INTRODUCTION

This fourth volume of the editorial series *British Envoys to Germany* comprises the last sixteen years of the German Confederation, between the Dresden Conferences of 1851 and the war between Prussia and the majority of the other member states in 1866. Many historical accounts of German politics of the years 1851 to 1866 are influenced on the one hand by the legacy of the revolutionary events of 1848–1849 and on the other hand by the dissolution of the Confederation and Bismarck's unification of a German nation-state dominated by Prussian policies and politics. While the early 1850s can be seen as a period of 'reaction' and a negative response to popular social and political demands, the remainder of the period is generally discussed in terms of the struggle for mastery in Germany, particularly the political and ultimately military conflict between Prussia and the Austrian Empire. However, the envoys' correspondence questions teleological accounts of the time between Dresden and Königgrätz. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, British diplomatic representatives reported on all matters regarding the German states and the German Confederation. In addition to international affairs and bilateral relations, the dispatches also cover German politics, its federal dimensions, and the policies and societies of the federal states. Like other contemporary sources, the envoys' reports provide strong evidence that the period 1851–1866 should be seen as more than just a time of transition between revolution and unification. In fact, the multifaceted views of British diplomatic representatives to Germany provide a much broader picture and substantiate the demand for understanding the time between 1851 and 1866 in its own right.[1]

[1]The main aspects of the period covered by this edition are discussed by Frank Lorenz Müller, *Britain and the German Question: perceptions of nationalism and political reform, 1830–63* (Basingstoke, 2002); Anselm Doering Manteuffel, *Vom Wiener Kongress zur Pariser Konferenz: England, die deutsche Frage und das Mächtesystem 1815–1856* (Göttingen, 1991); John R. Davis, *Britain and the German Zollverein, 1848–66* (Basingstoke and London, 1997); Gabriele Metzler, *Großbritannien – Weltmacht in Europa: Handelspolitik im Wandel des europäischen Staatensystems 1856 bis 1871* (Berlin, 1997).

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I

The diplomats accredited to the German courts in Vienna, Berlin, Hanover, Dresden, Stuttgart, Munich, the Federal Diet at Frankfurt, and the Hanseatic City of Hamburg continued to correspond with the Foreign Office after the Dresden Conferences led to the reinstatement of the Federal Diet, ensuring that the 'vessel of the Confederation [was] once again afloat'.[2] But was it a return to business as usual? In the 1850s, we find the same British representatives in Germany as before. Francis Reginald Forbes had been accredited to Dresden as early as 1832, and remained there for twenty-six years. John Duncan Bligh stayed at Hanover from 1838 to 1856, John Ralph Milbanke at Munich from 1843 to 1862, and George Lloyd Hodges at Hamburg from 1841 to 1860. Alexander Malet was in Stuttgart from 1844 to 1852, after which he proceeded to Frankfurt, where he stayed until 1866. Similarly, Lord Westmorland's appointment to Berlin lasted from 1841 to 1851, and he was afterwards accredited to the Imperial Court at Vienna until 1855. And even Lord Bloomfield, who followed Westmorland in the position at Berlin in 1851, had gained experience of Germany as the secretary of legation to Württemberg in the 1820s. Bloomfield stayed in Berlin until 1860, to be appointed ambassador to Vienna in the following year, remaining at the Austrian capital until 1871.[3]

However, there are signs that the continuity of diplomatic appointments to Germany was not uncontested. When the parliamentary Select Committee on Official Salaries of 1850 discussed the future of the British diplomatic service, the expenses for representations at the smaller German courts met with particular criticism.[4] After all, diplomats accredited in Germany were in charge of almost a quarter of all Britain's permanent diplomatic missions. Hence, one of the Committee's recommendations was that 'a single Mission at some central point in Germany may be substituted from the several Missions now existing'.[5] The Foreign Office and representatives of the diplomatic service fought off a reduction of diplomatic staff when they were called to give evidence before the committee. However, criticism was only temporarily silenced. In 1861, the Select Committee on the Constitution and Efficiency of the Diplomatic Service accepted the

[2]FO 30/150: Baron Cowley to Viscount Palmerston, No 176, Frankfurt, 9 June 1851.

[3]For information on British missions and diplomats, see *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Yearbook* (London, 1852 onwards).

[4]On the committee and the development of the diplomacy in general, see Raymond A. Jones, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815–1914* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks, 1983).

[5]Report from the Select Committee on Official Salaries, 1850 (611), p. ix.

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status quo but thought that the 'abolition of the smaller German missions [. . .] is an object very desirable to keep in view'.[6]

Such doubts from the British side about the usefulness of diplomats in Germany originated in fundamental changes in the United Kingdom and the British Empire. It seems that political realities in Great Britain and on the Continent drifted apart. Britain's preoccupation with domestic politics, the intense struggle over the reform of the electoral system, the Irish question, and the many conflicts arising in the context of the country's industrialization combined with the new challenges of its growing colonial empire. From the mid-1850s, British foreign policy aimed at a more independent course with regard to European affairs, while ensuring a balance between the Great Powers. The protection of Britain's colonial interests increased in priority in many political circles. Embedded in such views were economic interests, such as the dissemination of the principle of free trade, which claimed increasing importance as a foreign policy argument.

To some British observers, German politics – particularly the intricacies of German federalism – seemed less relevant. Naturally, the diplomatic establishment did not share such views when it came to defending diplomatic representations in Germany. It is illuminating to examine the responses to the demands of the Select Committees in 1850 and 1861. Viscount Palmerston answered the question of reducing the numbers of envoys to Germany with a clear 'No': 'I do not think that you could dispense with any of these organs without much inconvenience to the public interests.'[7] The Earl of Minto, Lord Privy Seal and a former diplomat who had served as envoy to Berlin, argued in 1850 that 'at the present time' it would be 'unadvisable to reduce the staff'.[8] And such views differed only marginally from the Earl of Clarendon's evidence given ten years later. Asked whether the German missions should be reduced, he stated: 'I know that there is an opinion favourable to the reduction of those missions, but I cannot say that I share that opinion; I do not see that there would be any advantage gained by reducing them.'[9]

There were various motives for these arguments. Institutional interests can be identified as highly significant, as the reduction of posts would have led to a scarcity in possible appointments. There

[6]Report from the Select Committee on the Constitution and Efficiency of the Diplomatic Service, together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index, 1861 (459), p. xv.

[7]Select Committee on Official Salaries, p. 68.

[8]Ibid., p. 150.

[9]Select Committee on the Diplomatic Service, p. 108.

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are indications that the diplomatic service developed over the 1850s into a more autonomous institution less dependent on party-political considerations. In 1858, the new Conservative foreign secretary used his prerogative of 'turning out his party's political opponents in diplomacy' for the last time.[10] All in all, five of the eight German missions were affected by the accession of the new administration. However such practices changed and, with the exception of the posts at Hanover and Stuttgart, the 'Tory' nominations would be maintained by the Liberal government under Lord Palmerston that succeeded in June 1859. The step towards a more transparent policy of appointing diplomats became apparent in 1860 and 1862, when the posts in St Petersburg, Vienna, and Berlin were raised to ambassadorships. From this point, the principle of seniority gained greater importance in the process of nominating an envoy than political affiliation. Consensus within Britain on foreign policy following the end of the Crimean War facilitated this development. At the smaller German missions, political considerations had traditionally been less important. John Duncan Bligh, Francis Forbes, and Sir John Ralph Milbanke outlived the various cabinet changes of government throughout the 1840s and 1850s. Their retirement in the late 1850s and early 1860s opened up opportunities for younger members of the emerging caste of professional diplomats, many of whom had served as attachés or secretaries of legation at one of the German courts. With respect to the job market for diplomats, the missions to Germany seemed indispensable.

To explain the opposition to changes in the British diplomatic service in Germany by institutional or professional concerns alone, however, is misleading. The network of envoys in Germany was also thought indispensable for international reasons. This applies to the convention of diplomatic reciprocity that had to be considered between Great Britain and the German courts, owing to the close ties between the British crown and the majority of German princes. More significantly, the fact that France and Russia maintained as many missions in Germany as Britain made it difficult to reduce the number of diplomatic representations without foreign political damage. Despite isolationist tendencies at home, British diplomats clearly understood themselves as being part of the international community of the diplomatic corps – the withdrawal from traditional postings in Germany would not only have been a considerable source of embarrassment for them but would also have questioned Britain's claims for a leading role in international politics. Last but not least, the minutes of the 1861 Select Committee give ample evidence that

[10] Jones, *Diplomatic Service*, p. 46.

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events in Germany and the state of German politics itself made it advisable to maintain the extensive diplomatic representation in Germany. George Hamilton Seymour, envoy to Vienna from 1855 to 1858, revoked his earlier conviction that the diplomatic representation at Stuttgart was dispensable, 'because I see a great deal going on abroad that gives me the idea that Germany is in a state of change'.[11] Similarly, other supporters of the diplomatic network in Germany referred to contingencies 'which may arise at any moment'[12] and 'unforeseen instances [. . .], which make a mission of more importance than it is generally supposed in times of quiet'.[13] The Committee on the Diplomatic Service thus concluded in its draft report: 'The peculiar condition of Germany renders it uncertain on what point the political interest may concentrate itself at any moment'.[14] As a result, the traditional structure of eight British representations to Germany remained untouched and, with the exception of the missions at Hanover and Frankfurt, was kept alive beyond the dissolution of the German Confederation in 1866.

II

While the question remains open as to whether the diplomatic reports from the smaller missions to Germany were relevant to British politicians, to today's historians they certainly are. The dispatches add facets to our knowledge that are usually not taken into consideration when dealing with nineteenth-century Anglo-German relations. Compared to Berlin and Vienna, but also to some extent to Frankfurt, daily business in the secondary capitals of Germany was less concerned with high politics and foreign policy. Life at the smaller capitals made it necessary to mix with members of society who did not belong to the court and political establishment, and as such broadened the respective envoys' views and opinions. The Earl of Clarendon referred to this when he defended the diplomatic network in Germany:

> it does not do for a Minister at a small Court, like either of those mentioned, to confine himself to the upper society of the place; but if the Minister takes care to get his information from the middle classes of society in Germany, which are very important, I believe that the information furnished by intelligent Ministers so performing their duty at Dresden, Stutgard [*sic*] and Munich, would be found to vary considerably, and that the aggregate of that information would

[11] Select Committee on Diplomatic Service, p. 200.
[12] Ibid., p. 292.
[13] Ibid., p. 154.
[14] Ibid., p. xv.

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> enable the Secretary of State at Home to form a more correct opinion of the real state of things in Germany, than he could possibly do if we had no agents at those places.[15]

This discussion of the 'real state of things' makes the envoys' reports from the smaller German states particularly interesting because they question broad narratives and generalizations of overall German developments. Charles Augustus Murray criticized the coverage of the British press in his dispatch from Dresden in June 1866, writing that 'English readers of the "Times" will of course believe that the Prussians are welcomed here as brothers, and that the Saxons wish no better and could do no better than to become incorporated with Prussia'. Murray's analysis of Saxon society questions such a positive response. In accordance with earlier accounts from Dresden, it was obvious to him that 'the poor Saxons should feel the most intense hatred' against the Prussian occupiers.[16] The attitude of the middle states towards German unification had always been ambivalent and, in 1855, Francis R. Forbes went as far as to question the existence of a national spirit:

> The North and South of Germany differ in manners, appearance, religion, almost in language, for they scarcely understand each other, and if it increases the political importance, will the Individuals be the happier for it? [. . .] Still as Germany now is, the hatred is strong between the inhabitants of the different states, as it once was between England and France. To go no further, the Saxons (excepting some of the Leipzig merchants) and Prussians dislike and ridicule each other on every occasion, while again the same bitter feeling exists between the Saxons and Bohemians, which last protest loudly against even being called Germans.[17]

This perception of regional distinctions went beyond the realms of particularism and German nationalism. The correspondence on economic and religious affairs in particular illustrates the diversity of socio-economic and cultural developments in Germany. For Saxony, for example, it was acknowledged, that 'Industry and Manufactories are making immense Strides';[18] Bavaria on the other hand, it was presumed, 'will long retain it's [*sic*] present agricultural character'.[19] While these reports reflect British interest in Germany as a trading partner, religious affairs were perceived against the background

[15]Ibid., pp. 108–109.

[16]FO 68/142: Charles Augustus Murray to Earl of Clarendon, No 36, Dresden, 28 June 1866.

[17]FO 68/95: Francis Reginald Forbes to Earl of Clarendon, No 40, Dresden, 14 October 1855.

[18]FO 68/87: Francis Reginald Forbes to Earl of Clarendon, No 25, Dresden, 4 May 1853.

[19]FO 9/144: John Ralph Milbanke to Lord John Russell, No 38, Munich, 25 April 1860.

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of strong anti-Catholic sentiments in British politics and society. Dispatches from Bavaria and Württemberg not only give insights into the increasing political importance of confession and denomination around the middle of the century, but also vividly underline that changes within Germany were part of wider European developments. To expect the envoys to be interested in political relations alone underestimates their position as observers and their understanding of the interdependencies between society and politics – on regional, national, and international levels.

Appreciation of the reports from the smaller British missions in Germany should not imply that British diplomacy overlooked the outstanding significance of the reports from Berlin and Vienna. The sheer number of dispatches indicates the level of British interest in the two German centres of European diplomacy. In 1857, one of the busiest years, George Hamilton Seymour sent as many as 1,518 official letters from the Austrian capital to London. The numbers of dispatches sent from the Prussian capital per year averaged around 600. This was significantly lower than the figure for Austria, something which can be explained by the developments in the Balkans, the Italian conflict, and the controversies within the Habsburg Empire. Diplomats on the spot, it seems, perceived Austria as not primarily a German power. However, again, the coverage from the minor courts adds to our understanding of 'the real state of things' in Germany, because the reports from the other missions indicate that Vienna was still a driving force and a key player in the struggle for Germany's future.

About one-third of all dispatches sent to the Foreign Office from Germany came from the five smaller representations. Hanover led this group, owing to the heavily disputed Stade tolls and the state's proximity to Schleswig-Holstein. In 1864, the year in which the German–Danish disputes over the duchies erupted into military conflict, Henry Howard sent more than 300 dispatches from the mission in Hanover. There were quieter periods too, with an average of 100 to 150 dispatches, which is also approximately the number of dispatches annually sent from Stuttgart and Munich. However, there were considerably fewer dispatches from Hamburg and Dresden: in both cases, The National Archives in Kew hold about half the number of volumes of political correspondence as from Hanover. While Hamburg's status of a legation (a fourth-class mission headed by a consul-general) can explain some of the imbalance, the case of the Dresden correspondence is more surprising. Saxony played a key role in the debate about a possible reform of the German Confederation, and its foreign secretary and minister president, Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust, can be described as one of the driving forces in the promotion of what is generally termed the 'Third Germany', the

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group of smaller kingdoms and principalities that attempted to follow a policy independent of the power politics of Prussia and Austria. The smaller amount of diplomatic correspondence from Dresden should remind us that such reports remain a historical source that is not easy to decipher. Individual characteristics, preferences in length or style, as well as habits and daily routines, affected the correspondence with the Foreign Office. A lack of dispatches could also be seen as a positive evaluation, with the low number of dispatches from Dresden being explained by Saxony's political stability and economic prosperity during the period: no news was good news. It also needs to be considered that a consul-general was stationed in Leipzig, the large commercial centre close to Dresden. Although lacking official diplomatic function, he also drafted dispatches on the situation in the Kingdom of Saxony.

The number of dispatches from British envoys to the Federal Diet also needs to be placed in context. Fewer letters were sent from Frankfurt than during the period of revolution, when it hosted the National Assembly and the provisional central government. The total of dispatches after 1850 is close to the number of dispatches sent from one of the middle states. To a certain extent, this is an astonishing fact, since almost all major political debates in Germany during the years 1851 to 1866 had a federal aspect. Nevertheless, the dispatches sent from Frankfurt provide an important key to understanding the federal dimensions of German politics. Alexander Malet's analyses of the competing factions and interests should be counted among the most convincing and penetrating attempts to characterize German policies in the later stages of the Confederation. However, Malet's correspondence also illustrates that the Federal Diet became significantly diminished as a player in German politics. During the Crimean War, when Germany became a focal point of diplomatic attention, he wrote: 'The struggle at present going on between the two great German Powers is in progress with more than usual activity, but the field is at present more confined to the separate Courts than to Frankfort, where the results of previous arrangements and decisions become finally apparent.'[20] Malet was referring to both the negotiations at the two capitals of Vienna and Berlin and also those at the courts of Germany's minor kingdoms such as Bavaria and Württemberg. In congruence with Malet's account, the Select Committee of 1861 came to the conclusion that 'it is probable that more really important information may come indirectly through missions at smaller courts than through the larger channels

[20]FO 30/171: Alexander Malet to Earl of Clarendon, No 23, Frankfurt, 14 February 1855.

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of communication'.[21] The former foreign secretary Lord Malmesbury stated before the Committee

> that in the last year of my holding office, before the Italian war broke out, we gained all our most important information from those missions. If any intrigues are going on they are almost always carried on in those small German states, and more information may be obtained from those places than from the larger.[22]

Malmesbury's statement is supported by the fact that the correspondence from Germany's smaller courts was included in the political debate. Within the diplomatic network, dispatches were forwarded for the attention of other diplomatists, and a number of reports were thought sufficiently important to be published in the Foreign Office's Blue Books, in particular the extensive volumes on the Crimean War, the Second War of Italian Independence, and the Schleswig-Holstein Crisis and ensuing German–Danish war.[23] The diplomatic Blue Books also had repercussions in Germany. In 1864, the publication of three dispatches by Henry Howard on the Schleswig-Holstein Question prompted the embarrassed Hanoverian foreign minister to restrict his hitherto daily interviews with the British envoy to once a week.[24] The publication of dispatches in the Blue Books, and subsequently in many cases also in German newspapers, not only compromised the traditional confidentiality of conversations and affected daily diplomatic practice: more generally, it illustrates how foreign policy was increasingly discussed and – arguably – affected by public opinion. In particular, dispatches that were filed during the Eastern crises, the Italian wars of unification, and the Second Schleswig-Holstein War reveal that British diplomatic attention was not just restricted to German politicians, state officials, and members of the diplomatic corps, but always included strong references to German public opinion. 'Your Lordship will hardly believe the degree of unpopularity, in which England now stands in Germany'[25] is only one of many similar remarks that show the prevalence of anti-British sentiments throughout the period 1851 to 1866. The diplomats' task to explain and represent the course of the British Foreign Office was made particularly difficult because, in many instances, the British government was held responsible for anti-German articles in English newspapers, for speeches before the Houses of Parliament, and also, as

[21] Select Committee on the Diplomatic Service, p. xv.

[22] Ibid., p. 180.

[23] See the lists in H.W.V. Temperley, *A Century of Diplomatic Blue Books, 1814–1914* (Cambridge, 1938).

[24] See FO 34/143: Henry Francis Howard to Earl Russell, No 158, Hanover, 23 April 1864.

[25] FO 68/95: Francis Reginald Forbes to Earl of Clarendon, No 6, Dresden, 4 February 1855.

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was the case with the question of political refugees residing in Britain, for British legislation. More than once, the patience of the diplomats was tested against this background.

III

Germany was entangled in international crises that deeply affected British foreign policy. Indeed, as Frank Lorenz Müller has pointed out, 'all major foreign political challenges faced by Britain from 1851 to 1863' – with the exception of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the American Civil War – 'had discernable German dimensions'.[26] With regard to international relations, the German Confederation remained a central part of British strategic thinking, and there is little evidence that the envoys to Germany thought about international politics in terms of a German nation-state. Their views of a balanced European system included the German Confederation until the very end. Even when their accounts of politics within the Confederation became increasingly characterized by consternation and disappointment about its development and ability, few changed their attitudes towards its benefits with regard to peace in Europe. As from the Vienna settlement of 1815, the underlying criterion of the assessment was the Confederation's stabilizing role within the European system of states. Throughout the years 1851 to 1866, countless references to France and Russia and various reports on the relationship between the German states and the two major continental powers leave little doubt of the special importance of Germany and her geographical position.

The Crimean War proved an important caesura and British views on what has been termed the 'Vienna system' transformed into a more isolationist position. However, even when the Confederation was dissolved, Alexander Malet still did not fail to acknowledge its importance for European peace. In August 1866 he wrote in one of his last dispatches from Frankfurt that with 'all its defects [...] the Confederation has been a bond of pacific union'.[27] Similar sympathy for the federal structure of Germany can be found in the year 1860, when Malet, referring to the possible federal organization of Italy, stated 'that no other political combination would have been equally effective'[28] – indicating that an overall appreciation of the existence of the German Confederation was not a purely retrospective view but

[26]Müller, *Britain and the German Question*, p. 157.
[27]FO 30/229: Alexander Malet to Lord Stanley, No 44, Frankfurt, 27 August 1866.
[28]FO 30/191: Alexander Malet to Lord John Russell, No 22, Frankfurt, 2 March 1860.

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was embedded in the mindset of British observers. To some extent, this attitude also helps to explain why in June 1851 the resuscitation of the 'paralysed heart of the German Body Politic'[29] (as John Duncan Bligh described the Federal Diet in one of his frequent general reports on the state of affairs in Germany) was perceived with some relief after the turbulent and critical years of 1848 to 1850: 'a fairer Page in the history of Germany may be said to have been opened by the reassembling once more in the ancient Diet of Representatives from every German State with a prospect of agreeing upon some common course of action for the peaceful reorganisation of the Fatherland'.[30]

Notwithstanding Bligh's positive outlook, the conflicts between Austria and Prussia were only superficially resolved by the Dresden Conferences. It was largely agreed that the future of the Confederation was dependent on the course of the two dominating powers, which influenced 'the rest of Germany in a thousand shapes'.[31] In his dispatch of 13 June 1851, for example, John Duncan Bligh repeated his earlier conviction 'that without concert between the two Great German Powers no Unity of Germany [. . .] could be effected, and that, on the contrary, dangers to both might probably ensue'.[32] The struggle for mastery within the German Confederation soon developed into the central crisis of the period. However, earlier accounts did not foresee an inevitable split between Berlin and Vienna. Henry Howard wrote that there was no 'danger of a rupture between the States of Germany in general, or between Austria and Prussia in particular'.[33] Of course, Howard was proved wrong. Throughout the 1850s, the envoys were uncertain about the outcome of the conflict, as Prussian ambitions were counterweighted by Austrian control – and not least the presidency – of the Diet. Until the end of the decade, the conflict was not generally perceived in terms of Prussian dominance. In January 1857, the experienced diplomatist Sir Hamilton Seymour could write: 'But, it may be said that Austria possesses a great element of strength by constituting the basis of German unity, that She is the Planet round which the minor States of the Confederation revolve.'[34] And even after Austria's defeat in the Italian war, Alexander Malet in Frankfurt stated: 'The position of Austria in federal Germany is

[29]FO 34/64: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 70, Hanover, 13 June 1851.
[30]Ibid.
[31]FO 30/167: Alexander Malet to Earl of Clarendon, No 22, Frankfurt, 25 April 1854.
[32]FO 34/64: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 70, Hanover, 13 June 1851.
[33]FO 64/334: Henry Francis Howard to Viscount Palmerston, Confidential, No 145, Berlin, 11 December 1851.
[34]FO 7/510: George Hamilton Seymour to Earl of Clarendon, No 72, Confidential, Vienna, 28 January 1857.

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at present stronger than ever, and with all her faults the Empire is evidently deeply rooted in the affections of the German People.'[35]

Despite such assessments, British preferences for Prussia became apparent in the reports received at the Foreign Office from the end of the 1850s, if not earlier. Some of this was religiously motivated. Catholic Austria and 'the fear of Romanist preponderance',[36] particularly following the Concordat of 1855, made the Hohenzollern state more appealing to British observers. The marriage between the Prussian prince and later emperor Friedrich Wilhelm and Queen Victoria's eldest daughter bolstered pro-Prussian attitudes. More importantly, emerging German nationalism, in the wake of the War of Italian Independence, and Prussia's reservations towards the Austrian course in Italy, recommended her as a reliable partner in Germany. Such positive views of Berlin proved consistent with former assessments of Prussia as 'the leading liberal Power'[37] being responsible for a peaceful balance within the Confederation. As in 1849, when Palmerston supported the Prussian project for a smaller German union, British diplomats again emphasized Berlin's role in Germany:

> Never perhaps had Prussia so favorable an opportunity of acquiring an ascendant [*sic*] in Germany. The spirit of the German Nation is roused. Any attempt to repress it will only tend the more to inflame it, and may produce other results more dangerous than those which it is sought to mitigate. Prussia may now lead and control the movement. If She fails to do so she will be later dragged in its wake.[38]

In contrast to British sympathies towards the Erfurt Union in 1849, however, British representatives now saw no feasible solution to the German question. Despite the optimistic appraisal of Prussia's role in Germany, the envoys' assessments were, on the whole, largely negative: 'German Unity which has been so much desired, has never been effected, and every succeeding year, renders such a consummation more improbable.'[39] The 'proverbial antagonism between Austria and Prussia',[40] as John Milbanke phrased it in 1861, led to the failure of every attempt at substantial federal reform. On the envoys' part, there was little doubt about 'the political feebleness of the Confederation'.[41] Not only did the reports on the various attempts for federal reform

[35]FO 30/187: Alexander Malet to Lord John Russell, No 35, Frankfurt, 28 July 1859.
[36]FO 30/207: Alexander Malet to Earl Russell, No 96, Frankfurt, 14 August 1863.
[37]FO 64/354: Lord John Arthur Douglas Bloomfield to Earl of Clarendon, No 163, Berlin, 22 April 1853.
[38]FO 7/569: Lord Augustus Loftus to Earl of Malmesbury, No 409, Vienna, 12 May 1859.
[39]FO 30/191: Alexander Malet to Lord John Russell, No 22, Frankfurt, 2 March 1860.
[40]FO 9/149: John Ralph Milbanke to Lord John Russell, No 63, Munich, 28 May 1861.
[41]FO 30/195: Alexander Malet to Lord John Russell, No 36, Frankfurt, 1 March 1861.

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during the early 1860s remain pessimistic with regard to the outcome of negotiations, but envoys refrained altogether from any constructive analysis or speculations as to possible solutions. The main identified task appeared to be 'to dissipate the misunderstandings which have arisen between Austria and Prussia'[42] in order 'to counteract the disunion of Germany'.[43] Hence, involvement in German affairs was dominated by fears of conflict more than inspired by ideas of nationhood or sympathies for the German people.

A telling example of how the deadlock in German affairs induced British observers to adhere to the status quo is Henry Howard's analysis of the Austrian memorandum that was presented at the Frankfurt *Fürstentag* in August 1863:

> My own opinion, abstractedly speaking, is, that were Prussia and Austria agreed, the present Federal Constitution with modifications much less extended than those now aimed at, would be found to work well, and that it will be difficult to hit upon any new plan in which the antagonism of those two Powers will not find a vent and weaken the action of Germany.[44]

Like his British colleagues in Germany, Howard saw no, or at least no peaceful, alternative to the coexistence of Austria and Prussia other than the established system of the German Confederation, with all its obvious shortcomings.

The fundamental scepticism towards the reformability of the Confederation also impinged upon judgements of the reformist initiatives of the middle-sized states, especially those of Saxony, Bavaria, and Württemberg. British diplomats largely agreed on their minor political weight and emphasized their obstructionist role in the Federal Diet. With regard to the interest of recent German historiography in potential alternative developments of the German Confederation,[45] it is striking that the proposals of the *Mittelstaaten* not only attracted much less attention than the federal policies of Austria and Prussia but that British envoys also judged them against the background of international politics. The Crimean War and the Italian crisis in particular seemed to reveal that the secondary states of Germany were unreliable partners in foreign policy; hence efforts to work towards a greater political role for the 'third Germany' were correspondingly dismissed. In 1854, John Milbanke rejected 'the tortuous efforts of these petty States to exercise a preponderating influence in European Politicks', which he had

[42]FO 7/637: Julian Fane to Earl Russell, No 163, Vienna, 11 September 1862.
[43]FO 30/191: Alexander Malet to Lord John Russell, No 51, Frankfurt, 4 May 1860.
[44]FO 34/137: Henry Francis Howard to Earl Russell, No 140, Hanover, 22 August 1863.
[45]Cf. Jonas Flöter, *Beust und die Reform des Deutschen Bundes 1850–1866* (Cologne, 2001); Jürgen Müller, *Deutscher Bund und deutsche Nation 1848–1866* (Göttingen, 2005).

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observed at the Bamberg conference: 'Nothing but a firm resistance to this preposterous combination can save the Two Great German Powers, not to say Europe itself, from the most fatal complications & embarrassments'.[46] The middle states' support of Austria during the Austro-Sardinian crisis in 1859 had a similarly undermining effect on British assessments of the initiatives for reform of the German Confederation instigated by the Würzburg Coalition from 1859 onwards.

IV

The reluctance of the British envoys to subscribe to any of the various attempts to reform the Confederation is also consistent with other patterns revealed by the diplomatic correspondence. A central point of reference throughout the period was provided by the revolutionary events of 1848–1849, which no less than eleven of the twenty-one chiefs of mission had witnessed in one or other of the German states. For most of the years between 1851 and 1866, British diplomats agreed in principle 'that Germany is only quieted on the surface' and feared that 'the outburst of that smouldering Teutonic flame which shewed itself so fiercely in 1848' might lead 'to a revival of the scenes of tumult and disorder of that epoch'.[47] The failure to unite Germany in the national project of 1848 coloured the envoys' perceptions for many years. George Jerningham wrote as late as 1858 about the revolutionaries' attempts for such 'phantasmagoric impossibility'.[48] The link between revolution and the public aspiration for national unity remained at the forefront of many assessments, each fearing that 'national feeling is but too often only a Pretext for Revolution'.[49]

This explains some of the reservations that characterized the envoys' responses to the 'cry for German unity' in 1859.[50] Any democratic tendencies in constitutional reform seemed to remind British envoys of the 'troublous year 1848'.[51] The foundation of the National Association

[46]FO 9/121: John Ralph Milbanke to Earl of Clarendon, No 40, Munich, 24 June 1854.

[47]Quotes from: FO 68/81: Francis Reginald Forbes to Viscount Palmerston, No 87, Dresden, 27 October 1851; FO 82/83: George Sulyarde Stafford Jerningham to Earl of Clarendon, Confidential, No 24, Stuttgart, 25 October 1856; FO 30/188: Alexander Malet to Lord John Russell, No 72, Frankfurt, 2 November 1859.

[48]FO 82/88: George Sulyarde Stafford Jerningham to Earl of Malmesbury, No 24, Stuttgart, 28 July 1858.

[49]FO 68/95: Francis Reginald Forbes to Earl of Clarendon, No 40, Dresden, 14 October 1855.

[50]FO 7/569: Lord Augustus Loftus to Earl of Malmesbury, No 409, Vienna, 12 May 1859.

[51]FO 9/140: John Ralph Milbanke to Earl of Malmesbury, No 34, Munich, 26 April 1859.

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(*Nationalverein*) in September 1859 did not resolve these anxieties. British observers did acknowledge that

> the steps taken by the Party for German Unity, and those they propose to take, have a much more moderate and practicable character than the illusory notions promulgated in the year 1848, and, therefore [. . .] afford some ground for hope that the present proceedings may ultimately obtain some satisfactory result to the ardent desires for German Unity.[52]

However, serious doubts remained. For British diplomatists, the National Association could not satisfactorily answer how German unity was to be realized. The diplomats' description of the *Nationalverein* as a 'Republican Unitarian association for Germany'[53] indicates that suspicion persisted, particularly towards a popular reform movement where democratic and centralist tendencies would overpower any sensible German policies. The association's political agitation during the Schleswig-Holstein Crisis and its support for the German pretender Prince Augustenburg did not encourage much confidence from the British side.

Despite these reservations, British observers realized the political significance of the various popular movements for national unity. Reports on public events, such as the celebrations of the centenary of Schiller's birth in 1859 or the meeting of the German Rifle Association at Frankfurt in 1862, illustrate that British diplomats took popular dimensions in German politics into account. It is also notable that only a few references were made to the key figures of the 1848 revolution, mainly in the context of the Refugee Question. To some extent these former revolutionaries also played a role in British discussions of Austria's and Prussia's repressive policies. Here envoys paid some attention to the governments' withdrawal of such 'exaggerated concessions which the movement Party exacted from the pusillanimity of Governments in 1848'.[54] Most reports show concern that such drastic measures would encourage rather than dissolve revolution, as the majority of British representatives judged that German governments used the wrong means to achieve a stable and peaceful situation. While they stressed the interdependence between revolution and reaction, they were equally convinced

> that steps in a liberal direction have been made which can never be retraced; and that guarantees for really constitutional and responsible Government must

[52]FO 33/162: George Lloyd Hodges to Lord John Russell, No 47, Hamburg, 22 October 1859.

[53]FO 82/95: George John Robert Gordon to Lord John Russell, Confidential, No 127, Stuttgart, 30 August 1860.

[54]FO 34/64: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 79, Hanover, 11 July 1851.

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> be secured to a People who, having so long been disappointed in their hopes of obtaining them by fair means, at length discovered and used means of extorting them, to an extravagant extent, by force.[55]

The envoys' fears that reactionary measures aimed 'at the almost entire overthrow of all liberal and Constitutional Institutions'[56] coexisted alongside their criticism of the inadequacy of constitutional life in Germany. John Ralph Milbanke, when describing the proceedings in the Bavarian chambers in 1856, left little doubt that the German states did not live up to the political standards of Great Britain: 'The notion that Parliamentary Government is the basis of these so called Constitutional Monarchies in these Countries is altogether erroneous.'[57] Milbanke's analysis of the situation in Germany, which differed little from the accounts of his colleagues, did not blame German parliamentarians for the lack of progress. Although George Jerningham, the envoy at Stuttgart, referred to the 'dogged theoretical obstinacy' of German representatives and described some of the radical members of the federal parliaments as 'enthusiastic votaries of what has been called the Empire of the Air',[58] there are fewer examples of derogatory statements towards the representative houses in the German states than was the case in diplomatic accounts during the *Vormärz* period and in reports from Frankfurt and the National Assembly during the years 1848–1849. To the majority of British envoys, parliamentary representation had been implemented in the structure of German politics – with Austria as the sole exception. However, criticism *was* directed towards how the German monarchs, the majority of their ministers, and parts of the political elite misinterpreted constitutional government. The diplomatic reports identified an overwhelming inability and unwillingness to instigate moderate and timely reforms. The King of Württemberg, Jerningham wrote, 'is actuated, to a certain degree, by the feeling, that, to use a familiar expression, He may do what He likes with His own'.[59] Likewise, Milbanke argued in his dispatches from Munich that the smaller monarchies have 'of late years especially been marked by vacillation and uncertainty – they have in ordinary times resisted without much discrimination every popular demand for

[55]FO 34/64: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 70, Hanover, 13 June 1851.
[56]FO 34/64: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 79, Hanover, 11 July 1851.
[57]FO 9/129: John Ralph Milbanke to Earl of Clarendon, No 45, Munich, 10 July 1856.
[58]FO 82/88: George Sulyarde Stafford Jerningham to Earl of Malmesbury, No 24, Stuttgart, 28 July 1858.
[59]Ibid.

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change and reform as an encroachment on the royal prerogative and influence'.[60]

More expectations were raised by developments in Prussia at the end of the 1850s, with the liberal programme introduced under the regency of Wilhelm of Hohenzollern, who had received governmental powers from his mentally ill brother Friedrich Wilhelm IV. Three weeks after the administration of the New Era took office, Alexander Malet reported from Frankfurt that 'there can be no doubt that a check is already put to a great many reactionary projects'[61] and hopes were expressed that the other states would follow. However, some scepticism remained as to whether liberal reform would consistently change Prussian politics. Lord Bloomfield pointed towards the danger of strong absolutist traditions in the Hohenzollern state and the influence of anti-constitutional elites in Prussian society in his dispatch of March 1860.[62] Only a few months later, the dispute between the Prussian chamber of deputies and government over the military budget illustrated that the New Era, if it ever had a chance for success, did not have a future. Bloomfield's successor in Berlin, the former British envoy to Munich, Lord Augustus Loftus, stated in a dispatch soon after the accession of Wilhelm I in January 1861 that the new monarch 'has apparently become far more reactionary in his political sentiments, although His Majesty is conscientious in his expressed intentions – faithfully to observe and maintain the Constitution'.[63] Loftus explained this paradox in terms of 'the fear of a Revolution and a repetition of the events of 1848'. He also pointed out that 'the different manner in which, as compared with England, Constitutional Government is regarded and practised in this Country by the Sovereign as well as by the Higher Classes' explained why little of what was promised during the regency materialized. As Loftus's successor noted with surprise, while Wilhelm's policies conformed to traditional conservative interpretations of monarchical power in Germany, the Prussian king also thought that his policies were constitutional. Lord Napier wrote from Berlin in 1865 that 'The King, strange as it may seem, believes that all he has done is consistent with the true interpretation of the constitution.'[64] Only a few months earlier, Napier cited Bismarck's remarks on the English constitutional model:

[60]FO 9/129: John Ralph Milbanke to Earl of Clarendon, No 45, Munich, 10 July 1856.

[61]FO 30/183: Alexander Malet to Earl of Malmesbury, Confidential, No 134, Frankfurt, 28 November 1858.

[62]FO 64/490: Lord John Arthur Douglas Bloomfield to Lord John Russell, Confidential, No 108, Berlin, 17 March 1860.

[63]FO 64/512: Lord Augustus Loftus to Lord John Russell, No 322, Berlin, 6 July 1861.

[64]FO 64/575: Lord Francis Napier to Earl Russell, Confidential, No 133, Berlin, 9 May 1865.

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'"if I could import the constitutions of England into Prussia with all that belongs to them, I should do so tomorrow."'[65] Similar comments can be found at the beginning of the New Era, when Bismarck, in a conversation with Alexander Malet, 'dwelt on the difficulties of Constitutional Government as understood and practised in England, being applicable to his own Country'. Bismarck's convictions were more or less in line with his Austrian counterpart at the Federal Diet, the Austrian envoy Count Rechberg, who reacted rather bluntly to Malet's supportive comments on the liberal course of the New Era:

> You English are too apt to measure all the world by your own Standard. The Germans and as much as any tribe among them – the Prussians, are unfit for self Government, they are so unused to think for themselves that they act like children when not kept in leading strings.[66]

These diplomatic reports on constitutional affairs in the German states confirm the notion that British diplomats consistently applied their own standards when judging German constitutionalism.

However, the diplomats realized that an implementation of the British model would neither resolve the controversial debate on constitutional reform in the Diet nor help to bring about political change within the federal states. As the minister resident to the Hanse Towns stated with regard to the constitution agreed to in Hamburg in 1860, the document was 'far from theoretically perfect; indeed it will not be by any means a representative one in the English sense'. Despite the shortcomings of constitutional reform in Hamburg, which dragged on for over ten years, John Ward judged it as 'a fortunate circumstance for the public interests, that the conflicting parties have at last come to an understanding'.[67] The Hamburg constitution indicates a change in how British envoys participated in the constitutional discourse and politics of the Confederation. In 1851, the Foreign Office had instructed the head of mission 'to express [...] the anxious hope of Her Majesty's Government, that the Diet may not take any steps to interfere on this Head, with the Freedom of the Hamburg People to modify their Constitution according to their own views of their interests'.[68] Palmerston's successors as foreign secretary were less keen on implementing British views on German constitutionalism. The lack of British interference in the debates over constitutional reform

[65]FO 64/566: Lord Francis Napier to Earl Russell, Most Confidential, No 2, Berlin, 18 November 1864.

[66]FO 30/183: Alexander Malet to Earl of Malmesbury, Confidential, No 134, Frankfurt, 28 November 1858.

[67]FO 33/166: John Ward to Lord John Russell, No 7, Hamburg, 14 July 1860.

[68]FO 68/81: Francis Reginald Forbes to Viscount Palmerston, No 87, Dresden, 27 October 1851.

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in Hanover and Hesse-Cassel provide evidence that the Foreign Office judged federal policy as being of secondary importance to their own interests. As the correspondence from the middle states implies, the majority of British representatives reduced their role to analysing the intricate negotiations without reporting them in every detail. Such practices were in marked contrast to the coverage of the events of 1848 and 1849, when all the details of the changing political circumstances and political instability had been described, and when local and regional events competed with national themes. Similarly, diplomatic dispatches of the *Vormärz* period had been characterized by criticism of interferences by the Diet with the rights of the Confederation's individual member states. In this respect, the 1850s and 1860s differed substantially from earlier periods, implying that federal politics were no longer seen as being so relevant.

V

Security and the European balance of power had traditionally been seen in British foreign policy as the prerequisite for prosperity, in the form of the expansion of British trade and commerce. Hence, British interest in Germany always had a strong commercial bias. However, the interdependencies between foreign policy and economic arguments were to some extent reversed during the 1850s. The diplomatic dispatches on the German Customs Union illustrate that, while peace and stability were understood as necessary for trade, in post-revolutionary Germany the degree of economic freedom was seen as an indication of the extent to which the policy of the German states was in accordance with British views. The liberalization of international markets was viewed as part and parcel of a liberal political and constitutional system, and British discussions of German trade policies increasingly gained such political connotations. Even Austria's policy in economic matters was interpreted as an indication of liberal changes in other respects. In 1858, Sir George Hamilton Seymour insisted that Austria was 'better than her reputation' and expressed his opinion that 'with regard to the Tariff I can only say that I shall be much disappointed if in a short time the Austrian commercial system be not at least as liberal as that of the "Zollverein"'.[69] While such predictions reflect the overall optimism that was characteristic of British free trade doctrine, Seymour's point of view was not shared among the other diplomats. In general, Austria's protective customs

[69]FO 7/486: George Hamilton Seymour to Earl of Clarendon, No 391, Vienna, 5 June 1856.

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policy and attempts to enter the German Customs Union were harshly criticized, as were pro-Austrian supportive statements by the south German states: 'there can be but little doubt that its object on the part of Austria is the exclusion of British Commerce and Manufactures, which was a favourite plan of the late Prince Schwarzenberg, who thought it the only way of making War on England'.[70] Prussia's domination of the Customs Union and Berlin's aggressive policies to counteract Austrian ambition were much more positively received. Lord Bloomfield argued in 1852 that the dissolution of the existing Customs Union would lead to the establishment of two separate economic zones: 'the North under the Banner of Free Trade and the South under those of Protection and higher duties'.[71]

In contrast to the 1840s, when the question of tariffs dominated the commercial reports from Germany, British diplomats increasingly placed the Customs Union within the context of the Austro-Prussian conflict. Despite the fact that the policies of the Union changed little and were in many respects still in contradiction to the principle of free trade, the diplomats' accounts of the *Zollverein* gained a much stronger political dimension, and increasingly coloured the debate on Germany's future in pro-Prussian terms. Starting with the disputes over Austria's plans for a pan-German commercial union and the treaty between Hanover and Prussia at the beginning of the 1850s, the diplomats pointed towards the political consequences of these economic relations. In September 1852, Francis Forbes judged: 'I must frankly say, that after so many years passed in Germany, I have never seen a moment, where more is at stake, and less present prospect of an arrangement.'[72] Much to British relief, Prussia prevailed, with the renewal of the *Zollverein* treaty until December 1865. However, the general problem of two competing factions in German trade policy was not resolved. Prussia had accepted Austrian demands for further negotiations in 1860 on the inclusion of Austrian trade into the union. Again, British observers – such as George Jerningham, in a report from Stuttgart – left little doubt of the significance of trade policies for Germany's political future. On the debate over Austria's admission to the Customs Union, the 'most important Question in Germany' at that moment, Jerningham wrote: 'It is perhaps not too much to say

[70]FO 68/84: Francis Reginald Forbes to Earl of Malmesbury, No 36, Dresden, 23 September 1852.

[71]FO 64/342: Lord John Arthur Douglas Bloomfield to Earl of Malmesbury, Confidential, No 148, Berlin, 18 June 1852.

[72]FO 68/84: Francis Reginald Forbes to Earl of Malmesbury, No 36, Dresden, 23 September 1852.

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that the Lot of Germany, as regards her internal & most vital relations, will be fixed in those five years.'[73]

From a British perspective, Jerningham's outlook on the years 1860 to 1865 has special relevance. With the signing of the Cobden–Chevalier Commercial Treaty in 1860, a general European tendency towards multilateral agreements, or, to be more precise, an increase in bilateral arrangements, can be identified. The Franco-Prussian Commercial Treaty of 2 August 1862 caused some irritation among the members of the Customs Union and added to the controversy about future arrangements. Here, again, the economic and political spheres overlapped and proved impossible to disentangle. Julian Fane, secretary of embassy at Vienna, doubted the feasibility of Austrian efforts to win over the south German members of the *Zollverein* to her plans for federal reform, and saw no possibility for success. He wrote in September 1862: 'Prussia, in a word, is, and will remain, the exponent of the principles of political liberty and commercial freedom in the Confederation'.[74]

VI

Prussia's return to a conservative anti-liberal policy in the early 1860s hardly affected British assessments of that state's role in Germany. In contrast to 1859, when both the liberal course of the New Era and Prussia's position in the Austro-Italian conflict had met with approval by British diplomats, her reactionary policies were not presented as affecting British interests on the Continent. Moreover, Prussia's changes of policy and the end of the New Era were overshadowed by the rising conflict over the succession in Schleswig-Holstein in 1863 and its culmination in the German–Danish War the following year. The fight over the sovereignty in the duchies linked Austro-Prussian preponderance in German affairs, the debate over a German nation-state, and a possible military conflict in Europe in a way that must have reminded the majority of diplomats of the late 1840s. Attempts to resolve the conflict peacefully through diplomatic channels were generally unsuccessful, owing to the heated public debate. To the German public it seemed obvious that British efforts to mediate were motivated by 'commercial interests';[75] thus, anti-British opinions, which also affected the negotiations of the Customs Union, gained

[73]FO 82/88: George Sulyarde Stafford Jerningham to Earl of Malmesbury, No 38, Stuttgart, 23 September 1858.

[74]FO 7/637: Julian Fane to Earl Russell, No 163, Vienna, 11 September 1862.

[75]FO 34/144: Henry Francis Howard to Earl Russell, No 176, Hanover, 13 May 1864.

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momentum. Diplomats similarly generalized German attitudes. The policies taken by the secondary states towards Schleswig-Holstein were particularly criticized, and German nationalism was linked with democratic and protectionist tendencies. This increase in temperature in diplomatic relations was followed by a striking British reluctance to interfere in the Schleswig-Holstein Question after the German-Danish War and the failure of the London Conference of June 1864 had led to Austro-Prussian control of the duchies. Even critical observers such as the ambassador to Berlin, Lord Napier, followed the tensions between the two German powers and the explosive potential of Prussian political dominance with remarkable aloofness. On the one hand, the settlement of the commercial disputes, which finally cleared the way for commercial treaties between Great Britain and both the *Zollverein* and Austria (May and December 1865), added to the tendency to accept Germany's future as Prussian. On the other hand, British interpretations of Austrian interests identified the reorganization of the remaining Italian provinces and the integration of the Hungarian parts of the Habsburg Empire as the monarchy's most important task, rather than German affairs.

Prussian momentum was best personified by Otto von Bismarck. British diplomats had early identified Bismarck's exceptional qualities as a politician, and Alexander Malet's reports from Frankfurt (where Bismarck acted as Prussian envoy to the Federal Diet) present his ambitions for Prussian hegemony against the opposition of the minor German states as at the forefront of his thinking from the start. Acting as Prussian foreign secretary and minister president from 1862, Bismarck was seen as a difficult partner in diplomatic negotiations. Lord Napier reported after his first meeting with him in November 1864:

> I do not know how far any person, however familiar and trusted, could influence the resolutions of a man of his peculiar temperament, – of one who with, – as I think –, some great and generous qualities, is so impetuous, indiscreet and – many would say – so unscrupulous in the ardent pursuit of his aims.[76]

Bismarck's dominance may partially explain why the ambassadors to Berlin refrained from taking a more active role in German affairs and restricted their efforts to more traditional diplomatic tasks of observing and reporting. An increasing distance can be identified, which showed most at the outbreak of the war between Prussia and the majority of the other member states of the Confederation, led by Austria.

[76]FO 64/566: Lord Francis Napier to Earl Russell, Most Confidential, No 2, Berlin, 18 November 1864.

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It could be argued that military conflict generally changes the character of diplomatic correspondence. Detailed narratives take the place of more general reflection. In 1866, this tendency coincided with the wider trend in British foreign policy to see the future of the German Confederation as of secondary importance. Although a biographical explanation is not fully satisfying, the death of Palmerston in October 1865 seems to have been a watershed in this development. To some extent, moreover, Britain became increasingly preoccupied with domestic policies in the context of the Second Reform Act. The civil war in the United States equally demanded British attention. Against this background, non-interventionism reflected the priorities of British policy. What is more, the acceptance of Prussian domination in Germany corresponded with general considerations for peace and a balance of power. As Henry Howard wrote from Munich two days before the peace treaty between Austria and Prussia was signed,

> Looking at the Question of Prussian Annexations from a higher point of view, that is to say from their bearing upon British interests, the aggrandizement of Prussia ought, in principle, to be viewed with satisfaction as creating a strong Power in the Centre of Europe, the natural ally of Great Britain from a community of interests, of Religion, and, to a great extent, of race, and calculated to form a barrier against the ambition of France on the one side and of Russia on the other.[77]

If we take the much longer tradition of British interest in Germany into account, a more significant change becomes apparent. Over the 1850s and 1860s, the German Confederation – and German federalism in all its shades and colourings – had transformed from being a stabilizing power in Europe to being a liability. While British diplomats had seen their efforts to avoid the dissolution of the Diet as a guarantee for Central European stability, they now felt that Germany needed to resolve the German question in order to avoid future international crises. German conduct during the Eastern Crisis, the wars of Italian unification, disputes over free trade, and the Schleswig-Holstein War combined with the failed attempts at federal reform to ensure that German federalism was discredited. Despite their ideological reservations, British envoys accepted that a future balance of power had to be sought in Berlin rather than Frankfurt. Augustus Loftus's assessment of the prospects for Germany under the leadership of Bismarck makes this point very strongly, writing to the foreign secretary Stanley: 'On the success of his policy will depend not only the future greatness, the prosperity and the happiness of his own country but possibly also the maintenance of the security

[77]FO 9/176: Henry Francis Howard to Lord Stanley, No 69, Munich, 21 August 1866.

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and peace of Europe.'[78] British envoys were watchful observers in the years up to 1870/1871 and beyond, and the dissolution of the German Confederation simplified their perception of German politics. To some extent, the definite end of the Vienna system and the persistence of British non-interventionist principles went along with a loss of understanding of the inner dynamics of German policies. However, the fact that, in addition to the embassy in Berlin, the missions to Dresden, Munich, Stuttgart, and (as a substitute for the dissolved legation at the Federal Diet) to Darmstadt survived into the *Kaiserreich* illustrates that a sense remained that 'a single Mission at some central point in Germany'[79] was still not seen as sufficient to meet the complexities of German politics. Not least in this institutional sense, a legacy of the Confederation lived on.

Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte

[78]FO 64/599: Lord Augustus Loftus to Lord Stanley, No 110, Berlin, 4 August 1866.
[79]Select Committee on Official Salaries, p. ix.

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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES AND TECHNICAL DETAILS

Volume IV of *British Envoys to Germany* comprises a selection of official reports on Germany and Anglo-German relations sent to the Foreign Office from the diplomatic missions in Frankfurt, Berlin, Hamburg, Hanover, Dresden, Stuttgart, Munich, and Vienna between 1851 and 1866. All originals are held in The National Archives, Kew.

As in the preceding volumes, the selection for this volume is based on the quality, originality of perspective, and informative value of the dispatches, as well as on a balance between the individual missions. While not aiming to give a representative selection of letters from each mission, we do intend to cover the major developments of the period 1851 to 1866 and to present as multifaceted a picture of British perceptions of Germany as possible. Dispatches on non-German affairs (including the non-German parts of the Austrian Empire) that do not refer to Anglo-German relations were not considered for selection.[80]

Each dispatch is provided with a standardized heading giving archive class mark (e.g. FO 68/72 = Foreign Office, general correspondence from Saxony, volume 72), author, addressee, number of dispatch, place and date of origin, and a brief summary composed by the editors. The transcribed reports, with some exceptions, are printed in their entirety, in order to maintain the authenticity of the sources, although the standardized form of address and concluding formula are omitted. Enclosures to the original dispatches, which can be voluminous, are not reproduced, but are listed in footnotes. With the exception of 'ß' (which has been transcribed as 'ss'), the orthography (including capitalization and abbreviations), punctuation (including apostrophes and the usage of 'it's' as a possessive pronoun instead of 'its'), and emphases (underlining) of the originals are retained. Errors or deviations in the original that might be mistaken

[80]Dispatches on the Eastern Crisis that are printed in Winfried Baumgart, ed., *Akten zur Geschichte des Krimkriegs. Serie III. Englische Akten zur Geschichte des Krimkriegs* (4 vols, Munich, 1988–2005) are not included in this volume. Further printed dispatches by British envoys to Germany can be found in the contemporary Blue Books presented by the Foreign Office to the Houses of Parliament. Cf. H.W.V. Temperley, *A Century of Diplomatic Blue Books, 1814–1914* (Cambridge, 1938).

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for mistranscription are marked '[*sic*]'. Placeholders, line breaks, and pagination are not considered.

Annotations to the dispatches, in the form of brief footnotes, aim to provide all the information required for an understanding of the document that does not become apparent from the document itself. German, French, and Latin expressions and terms are translated. Treaties, legislation, and publications mentioned in the reports are specified in the footnotes, and explained where necessary. In many cases, reference is made to other annotations and documents in this volume. All individuals mentioned are identified, as far as possible, and listed with brief biographies in the annotated index of names. An index of subjects and places completes the volume.

A combined subject and biographical index (including the short biographies) of the series is available online at http://www.ghil.ac.uk/envoys/.

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