INTRODUCTION

This volume documents the crucial significance of the three years between the outbreak of the German revolution in 1848 and the start of the Dresden Conferences in late 1850. With the beginning of the revolution, a period of great activity and vigilance began for the eight British envoys to Germany. For the Foreign Office in London, the unstable situation in Germany immediately resulted in an unprecedented flood of diplomatic dispatches. The envoys were in the middle of events, and tried to inform the foreign secretary, Palmerston, as well as they could. The brief period covered in this volume allows the density of events to be reflected at the level both of the individual states and of Germany as a whole. Given the wealth of events that were worth reporting, and increasingly worrying to British observers, the British envoys to Germany largely dispensed with the descriptions of the economic, social, and cultural aspects of their host countries that had been a feature of their reports of the *Vormärz* period, up to 1847. The selection of dispatches in the present book is, by comparison with its predecessors, different and more political. However, nothing has changed concerning the variety of the opinions expressed and the varying quality of the reports, depending on the author.

With few exceptions, the diplomatic staff at the British missions remained unchanged in 1848 and subsequently. Francis Reginald Forbes had been accredited in Dresden for fifteen years. John Duncan Bligh had been envoy to Hanover since the start of diplomatic relations in 1838. The Earl of Westmorland had been stationed in Berlin since 1841, the year that also saw George Floyd Hodges take up his position in Hamburg as *chargé d'affaires* and consul-general for the Hanse Towns. John Ralph Milbanke had been appointed envoy to Munich in 1843, and Alexander Malet to Stuttgart in 1844, while Viscount Ponsonby had taken up his post as ambassador in Vienna in 1846, after a Cabinet reshuffle in Britain. Baron Cowley was a special case among envoys in revolutionary Germany: he was sent to the new National Assembly and provisional central government in Frankfurt as a British observer in July 1848. But Cowley, too, could look back on eleven years' service in Germany, having spent the years from 1832 to 1843 as secretary of legation in Stuttgart. In their reports, British diplomats in Germany – and the same applies to their deputies, whose reports are also included

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in this volume – were able to place the events they observed into the context of larger developments and processes on the basis of their expert knowledge of Germany. Their familiarity with their German host countries allowed them to provide accounts which were both knowledgeable and analytical.

The revolutionary events of spring 1848 did not come as a surprise to the British envoys. They had been observing Germany for too long to be lost for an explanation of the unrest and oppositional movements that sprang up in almost all German states. Continuity with the pre-revolutionary period is clearest in the case of British reportage on Bavaria. The events which culminated in Ludwig I's abdication, carried on seamlessly from the political crisis around Lola Montez, which had already begun in 1847. In John Ralph Milbanke's opinion, Ludwig's behaviour and the influence of his mistress were politically untenable and, ultimately, the outcome of politics conducted in a way that was diametrically opposed to British views of sensible statesmanship. The revolt against the political system in Bavaria was a text-book example of the consequences of unsuccessful policies in the German states: 'These are the fruits of the System pursued in the so-called Constitutional German States for years past, and in this country [Bavaria] more particularly which enjoys nothing beyond the name of Constitution, for it has always been one of the first objects of the Sovereign to evade and neutralize it as much as was in his power, under the false notion that he thereby strengthened his own prerogative'.[1]

Given that reforms were long overdue, the majority of British diplomats reacted positively to developments in the first phase of the revolution. John Duncan Bligh, who was not 'surprised that the People should have seized the opportunity for extorting concessions from their rulers',[2] noted a 'wonderful change in public affairs'[3] in Hanover. The conciliatory course towards popular demands taken by German monarchs and their new March ministries was also approved by the British foreign secretary, Palmerston. In his instructions to the British envoy Stratford Canning, who was ordered to visit the German courts on his return from Constantinople, Palmerston left no doubt that it 'is good policy not [to] delay too long, Reforms and Improvements, which the spirit of [the] age, and the wants and wishes of a Nation

[1] FO 9/100: John Ralph Milbanke to Viscount Palmerston, No 13, Munich, 4 March 1848.

[2] FO 34/57: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 38, Hanover, 6 September 1849.

[3] FO 34/53: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 21, Hanover, 24 March 1848.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

require'.[4] Palmerston was not just looking at internal developments in the German states; he also stressed the importance of stable political conditions for 'the maintenance of Peace in Europe'.[5] In this context, he did not exclude the possibility of a closer union between the individual German states. Without referring explicitly to the controversial question of national unity, a discussion which all British diplomats in Germany had reported since early March 1848, Palmerston was open to 'any arrangement which would tend to strengthen Germany by more closely uniting and consolidating the separate States of which it is composed'.[6] When, at the end of March 1848, reform of the German Confederation was discussed in Frankfurt, the British envoy to the German Federal Diet was instructed to 'express on the part of H. M's Govt. a general desire to see some arrangement of this kind carried into effect by the common agreement of the German states'.[7]

As the reports clearly reveal, the initial positive attitude soon turned into disillusion. After failing for decades to address necessary reforms, or addressing them only hesitantly, the monarchs and their governments now failed again. On 12 May, at the end of his special mission through Germany, Canning summed up this assessment: 'The Governments [...] have fallen from one extreme to another, from unlimited power to utter helplessness'.[8] He thus added his voice to the chorus of disapproving diplomatic reports which were sent to Palmerston from all parts of Germany. With increasing anxiety and resignation, the consequences of what had been achieved by the March Revolution were noted, along with the unrest and revolutionary uprisings that continued up to early summer 1849. The right of assembly, freedom of the press, and a democratic franchise were held responsible for agitation by the opposition, and for the often destructive behaviour of the parliaments. The interplay between weak governments and unpredictable parliaments demonstrated to the British envoys Germany's inability to follow Britain's constitutional model with moderate policies. Beyond this, Germany also fundamentally lacked 'all those Basis, on which a real constitutional existence can be founded'.[9]

[4] FO 30/117: Viscount Palmerston to Stratford Canning, No 1, Foreign Office, 18 March 1848 (draft); not included in this volume.

[5] Ibid.

[6] FO 30/105: Viscount Palmerston to William Thomas Horner Fox-Strangways, No 1, Foreign Office, 25 March 1848 (draft); not included in this volume.

[7] Ibid.

[8] FO 30/117: Stratford Canning to Viscount Palmerston, No 20, Munich, 12 May 1848; not included in this volume.

[9] FO 68/72: Francis Reginald Forbes to Viscount Palmerston, No 46, Dresden, 4 October 1849.

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The events in the individual German states were observed and assessed in the respective regional centres and capitals by British diplomats on the spot. Thanks to the dense network of missions, no other European country was observed as closely by British envoys as Germany. This is also true of the time before the revolution, but what became more common in 1848 and subsequently was that local and regional processes were interpreted in a wider German context. As a result largely of the controversial discussion of the German question and the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, Germany's federal dimension acquired a new character in the envoys' reports of the revolutionary period: the German states were now perceived as a 'national' entity. In this context it is worth mentioning that the envoys referred to the correspondence of their British colleagues in Germany more frequently than was the case in the more peaceful *Vormärz* years. In addition to private correspondence between the envoys, the Foreign Office frequently forwarded copies of official dispatches from Germany to the missions. However, the envoys did not always share the views of their colleagues. Thus, for example, in December 1848 the Earl of Westmorland accepted only with reservations the view of his colleague in Frankfurt, Baron Cowley, 'that "six months ago the Assembly of Frankfort had incontestably within its hands the fate of the greater part of Germany"'.[10] Prussia, Westmorland argued, had resisted 'even the first acts of the Frankfort Assembly'.[11]

Regardless of differences of opinion, the exchange of information between the envoys contributed to the fact that parallel events which at first sight seemed separated from each other were perceived as part of Germany's overall development. This is also reflected in the fact that responses to events in other states were an important theme in the envoys' reports for the years 1848 to 1850. The execution of the revolutionary Robert Blum in Vienna, for example, which Ponsonby mentioned only in passing in his dispatches from the Austrian capital, forced almost all British observers to take a position on reactions in their respective host countries. Like Francis Reginald Forbes, who thought the laments over Blum's 'just Death' were 'disgusting',[12] the envoys did not hold back in their judgements because of their fundamental aversion to any form of radicalism.

[10] FO 64/290: Earl of Westmorland to Viscount Palmerston, No 440, Berlin, 18 December 1848. Cf. FO 30/115: Baron Cowley to Viscount Palmerston, No 325, Frankfurt, 10 December 1848.

[11] FO 64/290: Earl of Westmorland to Viscount Palmerston, No 440, Berlin, 18 December 1848.

[12] FO 68/69: Francis Reginald Forbes to Viscount Palmerston, No 79, Dresden, 15 November 1848.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The descriptions of radical agitators in the envoys' reports became sharper where the envoys could observe them at close quarters. Meetings of the representative assemblies, which the British diplomats frequently followed from the public gallery, often provided such an opportunity. With the assistance of the local press and conversations with private informers they were also able, in their reports, to cover events in the numerous political clubs and associations, and opposition meetings, such as the regular events held in the Berlin *Tiergarten*. Closeness to the events was a prerequisite for grasping the diversity of political life in Germany. The local perspective also affected the reportage. At times of severe crisis, such as spring and autumn 1848, early summer 1849, and autumn 1850, all the British envoys broke the routine of their diplomatic correspondence. Visibly impressed by the course of events, they often reported to the London Foreign Office more than once a day. Because of their closeness in time to the events described, the reports convey vivid impressions, varying extensively in style, language, and amount of detail.

The upheavals in the German states meant that envoys were not always able to fulfil their obligations to file reports, as a dispatch which the British envoy Reginald Forbes wrote during the May uprising in Dresden shows. Postal services were interrupted during the revolts, and no messengers were to be expected. Forbes kept his dispatch open, and had added several pages to it by the time the revolt was put down. His dispatch not only has all the features of an eyewitness account, but also reveals that the revolutionary events affected him personally. When the revolutionaries wanted to erect a barricade right next to his house, he persuaded them not to. Visibly relieved, and in marked contrast to his fundamental hostility to the revolutionaries, he wrote: 'I have never experienced greater civility than since the town has been in insurrection'.[13] The personal dimension of the revolutionary events also emerges in the descriptions by the British envoys in Berlin and Vienna. In a dispatch, dated 15 June 1848, on the storming of the Berlin arsenal, for example, the Earl of Westmorland reported that 'a large Mob assembled tumultuously under the windows of my house'.[14] And in a dispatch which Viscount Ponsonby wrote during the revolution of October 1848 in Vienna, we read that 'two chimneys of the Embassy were knocked down by a Shell, and that it was only by the advance of the Troops that the Insurgents were prevented from

[13] FO 68/72: Francis Reginald Forbes to Viscount Palmerston, No 26, Dresden, 7 May 1849.

[14] FO 64/288: Earl of Westmorland to Viscount Palmerston, No 235, Berlin, 15 June 1848.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

entering my house to fire from its windows'.[15] In contrast to Forbes and Westmorland, however, Ponsonby was reporting from the safe distance of the Vienna suburb of Hietzing, where he stayed, remote from the battles between the revolutionaries and the Austrian army, between 25 October and 7 November 1848.

Diplomats sometimes had to change location for reasons other than personal safety. Thus, for example, at the end of May 1849, Augustus Denham Craven, who lived in Baden as secretary of legation to the British mission in Stuttgart, followed the fleeing Grand Duke of Baden first to Strasbourg and then to Baden Baden, from where he reported on events in south-western Germany until the beginning of July. And Viscount Ponsonby, too, left his residence for two and a half months when he accompanied the Austrian Emperor to Innsbruck on 1 June 1848. From Ponsonby's point of view, it was not only that diplomatic convention demanded that he 'be near the Emperor'.[16] He also understood this step as a political statement against the ministry in Vienna, which he accused of playing into the hands of the 'ultra party'.[17] As Charles Magenis, who took over business temporarily in Vienna, reported to the Foreign Office, the presence of Ponsonby and his Russian colleague in Innsbruck was regarded as a political matter. The opposition in the Austrian Imperial Diet accused the Emperor of 'being exposed to the uncontrolled influence of two foreign diplomatists'.[18]

Despite their criticism of the policies of individual states, the envoys' reports leave us in no doubt about their loyalty to the courts to which they were accredited. Indeed, the threat to monarchical principles observed in Germany in 1848 and 1849 made good relations with the traditional representatives of political life seem desirable to the diplomats. The reports contain a great deal of evidence that there was not only close contact between the envoys and the respective governments and diplomatic corps, but also a special personal affinity with the monarchs. Westmorland's account of his visit to Friedrich Wilhelm IV immediately after the assassination attempt of May 1850 provides a good example of this level of personal relations.[19] For their part, governments and monarchs also sought contact with the

[15] FO 7/353: Viscount Ponsonby to Viscount Palmerston, No 395, Hietzing, 1 November 1848.

[16] FO 7/350: Viscount Ponsonby to Viscount Palmerston, Confidential, No 212, Innsbruck, 18 June 1848.

[17] Ibid.

[18] FO 7/354: Arthur Charles Magenis to Viscount Palmerston, No 64, Vienna, 30 July 1848.

[19] Cf. FO 64/317: Earl of Westmorland to Viscount Palmerston, No 185, Berlin, 22 May 1850.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

British diplomats. Formal dealings with the diplomatic corps were an expression of political sovereignty and thus served, at least in theory, to stabilize power. Beyond this, an exchange of ideas with non-German observers was considered to be of practical value at a time when the German states had rival interests. The British envoys were not only seen as presumably neutral sources of information and mediators between the German governments but also, given the European dimension which was involved in the German question and the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, the opinion of British envoys and their political support were considered of special significance. The diplomats were aware of the potential impact of the positions they took. This is reflected both in their constant efforts not to convey a false impression of Britain's official position to their German interlocutors and in their concern, which was even stronger than in more peaceful times, to avoid giving their employer in London any impression that they were acting independently, or in an unauthorized manner.

The question of diplomatic relations was especially sensitive in the case of the British representative at Frankfurt. Here, the first steps towards national unity had been followed with great interest since March 1848. These had involved reshaping the Federal Diet, convening the Pre-Parliament, setting up the Committee of Fifty, and, finally, electing the Frankfurt National Assembly. When the Diet of the German Confederation stopped work in July 1848 and delegated its powers to the Vicar of the Empire, Archduke Johann, the British Foreign Office faced the issue of future diplomatic relations with the new central government. With the dissolution of the Federal Diet, the organ to which a British diplomat had been accredited as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary without interruption since 1817 *de facto* ceased to exist. A few days after the central government came to power on 15 July, the new German foreign minister wrote to Frederick Doveton Orme, who, as *chargé d'affaires*, represented the British government to the Federal Diet on a temporary basis, 'desiring that the same friendly relations may be continued between the Government of Her Majesty and that of the Central Power, as heretofore with the Diet'.[20] However, Palmerston did not comply with Orme's request to be supplied 'with fresh Powers to enter upon Diplomatic relations with this Government'.[21] Instead, he decided to send Baron Cowley, the British envoy to Switzerland, on a special mission to Frankfurt. Palmerston's choice was a man who was receptive to the idea of a reorganized Germany, but, given the

[20] FO 30/104: Frederick Doveton Orme to Viscount Palmerston, No 46, Frankfurt, 18 July 1848.
[21] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'provisional character' of the new central power, the British foreign secretary did not consider it appropriate to 'give Credentials to any diplomatic agent to be stationed at Frankfort'.[22] Not only did the new political authorities in Frankfurt lack the requisite stability for diplomatic relations with Britain but, in contrast to the newly established French Republic with which Britain had established official diplomatic relations as early as 16 August 1848, there were doubts about the very existence of a German nation. 'There is indeed an assembly at Frankfort and a Vicar General. But that assembly is not as yet a really national representation, and that Vicar General has not as yet any actual Empire to administer. Hitherto the Parliament and Government of Frankfort may be said to govern opinion rather than territory, and to be founded upon Ideas rather than upon facts'.[23]

For the provisional central power in Frankfurt, which had hoped to gain legitimacy at home by the assumption of diplomatic relations with Britain, Palmerston's decision to send only an unaccredited observer to Frankfurt was disappointing. From August 1848, when Britain denied Baron von Andrian formal recognition as the official representative of the Vicar of the Empire in London, the issue of diplomatic relations weighed upon the relationship between Britain and the provisional central power in Frankfurt.

Despite the unofficial nature of his special mission, Cowley's daily tasks as a British observer did not differ from those of his British colleagues in Germany. The instructions which Cowley was given as he set off for Frankfurt on 29 July 1848 prescribed the object of his observations: 'Your principal Duty in the first Instance will be to inform yourself accurately as to what is passing at Frankfort in regard to the projected reconstruction of Germany and to report the same for the information of Her Majesty's Gov^{t}'.[24] The detailed reports which Cowley sent to London soon after his arrival in Frankfurt on 2 August show that he fulfilled this task in an exemplary manner. Within a short time, Cowley was in close contact with the key figures of Frankfurt politics, including the President of the National Assembly, Heinrich von Gagern, and had become a sought-after adviser. Cowley's receptiveness to the attempts to find solutions to the German question was matched by Palmerston's instructions to 'express the deep Interest which the British Gov^{t} takes in the welfare

[22] FO 30/107: Viscount Palmerston to Baron Cowley, No 1, Foreign Office, 29 July 1848 (draft); not included in this volume.

[23] FO 30/108: Viscount Palmerston to Baron Cowley, No 98, Foreign Office, 2 October 1848 (draft); not included in this volume.

[24] FO 30/107: Viscount Palmerston to Baron Cowley, No 1, Foreign Office, 29 July 1848 (draft); not included in this volume.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Germany, & the sincere and earnest wish which the British Gov[t] forms that the Deliberations in which the Representatives of Germany at Frankfort, are now engaged, may lead to results conducive to the Prosperity, the Happiness, the Strength, and Independence of the German Nation'.[25] The wait-and-see policy towards Germany which Britain had pursued since the beginning of the March Revolution, however, was not to be given up: 'the British Gov[t] has no right, and no wish to interfere'.[26]

As with the British diplomats who, after initial optimism, expressed disappointment with the politics of individual states, the positive attitude towards the national experiment which Cowley had brought with him to Germany gave way, after only a few weeks, to scepticism and the 'greatest anxiety'[27] about future developments. Visibly disillusioned, he stated on 20 August 1848 that the deputies in the National Assembly and the members of the newly created central government lacked political ability. In his view they were 'mere theorists' and unacquainted with 'the practical working of a constitution, the machinery of State Government'.[28] It is striking that even during the crucial phase of the constitutional debate, from October to December 1848, when a *kleindeutsche* solution to the German question, a narrow union without Austria, crystallized out of the discussions, Cowley devoted at least as much space in his dispatches to the conduct of the National Assembly in Frankfurt as to the actual subjects of the debates.

British observers had little respect for the National Assembly, not only because of its failure to direct the constitutional question in Germany, but also because of its attitude towards events in the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. At least since the revolt in Schleswig and Holstein in March and the beginning of the German–Danish war in April 1848, events in the duchies had been turned into a matter of national concern in Germany. For Britain, the conflict had the potential to expand into a European crisis. The threat of Russian intervention, above all, was observed with anxiety. The Frankfurt National Assembly had already contravened British policy by allowing deputies for Schleswig to sit in the Assembly. From the British view, even more worrying than this demonstration that Schleswig belonged to Germany, was the fact that the Assembly was obstructing the attempts to mediate between Denmark and Prussia which Palmerston had been making since May 1848. Furthermore, the Assembly claimed

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] FO 30/109: Baron Cowley to Viscount Palmerston, No 45, Frankfurt, 20 August 1848.
[28] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the power of decision for the German side on the Schleswig-Holstein question. On 5 September 1848, when it declared its opposition to the Armistice of Malmö between Denmark and Prussia, British fears were realized. From Britain's point of view, the Frankfurt National Assembly was endangering the European peace. Its attitude, it was felt, had politically discredited it. The fact that, at a second attempt on 14 September, the National Assembly did ratify the Malmö Armistice after all did not change Britain's opinion: 'From first to last, this Schleswig Holstein transaction has shewn a laxity of political morality among the Germans, which, if repeated, must destroy all confidence in them as a Nation'.[29]

The affairs of Schleswig-Holstein continued to be an outstanding feature of British policy for Germany. In the period 1848 to 1850, Palmerston touched on no other topic as frequently in his instructions, and there was no diplomat in Germany who did not discuss the Schleswig-Holstein question in detail in his reports. The significance that London accorded the Schleswig-Holstein question for the continental peace is also revealed by the activities of British diplomats. This was true not only of Baron Cowley, who had been advised, in the general instructions of 29 July 1848, to smooth the path for the imminent armistice treaty in Frankfurt as 'the only matter of pressing European interest',[30] and who, in September, passed on the foreign secretary's displeasure at the conduct of the National Assembly in no uncertain terms. The Earl of Westmorland in Berlin and George Floyd Hodges in Hamburg were also heavily involved, both actively participating in regulating the crisis. Because of Hamburg's proximity to the Duchies, in many cases Hodges was the first British diplomat to report on developments. He passionately represented the British government's standpoint on the spot. Hodges's involvement is even more remarkable because as consul-general and *chargé d'affaires* for the Hanse Towns, he ranked low on the diplomatic scale. His impact climaxed in August 1849 when he was appointed to the administrative commission for Schleswig along with a Danish and a Prussian plenipotentiary. In appointing Hodges, Palmerston had ignored Prussia, which accused the British consul-general of being pro-Danish. The appointment also went against the express wish of the pro-German court party around the Prince Consort, Albert. Despite all criticism, Hodges acted as arbitrator until the administrative commission for Schleswig was dissolved in the summer

[29] FO 30/110: Baron Cowley to Viscount Palmerston, No 101, Frankfurt, 17 September 1848.

[30] FO 30/108: Viscount Palmerston to Baron Cowley, No 98, Foreign Office, 2 October 1848 (draft); not included in this volume.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of 1850. The Earl of Westmorland in Berlin had a higher reputation than Colonel Hodges. Since the beginning of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis in the spring of 1848, Westmorland had, as a mediator, worked for a solution to the crisis. During the crucial phases of the negotiations for the armistice of 10 July 1849 and the Berlin Peace Treaty of 2 July 1850, the opposition parties met at his Berlin residence. Westmorland reported on this in detail in his dispatches.

For Britain, Prussian policies were most important, not only in relation to the Schleswig-Holstein question. From January 1849 at the latest, Prussia also became the crucial force in the process of reshaping Germany. Austria's hands were tied by events in Italy and Hungary, and the Frankfurt National Assembly had sidelined itself on questions of German policy. It is noticeable that the passionate debates conducted by delegates to the National Assembly on basic rights and the German constitution hardly evoked a response from the British diplomats. They had identified Prussia, which had become stronger again since the counter-revolution in November, as the only actor capable of taking action against the threat of republicanism. The Prussian King's rejection of the imperial crown offered by the National Assembly in Frankfurt, and the suppression of the revolts in Dresden, the Palatinate, and Baden, were unanimously welcomed by the British diplomats and left no doubts as to Prussia's strength. Moreover, the Three Kings' Alliance initiated by Prussia at the end of May 1849 provided a *modus operandi* for a *kleindeutsche* solution to the German question, which Baron Cowley had identified in December 1848 as the one with the best chance of success. From the point of view of British policy, Germany's return to internal order under the leadership of a constitutional Prussia was a desirable option. After the German revolution had come to an end with the defeat of the campaign for the Frankfurt Imperial Constitution and the dissolution of the Rump Parliament in Stuttgart, Palmerston was ready, in July 1849, officially to abandon Britain's policy of neutrality towards Prussia's plans for union. 'Such an union as this', wrote Palmerston in a dispatch sent to Westmorland and distributed in printed form to all British diplomats in Europe, 'would seem to be a scheme which might be worked out in theory and executed in practice; and such an extensive organization of Germany would no doubt be advantageous to the German people, with reference both to their internal interests and to their foreign relations, and it would consequently, on that account, be advantageous to Europe at large'.[31] The Erfurt Union

[31] FO 64/295: Viscount Palmerston to Earl of Westmorland, No 183, Foreign Office, 13 July 1849 (draft), not included in this volume; printed in: David Stevenson (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. Part 1, From*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

under Prussian leadership offered Palmerston the chance to support Germany's wish for unification, as this solution, unlike the plans of the National Assembly in Frankfurt, threatened neither the monarchical principle nor the sovereignty of, at least, the larger German states. In addition, Prussia's plans also fitted in with Palmerston's foreign policy calculations which involved creating a counterweight to the close imperial allies, Austria and Russia, and limiting Austria's sphere of influence to south-eastern Europe.

With some exceptions, the British diplomats in Germany did not share Palmerston's optimism in relation to the Prussian union project. Their analyses lacked the pan-European dimension which led Palmerston to support Prussia. Their observations from individual German states emphasized all the more strongly the potential for conflict inherent in the Prussian project from the start. Reports from Saxony and Hanover, in particular, Prussia's treaty partners in the Three Kings' Alliance, reflect the anti-Prussian mood in the German states. John Duncan Bligh reported from Hanover as early as July 1849 that the outcome of Prussia's quest for domination was 'at best, [. . .] a very uncertain one'.[32] And from Vienna, too, Ponsonby reported that Austria had by no means given up its ambitions to lead Germany. With the military victory over Hungary in the summer of 1849, it became apparent that Austria's return to German politics was imminent, and most British diplomats agreed that the Erfurt Union was built on sand. Given the apparent difficulties 'of reconciling conflicting interests',[33] the British diplomats, against their foreign secretary's official line, did not conceal their opinions from the governments of their host countries.

From autumn 1849 Palmerston, too, switched course after more and more reports of the Austrian–Prussian rivalry reached him. Now, only if Austria and Prussia returned to a common policy did a reorganization of Germany seem acceptable. This background explains why Schwarzenberg's *großdeutsche* plans for a German empire of seventy million people, including the Austrian Crown Lands, evoked little response among British observers. And in the case of the Erfurt Diet, Palmerston was content to send the British consul, Koch, from Frankfurt as an observer.

Much more attention was paid to the actual relationship between the two supreme German powers, Prussia and Austria, than to the

the mid-nineteenth century to the First World War. Series F, Europe, 1848–1914, Volume 18: Germany, 1848-1897 (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1990).

[32] FO 34/57: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 20, Hanover, 12 July 1849.

[33] FO 34/57: John Duncan Bligh to Viscount Palmerston, No 38, Hanover, 6 September 1849.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

various blueprints for solving the German question. Starting with the negotiations about a federal commission, set up in Frankfurt in December 1849 as an interim central power, current trends in the battle for supremacy in Germany were reported in detail. British diplomats reacted with extreme caution to the tension between Berlin and Vienna, which increased from February 1850 with the anti-Prussian Four Kings' Alliance. They were determined not to allow any doubts to arise about Britain's neutrality. This did not mean, however, that they did not express firm opinions in their reports. Prussia's adherence to the Erfurt Union and Austria's confrontational act of convening the Diet of the German Confederation in May 1850 were both criticized. Palmerston refused to recognize the Frankfurt Rump Diet officially, or to accredit any diplomats, until it had been accepted by all the German powers. He ignored Austria's argument that British recognition of the Diet would also promote the peace process in the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. During the conflict in Electoral Hesse, the second main area of crisis in the autumn of 1850, British observers also registered that Austria and Prussia were mainly concerned about their authority within Germany. Prussia, which put itself forward as the guardian of constitutionalism, disapproved of the Frankfurt Rump Diet's intention to intervene in favour of the Hessian Prince Elector, a view shared by most of the British diplomats. However, in this complicated situation, which gained momentum with the occupation of Hesse by federal troops, the British view was that the only chance of defusing the situation was to maintain its neutral stance. Like Arthur Charles Magenis in Vienna, the majority of British diplomats believed that a 'war between these two German Powers' was 'so much opposed to both of their interests' that 'some means of averting that calamity may be found'.[34] The reports sent to London in October and November 1850 were overtaken by new events almost on a daily basis. The 'atmosphere of contentious dispute' to which the envoys in Germany were exposed was reflected in Baron Cowley's observation that 'it is difficult to avoid at times noting to Your Lordship the impression which this jangling expression of different opinions leaves upon my mind'.[35] In their efforts to keep Palmerston updated on events in Germany, the British envoys kept a close watch on the hectic diplomatic activity. The telegrams that arrived in the capitals – a new means of communication – were considered particularly newsworthy. After the military incident between federal and Prussian troops near Bronzell on 8 November, the acute threat of war seemed

[34] FO 7/381: Arthur Charles Magenis to Viscount Palmerston, No 102, Vienna, 1 October 1850.

[35] FO 30/141: Baron Cowley to Viscount Palmerston, No 323, Frankfurt, 7 October 1850.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to have been warded off. Prussia returned to a policy of concessions, and Britain continued to press for a peaceful solution to the crisis. The reports filed by Westmorland, in particular, who was in close contact with both the new Prussian foreign minister, Manteuffel, and the Austrian envoy, Prokesch, provide evidence of this.

Even if the British envoys had different opinions about the extent of the threat of war, they were all, without exception, greatly relieved that the outbreak of a military conflict had been avoided by the Punctation of Olmütz and the convening of the Dresden Conferences. The dominant opinion among the British envoys, namely that co-operation between Austria and Prussia was essential, was now confirmed. In a dispatch concerning the changes in the policy and feelings of the Prussian government in 1849 and 1850, Westmorland wrote: 'It is therefore to these Conferences that Germany may now look with hope for the establishment of such a general Government as may secure to her, internal Peace and the independence of her different States'.[36]

Retrospective views, such as those given by Westmorland in Berlin or John Duncan Bligh in Hanover, make clear that, in the view of the British envoys, by December 1850 an end was in sight to the crisis that had begun with the revolution of 1848. With respect to the German question, a probable return to the *status quo ante* was in the interests of Britain and corresponded with its role as a guaranteeing power of the German Confederation. At the end of 1850, the envoys' reports mentioned, in addition to the main issue of the restoration of the German Confederation, a number of other open questions. These included the policy of reform or restoration in individual states, the integration of the non-German parts of Austria, relations between the small and middling states and the two hegemonic German powers, the unresolved conflict in Electoral Hesse, and, not least, the Schleswig-Holstein question. Over the next fifteen years up to the end of the German Confederation, which will be covered by the fourth and final volume in this series, these issues demanded the undivided attention of British envoys to Germany.

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[36] FO 64/322: Earl of Westmorland to Viscount Palmerston, No 279, Berlin, 12 December 1850.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960116305002307 Published online by Cambridge University Press