INTRODUCTION

Conservative foreign policy

The Conservative Party served four terms in government between 1846 and 1880. It did so three times in a parliamentary minority under Edward Geoffrey Stanley, the fourteenth Earl of Derby, and then with a substantial majority from 1874 until 1880 under Benjamin Disraeli, later the Earl of Beaconsfield (for ease of reference, referred to here as Disraeli throughout). During that time, foreign policy was dominated by the Stanleys: Derby closely monitored that of his governments, in the first two of which the Foreign Secretary was his close lieutenant, the third Earl of Malmesbury; thereafter, Derby's son, Lord Stanley, served as his father's Foreign Secretary from 1866 to 1868, then as Disraeli's in 1868 and between 1874 and 1878, by the last period having succeeded to his father's title as the fifteenth Earl of Derby.

This volume is designed to assist those seeking to explore the histories of both Conservatism and foreign policy. The historiographical moment is opportune; the political history of the nineteenth century has been reshaped in the last thirty years. However, while ever more sophisticated views of nineteenth-century Liberalism have emerged, it is only recently that the Conservative Party of 1846–1868 has received sustained attention from historians. In the last few years, the publication of Angus Hawkins's two-volume biography of the fourteenth Earl of Derby, the first for fifty years, has galvanized the process of reassessing mid-Victorian Conservatism.[1] In parallel developments, historians of Liberalism – notably Jonathan Parry and David Brown – have placed foreign policy firmly centre-stage, while another group of historians (mainly based at the University of East Anglia in Norwich) have started to reconsider the role of the Conservatives in foreign policy.[2] Recent research has also begun to challenge what might be described as the 'orthodox' narrative of

[1] Angus Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister: the 14th Earl of Derby*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2007–2008).

[2] See, e.g., John Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain and the balance of power, 1874–1914* (London, 1999); David Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846–55* (Manchester, 2002); Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, national identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge, 2006); Geoffrey Hicks, *Peace, War and Party Politics: the Conservatives and Europe, 1846–59* (Manchester, 2007); David Brown, *Palmerston: a biography* (New Haven

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foreign policy in the 1870s. In this, perpetuated by historians from the 1930s to the late twentieth century, the fifteenth Earl of Derby presided over a policy of drift, from the 'War-in-Sight' crisis of 1875 to the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, despite Disraeli's attempts to provide firm leadership.[3] While the orthodox account still has its adherents, among whom might be included T.G. Otte and Miloš Ković, this view has been challenged by others.[4] Derby's tenure as Foreign Secretary represents an area of increasing debate.

Until recently, Disraeli's victory over Derby in the policy disputes of 1878 had led to a version of events being constructed by the winners. Before the 1950s, the fourteenth Earl of Derby had no serious biographer;[5] his foreign secretaries – his son and Malmesbury – still await theirs. Although the crises of 1874–1878 have more readily attracted historians, they are still considered within a framework designed by Disraeli's first biographers, W.F. Monypenny and G.E. Buckle, whose work casts a long shadow.[6] Their forensic examination of Disraeli's papers enabled them to produce a coherent narrative of his life and career, with verisimilitude provided by primary material. Their thorough editing, supported by judicious admission of some of Disraeli's errors, created a picture in which the line of perspective was guided always to his triumph at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when the Prime Minister collaborated with Bismarck and Austria to outfox the Russians. The extent to which he undermined his Foreign Secretary during the Great Eastern Crisis was obscured. A chain of evidence was constructed to give Disraeli's analysis of foreign policy a coherence that it rarely possessed at the time, and sometimes placed him at the centre of events in which he had played a subsidiary role or none at all. Only recently have historians started to challenge these conclusions about his role.

Academic fashion has played its part. The study of a Conservative Party dominated by aristocrats, like the history of diplomacy, was

and London, 2010); Geoffrey Hicks (ed.), *Conservatism and British Foreign Policy, 1820–1920: the Derbys and their world* (Farnham, 2011).

[3]See e.g., R.W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question: a study in diplomacy and party politics* (London, 1935, 1962); Richard Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question, 1875–1878* (Oxford, 1979).

[4]See, e.g., T.G. Otte, '"Only wants quiet riding"?: Disraeli, the fifteenth Earl of Derby and the "War-in-Sight" Crisis', in Hicks, *Conservatism and British Foreign Policy*, pp. 99–127; Miloš Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (Oxford, 2011). For alternative views, see, e.g., Charmley, *Splendid Isolation?*; Bendor Grosvenor, 'Britain's "most isolationist Foreign Secretary": the fifteenth Earl and the Eastern Crisis, 1876–1878', in Hicks, *Conservatism and British Foreign Policy*, pp. 129–168.

[5]Until W.D. Jones, *Lord Derby and Victorian Conservatism* (Oxford, 1956).

[6]W.F. Monypenny and G.E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, 6 vols (London, 1910–1920).

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all but washed away in the historiographical tsunami of the 1960s and 1970s. Disraeli survived, because his cultural, literary, and racial identity made him different, exotic, more recognizably 'modern', and, compared with his aristocratic colleagues, a much more attractive subject for new forms of historical enquiry: social, cultural, ethnographic, and interdisciplinary. This process emphasized his centrality and meant that Conservatism was seen through a Disraelian kaleidoscope. Meanwhile, the study of foreign policy became a niche interest unless it was determinedly of a twentieth-century nature and could help explain the causes of wars.

There was, however, another reason for posterity's neglect. Any student of nineteenth-century Conservatism has been hampered by the limited availability of source material. The papers of the earls of Derby and Malmesbury were not readily accessible to scholars until the 1980s. The diaries of the fifteenth Earl were only discovered in the late 1970s, and his papers have been awaiting full cataloguing ever since. On the Liberal side of British politics, not only have papers been available for many years, but a slew of primary material has been published, including the multi-volume editions of Gladstone's diaries and Cobden's letters.[7] The published documents include much valuable material on foreign relations. Fascinating insights into the construction of Liberal policy are provided by the Kimberley letters and diary, and by Agatha Ramm's edition of the Gladstone–Granville correspondence.[8] Much less has been forthcoming on the Conservative side. For example, barely a letter of the fourteenth Earl of Derby's has appeared in print since Monypenny and Buckle reproduced some of his correspondence with Disraeli.

That said, two very significant sets of Conservative documents have been published. The Disraeli Letters project at Queen's University, Toronto and John Vincent's editions of the Derby diaries have presented invaluable material.[9] Given the enormous extent of the

[7]M.R.D. Foot and H.C.G. Matthew, *The Gladstone Diaries*, 14 vols (Oxford, 1968–1994); A.C. Howe's edition of *The Letters of Richard Cobden* is projected to extend to four volumes, two of which have been published thus far (Oxford, 2007 and 2010).

[8]John Powell (ed.), *Liberal by Principle: The Politics of John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley, 1843–1902* (London, 1996); Angus Hawkins and John Powell (eds), *The Journal of John Wodehouse, First Earl of Kimberley, 1862–1902* (Cambridge, 1997); Agatha Ramm (ed.), *The Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville, 1868–76*, 2 vols (London, 1952).

[9]Eight volumes of the *Benjamin Disraeli Letters* (hereafter *BDL*) have so far been published (Toronto, 1982–2009), with a number of editors, principally M.G. Wiebe, John Matthews, J.B. Conacher, and Mary S. Millar; the ninth volume, anticipated in 2012, will go up to 1867 and constitute the halfway point of the projected publication; J.R. Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849–1869* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1978) (hereafter *DDCP*); *A Selection from the Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826–93) between September 1869 and March 1878* (London, 1994) (hereafter

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former task, however, it may be decades before we see all of Disraeli's letters in print, particularly from his later career. And, vital though that work is, it inevitably emphasizes his role at the expense of his colleagues'. The Derby diaries give us another important Conservative perspective and essential context for the policy-making process, but were of course not themselves part of it; policy was constructed in a process of discussion and correspondence. The lack of published correspondence is not for want of material: in the record offices of Liverpool and Winchester there are significant numbers of letters written by Malmesbury and the elder Derby, while in a range of archives the debates of 1876–1878 have left their mark in hundreds of letters. The huge value for scholars of the Disraeli letters and the Derby diaries underlines the importance of more such material being collected, edited, and made widely available.

The case for producing a volume of this kind becomes all the more pressing when one considers the momentous nature of the events that embroiled the Conservative governments of 1852, 1858–1859, 1866–1868, and 1874–1880. These include the declaration of the French Second Empire, the first of the wars of Italian unification, the crises that followed the Austro-Prussian War, and, of course, the Great Eastern Crisis of 1876–1878, which left Ottoman power propped up for another forty years. With the publication of documents on topics such as these, the part played by Conservative ministries can be the better examined, considered, and re-inserted in the historical narrative.

The documents

This book does not purport to be a comprehensive collection of all that was written on foreign policy even by the principal members of those governments. Such a work would be enormous, and would contain a great deal of material that would be either trivial or unnecessarily obscure. To make the collection both coherent and useful, the editing process has been guided by certain principles. It was decided to end with the fifteenth Earl of Derby's resignation from the office of Foreign Secretary on 28 March 1878 (to be replaced by the third Marquis of Salisbury), when a consistent strand of policy also came to an end. Geographically, the correspondence contained in this volume relates to Britain's European and Near Eastern policy. Much of it concerns relations with the four 'great powers': Austria (Austria-Hungary from 1867), France, Prussia (Germany from 1871), and Russia. From 1861

DD); *The Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826–93) between 1878 and 1893* (Oxford, 2003).

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Italy took its place in the first rank of geopolitics and was accordingly the subject of intense interest. The Ottoman Empire, and the problem of managing its decline – the so-called 'Eastern Question' – takes up a similarly large place in the collection, particularly in the chapter dealing with the second Disraeli government. But almost all territories that constituted political nations on the European continent (and several that did not) are the subject of correspondence reproduced here.

The editorial decision to focus on European and Near Eastern policy is not intended to diminish the significance of other material. In the archival collections on which this edition draws, the papers on foreign policy also include material dealing with imperial affairs, relations with America, and the minutiae of diplomatic appointments. All three warrant separate consideration. To maintain the coherence of the collection, and to make it manageable (no small consideration, given the hundreds of documents examined), we have largely excluded material falling into those three categories. This being an art and not a science, our principles have occasionally had to be set aside when material has been found relevant to the broader themes of the collection.

One other exclusion, which the aficionado of the Great Eastern Crisis will immediately note, is the Constantinople Conference of late 1876 and early 1877, the gathering of great powers that was held to consider the deteriorating situation in the Near East, but which failed to prevent the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. Salisbury attended as Britain's representative; accordingly, there is in the Salisbury, Derby, and Disraeli papers a great deal of correspondence relating to its proceedings. After some consideration, it was decided to exclude documents dealing with the detailed discussions at Constantinople, which are worthy of collection in a separate volume. To include them here, in bowdlerized form given the confines of space, would not have done the conference justice either as a separate diplomatic episode or for its place in Salisbury's career. The natural home for material generated by the conference is with other documents relating to Salisbury's contribution. Given the conclusion of this collection in March 1878, when he succeeded to the Foreign Office, the exclusion of the earlier Salisbury endeavour seemed logical, and it enabled us to include other unpublished material. In the broader narrative of the Eastern Question, the caesura is not significant: the failure of the conference meant that the unfolding crisis in the Near East went unresolved and events careered on regardless.

In the first three chapters, the correspondence is overwhelmingly that generated by a small group of ministers. In Chapter One, it is all but a bilateral exchange between the elder Derby and Malmesbury; in Chapter Two, their letters still form the bulk of the

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collection, although their correspondence with and about Disraeli takes on a greater significance. In these two chapters, however, we have the immense advantage of being able to examine documents alongside those published in the Disraeli Letters, which have not been reproduced here, being already in the public domain in very fine editions. In Chapter Two, we have added a number of extracts from the unpublished diary of the Earl of Malmesbury, which he used as the basis for memoirs that were published in 1884. Unfortunately, only snippets of the diary survive in his papers. What little remains from 1852 is almost identical to the published memoirs, but that from 1858–1859, while brief, is rather different from what was published and, we hope, illuminates contemporary events. In Chapters Three and Four, dealing with a period for which the Toronto editors have not yet completed their labours, Disraeli's correspondence takes a more significant place than in the earlier sections. Chapter Three is, for the most part, a three-way exchange between Derby, Stanley, and Disraeli.

We make no apology for the limited number of correspondents in the first three chapters. It is an accurate reflection of their contributions to policy-making. In foreign policy, a small number of ministers guided, decided, and occasionally collided. In the first three Derby governments, the rest of the Cabinet were kept informed as much as was necessary, which for the most part meant not very much. Their contribution to policy was limited to commenting after the event or in Cabinet, where unfortunately no record was kept. Of course, many Conservative politicians, both in Cabinet and out, did discuss foreign policy in Parliament. That material, too, is under-utilized by historians, but not for want of opportunity, given all the volumes of *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (now collectively present on the Internet). Nevertheless, while speeches in Parliament presented policy and debate for public consumption, the private correspondence published here was generated in the substantive process of policy-making.

In its range of material, Chapter Four is different. For the first time in the nineteenth century, a Conservative Cabinet was filled with men with strong views about foreign policy and a readiness to express them. Such had often been the case with Whig and Liberal Cabinets, and Viscount Palmerston had long had to deal with incursions into his departmental territory, but Conservative ministers (the Duke of Wellington and Disraeli aside) had meekly deferred to their leaders and foreign secretaries. By contrast, Disraeli's Cabinet was full of armchair foreign-policy experts. The problem for Disraeli and Derby was that the armchairs were in departments of state, and the experts could not be so easily dismissed as could commentators in the press or Parliament. The Cabinet nearly shattered over foreign policy in 1877,

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and the range of interlocutors reflects the complexity of debate about the Eastern Question.

Others who played a significant role in foreign policy included Queen Victoria (and, before 1861, her husband, Prince Albert) and, of course, British officials at home and in foreign postings. Where royal contributions affected policy-making or illuminated policy-makers' intentions, material relating to them has been retained; but, in the Queen's case, it cannot be said that she has suffered from the neglect of posterity, nor that there is a paucity of primary material available for the historian. Her contribution has been amply served by the nine collections of her letters and the six subsequent volumes publishing her correspondence with her eldest daughter. For the Eastern Crisis of 1876–1878, the Buckle volumes also provide a wealth of material from Disraeli's exchanges with the Queen. But these publications have played their part in distorting our view of British foreign policy. While much heat was generated from Windsor, Balmoral, and Osborne, there was little light. The monarch's *influence* was significant, and when she could frustrate, delay, and harass ministers, as she made it her constitutional duty to do, she did. In 1876–1878, of course, she also took the opportunity of Cabinet divisions to intervene, as the fifteenth Earl of Derby recognized and deplored but could do little to stop. As the correspondence in this volume demonstrates, however, the Queen did not have *power*: she neither initiated nor directed policy, even if it suited Disraeli's purpose to foster the illusion that she did. For that reason, this work treats the monarch as one of several 'noises off'.

Britain's diplomatic representatives, as the agents of foreign policy on the ground, are a continuous presence in this book. The contributions of various ambassadors, ministers, consuls, and other officials were vital; they were the instruments of day-to-day policy, and their role excited comment, approbation, and disapproval. Like the Queen, however, they did not direct policy. Some, notably Lord Cowley in Paris, were given a great deal of latitude by virtue of seniority and experience. Others, such as successive representatives in Constantinople, were so far away that they sometimes had to act before directions could be received from London. But they were the agents, not the instigators, of policy. In 1858, for example, Cowley played a vital role in mollifying Napoleon III after a series of difficulties, but he did not determine policy. While diplomats might bemoan the political leadership they received, particularly if they were not of the same political hue as their masters, they could do little about it. Notable exceptions to this rule were Austen Henry Layard, who acted as much as Disraeli's agent in 1877 and 1878 as he did Britain's ambassador in Constantinople, and Colonel Frederick Wellesley, who played a similar (if more junior) role for Disraeli in Russia. Documents

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illustrating their contributions are therefore incorporated. Broadly speaking, however, this book treats the periphery as peripheral. It provides the correspondence of those at the centre of power. All of the documents in this collection would usefully be augmented with material from other archives, but this volume incorporates the 'core' of policy debate and decision.

The Derby governments of 1852, 1858–1859, and 1866–1868

The problems with which Conservative governments wrestled may be divided roughly in two. The principal concerns of the fourteenth Earl of Derby's three minority governments, and Disraeli's first, were generated by French revisionism on the European continent. By contrast, the second Disraeli government of 1874–1880 faced problems that lay as much outside Europe, and that blew up within a political landscape defined by Bismarckian conservatism.

While both Italian and German nationalism acted as catalysts, the Conservatives' major foreign-policy difficulties between 1852 and 1868 were caused by Napoleon III's foreign policy. In 1852, both over Belgium at the beginning of the first Derby government's period in office, and over the Second Empire at its end, France generated the most concern. The great powers feared that France was about to invade Belgium in early 1852, and were troubled by the potential consequences of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's declaration of his new empire (and himself as Napoleon III) in December 1852. In both cases, the Conservative government played a key role in resolving the crises. In 1858, the first weeks in office were spent mending relations with France. These efforts followed the political row that had brought down Palmerston's government, after French refugees in Britain were revealed to have been involved in the Orsini plot to assassinate Napoleon at the beginning of the year. Palmerston had been heavily criticized in Britain for bowing to French pressure and bringing in a Conspiracy to Murder Bill; the Conservatives had to mollify both French and British opinion. The summer of 1858 was overshadowed by French naval expansion; 1859 was dominated by French intervention in Italy. At Plombières in 1858, Napoleon had conspired with Count Cavour of Piedmont-Sardinia to provoke Austria into a war in which France would support Piedmont. This duly came to pass in the spring of 1859, and, as the diplomatic situation deteriorated in the prelude to war, the Conservative government tried to mediate. Caught between France (Britain's liberal ally from the Crimea) and Austria and Prussia (with whose desire for stability it

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sympathized), Derby's government failed in its efforts, but maintained British neutrality.

France was not, however, the originator of difficulties in the first month or so of the 1866–1868 government, which was dominated by the Austro-Prussian War. The Prussians won comprehensively and took advantage of their victory to create a North German state, embodying a greater Prussia. The conflict itself was over so quickly that it barely required a British reaction. Derby and his son (for simplicity in this section referred to as Stanley) were determined to keep Britain out of the diplomatic manoeuvres that surrounded its conclusion. Much greater difficulties stemmed from Napoleon's desire to secure compensation for the expansion of Prussia. He sought his recompense for wounded French pride by precipitating a row with Prussia over the contested territory of Luxembourg. Ultimately, the only way in which the crisis could be resolved was for Britain to take the lead in mediating at a conference and, with great reluctance on Stanley's part, to agree to a European guarantee of the grand duchy. In keeping with their non-interventionist instincts, the Foreign Secretary and his father then did their best to draw back from that commitment in Parliament.

In the period covered by the first three chapters, there were also several minor difficulties that generated a disproportionate amount of publicity. In 1852, for example, the opposition made hay with the fact that the Conservatives mishandled the case of a young Englishman, Erskine Mather, who was injured in a scuffle with an Austrian soldier in Tuscany. The northern Italian duchy was one of a series of Austrian puppet states in the region, so first the Conservatives had to address the question of who was the proper power with whom to negotiate for compensation for Mather (the Whigs having made very little progress with Austria). While the Government resolved this successfully, two British diplomats in Florence, Scarlett and Barron, then accepted an ill-advised settlement, which Malmesbury and Derby did not check thoroughly, but which – when revealed to the public – gave their opponents ammunition to accuse them of abandoning British interests. This left them open to unflattering comparisons with Palmerston's bravado over the Don Pacifico affair in 1850. The Conservatives faced similar dangers in 1858 over the case of two British sailors, Watt and Park, captured by the Neapolitans aboard a Sardinian ship, the *Cagliari*, that had been engaged in piracy. Over this, however, they negotiated much more effectively, successfully mediating between Sardinia and Naples and obtaining the release of the sailors, with compensation. This was in stark contrast to their Whig predecessors, who had failed to produce a settlement before losing office in 1858.

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One of the most important questions raised by this volume is whether, in dealing with problems of any kind, there was an identifiable 'Conservative' foreign policy. Although others may draw different conclusions, it is certainly our contention that there was. Examining the way in which Conservative administrations handled business prior to 1868, certain patterns emerge. The fourteenth Earl of Derby and Malmesbury in 1852 and 1858–1859, and Derby and Stanley in 1866–1868, appear to have deployed four guiding principles: to pursue good relations with all states regardless of systems of government; to resist being drawn in to any of the great continental struggles of the day; to mediate in international disputes; and to contain and underplay differences between states.

In relations with the great powers, they sought to mend fences and avoid disputes with both the autocrats and Bonapartist France. In 1852, overtures were made to Austria and Russia after Palmerston and his Foreign Secretary, the second Earl Granville, had left relations in a fragile state. Russia was consistently seen as a partner, for example over the Belgian crisis in 1852 and the Italian crisis in 1859. In 1866–1868, Stanley was still trying to take opportunities to appease the Russian court, especially if a cheap benefit could be obtained by, for example, giving the Tsar the Garter that he desired. While the Liberals, too, had of course sought good relations with France, Malmesbury went to great lengths to woo Napoleon in 1852, and was publicly criticized for doing so. In 1858, during a war scare, the Conservatives mended relations with France, while at the same time seeking to augment Britain's defences. In relations with the minor powers, a similar placatory approach was adopted. With Tuscany over the Mather case in 1852, Conservative policy-makers rejected the unsuccessful Liberal method of doing business with Austria. In 1859, Derby and his ministers sought to mend fences with Naples; they deplored an earlier Liberal decision to break off relations, given the problems that it had caused for them in resolving the question of the *Cagliari*. In 1852, a secret mission had also been sent to see if diplomatic relations could be established with the Vatican. Although they were unsuccessful in restoring diplomatic links with either court, their attempt was characteristic of a pragmatic, almost technocratic approach to foreign policy, in which instinctive cultural reflexes were ignored or set aside.

Throughout the correspondence in the first three chapters, one may perceive a deep concern about the extent to which Britain might be drawn into the political struggles of the European continent. In 1859, over the Italian crisis, while Derby and Malmesbury were happy to intervene as peacemakers, there was a frustration with French dabbling, Piedmontese ambition, and Austria's reluctance to embrace moderate reform. Once war had broken out, that frustration was

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replaced by a desire to wash Britain's hands of all the participants. The letters betray no sense of the fellow feeling exhibited by British Liberals for Italian nationalism, but neither was there any support for Austrian reaction, as contemporaries suspected there was. Meanwhile, a suspicion of the Palmerstonian commitment to Belgium – and the problems that it might create for Britain – manifested itself at regular intervals, as did a general contempt for that nation, for Greece, and for other smaller powers. In 1866–1868, Stanley and Derby rebuffed all efforts to involve Britain in the struggles between Prussia, Austria, France, and Italy. Indeed, it was only with great reluctance that Stanley was persuaded to involve himself in the Luxembourg dispute, which ran counter to all his Conservative instincts. Despite raising historians' eyebrows, the parliamentary statements that Derby and Stanley made about Luxembourg – in which they appeared to evade the commitment they had made – appear far less odd when one considers the *mentalité* revealed in this correspondence.

While the Conservatives were deeply reluctant to be embroiled in continental struggles, and contemplated military intervention only *in extremis*, they did seek to intervene diplomatically in order to keep the peace and resolve European disputes. So in 1852 (over the disputed canton of Neuchâtel in Switzerland, over a Greek succession crisis, and on the question of the Second Empire), in 1858, over the case of the *Cagliari* and another ship, the *Charles et Georges* (the subject of a dispute between Portugal and France), in 1859 (at the outset of the Italian war), and in 1867 (over Luxembourg), Derby and his foreign secretaries spent a great deal of time and political capital in pouring oil on troubled waters. In all but the Italian war, they were successful. There was also a desire to avoid confrontational grandstanding in the manner of Palmerston. Thus, in the cases of Mather in 1852 and several British subjects who ran into difficulties with the Austrian authorities, and in the case of the *Cagliari*, Malmesbury and Derby worked to resolve disputes as quietly as possible. Indeed, so little did they seem to defend British interests over the Mather case that their solution backfired badly. Examining their private correspondence enables the historian to obtain a more coherent sense of their conduct than either parliamentary exchanges or the published 'Blue Books' permit. It also allows such cases to be seen as part of a broader approach to policy.

Conservative policy stemmed from a clear desire to maintain the European status quo, and this desire permeates all the correspondence in the first three chapters. The Conservatives acted on the (mostly) unspoken assumption that the existing order in Europe and the Near East favoured Britain and provided the best conditions for economic expansion. Effort was thus best expended preserving that happy situation. Britain had no need to tie itself up in foreign difficulties;

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non-intervention was the obvious policy to pursue. This was not so very different from many Liberal analyses – leaving aside more radical visions such as Richard Cobden's – and to some extent it was born of British certainty about constitutional and economic progress. As Jonathan Parry has suggested, talk of non-intervention in the 1860s resulted from a 'complacent and insular confidence that the world was naturally moving Britain's way: not the end of arrogance but its zenith'.[10] Sometimes, there was minimal difference between the parties. It is quite possible to imagine Palmerston resolving the Greek and Swiss problems of 1852 much as the Conservatives did, while they cheerfully concluded his Schleswig-Holstein negotiations. Leaving aside the question of public presentation, important though it was, there is nothing to suggest that the Liberals would not have reached the same basic agreement over Luxembourg in 1867, especially given Gladstone's intervention three years later over Belgium. Where Conservatives and Liberals divided most obviously was over direct challenges to the existing order.

'Ye shall know them by their fruits', and it was in the response to crises and problems that Conservative policy can be seen most clearly. Faced with nationalist assaults, Derby, Malmesbury, and Stanley drew the conclusion that change should be as minimal and conservative as was necessary to maintain stability. By contrast, and unsurprisingly, their opponents favoured prodding Europe in a more liberal direction, which men such as Palmerston, Lord John Russell, and Gladstone all agreed (in their different ways) would help maintain order, stability, and the wellbeing of the people, as it had in Britain. From Malmesbury's point of view in 1859, merely moderate Italian reform by the Austrians would resolve the difficulties in that region. His analysis was very different from that of his political opponents, who were attracted to the notion of a liberal Italian state. He was wrong about the potential for reform, and so were they in assuming that an Italian state would always be a natural British ally. But Conservative policy was pragmatic. Once Austrian power had drained away, the Conservatives were quite happy for Bismarck to deliver the *coup de grâce*, in order that a balance of power might be preserved to prevent Russian or French expansion. This superseded any desire to prop up Austria, as might have been the Conservative instinct fifteen years before.

For all governments, foreign policy has a tendency to be a fire-fighting exercise, but this was even more pronounced in the case of the Conservative ministries, which saw foreign policy almost entirely as a reactive process. Given that the shape of Europe and much

[10] Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 238.

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of the world beyond had been defined in international agreements by which Britain had gained, the principal objective was to deflect threats when they emerged. There were no higher goals. Distilled, Conservative political philosophy was *survival*, in both domestic and foreign policy. In the Near East, where any threat to stability might have led to a Russian expansion or a great power free-for-all, Derby, Malmesbury, and Stanley were happy to embrace any solution that maintained the status quo. The Serbs, Montenegrins, Greeks, and Rumanians were regarded with disdain, and the problems thrown up by them as irritations to be resolved and dismissed as quickly as possible. Once the Cretan revolt had broken out in 1866, Derby's and Stanley's profound wish was for it to be extinguished swiftly. In these areas as in others, what emerges from all the letters is a sense of foreign policy as pragmatic conservatism, not for the pursuit of grand ideological visions, the garnering of prestige, or high-flown rhetoric. Distracted by elections and reform at home, the Conservatives' focus was in any case a domestic one, and foreign policy was to be kept at bay. Perhaps the Salisburian metaphor of foreign policy putting out the occasional boathook as it moved downstream might be best applied to the mid-Victorian Conservatives.

Out of power, the party leadership – though not always the rank-and-file MPs – monitored foreign policy and sought to moderate what they saw as Palmerstonian excesses or Aberdonian weakness, choosing particular moments of vulnerability to press home an attack. During the prelude to the Crimean War, for example, Malmesbury – the only living former Foreign Secretary not in Aberdeen's coalition – was one of the principal critics of the Government. He and Derby took the lead in condemning British policy in China in 1857, while the party also took advantage of Liberal weakness over the Orsini affair in 1858 and the Schleswig-Holstein imbroglio of 1863–1864. Gladstone's ineffectual response to German unification was one of many factors exploited by the party prior to its election victory in 1874.

But the Derby–Malmesbury–Stanley model of Conservatism did not go uncontested. One of the advantages of reading the correspondence across twenty-five years is that it is possible to contextualize the tensions in the upper reaches of the party that almost pulled the Cabinet apart in 1877 and 1878. Over twenty years, Disraeli's desire for Britain to seize opportunities in Europe periodically clashed with what might loosely be called the 'Derbyite' policy of limited, peaceful intervention and peace with all the powers (though one must enter the caveat that there were sub-variants of this even within the Conservative Party). Correspondence dealing with Disraeli's earlier interventions in foreign policy has been published before, albeit in edited form. However, in collections that take

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Disraeli as their central subject, his interventions appear only as part of a Disraelian narrative, the frustrations of a dynamic minister confounded by the timidity of colleagues such as Malmesbury and Stanley. His earlier commentary on foreign policy thus underscores the classic narrative of the Great Eastern Crisis; these early signs of his dynamism and decisiveness point to the great victory at Berlin in 1878. This collection similarly enables us to see the development of Disraeli's persona in foreign policy, but in rather different ways: unfocused in its objectives and out of tune with Conservative orthodoxy.

The events of 1877–1878 make rather more sense when seen as the destructive struggle of different philosophies of foreign policy whose roots went back much further than the 1870s. Appearing here as merely one element in ministerial exchanges, Disraeli's contributions were rather insignificant in contemporary terms; they were dismissed by Malmesbury and Derby in 1859 and ignored by Stanley in 1867. When one reads the correspondence in this volume it is clearer why. Both in 1859 over Italy and in 1867 in more general terms, Disraeli came up with amorphous suggestions for grand gestures; for Britain to seize the diplomatic initiative and re-orient relations between the great powers. As he explained to Stanley in 1867, it was time 'to dictate a little to Europe', which would give the Foreign Secretary the chance to 'turn out a regular Chatham'.[11] It was never wholly clear precisely what he was trying to achieve – other than the enhancing of British prestige – and the impracticality or vagueness of his proposals evidently left his colleagues nonplussed. What *was* clear in 1859 and 1867 was that he was at odds with the Conservative foreign-policy norm. But in the 1850s and 1860s, Disraeli did not have sufficient power to undermine his colleagues or challenge their policies. However one may view those policy-makers and their conclusions, it was not they who were eccentric in foreign policy, although accounts of the later government would have us believe that Stanley was. Historians will disagree over what Conservative foreign policy was in 1852, 1858–1859, and 1866–1868, and we hope that this volume will give them much evidence to fuel debate. Whatever it was, though, it was not Disraeli's, and the policy he faced down in 1878 was one that had a much longer history.

The second Disraeli government

The Conservative victory at the General Election of 1874 was unexpected; the first since 1841, it also gave Disraeli a parliamentary majority for the first time. The victory dashed the hopes of those

[11] Letter **241**.

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Conservatives who found him an uncongenial and incongruous leader of their party, and it put such men, of whom the third Marquis of Salisbury was the best example, in an awkward situation: should they swallow their objections and serve under a man whom they did not respect; or should they stick to their principles and perhaps find themselves excluded from future Conservative governments? For Salisbury, and others, the existence of Stanley, by now the fifteenth Earl of Derby, was crucial to resolving their dilemma. As the third Marquis explained to his former stepmother, Mary, now Countess of Derby, he had great respect for Lord Derby's intellect and character and would have been happy to have served under him; and he was reassured by Derby's advice that the best way to restrain Disraeli's odd propensities was to be a part of the Cabinet. There can seldom have been a Cabinet in which so many ministers saw it as part of their task to keep the Prime Minister from doing something dangerous; and there has rarely been one in which such a resolve was more necessary.

Derby's return to the Foreign Office was a foregone conclusion. The most important man in the Government after the Premier, he commanded far more confidence among the party faithful. Derby had all the qualities required of a nineteenth-century Prime Minister: immensely rich and of ancient lineage, he was also possessed of a social conscience, an interest in the 'march of mind', and a commitment to public service, which, as he himself deplored, was becoming less common in his class. His political power derived from the same source as his wealth – the ownership of much of Lancashire; it was he, rather than his nephew the seventeenth Earl, who was the 'last king of Lancashire'. His influence on the formation of the Cabinet was considerable: he played a major part in persuading Salisbury to join it; he also kept Gathorne Hardy out of the Home Office, which went to his own Lancashire protégé, Richard Assheton Cross; his brother and heir, Frederick Arthur Stanley, became Financial Secretary at the War Office. One of Disraeli's few intimates, Derby possessed the power that went with that – and with the fact that he was clearly marked out as his successor. That the Prime Minister's health was visibly failing added even more weight to his position. The political augurs expected Derby to become the next Conservative Prime Minister; but across this roseate prospect, some shadows could be discerned by those with eyes to see them.

Derby had served in every Conservative government since 1852, but his commitment, both to the party and to politics, was open to doubt: as early as 1855, Palmerston had tried to coax him into a Liberal government; in 1866, the prospect had been raised of his being the leader in the Commons of a coalition of moderates headed by Lord Clarendon; in 1872, those Tories dissatisfied with Disraeli's lacklustre

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performance in opposition had seen him as the obvious replacement. The object of the political calculations of others, Derby's own were of a more complex nature. He saw politics as the public service owed by men of his class to the State; an effective and diligent minister, he disliked precisely those elements of politics that so enthralled Disraeli – the plotting, the manoeuvring, the cut and thrust of parliamentary conflict; the prospect of the highest office was not one that held much appeal for him. Changes in his private life did nothing to help: in 1870 he married the dowager Marchioness of Salisbury – an event whose consequences for his career require some comment.

Lady Mary Catherine Sackville-West had been twenty-two when she married the widower second Marquis of Salisbury in 1847; she inherited five stepchildren, including Robert, later the third Marquis, who was only six years her junior. She established Hatfield as the great Tory salon of the 1850s and 1860s; a highly political woman, she seems to have formed an affectionate attachment to the slightly younger Lord Stanley sometime in 1855. The question of whether Lady Salisbury and the future fifteenth Earl had a full-blown affair is one that naturally occurs to the modern mind, whose prurience will have to remain unsatisfied since evidence is wanting. Certainly, Stanley continued to be a regular, honoured guest at Hatfield.

Salisbury's death in 1868 cleared the way for the couple to wed. It was not, however, until after the death of the fourteenth Earl of Derby in 1869 that the couple finally married. The marriage brought the new Earl of Derby deep domestic satisfaction: a naturally uxorious figure, he arranged his affairs to spend the maximum amount of time with his new wife; this took him out of the social round that was Disraeli's natural medium, and further distanced him from his old friend. The Conservative victory that brought him back to the Foreign Office posed questions about his future commitment to politics to which Derby had no simple answers. He resumed his duties out of a sense of public obligation – but without much enthusiasm. One of the biggest beasts in the political jungle, he was not even sure he wished to be part of it.

The documents in this selection challenge the orthodox dismissal of Derby as an oddball and an isolationist. He was no odder than most politicians (and a good deal less so than his chief), and his foreign policy was firmly in the mould of previous Conservative governments; any differences were in fact the result of what Disraeli called the 'German Revolution'. For all his addiction to hyperbole, Disraeli was right in his assessment of the impact of Bismarck's new German empire. Most of the rules under which the great diplomatic game had been played required serious readjustment, not least because Bismarck spent the period after the Franco-Prussian war creating a new system

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of alliances and arrangements that secured German gains and isolated France. Derby, who took a less histrionic view than Disraeli, distrusted Bismarck and was prepared to act against him if the risk was small and the price not too high; but he remained anxious to work with what might loosely be called 'the Concert of Europe', when it would work with him. Lacking in glamour and excitement, such an approach was the antithesis of the one that Disraeli hankered after; where Derby strove for effectiveness, Disraeli wanted to win prestige. This difference between them was one that Derby recognized from early on, and it would be the root of the separation between the two old friends.

Derby's approach was exemplified in the 'War-in-Sight' crisis of 1875. For a time it seemed as though Bismarck might be about to launch a pre-emptive war against a revived French Republic, which had been expanding its army since the Franco-Prussian War. An officially inspired headline in the Berlin *Post* of 8 April 1875 asked 'Is war in sight?', and European statesmen feared that Bismarck's answer might be 'Yes'. Unlike Disraeli, Derby had not thought war very likely, but in May 1875 he joined with the Russian Chancellor, Prince Gorchakov, in warning against such a pre-emptive strike. Derby was happy enough to gain a diplomatic success at so low a price. Approaches from Bismarck in 1875 hinting at a possible alliance were politely, but firmly, declined. Derby saw in them only the intention of pulling Britain into Bismarck's orbit, and the creation of bad blood with France; he had no intention of playing such a game, preferring, instead, to retain a freedom to act with whichever partners happened to present themselves as and when Britain needed them. Disraeli's views on these matters were, of course, less pragmatic and more dramatic. He regarded the formation of the *Dreikaiserbund* (League of the Three Emperors) of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia in 1873 as the recreation of the old 'Holy Alliance', seeing in the new alignment a diplomatic bloc that both isolated France and condemned Britain to irrelevance in continental affairs; for a Prime Minister who had criticized Gladstone for failing to maintain the prestige of Britain and her empire, this was hardly a satisfactory situation.

While an opportunity to rectify it took some time to appear, Disraeli found other ways to assert Britain's place in the world. One was the Royal Titles Act of 1876, by which the Queen was made Empress of India, and about which much has been written. The gloss he placed on the purchase of shares in the Suez Canal was another. In both cases, Disraeli acted in a manner designed to maximize the public impact of his preferred policies. Derby, as befits his rather negative caricature, is usually presented as having opposed purchasing the reversion of the Khedive's shares, but – as these documents demonstrate – he was in favour of the scheme. Like the rest of the Cabinet, once it

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was clear that the Khedive was willing to sell, he was persuaded that the danger of another power purchasing the shares was too great a risk to allow.[12] The belief that the initiative was solely Disraeli's arises largely from the flamboyant manner in which the Prime Minister conveyed the news to the Queen. Disraeli was focused primarily on the political impact of the purchase, and he ensured that it was presented in such a manner as to delight both monarch and public opinion. Derby was mystified and somewhat disturbed by the excitement. But he failed to appreciate, as he would so often, the power of such symbolic acts. Disraeli recognized, as few others did at the time, that the grand gesture was what mattered; British prestige was asserted, honour satisfied, and the electorate entertained. He sought the same advantages when the 'Eastern Question' erupted.

The Balkan uprisings against the Ottoman Empire that began in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875 posed challenges to the Bismarckian diplomatic system, and to the assumptions that underlay British policy in the Levant; it also provided Disraeli with an irresistible opportunity to play a hand in the 'great game' of diplomacy. All these aspects are reflected in the documents that we have selected.

Britain's interest in the 'Eastern Question' went back to the 1770s, and from Palmerston's day it had been a matter of consensus that the Ottoman Empire should be preserved. The precise meaning and modalities of this were open to debate; the end was not. Britain's interests in the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and northern India made it useful to have a buffer zone between its spheres of interest and those of the Russian Empire. Successive Russian victories over the Ottomans between 1774 and 1829 had eroded this zone, and the Crimean War of 1854–1856 was, in part, an attempt to secure it through an Anglo-French-Ottoman alliance. The allies' victory over Russia in the Crimea and the resulting Treaty of Paris in 1856 had slowed down the Russians' advance for a generation, but by the 1870s they were on the borders of Afghanistan, looking ever more of a threat to British India. Britain could expect no help from the other great powers in dealing with this, but Russia's place in the Bismarckian system offered the chance of assistance – in the right circumstances.

The Achilles' heel of Bismarck's diplomacy lay in the conflict of interest in the Balkans between his two allies, Austria-Hungary and Russia. The Habsburg Empire was content to support the status quo with regard to the Ottoman Empire and did not want the Slav peoples within its own borders to get ideas about independence.

[12] For a detailed exploration of the share purchase and Derby's role in it, see, e.g., Geoffrey Hicks, 'Disraeli, Derby and the Suez Canal, 1875: some myths reassessed', *History*, 97 (2012), pp. 182–203.

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The Romanovs, who saw themselves as the champions of Orthodox Christianity and Pan-Slavism, were happy to support those who wished to follow Greece in securing independence from Ottoman rule. They also saw the opportunity for influence over any successor states. Bismarck's main demand of the Balkans was that the area would stay quiet and cause no problems. He was frustrated by the revolts of 1875 and 1876; his desire thereafter was to prevent his two allies from going to war with each other – and asking him to choose between them. He therefore happily promoted any scheme that worked towards this end. By the spring of 1876, he and his allies had agreed upon what came to be known as the Berlin Memorandum: it called for an armistice and new negotiations between the insurgents and the Ottomans, based on five points, which required a significant number of concessions from the Turks. If hostilities continued after the armistice, then the great powers would arrange unspecified 'measures' accordingly. The British were not consulted over the terms of the Memorandum, but were asked to adhere to it in May 1876.

Derby's and Disraeli's differing reactions to the Memorandum revealed much about the different ways in which the two men regarded foreign policy. Derby disliked it because he felt that it would be ineffective – being, in effect, a licence to the insurgents to reject the proposals and hold out for better ones from the powers – and would bind Britain to further intervention. It would, he thought, have been better simply to have sought an armistice in the fighting. Disraeli cared little for whatever merits the plan might – or might not – have had; his objections to it lay elsewhere. He was irked by the assumption that Britain was expected to assent to a policy in whose formulation it had taken no part; he also saw an opportunity to disrupt the *Dreikaiserbund*. Vastly different though their reasoning was, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were agreed that the Memorandum should be rejected.

From Seymer Thompson's *Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield*, which was published in 1886, through R.W. Seton-Watson's magisterial *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question* (1938), to Millman's *Britain and the Eastern Question* (1979), there has been a consensus that, in refusing to join the Bismarckian overture to the Porte, Britain ensured that no action would be taken at Constantinople and effectively colluded in the 'Bulgarian Atrocities' that followed. This reflects the contemporary charge recorded by Derby when he told a delegation of working men that: 'there are a great many people in England who fancy that Lord Beaconsfield is the Sultan and that I am the Grand Vizier'.[13]

[13] T.H. Sanderson and E.S. Roscoe, *Speeches and Addresses of Edward Henry, XVIth Earl of Derby*, I (London, 1894), p. 296.

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Underlying such criticisms of Disraeli and Derby, then and now, is a set of 'Orientalist' assumptions. It is assumed that the 'Grand Turk' was effete, in decline, and entirely a creature of whichever European power sat on him last; thirty years after Said's *Orientalism* is certainly not too soon to jettison such views.[14] The new Turkish Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, had to contend with a real, and powerful, internal hostility to the attempts of the Christian powers to dictate to the one Islamic great power, and the notion that he, or his regime, was some sort of *tabula rasa* upon which a Westernizing agenda could be written is one that fails to stand up to any real scrutiny. Lacking this Orientalist perspective, Disraeli and Derby were more willing to see the Porte as an autonomous actor in its own drama; by holding aloof from the attempts to bully it, they simultaneously won its support and avoided the danger that Canning incurred in 1826 when he allied with Russia and France, which was that, in the event of Ottoman obduracy, the Tsar would be able to declare war on Turkey as Europe's mandatory. Unfortunately for them, any gains made from this line of policy were immediately imperilled by the reaction of British public opinion to the news of the 'Bulgarian Atrocities'.

Of all Victorian politicians, Disraeli was the least well equipped to deal with the public's response to the news that Turkish troops had massacred thousands of Christians in the Balkans. Sceptical of such stories, Disraeli allowed his cynicism public airing when he referred to them as coffee-house 'babble'; and his inability to empathize with the suffering Christians simply reminded his critics of his Judaic origins. In the face of massive public demonstrations demanding that action should be taken against the Turks, and with Gladstone's return from 'retirement' to help lead the agitation in September, giving it a fresh lease of life, Disraeli not only found it impossible to support the Turks but found himself facing increasing dissent from within his own Cabinet. He would have liked to have assured the Turks that he would not allow the Russians to attack them; he would have liked to have warned the Russians off; but he could do neither, not least because leading (and more religiously minded) members of the Cabinet began to take an increasingly anti-Turk and, by extension, pro-Russian line. The documents reveal the growing desire of the Cabinet to be involved in foreign affairs and the extent to which, at this point, Disraeli was reliant upon Derby. His stolid calm reassured the Prime Minister and acted as a brake on their Cabinet colleagues, almost all of whom were alarmed by the public outcry. So weakened had Disraeli become by the end of the 'Atrocities' campaign, that all he could do was keep his head down, encourage Cabinet members

[14] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978).

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to hold their nerve, and agree to the conference of the great powers that met in Constantinople in December 1876 to discuss reforming the Ottoman Empire. The decision to nominate Salisbury as Britain's representative brought him on to the European stage for the first time. It was a shrewd move. Salisbury had a reputation as no Philoturk, was known to oppose Disraeli's tendencies in that direction, and would be unable to complain about the failure of the conference if he was actually there.

Throughout 1876, the continuing Balkan upheavals further threatened the stability of Europe. The British refusal to sign the Berlin Memorandum drove the continental powers to make shift for themselves. That summer, the Russians and the Austrians reached a secret agreement at Reichstadt, which provided for the creation of spheres of influence in the event of a break-up of the Ottoman Empire. When the Constantinople Conference concluded in January without the Turks agreeing to its demands for reform, the two empires renewed their agreement – which prepared the way for a Russian declaration of war on the Porte. The documents in our selection show the attempts of the Conservative government to find a continental partner – and its helplessness in the absence of one. Disraeli's desperate wooing of Vienna was based upon his ignorance of the terms of Reichstadt, which Derby, by contrast, had long suspected. Disraeli's failure to win a European ally drove him back to the need for unilateral British action; it was here that the scale of his disagreement with Derby and others in the Cabinet finally became clear. As so often with Disraeli, rhetoric failed to keep pace with reality. His desire to 'do something' was difficult to translate into a policy; nor did it command the assent of his Cabinet.

The documents illustrate the way in which Cabinet government really worked in the high Victorian era. Disraeli, for all the bombast in his own letters, was no autocrat; the Cabinet needed to be wooed, persuaded, and cajoled; senior ministers – what a later generation would call the 'big beasts' – appear almost as independent potentates with whom careful negotiations needed to be conducted. The personal dynamic between the leading members of the Cabinet is therefore vital to understanding how the crisis ruptured the continuity between the Conservative foreign policy favoured by the House of Stanley and that popularized by Disraeli and his later admirers.

The reader can follow, sometimes on a day-by-day basis, Disraeli's attempts to convince, browbeat, and threaten his colleagues into agreeing to his preferences. What needs commenting on here are two aspects of it. The first is the initial weakness of Disraeli's own support in Cabinet: he had no unconditional supporters, with the exception of his old friend, Lord John Manners (by late 1876, the only

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other veteran of all the mid-Victorian Conservative governments). The second is the normative nature of Derby's preferences.

On the first of these, the documents chosen cast fresh light on Disraeli's famous claim that there were six or seven 'parties' in the Cabinet: for war (Gathorne Hardy, John Manners, Sir Michael Hicks Beach); for war if the Russians reached Constantinople (Lord Cairns, R.A. Cross, W.H. Smith, the Duke of Richmond); for war if they refused to leave it afterwards (Salisbury); for peace at any price (Derby); for an appeal to the other European powers (Sir Stafford Northcote); for Russian acquisition of Constantinople (the Earl of Carnarvon); for reconciling all the parties (Disraeli and the Queen).[15] At one level, that is far too few; on another, far too many. It is far too few because there is a sense in which every minister had his own view, even if many of them were ill-informed ones; it is too many in so far as not all views were of equal significance. Of those who regularly expressed their views, by far the most important were Disraeli himself, Derby, and Salisbury; to some extent all other views were subordinate to those expressed by these three, and the dynamic of the Cabinet meant that other ministers tended to cluster around them. Disraeli's last 'party', in any case, was disingenuous: he belonged variously in one of the first two, while the Queen was determinedly in the war party. Until December 1877, the High Church, anti-Russian Salisbury and the non-interventionist, pacific Derby appeared to be on the same side, and neither of them agreed with Disraeli. But this was not in fact quite the case; the documents here allow the reader to see more clearly. What they reveal is that Disraeli's bellicose policy alarmed almost everyone except Manners, Hardy, and Richmond; they show that Derby's caution was, for much of the crisis, a more attractive option for most ministers; but they also show the importance of contingency in politics. After the climax of the crisis it was easy to portray Derby as vacillating; but it was only at the end that most colleagues came to that conclusion. For much of the crisis, he enjoyed a good deal of support and approval, and that was because his policy was entirely in line with that of previous Conservative governments – to work with the 'Concert of Europe' to avoid war. The Derby of 1877 was the Stanley of 1866–1868, who had only reluctantly accepted a guarantee of Luxembourg, and his policy was that of his father in the 1850s.

During the most dangerous phase of the crisis – that is, between May 1877 and February 1878 – Derby tried to avoid the war that he feared Disraeli's bellicosity might bring. His close contacts with the Russian ambassador, Count Pyotr Shuvalov, were critical. Shuvalov,

[15]Disraeli to Queen Victoria, M&B, VI, p. 194. The story varied slightly depending on the audience: see, for example, *DD*, 21 October 1877, p. 446.

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like Derby, had his own home-grown hotheads whose love of 'prestige' threatened to bring the two countries into conflict again, and the two men were at one in trying to lower the diplomatic temperature. Derby's policy of trying to secure British interests while avoiding a repeat of the mistakes that had led to the Crimean War commanded majority support in Cabinet throughout 1877 and, to Disraeli's frustration, into 1878. It was, as is the way of successful diplomacy in such situations, lacking in showmanship and any public profile. By the time the Turkish redoubt of Plevna fell in December 1877 and the Russians were at the gates of Constantinople, public opinion was beginning to demand some dramatic demonstration of British power. To this clamour, Derby remained deaf.

Famously, in the novels of Jane Austen, the Napoleonic Wars appear only as noises off; in these letters, something of the same is true of the diplomatic crisis of 1877–1878. Given that the detail of the crisis is obscured by the political manoeuvring foregrounded in these documents, some brief account of it may be welcome to the reader.

After the failure of the Constantinople Conference, the spring of 1877 was replete with attempts to avoid a Russo-Ottoman war and, as that became increasingly impossible, to contain the damage it might do. In May, with war inevitable, Russia agreed to demands designed to safeguard British interests: Russia would not threaten the Suez Canal; it would not attack or occupy Egypt; it denied any imputation of a desire to acquire Constantinople and agreed that, were the city to be threatened, its status would be a matter for international negotiation; and it accepted that rights of passage through the Bosphorus and the Straits of the Dardanelles would be preserved in a manner satisfactory to all interested parties. Few thought that this was more than papering over the cracks. The key questions seemed to be how swiftly Russia would win the war, and what would happen if its demands were excessive in the eyes of Britain and Austria.

Wars seldom follow the expectations of those who launch them. Far from winning a swift war, the Russians found themselves bogged down on the way to Constantinople, with an Ottoman General, Osman Pasha, mounting an heroic defence of the fortress of Plevna. Always apt to spring to the defence of gallant little foreigners defending themselves against a great empire (provided, of course, that that empire was not British), British public opinion took Osman to its heart; that tide which had flowed so strongly against the Turks in 1876 now began to flow in their favour, strengthened by the growing anxiety that the Russians would seize Constantinople. All of this presented Disraeli and his colleagues with problems. News from the war zone was slow, intermittent, and sometimes contradictory; nonetheless, ministers were expected to react to it.

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The documents that we have selected illustrate the flexibility of Disraeli's responses as he pursued – with increasing frustration – a more 'active' policy resisted principally by Derby, Salisbury, and Carnarvon, as well as tracing out the lineaments of the divisions within his Cabinet. Upon one issue, however, the Prime Minister was clear: the political and diplomatic consequences of the fall of Constantinople would be fatal to his Government, and therefore that event must be prevented. The question of how best to secure this essential desideratum allowed of some degree of manoeuvre; but this should not obscure from the reader Disraeli's determination to stop the Russians from occupying Constantinople. Here, Derby's position was critical.

By June, Disraeli was quite ready to contemplate the resignation of Salisbury and other ministers who felt unable to defend Constantinople from Russian attack; but without Derby's support he could not to take the decisive action he desired. Not for the last time, Disraeli would appeal to their old friendship; and, not for the last time, Derby would be deaf to his entreaties. He was guided by his sense of public duty, nothing more. Derby was convinced that middle-class opinion was firmly against the war; Disraeli, who always despised the middle class, told him that 'the upper and working classes were united against Russia'.[16] The selections from Disraeli's secret correspondence with the British ambassador to the Porte, Austen Layard, provide an insight into exactly how bellicose Disraeli was prepared to be at this juncture, and the extent to which he was prepared to bypass the Cabinet. Writing to Layard on 6 August, in a letter his biographers chose not to publish, Disraeli appeared to be contemplating the British occupation of Armenia and Tiflis – a policy that would certainly have caused war.[17] He also stressed the importance of Turkish resistance being such as to secure another Russian campaign, which would present Britain with a *casus belli*. The extraordinary episode in which he and the Queen entrusted Colonel Wellesley, the British military attaché to the Tsar, with a 'secret mission', warning that Britain would not stay neutral in the event of a second campaign, is more comprehensible when placed in this context, but its risks are also more apparent. Disraeli had sent Wellesley to threaten the Tsar over the potential consequences of a Russian campaign that he was at the same time trying to provoke via Layard. Buckle's comment – that the mission was a 'questionable proceeding' – remains an unbeatable example of English understatement.[18]

[16] *DD*, 30 June 1877, p. 413.
[17] Letter **448**.
[18] M&B, VI, p. 148.

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The question of what to do should the Russians menace Constantinople was, as Derby admitted to his diary on 31 July, one that caused him to 'move, as it were, with my resignation in my hands'; nor, as the crisis wore on, was he the only one.[19] Between July and December, Disraeli made repeated attempts to force his colleagues to take the line he wanted on this issue – namely to threaten war if the Russians threatened Constantinople. Thanks to Derby, these attempts ended in failure. The documents enable the reader to make a full assessment of the Disraelian version of events. Derby's role can be fully traced, as can the persistent concern exhibited by Carnarvon and Salisbury. It also becomes clear that there was, as Northcote's letter to Corry of 15 August 1877 shows, some dissatisfaction with the manner in which Disraeli conducted Cabinet business.[20] The notion that Derby was, in some way, an isolated figure fails to survive close scrutiny. Such a conclusion does, however, invite a fresh question: why, in that case, was it Derby who ended up resigning in 1878?

This is not an absurd question – even if the Disraelian mythology might make it appear as such; the fact that it was Derby who resigned should not blind us to the fact that, at the time, other possibilities existed. The 'policy' that Disraeli outlined to the Tsar through Wellesley was never that of his Cabinet – which was why he used such an unorthodox and irregular route to promote it. Disraeli's conviction that the threat of British intervention would deter Russia from occupying Constantinople was not shared by enough of his colleagues for him to make it official British policy. By the time that Plevna fell to the Russians in early December, the Cabinet was as divided as it had been in the summer; however, with public opinion now in full cry, the time and space that had allowed the luxury of such debate was contracting. On the stage of the London music halls, the 'Great' MacDermott sang

> We don't want to fight,
> but by Jingo if we do,
> we've got the ships,
> we've got the men,
> we've got the money too

before declaring 'The Russians shall not have Constantinople!'

Disraeli looked to the 'Jingoes' for support; he found little in his own Cabinet. As the pressure from public opinion increased, and as rumours abounded that the Russians were in the suburbs of Constantinople, Disraeli pressed his colleagues to agree with him – but

[19] *DD*, 31 July 1877, p. 426.
[20] Letter **449**.

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to little positive effect. Even at a supposedly decisive meeting of the Cabinet on 17 December 1877, where he pressed for an immediate summoning of Parliament, increased defence preparations, and British pressure on Russia to make peace, Salisbury, Carnarvon, and Derby would not move. It was Disraeli who had to threaten to resign, and even then his opponents were not persuaded. What followed showed how close things were. For what was the final time, on 18 December 1877, Disraeli made another personal appeal to Derby; with the help of Cairns and Salisbury, a compromise was reached at Cabinet later the same day.[21] This postponed the summoning of Parliament to a date later than originally proposed and deferred the question of increased defence expenditure.

Contemplating future policy, however, Disraeli recognized that he could not be sure of achieving either his ends or Cabinet unity by such uncertain means. Shortly before Christmas 1877, he insured his position by seeking to win Salisbury's support.[22] He recognized that he needed to split Derby and Salisbury; the weaker, less well-respected Carnarvon could be more easily picked off. It was to Salisbury, therefore, that he let slip two secrets: that of the Wellesley mission, and his fears that the 'leaks' of Cabinet secrets came from Lady Derby herself. That Disraeli should have chosen to impute an act of betrayal to her in his letter to her former stepson, who may have suspected her of betraying his father, may simply have been a coincidence; but it put the relationship between the two men on a new footing. As far back as 14 July 1877, Derby, as the record here shows, had denied that the notes he made of Cabinet meetings could be the source of any leakages of information; only his wife and his private secretary, Thomas Sanderson, had access to those notes.[23] This, as the research of Bendor Grosvenor has shown, was not the reassurance that Derby imagined.[24]

Grosvenor's work has demonstrated the lengths to which Mary Derby was prepared to go to get access to the notes that her husband made of Cabinet meetings. Derby's notes (which have all disappeared save for one copy found by Jennifer Davey) were kept securely locked in his desk; only Derby and Sanderson had keys to unlock the drawer. But what Derby did not know was that his wife had access to the papers through Sanderson's agency. Sanderson seems to have nursed a tenderness for Mary Derby's youngest daughter, Margaret, and it

[21] *DD*, 18 December 1877, pp. 465–466.
[22] Letter **497**.
[23] Letter **440**.
[24] B.G. Grosvenor, 'Lord Derby and the Eastern Crisis' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2009), ch. 8.

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may be that that, or the formidable personality of Lady Derby, made him give her the key when she asked for it. The extent to which this made her the author of the information that Shuvalov then apparently passed to his government about Cabinet divisions is, however, unclear. Anyone who moved in London society, as the suave and amiable ambassador did, could scarcely have avoided hearing the anecdotes that dropped so readily from the lips of the Prime Minister himself. The Duke of Richmond had warned Lord Cairns in July 1876 of the dangers of the 'Chief's' love of gossip.[25]

The role of Lady Derby has recently been examined in great detail by Jennifer Davey, whose work shows the extent to which she should be seen not as some exotic interloper in a male world but as a 'female politician' in the mould of Trollope's Lady Glencora Palliser.[26] The part played by aristocratic women in British political life is worthy of much further study. We are aware that this volume is open to the charge of perpetuating the separation of 'male' and 'female' spheres by excluding most of Lady Derby's correspondence. That is far from our intention; rather, we hope that the letters here will be used as a starting point for further scholarship in this area, as in others. To have hastily added Lady Derby's letters, many of which have only recently been discovered or received attention, would have done a disservice to scholarship, while the detailed further work of historians such as Davey is ongoing.

Even as Disraeli was beginning to poison the wells of their friendship, Derby was taking the higher ground. His letter to Salisbury written on 23 December 1877 stands as the most lucid expression of the Conservative tradition of which he was heir: 'prestige' was all very well for those who, like Disraeli, seemed to be blinded by it, but this was not the way in which the British aristocracy ran things.[27] However, Derby's confident appeal to aristocratic solidarity was misplaced. For reasons that have been variously explained, Salisbury chose to side with Disraeli, and when Derby for the first time decided to resign, on 23 January 1878, Salisbury was the obvious choice to succeed him. Derby was undermined by widespread rumours as to his incapacity; Grosvenor has shown the way in which sources close to Disraeli disseminated stories about Derby's addiction to drink and the nature of his wife's relationship with Shuvalov.[28] In the 'Jingo' atmosphere created by the possibility of Russia occupying Constantinople, it was

[25] Letter **338**.

[26] J. Davey, 'The invisible politician: the political career of Lady Mary Derby, latterly the Countess of Derby (1824–1900)' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2012).

[27] Letter **496**.

[28] See, e.g., Grosvenor, 'Britain's "most isolationist Foreign Secretary"', pp. 159–160.

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easy enough to portray Derby as at best a weak vacillator, and at worst a drunken cuckold unable to come to grips with events. Aware that there were rumours, Derby fastidiously regarded them as further evidence that public opinion was not a fit barometer of foreign policy.[29] Despite everything that had passed, however, Disraeli was forced to take Derby back into the Government when it became clear, first, that the Turks were going to make peace with Russia anyway and, secondly, that the rumours had not quite done their work and Conservative backbenchers were not prepared to lose Derby.

Derby's refusal to countenance any formal threat to Russia was based upon two considerations: the first was that Britain could not act without an ally, and he did not think that the Austrians would fill that position if it came to war; the second was that the Russians would make a moderate peace settlement, probably along the lines of whatever they and the Austrians had concocted at Reichstadt in the summer of 1876. These two propositions hung together, and they hung on the reassurances of Shuvalov. Unfortunately for Derby, and fortunately for Disraeli, Shuvalov was not in the loop when it came to the negotiations being carried on by the Grand Duke Nicholas with the Ottomans. For the Pan-Slavs in the Livadia Palace (the Tsar's Crimean base), the time had come to seize their maximum gains, while Chancellor Gorchakov, like Shuvalov, wanted a more modest settlement that would not unite the old Crimean coalition against Russia. It would only become apparent which side had the Tsar's ear when the terms being negotiated at San Stefano were known.

When the news of the treaty eventually concluded between Russia and the Ottomans at San Stefano on 3 March 1878 became public, it was clear that, despite Shuvalov's assurances, it was a 'Pan-Slav' peace. The product of the thinking of the Russian military rather than its diplomats, San Stefano created a 'Big Bulgaria', which seemed destined to be a Russian client state, giving its patron access to an Aegean Sea port. This changed everything. A harder-line policy was now clearly needed, and with Austria-Hungary furious at what its foreign minister, Count Gyula Andrássy, took to be a blatant disregard of Reichstadt, the ally to help enforce such a line now became available. Presented with Disraeli's determination to annex some portion of Ottoman territory as part of a policy of confronting Russia, Derby again resigned from the Government on 28 March 1878 – when our collection of documents ends.

This collection ends there because that was the point at which the line of policy long accepted by the majority of Conservatives – and led by the House of Stanley since the 1840s – went into eclipse.

[29] *DD*, 9 February 1878, pp. 504–505.

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Salisbury, who had for so long seemed to agree with Derby, succeeded to his position at the Foreign Office. Tiring of what he had come to see as the constant negativity of Derby's position, he seems to have decided that even Disraeli's policy was better than not having one at all – which is what, increasingly, the Cabinet felt that Derby's position constituted.[30] Austrian resentment over San Stefano gave him the ally Derby had never had, while Bismarck's fears of an Austro-Russian war gave him an 'honest broker' to bring the two sides together in Berlin in June to undo San Stefano's more objectionable provisions.

At San Stefano the Russians had effectively destroyed Ottoman influence on the European side of the Bosphorus, replacing it with their own through a series of what looked to the other powers like client states; the mission of the powers at Berlin was to reverse this as far as it could be done, but without giving the Ottomans any real compensation. The Treaty of Berlin, signed on 13 July 1878, allowed Serbia, Montenegro, and Rumania to keep the independence conceded by the Ottomans at San Stefano, though not the exact borders; but the same was not true of the 'Big Bulgaria'. A new kingdom ruled by a Russian protégé which included the whole of Macedonia and which had a coastline on the Aegean was the sort of thing that only the Pan-Slavs who had negotiated San Stefano could have imagined would have been acceptable to the other powers; Berlin saw it dismantled. It was first bisected, with most of Macedonia and Thrace being returned to the Ottomans, and then divided into two: a smaller Bulgarian Principality, which was independent, and an autonomous Eastern Rumelia, which remained under Ottoman suzerainty. The Austrians got their pound of flesh in the form of a protectorate over Bosnia-Herzegovina and the right to garrison the Sanjak of Novi-Pazar. Russian influence in the Balkans was curtailed, and the results of the Congress were easily portrayed by Disraeli and a friendly press as a huge success, although within a generation it would become clear, as Salisbury would admit in 1886, that they had 'backed the wrong horse' in thinking that the 'Big Bulgaria' would have been a Russian client state.

All of that lay nearly a decade away from the summer of 1878, when Disraeli and Salisbury returned in triumph from Berlin declaring that they brought 'peace with honour'; sixty years later another Prime Minister would use those words in Downing Street. A delighted Queen Victoria rewarded both her ministers with the Order of the Garter, and they basked in public acclaim. Everyone agreed that it was a notable British diplomatic triumph. One dissident voice was that of Derby, whose only contribution to the general gaiety was to explain to the

[30] See, e.g., letter **482**.

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Lords the reasons behind his resignation. This led to his being accused by Salisbury of both leaking and falsifying Cabinet discussions, and being likened to Titus Oates, the seventeenth-century perjurer who had made a series of allegations about Roman Catholic plots. The breach between the two men was complete. Salisbury remained as Foreign Secretary until the Government's defeat at the general election of 1880, eventually succeeding Disraeli as leader and becoming Prime Minister in 1885. By that time Derby had completed his detachment from the Conservative Party by accepting office in Gladstone's Liberal Cabinet. Where Salisbury became a prominent figure in the history of the Conservative Party, Derby was all but forgotten. This collection is a contribution to excavating the role that he, and his father, played in that history.

Easy and tempting though it is to suggest that Disraeli's triumph marked the complete eclipse of the Derbyite position in Conservative foreign policy, there are grounds for proceeding with more caution. The exact nature of the relationship between Disraeli and Salisbury at the Foreign Office after 1878 suggests that the showmanship of the former was of limited use for a defined period of time, the *réclame* of Berlin and of Disraeli's posthumous reputation notwithstanding. Since history deals in continuities as well as change, it might be that further study of Salisbury's diplomacy will reveal its similarities with that traced in this collection, raising the question (which we cannot answer here) of the real legacy bequeathed to the Conservative Party by Disraeli. The notions of continuity and bipartisanship in British foreign policy have created the impression of a golden thread running from Canning, through Palmerston and Disraeli, to Churchill, Thatcher, and Blair, in which a concern for British prestige and an activism on its behalf have been the dominant themes. This collection suggests the existence of other continuities; in place of the 'golden thread' we can discern something more complex. When Paul Kennedy and Paul Schroeder wrote about the persistence of a policy of 'appeasement', they were, in part, stumbling over the prostrate remains of the Conservative tradition traced in these documents. But labelling it 'appeasement' was to continue a tradition (already a long one by the 1970s) of reading British foreign policy backwards.[31]

Beginning with Gooch and Temperley's documents on the origins of the Great War and continuing with the volumes on British policy leading to the Second World War, edited by Sir Llewellyn Woodward, published collections of documents on British foreign policy have

[31] For a detailed exploration of the 'tradition' of appeasement, see Geoffrey Hicks, '"Appeasement" or consistent Conservatism? British foreign policy, party politics and the guarantees of 1867 and 1939', *Historical Research*, 84 (2011), pp. 513–534.

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focused on the twentieth century and on the origins of wars. There is an obvious place for both, but too great a concentration on the latter is, to diplomatic history, what autopsies in cases of sudden death are to forensic pathology; if we drew our knowledge of pathology solely from studying sudden death, we might end up supposing such a state of affairs to be natural – when it is not. Equally, a concentration on the twentieth century can lead us to neglect the long-term continuities that underlie British foreign policy. Many years ago, Rab Butler commented that it was impossible for a global empire to have one 'simple traditional policy', because British interests 'and the world itself are too complicated to enable us to follow any one high road'.[32] We hope that the documents that follow offer ample evidence of that assertion – and sources from which further studies may proceed.

[32]Trinity College, Cambridge, R.A. Butler MSS, Butler to Ian Black, 21 April 1938, RAB G/9/13.

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