He spoke of 'the trade of the kingdom given up by insidious and precarious treaties of commerce, whilst the people, amused with new worlds explored, were contented to see the most advantageous branches of their commerce in Europe lost or betrayed'. What was remarkable here was not so much the implausibility of these charges, but the powerfully

Eurocentric framework within which the Whig critique of Tory grand strategy was conceived and articulated.²⁹

Oxford's rebuttal was simple. He denied any wrongdoing and pointed out that not only had 'the nation wanted a peace' but that his conduct had been 'approved by two successive parliaments' as well as by the Queen. Later Oxford mounted a more detailed defence of his actions in the formal answer to the impeachment charges, in which he justified the abandonment of Charles VI with reference to the changed balance of power after the death of the Emperor Joseph. He therefore invoked a 'rule by the law of nations, in references to leagues between princes. That if there happens a material change in what was the principal ground and cause of the treaty, the obligation thereof ceases'. It was no use. Oxford was brought before the bar of the House of Lords and voted to be sent to the Tower. Seeing the writing on the wall, Bolingbroke and the Duke of Ormonde fled to France in June-July and were duly attainted (that is, Parliament declared them outlaws, whose estates, titles and civil rights were forfeit). The new reign had opened with a settling of accounts on foreign policy. The Tories had been effectively decapitated.³⁰

Jacobitism was a different matter. Here the problem was not so much English support for the Pretender, which was extensive enough, but the potential linkages between him, France, and the rebellious peripheries of the British Isles. According to the terms of the Utrecht agreement, the Pretender was expelled from St Germain-en-Laye near Paris, where the Stuart court had found refuge since 1689. He moved not very far down the road to Bar-le-Duc in Lorraine, just over the French border. He was still within striking distance of the Channel ports. In late March 1715, when the Hanoverian succession was not even a year old, Robert Walpole complained that 'the Pretender still resides in Lorraine, and he has the presumption, by declarations from thence, to stir up Your Majesty's subjects to rebellion.'³¹ Moreover, the Pretender had a large reservoir of military and diplomatic talent at his disposal in the shape of the Jacobite diaspora. There were thousands of Irishmen, for example, serving as 'Wild Geese' in the service of France, Spain, Vienna, and even Baltic powers such as Sweden, Prussia and Russia. Many continued to slip away across the sea, escaping the brutal penal laws in search of education, military training and betterment in Continental Europe. British ministers lived in terror that one day the sky would darken with their return. No doubt the Whig oligarchy inflated the danger of a Stuart

restoration after 1714 in order to marginalize the opposition, tar the Tories with the brush of sedition and justify a state of semi-permanent emergency. But the fear was real enough.³²

The King's Hanoverian entourage also feared the Pretender. This was demonstrated by their panicked reaction to an assault on Caroline, Princess of Wales. Early one evening she was being borne on a sedan chair to see her daughters at St James's Palace when one of the bearers, an Irish Catholic by the name of Moore, suddenly spat in her face. To make matters worse, Moore claimed that 'neither she nor her husband [the Prince of Wales] had any business' being in England. Indeed, according to another German account, he justified his act by saying that he 'did not recognize any other legitimate king in these lands than James III, and that he regarded the reigning King and all his family as usurpers'. The horrified authorities initially thought her assailant to be either drunk or mentally disturbed; he denied this, saying that he 'had done only what it was his duty to do', whereupon he was sent to prison. Worryingly, Moore used his arraignment before a grand jury at Westminster to launch another tirade against the royal family as a whole.³³

'James III', of course, made the most of the monarchy's German connections. His 'declarations' emphasized not only the corruption, unpopularity and cruelty of the Whig regime, but also the 'otherness' of the Hanoverians. 'We have beheld a foreign family,' he lamented, 'aliens to our country, distant in blood, and strangers even to our language, ascend the throne.' Moreover, he pointed to the implications that the acquisition of substantial areas on the north German coast might have for British liberties. 'By taking possession of the Duchy of Bremen,' he argued, 'in violation of the public faith, a door is opened by the usurper to let in an inundation of foreigners from abroad, and to reduce these nations to the state of a province, to one of the most inconsiderable provinces of the [German] Empire.' This was a direct appeal to people's primordial fear of being inundated by foreigners to the extent of losing their own liberty and identity. It was to form a staple of anti-Hanoverian critiques throughout the first part of the century. Throughout April and May 1715, in fact, Britain was rocked by severe anti-Hanoverian protests and riots following the coronation of George. A wave of anti-German propaganda targeted the dynasty. As one ballad of that year put it:

Now all true *British* Worthies
With Ormonde are discarded
Whilst Treacherous knaves, and *German* slaves
With places are rewarded

Only the introduction of the Riot Act in July 1715 – which greatly increased the powers of the civil authority – was able to quell the disturbances. But the threat of a joint action between Jacobites and other disaffected elements was by no means banished.³⁴

If a Jacobite coup was to succeed it would need foreign support. It was for this reason that a close eye was kept on the exile court at St Germain, particularly after the arrival of Bolingbroke. His knowledge of European diplomacy was unrivalled: if he could moderate the Pretender's popish predilections and secure French support, an invasion on behalf of the Stuarts was a realistic possibility. It thus became imperative for George and the Whigs to ensure that James was exiled 'beyond the Alps', preferably to Rome. This would serve the double purpose of allowing early warning of any attack, and of reinforcing the Catholic associations of the Stuarts in the mind of the British public. These fears came to a head in the autumn and winter of 1715, when the highlands of Scotland rose in revolt under the Earl of Mar. The arrival of the Pretender himself, with foreign gold, arms and perhaps even troops was believed to be imminent; he was known to have left Lorraine. Bolingbroke had, as one Hanoverian put it, 'completely torn off the mask' and was said to be pressing Louis to support James. To make matters worse, the French attitude was ambiguous: Louis had abjured the Pretender at Utrecht, but this did not prevent him providing covert encouragement and even support to the cause. Loose tongues at the French court exulted in the expected triumph of Jacobitism. Thus in mid 1715 the French envoy to Sweden suggested to a then sceptical Charles XII of Sweden that he should support an invasion by the Pretender. The Hanoverian dynasty faced a massive domestic and possibly external challenge less than a year after its installation.³⁵

Fortunately for George, the international context was a relatively benign one. Louis XIV died in September 1715. The Duke of Orleans, who stood in as Regent for Louis XV, who was still a minor of five, was hardly an Anglophile, but he wished to avoid confrontation with Britain, at least so long as the succession in France itself was fragile. The

Pretender was strongly discouraged from launching an attack on Britain. Spain was more encouraging – and Philip V was the largest contributor to Jacobite finances during this period – but he drew back temporarily when a commercial treaty with Britain seemed in the offing. George was also able to cash in the assets which an earlier generation of Whig statesmen had banked. Now the Dutch troops promised under the Barrier Treaty came into their own, at least in the south. In November 1715 the Jacobites were finally defeated at the Battle of Sheriffmuir, and the spectre of rebellion was banished. Having been held up by French obstruction, it took the Pretender until January 1716 to reach Scotland. By then, the rebellion had largely collapsed, and he returned to France a month later. The victory proved to be a mixed blessing, as it led to a further dispersal of Jacobites across Europe, where they continued to agitate against the Hanoverian succession.³⁶

The Jacobite rebellion of 1715 was hardly a surprise, but it still came as a considerable shock. It showed just how weak the hold of the Whig establishment was on large parts of the country, how shallow the roots of the new dynasty were, and the extent to which foreign powers could take advantage of British domestic divisions. As the articles of impeachment against the seven rebel peers who had supported the rebellion made clear, it also reflected the failure of British diplomacy at Utrecht. ‘The dissolution of the late glorious confederacy against France,’ the argument ran, ‘and the loss of the balance of power in Europe, were further steps necessary to complete the designs of the said conspirators.’ ‘The same being effected by the late ignominious peace with France,’ it went on, ‘the French King was rendered formidable, and the Protestant succession was thereby brought into the most imminent danger.’³⁷ Britain’s first line of defence, in other words, was where it always had been: in Europe. Jacobitism and ‘universal monarchy’ were two sides of the same coin. They could only be dealt with through a series of interlocking diplomatic and domestic measures.

A twofold strategy was therefore adopted. First of all, the ministry strengthened its domestic grip. The Septennial Act of April–May 1716 increased the interval between elections from three to seven years. This was partly designed to reduce the expenditure and disruption repeated contests involved, but it was also intended to strengthen the royal prerogative and thus Britain’s international position. The extent to which this argument was deployed by supporters of the Septennial Bill testifies

to the importance which the primacy of foreign affairs also had for British domestic politics. Thus the Duke of Devonshire argued that frequent elections gave ‘a handle to the cabals and intrigues of foreign princes’; longer intervals between them were therefore necessary to reduce outside interference and to channel the nation’s energies into dealing with external threats. Moreover, as the Duke of Newcastle argued, the Septennial Bill would reduce domestic political controversy and thus make Britain a more dependable ally. ‘The allies,’ he told Parliament, ‘having the sad experience of being left in the lurch [. . .] would certainly enter into alliances with us with more confidence, if they saw that our government was not precarious.’ The memory of the past six years, when Parliament had first called for the abandonment of Britain’s Continental allies, and then after the election of 1715 moved to impeach the architects of that policy, was still fresh in everybody’s mind. If the ambitious programme of alliances with which the ministry sought to reorder European geopolitics was to take effect, then British domestic politics would have to be reordered in tandem.³⁸

The primacy of foreign policy also underlay the question of the domestic military establishment. Every year, the debate on the ‘Number of the Land Forces’ and the ‘Mutiny Bill’ – the two measures which regulated the size of the army and the discipline to which it should be subject – generated the same exchanges in Parliament, and often in the public sphere as well. The arguments were not new – many had been in circulation since the late seventeenth century if not earlier – but they burst forth again with renewed vigour in the first years of the new reign. Britons differed fundamentally about what the best domestic response to the challenges of the international system was; and even where the integrity of the realm was not immediately in danger, the question of what measures should be taken at home in order to uphold British interest abroad was still a pressing one. To the King and his ministers, and to a large section of parliamentary and public opinion, it was clear that security through the maintenance of the European balance came first. As James Craggs, the Secretary at War, observed in early December 1717, ‘in all wise governments, the security of the state is the rule chiefly to be regarded’.³⁹ To this end some sort of standing army would have to be maintained. Stanhope argued that ‘it was now a matter of prudence, as well as necessity, to keep up a competent force, both to suppress any insurrection at home, or to repel any insult from abroad;

and to make good our engagements for maintaining the repose of Europe.⁴⁰

On the contrary, argued the Tories and many independent Members of Parliament. It was not just that they objected to the vast expense. Their main point was, as William Shippen put it, 'that the civil and military power cannot long subsist together; that a standing army in time of peace will necessarily impede the free execution of the laws of the land.' He rejected the argument of necessity. How many nations, he asked, 'had lost their liberties' because they listened to siren voices warning of 'the ambitious designs of their neighbour nations and the need to preserve the balance of power'. The Tories also attacked military mobilization as a form of 'German' politics, deriving from alien usurpers and not suited to British needs and traditions. Thus Shippen accused the ministry of having made demands 'which seem rather calculated for the meridian of Germany, than of Great Britain'. He went on to add that 'It is the only infelicity of His Majesty's reign, that he is unacquainted with our language and constitution.' He reminded ministers 'That our government does not stand on the same foundation with his German dominions, which, by reason of their situation, and the nature of their constitution, are obliged to keep up armies in time of peace.'⁴¹

This slight earned Shippen a four-month spell in the Tower of London for insulting the King, but he was making a much broader geopolitical point. A standing army might be suited to the 'meridian' of Hanover, which was in the middle of Europe and surrounded on all sides by hostile powers, but not to Britain, which had a very different meridian: it was an island. The army could therefore be safely reduced or even disbanded, without exposing the kingdom to immediate attack. As the Tory Thomas Hanmer put it in the same debates, 'our situation is our natural protection; our fleet is our protection.' It was an argument which was to resonate with many variations throughout the eighteenth century. Another Tory, Edward Jefferies, the MP for Droitwich, pointed out 'That this island has retained its freedom longer than the countries on the Continent, has been imputed to its situation, which not being so much exposed to the incursions of its neighbours, there was not the like pretence for keeping up regular troops.' He added that 'the preservation of our liberties to this time, is, in my opinion, rather to be ascribed to the due sense our forefathers had of the danger the public underwent from entrusting princes with a standing force in time of peace.' On

this reading, geography was not enough; eternal vigilance was also required.⁴²

Increasing British military striking-power and domestic cohesion was certainly necessary, but not enough. British diplomacy would have to be mobilized directly in defence of the succession. The first step was to improve relations with the United Provinces and revive the Grand Alliance. After all, the Dutch troops promised under the old Barrier Treaty had been one of the government's few disposable military assets in 1715, and the prevailing orthodoxy rated the United Provinces a major power well into the eighteenth century despite many indications to the contrary, in particular the progressive disintegration of the Dutch navy. As a result, the new British envoy to The Hague, Robert Walpole's brother Horatio, became a major figure in British foreign policy after 1714 and one of the most prominent exponents of a European orientation. This involvement with the Dutch went beyond the purely diplomatic sphere to interference in the long-running rivalry between the commercialist, neutralist and often pro-French oligarchs of Amsterdam, and the pro-British Stadholder party centred on the Prince of Orange; there had been no Stadholder since 1702 and there was to be none until 1747. Far from supporting their fellow oligarchs, the Whigs sought to strengthen the absolutist element as a bulwark against France: the preservation of 'European liberties' – the balance of power – was not necessarily synonymous with safeguarding the political rights of individual Europeans.⁴³

The new ministry simultaneously began to repair relations with the Habsburgs, who had been so comprehensively abandoned by Bolingbroke's Tories. This was essential to restore the united front against France and to prevent any Austrian flirtation with Jacobitism, to which they were drawn by ties of family and affinity if not state interest. Besides, Britain would have to rebuild her battered position within the Holy Roman Empire in order to put the security of Flanders back on a viable footing. Britain would therefore have to mediate between Vienna and the United Provinces on the vexed question of the Barrier fortresses, for which the Austrians were supposed to pay out of local revenue in Flanders. The Dutch also wanted to keep the river Schelde and Antwerp closed to trade, and generally limit Austria's ability to develop the area economically, so as to maintain their commercial supremacy. The Austrians, on the other hand, fiercely resented these restrictions on their sovereignty and made no secret of the fact that they would rather have

gained the smaller but geographically contiguous Electorate of Bavaria instead. In November 1715, a new Barrier Treaty was negotiated. This was commercially less favourable to Britain, but enabled the Dutch better to fulfil their strategic task of deterring a French attack. Moreover, from early 1716, Britain began to make a serious effort to iron out differences between Vienna and the Dutch in her search for an Austrian alliance. She also sought to reduce Austro-Turkish tension, which could only benefit France, by distracting the Emperor from the defence of Britain's European outworks in the west.⁴⁴

By the beginning of 1716, therefore, much had been achieved. A Jacobite incursion had been seen off, albeit with some difficulty. Tory isolationism had been banished. The Whig strategic paradigm had been restored. Relations with the Dutch had been rebuilt, and with them the vital barrier to French expansion in Flanders had been strengthened. A rapprochement with the Austrians, vital to the reconstruction of Britain's buttresses in the Holy Roman Empire, was well under way. The ring of containment around France, which had come apart after 1710, was being reforged. All this had been achieved under the aegis of a monarch who shared Whig preoccupations with the European balance of power, and took up pretty much where William III had left off in 1702. The Hanoverian succession – like the Dutch connection before it – had been integrated into British grand strategy. So far, so familiar. But it would soon become clear that George had ideas of his own about Europe, which would take the Whig elite and Britain into new territory.

9

Imperial Retreat, 1733–1736

[T]he success of either side may elate the minds of victors, and make them resolve to carry their conquests much farther than they at the beginning really intended, and farther than is consistent with the balance of power, or the liberties of Europe; and therefore, though this nation was, at first, no way concerned with the motives or causes of the war, yet it may at last come to be very deeply concerned in the event.¹

Lord Hinton on the War of the Polish Succession,
House of Lords, January 1735

It is not however possible for them [Britain and Holland] in the present situation of things, and by the nature of their respective governments, ever to think of engaging their people in the expense and hazards of a war, till they shall have been enabled to show the world, that all possible means have been tried in vain to avoid it.²

Lord Harrington, Secretary of State for the North, May 1734

One Mrs Mopp, a famous she bone-setter and mountebank, coming to town on a coach with six horses on the Kentish Road, was met by a rabble of people, who seeing her very oddly and tawdrily dressed, took her for a foreigner, and concluded she must be a certain great person's mistress. Upon this they followed the coach, bawling out, No Hanover whore, no Hanover whore. The lady within the coach was much offended, let down the glass, and screamed louder than any of them, she was no Hanover whore, she was an English one, upon which they all cry'd out, God bless your ladyship, quitted the pursuit, and wished her a good journey.³

Pulteney to Swift, December 1736

By the mid 1730s British foreign policy was once again in profound crisis: Walpole's ministry was now under sustained attack for its strategic mismanagement. Part of the popular and parliamentary critique concerned the perceived neglect of Britain's overseas interests, particularly in relation to the illegal trade with Spanish colonies. The principal complaint, however, concerned the progressive collapse of the British position in the German Empire. To many critics, the War of the Polish Succession was no obscure eastern European spat, but the beginning of a French-inspired assault on the integrity of the Habsburg monarchy. The Austrian position in southern Italy and the Mediterranean was smashed, and Lorraine was about to fall to France. One by one, it seemed, the pillars of the European balance were falling to the French advance, with all the implications that had for the Barrier and ultimately for the security of the island itself. As Britons searched around for scapegoats, many resorted to the tried and trusted device of blaming the Hanoverian Electorate for their domestic and diplomatic problems. One way or the other, Britain remained a central European power firmly locked into the Holy Roman Empire.

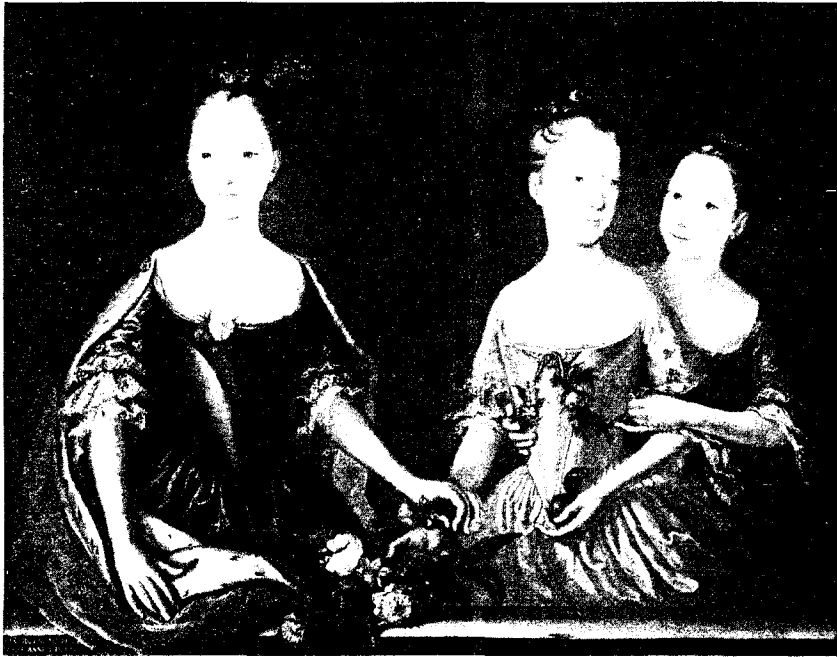
In London, the extent of Britain's growing isolation in Europe was at first not fully grasped. Indeed by 1733 a certain complacency was beginning to creep in. The King's Speech of January of that year announced that 'It is a great satisfaction to me, that the present situation of affairs, both at home and abroad, makes it unnecessary for me to lay before you any other reason for my calling you together at this time; but the ordinary dispatch of the public business.' This was the first time in many years that Parliament was not being asked to consider some far-reaching, controversial and expensive British scheme to maintain the European balance of power. It was almost as if London had cut itself off from Europe. This mood worried some MPs. Sir Thomas Aston, the MP for Liverpool, responded that he did 'not really think that our affairs are in the best situation either abroad or at home. Are not our neighbours the French still going on in fortifying and restoring the harbour of Dunkirk under our very nose, and contrary to the faith of the most solemn treaties? We can no longer say the French are our good allies.'⁴

This crisis was not just a product of shifts within the European balance beyond the control of ministries. It also reflected a much deeper conceptual failure. There was no longer a Stanhope or even a Townshend at

the helm, capable of looking at Europe in the round. This accentuated the existing tendency to view foreign policy through the lens of the two departments for the North and South. Newcastle, who was Secretary of State for the South, remarked on this in a private letter to Horatio Walpole concerning the distribution of Austrian dispatches. 'I don't know,' he wrote, 'whether they have been sent to you or no, for you know we know nothing of what goes from the other office, except on the material points, and they are not always considered so much as they should be; but this *entre nous*.' British policy was now made not by visionaries or innovators, but by technicians. Admittedly, many of these men, such as Horatio Walpole, were very able technicians indeed. Some of them, such as the Duke of Newcastle, were more able than they were given credit for, and were still ascending a learning curve in grand strategy. The gifted if somewhat unpredictable Carteret, on the other hand, now languished in opposition, waiting for an issue and opportunity which would return him to power.⁵

British diplomacy now made a determined attempt to reforge the ring of containment around France. The marriage of Princess Anne to the Stadholder of the Netherlands in March 1734 was designed to buttress the sagging Dutch Barrier. The marriage contract explicitly spoke of the desire to renew 'that happy alliance which has existed in the past' between the two Houses and for 'the maintenance of the Protestant religion'; it was domestically popular. Further east, Britain continued to pursue a *Reichspolitik* designed to strengthen the Empire against French encroachments. This meant throwing nearly a decade of anti-Austrian diplomacy and propaganda into reverse. For the moment, however, Britain proved unable to mobilize a substantial party in the Empire; made no headway at all towards a Prussian alliance; and risked being dragged into the disputes over Mecklenburg, which flared up again in the first years of the decade. For in 1730 Duke Charles Leopold of Mecklenburg returned from exile, reviving British anxieties that the Russians and Prussians, and prior to 1731 the Austrians, might use him to put pressure on Hanover. Nor could any instability necessarily be contained. Thomas Robinson, the British ambassador to Austria, warned that there was a danger 'of drawing on a universal war from the least disturbance in Lower Saxony'.⁶

A sustained effort was also made to shore up bulwarks in the Baltic and the Mediterranean. Thus British diplomats tried to repair the



15. Three of George II's daughters – Anne, Amelia and Caroline. Marriages were sought for them and their sisters in support of British diplomatic aims. Princess Anne married the Dutch Stadholder; Princess Louisa the King of Denmark; and Princess Mary the Hereditary Prince of Hesse. Amelia and Caroline never married.

self-inflicted wounds in Italy by pursuing an alliance with Savoy. A sustained push was undertaken to bolster Britain's position in the Baltic. Relations with Sweden were poor, however; here, the founding of a Swedish East India Company in 1731 was a worrying sign. The Danes did the same at Altona, just outside Hamburg, although Danish designs on the Swedish crown were a much greater concern. The principal aim in Scandinavia now was no longer to block Russia, but to contain the increasing French naval presence, and to prevent Versailles from gaining ground at Copenhagen or Stockholm. The strategic aim in both instances was to safeguard the supply of naval stores, and to stop the French from gaining naval allies and thus overturning Britain's dominance on the high seas. The European balance and Britain's maritime security were thus closely linked.⁷

None of this sufficed to cushion the shock which the outbreak of

European war in 1733 was about to administer to Britain. The conflict has gone down in history as the 'War of the Polish Succession', but it was really about France, and most of the fighting took place in Italy. At issue in the first instance was the question of the Polish crown, which became vacant in February 1733 on the death of Augustus of Poland and Saxony. A French-backed candidate, Stanislas Leszczyński – who was also Louis XV's father-in-law – was officially proclaimed his successor in September by the Polish parliament – making him King of Poland for the second time in his life. The Russian- and Austrian-sponsored Augustus III of Saxony was proclaimed in opposition to Leszczyński a month later by a rival group of nobles. France and Sardinia concluded an alliance at Turin in September. By now the Russians had invaded Poland to support their candidate, and very soon French, Sardinian and Spanish troops were heavily engaged against the Austrians in Italy. In Poland, the Russians quickly defeated Leszczyński, who was chased into Prussia by July of the following year. Danzig was besieged, and finally taken. But in Germany, things went badly for Austria, with the siege of Kehl on the Rhine in 1733, and that of Phillipsburg a year later; the outer buttresses of the Barrier system were under threat. And in Italy, Austrian forces were worsted by the French at Parma in June 1734, and Philip's son Don Carlos, whom the British had so controversially ensconced in the northern Duchies, took control of Naples and southern Italy, which had been in Austrian hands since the Treaty of Utrecht. Soon after, Spanish troops began to besiege Mantua in the north. Charles VI appealed to Britain for help, particularly in the Mediterranean, under the terms of the Treaty of Vienna.

All this was viewed with increasing alarm in Whitehall. To see Poland turned into a French ally was bad enough: it would effectively constitute a ring of encirclement around the Habsburg monarchy. But the threat was far greater than that: a major Austrian defeat might spark off the dismemberment of the Habsburg bloc and thus transform the war effectively into a War of the Austrian Succession. Poland and Danzig themselves were not the issue; the problem of French power very much was. 'What relates singly to Poland is a very remote consideration for His Majesty,' Newcastle argued, what mattered were the 'liberties of Europe'. Horatio Walpole echoed him in late March 1734: 'the balance of power in Europe entirely depends on the event of that war'. Likewise, the new Northern Secretary, Lord Harrington, saw the 'Liberties of

Europe . . . in the greatest danger from the rapid successes of France and her allies'. By May 1734, as the military position of Austria deteriorated, British diplomats were anxiously wondering 'how far they [the French] were prepared to push their conquests'. In particular, they were worried about French negotiations with 'several of the [German] Electors'. These, Harrington continued, 'gave just reason to apprehend, that they intended the destruction of the House of Austria; for it could not be thought, that those Electors would enter into engagements against the Emperor, and the Empire, with any other prospect than an absolute annihilation of that House'. Worse still, the Barrier was in danger. One parliamentarian lamented the 'weak and defenceless condition [the] Barrier in Flanders is [in] at present'. The Dutch were in a complete funk. An observer in Whitehall remarked that 'Their Barrier is naked; no secret is kept among them, and they fear that if they talk like men in a conference . . . the French will attack them.' The only sensible first step, he continued, 'should be the sending our quota [of troops] to their assistance to secure the Barrier,' but he doubted that the Dutch would have the courage to admit them. Fears for the steadfastness of the Dutch were openly voiced in Parliament. For all these reasons, the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament in 1734 recognized that the war 'is become the object of the care and attention of all Europe; and though I am no ways engaged in it . . . I cannot sit regardless of the present events, or be unconcerned for the future consequences of a war, undertaken and supported by so powerful an alliance'. The insouciance of early 1733 had evaporated.⁸

Inevitably, the increased international tension led to a revival of anxiety about Jacobitism. At first, London had been concerned that the Pretender would seek the Polish throne for himself, on the strength of his marriage to the Polish princess Clementina Sobieska. Later, British ministers worried that he might take advantage of international instability to conclude new alliances with European powers. Jacobite correspondence was therefore closely monitored. News that Charles Edward – the 'Bonnie Prince' – had been in contact with Don Carlos fed anxieties. Newcastle remarked to Walpole in early September 1734, that 'His being received by Don Carlos was certainly abominable'. In fact, London need not have worried. Shifts in the international scene had left the Jacobites even more exposed. Many of their best men were now locked into the militaries of powers which had now reconciled to Britain, or were at least enemies of Britain's enemies. By a strange twist of irony

the French fleet was defeated off Danzig in June 1734 by Admiral Thomas Gordon, a Jacobite in Russian service, while the Russian army which deposed the French candidate in Poland was commanded by the Jacobite Peter Lacy.⁹



16. The Pretender had succeeded in marrying a wealthy Polish princess, despite George I's attempts to prevent it.

Britain would now have to decide whether to enter the War of the Polish Succession. There were many good grounds for honouring the spirit of the Treaty of Vienna and weighing in on the Austrian side, at least in the Mediterranean theatre of war. Newcastle, for one, tended in that direction. Already in 1732 he was describing himself as '*bon-impérialiste*'. As the Habsburg cause plummeted in 1734, he fretted that 'I own I cannot but have a concern for them, as thinking their power not dangerous and the support of their interests to a certain degree very material for the common cause.' And yet Britain remained neutral. There were many reasons for this. Popular opinion would probably not have accepted the costs of intervention, and Britain did not want to provoke France into supporting a Jacobite invasion. But the principal reason was that the ministry itself – and in particular Walpole – was unpersuaded of the need for a military commitment to Austria at this point. He was genuinely averse to the blood-letting which would inevitably have

followed. 'Madam,' Walpole famously told the Queen, 'there are fifty thousand men slain this year in Europe, and not one Englishman.'¹⁰

The result was a policy of passivity. Significantly, the King's Speech of January 1734, despite its robust warnings about the dangers to the balance of power, committed itself only to 'take time to examine the facts alleged on both sides'. Instead of supporting Austria, Britain launched a joint mediation effort with the Dutch, aimed at, as Newcastle put it in May 1734, the 'preservation of the balance of power in Europe'. The Austrians were bluntly told that there was no prospect of Britain entering the war until Parliament and public opinion had been convinced 'that all possible means have been tried in vain to avoid it'. In other words, British public opinion and Britain's representative system placed a larger burden of proof on those who sought to take the country into conflict. For this reason, it was vital to establish French intentions clearly. 'If their demands and views shall appear exorbitant,' the Secretary of State for the North, Lord Harrington continued, 'and tend to endanger the balance of power in Europe, it will not only justify His Majesty . . . to [his] own people, but even put [him] under a necessity of taking such vigorous measures in conjunction with the Emperor as will then be found expedient for their common safety and for the preservation of the Liberties of Europe.'¹¹

The shock of the War of the Polish Succession gave a new impulse to the domestic debate on the armed forces. The feeble performance of the Polish militia was noted. In the debate on the Mutiny Bill in the House of Lords in March 1735, one speaker remarked that 'considering the difference between regular forces and militia, which the late troubles in Poland have made sufficiently manifest . . . the number of regular forces kept up in this nation, ought always to bear some sort of proportion to the number of regular forces kept up by neighbouring states.' These, he noted, had recently massively increased, 'especially our neighbouring kingdom of France, the nation from which we have the most to fear'. Indeed, the perceived threat to the European balance was regularly advanced in support of an increase in the land forces. After all, another parliamentarian asked in February 1734, 'when such a general war is broke forth in Europe, when the united forces of France, Spain and Sardinia are tearing the Emperor's dominions in Italy asunder, are we to be altogether inattentive? Are we to sit entirely regardless of a war which may end in the total overthrow of the balance of power in

Europe?' Likewise, the MP George Heathcote argued that 'we are perhaps amongst the most remote from danger, but it may reach us at last.' Britain, after all, could not cut itself off from developments in Europe. 'Our house is not yet on fire,' the argument ran, 'but our neighbour's is all in a flame; and then certainly it is time for us to prepare the engines necessary for preserving our own: these are a powerful fleet and a sufficient body of regular well-disciplined troops, ready to march at the first word of command.' In short, the link between Britain's exposed international position in Europe and increased militarization at home was widely accepted in parliamentary discourse.¹²

Opponents of standing forces continued to stress Britain's insular identity and rejected the 'very extraordinary', and 'new maxims in politics', by which Britain should keep up regular armies in competition with its neighbours. 'If we were so unlucky as to be situated on the Continent,' one peer argued, 'or to have any neighbours that could come at us by land,' that would be one thing, 'but as we have the happiness to be surrounded by the sea; as we have the happiness to have a fleet, superior to any that can probably be sent against us; we have no occasion to be worried.' It was conceded, however, that other European countries might be compelled to keep up a standing army in a threatening international environment. Even the Dutch, or at least their exposed eastern provinces, were believed to be subject to a different geopolitical imperative. 'As the situation of that country is very different from the situation of this,' one speaker argued, 'it is at all times necessary for them to keep up a numerous army. They have the misfortune to be situated upon the Continent, and may consequently be suddenly invaded by great armies; they have an extensive frontier to defend.' What was striking here was the extent to which even those who defended 'English liberties' against standing armies argued from Britain's strategic position in Europe.¹³

The challenge of the Polish succession contributed to an acute sense of domestic crisis, from which Britain's strategic failures were believed to stem. It came in the midst of a bruising controversy over the Excise in 1733-4, when Walpole attempted to shift some of the tax burden from the landed proprietors by converting customs duties on tobacco and wine into inland duties. This provoked a flood of petitions and widespread unrest. Walpole – by now also facing a parliamentary revolt – backed down. It was the first time his domestic authority had been seriously questioned. Thus the Whig grandee Pulteney argued in mid

January 1734 that 'there are many, many grievances both foreign and domestic, under which the nation groans at present, and which call loudly for redress.' 'Therefore,' he concluded, 'the state of the nation must be called for'. In other words, there should be a searching formal examination of Britain's declining domestic, international and fiscal situation, which Pulteney believed to be 'owing to the mismanagement of those at home'. The only way of identifying the evil, and remedying it, was through greater openness. The perceived decline in Britain's European position thus galvanized a long-running debate on the relationship between secrecy, security and consultation in Britain. This came across most clearly in the question of whether Parliament should be kept abreast of diplomatic negotiations, a demand which was pushed with greater vigour whenever external danger loomed. After all, Pulteney pointed out, 'If the question itself should come before us, whether or no we ought to take any part in the present war? Can we pass any judgement upon such a question, without first knowing how we stand engaged to the several powers abroad?' Pulteney therefore called for the creation of a 'secret and select committee to inspect such papers, and to report what they find in them relating to the affair under our consideration'.¹⁴

Ministers argued forcefully that Parliament should enjoy no such right. Thus Sir William Yonge, then a lord of the Treasury, but soon to become the secretary at war, did not deny that Parliament had the right 'of calling whatever papers they may think . . . yet we ought in no case to call for those papers which may contain secrets, the publishing whereof might be of signal disadvantage to the commonwealth'. The danger, he continued, was that publication of secret documents 'might perhaps open new sores and give offence to some powers with whom we have at present a good understanding'. Hence he was prepared to countenance the release of 'any particular paper, which . . . may be necessary for the information of the House', but not a comprehensive publication. Walpole also rejected the opposition demands, adding for good measure that they seemed 'calculated rather for giving gentlemen an opportunity of declaiming against those who have the honour to serve the Crown, than for procuring any proper information to the House or any advantage to the country'. That said, even those supportive of Britain's active role on the Continent were anxious to get the balance between constitutional and strategic imperatives, between military effectiveness and political freedoms, right. 'Is there no way of preserving the

liberties of Europe,' the Earl of Winchelsea and Nottingham asked in March 1734, 'without making a sacrifice of the liberties of Great Britain?' He was not the first or the last man to ask that question.¹⁵

Critics dismissed the arguments for secrecy as a smoke-screen for arbitrary rule. After all, Sir William Wyndham asked, was there any 'prince [or] state whom we have not disobliged and fallen out with by turns'? The demand for diplomatic sensitivity was thus effectively a plea for perpetual secrecy, with the clear aim of shutting Parliament out of the deliberative process altogether. Yet the demand for accountability ran up against a paradox. Nearly all the measures, including controversial treaties and subsidy payments, had been approved by the very Parliament that critics were mobilizing to censure them. It was hard to argue, therefore, that Walpole's foreign policy had been entirely hatched in secret, behind Parliament's back. What critics could and did claim was that the approval of a House of Commons so comprehensively controlled by Robert Walpole's patronage machine was no defence against the charge of treason, still less of incompetence. William Pulteney announced in full view of his quarry, Walpole, in late 1734 that 'I have known, in former parliaments, most scandalous things done by a corrupt majority; any things being done or resolved on by a majority, even of this House, will not make it right, nor convince the nation that it is so.' He was not saying, though he came close to doing so, that the majority had no right to be wrong. Pulteney was claiming that a corrupt Parliament was not fit to decide the nation's destinies. It was a short but momentous step from that to argue that the defence of Britain's European position required a more representative House of Commons.¹⁶

The policy of mediation and non-intervention proved highly controversial in the political nation and the public sphere. To be sure, the ministry won all the votes in Parliament. Thus in January 1735, the Commons congratulated the King on 'steadily pursuing such measures as have tended towards peace and accommodation, rather than to involve too precipitately this kingdom, and all Europe, in a general and bloody war'. Parliament also resolved that 'the crown of Great Britain could never appear with greater honour and lustre, than by Your Majesty's interposing your good offices between the contending parties.' There was widespread support for reserving judgement on French intentions until the policy of mediation had run its course; only once all reasonable offers had been refused should intent to subvert the European

balance be inferred. All the same, some saw in even the limited mediation effort a betrayal of Britain's colonial and maritime destiny, which was still being challenged by Spain overseas. Thus Sir William Wyndham accused the ministry of 'backwardness' in making use of British power 'when repeated insults have been offered to the nation, when our merchants have been pillaged, and our sailors murdered, and that for years together'. By contrast, he complained, ministers were 'unseasonably forward in engaging in disputes where the interest of the nation may call upon them to be at least neutral'.¹⁷

There was also scepticism about the nature of the European threat. It was 'ridiculous', they claimed, 'to put the nation to a great expense, to provide against a danger which may never happen'. In any case, Sir Thomas Lumley Sanderson argued, Britain would not be attacked if it remained neutral. He therefore objected to paying for an increase in the army 'whenever any little quarrel happens between any two of our neighbours, and that whether we are to have any share in the quarrel or nor'. Likewise, William Pulteney accused ministers of 'raising *fantômes* in the air, in order to find pretences for loading the people of England with taxes'. Underlying opposition to intervention, or even mediation, on the Continent was the fear of creating a dependency culture within Europe. Thus one parliamentarian dismissed concerns about the weakness of the Dutch Barrier with the words,

For God's sake, are we thus to be eternally the dupes of Europe? If the Emperor, or any other power, neglects to keep their fortified places in a proper posture of defence, must we answer for that neglect? Are we, for the sake of preserving the balance of power to undertake, at our own charges, to defend every power in Europe, and to prevent their being invaded or conquered by any of their neighbours?

In the same spirit another critic warned that 'this nation should [not] set itself up as the Don Quixote of Europe', or else 'most of the powers of Europe, who are not immediately attacked, will leave the whole burden upon us'.¹⁸

The colonialist and neutralist critics of the ministry were vocal, but relatively few. Most members of the political nation accepted the notion that it was Britain's calling to think on behalf of the whole of Europe regarding the maintenance of the balance. As one speaker observed in January 1735, 'though all the nations of Europe are equally concerned

with us in preserving the balance of power, yet some of them may be blind to their own interest.' He went on to ask whether '[we] are . . . to neglect what is necessary for our own security, or to refuse contributing any thing towards preserving or restoring the balance of power, because every one of the other parties concerned will not contribute their proportionable share?' If some powers, such as the Dutch, refused to recognize the growing danger and act upon it, that was to be deplored not imitated. It was up to Britain to make them see. She would have to act as a persuader for the balance of power.¹⁹

By far the strongest case against British policy on the Polish succession, therefore, was made by those who felt that the government had not been sufficiently concerned with Continental affairs. At the very least, they believed that Walpole had mismanaged the European balance of power. The Treaty of Hanover – which had completed the estrangement from Vienna and driven Britain closer to France – received another pounding. So did the Treaty of Seville, by which Britain had allowed Spain to prise loose the Austrian hold on Italy. William Pulteney argued that 'the moment you separated the courts of Vienna and Spain, every thing that has since happened might have been foretold.' 'By that treaty,' it was argued, 'the ancient union between France and Spain [was] restored; and by the introduction of Spanish troops into Italy, we not only opened the way for the Spaniards, but by that very step, we lost the King of Sardinia, by which we opened a way likewise for the French into the same country, and thereby united those three powers in that close confederacy, which occasions the present disturbance in Europe.' Walpole, in short, had lost Italy.²⁰

Critics were quick to see Hanoverian considerations at work in all this. The Jacobite Sir John Hynde Cotton announced 'an objection to the passage where we promise to provide for the security of His Majesty's kingdoms, "rights" and "possessions"'. He saw these words as a code to 'include His Majesty's German dominions' in the guarantee. Cotton believed that the phrase would certainly be 'understood in this sense by all without doors'. The ministry furiously denied any such intent, but the claim had the effect of putting them on the back foot. Behind these manoeuvres lay the fear that Britain would be sucked into the war in the wake of George's German ambitions. If, as William Wyndham noted in March 1734, the King of England had not yet taken part in the war, 'yet he certainly has as Elector of Hanover: and as this nation has by

some fatality or another, been generally engaged in the same quarrel which our King, as Elector of Hanover, espoused, if the same thing should again happen, this nation may then indeed come to be threatened with some danger or insult.' It was widely believed then and since that only popular opinion, Walpole's wiles, and the cooperation of Queen Caroline prevented George from dragging Britain into the war in support of Hanover and the Emperor.²¹

In fact, the charge was unfair. George did vote at Regensburg for an imperial war against France, and his Hanoverian minister in London, Hattorf, tried to persuade British ministers to intervene. But George did not seem much concerned by French incursions along the Rhine; his Hanoverian troops only joined Prince Eugene in June 1734, well after the start of hostilities. In truth, the King was heavily distracted throughout by developments in Mecklenburg, which had erupted once again in 1733–4. Duke Karl Leopold had attempted a coup with the help of the bourgeoisie, clergy and peasants. This was almost immediately suppressed by a joint Prussian–Hanoverian operation that same year. Two years later both powers occupied the Duchy as collateral for the repayment of the costs of the intervention. Indeed, George seems to have toyed with the idea of annexation. Because many European powers regarded Hanover as a weathervane for British policy, George's restraint in his Electoral capacity was widely interpreted as a confirmation of the neutrality policy. As the Spanish chief minister Patino remarked to the British ambassador in 1734, 'proceedings in his Electorate . . . are looked upon as prognostics of the part England will take in favour of the Emperor', or not, as the case might be.²²

Rather than be beholden to the King's German interests, the opposition argued, Britain could and should be responsible for the whole of the Continental balance of power. As Robert Walpole remarked with some exasperation, 'really by some gentlemen's way of talking, one would imagine that the ministers of England were the ministers of Europe; or that madness and folly reigned at this court, and that the most profound wisdom prevailed at all others.' His brother Horatio elaborated on this theme. 'There are some gentlemen,' he complained, 'who seem to have laid it down as a principle, that every thing that's wrong, happen in what corner of Europe it will, must be owing to the mismanagement of the ministers of Great Britain.' Even as he fended off opposition attacks, Horatio Walpole's anguish was clear. 'I would gladly

ask them,' he exclaimed, 'where or when any of them have prophesied, what potentate, or in what manner any potentate, would interfere in the election of a king of Poland? Have any of them prophesied that the King of Sardinia would grant a passage to the French troops through his territories to Italy; or did they prophesy, that he would join with France in declaring war against the Emperor?' Like many political practitioners then and since, he would not allow the judgement of hindsight. In short, the greatest threat to the ministry came not from those who wished to turn their backs on Europe, but those who demanded greater involvement.²³

In the end, the Polish succession was decided without Britain. Although the war did not officially wind up until 1738, hostilities in the west came to a close in October 1735. There was a palpable sense of unease in London, as Britain awaited the outcome of negotiations in which Britain was, for the first time in decades, entirely on the sidelines. France accepted the Saxon Elector Augustus as King of Poland, but Austria was forced to pay a heavy price for her defeats in Italy. Sicily and Naples were surrendered to Don Carlos, and thus effectively to the Bourbon family compact. This was a catastrophe for the Italian balance. Vienna had been comprehensively humbled, and a major blow dealt to the basis of British policy since 1731. In a long dispatch from Vienna, lamenting the decline of Austria, the British ambassador, Thomas Robinson, claimed that the 'Emperor cannot live for a moment in security without a guarantee from the maritime powers of what shall be left to his family'. A few months later he warned that Austria had been lost to 'the general balance of Europe against the House of Bourbon'. Robinson feared that 'this family cannot without a miracle be retrieved at all, or even with one, be entirely recovered', for many years. It seemed as if the partition of the Habsburg monarchy had begun while Charles VI was still alive.²⁴

To make matters much worse, France had secured the reversion of Lorraine. In return for renouncing the Polish throne, Stanislas Leszczyński had been installed as Duke of Lorraine, with the understanding that it would pass directly to France on his death; Francis Stephen of Lorraine, Maria Theresa's husband, had to make way. British statesmen and diplomats contemplated this with dismay. Thomas Robinson feared that 'When the French are once nested in Lorraine, that signal acquisition will give them strength . . . to take Luxembourg upon the first trouble, of which they themselves will be the authors.' There was thus every

likelihood that the French tide would surge ever further eastward, as in Louis XIV's day. This was certainly in Robinson's mind when he referred in March 1736 to the 'danger of France's erecting, one time or other, a chamber of reunion, like the famous one of Metz', in the later seventeenth century, when Louis XIV had cobbled together various spurious claims to reunite lands on France's eastern border with the monarchy. In this context, the fact that the cession of Lorraine had originally been suggested by Britain in order to detach France from the anti-Austrian coalition was a recognition of how desperate London had been to salvage what it could from the Habsburg wreckage.²⁵

The implications of the loss of Lorraine also shook the political nation at large. As one parliamentarian pointed out in mid January 1736, France had ended hostilities not because of any British military demonstration, as the ministry weakly argued, but because of the 'annexing to the crown of France for ever the whole dominions of the duke of Lorraine . . . a cession which this nation, as well as the rest of Europe, may soon have reason to repent of'. Another rejected any peace which would lead to Britain being 'slaves to France'. Indeed, he thought that 'the balance of power is brought into more danger by the peace, than it was by the war, because if the war had continued, it was in our power whenever we have a mind to take Lorraine from France or to get the Emperor, Poland and Muscovy to join to retrieve it.' If, the argument continued, 'France was before an over-match for any power in Europe, the addition of anything, even the smallest village, to that crown, is a step towards overturning the balance of power; but the addition of such a populous and fertile province as the dukedom of Lorraine, is certainly a most wonderful stride.' The geopolitical implications of the loss of Lorraine were immense. It was 'a part of the Empire, it was a barrier for all that part of the Empire situated between it and the Rhine'. It had been an outer rampart and an early warning post. Now 'France will be enabled to surprise and take possession, whenever she pleases, of all that part of the Empire between Lorraine and the Rhine.' That was to say: Zweibrücken, much of Trier, the Electoral Palatinate, the Bishoprics of Speyer, Worms, and so on. In short, Walpole, having lost Italy, was on the verge of losing Germany as well.²⁶

In Europe, the initiative now passed wholly to France. The Austrians, as the ambassador to Vienna complained, were now 'entirely in the power' of France; they relied 'upon the King [George II] singly for their

future safety once out of their present troubles'. Yet British credit in Vienna was at its lowest point. The Austrians were outraged at Walpole's refusal to countenance anything more than a mediation on their behalf. Indeed, Newcastle wished that 'we could have been so happy as to have persuaded the Emperor that we, viz. England and Holland, really wished him well (which perhaps, he may doubt)'. 'Our affairs abroad,' as Horatio Walpole put it bleakly in October 1736, 'are in a most loose and shattered situation.' They were to get worse still. Britain looked on helplessly as Austria was dragged into a war against the Ottoman Empire in 1737. What happened there mattered intensely to Britain. If Austria did not join Russia in the attack, the Tsarina might overrun the Turks quickly, cross the river Bug, and make unilateral gains at their expense. As the British ambassador to Constantinople pointed out, Russia and Austria 'would then become borderers, and a weak declining [Ottoman] empire is a less dangerous neighbour than one that is in full strength and vigour'. Given that the local populations were Orthodox – and 'look upon the Tsarina as their natural protectress' – there was nothing to stop the Russian tide from extending still further. 'Moldavia and Walachia,' he warned, 'are open as well as rich provinces, and he who is master of the first, may possess them both as soon as he can march over them'. The resulting weakening of the Habsburg monarchy would be bad for Britain's overall strategy of using Austria to contain France.²⁷

On the other hand, the decline of the Ottoman Empire was also to be discouraged, partly because it had often been a useful lever to put pressure on either Russia and Austria, and partly for commercial reasons. As one British diplomat remarked in late August 1736, public opinion was 'arguing how dangerous it would be to trade, to the Protestant religion and to our civil interest to have the Turk driven out of Europe'. The eighteenth-century British definition of Europe and the Protestant interest was elastic enough to include the preservation of the Ottoman Empire, which was, of course, to become a shibboleth of the next century. Yet when the Turks appealed to Britain for mediation in early May 1736, she was too isolated and distracted to help. In the event, the Austrian offensive quickly foundered: there was to be no repeat of Prince Eugene's short, sharp victorious campaigns of 1716-18. Significantly, the Austrians looked to Paris not London for mediation to get them out of this mess. The resulting Treaty of Vienna in November 1738 brought Austria closer into the French orbit.²⁸

All these European developments had profound implications for Britain's maritime position. Thus one parliamentarian observed in mid January 1736 that 'as by the situation of Lorraine the frontiers of France will be contracted, rather than enlarged, which will prevent her being obliged to keep up any greater land force than formerly, we may presume, that this whole sum will be employed yearly towards increasing and keeping up her naval armaments . . . which may so probably increase the naval power of our greatest and most dangerous rival.' More generally, the decline of British standing in Europe made it less likely that she could pin down French resources there through Continental coalitions, as in the wars against Louis XIV. The long-standing link between Britain's European position and her maritime security was thus reprised in the light of the War of the Polish Succession.²⁹

French naval preparations did indeed take off in the 1730s. Squadrons were dispatched to the Baltic in 1734 and 1738. Moreover, Fleury entered into a secret agreement with Spain to challenge Britain's maritime and colonial dominance. The Bourbon family compact of 1733 now effectively encircled Britain from the St Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico. The French pushed further and further into the Mississippi Valley and the west, which they tended to regard as a strategic unity. Spanish depredations against British merchants continued, and became the subject of increasing parliamentary protests. French encroachments in Canada also gave rise to concern. Newcastle complained of unauthorized settlement in Newfoundland. Even more worryingly, French missionaries continued to subvert British authority in Acadia. 'How to prevent the ill consequences,' the Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, Lawrence Armstrong, wrote, 'I know not, without we could have missionaries from a place independent of that crown, but this will prove a considerable expense, which the French King bears at present with alacrity for very political reasons.' 'It is most certain,' he continued, 'that there is not a missionary neither among the French nor Indians who has not a pension from that crown.' Thanks to Walpole's cheese-paring, the Royal Navy was in a state of some disrepair. In short, the failure to contain France in Europe was directly injurious to Britain globally.³⁰

In the colonies themselves, the deteriorating strategic position was noted with some concern. The underlying geopolitics had long been masked by the French alliance of 1716; with the collapse of that entente

and the emerging Franco-Spanish axis these realities reasserted themselves. Thus the Pennsylvanian grandee, James Logan, wrote in 1732 that 'Tho' Canada as an encroachment has always given uneasiness to the English colonies, yet as it is generally a very cold and not very fruitful country, there never appeared any great probability of its being very considerable, 'till the Sieur la Salle about the year 1680 discovered the great river Mississippi, to which the English notwithstanding had a prior pretence.' In this the French had made no progress, he continued, until after the peace of Utrecht, 'but now they surround all the British dominions on the Main. They have a valley in the interior a thousand miles wide, accessible only from the St Lawrence and the Mississippi, while the British have merely a coastal strip 300 miles in width.' Moreover, the French were well organized and had co-opted the Indians to their cause. The twelve colonies would either have to expand or risk stagnating – or even being driven back into the sea by the surrounding Bourbons.³¹

There was not much point in relying on the Americans themselves to remedy the situation. The colonial assemblies were characterized by disunity and mutual suspicion in the face of the common enemy. James Logan was a highly unusual Pennsylvanian – a rare Quaker geopolitician. Most of his co-religionists were strongly of the view that security should be established through accommodation with the French and Indians, not by military means. Even Benjamin Franklin, who was later to do so much to create a common American strategic consciousness, spoke around this time of the need 'more fully to bend our minds to the study of the true interest of Pennsylvania', rather than of the twelve colonies as a whole. Most other Americans had similarly limited horizons. Until the late 1740s, Virginia was such a strategic backwater that the colonist William Byrd could write in 1735, 'we live here in health and plenty in innocence and security fearing no enemy from abroad or robbers at home.' In short, as James Logan lamented, while the French were 'under one general command' in North America, the situation 'in the British colonies is too much the reverse. Each of them is a distinct government wholly independent of each other, pursuing its own interest and subject to no general command.'³²

It would therefore be up to London to keep the Bourbons at bay. In 1733, action was finally taken against the threat of Spanish infiltration from Florida and New Spain by setting up the new colony of Georgia.

This would provide a much-needed buffer zone to shield the Carolinas. In time, of course, Georgia would need its own buffer in Florida; such is ever the argument of complete security. To a certain extent, such measures were self-financing – with colonists driven by hopes of betterment – but it was clear that the broader task of shoring up British defences in Canada, building forts to the west and so on, would be a massive drain on the exchequer. For this reason, London began to reflect on ways in which the thirteen colonies could be persuaded to share the cost. Thus in 1739 the former colonial governor and pamphleteer Sir William Keith suggested the introduction of a Stamp Duty in order to pay for the dispatch of British soldiers necessary to deter France. This plan was rejected by Walpole, who had been badly burned by the Excise protests in 1733. He is said to have replied that ‘I have old England set against me, and do you think I will have new England likewise?’ Instead, Walpole preferred to generate revenue indirectly through trade. ‘This,’ he argued, ‘is taxing them more agreeably both to their own constitution and to ours.’³³

Despite all these difficulties, most Britons regarded the colonization of North America as an investment in their own security. As Logan wrote, ‘It is manifest that if France could possess itself of those [British] dominions [in North America] and thereby become masters of all their trade, their sugars, tobacco, rice, timber and naval stores, they would soon be an overmatch in naval strength to the rest of Europe, and then be in a position to prescribe laws to the whole.’ His memorandum is known to have reached Walpole himself, and these ideas, which became commonplace in the 1750s, were already gaining wide currency among the political elite and decision-makers. British dominance overseas was believed to be the key to defending the European balance of power. So as settlers and colonial governors limbered up for war with France and Spain in the 1730s, they did so only in part to resolve the struggle for mastery in America itself. What was ultimately at stake, in their minds and those of the British ministries, was the future of Europe itself.³⁴

The Colonial Mirage, 1737–1739

I believe the people of Great Britain are governed by a power that was never heard of as a supreme authority in any age or country before. This power, sir, does not consist in the absolute will of the Prince, in the direction of Parliament, in the strength of an army, in the influence of the clergy; neither, sir, is it a petticoat government: but, sir, it is the government of the press. The stuff which our weekly newspapers are filled with is received with greater reverence than Acts of Parliament; and the sentiments of one of these scribblers have more weight with the multitude than the opinion of the best politician in the kingdom.¹

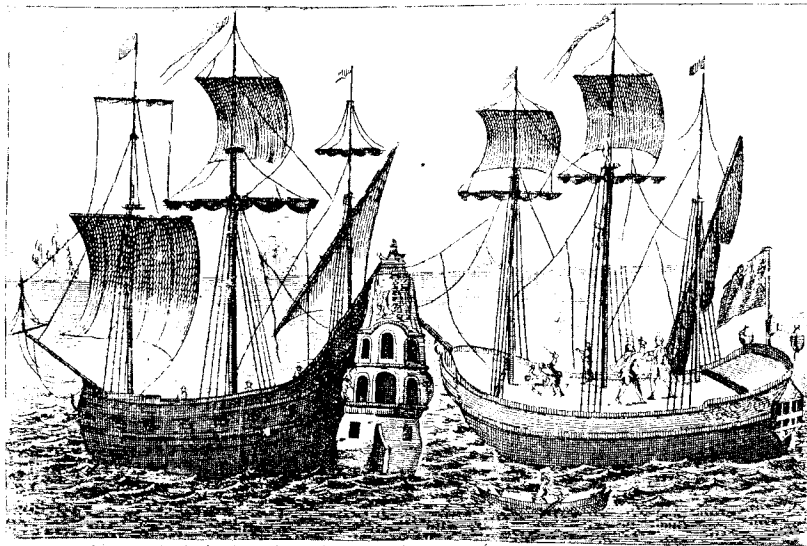
John Danvers, House of Commons, February 1738

No man can prudently give his advice for declaring war [on Spain], without knowing the whole system of the affairs of Europe as they stand at present, and how the several potentates of Europe now stand affected towards one another.²

Sir Robert Walpole, House of Commons, March 1738

Nothing fired the imagination of the British public more than the gruesome fate of Captain Robert Jenkins of the merchantman *Rebecca*. In April 1731, Spanish coastguards, fed up with the growing illegal contraband trade with their American colonies, intercepted his vessel off Cuba, confiscated the cargo, and tortured Captain Jenkins. He was being made an example of. As a final indignity, one ear was lopped off. Jenkins did not – as one account had it – appear himself at the House of Commons with his ear preserved in a box or bottle, but his case formed a staple of a subsequent press campaign for war with Spain, and was mentioned in parliamentary debates. The amputation of an ear was

still a legal punishment in Britain for certain offences, so there was nothing intrinsically cruel and unusual about his treatment; but in the perfervid context of the time it was perceived as a national slight. Jenkins was certainly luckier than one Dutch captain, who had his hand amputated, cooked in front of him, and was forced to eat it. One way or the other, by the late 1730s Spanish colonial governors – some of them acting on their own initiative – were clearly upping the ante on the contraband trade, adding a flood of new complaints to those of the 1720s and early 1730s, with which popular opinion was already obsessed.³



17. A popular print illustrating the incident that outraged Britain and sparked the War of Jenkins's Ear.

The maritime war with Spain, which followed at the end of 1739, is therefore known as the 'War of Jenkins's Ear', and has become a byword for popular chauvinism, and for the increased importance of commercial and overseas concerns in British politics and policy. It followed a prolonged debate about British strategic priorities in which Tories and radical Whigs contrasted the naval and insular virtue of 'true Englishmen' with the Continental 'entanglements' and apparent timidity of Walpole's ministry. The late 1730s thus saw the revival of the navalist discourse in British politics which had flourished in the late seventeenth

century, triumphed briefly towards the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, but had deflated in the 1720s. For throughout this period, British statesmen were very reluctant belligerents. To them, the economic case for war with Spain was far from proven, and their primary concern was not with overseas expansion *per se*, but the impact which colonial resources would have on the European balance of power. Ministers thus had their eye primarily on developments within Europe. The rise of Spanish power in Italy after the War of the Polish Succession – and the consequent collapse of Austrian power there – was a greater concern than the activities of the Spanish coastguard. Even more worrying was the French advance in Germany. As ever, the main concern of Crown and ministry in London was not the looming conflict over the Spanish American Empire, but the deepening crisis within the Holy Roman Empire.

In late July 1735 Horatio Walpole rebuked Newcastle, who as Secretary of State for the South was responsible for colonial affairs, for neglecting the Caribbean. 'Believe me,' he warned, 'you do not know what may be the consequence in all respects of your great indolence and neglect on this point; if you heard half what I hear from all quarters, friends and foes, on this head, I think it would affect you.' The British South Sea Company, which had in the meantime recovered from the burst 'bubble', had been making vigorous representations against the Spanish 'depredations' at Whitehall, and at Madrid through its agent there, who was none other than the British ambassador, Sir Benjamin Keene. After the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, the Company had been awarded the *Asiento*, the coveted right to ship slaves to the New World, for thirty years. The Company's principal demand was that this privilege be extended beyond its original expiry date of 1744, to take into account those years of warfare in the 1720s when it was not in operation. Meanwhile British merchants and sailors engaged in a very profitable illegal trade with the Spanish colonies. Spain, however, was determined to regain full control of her colonial trade, primarily in order to generate the resources necessary to support her great-power pretensions in Europe. This created tension between London and Madrid, not least because the Royal Navy openly colluded with the smugglers. There were also tensions in Central America, over the British settlement on the Mosquito Shore (now the east coast of Nicaragua). To make matters

worse, Britain and Spain now faced off over Georgia, which had been founded in 1733 as a buffer against incursions from New Spain: by 1736–7 a full-scale Spanish attack on the colony was believed to be imminent.⁴

All the same, the storm which hit the administration from late 1737 took ministers by surprise. In October, merchants launched a concerted campaign of petitioning and parliamentary agitation to force the government into confronting Spain on the high seas. Their immediate objective was to secure the right to trade directly and unmolested with the Spanish colonies, but there was a more ambitious and sometimes overt intention to supplant Spain there altogether. In both cases, the argument was framed within a navalist rhetoric which rejected any right of search on the high seas. Thus the great petition of 11 October demanded ‘that no British vessels be detained or searched on the high seas by any nation, under any pretence whatsoever’. It added, more delphically, ‘that the trade to America may be rendered secure for the future by such means, as Your Majesty in your great wisdom shall think fit’. The merchants rejected any Spanish right to search British ships on the high seas as the ‘claiming and exercising the sole sovereignty of the seas’. Heavy lobbying by West Indian merchants and other pressure groups ensued. A wave of depositions, petitions, declarations and proofs now piled up on ministers’ desks and reverberated around the halls of Westminster.⁵

The protests in the City of London were led by Sir John Barnard, a High Church Tory who was Lord Mayor in 1737–8. His successor, Micajah Perry, was also a long-standing Hispanophobe. By the following year the ‘Spanish depredations’ had become a truly popular patriotic cause. Government policy was routinely lambasted in the provincial and London press, in pamphlets, ballads and even stage performances; ministerial censors scrambled to suppress the worst offenders. Tremulous society ladies attended the relevant parliamentary debates in March 1738, no doubt in the hope of catching a glimpse of one of Jenkins’s severed extremities. The Prince of Wales spearheaded a boycott of French wines and Italian songs. Opera and claret were, for the moment, deeply unfashionable. British products were exalted in their stead. In mid 1738, the *London Evening Post* announced that ‘If such resolutions as these prevail, we may hope to find that OPERAS, CLARET and CAMBRICKS, will become as distasteful to the POLITE as PENSIONS, EXCISES and STANDING ARMIES are to the honest part of the BRITISH NATION.’

Britain, in short, was experiencing the cultural retrenchment which often accompanies national crisis.⁶

Many contemporaries remarked on the rising importance of the press and the growth of a public sphere in foreign policy. Those who welcomed the discomfiture of the government rejoiced in it, others deplored it. In what was neither the first nor the last outburst of its kind, the MP John Danvers lamented that ‘the people of Great Britain are governed by a power that was never heard of as a supreme authority in any age or country before . . . the government of the press.’ The opinions of these ‘scribblers’, Danvers went on, ‘is received with greater reverence than Acts of Parliament’. It was the old notion of power without responsibility, with which the press has been charged down the ages. The ministerial supporter, Bishop Hoadly of Salisbury, condemned the popular onslaught in similar terms. ‘They in the opposition,’ he lamented in early March 1739, ‘have many advantages, without doors, over those in the ministry. They have the happiness of being looked upon by the people as advocates for their rights. This gives great weight to all they say or print. They likewise never fail to cover all their designs with a word that is clear to every free-born people, Liberty. This, my lords, gives them a fine field for declamation.’ It was one of many references, approving and disapproving, to the new importance of opinion ‘out of doors’. Lord Bathurst had referred to it in February; so did Lord Carteret. The Earl of Cholmondeley even warned that ‘if . . . we make those without doors not only partners but judges of our councils, we are then in a deplorable situation’.⁷

Those who called for a greater parliamentary role in foreign policy were quick to turn the popular fervour to their advantage. Ironically, it was the Tories who were the supporters of parliamentary, as opposed to executive supremacy in this context. In 1738 their leader Sir William Wyndham claimed the right to demand and scrutinize diplomatic correspondence. In particular, he requested that treaties should be placed before Parliament for ratification. How else, the opposition MP Pulteney asked, could Parliament discharge its obligation as ‘His Majesty’s great and chief council’? If there were any papers ‘which ought not, for the sake of public good, to be exposed to public view, it [was] the business of the Crown to tell us so’, not that of the ministry. Indeed, Pulteney announced that ‘no gentleman can take upon him to dictate what papers are proper, and what are improper for our inspection’. The arguments

which had been hurled at Walpole over the War of the Polish Succession were now dusted off and applied to the Spanish 'depredations'. Further petitions were presented in mid March 1738. In late March, a packed House of Commons met to discuss them. There were calls for relevant papers to be presented and translated. There was no let-up in the attacks, and Carteret launched a long diatribe in early May. In the end, the ministry was embarrassed into approving additional naval spending and promising to back up diplomacy with force.⁸

The campaign against the Spanish depredations was ostensibly about trade, but it was also about much more than that. It provides a fascinating snapshot of British identity and strategic conceptions on the eve of the War of the Austrian Succession. To be sure, straightforward xenophobia was an important part of the picture. The late 1730s saw a renewed surge of anti-French and anti-Spanish sentiment. The classic themes of Continental absolutism and popery were reprised and contrasted with British roast beefery. The Spaniard, by contrast, was dismissed as a self-basting foreigner. But there were also more subtle arguments about honour. It was widely felt that Britain had lost face in Europe, and that her predicament on the high seas was an indication of a universal contempt which could only be dispelled by war. 'A dishonourable peace,' the independent Whig Sir John Barnard argued in March 1738, 'is worse than a destructive war . . . All nations are apt to play the bully with respect to one another; and if the government or administration of a nation has taken but one insult tamely, their neighbours will from thence judge of the character of that nation . . . and will accordingly treat them as bullies do noted poltroons; they will kick and cuff them upon every occasion.' At times, the appeal to national honour became histrionic. Alderman Willmot, for example, condemned the mistreatment of captured British sailors in particularly heated terms: 'Our countrymen in chains! and slaves to Spaniards! Is not this enough . . . to fire the coldest? And shall we . . . sit here debating about words and forms, while the sufferings of our countrymen call out loudly for redress?' Another parliamentarian announced that 'in this affair we have already made use of so much ink and paper without any effect, that I am afraid it will appear necessary for us to begin to make use of another sort of ammunition . . . I mean . . . the weight of our metal, and the sharpness of our swords.'⁹

*

This strategic discourse was not just driven by popular and parliamentary machismo. It was part of a much more subtle intellectual project led by the principal Tory thinker on foreign policy, Bolingbroke, who had been in semi-voluntary exile in France since 1735, partly in order to escape his creditors, and partly because of increasing government attempts to silence him. There British diplomats were keeping a close eye on him. The ambassador William Waldegrave reported in mid November 1737 that Bolingbroke 'was quite retired, and meddled no more with politics'. He could not have been more wrong. It was around this time that Bolingbroke was working on his famous tract, *Letters on the spirit of patriotism* (commonly known as *The patriot king*), which soon circulated in manuscript form, although it was not published until a decade later. Its author argued that 'the true interest of several states' depended on the 'situation of countries'. On this reasoning, Bolingbroke continued, 'The situation of Great Britain . . . the character of her people, and the nature of her government, fit her for trade and commerce.' This was because 'The sea is our barrier, ships are our fortresses, and the mariners, that trade and commerce alone can furnish, are the garrisons to defend them.' For this reason, he continued, 'the government of a PATRIOT KING, will be directed constantly to make the most of every advantage that nature has given, or art can procure towards the improvement of trade and commerce.' The implicit contrast with the current failure of monarchy and ministry is obvious, the appeal to the reversionary interest of the Prince of Wales – the expectation that the death of George II would bring better times under his son and heir – only slightly less so. 'For eighteen years,' Bolingbroke thundered, 'we have tamely suffered continual depredations from the most contemptible maritime power in Europe, that of Spain.'¹⁰

On this reading, Britain was an island state, set apart from the rest of Europe. 'Great Britain,' Bolingbroke wrote, 'is an island: and whilst nations on the Continent are at immense charge in maintaining their barriers, and perpetually on their guard, and frequently embroiled, to extend or strengthen them, Great Britain may, if her governors please, accumulate wealth in maintaining hers.' For this reason, Britain might 'advise, and warn . . . abet, and oppose; but it can never be our true interest easily and officiously to enter into action, much less into engagements that imply action and expense'. Britain should not 'dissipate [her] strength on occasions that touch us remotely or indirectly'. Instead, she



18. Bolingbroke, author of *The patriot king*, was the eighteenth-century father of the 'blue water' policy.

should devote 'a continual attention to improve her natural, that is her maritime strength'. In that way, Britain could be 'the arbitrator of differences, the guardian of liberty, and the preserver of that balance' of Europe. He concluded with a sentence which was to echo down history: 'Like other amphibious animals, we must come occasionally on shore: but the water is more properly our element, and in it like them, as we find our greatest security, so we exert our greatest force.'¹¹

In this context, it was natural that patriots should look once again at the Hanoverian connection with a jaundiced eye. According to the diarist and courtier Lord Hervey, admittedly one of the King's detractors, George returned from the Electorate in 1735 with scarcely a good word to say about Britain. At a time when the nation was greatly exercised by maritime affairs, the King's prolonged absence with his mistress, Countess Walmoden, in the Electorate in 1736–7 appeared tactless. She was regularly abused in public as a 'Hanover whore'. The Hanoverian connection was also the target of pamphlet and literary attacks. Once again, the association between the Electorate and Oriental despotism, and the contrast with native British freedoms, was made. Thus in Lord Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian in England to his friend at Ispahan*, the Persian dress of the narrator prompted the mob to assume that he 'was a German minister sent by the court to corrupt the electors'. And in 1738–9, Samuel Johnson's *Lilliput debates* were a thinly disguised attack on the King's German patrimony, which was dismissed as 'vast tracts of land . . . too spacious to be constantly garrisoned and too remote to be occasionally and duly supplied'. He took another swipe at

Hanover – and Walpole – in his pamphlet *Marmor Norfolkiense* (1739). 'And, yet more strange! His veins a horse shall drain, / Nor shall the passive coward once complain'. Everybody knew what these lines meant: the Saxon horse was well known as the symbol of Hanover.¹²

Rumblings against the King's German preoccupations could also be heard behind the scenes. Every time George visited the Electorate, the focus of decision-making, at least in foreign policy, perforce had to follow him. As one British diplomat put it, 'business will naturally go to Hanover'. In 1736, for example, the King was accompanied by the senior undersecretaries of both the Northern and Southern departments. Sometimes he was joined by one or the other of the principal ministers, especially Lord Harrington, who was Secretary of State for the North. Moreover, British diplomats were now instructed to write to Hanover for the duration. Queen Caroline was left as 'guardian of the realm'. The King also attracted a steady stream of Englishmen on the grand tour. As George Tilson, an undersecretary of state who was with him in 1736, remarked, 'we are about to have a fresh cargo of English, who love to break in upon the King's retreat here. We have now two of Mr Vernon's sons, who are going to Geneva to pick up a brother and travel through Italy and France.' Some British statesmen and diplomats were not just worried that the King's presence in Hanover created a rival focus to London, they also fretted about consequent distortions in the content of policy. Even Horatio Walpole, who was no patriot harrumph, privately complained in 1737–8 that 'those Electoral considerations in which we have not the least concern do often prove inconvenient to us'.¹³

There were good reasons for Walpole's irritation. Even as British policy sought to prop up the Catholic Emperor Charles VI in Germany as a counterweight to France, George championed the Protestant cause in the Empire every bit as much as his father had. He was an active presence in the *Corpus Evangelicorum*, and a doughty vindicator of Protestant grievances against the Emperor. But while George I's imperial policy had moved largely in tandem with a broader British concern to curb Habsburg pretensions to universal monarchy, that of his son cut across British plans to restrain Louis XV. Not only did the King use his Hanoverian servants to pursue this strategy, which was bad enough, but he also instructed British diplomats to cooperate with them. Thus in late March 1736 Thomas Robinson, the British ambassador to Vienna, was

directed to defend Protestant rights against Charles VI. 'His Majesty's Electoral minister', the Secretary of State for the North, Lord Harrington, wrote, 'will have full directions for his conduct in this affair, and it is the King's pleasure that you should not only *second him therein*, but should likewise speak in the strongest manner in the King's name, *as King as well as Elector* [underlined in the original] for promoting what will be desired, His Majesty being concerned to do it in the former quality also.' A few months later Robinson was also told to 'concert with the other Protestant ministers', with regard to 'the address proposed to be obtained for the grievances of the Protestants in the Empire'. The imperial horizons of George II and his 'patriot' critics thus diverged. They inhabited quite separate strategic and geographical mental worlds.¹⁴

The unpopularity of the King was not just reflected in the upsurge in anti-Hanoverianism. The revulsion against the Spanish atrocities took place against a backdrop of, and contributed to, a much broader popular and political discontent. To be sure, there were social and economic grievances: a rash of poor harvests after a period of plenty led to shortages and hardship. But the principal bone of contention, as the opposition *Craftsman* pointed out, was political and strategic. It was, the argument ran, 'above all, the *Spanish depredations*, about which the people have so chafed themselves, that they have hardly patience to wait till our *vigilant* and *wise ministers* have made proper remonstrances'. The petitions for redress and action against Spain were directed at the monarch in person, and failure to react damaged his credibility. Even Horatio Walpole had to admit that the situation 'highly reflects upon the honour and dignity of the Crown, in not being able to protect her subjects'.¹⁵

As the gulf between monarchy and 'the people' grew, relations within the royal family took on a new significance. As in the late 1710s, a crisis in foreign policy went hand in hand with a royal split. Just as George II and his father had cordially hated each other, so did King and Prince of Wales in the 1730s. Tensions boiled over after Frederick married in 1736 and demanded a larger allowance. Queen Caroline also took strongly against her own son. She said of him that he was 'the greatest ass, and the greatest *canaille* [scoundrel], and the greatest beast, in the whole world, and that I most heartily wish he was out of it'. In September 1737 the Prince and his friends were banned from court; not even Caroline's death two months later helped to dispel the tension. Walpole,

of course, backed George. Newcastle, his brother Henry Pelham and the Whig stalwart Lord Hardwicke tried to mediate, for the scene was a familiar one to them. They had seen twenty years earlier how divisions within the royal family had given enterprising politicians a handle with which to attack the ministry, quite apart from being a distraction from urgent matters of foreign policy.¹⁶

Now patriot opinion, and disaffected parliamentarians such as Pulteney, Lord Carteret, the Earl of Chesterfield and Lord Stair, looked to Frederick, Prince of Wales for leadership. The young William Pitt made his parliamentary debut in 1736 in defence of the Prince of Wales, thus earning the hatred of George, as well as a dismissal from the army. The issue moved from the courtly into the parliamentary sphere, as King and opposition tussled over royal allowances and much else. Only under the guidance of a 'patriot king', it was felt, could Britain find its way out of the European morass caused by Walpole's corruption and mismanagement. The Prince of Wales, in turn, attacked the failure to confront Spain and the general decline of British standing in Europe. In retaliation, George built up his own parliamentary following, telling Sandys, whom he otherwise detested but who had fallen out with the 'patriots', that 'Since they piss upon you, I will stand by you.' Moreover, the birth of a daughter to the Prince of Wales in 1737 was celebrated on the grounds that the differing succession laws in both territories might lead to a rupture of the Personal Union; that was indeed exactly what happened, but one hundred years later.¹⁷

One of those who came of age politically during this febrile period was the young William Pitt. Admittedly, Pitt's background was hardly that of a paragon of commercial virtue. His father, 'Diamond Pitt', had made his fortune in India, often in intense rivalry with the East India Company, and subsequently bought the rotten borough of Old Sarum and the parliamentary representation that went with it. Pitt himself sat for that borough until 1747, when he switched to a seat held by the Newcastle interest. In other words, unlike many of the anti-ministerial scourges, Pitt did not hold either a county or a metropolitan mercantile seat: he was dependent on patronage, not popular opinion. Nor was he a complete ignoramus on Europe, having gone on the grand tour in 1733 and even studied briefly at the University of Utrecht. During this period, Pitt was powerfully attracted to the anti-Walpolean 'boy patriots' led by Viscount Cobham, and cultivated the reversionary interest, being

made a Groom of the Bedchamber to the Prince of Wales in 1737. He became known as one of 'Cobham's cubs'. They also shared the prevailing view that Walpole's Spanish policy had reached the end of the road, though, as we shall see, it was the parlous state of the European balance with which they were more deeply concerned.¹⁸

With the intellectual sponsorship of Bolingbroke, the political patronage of the Prince of Wales, and popular enthusiasm at their backs, the scene was set for a final parliamentary extravaganza. This agitation against the Spanish depredations was more than just inchoate maritime, insular and colonialist enthusiasm. It saw the revival of a classically naval strategic national vocation. On this reading, Britain's inferiority on land could be discounted. 'All we have occasion for,' the Opposition Whig MP George Lyttleton remarked in February 1738, 'is to send a superior fleet, with some land forces on board, to infest their coasts, till we have brought them to reasonable terms.' Another parliamentarian spoke of conflict with Spain as 'a war upon an element where we were sure to be masters'. A year later, Sir John Barnard – the independent Whig MP and Lord Mayor of London – said, 'I am not . . . much either of a soldier or a sailor . . . but I have read a little, and have heard a great deal with regard to the management of a war betwixt us and the Spaniards . . . [S]o far as I may be allowed to judge, there is but one way in which we can possibly attack them, and that is by sea.' Time was to show that a little reading on the management of war can be a dangerous thing.¹⁹

In March 1739, Lord Bathurst summarized the emerging consensus in a eulogy on amphibious warfare. He announced that

we might not only reap advantage by distressing them [Spain] at sea, but we might reap still greater advantages, and reduce them to greater difficulties by attacking them at land . . . by having a squadron with 5 or 6,000 land forces on board, continually roving around their coasts, and making inroads upon the country, as often as they found an opportunity, we might do infinite mischief to our enemies, and often get rich booties for our soldiers and seamen. Then with regard to their settlements in America . . . we might plunder them from one end to the other; or if we thought it more for our purpose, we might enable them to throw off the yoke of Spain.

This was, perhaps, the first time that the idea of regime change in the New World had been floated. The protagonists believed that it would

be not only an easy, but a self-financing war of liberation. The *Craftsman* revelled in the prospect of capturing the silver fleet, taking Havana, and perhaps even Panama. Interestingly enough, some British intelligence sources concurred, stressing the weakness of Spanish defences and the restiveness of the local population. One British seaman predicted that 'Millions of miserable people would bless their deliverers; their hearts and their mines [sic] would be opened to us.' The reference to 'mines' for 'minds' was surely a Freudian slip, revealing as it did the synergy between liberation and resource extraction.²⁰

It should come as no surprise that all this was accompanied by a surge of interest in Britain's past naval heroes. Tellingly, Lord Cobham's new Temple of British Worthies at Stowe contained busts of Queen Elizabeth and Sir Francis Drake, as well as that contemporary metropolitan hammer of the Spaniards, Sir John Barnard. The idols of the past decades, generals such as Marlborough, were no longer in fashion. Inevitably this naval fervour and a sense of insular identity translated into even greater opposition to a standing army during the annual Mutiny Debates. The patriot George Lyttleton argued that there was no point in fetishizing 'that in which the King may be rivalled by every petty prince of any little state in Germany'. He went on to say, with calculated offensiveness, that 'If the greatness of a state is to be measured by the number of its troops, the Elector of Hanover is as great as the King of England.' Others believed that constitutional liberties should be qualified by considerations of national security. There was clearly no point in turning Britain into an absolutist state in order to defend against French or Jacobite absolutism. At the same time, it would be perverse to cling to every peacetime right, if that endangered the security of the realm upon which all British liberties ultimately depended. Henry Fox, the pro-government MP for Hindon, argued that 'there is no country in the world, nor I believe was there ever any people, who were so scrupulously attached to their original forms of government, as not to dispense with them when a too strict adherence to these forms might endanger their liberties.' To him, the maintenance of a standing army was 'evidently agreeable to the first maxims of all constitutions, which is the safety of the people'.²¹

If the opposition attack was driven by their view of Britain's role in the European state system, so was the government response. The ministry was entirely unpersuaded by the economic case for war with Spain.

Despite all the mercantile bleating, Henry Pelham argued that trade and colonies might 'have suffered a little by the late behaviour of Spain toward us, but their sufferings are not, I believe, near so considerable as some people seem fond of representing'. Indeed, the government believed that the commercial consequences would be disastrous. For all the colonial froth generated over the past decade, trade with 'Old Spain', regulated by a treaty of 1667, was far more valuable than the illegal contraband trade with Spanish America. In any case, seizures by the Spanish coastguard affected only about 2 per cent of that trade. Salted fish and woollens were exported to Spain; oil, dye-stuffs, wine and wool were imported. This trade was carried in British ships and managed by British merchants. The balance of trade was largely favourable. All this, Walpole warned Parliament in March 1738, would be hazarded by war with Spain. The weakness of the commercial lobby against war reflected not economic but politico-cultural realities. Most of the trade with Old Spain was in the hands of marginal men: Jews, Irish and English Catholics (none of them represented in Parliament; many of them Jacobites). They were not able to compete with the colonial crock of gold so many saw over the horizon.²²

Moreover, as ministerial voices were quick to point out, taking on Spain over this issue effectively meant condoning smuggling, and thus violating international law. 'Such a war,' Lord Hervey pointed out in February 1739, 'would certainly be unjust upon our part; because it would be, and by all Europe would be considered, as war for supporting the smuggling trade, that may be carried by our subjects in the Spanish West Indies.' The aggression, self-confidence and chauvinism of the war lobby also grated with many. The Prime Minister pointed out that 'in contests between nations, it is the same as in contests between private men: each party thinks himself right.' Ministers were therefore unimpressed with the demand for a more robust British diplomacy. Henry Pelham reminded the House of Commons in late March 1738 that 'I believe we never made a treaty, where we could obtain all that was convenient for us; I believe, no nation ever did; for a *carte blanche* is not properly a treaty; it is the law which the conqueror prescribes to those he has conquered.' As for the constant allegations of cowardice, Walpole responded that in a private matter, a man might respond instinctively, because 'he has nothing but his own life to lose'. A statesman, on the other hand, had to act more responsibly, because 'the lives of many

thousands were concerned; and those who are to deliberate and determine in what manner, or how soon, an injury ought to be resented, are generally those whose lives, in case of a rupture, will be the last of being brought into danger'.²³

Moreover, at this point war was militarily just too risky. The fleet and the army were unprepared, even for the easy war that many seemed to expect against Spain; and those in the know thought her no pushover. Sir Charles Wager, an MP with many years of naval experience, warned the House of Commons that 'no nation in the world, I believe ever declared war, till they were ready to enter upon action; and as we at present have neither a fleet nor an army ready sufficient for attacking such a powerful nation as Spain, I think we ought not to yet do anything, that may look like a declaration of war, or even like a resolution to declare war.' No wonder then that Horatio Walpole argued that 'It was a maxim with Julius Caesar, never to venture even a battle, if the disadvantages that might ensue from a defeat appeared to be greater than any advantages he could expect from a victory.' In these circumstances, he continued, bearing 'many insults and indignities' might be the statesmanlike thing to do, if 'only because by a little patience' one might 'obtain a victory with less bloodshed'.²⁴

But the main reason why British statesmen opposed war with Spain, was the alarming condition of the European state system. The War of the Polish Succession had dealt a severe blow to the balance. First of all, it had seen the ejection of the Austrians from Naples and Sicily, and their replacement by a French-leaning Spanish Bourbon dynasty. Secondly, France had secured the reversion of the Duchy of Lorraine, which further exposed the western flank of the Holy Roman Empire. Meanwhile, the Dutch were hopelessly ill-equipped, and in any case disinclined to man the fortresses in the Austrian Netherlands. More generally, as the British ambassador to Spain, Benjamin Keene, remarked in April 1738, 'the Dutch will abandon us in the conflict, and get private advantages by our fighting for a cause in common to both nations.' The Emperor, Charles VI, was getting on, and no definitive solution to the Habsburg succession was in sight. And if all this was not bad enough, Charles had embarked on a disastrous war with Turkey in 1736, which tied down the bulk of his forces. In other words, the barriers to the advance of French power in central Europe were weakening at the very moment when the power of the House of Habsburg was on the wane, and

distracted to boot. Nor did the end of the Austro-Turkish war in 1738 bring relief: quite the opposite. It was brought about by French mediation, which greatly increased French prestige in Vienna at Britain's expense. Indeed, there were now fears in London that Austria was becoming a French satellite and that a Habsburg-Bourbon alliance might even be in the offing. British diplomats referred apprehensively to 'the union which subsists between the Houses of Austria and Bourbon'. Elsewhere, the picture was one of almost unrelieved gloom. In the Baltic, rumours of a Franco-Danish treaty 'for subsidies on account of a body of Danish troops designed to be at the disposition of France'. A coup in Stockholm displaced the pro-Russian and generally pro-British 'Cap' party, and brought the pro-French 'Hats' to power once more. In December 1738 news of a proposed Franco-Spanish double marriage hit London. It seemed as if bastions were falling north, south and across Europe.²⁵

To cap it all, after a relatively calm period, relations with Prussia were once again on a knife-edge from early 1738. Frederick William had been inflamed by the disputed succession in Jülich-Berg, a small but strategically important principality on the western border of the Holy Roman Empire. This pitted Frederick William against the French, the Austrians and the Elector-King, who supported the rival claims of Pfalz-Sulzbach. George opposed a Prussian presence there on the grounds that it would have increased the encirclement of Hanover (the Prussians were already in nearby Cleves-Mark), and strengthened her standing within the Empire, where the leadership of the *Corpus Evangelicorum* was in dispute. Prussian military preparations were watched with anxiety from London. The Northern Secretary thought that although Frederick William might be bluffing, 'all his neighbours would certainly do well to be on their guard against any surprise'. In the broader scheme of things, George's anti-Prussian stance both supported and subverted British strategy in central Europe. It provided some much-needed support for Austria in the Empire, and thus bolstered the ailing Charles VI; on the other hand, it threatened to drive Frederick William into the arms of France.²⁶

More immediately, the looming clash with Berlin meant that the ministry would have to consider the safety of Hanover. At a bad-tempered and alcohol-fuelled dinner in the Prussian capital in late June 1738, the Prussian chief minister, Grumbkow, appealed to Protestant

solidarity against Vienna and Versailles, failing which Prussia 'would invade Silesia and Hanover'. He threatened not only to support the Pretender, but that the Prussians 'would overrun Hanover, and that would only be a breakfast'. Grumbkow also threatened to invade Holland into the bargain. The British ambassador was left to bluster that 'they would not find His Majesty's dominions so defenceless as they seemed to imagine, and that . . . if they came and breakfasted there without being invited, they could rest assured His Majesty would take the liberty of dining and supping with them longer than perhaps they should care for his company.' All this was a further reminder, if one was needed, that even relatively minor German disputes could suck Britain-Hanover back into the vortex of central Europe.²⁷

This was therefore not the moment, Newcastle argued, to launch a naval war with Spain. 'So many changes,' he warned in March 1738, 'may happen at the several courts of Europe, that nothing but omniscience can foresee them . . . so many schemes may be formed, for disturbing the present tranquillity, that no omnipotent power can, with authority, say, none of them shall take effect.' And because it was 'our business to preserve the peace of Europe,' Newcastle went on, Britain needed to be on the lookout for further French encroachments. So long as Fleury prevailed, all might be well, but after his death all bets would be off. 'The new ministry,' he feared, 'might fall in with the views of Spain and . . . instead of guaranteeing the Emperor's dominions in Italy, they would join with Spain in endeavouring to drive him entirely out of the country.' Besides, Britain would have to hold back land and naval forces to deter an assault by the Spaniards on her ally Portugal. 'I do not know,' Newcastle remarked, 'how soon a war may be kindled up in Europe, by their ambitious projects against Portugal or Italy.' What is striking here is the extent to which he feared Spanish ambitions in Europe far more than overseas.²⁸

Moreover, Newcastle saw the colonial and the European balances were closely linked within a Eurocentric framework. He pointed out that if 'any of our European neighbours . . . suspect[ed] that we had formed a design to dismember any part of the Spanish monarchy from that crown, there is not the least doubt but they would look upon us with a very jealous eye'. It would be a clear violation of the Treaty of Utrecht, which forbade any further Spanish territorial losses. Besides, it was by the same treaty that France 'was obliged to give up all claim to

... any commerce to the Spanish settlements ... This ... has always been looked upon as a necessary step towards preventing any nation in Europe from becoming too powerful for the rest'. For this reason, he continued, 'preserving the sole right of navigation and commerce to and from the Spanish settlements in America to the Spaniards themselves, was not the effect so much of Spanish policy, as of the jealousy which the powers of Europe entertained ... themselves, lest any other should acquire too great a property in that valuable trade of commerce'. Because, he continued, 'should too large a share of [these profits] come into the hands of another nation in Europe, whose situation, power or trade, render them perhaps already formidable to their neighbours, they might be employed to purposes inconsistent with the peace of Europe, and which might one day prove fatal to the balance of power.' In other words, control of the Spanish American Empire was primarily to be feared for its implications for the general European balance.²⁹

The deterioration of relations with Spain brought with it an increased fear of Jacobite machinations on the Continent. For much of the 1730s the opposition had dismissed the Pretender as a Walpolean fiction designed to keep them in their place at home, and to justify an inflated military establishment. 'All the dangers [alleged] either abroad or at home,' the Earl of Chesterfield protested in March 1738, 'depend on maybe's which must always subsist. A minister may die, a prince may have ambitious views, a prince's success may raise the jealousy of others, his misfortunes may revive their hopes, there may be a design to invade us, though we have not, at present, the least item of it.' He therefore accused ministries of 'terrifying us with imaginary plots and invasions, and making the tour of Europe in search of possible dangers, in order to show us the necessity of keeping up a mercenary standing army'. In the same vein, the Tory leader Sir William Wyndham said that Walpole's preoccupation with Jacobitism was a 'phantom of his own brain. This phantom haunted him about from place to place, and nothing could drive it out of his head.' In fact, the Pretender was indeed rallying diplomatic and military support in Europe in expectation of a rupture with Spain, and a close eye was kept on his movements. Diplomatic relations were broken with those states, such as Venice in 1737, which were deemed to be too close to the Jacobites. In March 1738 the Pretender welcomed news of deteriorating relations between London and Madrid as 'great progress towards a rupture'. Moreover, Elizabeth Far-

nese regularly played the Jacobite card herself: she reportedly announced in May 1738 'that if we force her to a war, she can raise such troubles in England as will make us sick of it'.³⁰

British ministers were acutely conscious of their limitations in the face of these mounting threats. 'I wish,' Walpole remarked with some exasperation, 'that it were in our power to give laws to every potentate in Europe, and to prescribe to them how they should behave, in every case, not only to us, but to one another. But this is at present impossible.' It might, with difficulty, be possible to master Spain, but only if France did not intervene. It was for this reason that Walpole rejected opposition demands for the seizure of Spanish vessels in reprisal. 'I am far from thinking,' he remarked in May 1738, 'that we are not a sufficient match for the Spaniards ... But give me leave to say that I think we are not a match for the Spaniards and French too.' At the beginning of the following year, he returned to this theme. 'I know that gentlemen ... are apt to imagine, from the military glory of this nation, that our arms are invincible, and I own ... that this is a most prevailing argument, especially in a popular assembly. There is somewhat in it, that flatters the ambition.'³¹

For all these reasons it was essential that Britain should not appear as the aggressor in any war with Spain. Patient negotiation in good faith, Newcastle argued, 'will convince the other powers of Europe that we have right as well as power on our side. But should we precipitately enter into a war with Spain ... without giving them an opportunity of making us reparation in an amicable way, the other powers of Europe would immediately take alarm.' They would suspect a British design to partition the Spanish colonial empire. Likewise, Walpole did not 'think it would be prudent in us to attempt making use of our power in a manner too positive and haughty lest by so doing we should provoke the other powers of Europe to unite together, in order to reduce the power of this nation'. Indeed, precipitate war 'might stir up some of the other powers of Europe to join with Spain, who would otherwise have remained neutral'. Above all, it was vital that Britain maintain good relations with France and especially with her chief minister, Fleury. He was now well into his eighties and his health became something of an obsession for British statesmen and diplomats. So long as Fleury held the line on Jacobitism; so long as he kept demands for a closer naval relationship with Spain at arm's length; and so long as the Habsburg

humpty-dumpty kept together; for so long, Britain would be relatively safe.³²

All this, of course, was grist to the opposition mill. If Britain was constrained by the deteriorating situation on the Continent, then surely this suggested some mismanagement of the European balance. Pulteney argued that 'if the political affairs of Europe have been negotiated into such a system [that] . . . this nation [is] not provided with any one ally, whose assistance we can depend on', then one might have to appease Spain; but then one would also need to 'deliver [Britain] from the councillors who have brought it into those difficulties'. Another parliamentarian argued that if Britain was isolated in Europe, 'would it not be our duty, to enquire into the state of the nation, and deliver our country from such polluted hands'. After all, he continued, 'if any powerful alliance be formed against us, and we cannot form a sufficient counter alliance, it must be owing to some late weakness or mistake in our conduct'. The MP, diplomat and entrepreneur Edward Wortley Montagu supported the call for an inquiry, 'for the affairs of Europe can never be brought into a bad situation for us, without some mismanagement of our own'. Very soon, as Britain's isolation in Europe deepened still further, the opposition critique of Walpole's management of the Continental balance of power was to gain much greater traction than its attack on the neglect of the maritime rivalry with Spain.³³

The ministry was now visibly under pressure. Behind the scenes it was beginning to panic. Thus at the very end of October 1737 Horatio Walpole complained to the British ambassador at Madrid that 'If the outrageous depredations lately committed by the Spaniards upon our commerce in the West Indies . . . are true, I cannot see how we can avoid interrupting a little the variety of diversions which Their Catholic Majesties seem to enjoy with so much tranquillity.' He doubted whether 'the English nation will bear as quietly their taking our ships, as they do their taking away Farinelli [a celebrated Italian castrato who had been lured away from his contract in London to sing at the Spanish court]. I must own but that you seem silent on that subject.' This, it must be remembered, from one of the most ardent British Eurocentrics. By the spring of 1738, it was clear that some concession to popular fury would have to be made. The ministry introduced a measure authorizing retaliatory action by authorized private contractors – bearing 'letters of marque and reprisal' – against Spanish shipping. This had the advantage of

subcontracting the job to local agents; intrinsically a half-measure anyway, it was also weakened by the fact that no private investor was likely to sink money into such vessels while a deal with Spain remained imminent. It could be no more than a stopgap solution, to allow more time for diplomacy.³⁴

By the beginning of 1739, popular agitation was increasingly setting the ministerial agenda. In the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament, mention was made of 'how sensibly I have been affected with the many hardships and injuries sustained by my trading subjects in America'.³⁵ One last effort was made to settle differences without war. The increasingly bizarre condition of the Spanish royal family made this all the more difficult. The Spanish King himself was a virtual prisoner in the Escorial Palace, where he was serenaded every day by Farinelli. Elizabeth Farnese was in total control. All the same, in mid January, British and Spanish negotiators agreed the Convention of the Pardo. By its terms, all the various obligations and claims were totalled and it was determined that Spain would pay the difference of £27,000, a fraction of the British claims, to be sure, but not a trivial sum. Six weeks later, commissioners were appointed to resolve the boundary disputes between Georgia and New Spain, which had been left open.

On 8 February the Convention was laid before Parliament. It was followed by a flood of condemnatory petitions from West India merchants and figures within the City of London. The MP Sir Thomas Sanderson said that 'The Convention now before us . . . is the most dishonourable, the most deceitful, the most ruinous treaty this nation ever made; I will be bold to say that ninety-nine out of a hundred of the people are of the same opinion.' What is striking is the extent to which the critique of the Convention of the Pardo hinged not on any points of detail, even once this was known, but on the rather nebulous concept of national 'honour'. 'If we do not vindicate our honour,' Lord Bathurst urged, 'and assert the rights and privileges of our people, in all parts of the world where they may have occasion to go, we must give up our foreign trade.' In the House of Commons one speaker claimed that 'the heart of every Englishman should be inflamed . . . I look upon this Convention as disadvantageous to the King, and ignominious to the nation.' Even the young William Pitt weighed in, stating that 'This Convention . . . I think from my soul is nothing but a stipulation for national ignominy.' Indeed, the government was widely suspected not

only to have caved in to Spanish maritime demands, but also of having agreed to the surrender of Georgia. The ministry rejected this hawkish fervour and the overt contempt for the very notion of negotiations. Lord Hervey responded that 'People may call the Convention a paper-peace, or by what other name they please, but if ever we make peace, we must trust to paper, or we can trust to nothing. Negotiations may be supported or enforced by military preparations, but they must be carried on in paper.' After all, he concluded, 'since paper was invented, I never heard of a peace that was concluded without paper . . . there can be no other sort of peace.'³⁶

As always, it was the primacy of Europe which underpinned ministerial thinking and rhetoric on the Convention of the Pardo. As the Duke of Portland pointed out, the quarrel with Spain 'relat[ed] entirely to trade: [it was] not founded on her aspiring to universal monarchy'. There was therefore no pressing reason for war. Lord Hervey argued that 'at a time when the affairs of Europe are in such a situation, that we can form no confederacy against them [France and Spain], at a time when, if we engage in war, we must stand single and alone against these two powerful nations . . . at such a time it would be prudent to suspend our vengeance . . . till a more proper opportunity should offer.' Moreover, the Dutch remained completely useless. Trevor, the British ambassador to the United Provinces, complained that 'the present inaction of this court is so great' that it was hardly worth bothering with a dispatch. In vain he pressed the Grand Pensionary – in effect the Dutch prime minister – about 'France's growing ascendant in the North'; in vain he stressed the need for a '*contrepoids* [counterweight] to the formidable monarchy'. Like the ministry in London, Trevor was worried by the 'far-fetched and expensive alliances which France was now negotiating in the north', which were intended 'to indispose and divert the several Protestant powers in Lower Saxony [the Principality of Lippe, the Duchy of Brunswick and the Electorate of Hanover itself] from contributing their forces towards opposing any enterprise that France may come to make on the Rhine or on the side of Flanders; and that the least I could estimate such a diversion at, was the difference of 50,000 men in the common cause'. All the spheres of Europe, in other words, were interconnected in this conception of Britain's security interests.³⁷

The basic problem was the domestic weakness of the Dutch Republic. Trevor's venomous reports on Dutch internal politics, he suggested,

'may serve to give one a pretty just idea of the Republic's interior economy, or rather its want of it'. He inveighed against the 'ingenuous and pathetic lectures' of Dutch politicians, and the 'puerility and confusion of their proceedings' in 'this decrepit state'. 'I do not know,' he concluded crushingly, 'the danger they would not dissemble, nor the affront they would not put up [with] rather than bestir themselves effectually.' All this, he remarked, was due to the Dutch sense of their 'domestic liberty', which would endanger the 'natural' liberties of Europe. Besides, the Dutch lived in terror of France: Trevor spoke of 'the very conviction of the superiority of France'. Even one of Trevor's interlocutors admitted the weakness of the United Provinces, which he described as 'a trunk without feet, without arms and without a head . . . her weakness appeared to him incurable'. The only remedy, he believed, was 'some standard erected in the cause of public liberty', to which the healthy forces in the United Provinces could rally. But that was a long way off. For the moment, no help could be expected from this quarter. Things were no better in Vienna. 'The House of Austria,' Walpole noted in March 1739, 'is now in so weak a condition' on account of the Turkish war, that it was unable to provide any assistance to Britain; Trevor also remarked on the Emperor being 'drained so low by his late and disastrous war'. Moreover with the increase of French influence in Vienna, some sort of attempt to subvert the Barrier itself was daily expected. The German princes were preoccupied with the Palatine succession, Sweden was hostile, Russia was 'at too great a distance to afford us any relief'. Britain was, in short, 'at present without any one ally upon the Continent'. Indeed, it was perfectly possible that 'the greatest part of Europe would unite against us'.³⁸

In any case, there was no guarantee that military action would be successful. 'I am not sanguine,' Lord Hervey remarked, 'as to think that we have victory chained to our chariot-wheel, or that we must be successful in every war we engage in.' The Earl of Isla, a staunch Scottish Whig like his elder brother the Duke of Argyll, reminded peers that 'Wars and victories . . . make a fine figure in history, or even in a newspaper . . . but upon balancing accounts we should have found, I believe, that the profit would not answer the charge.' Horatio Walpole warned, 'The event is doubtful, let the hopes of either party at the beginning be never so well founded. It is not the first time we have heard of the event of war's turning out contrary to all human appearances.'

Indeed, the recent example of Charles VI's disastrous attack on the Turks was a sobering one. In a pamphlet widely distributed by his brother Robert, Horatio Walpole punctured the idea of a lucrative risk-free naval bonanza. In a privateering war Spain would give as good as it got. But as the pro-government cleric, the Reverend Henry Etough later noted, 'This very instructive and prophetic pamphlet, as it had no influence on a mad and vain nation, is a memorable proof of the tenacious force of nonsense.'³⁹

Meanwhile, British ministers made strenuous efforts to escape isolation on the Continent. Negotiations for the renewal of the treaty of 1734 with Denmark were set in train. This was vital if Sweden was to be contained in the Baltic. Talks were begun in 1738, but almost immediately stalled when the Danes attempted to annex the territory of Steinhorst, and were ejected by the Hanoverians after a short battle. Once again, the King's German preoccupations threatened to cut across British grand strategy. By May 1739, however, a subsidy treaty with Denmark was on the table. Even the sceptic Carteret, who had been bitterly critical of government passivity, accepted that this was a move in the right direction. Unless Britain could escape her isolation and 'form a confederacy' in Europe, she would have no hope of containing France and Spain. The Danish treaty, therefore, was 'but a preparatory step towards accomplishing so great and necessary a design'. He supported the paying of what was literally Danegeld, in order to deny France an alliance with Denmark. This was essential not just to secure the 'tranquillity of the north' but also because 'if the French should join with the Spaniards against us, it would be of the most dangerous consequence, to have the navy of France increased and supported by the ships and seamen of Denmark as well as Sweden.' The link between Britain's European isolation and the danger of naval inferiority was once again made explicit.⁴⁰

This connection between Britain's Continental alliances and her naval security was central to British strategic discourse. As the Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Hardwicke, put it in March 1739, 'I know . . . it may be said, that as we have the good luck to be environed by the sea, and have a fleet superior to any that France and Spain, joined together, can bring against us, we may protect our own trade and dominions, and so much infest the trade and dominions of our enemies, as to make them, at last, glad to agree reasonable terms.' The snag, he pointed out, was

that 'if our enemies are, by their great land armies, absolute masters upon the Continent, they may not only prevent our receiving assistance from any of the princes or states upon the Continent, but they may induce or oblige them all to join against us,' and close their ports to British trade. Britain's commercial prosperity, in short, was dependent on the European balance of power. So was her naval predominance. As Lord Hervey argued, 'We are at present superior to both [France and Spain] at sea; but as France has great numbers of seamen, they would soon get ships of war, if they were to be at no expense in defending themselves at land; so that they might soon rig out a powerful squadron.'⁴¹

None of this could deflect a last great burst of naval chauvinism. Patriot speeches now challenged Britain's enemies to bring on the three corners of the world in arms so that Britain could shock them. The Duke of Argyll announced that 'We . . . are masters of that element whereon the cause must be decided, and let all our enemies, either professed or secret, nay, let all the neutral powers in Europe unite their naval force, we have a fleet now at sea that is able to beat them all.' As the year wore on, the demand for war grew ever shriller. In early May, Argyll announced that 'We must beat them [the Spaniards] into a better, I hope a righter opinion of us,' for they were a 'contemptible, though insolent nation'. 'For God's sake,' he cried, 'what are we afraid of? . . . Must we do nothing but what France gives us leave to do?' 'Let France take whatever part she will,' Chesterfield remarked in early June, 'She cannot look us in the face at sea; she cannot prevent our seizing the Spanish plate fleet.' Patriot scribblers, such as Sir William Keith, dismissed all European entanglements and called instead for a 'powerful armament by sea' and praised the 'British admiral, at the head of his fleet [as] by far the best ambassador and plenipotentiary, that can be made use of in a conjuncture such as the present'. Press critics of the pacific policy towards Spain, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, also refused to acknowledge any serious European constraints.⁴²

A general sense of crisis now gripped the country, as the frustration over the maritime disputes with Spain mutated into a much broader critique of Walpole's foreign policy. Pulteney remarked that 'considering the unfortunate situation the affairs not only of this nation but of Europe, are in at present, it is a subject of as serious a nature, as ever came before a British parliament.' Everybody knew what that meant: it was code for impeachment. 'We have got no security,' Carteret

thundered around the same time, 'and, I am afraid, little or no reparation.' 'The state of affairs in Europe is . . . formidable' and was 'growing every year more and more so'. All this, he claimed, was the result not of 'the nature of things, but [of] the late measures pursued by France and us'. There followed a long diatribe against the Treaty of Hanover, the alienation of the Emperor over the Ostend Company, the uselessness of the Dutch, the Spanish advances in the Mediterranean, and so on. Britain was now 'insulted and plundered by impotent neighbours abroad'. All this, he concluded, was the result, not of 'a vigorous but a pusillanimous conduct'.⁴³

The ministry wilted under the pressure. Boxed in by Hanoverian concerns, the deteriorating European balance, domestic distractions and the patriot din, they began to turn on each other. Thus Horatio Walpole complained to his brother that 'nobody has credit or courage enough to speak plainly . . . in their respective departments; and if you venture to do it sometimes, 'tis in a cursory manner. You receive short answer; domestic affairs employ your time and your thoughts; and the foreign mischief continues.' At the same time, perhaps sensing the inevitable, ministerial figures now began to adopt naval and insular rhetoric themselves. Hardwicke, for example, conceded in March 1739 that 'it is the peculiar happiness of this island, that no one nation in the world can attack us.' Newcastle in particular made a rapid – and temporary – conversion to maritime measures. After all, he remarked in late September,

if we go on despising what people think & say, we shall not have it long in our power, to direct what measures shall be taken . . . A little yielding to times, a plain dispassionate stat[ing] of our case, with proper assurances to the Public, that right Measures & vigorous ones, shall be undertaken against Spain, might have a good effect before the parliament meets, but if we are to go on in extolling the Convention, I say it with great concern, it will not do, & we shall feel the consequences of it.

Newcastle now set out to re-educate himself as a navalist, starting with Swift's famous pamphlet of 1711, *The conduct of the allies*. He became a prisoner of the public mood and his own demands for additional resources to intimidate Spain. 'I dread the consequences,' he wrote at the very end of September, 'of an expensive but necessary preparation, without having done any thing, or seeming to have any real solid plan

for that purpose. It can only be done in the West Indies, & there the author of *The conduct of the allies* says we should have carried our arms [in] the last war.' Newcastle added that although he was 'always answered, that it is improper to say we will undertake some thing, or some expedition in the West Indies, till we know what. Let us determine to do something; we shall soon find out what may be undertaken.' In effect, the Duke was succumbing to the view that 'something' – anything – was better than doing nothing. Newcastle was reinforced in this stance by intelligence reports which showed the French to be bluffing.⁴⁴

In the late summer and early autumn of 1739 the situation quickly worsened. As a final feeble gesture towards public opinion, yielding to the spirit of the time and in order to put pressure on Spain to make rapid restitution under the Convention, Newcastle refused to withdraw Admiral Haddock's squadron from the Mediterranean as promised at the Pardo. Spain refused to pay up their £27,000 until he did so. Thus was the Convention ruptured and war with Spain duly followed in September. In mid November, the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament cited 'the repeated injuries and violences committed by that nation upon the commerce of these kingdoms, and their obstinacy, and notorious violation of the most solemn engagements [which] have rendered [war] unavoidable'. For the first and last time in the eighteenth century, Britain had entered into a major war primarily for colonial and commercial reasons.⁴⁵

The Empires Strike Back, 1742–1745

The only basis upon which the balance of power can now be established, is to restore a firmer union and good correspondence among the several princes of Germany . . . to restore activity or force to the Germanic body.¹

Edmund Waller, House of Commons, December 1742

We may talk of our being an island: we may now boast of the superiority of our naval power: we may now in a great measure depend upon it as a security against our being invaded; but in this state of things, which Europe may probably be reduced to, if we do not powerfully interfere, I am afraid we shall not long have reason to boast of the superiority of our navy. If France were again in possession of the Netherlands, and freed from all apprehensions of an attack by land, she would certainly apply herself with the utmost diligence and application to the increase of her navy, and might in a very few years be able to fit out a most formidable squadron.²

Sir William Yonge, Secretary at War, 1742

All that we have to do, in my opinion, is to prepare for battle, to procure an early and universal attendance of all our people, and to blow the Hanover flame to height.³

Earl of Chesterfield, Whig rival of Carteret, 1743

Walpole left the security of Britain in the most parlous situation it had been in since the War of the Spanish Succession. Everywhere in Europe, French power or that of her allies was on the advance; British power, or that of her principal ally, Austria, was in full retreat. In Italy, Maria Theresa seemed about to lose the remaining Habsburg possessions to local Bourbon or Bourbon-backed forces. In Germany, the imperial

crown had been alienated from the Habsburgs, while Frederick of Prussia and an opportunistic alliance of German princes threatened to partition the Habsburg conglomerate there and then. The continuing colonial war with Spain, so controversial in 1739–40, was increasingly lost to view as the Spanish resurgence in the Mediterranean took centre stage. Within two years, the new ministry under Lord Carteret had restored the situation. The financial resources of the British Empire were harnessed to the political and military potential of Germany; an army composed of Hanoverian and other German contingents, the ‘Pragmatic Army’, was sent to uphold the integrity of the Habsburg lands. This strategy was designed not only to restore the European balance of power, but also to divert French energies from a naval assault on Britain. It triggered the most searching domestic debate yet on the question of the Hanoverian connection in particular, and Britain’s place in Europe more generally. By the end of 1743, however, the strategy had been resoundingly successful, as the victories at Dettingen and elsewhere showed. In this way, the combined resources of two Empires – the British and the German – were deployed to contain the French threat, and to ensure the maritime security of Great Britain.

Unlike Walpole, who had led from the Treasury, the new chief minister, Carteret, chose the Secretaryship of State for the North. It was a portent both of his determination to work closely with the King on foreign policy, and of the future centre of gravity of British policy, which would be Germany. Carteret was a known quantity. True, he had been a powerful advocate of the war against Spain, and remarkably insouciant about the French threat to the Pragmatic Sanction. His eloquent navalism of the past three years was a matter of record. Yet anybody who had observed Carteret’s career since the 1720s knew him as a committed Continentalist. He had cut his teeth as a young diplomat in Stockholm, trying to secure a Swedish alliance in order to contain Russia. He had been a firm opponent of the Hanover Treaty, which he regarded as a deviation from Britain’s traditional pro-Habsburg policy, and a supporter of Austria in the 1730s. He had travelled widely in Europe, had many friends there, including Hanoverians, took a keen interest in European literature, and spoke several languages: French, of course, but also Spanish and German. He was able to give the House of Lords an impromptu tutorial on the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire.

Europe and particularly Germany became Carteret’s obsession for the next two years.⁴

His priority now was to rescue the House of Austria. This he considered to be the ‘cause of the [German] Empire and of Europe, as well as that of the faith and public security’. According to his mother, the new chief minister even sent one claimant for preferment packing with the assertion that he ‘was never interested in anybody’s business, his whole mind being taken up with DOING GOOD TO THE NATION, and till the French was drove out of Germany and Prague was taken he could not think of such a bagatelle’. The first thing that Carteret did, therefore, was to try to persuade smaller German princes to provide mercenaries in support of Maria Theresa. In early March 1742 he told Prince William of Hesse of his alarm at seeing ‘France disposing in a sovereign manner of the [German] Empire and its provinces, and thus by consequence of the future of Europe’. This was because the new Bavarian Emperor would not have enough independent weight to maintain the balance of power in the Empire and thus in Europe as a whole. ‘Who knows,’ he argued, what would happen to ‘a House which, for more than a century, has been its principal instrument for defending and maintaining the liberties of the Empire and of Europe?’ The new Emperor, he feared, would be ‘eternally dependent’ on French support.⁵

The next step was a concerted diplomatic and military offensive to take the pressure off Austria and contain France. William Pulteney, who had taken a peerage as the Earl of Bath and become a supporter of the new ministry, now spoke the language of classic Whig strategy. He ‘laid it down as a maxim that this nation was to hold the balance in Europe. There was no supporting it but by a power on the Continent able to oppose France: that power was the Queen of Hungary.’ It was therefore necessary to ‘show France we were prepared: that Flanders was barrier to us, as well as to Holland. Therefore that we should send forces thither . . . [which] if it had no other effect, would occasion a powerful diversion in favour of the Queen of Hungary.’ From the spring of 1742 onwards, therefore, British forces under the command of Lord Stair began to deploy to the Austrian Netherlands in preparation for opening up a new front against the French and easing the pressure on Maria Theresa. Officially, these men were fighting for Maria Theresa and not against France, as war with that power was not yet declared.⁶

Carteret was at first successful in Germany: Lord Hyndford mediated

a preliminary peace agreement between Prussia and Austria at Breslau in June 1742. He also succeeded in concluding a defensive alliance with Frederick the Great at Westminster in November 1742. The problem with these gambits was that they involved unilateral concessions by Austria, which weakened the Barrier and made Britain complicit in Maria Theresa's distress. As she herself pointed out, there would have to be some sort of compensation for the loss of Silesia. 'Since England has insisted with great vehemence on accommodation with Prussia,' Maria Theresa wrote in mid June 1742, 'and has not seen fit to provide [me] with any help . . . the loss will have to be made good somewhere else.' Carteret's solution was nothing if not audacious: it was to construct a whole new geopolitics of central and southern Europe in order to keep the Austrians up, and the Bourbons out. Maria Theresa would be reconciled to the loss of Silesia and the imperial crown through compensating her with 'equivalents', perhaps Lorraine and parts of Alsace. In Italy, Carteret hoped to restore Naples to Austria. Taken together, both moves would reverse the consequences of the War of the Polish Succession at a stroke.⁷

At the same time, Carteret sought to detach the new Emperor Charles VII from France. This was attempted in the negotiations at Hanau in July 1743, when generous subsidies were offered to Charles Albert through his appointed mediator, Prince William of Hesse. Carteret and George also considered proposals to offer Bavaria the prospect of territorial gains in Germany at the expense of some of the smaller German bishoprics and imperial cities; the ethical and legal implications do not seem to have bothered them. This was of a piece with the traditional 'Protestant' *Reichspolitik* of the first two Georges. In return, Charles Albert was to break with France, and ensure France's withdrawal from Germany. Shortly afterwards, the Treaty of Worms created a generously funded alliance between Britain, Austria and Piedmont-Savoy in September 1743. The two gambits had separate geographical foci but the same aim, which was to strengthen the Habsburgs and thus restore the European balance of power.⁸

Both schemes hit two more or less immovable objects. First of all, there was the unwillingness of other powers to be shunted around in accordance with British conceptions of the European balance. Maria Theresa, in particular, was loath to give up Silesia or to forego the chance of venting her wrath on the Bavarians. If pressed, she preferred

neighbouring Bavaria as an equivalent for Silesia, to the return of distant Lorraine. Emperor Charles Albert disliked the idea of 'secularization' – that is the despoliation of ecclesiastical principalities – because it would have damaged his standing in the Catholic half of the Empire. Secondly, there was the anticipated scepticism of the British parliament, which was reluctant to pay more than absolutely necessary to Maria Theresa and even more so to enter into an open-ended commitment to the Savoyard territory of Sardinia. The 'treaty' of Hanau was therefore never completed: it was rejected by Carteret's fellow ministers in London, the Earl of Hardwicke, the Duke of Newcastle and his brother Henry Pelham, as well as by Maria Theresa herself.

Their reasons were in part personal. The Regency Council in London, to which the government had been entrusted after George left for Hanover in May 1743, was terrified that Carteret would exploit his proximity to the monarch to sideline them. They had seen it happen only two years earlier with Harrington; now they feared that Carteret would press the claims of his candidate, Pulteney – Lord Bath – over those of Henry Pelham to succeed Lord Wilmington at the Treasury. But there was a more fundamental strategic disagreement – aggravated by a measure of misunderstanding – which had sprung up between London and Carteret in Germany. Newcastle was quick to see in the negotiations an attempt by Carteret to indulge the King's Hanoverian ambitions at the expense of Austria. Indeed, it was at this point that the commander of the British forces, Lord Stair, resigned because he thought that Britain was about to leave Maria Theresa in the lurch. They feared that Carteret was about to 'lose' Austria all over again. Underlying this was a crucial ambiguity in British *Reichspolitik*. It had been axiomatic until about 1720 and again since the early 1730s that the containment of France required a strong Emperor and a strong Habsburg monarchy; before 1740, the two were identical. But what if the Emperor were not a Habsburg? In that case, Newcastle felt, there was no point in supporting him. Far better, he thought, to distract the French in Europe by distressing his German ally. 'I dread,' Newcastle wrote in late May 1743, 'having France and Spain singly on our hands . . . The Emperor is the weak point of their question; he is more than half conquered already; there we must press France, and there we shall get the better of them.'⁹

Diplomacy was only one part of Carteret's strategy; military coercion was another. In the Mediterranean, the Royal Navy now engaged the

Spanish fleet, and occasionally the French – with whom they were not yet formally at war – with much greater vigour. French ships were driven into St Tropez in 1742 and burned. That same year, Commodore Martin sailed into the Bay of Naples, trained his guns on the royal palace and threatened to level it unless King Charles of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies withdrew from the anti-Habsburg coalition. This he promptly did, an event which was much celebrated as an advertisement for British naval diplomacy. By the following year, Spain was forced to send reinforcements to Italy via France, as the route by sea had become too insecure. She concluded a family compact with France in October 1743, but this did nothing to change the fact that the naval balance had swung back towards Britain. And this was felt not so much in the colonies but in the crucial European theatre, the Mediterranean. This is borne out by the disposition of British naval forces in 1742–3. In 1742 there were 16,000 seamen in the colonies, nearly 13,000 in the Mediterranean, and about 16,000 in home waters; in 1743 the figures were respectively 11,000, 19,000 and 15,000. Even the great naval innovation of the 1740s, the permanent western squadron cruising between England and Cape Finisterre – the brainchild of Admiral Vernon – pertained to home waters. The colonial war against Spain – the War of Jenkins’s Ear – in fact stagnated in 1742–4. There were so many more important things happening in Europe.¹⁰

Here the crucial front lay in the west: in Flanders, the Rhineland and the Palatinate. It was here that the French would have to be checked and pinned down. One option was to seek an auxiliary corps from Russia, where some measure of stability had returned with the accession of the Tsarina Elizabeth in November 1741. As Russia was still at war with Sweden, Carteret sought to mediate in order as he put it ‘that they may have their hands free to act in a greater, more useful and more salutary manner’. The auguries for Britain were good, as the French had disgraced themselves in St Petersburg not only by their overt partisanship for their traditional ally Sweden, but also because they were suspected of trying to incite the Ottoman Turks to attack from the south. Paradoxically, the large Jacobite contingent in the Russian army does not seem to have been much of an obstacle. On the contrary, their fighting skills were so highly prized that British policy hinged on keeping them in Russia, if only to deny them to France. In the end, the problem in Russia was that everything moved very slowly. A defensive treaty was

secured in 1742, and the pro-British Count Alexis Bestuzhev triumphed as Chancellor in 1744 and became Tsarina Elizabeth’s chief minister, but a treaty between Maria Theresa and the Tsarina Elizabeth – the Treaty of the Two Empresses – did not come about until 1746, and it was only in 1748 that Russian troops actually arrived in central Europe, much too late to make any difference to the outcome.¹¹

There was thus no alternative to the deployment of a British, or at least British-sponsored, army in Germany. Carteret quickly realized that the key to that enterprise was bringing Hanover into the war. The Electorate had a substantial population – about 700,000 inhabitants – and the armed forces were, at 20,000 men, not insubstantial by mid-eighteenth-century standards. Moreover, while Elector George was constrained somewhat by the laws of the Holy Roman Empire, he had a reasonably free hand in foreign policy; there was no Hanoverian equivalent to the Westminster parliament. The Neutrality Convention was therefore revoked, and Hanover became the mainstay of an army fighting in Germany and Flanders. This force, which came to be known as the ‘Pragmatic Army’, numbered about 14,000 British troops, 14,000 Austrians and some 22,000 British-paid Hanoverians. It was commanded initially by the British general Lord Stair and then by George II in person. The French rose to the bait: Fleury had been attacked for letting George off the hook with the Neutrality Convention in 1741, and the reopening of hostilities seemed to give the French a second chance to attack Britain’s perceived Achilles heel.¹²

Hanover, in other words, was co-opted for the British war effort. As Carteret remarked, he could not ‘discover any clause by which we are forbidden to make use in our own cause of the Alliance of Hanover, or by which Hanoverians are forbidden to assist us’. As one undersecretary of state reported him as saying in March 1742, Carteret ‘staked his whole on keeping the Elector an Englishman’. ‘England,’ Carteret argued, ‘was subservient to Hanover. But Hanover is now subservient to England.’ This was, he explained, because ‘The Electorate is regulated by our measures and is, not without the utmost danger, engaged in a war which might easily have been declined.’ The Hanoverian envoy was told that the ‘distinction between His Majesty as King and as Elector must cease’. On the other hand, Carteret was brutally clear that Britain could no longer be blackmailed through Hanover. Frederick the Great was wasting his time when he warned George II in December 1742 that he ‘would

have him remember that Hanover is at a very little distance from me, and that I can enter there when I please'. He had already been told, as Carteret instructed Lord Hyndford, the British minister in Berlin, that 'His Prussian Majesty will much deceive himself, if he thinks the King will be frightened from pursuing the system of England, and be brought to abandon the liberties of Europe by the danger with which his German dominions may be menaced.' On the contrary, Carteret warned that George II could 'firmly rely on all the weight and power of these Kingdoms being exerted in defence of them, whenever they shall be involved with England in the great and general cause'. British and Hanoverian security, in short, were not in contradiction, but symbiotically linked.¹³

This co-option of Hanover was reflected in the coordination between British and Hanoverian diplomats. In October 1742 the British minister at the Saxon court at Dresden was not only instructed to search for allies in Germany to help Maria Theresa against the French, but also to go via 'Hanover to receive there such lights [instructions] as will be given you by the King's Electoral ministers'. In April of the following year, the Hanoverian ministers not only kept Lord Hyndford briefed on the situation in Germany, but also supplied copies of documents which were to be 'sent to the German ministers of the King at foreign courts so that they can modify their language accordingly'. In other words, British and Hanoverian policy was being synchronized. And in May 1743 Carteret, accompanied by his German-language tutor Caspar Wetstein, set off to join George in Hanover. The Hanoverians themselves were certainly under no illusion that it was a British and not a Hanoverian war that was being waged after 1742. Thus the instructions sent by the Hanoverian ministers to their representative at the Reichstag stated that the Elector, 'in order to please the English nation, wished to continue the war in Germany out of rancour against France'.¹⁴

In military terms, Carteret's strategy was at first quite successful. From the spring of 1742, France – as yet still formally at peace with Britain – was forced to engage the Pragmatic Army. Rather than concentrating on attacking Britain overseas, she found herself bogged down in Germany. The Marquess of Tweedale told Parliament in 1742 that French ambitions in the (German) Empire and throughout Europe had been contained, and that 'the power of the House of Bourbon has been diminished on every side, its alliance has been rejected, and its influence disregarded.' Even such a staunch independent Whig critic as Sir John

Barnard, who excoriated 'the extreme complaisance' that Carteret's ministry had 'shown to the Crown with regard to domestic affairs', was moved to grant that 'with regard to foreign affairs, our conduct seems to be a little altered: our new ministers seem to act with more vigour, and to show a little more regard to the preservation of the liberties of Europe, than their predecessor ever did.' In late June 1743, George II, spurring his troops on in broken English, led the Pragmatic Army to victory at Dettingen, the last British monarch to do so. The King had been, as Carteret proudly related, 'all the time in the heat of the fire'. This was the sort of leadership which Britons appreciated, and the initial enthusiasm for George was not far behind that for Vernon over Porto Bello. One of Newcastle's stewards put the success down 'to His Majesty's being there', and remarked that the people were now happier to pay up for the war and drink to the royal family 'and the rest of the brave fellows abroad'. Moreover, the Electoral contingent had made a major contribution to the victory; 'no artillery was better served,' one account of the battle related, 'or did more execution, than the Hanover.' Against this background Newcastle, who harboured a profound mistrust for Carteret, was forced to concede that keeping Hanover in the war was 'the best thing he ever did'. The German Empire had been effectively mobilized against France.¹⁵

In political terms, however, the decision to co-opt Hanover and pay for the Hanoverian contingent in the Pragmatic Army was to prove highly controversial. The issue of the 'Hanover troops' now became a sounding board for a much broader discussion about British foreign policy, Britain's place in Europe, and British identity more generally. It was a debate which was conducted both in Parliament and 'out of doors': the distinction is a fine one, because the themes and the protagonists were often the same whether they were to be found in popular pamphlets or on the floor of the Houses of Parliament. None of the arguments advanced was new, but never before had they been advanced by so many and with such vigour or clarity. Some 45 pamphlets were published on the conduct of the war in 1743, and in 1744 it was 50; by 1747, it was only 7. As the Lord Chancellor and Whig stalwart Hardwicke complained in 1744, 'In the last winter before this time, there were volumes of virulent pamphlets published, which did infinite mischief.' There was never again to be quite such a sustained discussion of British foreign policy, until perhaps the closing stages of the Seven Years War.



22. King George II leading his troops at the Battle of Dettingen.

But then, there did not need to be: it had all been said, many times over.¹⁶

The resulting debates were ferocious, particularly in the House of Lords. In mid December 1743, for example, the Earl of Litchfield lamented that the idea that the liberties of Britain and Europe 'should be sacrificed to a mere Hanover job [‘job’ was eighteenth-century parlance for the corrupt provision of employment to a crony at public expense], raises my indignation, I must confess, above that coolness with which every lord ought to express himself in this House. I say, my lords, a Hanover job, it is not only a Hanover job, but a job of the most sordid kind: a low trick to draw the nation in, to give a large sum of money to Hanover yearly.’ A month later it was the turn of the Earl of Westmorland to condemn the hire of Hanoverian troops as a ‘job, a mean, despicable job; a job invented only to enrich Hanover and by enriching Hanover, to recommend the minister to a job to plunder the nation, and to advance the fortunes of sycophants and prostitutes.’ He went on to say, ‘I hope, my lords, I shall be forgiven if my indignation has transported me to the use of some expressions which, upon any

other occasion, might justly be censured. For, my lords, my natural hatred of a job leaves me not sufficiently master of my temper.’ This was strong language even by the standards of the time. Thus the Earl of Cholmondeley deplored ‘the licentious language and unusual virulence, which have appeared in the discussion of this question’, which had seemed to ‘authorize every man to offer his sentiments with very little premeditation, and to set himself free from the anxious observation of forms of decency’. In this perfervid atmosphere, it was perhaps no surprise that Carteret and Arthur Onslow, the Speaker of the House of Commons, both received death threats during the Hanover debates.¹⁷

On the face of it, the response to the hiring of the Hanoverians was simply another attack on Hanover and the Personal Union itself. It was led in the House of Commons by Edmund Waller, the Opposition Whig stalwart, and in the Lords by the Earl of Chesterfield. Together, they wrote *The case of the Hanover forces in the pay of Great Britain, impartially and freely examined* (1742/3). The weekly *Old England*, or *the Constitutional Journal* also kept up a steady barrage of anti-Hanoverian rhetoric. Many of the pamphlets were written by peers or MPs, so that Parliament and the press formed an echo chamber in which the arguments resonated to devastating effect. It was alleged that the war was being waged solely to enlarge ‘insignificant’ Hanover, that the hiring of the Hanoverians was simply a device for fleecing British taxpayers, and that all this was highly unconstitutional. ‘It is Hanover, and Hanover only,’ one MP lamented, ‘that seems to be our care: that is to be guaranteed by all our treaties . . . Is this not contrary to the Act of Settlement? Is this not unhinging the very frame of our constitution?’ In the House of Lords, the naval enthusiast the Earl of Sandwich lamented ‘that England has no longer the honour of being the arbitress of the Continent; that she is considered only as the ally of an Electorate’. And all this, as the Earl of Chesterfield claimed, in order to pay for a militarily worthless force. ‘I have been told by all the German officers I have ever conversed with,’ he claimed, ‘that they are among the worst troops in Germany.’ But the most ferocious attack was launched by William Pitt, for whom these debates represented a political and oratorical breakthrough. ‘It is now too apparent’, he thundered, ‘that this great, this powerful, this formidable kingdom, is considered only as a province to a despicable Electorate.’ Pitt, according to one observer, ‘spoke like ten thousand angels’.¹⁸

Some attacks did not stop short of the throne itself. Chesterfield's suggestion that the 'partiality shown to the Hanoverians', stemmed from the fact that George was 'born and bred a Hanoverian', left him on the right side of the law if not of convention. But in December 1742, Pitt suggested to uproar that George had submitted to 'temptations of greater profit' in hiring the Hanoverians. The implication that the King had sold out the national interest for pecuniary gain could certainly be construed as lese-majesty. So could the speeches of the MP John Hynde Cotton who, oddly for a Jacobite, hinted that exile, the fate of James II, beckoned. Likewise Lord Lonsdale warned that admirable though George's affection for Hanover was in itself, 'Our own late history has furnished us with an example of a king, that was drove from his throne for extending too far a quality that was in itself highly commendable: zeal for religion.' The sense of menace was unmistakable. Clearly, it was not just ministers who could fall if the affairs of the nation were mismanaged, but even kings.¹⁹

Much of the argument was crude, but some of it did not lack sophistication. The Hanover treaties, the opposition claimed, violated not just the British constitution, but that of the German Empire as well. For this purpose Sandwich turned himself into something of a barrack-room imperial lawyer. 'It is necessary,' he announced, 'to take a view of the constitution of the Germanic body, which consists of a great number of separate governments . . . subject in some degree to the Emperor as the general head.' Now that Charles VII had received the endorsement of the Reichstag at Regensburg, Sandwich claimed, 'none' of the troops of Germany can . . . be employed against him, without subjecting the prince to whom they belong to the censure of the ban, a kind of civil excommunication.' This argument was – as Carteret soon demonstrated – quite specious, but it was not straightforwardly ignorant. It found its way into the protest of the twenty-five dissentient lords, who objected to the Hanover payments 'because we apprehend that the troops of the Elector of Hanover cannot be employed to act in Germany against the head of the Empire'. Likewise, the accompanying pamphlet literature argued that Hanover was barred by imperial law from sending troops against Charles.²⁰

Far from allaying these concerns, the victory at Dettingen actually inflamed them in some quarters. The fact that George had charged into battle wearing not British colours, but the yellow sash of Hanover, gave

particular offence. Some of the attacks, such as the ballad entitled 'The Yellow Sash, or Hanover Beshit', were openly scatological. It was alleged that the Hanoverian contingent, despite shirking battle, had been given special marks of royal favour and that the British commander Lord Stair had been deliberately slighted and subordinated to the Hanoverians. 'The omniscient Hanoverians,' Sandwich alleged in the House of Lords, 'had the unrivalled direction of every movement', thanks to 'fawning ministers'. 'Thus,' he lamented, 'was the honour of our country, and the success of our undertakings, sacrificed to Hanover.' Most of these criticisms were ill-founded. It was true that George had worn Hanoverian yellow at Dettingen, but there was no reason for him not to do so, as Britain was not yet formally at war with France. In any case, he had worn the same dress at the Battle of Oudenaarde back in 1708, during the War of the Spanish Succession, when a Hanoverian contingent had served under Marlborough. The message for those who were disposed to recognize it was the continuity of Francophobe Continentalism. All the same, John Wootton's painting of the battle, which hangs in the National Army Museum in Chelsea, tactfully renders the sash in blue. Nor was there much in the accusations of favouritism. Indeed, George had specifically instructed his Hanoverian generals to take orders from Stair. Thus the cavalry commander, General du Pontpétin, was to keep Stair informed of his movements and 'to await instructions from the same in which way he is to join him with the corps entrusted to him and where the rendezvous is to take place'. Once in Germany, of course, George took over direct personal command from Stair.²¹

Unsurprisingly, the Jacobites and Tories sought to take advantage of the controversy. Hynde Cotton accused British ministers of being 'biased and blinded by their fondness for the project of adding a part of the Prussian dominions to the Electorate of Hanover'; he criticized the 'great flow of riches into the Electorate of Hanover' and deplored that 'the views of Hanover have been the pole-star of our political compass ever since the death of the late Emperor, as they had been for many years before'. At the same time, John Campbell of Cawdor claimed to be 'well informed that the government know the Pretender's instructions are to run down Hanover as much as possible'. Ministers hoped, he argued, thereby to distract from the unpopularity of the Pretender himself. Indeed, as Horatio Walpole observed wearily in December 1742, 'if we have a mind effectually to prevent the Pretender from ever obtaining

this crown, we should make him Elector of Hanover, for the people of England will never fetch another King from there.²²

But it was really the non-governmental Whigs and disaffected grantees who made the running. So much so, that the government made strenuous efforts to suppress public discussion by harassing printers and confiscating their stock. For if the outrage directed at Hanover was genuine and popular, it was also tactical. It is clear from the large and potentially risky print runs that the principal motivation was political, not commercial. Indeed, the whole campaign in and out of Parliament was directed by the opposition Whig leader, the Earl of Chesterfield, with the express purpose of bringing down the ministry. To do this, he believed, it was necessary 'to blow the Hanover flame to height'. The balance between spontaneous popular feeling and party-political manipulation is illustrated by some remarks of the Earl of Sandwich. 'The clamour and general discontent of all ranks of people on account of our late Hanoverian measures,' he told the Duke of Bedford, 'is greater than I could have imagined it could possibly have been; and, if rightly pursued by a vigorous attack at the beginning of the session, may be productive of very good ends.'²³

Most of the fire was concentrated on Carteret, who was accused of having used the Hanoverian issue to ingratiate himself with the King. One sixpenny ballad ran thus:

Abroad our gallant army fights
In Austria's cause for G—rn—n Rights
By English Treasure fed
Hessians and Hano— too
The gainful trade of war pursue,
With C—T at their head²⁴

This theme was echoed in Parliament. 'If we are thus to go on,' the extremist Tory MP for Cornwall, Sir John St Aubyn thundered, 'and, if to procure the grace and favour of the Crown, this is to become the flattering measure of every successive administration – this country is undone!' Only a 'thorough-paced courtier,' George Lyttleton argued, 'may perhaps think that the cause of Hanover is the cause of Europe'. Lord Barrington argued that 'an unpopular and detested minister must think of courting the favour of his prince, and . . . [f]or this purpose he must humour and flatter his favourite passions and prejudices, let them

be never so inconsistent with the interest or happiness of the nation.' George Dodington attacked the 'Hanoverianized' ministers. Pitt even went so far as to describe Carteret as 'an English minister without an English heart, a Hanover troop minister'. The opposition Whigs were joined by former supporters of Walpole in their quest to supplant Carteret. In a letter to his brother, Henry Pelham, Newcastle wrote that 'that which particularly at this time makes it, in my opinion, impracticable to go on with him [Carteret] is that his chief view in all he does or proposes to do is the making court to the King by mixing Hanover considerations to all others. By this method he secures the closet [i.e. the King's favour] whether his schemes succeed or not.' Twenty-five years on from the Baltic crisis of 1717 not much had changed.²⁵

The Hanover controversy of 1742–4 was about much more than just the Personal Union and political infighting. It was also a far-reaching discussion of Britain's role in Europe and the wider world. Many of Carteret's critics were themselves supporters of the European balance of power, the Austrian alliance and the Protestant Succession. Lord Stair, the military scourge of the Hanoverians, was certainly one. He had a long pedigree of Francophobia and staunch support for the 'balance of power'. He had even supported vain attempts in 1734 to bring Britain into the War of the Polish Succession on the Austrian side. Nor – as a strong anti-Jacobite – could he be accused of deliberately making the Pretender's breeze to blow. Much the same could be said of many other Whig critics of the Hanover troops, including Chesterfield and Pulteney. Thus when Stair launched his diatribe against the Hanover troops in early December 1742, it was not the neglect of colonial expansion he attacked, but the abandonment of Austria in the War of the Polish Succession – 'deserting her in the year 1733' – the alleged partiality towards France, and the general mismanagement of the European balance of power. Likewise, when Lord Quarendon went into massive historical detail to demonstrate the mistakes of the Walpole administration, most of it pertained to European grievances. After fifteen columns, he was just over halfway into his speech, and was still not past 1720. Opposition to the Hanover troops, therefore, did not as such signal hostility to engagement on the Continent.²⁶

Indeed, much of the opposition critique was devoted to outlining an alternative European policy. The *Old England* journal accepted in June 1744 that 'true Britons' should remain engaged in Europe, but 'only' in

the 'necessary defence of that part of the Continent . . . in which England has any concern, I mean the Barrier'. Later that year it criticized the ministry for failing to come to grips with the depth of Austro-Prussian rivalry. The same point was made by Edmund Waller in the House of Commons, when he argued that relying on a revitalized Austria was not enough to contain France: the Prussians, Bavarians and a whole range of other German princes would have to be co-opted as well in order 'to restore activity or force to the Germanic body'. The Opposition also professed faith in Britain's traditional Dutch ally. Here the thinking was somewhat contradictory: intervention should wait for the Dutch, but British troops should not be sent to Flanders for fear of provoking the French to attack the Dutch. Even the Earl of Chesterfield, scourge of the Hanover troops, agreed that Britain should intervene actively in support of the balance. 'We might lay it down as an invariable maxim,' he argued, 'never to enter into a land war, never, but when the Dutch Barrier was in danger.' The problem was that upholding the Dutch Barrier was not possible without maintaining the House of Habsburg, which in turn involved a major commitment to the European balance of power.²⁷

But for many, Hanover was just a pretext to ventilate navalist and even isolationist tendencies. Thus Lord Sandwich saw Britain 'entangled in a labyrinth in which no end is to be seen . . . that we are involved in a foreign quarrel only to waste that blood and that treasure, which might be employed in recovering the rights of commerce, and regaining the dominion of the sea'. Spain should therefore be 'subdued' first. In the meantime, he concluded, Britain should not 'engage in a distant war, in a dispute about the dominion of princes in the bowels of the Continent; of princes of whom it is not certain, that we shall receive either advantage or security from their greatness, or that we should suffer any loss or injury by their fall'. This isolationist trend found a loud echo in the public sphere. The author of *The political maxims* (1744), for example, announced that 'A prince or state ought to avoid all treaties, except such as tend towards promoting Commerce or Manufactures . . . All other alliances may be looked upon as encumbrances.' Among Britain's allies, of course, all this produced horror and incomprehension. The Dutch statesman Count Bentinck asked in 1745 what seventeenth-century Englishmen would think, 'if they had heard an English nobleman say that it signifies as little who is Emperor, as who is Lord Mayor of London'. It

was, after all, the failure of James II to react to events in the Empire which had broken the back of the Stuarts in 1688.²⁸

If Continental alliances were suspect *per se*, then so was the old Whig orthodoxy by which France was to be tied down in Europe, in order to secure Britain's naval superiority. 'The maxim,' Edmund Waller argued, 'of our keeping France and Spain involved in a land war, in order to prevent their attacking us with their joint force, by sea, ought not to be received without some qualification.' If 'the land war must be chiefly supported at our expense, we ought rather to take our chances of supporting a naval war by ourselves alone, than engage in any such war by land, because it would divert us from prosecuting the war by sea . . . by which alone we can expect to reap any benefit to ourselves'. Likewise the pamphlet *The interest of Hanover steadily pursued* (1743) wondered 'Whether it might be conducive to the true interest of this nation to rely wholly upon that situation which disjoins it from the rest of the world, to increase its naval force, and to give its great application to the marine without concerning itself with the intrigues of the neighbouring states.' This struck the author as preferable to limbering up 'once more to cover Flanders with our troops, to negotiate, to fight, and to expend our treasure, in restraining the overgrown power of France, and in preserving the balance of Europe'. Of a piece with this navalist thinking were the demands for coastal raids on France, which first surfaced in Opposition rhetoric in 1743-4.²⁹

Underlying this thinking was a disenchantment with the whole idea of the balance of power, or at least of its viability. Thus another prominent navalist, Lord Halifax, saw no British interest in paying for the Hanover troops, only a rather woolly desire for 'the general happiness and liberty of all the nations of Europe'. Indeed, he claimed that 'We are now . . . about to fight, not for our lives or our estates, or for the safety of our families, or the continuance of our privileges; we are contending only to support what has been so often shaken that it is not easy to find how it can be fixed; we are only attempting to settle the balance of Europe.' Halifax dismissed the balance of power as a catch-all of the politics of fear, designed to fleece the nation, curtail their liberties, and deter them from asking searching questions about how their money had been spent. Similar points were made by Edmund Waller in the House of Commons. 'We have of late,' he remarked in January 1744, 'got into a ridiculous custom of making ourselves the Don Quixotes of Europe.' This was

because Britain 'sometimes under the pretence of preserving a balance of power in Europe, at other times under the pretence of preserving a balance of power in the north', had 'engaged . . . in the quarrel of almost every state in Europe, that has, by its imprudence or ambition, brought itself into any distress'. The result, Halifax complained, was that 'whilst we take upon ourselves the burden of defending our allies, they give themselves very little trouble about defending themselves.' Too much British intervention on the Continent, in other words, had created a dependency culture among the other powers.³⁰

These parliamentary and popular debates were ostensibly about foreign policy, but they were also very much about the nature of British, or English, identity. It is well known that eighteenth-century 'Britons' constructed their identity in opposition to a Catholic and French 'other'. What is less well known is that the most sustained popular and elite engagement with the 'other' concerned Protestant and German Hanover. Antagonism to the Personal Union became a way of accentuating one's own patriotism. Thus the opposition Whig John Tucker, MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, claimed that 'all true Englishmen' were against the Hanover troops, and that 'Whig and Tory has been laid aside a good while and the distinction of Court and Country is now sunk into that of Englishmen and Hanoverians.' Looking forward to the 1742 debates, the opposition Whig Richard Grenville wrote that 'We shall then see . . . who are Hanoverians, and who Englishmen.' A year later, the Duke of Bedford described the Hanoverians as guilty of 'partiality, insolence and disobedience' and also as 'strangers to England'. The Earl of Chesterfield pronounced that 'The people of this kingdom have already conceived a sort of aversion to Hanover . . . I am resolved that let this question go how it will, it shall appear upon your journals [i.e. the parliamentary record], that I acted upon this occasion like an Englishman.' The twenty-six peers who voted against the Hanover payments registered their dissent so that 'our names in the books may transmit us to posterity Englishmen'. To underline the point, one version of the division list printed the names of the ayes in Hanoverian yellow and the nays in glorious British red.³¹

The sense of British identity which emerged from the Hanover debates was not so much ethnic but political. Critics repeatedly stressed their 'freedom' and 'liberty' against the Continental despotism of Hanover and the King; they were, in the words of one peer, 'stubborn freeborn

Englishmen, who had from their infancy conceived a notion of rights and privileges inherent and unalienable'. Lord Lonsdale stated it as axiomatic 'that any freeborn Englishman ought to precede a hireling of Hanover'. Sometimes, this rhetoric took on an orientalizing streak, when one peer spoke about the 'Electoral divan [having] regulated the operations'. On this reading the Hanoverian connection had the taint not merely of central European but eastern – Ottoman – despotism.³²

For this reason, the suspected aggrandizement of Hanover was not just a violation of the Act of Settlement but a mortal threat to the constitution itself. The *Old England* journal argued in December 1743 that 'He that govern'd by will and pleasure in one country would be apt to think himself extremely unlucky that he could not do the same in another; other than continue thus unhappy he would endeavour to introduce and establish, if not exactly his own arbitrary system, something that might answer his ends almost as well. And this might be easily and safely done by his dodging between the two capacities of K[ing] and E[lector]'. Moreover, the employment of Hanoverian troops fuelled fears that they might be employed by the monarchy and corrupt ministers to threaten British liberties. Thus St Aubyn argued that the Hanoverians 'lived under a prince who being used to arbitrary power in his dominions abroad, was minded to establish it here; and that all his measures were calculated for that end and this of Hanover troops in particular'. Likewise, Sandwich fretted that 'These troops may support the minister, which may ruin the nation; nor is this the first body of auxiliaries which courtiers have called in to their assistance.' In this context, of course, the acquisition of Bremen and Verden took on a particularly sinister aspect. As one pamphleteer pointed out, a future monarch with absolutist pretensions could enslave Britons by embarking troops in 'these outlets from Germany', as many men 'as he should think necessary for fitting us with manacles'. Once again, therefore, the Hanoverian connection became a focal point for fears of Continental contamination.³³

Central to all this was an insular conception of British identity, which the Hanoverian connection and its resulting European entanglements seemed to threaten. Chesterfield, who held rather different views in private, showed no hesitation in playing to the gallery on this issue, in his famous pamphlet *The case of the Hanover forces*. 'Hanover,' he argued, 'robbed us of the benefit of being an island and was actually a pledge for our good behaviour on the Continent.' If England were to

take on the defence of Hanover, the *Old England* journal argued in April 1744, it 'would lose the very benefit of being an island, and become a most wretched part, of a most contemptible particle of the Continent'. This theme was elaborated in the September issue, when the writer James Ralph argued that 'as an island and an independent people, we have no more to do with the present war, than we could have in a war betwixt Kublai Khan and Prester John.' Lord Barrington plaintively hoped that 'an Angel could come and tell us, I will separate you from Hanover, I will make you an island again.' On this reading, Britain's proper element was the sea, not the European continent. Thus the Tory MP John Phillips told Parliament that the navy was 'our natural strength'; exactly the same phrase was used by Edmund Waller exactly one year later.³⁴

The xenophobia of the parliamentary onslaught was taken to new heights in the popular debate. The *Old England* journal dismissed the Electorate as a 'province scarce known to the world, scarce to be found on the map'. A ballad described Hanover as a 'tatter'd Nurse of aspect glum', Britain as 'an Island-Nymph most fair'. Hanoverian 'slaves' were contrasted with 'free-born' Englishmen. The *Westminster Journal* dismissed Hanover as 'a spot of German furze and heath'. The 1743 ballad entitled 'Beef and butt beer against . . . Pumpernickel' speaks for itself. Prints routinely depicted the Electorate as a desolate and impoverished principality, producing only kings, linen and mercenaries for export. Attacking Hanover, therefore, became a way of defining what it meant to be British. By implication Britons were not fat, slow-witted, morose, gluttonous, flatulent, drink-sodden, humourless, venal, ruled by a despotic prince, or inhabitants of a small territory in the middle of an unpleasant and intractable European continent. Instead, they were free-born, virtuous, prosperous men who lived on a temperate island; and of course they had a special sense of humour.³⁵

In the main, however, the ministry and its supporters responded to the Hanover attacks with a robust restatement of their policies and beliefs. The growing isolationist and navalist trend came in for a particularly serious battering. Lord Perceval, a Whig critic of Walpole's grand strategy, lamented to Parliament that 'a doctrine has been taught and inculcated for some months past, that it is of no importance to this nation what may happen on the Continent; that this country being an island entrenched within its own natural boundaries, it may stand secure and unconcerned in all the storms of the rest of the world.' He pro-

An Actual Survey of the Electorate, or Face of the Country whereon Hanover Stands, with a View of Herminiaffen and the Seats of Manufactures.



The above view gives an accurate and true account of a province which is supposed to be the richest and most fertile part of the Continent. And yet it is so barren, that it is scarce worth the view of a King. *See much more of the same kind, in the next Part, &c.*

Printed and sold by A. Millar, in Pall-mall; and by J. Roberts, in St. Dunstons Church-yard. MDCCLXXII.

23. A satirical 'view' of Hanover which, with its sarcastic caption, is typical of the Hanover-bashing of early eighteenth-century British debate.

nounced 'this doctrine' – which was being articulated 'without these walls' – to be 'contrary . . . to the universal principles of policy by which this nation hath been governed from the Conquest to this hour'. In the same vein, Carteret argued that engagement in European alliances and wars was not just some 'sort of superfluous heroism'; Britons were not simply wasting lives and treasure on 'romantic expeditions'. On the contrary, failure to intervene on the Continent would simply allow the French to realize their plans for universal monarchy. To disband the Hanoverians would be to 'leave the French to ravage provinces without resistance . . . and make half the princes of Europe the slaves of their pride'. Naval power alone would not suffice. 'Armies,' as Carteret stressed, 'were only to be repelled by armies.' To this end, Samuel Sandys, the Whig MP for Worcester and a confirmed opponent of a large standing army in peacetime, was prepared not only to swallow his constitutional objections to standing armies, but also to dig deeply into his pocket. He therefore condemned the fact that 'The bulk of mankind can see no danger but what is directly before their eyes, and consequently are unwilling to contribute to the charge of guarding against a danger which they cannot see.' 'The people,' the Paymaster-General Thomas Winnington lamented, 'expect to be protected by their government, they expect to be secured even from the approach of danger,

and yet they grudge every expense which becomes necessary for that purpose.³⁶

Of course, Britain could not contain France alone. Keeping Austria intact, Horatio Walpole argued in December 1742, was therefore crucial to the 'harmony and unanimity of the Germanic body', upon which in turn 'the balance of power must now depend'. 'The preservation of the House of Austria,' Thomas Winnington argued in late 1743, 'and in that the balance of power, is a measure which has, ever since the Revolution, been judged necessary for this nation to pursue.' Indeed, as Sandys remarked, 'the House of Austria is the Ucalegon [a neighbour whose house is on fire] of Great Britain; for if ever that house should be destroyed by the flames of a war lighted up by France and Spain, Great Britain will certainly be next, because we are next in power.' A direct link between the Austrian alliance, the stability of the Holy Roman Empire, British security and the political achievements of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was thus established. It was in fact the same argument which had driven the critique of Stuart foreign policy from the early seventeenth century. As each Continental bastion was washed away by the French tide, Britons saw the threat of universal monarchy inch closer and closer to them.³⁷

Moreover, these men made the same ritualized and instinctive connection between British naval power and the European balance which had characterized British grand strategy since the time of William of Orange. For Carteret, Horatio Walpole, Newcastle and other advocates did not see engagement in Europe as preferable to naval expansion; they saw it as essential in the long term to the maintenance of British maritime supremacy. Europe and America, on this reading, were not opposites but linked in a vital and virtuous circle. If France were ever to gain control of Flanders, the Secretary at War William Yonge warned, then she would be freed of all European distractions and able to challenge Britain more effectively at sea. The same point was made by Horatio Walpole, who insisted British intervention on behalf of Maria Theresa was essential for the maintenance of British naval superiority. If Britain had remained inactive, he argued, 'and allowed France to parcel out the Austrian dominions as she pleased, what fatal consequences might we not have expected? France would then have had no occasion for keeping up a very great land army . . . and applied all that saving towards repairing and augmenting her naval force'. For this reason Walpole

argued that 'by land we beat them out of the sea. We obtained so great and so many victories at land, that they were forced to neglect their sea affairs.' On the other hand, he concluded, if both France and Spain were to unite against Britain, 'and we should have no one to assist us, nor they any enemy to fear at land, I would not have gentlemen vainly imagine that we should be in no danger of losing our superiority even upon our own element'. He elaborated these arguments the following year and again in January 1744.³⁸

The model for a successful European intervention was generally taken to be the early and middle stages of the War of the Spanish Succession, when Britain, Austria and the Dutch had grappled with the French on the Continent, while the allied navies eventually prevailed overseas. As Horatio Walpole observed in late 1742, 'If we had then had no assistance from the Dutch, we should not perhaps have found ourselves such an overmatch for the French at sea, as some people imagine we now are; and yet, during all that time, she kept up most numerous armies at land.' That being so, he continued, 'what then have we to expect, should the whole treasure and strength of France, or the greatest part of both, be turned towards gaining a superiority or at least an equality at sea?'³⁹ By contrast, the final stages of the conflict, when a Tory government was believed to have abandoned Britain's allies and the common cause against France, was a traumatic memory for Whig Continentalists. Thus one MP warned in early 1744 that to withdraw from the European war 'will be a more unjustifiable measure than the desertion of the Grand Alliance in 1712: the Queen then declared by the mouth of the Bishop of Bristol, her plenipotentiary at Utrecht, that she looked upon herself as free from all her engagements to her allies'. He added that to abandon Maria Theresa was to 'repeat the perfidy without giving the warning'. The immediate result, he added, would be an Austrian accommodation with France in which she would 'surrender her part of the Barrier to France or to a prince who may be a dependant on France'.⁴⁰

In this context, Hanover was not merely a source of useful mercenaries, or a forward base to mobilize the Holy Roman Empire, but the keystone of the Continental diversion. Thus the anonymous author of the *Plain reasoner* argued that:

If it be true, as our minor politicians say, that our business [in Germany] is only to defend Hanover, I hope there will always be a Hanover there . . . so the French

may always be kept in Germany at the hazard of the ruin of France. And I conceive that if there was neither a Hanover nor a House of Austria in Germany, yet one would contrive to find something else, to keep them employed on that side to keep them in a perpetual waste of wealth and strength rather than they should come with their force and vigour to our own doors.

If Hanover did not exist, in other words, Britain would have had to invent it. It would be hard to find a more succinct defence of the classic Whig Continental strategy, and Hanover's developing role in it.⁴¹

It is therefore unsurprising that in early 1744, as the Hanoverian troop debates reached their climax, British ministers paid a backhanded compliment to the Personal Union. The King, shaken by the anti-Hanoverian rhetoric of the past two years, had begun with his German servants to explore the viability of breaking the connection between the two countries. On the first occasion the issue had arisen, around 1720, British ministers had counselled George I against the move. This time both London and the Hanoverian ministers were opposed. The King's German advisors foresaw a legal headache: though George could renounce his own rights, he had no authority to do so on behalf of his son. Moreover, they saw value in the link: it helped to maintain Protestant solidarity in the Empire, while providing a support to Austria against France. On this reading, Hanover was a British asset in Germany, through which coalitions and subsidies could be organized. George backed off for the moment, though he was to return to the subject thirteen years later when another Hanoverian neutrality treaty raised very similar issues.⁴²

The employment of Hanoverian troops and the protection of the Personal Union was thus a necessary part of the containment of France, the maintenance of the European balance, and the preservation of British naval security. In late January 1744, as the debates on the Hanoverian troops reached their climax, Carteret thus drew together all the elements of the Whig orthodoxy in a compelling peroration. French universal monarchy, he argued, could only be stopped by supporting the House of Austria as a counterweight:

For if the French monarch once saw himself freed from a rival on that continent, he would then sit secure in the possession of his conquests, he might then reduce his garrisons, abandon his fortresses, and discharge his troops; but that treasure which now fills the plains with soldiers, would soon be employed in designs more

dangerous to our country: we should see the project of forming a rival force renewed, the ocean would soon be covered with the fleets of France, and it would contribute very little to our security that we are surrounded with waters and by rocks.

In this context, Sir William Yonge argued in Parliament, 'it was right in us to take the first troops we could get, which happened to be those of the Electorate of Hanover.' Besides, the Hanoverians were hired more or less at cost and not – as with other troops – at a premium. Pro-government voices were not slow to point this out. In the end, all of the votes on the Hanover troops in 1742-4 were carried by the government with comfortable margins.⁴³

Moreover, some enthusiasts saw Hanover as a potential British outpost on the Continent. Not only could it be, as Carteret had argued, co-opted into the common anti-French front: the Electorate, and especially the Hanoverian ports of Bremen and Verden, were nothing less than a British foothold in Germany. Thus Horatio Walpole claimed that the question of whether 'those countries which command the navigation of the Elbe and the Weser, the only inlets from the British seas in Germany', should be allowed to fall into the potentially hostile hands of Sweden or Denmark, or should be 'annexed for ever to the King's Electoral dominions', was one 'which can easily be decided by a bare inspection into the map of Europe'. Lord Bathurst argued in his *Letter to a friend concerning the electorate of Hanover* in 1744 that 'it is known to everybody of what consequence maritime forts and harbours are to the trade of this nation . . . I do not see why the same arguments may not in some degree hold good with respect to our having a naturalized tenure among the Germanic body on the Continent.'⁴⁴

But there were also some who openly deplored the xenophobic groundswell which characterized so much of the Hanover debates. The Duke of Marlborough regretted that 'It is not possible to mention Hanover or its inhabitants, in any public place, without putting the whole house into a flame, and hearing on every hand expressions of resentment, threats of revenge, or clamours of detestation.' Indeed, he continued, 'Hanover is now become a name which cannot be mentioned without provoking rage and malignity and interrupting the discourse by a digression of abhorrence.' Lord Raymond spoke of a 'vehemence' which was 'inclined to intimidate enquiry, and intimidate opposition'.

He went on to remark 'That the people of England are by nature or habit enemies to foreigners, is generally believed; but surely, my lords, this is not one of our native qualities of which we ought to boast.' He added that 'in the eye of reason, my lords, it is more laudable to make an estimate of a man by his merit, than by his country, and to enquire rather how he has passed his life than whence he received it?' Instead, Raymond lamented, 'the people have been taught to hate the Hanoverians'; and this, one might add, at a time when Britain needed all the help it could get.⁴⁵

Within two years of the fall of Walpole, therefore, the strategic position of Britain was greatly improved. The Austrian collapse had been halted at least for the time being. France was mired in an unsuccessful war in Germany which sapped her naval and colonial efforts. British strategic doctrine about the need for a Continental engagement was further refined. Hanover had been turned from a military and constitutional liability into a strategic asset, albeit one that was still domestically controversial.

The American Empire Restores
the Balance in the German Empire,
1745–1748

*At length she comes, the goddess fair
Victoria! Whom we late implor'd;
Advancing with majestic air,
At once both dreaded and ador'd*

*But not on Flandria's hostile plain
As we, mistaken, then besought,
The British blood is spilt in vain,
For not the British cause is fought.*

*Beyond the wide Atlantic sea
She rises first to crown our toils,
Thither to wealth she points the way,
And bids us thrive on Gallic spoils*

*When solid measures we pursue,
Our arms she ever will uphold:
And while of these we lost the view,
New England's sons have taught the Old.*

Gentleman's Magazine, 1745¹

British fortunes in the final years of the War of the Austrian Succession were mixed. After the triumph of Dettingen, and the recovery of Maria Theresa in 1742–4, the situation in the Empire began to deteriorate once more. Prussia re-entered the war, wreaking havoc with British policy in Germany. The only ray of hope there was the death of the Emperor Charles VII in 1745, which allowed the election of Maria

Theresa's husband Francis of Lorraine as his successor. One pillar of Britain's imperial security structure had therefore been restored. The other pillar, however, was now crumbling at an alarming rate. Austria, preoccupied with Frederick the Great, made only feeble efforts to defend the Barrier in Flanders against the French advance. From 1745, the fortresses there began to fall with depressing regularity; this worried the Crown and ministry even more than the arrival of Bonnie Prince Charlie in Scotland in 1745 and his advance into England. In this context, the spectacular victory over the French at Louisburg in Canada was not just a 'good news' story for the ministry. It moved the New World from the margins of strategic debate closer to the centre of attention. British statesmen became more conscious of the value of colonial resources to their standing and effectiveness in Europe. Even more importantly, the victory at Louisburg provided London with a vital bargaining chip to restore the fallen bastions in Flanders. From now on, British statesmen would begin to integrate the New World more systematically into their conception of the European balance of power.

By early 1744 Carteret's European policy, which had been quite successful in 1742-3, was in trouble. In March 1744 France finally declared war on Britain and Hanover. In some ways, this simply legitimized the existing state of affairs. The French continued to be heavily engaged in Germany and Flanders; their operations overseas ground to an almost complete halt. This was all to the good. But Carteret was unable to uncouple the Emperor from Versailles. He also failed to contain the Franco-Spanish advance in Italy. Above all, he inadvertently provoked Prussia into rejoining the war against Austria. He had already irritated Frederick with the Treaty of Worms in September 1743, and in December of that year he compounded the offence by helping to mediate a treaty between the Austrians and the Saxons, which appeared to have a secret article implying the creation of a land link between Saxony and Poland at the expense of Prussia. In May 1744 Frederick set up the Union of Frankfurt in conjunction with the Emperor, William of Hesse and the Elector Palatine; he also occupied the north German principality of East Friesland. In August 1744 he launched his second attack on Maria Theresa. Carteret's German policy had therefore collapsed and with it the credibility of a ministry already heavily battered by the Hanover controversy.

The final straw had been not just European developments, but the accompanying press campaign which Frederick the Great and Carteret's domestic enemies had carefully manipulated. For in August and September 1744, the 'treaty' of Hanau, by which Carteret had sought to uncouple the Bavarian Emperor from the anti-Habsburg alliance, and which many had believed buried the previous year, was exhumed and its failure laid at Carteret's door. These months saw the publication of two Prussian-inspired pamphlets and the appearance of a 'narrative' by the slighted Prince William of Hesse, who had acted as Charles Albert's intermediary at Hanau. It was not the highways and byways of German imperial politics which mesmerized British audiences, but the allegation – which Carteret proved unable satisfactorily to refute – that the King's chief minister, not the cabinet as a whole, had sabotaged the negotiations, and thus set in motion the train of events which brought Prussia back into the war. This blunder was blamed on Carteret's desire to pander to the King's Hanoverian prejudices. In particular, the Prussian envoy to London proved adept at fuelling the press campaign to undermine Carteret. He made a valuable convert in the Earl of Chesterfield, whose pamphlet *Natural reflexions on the present conduct of His Prussian Majesty*, did additional damage. 'Who lost Prussia?' was now the cry.²

In November 1744, Carteret's Whig rivals pounced. He was reproached with failing to explore potential links to the Russians and Saxons with sufficient vigour; with neglecting to bring the Dutch into play; and with making no effort to court Prussia. Within a very short time, Carteret had resigned, yet another British statesman to fall due the perceived failure of his German policy. He was replaced by a ministry dominated by Newcastle as Secretary of State and his younger brother, Henry Pelham, at the Treasury. Yet the Continentalist orthodoxy, which had been reasserted from the fall of Walpole in 1742, continued to prevail. The deployments after 1744 bear this out. In that year, there were 37 Royal Navy ships in colonial waters, with crews of about 11,000 men. There were 48 in the Mediterranean, with crews of more than 20,000 men, as well as 24 ships in home waters with more than 10,000 sailors on board. Twelve months later, the relative proportions had not much changed. In both years, there was a preponderance of larger, heavy-gunned ships on the near side of the Atlantic. Moreover, the bulk of the colonial deployments, particularly of battleships, were

to the Caribbean, not to North America. Their purpose was in accordance with traditional British grand strategy: to safeguard the revenue flows and deny France the colonial resources to fund European expansion. The picture was even clearer with regard to troop dispositions: there were scarcely 2,000 men in North America, and a few more in the Caribbean. The bulk were to be found in Europe: 19,000 in Britain itself, 8,000 in the Mediterranean and a whopping 21,000 in Flanders. In short, the main effort by the Royal Navy and the British army throughout the War of the Austrian Succession was made in Europe.³

Newcastle elaborated his thinking in the course of the coming years. In late 1745, he justified his support for a land war against France by 'the danger and hazard of being alone at war with France and Spain, which two powers, by being absolutely disengaged from all expense on the Continent, would soon be able to be superior to us at sea'. Against Pitt, who wanted to wind down the European operations, he argued 'that a defensive war upon the Continent and an offensive war at sea was better than only an offensive war at sea, which was what they proposed'. This was because 'if France and Spain had nothing to deal with but England, they might . . . soon have a marine superior to ours, and then what a condition should we be in?' In the War of the Spanish Succession, he continued, 'we destroyed their marine by creating them business on the Continent . . . by delivering them from expenses on the Continent, we should force them to re-establish their marine, of which we should hereafter feel the bad effects.' He was thus very much against, as he put it, 'reducing ourselves to our wooden walls'. A couple of months later he returned to this theme when he argued for the need to 'employ France on the Continent, that the whole weight of their power may not fall upon us'. The main outlines of Carteret's German policy and his broader strategic framework thus remained in place.⁴

The new ministry sought to persuade Maria Theresa to accommodate Frederick and concentrate on fighting the French. Chesterfield, who had now become the envoy to The Hague, thus lamented Maria Theresa's failure to 'make up with' Prussia: 'the immediate effect of that obstinacy and greediness,' he predicted, would be another Franco-Prussian rapprochement. Like Carteret, the ministry also pursued an active imperial policy. In January 1745 Britain, Holland, Austria and Saxony concluded a defensive treaty at Warsaw by which all contractants agreed to uphold the Pragmatic Sanction and the balance in the Empire. The chance of

prising open the French position in Germany came unexpectedly in January 1745 with the sudden death of Charles Albert of Bavaria and thus another imperial vacancy. Thus Chesterfield was particularly keen to secure the Elector of Saxony, to 'snatch him up', as he put it, before the French did so, if necessary by supporting his candidacy as Emperor. Newcastle, on the other hand, stuck to the traditional line; he thought that the Saxon Elector was not sufficiently strong in his own right to maintain the Barrier function of the German Empire. 'It is for the general interest of Europe,' Newcastle pronounced in February 1745, 'that the imperial crown should be fixed in the House of Austria . . . A weak Emperor will be (and sooner or later must be) a French Emperor.' The centrality of the Empire to British grand strategy thus remained unchanged. In the end, British policy in Germany was successful more through luck than judgement: Charles Albert's successor as Elector, Max Joseph, took Bavaria out of the war at the Treaty of Füssen and cast his vote for the Austrian imperial candidate, Maria Theresa's husband, Francis Stephen of Lorraine.⁵

At the same time, a sustained attempt was made to win over Prussia. Here the Hanoverian ministers and the King proved once more a major obstacle. George had reacted to the second Prussian attack on Maria Theresa by putting punitive action against Frederick, and the aggrandizement of the Electorate at his expense, back on the agenda. Carteret had rather indulged these plans, perhaps to humour George. Their logic was clear enough: Frederick had now broken imperial law for the second time. He was not to be trusted and had to be eliminated, for France could only be beaten if Austria were able to deploy all of her might against her. Moreover, Frederick had infuriated George in late 1744 by his threat to invade Hanover if George moved against Charles Albert. The ministry certainly considered the partition of Prussia. 'I don't know,' Chesterfield mused in 1745, 'whether the dismembering of him [Frederick] is not the shortest way of getting out of our difficulties.' The problem with the proposed policy of freeing Maria Theresa from Prussian distractions by military force was not its desirability but its impracticality. So by the Convention of Hanover in August 1745 with Prussia, Britain agreed to mediate with Austria, while Frederick agreed to make peace with Austria and to vote for the Austrian candidate as Emperor. Maria Theresa soldiered on for a few months, but after the Saxons were crushed by Frederick at the Battle of Hohenfriedberg in

November–December 1745, she threw in the towel at the Treaty of Dresden in late December 1745 and made her peace with Frederick for the time being. Francis Stephen was duly elected Emperor. The Empire was back in Habsburg hands, and Austria was now free to turn all her attention against France in the west.⁶

There was still the public relations problem of what to do about the Hanoverians. Here an elegant solution was found. The existing subsidies were loudly discontinued. Henceforth, some 6,000 troops would be paid for by the King himself out of his Hanoverian revenues. As for the rest, the government would simply record the sum as a subsidy to Maria Theresa, but pay the money directly to the Hanoverian minister in London. This required a certain amount of financial juggling. Hanoverian troops in British service were paid more than their counterparts in Electoral service. When the two fought alongside each other, George refused to pay the difference, so the British exchequer footed the bill. It was still a good deal. As Newcastle noted with some satisfaction in January 1746, because the King was paying for many of the men ‘upon his own Electoral account’ this enabled the ministry to ‘avoid the objections arising from an estimate for taking those troops into the British pay, and the King, as Elector, will contribute considerably towards the war in Flanders’. The bottom line was that Britain was getting some of her Hanoverian troops on the cheap. Moreover, the Hanoverians were an important part of the allied war effort, even after Britain became a belligerent. The Whig George Grenville – a bitter critic of Hanoverian troops – contrasted their performance with those of the British and their Dutch auxiliaries during the lost Battle of Fontenoy in May 1745. ‘The Dutch horse behaved scandalously,’ he wrote, ‘their foot but indifferently; the Hanovers very well.’ He blamed the defeat in part on the (British) Brigadier General Ingoldsby ‘who several times refused to attack’ despite being ordered to do so. In the end, the assault was launched by ‘two Hanover battalions, which were cut to pieces, whilst Ingoldsby looked on with four choice English battalions; for which neglect, or not to mince the word, *poltronnerie*, he is to be tried as soon as he recovers [from] his wounds’. Throughout the war, in fact, the King’s German soldiers remained an important asset for Britain. Opposition to the Hanover troops petered out, with only a small row over those subsidies in early 1745.⁷

The continued reliance of the new ministry on ‘Continental measures’

did not go unremarked. Horatio Walpole later claimed that ‘the Duke of Newcastle . . . grew as fond of the war abroad as Lord Granville [Carteret]’. In Parliament Lord Strange condemned the manoeuvres over the subsidies as ‘a piece of low legerdemain’ and lamented the ‘use of the Queen of Hungary as the cat’s paw for drawing that sum out of the pockets of the people of England’. Edward Turner complained that his ‘patience is worn out, in seeing patriots swallow down ministerial puddings piping hot without so much as blistering their tongues’. There was also a fresh surge of press derision. In spring 1745 the *Westminster Journal* renewed the demand for a separation of Kingdom and Electorate, before the latter siphoned off more British resources ‘which ought to act only in defence of our own trade and honour’. The opposition paper *Old England* predicted a few months later that the country would soon be ‘the wretched appendix of a despicable corner of Germany’, in which Hanoverian sergeants would ‘beat up’ for ‘recruits on the streets of London’. Far from putting the Germans in their place, it complained, the new ministry had indulged them still more.⁸

But by then, the government had much more important things to worry about. For on 23 July 1745 Charles Edward Stuart, the son and heir to the pretender to the throne, went ashore on the Isle of Eriskay in Scotland with a small band of followers. The goblin which Pulteney had dismissed in the early 1740s had landed. Britain would have been glad of a few more Hanoverians on those street corners.

To the clansmen who trickled to the Stuart standard at Moidart, Charles Edward represented a chance to turn the tables on the British and the lowland Scots establishment. But his appeal to the nation as a whole was couched in more patriotic terms, in which criticism of the Hanoverian connection and European entanglements played an important part. Thus the ‘Declaration of James III’, drafted in late December 1743 in preparation for a planned landing, claimed that Englishmen had ‘seen the treasures of the nation applied to satiate private avarice, and lavished for the support of German dominions’. Moreover, the Pretender argued, following classic anti-Hanoverian propaganda, the past twenty years had found ‘the nation involved in wars, which have been . . . carried on without any advantage to Britain, and even to the manifest detriment and discouragement of its trade, and a great body of Hanoverians taken into the English pay and service’ to whom ‘preference and partiality’ had been shown. Likewise, the Jacobite pamphleteer

William Harper argued that it was preferable to be ruled by Charles Edward's backers, the French, than by Germans. 'The first,' he claimed, 'has a frankness and generosity to temper, qualify and soften it: but a German despotism, being grafted on a stock of sullen, sour, morose, bitter nature congenial to the nation, is by far the more dangerous and dreadful of the two.' Britain, so the Jacobite argument ran, was being fleeced by Hanover; George II was really a German with absolutist pretensions, while Charles Edward represented a local dynasty.⁹

For the next nine months or so, Charles Edward proceeded to run riot, defeating the government forces in Scotland and marching south as far as Derby. It was the failure of French support to materialize, and the hesitation of English Jacobites, rather than the immediate military resistance which eventually persuaded the majority of Charles's council, though not the Young Pretender himself, that the time had come to retreat. Charles – as he had always stressed – was no absolutist, and to his great mortification he was outvoted. This was certainly a missed opportunity. The only loyal troops between the Jacobites and London were a detachment of militia cowering at Finchley. They would have been shrugged aside if Charles's council had decided to press on.

While the capital lay open to a force of rebels who had marched almost the length of the island pretty much unopposed, large contingents of British troops were deployed elsewhere. There were 28,000 men in Flanders; but just 16,000 regulars in the whole of Britain. In fact, what is striking about the governmental response to the Forty-five is the relative nonchalance with which the Jacobite threat, *per se*, was regarded. True, Newcastle wrote in November 1745 that 'Every day shows that this rebellion is by no means a trifle.' On the other hand, Chesterfield, admittedly from the distance of Dublin Castle, saw 'nothing more ridiculous than that rascally Highland army, with which His Royal Highness Prince Charles intends to conquer us, except it be our army that runs away from such a pack of scoundrels'. Two months later he declared that 'the number and condition of the rebels is contemptible, and should they be joined by any insurrection in England, they would only be joined by people still more contemptible than themselves.' What worried the British far more was the prospect of a French invasion in support of the Pretender. 'If they have no foreign assistance,' Chesterfield argued, 'there must be an end of them one way or another.'¹⁰

Outside intervention seemed in the offing at the very end of 1745,

when a French army of about 10,000 men assembled at Boulogne. The spectre of French invasion explains the ferocity with which the government pursued the 'pacification' of the Highlands after the defeat of the Bonnie Prince at Culloden in April 1746. They were determined to put an end to Scottish Jacobitism once and for all. Newcastle wrote that 'The rebellion must be got the better of in such a manner that we must not have another next year. And, if this power of the Highlands is not absolutely reduced, France may play the Pretender upon us whenever she pleases, when perhaps, we shall not be so well prepared to resist it as we were even this time.' Fears of an invasion remained acute, even after the army at Boulogne was stood down. Likewise, fear of a renewed Jacobite rebellion, this time with substantial French help, continued to plague the government for some time. Thus Charles Edward was quoted in messages intercepted by the British in October 1746, as saying that 'If the English force us to lay aside all sort of management with them we do not want the means to raise new disturbances in their islands.' In short, the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 was seen – as the threat of the Pretender had always been – through the prism of the European balance and the French threat.¹¹

For most of the period of the rebellion, in fact, Britain remained far more concerned with developments in Flanders. It was there, and not in Scotland, that London felt most threatened; and it was in Flanders that the military tide began to turn in France's favour. As Horatio Walpole later remarked, 'the war was not better managed on the Continent after [Carteret] was turned out.' Instead, the French heavily defeated the British army at Fontenoy and advanced northwards with alarming pace. George Grenville wrote that 'people hang their heads about this battle'. In July 1745, only a fortnight before the landing of the Pretender, the Earl of Sandwich wrote that 'we are all greatly alarmed with the melancholy posture of our affairs in Flanders.' The fall of Ostend – with 'dreadful consequences' – seemed imminent. The Duke of Newcastle was no more sanguine: 'our foreign affairs go ill indeed,' he wrote in October 1745. The general gloom was summed up by Sir Benjamin Keene, a long-serving ambassador then between postings. 'I have not the heart to touch upon any political affair,' he wrote. 'They seem to be in so very bad a way that I neither see the light or conceive hopes of our bringing them to a good conclusion. The French do what they please in Flanders . . . what can a handful of men do against a country which now

every body feels the power of?' The Barrier was in danger. In August 1745, scarcely four weeks into the Rebellion, Newcastle stressed that 'the recovery of Flanders is so capital a point for this country that we cannot but humbly hope that it will take place of all other considerations.' Shortly afterwards he repeated 'that it was essentially our interest . . . to keep them [the Dutch] an independent state'. Britain's security, in other words, was more dependent on the European balance, particularly on keeping the French out of the Low Countries, than it was on keeping the Pretender out of Britain itself.¹²

Popular opinion in 1745–6 became profoundly exercised by British weakness. Most agreed that the kingdom should be protected by a system of European alliances, but they were also of the view that Britons ought better to be able to provide for themselves. As always in a time of national crisis, the nation was beset by a series of moral panics in the early 1740s. Ideas of 'public virtue' were closely linked to perceptions of military vibrancy: defeats or apparent lack of leadership were explained through corruption. The demand for inquiries and 'answers', which had so dogged the final years of the Walpole administration, now spilled over into scrutiny of the armed services. Even the otherwise popular Navy came under increasing scrutiny, particularly during the controversy between Matthews and Lestocq, which followed the Toulon engagement in 1744. Unlike in earlier years, however, the critique now centred more on society as a whole, rather than the ministry and the court, though these did not escape censure. These anxieties peaked in 1745, when the nation looked on in horror as a band of despised Highlanders marched as far south as Derby, scattering all before them. The indignity of having to hire 6,000 Hessians to deal with them was keenly felt, even if the Rebellion was ultimately suppressed by a British force under the Duke of Cumberland.¹³

The King, for his part, remained far more preoccupied with the Prussian threat to Hanover than what was happening in Scotland or even Derby. Frederick the Great's re-entry into the war had not only increased the pressure on Britain's ally Maria Theresa, but also opened up a potential new front to the east. It was with some difficulty that Newcastle and his brother Henry Pelham dissuaded George from withdrawing the Hanoverian contingents from Flanders – where they were a highly valued fighting force – to cover the Electorate. Yet the King remained anxious for his German homeland: as Chesterfield observed in December 1745,

George would not want to see Hanover 'expose itself to another visit from Maillebois', the French general who had nearly occupied the Electorate in 1741. All this was clear evidence, if any more were needed, that the war was being continued for British and not Hanoverian purposes. The problem was that the security of the King's German lands and the integrity of the Dutch Barrier were closely linked: if the Dutch made a separate peace, the western flank of Hanover was open to renewed French attack. And in Flanders things looked very bleak.¹⁴

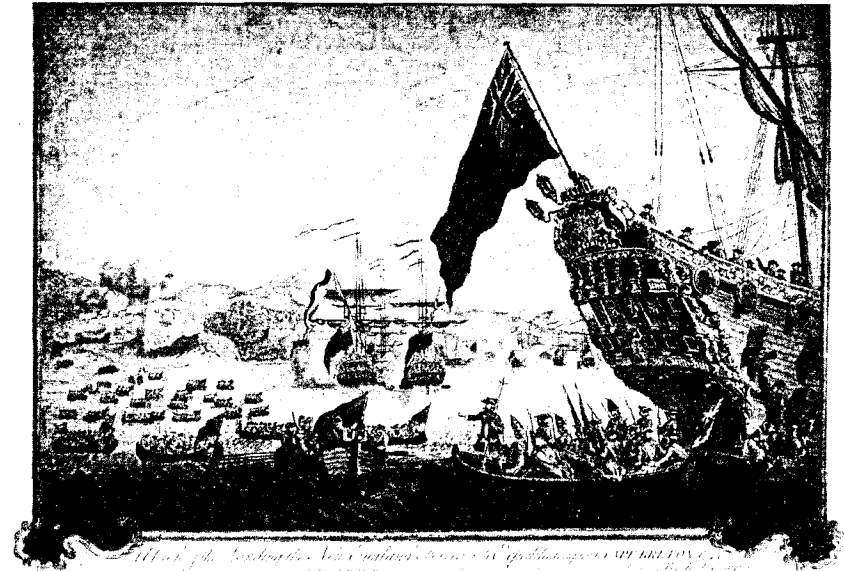
The problem facing Britain in the Low Countries was fundamentally structural in nature. Ever since the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, London had looked to the Austrian presence in Flanders and the stiffening of the Dutch Barrier fortresses to keep the French out. In this way the politics of the Grand Alliance were to be perpetuated. At the height of the French alliance in the 1720s, this had been of little relevance, but by the late 1730s, the revival of Anglo-French antagonism had made the Low Countries once again an area of extreme geopolitical sensitivity for Britain. Throughout the early 1740s, as we have seen, great hopes were still being placed in the Dutch. After France had joined the war in 1744, the Dutchmen manning the Barrier were directly engaged, though the United Provinces itself was not yet formally at war. Their lacklustre defence of the fortresses – and the blatant sabotage of the Dutch war effort by the Francophile 'patriot' party within Holland – punctured any expectations of help from that quarter. By September 1744, Newcastle was complaining that the Dutch 'absolutely renounce the precedents of former wars'. In March 1745, the British envoy to The Hague judged that the notion of a 'Grand Alliance and universal plan of operations' with the Dutch was 'impracticable'. At the same time, the other pillar of the Grand Alliance was beginning to wobble. Maria Theresa was too preoccupied by her losses in Germany, and intimidated by the French advance, to carry out the role allotted to her by Britain. 'You will find,' Chesterfield predicted to Newcastle, 'that, when Silesia is out of the question, the Queen of Hungary will be very indifferent about everything else and even impatient to make her peace with France.' Indeed, he continued, 'She will then tell you that Flanders has been only a burthen and not an advantage to her, and that it is the business of the maritime powers alone to defend it.'¹⁵

These developments prompted a rethink of Britain's traditional European policy. If the Dutch and the Austrians would not defend the Barrier,

who would? In May 1746 the idea of a perpetual neutrality of the Low Countries, that is the Dutch Republic and the Austrian Netherlands, was briefly floated. This found little favour with Newcastle, who feared that it would take the United Provinces out of the European balance of power and remove a constraint on French power in Germany. More generally, British statesmen had to confront the fact that Prussia and not France was now the principal enemy of Austria. The ramifications of this for Britain's European policy took some time to sink in. Those who, like Chesterfield, thought that France could only be contained if Britain proceeded to 'whisper and agree with *Antimac* [Frederick – a reference to his *Antimachiavelli* tract of 1740, in which he challenged Machiavelli's ideas on statecraft]' were still a minority. A Prussian alliance had been canvassed before, but since December 1740 it always came at the price of alienating Austria; the time was not far off when that price would be worth paying. For the moment there was nothing for it but to try to bring the war to a rapid close before the French overran the rest of the Low Countries. As Chesterfield wrote in late November 1745, 'I would make peace with 'em [the Dutch] and through 'em. Oh! But then it will be a bad peace, and we won't have a bad peace. I can't help that, but when you are beaten and can't carry on the war any longer unless to be beaten still more (which is our present case), all I know is that you must make the best peace you can, and that will be a bad one, which is always the case of the vanquished.' To this end, peace negotiations were eventually commenced at Breda in October 1746.¹⁶

It was into this scene of unrelieved gloom that news of a great victory in North America burst towards the end of 1745; ironically, like that of Cartagena, it reached George in Hanover. For in mid June, a naval expedition under Admiral Peter Warren, supported by colonial militia, captured the key French fortress of Louisburg at Cape Breton. This base was believed to control the mouth of the St Lawrence and thus access to Quebec, Montreal and most of Canada. It was the first British success of any note overseas since Porto Bello some five years before. There were now many who hoped to make it a stepping stone for further and decisive action in North America, starting with an expedition to capture Quebec in the summer of 1746. It was planned to send some 5,000 regulars and twenty ships in order 'to effect the entire reduction of Canada'. The purpose of this move, as Governor Shirley wrote to the

Duke of Newcastle, was to enlarge the British Empire, not as an end in itself, but in order to 'lay a foundation for a superiority of British power upon the continent of Europe'. He was thus articulating a grand strategy for Britain which had long existed in outline but was to become the new orthodoxy. Not only would Britain secure her maritime dominance through European alliances, but she would also use the Royal Navy to support these alliances and promote overseas expansion. Now colonial expansion would underpin naval superiority and the European balance in a virtuous circle.¹⁷



24. The capture of Louisburg on Cape Breton was the most spectacular British colonial victory of the war. It was exchanged for a French withdrawal from the Low Countries.

The capture of Louisburg and the prospect of further gains reinvigorated popular colonialist and navalist discourse. Once again maritime virtue was contrasted with European vice. This was epitomized by the 'Hymn to Victory on the taking of Cape Breton', published in the July 1745 edition of the *Gentleman's magazine*. It celebrated a success 'not on Flandria's hostile plain', but 'beyond the wide Atlantic sea', where the sons of 'New England' were instructing the 'old'. In the same vein, the *Universal Spectator* announced that 'It is presumed our success at Cape Breton, which the French have so much interest in defending, will

encourage us to some farther attempts upon their settlements in America: By which we might more effectively distress them, and serve ourselves, than by showing them our B[ac]k s[i]des in Flanders. The Leeward Islands seem on this occasion the most inviting object.' Likewise, the *Newcastle Courant*, following leads in London newspapers, wondered 'whether Quebec, St Augustine, the Havannah, St Domingo, or the fortress of Martinico, be not of more importance to us than Tournay, Mons, Namur, Brussels, Antwerp, or Bergen-op-Zoom.' All of these latter towns and fortresses lay not in a far-off corner of eastern Europe, but in the strategically crucial Low Countries.¹⁸

Victory at Louisburg was particularly celebrated, of course, in the thirteen colonies. Americans regarded it as very much their own triumph. Because of the priority given to Europe, the expedition had been mounted largely by the colonists themselves, with the Royal Navy in a supporting role. The fact that the Massachusetts Assembly had endorsed the attack by only one vote in January 1745 was quickly forgotten. A wave of sermons and pamphlets celebrated both the campaign and its mastermind, Governor Shirley. At the very least, they were determined to hold on to Louisburg. Thus the Boston cleric, the Reverend Thomas Prince, attacked the Tories for having handed back Cape Breton at the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, a clear shot across the ministry's bows. In 1746 sermons given to mark the first anniversary of the victory helped to keep the issue on the boil, as did newspapers such as the *Boston Weekly Newsletter* and the *Boston Evening Post*. These American papers borrowed material from the *Westminster Journal* and other London publications. Taken together, they constituted an emerging single transatlantic public sphere, whose principal preoccupation was the direction of British grand strategy.¹⁹

Henceforth colonial politics would be dominated by one thing: whether or not the security of British North America was best served through a policy of pre-emptive expansion, designed to drive the French from Canada and ultimately from the western lands as well. The geopolitical rhetoric of barriers, so familiar to audiences in London and Westminster, was imported from Europe and applied to the new continent. In Massachusetts and other colonies, expansionists now rallied to Governor Shirley's imperial vision. One Pennsylvanian wrote in 1746 that 'Nothing but a wide river, or inaccessible mountain, are sufficient to separate us from such monsters in nature' as the French. The Massa-

chusetts writer William Bollan, who was the agent for the colony in London, pointed out that Louisburg was 'so situated, as to be either of inestimable value, or inconceivable detriment to the English nation . . . It shuts up as it were, the entrance into the Gulf, and consequently the river of St Lawrence.' Depending on who held it, Louisburg either cut communications between France itself and New France in Quebec, or cut off Newfoundland from the rest of British North America. It was, in short, the 'key to all the British territories in the vicinity'.

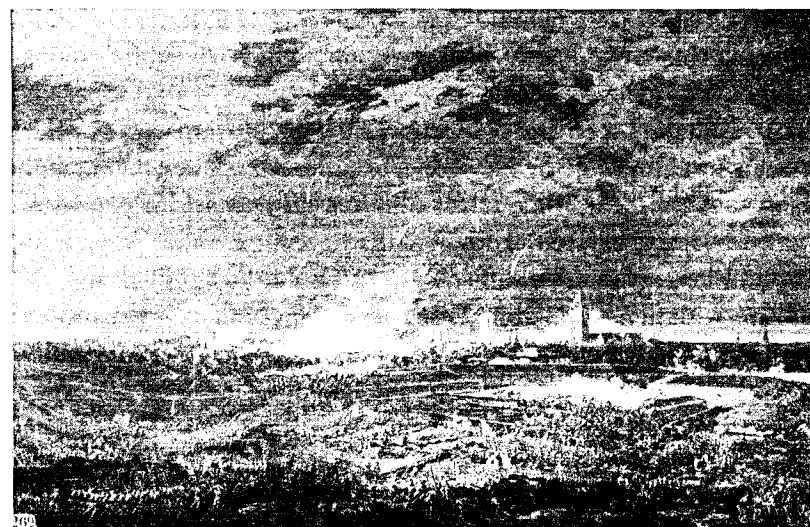
Moreover, Louisburg would serve as a springboard for the complete expulsion of the French from the St Lawrence. 'I look upon the reduction of Canada,' Bollan wrote, 'as the natural (I had almost said necessary) effect of reducing Cape Breton.' This would be 'by far the greatest advantage we have hitherto gained by the war'. The strategic value of Louisburg was not just geopolitical, Bollan believed. It was also – and here he followed Shirley's thinking – a potentially decisive contributor to Britain's naval strength and thus to her European standing. The region was not only a source of naval stores, such as pine for masts, but also a centre of the fur trade and the hub of the highly lucrative cod-fishing industry. Above all, Louisburg could be 'a chief nursery for seamen', perhaps up to 30,000 sailors. 'Taken out of the hands of our enemies,' he argued, 'and added to our own trade,' these advantages 'ought . . . to be accounted in a duplicate proportion to the real sum'. In short, 'having that fund of seamen to supply our fleets upon any emergency', and denying these to the enemy, made possession of Louisburg a 'main sinew of war'. All this, he claimed, would soon make George II 'the greatest prince in Europe'.²⁰

The euphoria of Cape Breton wore off quickly. It was followed by the fall of Madras to the French in October 1746, a major blow to the British position in India. The planned follow-up expedition against Quebec was caught in a thicket of competing agendas in London, and ultimately cancelled. Besides, the European balance commanded a far higher priority. Here the situation had gone from bad to worse after the defeat at Fontenoy. In February 1746, the French entered Brussels, in July, Mons. Two months later, they marched into Namur and in October, the French worsted the allied army at the Battle of Rocoux. All this showed that the Austrians and Dutch were no longer able or willing to defend the Barrier. A subsidy treaty concluded between the Dutch, British and Austrians at The Hague in August 1746 sought to

pin down Maria Theresa to further commitments, but the impact on the ground was negligible. 'The United Provinces,' Chesterfield wrote in late October 1745, 'are impotent by their form of government, which does not seem likely to be altered; they are beggared by their long mismanagement, and soured by their late misfortunes, and I will venture to prophecy that you will soon see 'em in a state of quiet subserviency to France. So that, as an ally, they are really not worth a sacrifice.' The problem was that simply abandoning the Dutch was not an option: as Chesterfield had put it, 'if we break with them, we have not an ally left in the world.' Regime change at The Hague seemed to be the only answer.²¹

The Orangist coup in April–May 1747, which restored the Stadholder to power at The Hague, was probably not sponsored directly by Britain. But a Royal Navy squadron was sent to the Schelde to support the putschists, and the enthusiasm which the news of the change of government in Holland produced among British statesmen was unmistakable. Newcastle hailed it as 'a great event . . . for this country and all Europe; for by it, in all probability, the Republic of Holland will recover its ancient weight and strength, and England have a useful friend and ally instead of a jealous, timid and burthensome neighbour.' There was good reason to expect that this would be the case: on a number of occasions over the past one hundred years, an ailing Dutch government had been toppled to make way for a more robust prosecution of the war against France. On this occasion, however, history was a poor guide to future events.²²

That summer, the Duke of Cumberland was defeated at Lauffeldt in the Low Countries, despite – as Pitt put it – the bravery of his 'British and Electoral troops [who] did all that can be expected from men overpowered by numbers'. One key fortress after another fell to the French advance, including the crucial Bergen-op-Zoom in September; its 86-year-old Dutch commander lacked the vim of the octogenarian who had defended Cartagena against Vernon. 'Holland seems gone,' the younger Horace Walpole (Robert's son) remarked. 'How long England will remain after it, Providence and the French must determine.' Maastricht fell in May of the following year. If peace were not made soon, the French would overrun the whole of the Dutch Republic as well and thus completely overturn the European balance of power as London understood it. Not since the days of Parma and Louis XIV had the outworks of England been in such danger.²³



25. A French depiction of their victorious attack on Bergen-op-Zoom, which had formed a key part of the Barrier.

In this situation, Louisburg was virtually the only card British ministers could play. It could be traded for a French withdrawal from the Low Countries, and perhaps also for Madras. This was certainly the view of Lord Harrington, who briefly returned as Secretary of State for the Northern Department in 1746. British ministers were also aware, however, that to do so would unleash a storm of public indignation. Key ministers, such as Bedford and Sandwich, argued for its retention; but the Dutch were adamant that they should not be subjected to continued French attack for the sake of Louisburg. Bedford and Sandwich's insistence on Cape Breton was part of a much broader strategic conception. They believed that Britain's destiny lay in the colonial and maritime sphere, rather than supervising the European balance through presences in the Barrier or the Mediterranean. Indeed, Bedford argued that it would be better to exchange Gibraltar, if that were necessary to hold on to Louisburg. While he knew restitution of Gibraltar to be 'a rock all ministers will fear to split on', he thought 'there are advantages Spain could and I believe would, give us in the West Indies that it might be worth parting with it for, especially as peace founded upon that basis might be reasonably supposed to be a lasting one.' What was heretical here, from the traditional Whig perspective, was not the willingness to exchange Gibraltar for a lasting peace with Spain – that had been

countenanced by George I and Stanhope twenty years earlier – but the suggestion that a major European asset should be bartered for colonial or commercial gains.²⁴

The result was a prolonged period of buck-passing during which ministers tried to delay the inevitable, or at least to pin the blame for it on someone else. ‘The affair of Cape Breton,’ Chesterfield argued in late November 1745, before negotiations had even got under way, ‘is the great and insurmountable difficulty, and I think you should buy it, if you can, with almost anything else; for I really don’t know who will venture to sign it away.’ Newcastle agreed. ‘Cape Breton is a difficulty,’ he wrote in March 1746, ‘which I do not see how it can be got over at present. France will not make peace without it, and that you may depend upon; and who will dare to give it up, I know not.’ Indeed, Louisburg had become a millstone as much as a trump card. Henry Pelham described it as ‘a stumbling block to all negotiation’. ‘You may remember,’ Chesterfield had told Newcastle, ‘I was aware at first of the difficulties it would create; and, when I heard people bawling and huzzaing for its being taken, I wished it in their throats. But now I think you have no option left, and you might much easier give up Gibraltar and Minorca.’²⁵

In the end, as the peace negotiations dragged on at Breda from 1746 to 1748, and the relentless French advance continued, Britain was forced to bite the bullet. At the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in October 1748, she exchanged Louisburg for a French withdrawal from the Low Countries; border questions in North America were referred to joint commissions. The crucial Barrier was thus restored. The return of Louisburg also placated the Dutch, ever jealous of British colonial gains, and resentful of London’s unwillingness to surrender a ‘loose and precarious acquisition in America’ in order to safeguard their security. The sense of relief in London was palpable. Henry Pelham looked ‘upon it as almost a miraculous deliverance for this country and the Republic, considering the great and successful army of France, and the weak and unfortunate one of the allies’. He defended the treaty in Parliament by asking whether ‘any gentleman will say that it was not more for the interest of this nation to restore to France the possession of Cape Breton than to leave her in possession of Hainault, Flanders, Brabant and Namur, and consequently of the whole coast . . . from Zealand to the westernmost part of Bretagne’. For this reason, he argued, ‘our restoring Cape Breton upon this consideration was for the interest of England, without any

regard to our allies, or to the balance of power in Europe’. Madras, by contrast, ‘was of . . . little moment’, and Cape Breton ‘of no manner of consequence’.²⁶

When Sandwich protested against the return of Louisburg, Newcastle conceded that ‘the cession of Cape Breton is infinitely more material than any that is proposed to be made by his [George II’s] allies’. But, he continued, desirable though its retention was, the course of the war had made it too burdensome. For this reason, Britain would have to surrender the fortress not only to secure peace but also to ensure

a restitution of the Low Countries, and immediate relief to the Republic of Holland, and a tolerable settlement of Europe, which by a most perfect and well-concerted union between the present allies and such other powers who may also dread the growing power of France, and by proper measures after the conclusion of the peace, may still secure the liberties of Europe and preserve them from being overturned by that power, which will always have it in view, though, from the great success of His Majesty’s naval operations, their trade, commerce and marine have suffered so greatly that it is to be hoped that they will not have it so soon in their power to affect it.

Of course, this was a short-term solution only: what was the point of restoring the Barrier if the Dutch and Austrians were not prepared to defend it? As Chesterfield warned,

to restore it [Louisburg] for a town or two more in Flanders, which neither the Dutch nor the Queen of Hungary will defend, and which France can most certainly take again whenever it pleases, will be giving up a very real advantage from England for a precarious and shortlived one for the Dutch . . . the peace, whenever it is made, will not leave us what used to be called the Balance of Europe . . . We may keep Cape Breton by our fleets, but I fear we and the Dutch together shall never be able to keep Flanders by our armies.

It was a problem with which Britain would have to grapple further over the next decade.²⁷

The return of Louisburg provoked an outraged response from popular advocates of a ‘blue water’ policy. As the *Newcastle Courant* remarked sourly, Britain agreed not only to ‘restore Cape Breton to the Crown of France . . . but also [to] expend, in a firework [to celebrate the peace], a sum little inferior to the original demand upon Spain [i.e. for compensation for the ‘depredations’ of the Spanish coastguard]’. The notion that

Britain should make any sacrifices on behalf of the European balance was likewise dismissed. As Viscount Tyrconnel, a Whig MP, remarked in 1748, 'if a nation can ever learn wisdom by past sufferings, we shall never more enter into a consuming land war, we shall leave the balance of power upon the Continent, and the liberties of Europe, a couple of cant words'; he also famously attacked 'this execrable, detestable, ruinous, ill-advised, ill-concerted, romantic, Quixotic, senseless, all-consuming land war'. In America the return of Louisburg also distressed the emerging public sphere, though perhaps less than might have been expected. The howls of protest generally originated in London and were reprinted there. There was not a peep out of either Shirley or the Massachusetts assembly. The military cooperation between the metropolis and colony had in any case not been an entirely happy one. The individual colonies sank back into apathy and introspection. In any case, many Americans accepted the primacy of European concerns, and saw the role of the colonies as supporting Britain's position within the state system. The development of a strategic debate in the thirteen colonies faltered until revived soon after by the French penetration of the Ohio Valley.²⁸

The colonial successes of the 1740s and the disappointments of the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle gave new impetus to insular and navalist arguments in Parliament. 'As we are by nature disjointed from the Continent,' Venters Cornwall, the Tory MP for Herefordshire, told the House of Commons in 1748, 'and surrounded with the sea, it ought always to be a maxim with us, to have as little to do as possible with the disputes among the princes of Europe, and never to engage as principals in a land war.' He rejected the conduct of the War of the Spanish Succession as a strategic template. Instead, he argued that British policy had taken a wrong turning 'soon after the Revolution. We then began to interfere in disputes upon the Continent, more than we ought to have done.' All this, he claimed, had turned Britain into the 'Don Quixote of Europe'. For this reason, he argued against the return of colonies to France: 'no success of the French upon the Continent can force Great Britain, if directed by British counsels only, into an ignominious peace; for experience has shown, that we can support a naval war with success both against France and Spain.' All this was accompanied, in the usual way, with swipes against the 'extravagant zeal' with which ministers had tried to protect 'that German dominion [Hanover]'.²⁹

The late 1740s also saw the greatest surge of popular navalism since

the clamour for war with Spain in 1738–9. A ballad of early 1748, which warned against the betrayal of colonial interests in the peace negotiations, was not untypical:

If Britain's sons all Gallic Arts despise,
Why listen we at Aix to Gallic lies?
If on our navy Heaven confers success,
Why this long quibbling, and this fine address?

Why not our wooden world in motion keep?
Say, is not Britain regent of the deep?
Superior force invincible is ours.

If the Grand Monarch [Louis XV] will insist on things
Beneath the dignity of generous kings;
Let him insist – and if he's e'er so stiff
Man well the fleet.

Here it was again, the same blend of popular enthusiasm, jingoistic exuberance and divinely inspired naval destiny. It was perhaps no coincidence that the authorized account of Anson's celebrated and gruelling Pacific voyage of 1740–44 was published in 1748 and reprinted no fewer than five times.³⁰

If the true interest of British foreign policy was colonial expansion, the war had been fought in vain. If, on the other hand, Britain's chief concern was the restoration of the European balance of power, then it had all been worth it. Austria had not been partitioned. The threat of French hegemony on the Continent, and the resulting loss of naval security overseas and in home waters, which had loomed so large in 1739–41, had been averted. For this reason, as Henry Fox, the Secretary at War, told the House of Commons in 1748, all pressure for a purely maritime war had been rejected: 'because our conquests at sea, or in America, would in the end signify nothing if, while we were busied about them, the French should make themselves masters of the continent of Europe'. For if they were to achieve that, Fox continued, and 'have it in their power to command the Dutch, and all the other maritime powers of Europe, to join with them against us, no one can suppose that we could be able to carry on even a naval war against all the powers of Europe united against us.' The result would be not only the swift loss

of whatever had been gained overseas, but the bringing of 'this island into the same thralldom with the rest of Europe'. 'This consideration,' he concluded, 'will justify the conduct of our ministers in the wars of King William and Queen Anne: this will justify every treaty, and every alliance, we have made ever since the Revolution.' In short, the Europeanist orthodoxy, which had dominated British foreign policy since the Glorious Revolution, and had been briefly eclipsed in 1739-40, had reasserted itself. It had emerged from the debates on war with Spain, the temporary collapse of Austrian power, the Hanover debates, the Barrier discussions, and the Louisburg controversies, in a refined but essentially unchanged form.³¹

And yet, within this Eurocentric framework, America had been decisive. In seeking to solve their geopolitical predicament, English and British statesmen had always widened their perspective as appropriate. For centuries, this impulse had sucked them ever eastward in the quest to uphold the Barrier in Flanders. Now, they looked west across the Atlantic as well. It was there that Britain could make good the leverage she had lost in Europe. The need to safeguard these assets led to the development of a whole new language of barriers and geopolitics in America which formed such an important part of strategic discourse in decades to come. British statesmen had thus – to borrow a phrase coined for the nineteenth century – called a new world into being in order to redress the balance of the old.