THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY IS WHAT, EXACTLY? THE BRITISH FLANDERS
EXPEDITION OF 1793 AND COALITION DIPLOMACY

Nathaniel W. Jarrett, B.A.

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APPROVED:

Michael V. Leggiere, Major Professor
Marilyn Morris, Committee Member
Robert Citino, Committee Member
Richard B. McCaslin, Chair of the Department of History
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School
The British entered the War of the First Coalition against Revolutionary France in 1793 diplomatically isolated and militarily unprepared for a major war. Nonetheless, a French attack on the Dutch Republic in February 1793 forced the British to dispatch a small expeditionary force to defend their ally. Throughout the Flanders campaign of 1793, the British expeditionary force served London as a tool to end British isolation and enlist Austrian commitment to securing British war objectives. The 1793 Flanders campaign and the Allied war effort in general have received little attention from historians, and they generally receive dismissive condemnation in general histories of the French Revolutionary Wars. This thesis examines the British participation in the 1793 Flanders campaign a broader diplomatic context through the published correspondence of relevant Allied military and political leaders. Traditional accounts of this campaign present a narrative of defeat and condemn the Allies for their failure to achieve in 1793 the accomplishments of the sixth coalition twenty years later. Such a perspective obscures a clear understanding of the reasons for Allied actions. This thesis seeks to correct this distortion by critically analyzing the relationship between British diplomacy within the Coalition and operations in Flanders. Unable to achieve victory on their own strength, the British used their expeditionary force in Flanders as diplomatic leverage to impose their objectives on the other powers at war with France.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

On 25 February 1793, the British reluctantly dispatched a small expeditionary force under Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany, to support their Dutch allies against an invasion from the armies of Revolutionary France. York’s expedition marked the initial British commitment to participate in the War of the First Coalition (1792-97). Throughout 1793, the expedition defended the Dutch Republic and coordinated offensive operations with Austrian forces until defeated at Hondschoote on 8 September. Although it enjoyed only limited military success, the Flanders expedition served as an important tool in British efforts to end their diplomatic isolation and define the war aims of the First Coalition.

The French declaration of war against Britain and the United Provinces on 1 February 1793 had caught the British unprepared for war and without a major continental ally to aid them. Instead, London faced the necessity of relying on a separate Austro-Prussian alliance already at war with France to obtain its continental objectives. The German powers’ pursuit of territorial indemnification conflicted with the British preference for the status quo. In negotiations to reconcile these competing objectives, particularly with Austria, the British used their military presence in Flanders as leverage to extract concessions from their prospective ally. Throughout the 1793 Flanders campaign, London directed the operations of its Flanders expedition to maximize its influence over Coalition forces.

Frequently, historians view the War of the First Coalition in the context of the subsequent Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The very nomenclature of the sequentially numbered coalition wars between 1792 and 1815 encourages this comparison. Such a perspective contains an inherent danger of anachronistic analysis. Allied commanders, diplomats, and statesmen
often receive harsh criticism for their failure in 1793 to create the multi-national unity that yielded the downfall of Napoleon in 1814 and 1815. As a result, traditional military histories of the War of the First Coalition present a narrative of defeat and mistakes without critical analysis of the reasons for Allied decisions.

The separation of Allied armies in Flanders in August 1793 to allow British-led forces to besiege Dunkirk remains one of the most notorious Allied missteps. Historians condemn it as a symptom of either an outdated mode of warfare or broadly-defined Coalition disunity. R. R. Palmer declared that “this gigantic blunder… saved the French Republic from extinction.”¹ T. C. W. Blanning echoes this sentiment more moderately, calling the division a “miscalculation.” To explain it, Blanning cites “political reasons,” echoing J. W. Fortescue’s accusation that British ministers waged an “electioneering campaign.”² Paddy Griffith and Gunther Rothenberg ascribe the decision broadly to diplomatic disagreements with little further explanation.³ Thus, general histories of the Revolutionary Wars criticize Allied operations in 1793 with little analysis of their cause and context.

In their study of British foreign policy, A. W. Ward and G. P. Gooch identify the acquisition of an alternative Austrian indemnification to replace the Belgium-Bavaria exchange project as the primary motivation for British participation in a campaign of sieges in French Flanders.⁴ Jennifer Mori echoes this reasoning in her examination of Pitt’s response to the

French Revolution. However, these accounts fail to explain why the British insisted on pursuing independent objectives despite repeated Austrian requests to keep the two armies united. Paul Schroeder rejects the mistake theory as anachronistic, but he attributes British insistence on an independent campaign to the British desire for an indemnity. Michael Duffy offers a more detailed explanation that cites four British objectives. First, the British hoped to use Dunkirk as a bargaining chip to mitigate Austrian demands for an indemnity. Second, despite having Oostende as a base to supply British forces operating in the Low Countries, the British desired the larger port of Dunkirk. Third, by gaining Dunkirk, the British would eliminate a major base used by French privateers. Finally, an operation to attain Dunkirk would secure public support for the war.

Few detailed military studies of the 1793 Flanders expedition exist to illuminate the matter from the British perspective. Although more than one century old, the fourth volume of J. W. Fortescue’s *A History of the British Army* provides considerable detail on the 1793 Flanders campaign but with few citations and polemical analysis. Michael Duffy offers a conservative revision of Fortescue’s account in an article on the siege of Dunkirk.

While Anglophone military histories criticize Allied operations in Flanders in 1793 as short-sighted, diplomatic studies provide a broader perspective. Blanning’s *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* offers a general overview of the complex diplomatic framework of Europe at the start of the War of the First Coalition. Ward and Gooch provide an excellent overview of British foreign policy and diplomatic isolation from 1783 to 1793, but they include

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9 Michael Duffy, “‘A Particular Service’, ” 529-54.
only sparse citations and brief reference to the campaign of 1793. 11 Jeremy Black’s British Foreign Policy in an Age of Revolutions, 1783-1793, offers an excellent foreign policy context for the campaign, but it concludes with the outbreak of war in 1793. 12 John Ehrman’s three-volume biography of William Pitt the Younger views the period through the lens of Pitt’s life. The trilogy covers a wide scope of diplomacy, politics, and military affairs, yet it provides little depth on the campaign in Flanders. 13 Although all excellent sources, such discussion as these authors include on the Flanders expedition is drawn largely from Duffy and Fortescue. The military ramifications of the unstable diplomatic climate in general and British isolation in particular remain outside the scope of these texts. By examining the 1793 British expedition to Flanders, this thesis will place the campaign in its appropriate diplomatic, political, and military context.

In The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848, Paul Schroeder provides the basis for this broader context. Schroeder presents a persuasive structural outline for the European balance of power system of international relations that framed the French Revolutionary Wars. He defines the balance of power as a system governed by the following informal rules: “compensations; indemnities; alliances as instruments for accruing power and capability; raison d’état; honour and prestige; Europe as a family of states; and finally, the principle or goal of balance of power itself.” Schroeder provides detailed explanations for the first three rules and treats the remaining four as self-explanatory. Compensations and indemnities represent opposite approaches to the same idea. In the former, states insisted on

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12 Jeremy Black, British Foreign Policy in an Age of Revolutions, 1783-1793 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
matching any of their neighbors’ gains with conquests of their own, while in the latter, states
demanded payment from either allies or enemies for losses incurred in war. According to
Schroeder, alliances functioned as contracts with precise limitations on the obligations of the
contracting parties. In wars, the partner who initiated the war or faced a direct attack became the
senior partner in the relationship and was expected to commit fully to the conflict. The other
partner became a junior partner and was only expected to meet the obligations stipulated in the
treaty of alliance. Schroeder analyzes Allied foreign policy in the War of the First Coalition in
the context of this model and argues that “greed, bad faith, and folly reigned among the Allies;
but it is worth remarking that this was systemic.” He presents the notion of an altruistic war to
defeat France as an anathema to eighteenth-century modes of thinking.14

This thesis supports Schroeder’s arguments by demonstrating a connection between
British operations in Flanders and Coalition diplomacy. British ministers directed military
operations in Flanders to maximize their diplomatic leverage for gaining Austrian acceptance of
British war aims. Another theme addressed in this thesis is the relationship between British
foreign policy and public opinion. In Debating Foreign Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain,
Jeremy Black notes that much of the scholarship on British foreign policy remains introspective
and overlooks the significance of strategy and military reality. He calls for new research that
integrates “an informed knowledge of the military situation and of strategic options” into the
discussion of British foreign policy.15 While Rory Muir’s Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon
and Christopher Hall’s British Strategy in the Napoleonic War 1803-15 fill this gap for the

14 Paul Schroeder, The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 5-6, 109,
129.
15 Black, Debating Foreign Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011),
4, 219.
Napoleonic Era, no comparable study exists for the French Revolutionary Wars. This thesis addresses the impact of public opinion on the British government’s foreign policy and military decisions. In particular, it focuses on ministerial perceptions of public opinion rather than on the nuances of public opinion directly.

Numerous collections of published journals and correspondence provide the foundation for this study. Pitt’s Foreign Secretary, William Wyndham Grenville’s papers published in *The Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue Preserved at Dropmore* provide excellent insight into British policy-making during the pre-war diplomacy and the war itself. The published correspondence of the British ambassador to The Hague, William Eden Auckland, also illuminates currents of thought in the British foreign ministry throughout the period considered in this thesis. For information on the campaign, the thesis relies on the published journals and correspondence of the Duke of York, Captain Harry Calvert, and Corporal Robert Brown. These parallel accounts provide three distinct perspectives on the operations. York addresses the primary command decisions and their interaction with official policy. Calvert presents his observations of the campaign as an educated officer, often commenting on the diversity of the armies in the region and offering speculations on military and diplomatic decisions. Brown’s perspective represents that of the common soldiers. His account primarily concerns the daily situation of the men with reference to weather, supplies, and living arrangements. Of the few secondary works on the subject, those of Fortescue and Duffy remain most helpful.

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A chronological analysis offers the best means of placing the 1793 Flanders campaign in an appropriate diplomatic and military context to understand its purpose. The second chapter provides an overview of British diplomacy and foreign policy from 1783 to 1793. Throughout this decade, the British foreign ministry struggled to end London’s diplomatic isolation in general and regain influence over the United Provinces in particular. After the collapse of the Anglo-Prussian alliance in 1763, Britain faced an indirect alignment of Spain, France, Austria, and Russia with no continental ally. Diplomatic isolation contributed to British defeat in the American War of Independence. More troublingly for the British, that war also produced a Franco-Dutch alliance that jeopardized the security of both the British Isles and the new focal point of the British Empire in India. By 1788, the British achieved their diplomatic objectives through a triple alliance with the United Provinces and Prussia. However, British efforts to use this alliance to preserve the status quo failed due to the Prussian preference to preserve the balance of power through aggression and territorial compensations. This divergence of policy led to an Anglo-Prussian split and an Austro-Prussian rapprochement. As a result, the French waged war against two competing alliances rather than a unified coalition in 1793.

The third chapter examines British policy toward the war between France and the Austro-Prussian alliance in 1792. Anglo-French relations deteriorated steadily over the course of this year. Following the outbreak of revolution in 1789, the British expected Revolutionary France to be a better neighbor than its absolutist predecessor. However, the radicalization of the Revolution and the corresponding increase of violence and aggression soured British opinions. Regardless, the British endeavored to maintain neutrality despite the outbreak of war between France and the Austro-Prussian alliance on 20 April 1792. The suspension of the French monarchy on 11 August precipitated the recall of the British ambassador for lack of an officially
recognized government in France. Although disgusted by the September Massacres, the British remained steadfastly neutral until French decrees on 16 and 19 November directly threatened British interests. These decrees asserted the French right to disregard existing treaties, violate the rights of neutral powers, and support insurrections in other states. Each of these points threatened both Britain and the United Provinces and led British ministers to anticipate war. Nonetheless, Grenville endeavored to preserve peace through unofficial negotiations, deterrence, and mediation from the receipt of the November decrees until the French declaration of war.

Chapter 4 analyzes British military preparations in 1792 and the government’s initial response to the outbreak of hostilities. The British conducted limited mobilization carefully calculated to deter the French and gain public support through a judicious demonstration of force. A British squadron sailed to the United Provinces on 27 December 1792 to demonstrate Anglo-Dutch solidarity, while the government passed several measures to increase the manpower available for naval service. In addition, the Cabinet summoned the militia gradually in early December ostensibly to suppress French sponsored insurrections in the country. This action served to liberate the regular regiments stationed in Britain for service elsewhere. It also inspired a surge of loyalism throughout the country in response to the perceived French threat to king and country. Deterrence measures ultimately failed and left Britain poorly prepared to respond to a French attack on the United Provinces in February 1793. Dutch weakness in the face of a French invasion on 17 February 1793 forced the British to send their ally reinforcements. Thus, the British Flanders campaign of 1793 began as an unintentional reaction to French aggression and the panicked requests of a beleaguered ally. From its departure on 25 February to the Allied conference at Antwerp on 7 April, the British expedition under the Duke of York lacked a plan and simply reacted to Dutch needs and French movements.
The fifth chapter examines the relationship between York’s operations from 7 April to 8 September 1793 and the concurrent Anglo-Austrian negotiations regarding the purpose of the war and the postwar settlement. Grenville’s diplomatic efforts to dissuade the Austrians from taking indemnification for the war by exchanging Belgium for Bavaria drew York’s expedition into the Allied offensive in Flanders. A new ministry in Vienna accepted Grenville’s proposed alternative – French Flanders – on the condition that York’s forces assist in conquering it. In the absence of a formal alliance, the presence of a British army in Flanders provided the British with their only leverage to influence Austrian policy. The British insisted on preserving York as an independent commander and sending him to conquer Dunkirk primarily to maximize this leverage while negotiations for an Anglo-Austrian alliance continued. Although the expedition failed militarily at Hondschoote on 8 September, the Anglo-Austrian alliance signed on 30 August represented a success for British war policy.

The conclusion describes the changes in British war policy from the alliance with Austria and the Battle of Hondschoote to the establishment of winter quarters in November 1793. Austria’s firm commitment to make peace only with British agreement diminished the importance of York’s expedition as a source of diplomatic leverage. Together with the rise of alternative opportunities in the Caribbean, the Vendée, and at Toulon, this led the Cabinet to give York much more freedom to follow his own military judgment. However, the rise of alternative opportunities also prompted ministerial efforts to recall and redeploy much of York’s forces. The Allied failure at Wattignies and subsequent destabilization of the Coalition cordon demonstrated that York’s army had evolved from a tool for diplomatic leverage into an integral component of the Allied military effort in Flanders. This final chapter also provides a conclusion summarizing the arguments presented in the previous chapters. This overview highlights the
interconnected nature of diplomacy and operations throughout 1793. In addition, it contrasts the British commitment to Flanders at the beginning of 1793 with their integral involvement by the end of the campaign season.
CHAPTER 2
IMBALANCE OF POWER, 1783-1793

On 1 February 1793, the French National Convention declared war on Great Britain and the Dutch Republic, expanding its ongoing war with the Austro-Prussian alliance from the previous year into the struggle eventually known as the War of the First Coalition. This conflict caught the European powers, and particularly the British, ill-prepared diplomatically for a major war. Uncertainty and change characterized international relations in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The decade prior to this French declaration of war witnessed the increase of instability as each European power sought to gain advantages through diplomatic realignment.¹

In this atmosphere arose two competing views of the European balance of power that divided the future members of the First Coalition. Britain and the Netherlands pursued foreign policies calculated to maintain the balance of power through peace and the preservation of the territorial status quo.² Austria and Prussia likewise sought to preserve the balance of power, but through war and territorial adjustments. This considerable difference in foreign policy persisted as the contest that commenced in 1792 expanded into the War of the First Coalition. More importantly, these conflicting views shaped the strategy of the states that formed the First Coalition. In particular, the contrast of the two approaches can be observed in the planning and execution of the 1793 Flanders Expedition. Thus, to understand the purpose and results of this operation, the internal workings of the First Coalition must be analyzed in a diplomatic context.

Due to two major events in British history, 1783 marks an excellent starting point for an examination of this diplomatic context. First, on 20 January, delegates from all belligerent powers participating in the American War of Independence signed a preliminary peace that

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recognized the sovereignty of the United States. This unpopular peace caused the downfall of
Prime Minister William Petty, Second Earl of Shelburne.\(^3\) The collapse of Shelburne’s ministry
led to the formation of an awkward coalition under the de facto leadership of the great
parliamentary orator and Whig leader, Charles James Fox. This ministry clung to power
throughout 1783 until dismissed in December by King George III after a dispute over the fate of
the East India Company.\(^4\) To replace Fox as principal minister, the king appointed William Pitt
the Younger on 19 December 1783. As Pitt directed British policy throughout the 1780s and the
duration of the French Revolutionary Wars, his ascendency in 1783 marks the second major
event in British history for that year.

The American War of Independence exposed the limitations of British strength and the
dangers of diplomatic isolation. As the war dragged on, Britain faced a growing coalition
consisting of France, Spain, the Netherlands, and the United States. In addition, the hostile
League of Armed Neutrality formed under Russian leadership. Consisting of Denmark, Sweden,
Austria, Prussia, Portugal, Naples, and Russia, the League opposed British commercial war time
practices.\(^5\) Aside from countering resistance from the League, the Royal Navy struggled to meet
the challenge of the combined Bourbon and Dutch fleets while simultaneously enforcing British

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\(^3\) Grenville to Temple, 18 February 1783, in *Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George III* (London: Hurst and
Blackett Publishers, 1853), 1:154-55; Black, *Parliament and Foreign Policy*, 107; Ehrman, *Years of Acclaim*, 98-
104.

For detailed primary documentation of this ministry and its shortcomings, see the letters published in *Court and
1861), 1:48-66, and *The Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue, Esq., Preserved at Dropmore* (London: Eyre and
Spottiswoode, 1892), 1:208-25.

\(^5\) France provided covert support for the American colonies until joining the war as a formal ally of the United States
in 1778. Spain joined the war in April of 1779 as a French ally. Britain declared war on the Dutch in December of
1780 to preempt a Russo-Dutch alignment in the League of Armed Neutrality, which prompted the Dutch to seek
protection in a wartime alliance with France. Catherine II’s league of armed neutrality asserted the right of neutral
powers to sail and trade freely with belligerent powers except for narrowly defined contraband items and
specifically designated ports under actual blockade. Dull’s *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*
provides an excellent overview of the diplomatic maneuvering before, during, and after the American War of
Independence. See also, Norman Saul, *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763-1867* (Lawrence, KS:
blockades and raiding commerce. The absence of a continental ally allowed Britain’s opponents to concentrate their efforts on the colonial conflict and thereby defeat the island power.\(^6\)

The American War of Independence left Britain economically drained, militarily exhausted, and diplomatically isolated; Pitt inherited the unenviable task of charting a course to national recovery.\(^7\) Reform characterized Pitt’s first years in office. The weakness of the Shelburne and Fox administrations prior to Pitt’s appointment combined with the cost of the war had shattered British finances. Pitt first sought to remedy the situation through a rationalization of Britain’s internal tea trade. The existing 119 percent duty on tea encouraged smuggling and cost more to enforce than it yielded, so Pitt reduced it to 12.5 percent. This reduced the government’s gross income, but also undercut smuggling and reduced enforcement expenditures, thus eventually producing a net gain. He also passed measures to fund Britain’s national debt, increasing and consolidating several small excises and taxes for a significant cumulative effect. These far-sighted financial measures combined with concurrent advances in industry stabilized and revived the British economy.\(^8\)

For Pitt, financial reform served the dual purpose of restoring prosperity and credit as well as providing him with the means to reform and restore Britain’s battered navy. At his behest, a 1784 parliamentary inquiry into the state of the naval establishment revealed deficiencies in the quality of both ships and port facilities.\(^9\) Naval setbacks during the American

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\(^7\) Ward and Gooch, *Cambridge History*, 137-40.


War of Independence demonstrated the limits of Britain’s control of the sea. ¹⁰ To regain British naval supremacy, Pitt maintained a naval strength of 18,000 seamen, allocated £2,400,000 for shipbuilding, and tightened checks against corruption in the Navy’s command structure.¹¹ These measures provided ninety-three ships of the line by 1790, which restored both domestic and foreign confidence in British strength.¹² Economic and naval vitality served to increase Britain’s appeal as an ally and ease Pitt’s efforts to end diplomatic isolation.

These efforts included an attempt to revive the defunct Anglo-Prussian alliance of the Seven Years’ War. During a September 1785 discussion with Lord Charles Cornwallis, London’s Special Envoy to Berlin, Frederick II offered a bleak perspective on the European balance of power. He portrayed the string of alliances connecting Spain to France, France to Austria, and Austria to Russia as a solid bloc arrayed against mutually isolated Britain and Prussia. In addition, French influence dominated the United Provinces, adding the Dutch to the list of potential enemies. Frederick expressed concern that the combined fleets of these powers outmatched the British Navy and balked at the possibility of an Anglo-Prussian alliance for fear of instigating conflict with the other powers. Frederick’s comments reflected a widespread impression throughout Europe that an ostracized Britain would soon follow Sweden and Denmark into the ranks of Europe’s secondary powers.¹³

¹⁰ Specific triumphs include French naval superiority at Yorktown, the maintenance of an invasion fleet off the British coastline, and the Spanish conquest of Minorca. Bourbon and Dutch fleets in the English Channel, the North Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean stretched the Royal Navy to its limits. According to Dull, the Allies maintained 146 ships of the line by 1782 compared to 94 British. Dull, American Revolution, 110-11; J. R. Jones, Britain and the World, 1649-1815 (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980), 252; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 134-35.
¹¹ Cobbett, Parliamentary History, 24:1273-90.
¹³ Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 143-44.
For Great Britain, the American War of Independence exposed the dangers of isolation and the corresponding need for continental support. Keenly aware of this situation, Pitt and his Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Francis Godolphin Osborne, Marquess of Carmarthen, made overtures to the major powers of Europe, which included Cornwallis’s 1785 mission to Berlin.\(^{14}\) They initially hoped to overturn the diplomatic imbalance and restore British influence in Europe. Pitt understood the precariousness of the British position and strove to repair relations with the continental powers yet avoid committing Britain to agreements that could lead to war.\(^{15}\) Despite the deterioration of Anglo-Prussian relations, Berlin remained Britain’s most probable European ally. Thus, Carmarthen instructed Cornwallis to seek an alliance with Frederick. This overture constituted one part of a broader diplomatic strategy. Pitt and Carmarthen sought to build an alliance of northern and eastern states to counter the power of the Bourbon Family Compact.\(^{16}\)

Pitt prioritized the restoration of British influence in the Low Countries above other British foreign policy objectives. Throughout the eighteenth century, the preservation of British influence in the Netherlands and the exclusion of the French loomed large in British foreign policy. Three factors established close relations with the Dutch Republic as important to the British. First, its geographical position made it the ideal launching point for an invasion of England. In addition, Britain derived tremendous economic benefit from trade with and through the Low Countries. Finally, the substantial Dutch fleet and extensive Dutch colonial possessions


\(^{16}\) After the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) replaced the Spanish Habsburg rulers with a Bourbon monarchy, the close dynastic ties between the French and Spanish Bourbons engendered typically friendly relations that often manifested in some form of alliance. The Franco-Spanish alliance became a fixture of European international relations in the eighteenth century with the conclusion of the first *Pacte de Famille* in 1733. Carmarthen to Cornwallis, 2 September 1785, in *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis* (London: John Murray, 1859), 1:202-4; Ehrman, *The Years of Acclaim*, 469-71; McKay and Scott, *Great Powers*, 269.
in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia held the potential to either secure or threaten the British position in India. The loss of the American colonies dramatically increased the importance of India in British colonial policy, which correspondingly enhanced the importance of the Dutch in British foreign policy. Consequently, the Franco-Dutch alignment during the American War of Independence and its postwar endurance caused considerable angst in London.

As French influence at The Hague proved too tenacious for simple diplomatic efforts to overcome, the British diplomatic service spent the first year of Pitt’s administration seeking an opening to gain any continental ally. Although Prussia’s similar isolation made it a logical partner, Frederick remained hesitant to return to a British alliance for fear of again finding himself at war with France. In contrast, the revival of Britain’s traditional connection with Austria enjoyed greater support within the government and appeared to benefit from circumstances. The aggressive nature of the Habsburg ruler, Joseph II, seemed to place Austria at odds with its allies and provide a foothold for British diplomacy. An Austro-Dutch dispute over trade-rights on the river Scheldt and indemnities created the fractures in the French system of alliances that Pitt and Carmarthen sought.

Closed to trade since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the Scheldt connected the once thriving commercial center of Antwerp in the Austrian Netherlands to the North Sea. More than one century later, the river’s closure still served Dutch interests by reducing competition from Austrian merchants. However, Joseph II strongly desired to reopen the Scheldt to increase Austria’s commercial revenue from the region. On 4 May 1784, he presented the Dutch an ultimatum demanding territorial concessions and indemnities; he added the opening of the

17 Blanning, Origins, 48-49.
19 Black, British Foreign Policy, 59; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 159.
Scheldt in an expanded ultimatum issued on 23 August. The Dutch rejected the ultimatum, and both parties sought support from their mutual French ally while mobilizing for a potential war.\textsuperscript{21}

Simultaneously, Joseph sought the execution of another perennial Habsburg project in which the Bavarian Wittelsbachs would cede Bavaria to Austria and receive the Austrian Netherlands as compensation. This project originated from the Wittelsbach claim on the Spanish throne in the late seventeenth century. Elector Max Emmanuel’s term as Lieutenant-Governor and Captain-General of the then Spanish Netherlands in 1691 established Belgium as the primary choice for the exchange. Kaunitz considered the project in 1764, but did not pursue the idea. A Wittelsbach initiative to effect the exchange in 1776 precipitated the War of Bavarian Succession, in which the Austrians abandoned the project in the face of Prussian opposition.\textsuperscript{22}

Joseph revived the idea in November 1784 as the Scheldt crisis continued to escalate. He wrote to Louis XVI of France, seeking his support for the measure in return for Austrian acceptance of French mediation of the Scheldt dispute. After some deliberation, Versailles replied that it could not support the exchange without Prussian consent. Unwilling to seek Prussian support, Joseph dropped the matter forthwith.\textsuperscript{23}

Although officially concluded from the Austrian and French perspective, the British and Prussians learned of the matter only indirectly, prompting suspicions of an ongoing Franco-Austrian plot. The prevalence of rumor instead of official information in British diplomatic circles regarding the Scheldt crisis and the possibility of a Belgium-Bavaria exchange created an atmosphere of alarm. Many sensed that the situation demanded action, yet the fog through

\textsuperscript{21} Harris to Carmarthen, 7 and 10 December 1784, in Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury (London: Richard Bentley, 1844), 2:75-80; C. T. Atkinson, A History of Germany, 1715-1815 (London: Methuen and Co., 1908), 317.
\textsuperscript{22} Michael Hochedlinger, Austria’s Wars of Emergence: War, State, and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1683-1797 (London: Longman Group, 2003), 364-70; McKay and Scott, Great Powers, 229-31; Schroeder, Transformation, 26-32.
which they viewed events limited the possibility of taking informed and effective measures. Whether the exchange or the status quo better served British interests remained in considerable doubt.  

The British response to this proposed exchange revealed a significant division of purpose between king and country that undermined Carmarthen’s efforts to capitalize on the tension between Austria and France created by the Scheldt crisis. Joseph’s perceived infringements of traditional imperial rights produced increasingly urgent proposals for a Fürstenbund or league of German rulers. Amid some confusion regarding the potential exchange project, George III decided to oppose it. In his capacity as Elector of Hanover, he formed a Fürstenbund with the rulers Prussia and Saxony on 23 July 1785. He perceived the exchange as detrimental both to British and Hanoverian interests. With regard to the former, a small independent ruler in Belgium provided much less of an obstacle to French military and diplomatic domination of the Low Countries. This situation posed an unacceptable national security risk to Britain and poised France to increase its commercial and colonial power. For Hanover, the exchange undermined the integrity of traditional territorial rights within the Holy Roman Empire and the considerable independence that Hanover enjoyed.

Although initially accepting George III’s move to join the Fürstenbund as Elector of Hanover, the king’s British ministers soon found that his Hanoverian policy damaged ongoing

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24 Harris to Carmarthen, 21, 25, and 28 January and 1 and 2 February, in Malmesbury, 2:94-106; Black, British Foreign Policy, 83-84.
26 Duke of York to George III, 28 February and 1 April 1785, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 132-35, 152.
27 Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 161-63; Black, Parliament and Foreign Policy, 114.
29 Black, British Foreign Policy, 89-90; Ehrman, Years of Acclaim, 471-75; McKay and Scott, Great Powers, 233; Mori, William Pitt, 54-55.
British diplomatic efforts. Joseph II and his ally, Catherine II of Russia, viewed the league as needless and inflammatory, given the abandonment of the Belgium-Bavaria exchange project months before. Thus, British efforts to establish closer relations with both Vienna and St. Petersburg suffered. In addition, the anticipated rupture between Austria and France over the Scheldt crisis failed to materialize. Joseph accepted a French solution with the Treaty of Fontainebleau on 8 November 1785. The treaty confirmed Dutch rights over the Scheldt and produced a formal Franco-Dutch alliance. While the Scheldt Affair damaged Austro-French relations, the alliance that bound them together remained intact.

Consequently, Pitt’s first two years produced little diplomatic progress. The rulers of Austria and Russia continued to prefer their existing connections with France to the British alternative. France gained rather than lost influence over the Netherlands, and, while Prussia remained the friendliest continental power, Frederick refused to consider a formal alliance.

The crises of 1784 and 1785 ended unfavorably for the British, but fresh disruptions in 1786 and 1787 in both Eastern and Western Europe provided new opportunities for British diplomats. Britain also gained significant diplomatic maneuverability through a convention with Spain regarding their respective American colonies in July of 1786 and a commercial treaty with France in September of the same year. The former arrangement resolved questions regarding the British settlements along the Mosquito Coast and Belize. The commercial treaty with France involved a renegotiation of the duties and permissions for goods traded between the two powers. It also contained numerous articles regarding international commerce and subjects travelling

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31 Harris to Carmarthen, 9 August 1785, in Malmesbury, 2:132-34.  
32 Hochedlinger, Austria’s Wars, 370-74.  
33 Black, British Foreign Policy, 89-93.  
abroad.\textsuperscript{35} These treaties hardly amounted to friendly relations with the Bourbon monarchies, but they reduced the immediate hostility and threat of commercial and colonial conflict.\textsuperscript{36}

Even as the treaties with Spain and France stabilized relations between Britain and its traditional enemies, instability spread across the remainder of the continent. In the west, civil unrest wracked the Low Countries. Joseph II’s centralizing reforms met with stiff resistance in the Austrian Netherlands. Simultaneously, in the United Provinces, the Patriot party gained strength in the summer of 1786. The Patriots favored decentralized governmental power and mounted an increasingly belligerent opposition to the William V, Prince of Orange.\textsuperscript{37} In the east, tensions between Russia and the Ottoman Empire over Georgia and the Crimea moved the two powers ever closer to war.\textsuperscript{38} Between these two crises stood the unpredictable Joseph II and, after the death of Frederick the Great on 17 August 1786, the untested Frederick William II of Prussia.\textsuperscript{39}

The British perceived the Dutch civil conflict as an opportunity to oust French influence in the United Provinces by supporting the Orangist regime against the French-backed Patriot party.\textsuperscript{40} This led to a standoff between London and Versailles as both refused to concede but neither desired war.\textsuperscript{41} The policies of the German powers ultimately proved decisive in resolving the crisis. The British sought Prussian support for the Orangist cause, and Stadtholder William V’s status as Frederick William’s brother-in-law gave them considerable hope for a


\textsuperscript{36} Barnes, \textit{George III}, 144-47. Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 93-112; Ehrman, \textit{Years of Acclaim}, 477-506.


\textsuperscript{38} For a discussion of the origins of this war, see McKay and Scott, \textit{Great Powers}, 234-38, Hochedlinger, \textit{Austria’s Wars of Emergence}, 378-82; and Schroeder, \textit{Transformation}, 19-23, 56-57.

\textsuperscript{39} Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 112-16; McKay and Scott, \textit{Great Powers}, 267.

\textsuperscript{40} “Considerations to be employed with ministers to prevail on them to support the Republic of Holland”, 19 May 1787, in \textit{Malmesbury}, 2:302-3.

\textsuperscript{41} Mori, \textit{William Pitt}, 57-58; Schroeder, \textit{Transformation}, 41.
positive response. Regardless, the new Prussian king remained indecisive. Dynastic concerns and Anglophile ministers pushed him toward intervention, but Francophile ministers and fear of Austrian and French intervention kept him inactive.\textsuperscript{42}

In 1787, several factors converged to overcome Frederick William’s hesitancy. First, on 28 June, a Patriot Free Corps arrested Princess Wilhelmina of Orange, wife of William V and sister of Frederick William II.\textsuperscript{43} The disrespectful treatment she received incensed Frederick William, who protested diplomatically and mobilized troops to insure satisfaction.\textsuperscript{44} Yet the Prussian monarch continued to dither. Despite Austrian support for Prussian intervention in the United Provinces, Frederick William feared that any action could lead to war with France and, by extension, Austria as well.\textsuperscript{45}

On 19 August 1787, an Ottoman declaration of war on Russia altered the situation. Joseph’s obligation to aid the Russians finally provided the distraction Frederick William needed. Thus assured that the Austrians would not attack him, the king prepared for military intervention. Simultaneously, financial crisis and ministerial division paralyzed France. French resolve faltered at the prospect of acting alone to defend an unruly Dutch faction.\textsuperscript{46} Confident of British support, Austrian preoccupation, and French weakness, Frederick William ordered Prussian troops to enter the United Provinces on behalf of William V on 13 September. Patriot resistance evaporated in the face of the Prussian army, and William V regained effective control of the country before the end of the month.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{42} Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 130-35; McKay and Scott, \textit{Great Powers}, 267.
\textsuperscript{43} Harris to Carmarthen, 29 June 1787, in \textit{Malmesbury}, 2:325-28.
\textsuperscript{44} Harris to Carmarthen, 7 July 1787, in ibid., 332-33.
\textsuperscript{46} Storer to Eden, 5 October 1787, in \textit{Auckland}, 1:442-43.
The crises of 1787 effectively dissolved the diplomatic alignments of Western Europe and fundamentally altered those of Eastern Europe. French capitulation to the Anglo-Prussian settlement of the Dutch question demonstrated a degree of weakness that rendered France diplomatically irrelevant until the outbreak of the Revolutionary Wars.\(^{48}\) Although disastrous for France, the crisis provided the opening that Pitt sought. The Spanish hesitated to support a weakened France against a strong Britain, thus ensuring the passivity of the Bourbon Family Compact in European affairs. Austrian ambivalence toward the French position in the United Provinces and preoccupation with a Turkish war effectively ended the Franco-Austrian entente created by the Diplomatic Revolution. Freed from the fear of effective coordination between France and Austria, Frederick William adopted a more adventurous foreign policy that brought Britain, Prussia, and the newly restored Orangist regime closer together.\(^{49}\)

Despite the French collapse, the British made little progress in Vienna or St. Petersburg. With few options remaining, Pitt heeded the advice of his diplomats, particularly the ambassador to The Hague, Sir James Harris. To finally end British isolation, the British sought a Prussian alliance in 1788.\(^{50}\) Pitt hoped to create a multi-state alliance system both to protect the recently obtained security and independence of the United Provinces and to restrain the ambitions of expansionist powers throughout Europe.\(^{51}\) On 15 April, an alliance with William V constituted the first step toward this goal. Prussia’s cooperation in the Dutch crisis and the ambivalence of Austria and Russia made an Anglo-Prussian alliance a natural extension of the Anglo-Dutch alliance. On 13 August, the two powers converted a previous temporary understanding of October 1787 into a formal defensive alliance. Together, these two alliances and a Prusso-Dutch alliance...

\(^{48}\) Schroeder, Transformation, 69; Ward, Cambridge History, 175.

\(^{49}\) Black, British Foreign Policy, 153-55; Hunt, Political History, 299-301.

\(^{50}\) Harris to Carmarthen, 30 October and 16 November 1787, in Malmesbury, 2:402-6.

\(^{51}\) Carmarthen to Harris, 1 February 1788, in ibid., 2:412-13.
alliance concluded in April comprised Britain’s Triple Alliance, which Pitt intended to be the foundation of a collective security system to safeguard British interests in Europe.\(^52\)

On 6 July 1788, the outbreak of war in the Baltic tested the restraining influence of the Anglo-Prussian alliance. Russia’s involvement in a Turkish war enticed Gustavus III of Sweden to declared war on Catherine II. He hoped to consolidate his hold on Swedish Finland and drive a wedge between Russia and Denmark-Norway.\(^53\) Both London and Berlin anticipated Sweden’s defeat and feared the prospect of Russian aggrandizement in Scandinavia alongside similar success in the Balkans.\(^54\) Consequently, the two powers supported Sweden indirectly by neutralizing the Danes, which they accomplished through a combination of threats and intercessions. In the process of restraining Denmark, events outpaced communication. British envoys took unwarranted initiative in authorizing Prussia to threaten Denmark without first receiving approval from London. Prussian willingness to take this step and thereby risk war contrasted with the British preference for negotiations and the strict avoidance of hostilities. As such, the Baltic crisis exposed a discrepancy between British and Prussian aspirations for the Triple Alliance at its very start. Prussia sought to preserve the European balance of power through an active and aggressive foreign policy, while the British preferred passive mediation and negotiation.\(^55\) In the end, the Allies achieved only partial success by neutralizing Denmark, but Catherine II refused to accept their mediation and perpetuated the war that Gustavus III started.\(^56\)

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\(^{54}\) Pitt to Grenville, 1 September 1788, in *Dropmore*, 1:353.


After a period of relative stability, British diplomacy encountered fresh crises in both Eastern and Western Europe in the summer of 1789. Although a popular topic for the British press, the French Revolution held far less interest for Pitt’s administration than the neighboring Belgian revolution in the Austrian Netherlands. In response to Joseph II’s demands for a new constitution and a permanent subsidy, the Belgians rebelled, declared independence from Austria, and defeated an Austrian army in late October 1789. In addition, Joseph faced the threat of rebellion in Hungary as well as the attack of an opportunistic Prussia in the midst of his indecisive war with the Ottomans. With France reduced to impotence by financial and political upheaval, Joseph sought British assistance in resolving the troubles that beset him. These events caused considerable concern in London and revealed paradoxes in the Anglo-Prussian alliance.

Frederick William II hoped to capitalize on the unrest within the Austrian territories as well as the Turkish war to extort territorial concessions for Prussia. Consequently, he favored the Belgian revolutionaries and the creation of an independent principality to weaken Joseph II and make him more receptive to Prussian mediation. In contrast, British ministers preferred a return to the status quo. Fundamentally, they hoped to avoid the growth of French power in the

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57 The French Revolution appears in official correspondence and parliamentary records primarily as an object of curiosity and debate but not action. In contrast, the Belgian revolt and the possible courses of action for the Triple Alliance dominated the Cabinet meeting of 30 November 1789. Browning, *Political Memoranda*, 146-47. See also Ward and Gooch, *Cambridge History*, 186.


60 In response to the outbreak of the war between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Russian alliance, Prussian minister Count Ewald Hertzberg proposed a plan to both mediate that conflict and provide some compensation for Prussia. His complex plan called for Prussia to gain the cities of Danzig and Thorn from Poland, which would, in turn, regain Galicia from Austria (ceded in the First Partition of Poland). Finally, Prussia, Russia, and Austria would guarantee the Ottoman Empire. In this manner, Prussia would be compensated for Austro-Russian gains at the expense of the Ottomans. In various incarnations, this plan, known as the Hertzberg Plan, dominated Prussian foreign policy until the end of the war in the Balkans. For a description of this plan, see Auckland to Keith, 19 March 1790, in Keith, 2:267; Atkinson, *A History of Germany*, 325-27; Ehrman, *Reluctant Transition*, 5; Blanning, *Origins*, 52-53; Hochedlinger, *Austria’s Wars*, 388; Heinrich von Sybel, *History of the French Revolution*, 4 Vols., Walter Perry trans. (London: John Murray, 1867), 1:203-5; Schroeder, *Transformation*, 59-60.
region. A victory for Joseph contained the possibility for such growth by increasing the local authority of Austria, which officially remained a French ally. Conversely, a victory for the revolutionaries meant a weak, independent Belgium far more susceptible to French influence than Austria. The British also hoped to avoid any further reduction of Austria’s strength, which, in London’s estimation, represented its ability to oppose French ambitions in Europe.

Further incidents in 1790 complicated the unresolved questions of the previous year. First, the death of Joseph II and succession of his brother Leopold II changed Austria’s foreign policy from aggressive and belligerent to pacific and conciliatory. Three years earlier during the 1787 Dutch crisis, Sir James Harris echoed the general opinion of Europe in a letter to Carmarthen when he wrote, “As for Joseph, his ambition is greater than his wisdom; his means, I trust, are less.” In contrast, the British envoy to Vienna, Sir Robert Murray Keith, relayed to the Duke of Leeds (formerly Marquis Carmarthen) that Leopold enjoyed a reputation for “love of economy, good order, and justice.” He added that the Austrians “believe him averse to war, and hope that his first endeavor will be the restoration of the general tranquility.”

In addition, an Anglo-Spanish dispute over colonial sovereignty and territorial waters between California and Alaska distracted the attention of British ministers from continental European affairs. Known as the Nootka Sound Crisis, this incident precipitated a standoff between Britain and Spain. Both states called on their allies for support and mobilized for war as their diplomats struggled to strike a compromise. Britain emerged in a superior position both in terms of allied support and military preparations. Whereas the British received assurances of

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61 “Throughout the latter part of 1788 and the whole of 1789, Anglo-Prussian diplomacy is one long struggle between Prussia’s forward policy and the British conception of the Triple Alliance.” Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 187-88, 190-92.
62 Browning, Political Memoranda, 146-47.
63 Harris to Carmarthen, 2 February 1785, in Malmesbury, 102.
64 Keith to Leeds, 18 February 1790, in Keith, 253.
65 The crisis dominated parliamentary debates from its announcement on 5 May 1790 to the close of the session on 10 June. Cobbett, Parliamentary History, 28:764-824; Black, Parliament and Foreign Policy, 117-18.
support from both the Dutch and the Prussians, Spain gained no such promise from the French National Assembly. Unable to find support elsewhere in Europe and unwilling to confront the combined strength of the British and Dutch fleets, the Spanish capitulated to many of the British demands in October.  

The Austrian succession affected British policy less directly yet more broadly. Overtures from Leopold convinced Pitt’s administration that Austrian foreign policy would quickly shift in Britain’s favor. This encouraged them to restrain Frederick William’s bellicose plans and push for a negotiated settlement of both the Turkish war and the Belgian revolt on the basis of the \textit{status quo ante bellum}.  

In the spring of 1790, Leopold and Frederick William corresponded on the question of peace for Austria. Leopold proposed negotiations on the basis of the \textit{status quo ante bellum}, and Frederick William acknowledged this as acceptable. Nevertheless, the Prussian king ratified a treaty of alliance with Poland in March and the Ottoman Empire in June. Moreover, he maintained his army on a war footing to strengthen his hand. Simultaneously, Catherine II of Russia declined to offer Leopold military support in the event of a Prusso-Polish invasion of Austria. In turn, this refusal undermined Vienna’s dedication to the Austro-Russian alliance. British restraint of Prussia and Austrian willingness to abandon its uncooperative Russian ally led to peace talks between Austrian, Prussian, British, and Dutch envoys at Reichenbach in June.

and July. The talks produced the Convention of Reichenbach, which the envoys signed on 27 July 1790.\(^70\)

The Convention of Reichenbach represented a triumph for British preference for stasis.\(^71\) It called for Austria to conclude peace with the Ottomans on the basis of the *status quo ante bellum* (excepting modifications by mutual consent), Prussian compensation for any Austrian gains, and the restoration of Belgium to Habsburg rule. The Ottomans resisted Austrian peace overtures until the Russians and Swedes made peace in August. Thereafter, they accepted the mediation of the Triple Alliance and concluded peace with Austria at Sistova on 4 August 1791 after lengthy negotiations that began on 31 December 1790.\(^72\)

With the Austro-Turkish war settled and Prussia temporarily satisfied, the Triple Alliance faced the task of restoring Belgium to Austrian rule. The British, Dutch, and Prussians urged both Leopold and the Belgian rebels to negotiate under the mediation of the Triple Alliance. Rejecting their offer, Leopold issued an ultimatum to the rebels which they refused to accept until after its expiration. No longer interested in a negotiated settlement, Leopold authorized troops to enter Belgium on 24 November 1790. Within one week, Habsburg forces gained effective control of the region.\(^73\) The Triple Alliance reluctantly accepted the Austrian action, which ended the crisis in the Low Countries with a solution amenable to Anglo-Dutch interests if not on their terms.\(^74\)

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\(^72\) Keith to Grenville, 4 August 1791, in *Keith*, 469-72; For an overview of the turbulence of 1790, see Atkinson, *History of Germany*, 347-55; Ehrman, *Years of Acclaim*, 538-71.

\(^73\) Despite his choice to dispel the rebels by force, Leopold reinstated the ancient rights and privileges that Belgium enjoyed prior to Joseph’s reforms, thereby easing the restoration of order.

\(^74\) The Triple Alliance attempted to maintain at least the pretence of mediation by concluding The Hague Convention on 10 December 1790 to guarantee the new arrangement in the Austrian Netherlands, but Leopold refused to ratify the convention. Grenville to Auckland, 3 January 1791, in *Dropmore*, 2:1-2.
Although desirous of peace, Catherine II proved more resistant to the mediation of the Triple Alliance than Leopold. Separate peace with Sweden and military success removed any Russian need for predominantly Anglo-Prussian mediation on the basis of the status quo ante bellum. In addition, Britain and Prussia differed on the ideal resolution of the Russo-Turkish war. Both powers opposed substantial territorial gain in the Balkans, but for conflicting reasons. Prussia favored the preservation of the balance of power among the eastern powers, which necessitated comparable territorial compensation for Prussia for any gains the Russians made at Ottoman expense. As such, the Prussians conditionally remained open to the prospect of Russian conquests along the Black Sea coast. In contrast, British resistance to Russian expansion stemmed from Pitt’s growing commercial and geopolitical interest in Poland and commitment to the territorial status quo.\(^75\) Russia’s projected conquest of Ochakov and Bessarabia threatened to bring the Dnieper, Bug, and Dniester rivers – and thus much of the Polish grain trade – under Russian control.\(^76\)

Ochakov, a dated fortress of limited strategic value that guarded a region of even less direct economic value, became the focal point of negotiations between the Russians, Ottomans, and the Triple Alliance. Catherine refused to return the fortress on the grounds that it threatened Russian security in the region. That past Ottoman offensives into Russian territory commenced from the fortress lent credence to her claim. Regardless, the Triple Alliance viewed Russia’s acquisition of Ochakov as an unacceptable extension of Russian power both over the Poles and into the Balkans. Attempts at mediation stalled as British and Prussian diplomats worked at cross purposes. The British sought to enlist Poland in efforts to force peace on the Russians and more generally into the Triple Alliance to increase its restraining power. Unlike the British, the

\(^{75}\) Blanning, Origins, 54; Schroeder, Transformation, 79-80.

\(^{76}\) Pitt to Auckland, 7 March 1791, in Auckland, 2:382-83; Ehrman, Reluctant Transition, 6-7.
Prussians saw room for a possible compromise in which Russia would keep its gains in return for Prussian annexation of Danzig and Thorn. The two Polish cities stood between East and West Prussia, and the former served as Poland’s primary port. British efforts to include Poland in both the mediation and the Triple Alliance contrasted with Prussian endeavors to obtain Polish territory through compromise. Consequently, London and Berlin undermined each other, thus straining the alliance. Nonetheless, at Prussian insistence, the two powers prepared to issue an ultimatum to Catherine in the spring of 1791 demanding peace on the basis of the status quo ante bellum.

The prospect of an ultimatum forced Pitt’s ministry to seek parliamentary approval for the necessary naval mobilization to enforce it. This ultimately proved fatal to the Triple Alliance and Pitt’s foreign policy. Opinions throughout the Cabinet, the diplomatic service, and Parliament varied widely over Pitt’s policy toward the Russo-Turkish war. Pitt and his ministers faced eloquent rebuttals from the opposition in both houses in March and April 1791. Although the government retained a slim majority of approval, the narrow margin convinced Pitt that he lacked the domestic support to push the issue to war if necessary. As such, he reversed direction in foreign policy and drafted new instructions for the relevant diplomats advocating compromise in place of aggression. Notably, Leeds refused to take part in this reversal of British policy and resigned. In his place, Pitt appointed the prominent politician and personal

77 Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 203-5.
78 Black, British Foreign Policy, 276-300; Ehrman, Reluctant Transition, 18-19.
79 Mori, William Pitt, 95-98.
80 Cobbett, Parliamentary History, 29:31-249.
81 Browning, Political Memoranda, 148-61.
82 Ehrman, Reluctant Transition, 26-27; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 207.
83 Browning, Political Memoranda, 166-74.
confidant William Wyndham Grenville, first Baron Grenville. Grenville subsequently served as Pitt’s Foreign Secretary for the duration of the French Revolutionary Wars.  

On the surface, Frederick William accepted the reversal of British policy with amiable understanding, but the incident convinced him of the worthlessness of his British ally. He expressed his irritation by concluding a convention with Austria in July 1791. The British had hoped for a rapprochement between Austria and Prussia that would lead to Austria’s inclusion in the Triple Alliance. Instead, the Austro-Prussian alignment marked Prussia’s de facto departure from Britain’s intended collective security arrangement. With the prospect of Triple Alliance mediation thereby reduced from unlikely to impossible, Catherine effectively ignored British and Prussian suggestions regarding peace. After further victories on both land and sea, she concluded a peace treaty with Sultan Selim III on 9 January 1792 in which Russia gained the Ochakov region and the right to integrate Crimea into the Russian Empire.

The Austro-Prussian alignment arose partially from the revival of France in European diplomacy. Leopold’s dynastic connection with France through the marriage between his sister, Marie Antoinette, and King Louis XVI obligated him to ensure the safety of the French royal family in the midst of the increasingly volatile revolution. In addition, Leopold’s position as Holy Roman Emperor endowed him with the responsibility for protecting the rights of imperial princes. Several of these princes found themselves in conflict with the French Revolution over their decision to shelter émigrés. Louis’s flight from Paris and subsequent capture at Varennes in June of 1791 exacerbated the danger to the royal family and prompted Leopold to respond

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84 Barnes, George III, 229-34; Ward, Cambridge History, 207-8.
86 Black, British Foreign Policy, 316.
87 Barnes, George III, 235; Black, British Foreign Policy, 314-25.
favorably to Prussian proposals for a mutual understanding regarding French and Polish affairs in July.\textsuperscript{88}

Through this alignment, Frederick William replaced the apparently unreliable British with the Austrians as the primary Prussian ally against Russian expansion. In return, Austria gained a measure of security and Prussian support for any potential Austrian intervention in French affairs. A treaty of alliance codified this by binding the two powers to cooperate with each other in affairs related to Poland and France. Projected compensation for mutual support included a Russo-Prussian partition of Poland for the Prussians and the Belgium-Bavaria exchange for Austria.\textsuperscript{89} Both powers thereby rejected the Triple Alliance’s emphasis on the territorial status quo in favor of mutually supportive aggrandizement.\textsuperscript{90}

In response to the Flight to Varennes, Leopold issued the Padua Circular on 6 July 1791. This appeal to the crowned heads of Europe for collective action to emancipate the French royal family met with mixed responses.\textsuperscript{91} The Russians, Swedes, and Spanish all offered hearty support for the measure but lacked the capacity to follow through with any action. The British remained aloof and relatively unconcerned with France’s domestic upheavals.\textsuperscript{92} Only the Prussians possessed both the capacity and the will to coordinate with the Austrians on French affairs.\textsuperscript{93}

In August, the monarchs of the two German powers met in Saxony and jointly issued the Declaration of Pillnitz, which called for direct intervention on behalf of Louis XVI. The

\textsuperscript{88} Hochedlinger, \textit{Austria’s Wars}, 393-96; Mori, \textit{William Pitt}, 97-100.
\textsuperscript{89} “Substance of the Partition Treaty between the Courts in Concert” in \textit{Collection}, 1:1-2.
\textsuperscript{90} Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 316, 377.
\textsuperscript{92} Grenville to Auckland, 23 August 1791, \textit{Dropmore}, 2:171.
\textsuperscript{93} Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 368; Schroeder, \textit{Transformation}, 90.
declaration contained the caveat that the two powers would only intervene with British support.\textsuperscript{94} Pitt and George III had no intention of providing such support for fear that conflict with France might precipitate a destabilizing military campaign in the Low Countries. Thus they offered only vague statements of neutrality and support of peace and stability.\textsuperscript{95} The Dutch suggested a mutual guarantee of the United Provinces and the Austrian Netherlands to protect the region but, unwilling to risk the prospect of war that such a step would raise, the British restrained their ally.\textsuperscript{96}

In early 1792, relations between Austria and France deteriorated rapidly. Leopold’s connection with the beleaguered French royal family ensured tense and suspicious relations between Paris and Vienna. More significantly, Leopold’s position as Holy Roman Emperor put him at odds with the revolutionary government at Paris. Increasingly forceful French demands for the expulsion of the émigrés harbored in imperial territory moved Austria and France closer to war.\textsuperscript{97} Until his death in March, Leopold sought victory over the revolutionaries through posturing and intimidation. Both sides perceived their opponent as weak and incapable of effective resistance, and that misconception increased mutual willingness to risk war.\textsuperscript{98}

Leopold’s death precipitated a French declaration of war, which opened hostilities between France and the Austro-Prussian alliance.\textsuperscript{99} The rest of Europe remained neutral. Catherine II offered only moral support for the war with France and focused efforts on an impending invasion and partition of Poland in conjunction with Prussia. Madrid likewise

\textsuperscript{94} “Substance of the Convention between the Emperor and the King of Prussia” in \textit{Collection}, 1:2-3; McKay and Scott, \textit{Great Powers}, 277.
\textsuperscript{95} Grenville to Keith, 19 September 1791, as cited in Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 373; J. H. Rose, \textit{William Pitt and the Great War} (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1911), 6.
\textsuperscript{96} Grenville to Auckland, 19 December 1791 and 17 January 1792, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:251.
\textsuperscript{97} Atkinson, \textit{History of Germany}, 375-78.
\textsuperscript{99} The convention became a full defensive alliance in August of 1791; Ehrman, \textit{Reluctant Transition}, 28.
supported the Austrian position yet lacked the strength to intervene. Britain and the United
Provinces remained thoroughly neutral and offered neither moral nor material support. The
failure of Pitt’s Triple Alliance and Britain’s return to diplomatic isolation after the Ochakov
Crisis left the British government leery of continental commitments and suspicious of Russia and
the German powers. ¹⁰⁰

The Triple Alliance, effectively an Anglo-Dutch defensive alliance after 1791, and the
Austro-Prussian alliance constituted competing rather than cooperative power blocs. Although
not in direct opposition and both having the theoretical allegiance of Prussia, the two alliances
represented opposing perspectives on the European balance of power. The Anglo-Dutch alliance
stood for the preservation of the European balance of power through peace and the territorial
status quo. ¹⁰¹ The Austro-Prussian alliance also sought to preserve the balance of power, but
through war and material adjustments in the form of territorial indemnities. Given this gulf in
perspective, British politicians and diplomats, Pitt chief among them, felt little need to involve
Britain in the contest between the French Revolution and the German powers. Like most
European observers, the British anticipated a rapid Austro-Prussian victory. ¹⁰² Nonetheless,
British foreign policy interests left them ambivalent over the outcome of the struggle.
Consequently, friendly overtures from both camps before and after the outbreak of war met only
with assertions of peaceful intentions and committed neutrality.

¹⁰⁰ Auckland to Grenville, 14 March 1792, in Dropmore, 2:261-63; Black, British Foreign Policy, 389-98; McKay
and Scott, Great Powers, 279.
¹⁰¹ Barnes, George III, 224-25.
¹⁰² Jones, Britain and the World, 259.
CHAPTER 3

“WE SHALL DO NOTHING”

On 17 February 1792, British Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger famously declared,

I am not, indeed, presumptuous enough to suppose that, when I name fifteen years, I am not naming a period in which events may arise which human foresight cannot reach and which may baffle all our conjectures. We must not count with certainty on a continuance of our present prosperity during such an interval; but unquestionably, there never was a time in the history of this country when, from the situation of Europe, we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace, than we may at the present moment.¹

Pitt’s Foreign Secretary, William Wyndham, first Baron Grenville, held similar opinions and even anticipated a potential rapprochement between Britain and Revolutionary France.² The Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, agreed with the government’s strict policy of neutrality toward the French. However, he correctly anticipated France’s descent into violence and the likelihood that this would render British neutrality tenuous.³ King George III personally detested the revolutionaries, but left the conduct of British policy largely in the hands of his ministers.⁴ He accepted and endorsed the pragmatism of neutrality and British abstinence from a continental war.⁵

With the uncertain years at the start of his ministry behind him, Pitt maintained a firm grasp on the leadership of British affairs throughout the French Revolutionary Wars. The king remained the official head of state and retained considerable privileges, but George III left the

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² G. Pallain, La Mission de Talleyrand à Londres en 1792. Correspondance inédite de Talleyrand avec le Département des Affaires Étrangères... (Paris: Librarie Plon, 1889), 133-43.
⁴ George III to Grenville, 4 May 1792, in Dropmore, 2:267.
⁵ George III to Grenville, 22 September 1792, in Dropmore, 2:317; Ehrman refers to British policy toward France in 1792 as a “quarantine.” Ehrman, Reluctant Transition, 46.
management of British affairs largely in Pitt’s hands. Unlike his predecessor, Grenville enjoyed Pitt’s confidence and thus handled foreign affairs with the prime minister’s approval and not his interference. Dundas had little to do with foreign affairs until the outbreak of war, but he advised and supported Pitt in his capacity as Home Secretary. Collectively these three men directed the British government during the French Revolutionary Wars.

Diplomats to courts of importance to British foreign policy also held sway over the conduct of foreign policy. The importance of the United Provinces to British foreign policy in this period gave the ambassador to The Hague, William Eden, first Baron Auckland, significant influence in London. Auckland wielded little influence under Leeds due to a personal dissonance between the two and a greater importance placed on the Prussian connection. The increasing rift between Britain and Prussia after the Ochakov crisis and the more amicable relationship between Grenville and Auckland raised the importance of the latter’s position at The Hague. Auckland served his government as an observer of the French Revolution and as a general hub of British foreign policy in Europe. He also kept Whitehall informed of developments in Dutch politics. The rise of Grenville and Auckland to prominence in British foreign policy marked a transition from Leeds’ proactive policies to more cautious isolationism.

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8 Matheson, Dundas, vi-vii.
9 The conservative parliamentary orator Edmund Burke went so far as to say, “Those in power here, instead of governing their Ministers in foreign Courts, are entirely swayed by them.” Edmund Burke to Richard Burke, 16 August 1791, in Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam and Richard Bourke, eds., Correspondence of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, 4 Vols. (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1844), 3:268. J. R. Jones provides a description of the importance placed on various diplomatic posts throughout the eighteenth century. Jones, Britain and the World, 41-45.
10 Black, British Foreign Policy, 384.
11 Auckland to Grenville, 12 June 1792, in Dropmore, 2:279. For a concise but thorough overview of the men who directed British policy see Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 218-22.
The pacific expectations within Pitt’s relatively united ministry perhaps represent a triumph of hope over discernment. Pitt’s policies, both foreign and domestic, left Britain unprepared for a major European war in 1792. After taking office in 1783, Pitt oversaw the comprehensive demobilization that followed the conclusion of the American War of Independence. In just one year, the army’s strength dropped from 125,000 in 1783 to 30,000 in 1784. Preferring domestic reform to military adventures abroad, Pitt maintained Britain’s eighty-one battalions in a skeletal state. By 1792, the total global strength of the British army amounted to approximately 52,000 on paper. Of those, only 17,013 (later reduced to 13,701) remained in the British Isles. The remaining 35,000 were dispersed throughout Britain’s colonial empire, including nineteen battalions in the West Indies and nine in India. This marginalization of the army left Britain in a weak position to intervene in Europe, but granted Pitt the financial flexibility to conduct his economic and naval reforms.

Economically, Pitt succeeded in reducing Britain’s debt, which consequently boosted its credit. As noted, other financial reforms reduced smuggling and produced more efficient taxation. The economic improvement allowed greater expenditure on naval improvement. In turn, the naval reforms and construction programs produced a larger and more efficient navy that contributed to the British triumph in the Nootka Sound crisis. Armed with a reinvigorated

12 Pitt, Grenville, Dundas, and Auckland generally agreed on most major matters of state, and such unity among prominent ministers was never guaranteed in eighteenth-century British politics. Auckland said of Grenville and Pitt that “whatever is written to the one may be considered as written to the other,” and in a later note to his brother, Morton Eden, he claimed, “I live in perfect confidence both with Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville, and on good terms with Mr. Dundas.” Auckland to Grenville, 2 February 1792, in Dropmore, 2:25-26; Auckland to Morton Eden, 12 December 1791, in Auckland, 2:395.
13 Gregory and Stevenson, Britain in the Eighteenth Century, 197; Rose, Great War, 124.
14 Fortescue, A History of the British Army, 4:77.
16 Rose, Great War, 30-31.
17 Ehrman, Years of Acclaim, 239-81; Rose, National Revival, 184; Barnes, George III, 110-11; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 147; W. Cobbett, Parliamentary History, 24:1009-13; Hunt, Political History, 284-86.
18 Rose, National Revival, 210-11; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 147; Barnes, George III, 142; Gregory and Stevenson, Britain in the Eighteenth Century, 199.
navy, the British maintained a firm command of the seas and enjoyed the security this brought to both the colonies and the home islands. Although Pitt’s domestic improvement projects bolstered Britain’s ‘sinews of power’, they required the preservation of peace to continue yielding improvement.  

The state of British foreign policy in 1792 provided equally compelling reasons to prefer the continuation of peace. During the preceding decade, British diplomacy produced only one unqualified success in the form of the Dutch alliance of 1788. The alliance separated the United Provinces from Versailles and bound them to London. The accompanying Anglo-Prussian alliance proved less successful. Attempts to use the Triple Alliance revealed division of purpose and met with mixed success. British restraint and hesitation precluded Prussian gains in the attempted mediation of the Russo-Swedish war in 1788, the Austro-Turkish war in 1790, and the Russo-Turkish war in 1791. London’s commitment to the status quo failed to satisfy Prussian ambitions. As a result, Frederick William II of Prussia concluded an alliance with Leopold II of Austria in August of 1791 for the purpose of obtaining territorial compensations. Although the Triple Alliance remained officially in effect, Prussian ministers and diplomats reduced their communications with their British counterparts. In practice, if not in form, this left the Dutch Republic as Britain’s only ally. The failure of British diplomacy to make inroads elsewhere in Europe made any new alliance unlikely. In the words of Auckland, “Under the palsied

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19 The opening quote in which Pitt declares the expectation of fifteen years of peace as entirely reasonable speaks to this necessity. The quote is taken from his budget proposal to Parliament for 1792. In this budget, he proposed to reduce taxation but also military expenditure so that the Sinking Fund (a mechanism through which the British funded their debt) would reach its maximum value in fifteen years, assuming a continuation of peace. Coupland, _War Speeches_ 15-16; Rose, _Great War_, 30-31. For a discussion of the relationship between money and war in Britain, see John Brewer, _The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783_ (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989).
compositions of the Prussian Ministry we have, in effect, no Continental alliance, and, perhaps, so much the better.”

The absence of shared interests with any of the continental powers at the start of 1792 persuaded Pitt and Grenville to pursue a course of neutrality as instability in Paris threatened to draw Europe into a war. Despite George III’s personal sympathy for Louis XVI, the British remained aloof from calls to rescue the beleaguered French king in both the Padua Circular (25 July 1791) and the Declaration of Pillnitz (27 August 1791). After the conclusion of peace between Austria and the Ottoman Empire on 4 August 1791, Grenville wrote Auckland:

The conclusion of the Sistovo business has removed every difficulty which there was in the way of our speaking out, and avowing our determination of the most scrupulous neutrality in the French business; and I now hold this language to all the Foreign Ministers in order that it may be clearly understood that we are no parties to any step the King of Prussia may take on the subject.

The British government refused to bind itself to the counterrevolutionary cause through intervention in a French affair of limited significance to British interests.

Following their rebuff of Austrian and Prussian calls for concerted action against the revolutionaries, Pitt and Grenville found themselves the target of a French approach on 24 January 1792. Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord led this mission as an unofficial envoy with credentials only as an individual well informed on French policy. Talleyrand and Grenville discussed the possibility of an Anglo-French alliance, a mutual guarantee of territory,

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22 Auckland to Grenville, 14 March 1792, in Dropmore, 2:261-63; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 222.
23 Although foreign policy decisions may be understood as taken by mutual consent of the Cabinet, this chapter will refer to them primarily as Grenville’s doing for several reasons. First, the aforementioned solidarity between Pitt and Grenville in particular and throughout Pitt’s administration more generally, makes the usage of multiple names needlessly confusing and redundant. Second, letters to and from Grenville comprise a substantially larger part of the available primary material than Pitt’s correspondence. Third, Grenville, in fact, was responsible for most of the foreign policy decisions at this time and for the instructions that put them into effect.
25 Grenville to Auckland, 23 August 1791, in ibid., 2:171.
26 Schroeder, Transformation, 98-99.
27 Lessart to Grenville, 12 January 1792, in Pallain, Talleyrand, 40-41.
28 Black, British Foreign Policy, 385.
or simply a British declaration of neutrality. The French envoy’s unofficial status prevented any formal diplomatic action, but Grenville exchanged assurances of benevolent intentions with him. Talleyrand returned to France in March without securing any official British commitments, yet his encounter convinced him that Britain would remain neutral in the event of a continental war.29

The British insistence on official channels of communication reflected distrust, caution, and a commitment to strict neutrality. The perceived volatility of French politics rendered the accuracy of diplomatic exchanges questionable and contingent on circumstances. Written communications delivered through the British ambassador to Paris, George Granville Leveson-Gower, or a French ambassador in London provided greater insurance against misinterpretation than informal discussions. Grenville recognized the great care necessary to insure that good intentions toward France did not lead to Austrian hostility.30 To provide this avenue for official communication, the French appointed Bernard-François, marquis de Chauvelin as ambassador in April. After Talleyrand’s departure in March, Chauvelin managed official communications between the two countries.31

As tension between Austria and France escalated, French interest in Britain focused on London’s policy toward the Low Countries. The room for neutrality seemed small. Grenville cautiously preserved neutrality by limiting the British commitment to upholding the territorial integrity of the United Provinces only and not the Austrian Netherlands.32 The Dutch protested this change of policy, fearful of the consequences of an unopposed French invasion of the

29 Talleyrand to Lessart, 2 March 1792, in Pallain, Talleyrand, 133-43; Hunt, Political History, 333-34; Rose, Great War, 41-44, 49; Schroeder, Transformation, 94; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 212-13.
30 Grenville to Gower, 9 March 1792, in Pallain, Talleyrand, 149-52.
31 Grenville to George III and George III to Grenville, 28 April 1792, in Dropmore, 2:266-67; Black, British Foreign Policy, 388.
32 Grenville to Auckland, 17 January 1792, in Dropmore, 2:251.
Austrian Netherlands. Grenville acknowledged this potential danger, but also emphasized the hazards of rash actions:

I still own my doubts as to the prudence of our mixing ourselves in such a scene of folly and bad conduct as the Austrian Government in the Netherlands. Surely, if mere military force is sufficient to maintain the Emperor’s sovereignty, his 50,000 or 60,000 men will answer that purpose, without trouble or expense on our part, and without committing the Republic and us with the Enragés of France. If there is such a rooted hatred to the Emperor’s Government there that not even that army can keep them quiet, will 20,000 or 30,000 men from England and Holland do it? Or, if not, why should we have the disgrace of being involved in his failure? That we should not give them support or countenance I readily agree; and even that we should avow that determination whenever he will make it possible for us to do so; but I feel very strongly that this is not a time for embarking in gratuitous and unnecessary guaranties, particularly of forms of government, and still more particularly in the case of a Government wholly destitute of both wisdom and honesty.34

Grenville correctly suspected that Austria might use its Prussian alliance and a war with France to unload its Belgian provinces in favor a less troublesome territorial indemnity elsewhere.35

The death of Leopold II of Austria on 1 March 1792 promised change in Europe, and his successor, Francis II, added an unknown factor to all diplomatic calculations.36 The succession initially appeared to offer a chance for better Anglo-Austrian relations.37 Such aspirations faded in the wake of the French declaration of war on Austria on 20 April. Immediately, the French prepared to attack the Austrian Netherlands.

Due to Britain’s traditional opposition to any French presence in the Low Countries, a French invasion of the Austrian Netherlands threatened to instigate war with Britain. To forestall this, Talleyrand returned to aid Chauvelin in late April 1792. He sought to gain the support of the Triple Alliance against Austria. In lieu of a traditional alliance, the French also offered to cede the island of Tobago to the British in return for a loan to stabilize French

33 Auckland to Grenville, 15 May 1792, in Dropmore, 2:269-70.
34 Grenville to Auckland, 17 January 1792, in ibid., 2:251.
35 Black, British Foreign Policy, 388-89.
36 Keith to Grenville, 1 March 1792, in Keith, 2:503; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 211.
37 Keith to Grenville, 7 March 1792, in Keith, 2:507-9.
finances. Neither of these proposals met with a favorable response in London despite persuasive economic arguments for the latter arrangement.\textsuperscript{38}

In response to the French declaration, Grenville expressed to Chauvelin strong displeasure about the prospect of a French invasion of the Austrian Netherlands.\textsuperscript{39} Later, in May, he offered a formal statement of policy in which he promised British neutrality in accordance with existing treaty obligations.\textsuperscript{40} The latter assertion required the French to observe the territorial integrity of the United Provinces and Prussia. These two statements reveal the paradox confronting the British ministers in 1792. French aggression threatened British interests, yet a war to contain France without a strong continental ally committed to British objectives offered no guarantee that British interests would be served. The conditional neutrality that Grenville pursued reflected recognition of British weakness and isolation in Europe.

Even as Grenville and Chauvelin engaged in dispassionate policy discussions, domestic developments in their respective countries threatened to undermine British neutrality and cast Anglo-French relations in an ideological light. From 1782 to 1789, Pitt and his supporters advanced democratizing political reform measures consistent with ideas concurrently gaining momentum in France. Pitt’s 1785 reform bill to reduce election corruption marked the culmination of his efforts at direct reform, but the opposition defeated it in Parliament.\textsuperscript{41} Thereafter, Pitt abandoned the direct approach and packaged minor political reforms with more popular economic reform bills.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{39} Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 389.

\textsuperscript{40} Grenville to Chauvelin, 24 May 1792, in Debrett, \textit{Collection}, 1:318; Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 390.

\textsuperscript{41} Hunt, \textit{Political History}, 287.

\textsuperscript{42} Ehrman, \textit{Years of Acclaim}, 217-36; Mori, \textit{William Pitt}, 27.
Despite Pitt’s change of tactics, the reform movement continued outside of Parliament. The centennial of the Glorious Revolution in 1788 revived interest in reform societies celebrating Britain’s revolutionary past as well as less reputable and newer clubs that more aggressively sought reform. Both types responded positively to the French Revolution as a model for political and societal reform, initially causing Pitt little concern. Many of these societies held celebrations of Bastille Day on 14 July 1791 involving rhetoric that strayed from reformist to revolutionary. This established a connection between the British reform movement and the French Revolution that foreshadowed a radical swing and began to trouble the government.

The growing activism of the poorer elements of British society in reform movements began to concern the aristocrats and politicians. In February, Thomas Paine published Part II of *The Rights of Man*, and, within one week the government condemned it as seditious libel. The revolutionary potential of these British radicals caused almost as much concern at The Hague as it did in London. Reporting on this sentiment on 15 May, Auckland wrote: “The anxiety of our Dutch friends on these subjects is not quite disinterested, for they feel that, in the present circumstances of Europe, the Republic is safe from any external attack, and from any interior commotion, so long as England maintains her tranquility.” The government of Dutch Stadtholder William V, Prince of Orange, depended on the British government’s freedom of action for both internal and external security.

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45 Morris, *British Monarchy*, 84.
On 21 May, the escalation of both the reform movement and government fears prompted a royal proclamation against seditious writings.\textsuperscript{48} In vain, Chauvelin protested this as unduly prejudiced against the French revolutionaries, who professed no ill-will toward the British.\textsuperscript{49} By 14 July 1792, the conservative, loyalist reaction against the radical reformers led to the cancellation of Bastille Day festivities for that year.\textsuperscript{50} As the year wore on, the British government’s hostility to radicals within Great Britain undermined its diplomatic neutrality.\textsuperscript{51}

The alliance with the United Provinces also threatened to undermine British neutrality. Dutch Grand Pensionary, Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel, demonstrated less caution than Grenville in his approach to diplomacy.\textsuperscript{52} Spiegel supported Austro-Prussian counterrevolutionary intervention in France and pushed his British allies to participate.\textsuperscript{53} In addition, the Stadtholder’s second son, Prince William George Frederick of Orange, even requested to serve with the Prussian army. However, Frederick William II “refused permission for Prince Frederick of Orange to serve in the allied armies, otherwise than in his regimental rank, which… is only that of Captain; he is therefore not to go.”\textsuperscript{54} Auckland faced the task of reconciling the official British and Dutch positions on European affairs, but he expressed

\textsuperscript{48} The letters among British politicians and diplomats during the month of May illustrate an increased concern about the domestic reform movement and its impact on the ability of the British to defend their interests on the continent; see \textit{Dropmore}, 2:267-76.

\textsuperscript{49} Chauvelin to Grenville, 24 May 1792, in Debrett, \textit{Collection}, 222.

\textsuperscript{50} Buckingham to Grenville, 17 May 1792, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:270.


\textsuperscript{52} The Dutch Grand Pensionary held a position comparable to that of the British Prime Minister, so Pitt and Spiegel held roughly equivalent positions.

\textsuperscript{53} Grenville to Auckland, 21 July 1792, in \textit{Auckland}, 2:419.

\textsuperscript{54} Auckland to Grenville, 26 June 1792, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:285.
concern over restraining the Orangists. Concurrently, residual Patriot unrest destabilized Dutch internal politics and provided an avenue for potential French interference. The Dutch took steps to ready their forces in case of emergency and sought continuous assurances of British support.

Nonetheless, both Grenville and Chauvelin strove to preserve British neutrality, and military developments aided them. The initial failure of French forces at Lille on 29 April 1792 reduced Dutch and British concerns about French intentions. The subsequent lull in military action as Austrian and Prussian forces slowly mobilized kept tensions low. In addition, Grenville offered Chauvelin a clarification of his earlier statement regarding Britain’s resolution to honor the requirements of existing treaties. He explained that the alliances binding Britain to Prussia and the United Provinces only required British action in the event of a direct external attack. Prussia’s decision to assist Austria against France failed to meet this requirement.

The collapse of French arms in the summer of 1792 seemed to indicate a quick and decisive Austro-Prussian victory. This concerned the British nearly as much as the initial French invasion of the Austrian Netherlands. They anticipated that a triple alliance of Austria, Prussia, and France would follow a successful Austro-Prussian restoration of the French monarchy. As with Britain’s Triple Alliance after the Dutch crisis, such a league would preserve the new political order and compensate the intervening powers. In this case, the British feared a revival

55 Auckland to Grenville, 15 and 26 May 1792, in Dropmore, 2:269, 274.
56 Auckland to Grenville, 29 May and 5 June 1792, in ibid., 2:275, 277.
57 On 29 April, Marshal Jean-Baptiste Rochambeau sent three French columns into the Austrian Netherlands. General Théobald Dillon advanced from Lille on the far left, General Armand Biron marched from Quievrain in the center, and Lafayette assembled a third column on the far right at Givet. At the first sight of Austrians, Dillon’s column broke ranks, fled to Lille, and killed their commander. Lacking support, Biron began to retreat, but an attack from Austrian hussars sent his men into a route that did not stop until they reached Valenciennes. Lafayette remained stationary. George III to Grenville, 4 May 1792, in ibid., 2:267; Fortescue, British Army, 4:37-38.
58 Black, British Foreign Policy, 393.
of the string of alliances that had so isolated them in the previous decade. Such a prospect effectively constituted a continent united against British interests.59

Chauvelin and the French Director General of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Guillaume de Bonnecarrère, also fearfully anticipated an Austro-Prussian victory in June and July 1792. At the behest of a new French Foreign Minister, Scipion-Louis-Joseph, Marquis de Chambonas, Chauvelin attempted to persuade the British of the dangers posed by the Austro-Prussian alliance. Simultaneously, Bonnecarrère provided Gower with an unofficial suggestion for an Anglo-French entente.60 After some deliberation, Grenville responded favorably to the overtures, thereby bringing Britain close to a breach of neutrality in favor of the French.61 However, such proposals came to naught due to the French political upheavals in late July. Chambonas lost his position on 23 July and Bonnecarrère followed him during the collapse of the monarchy in August.62 Amid such instability, Grenville reverted to cautious neutrality as the best insurance against the uncertainties of the continental war.

In late July and early August 1792, the British government found itself under pressure from the counterrevolutionary camp to guarantee the safety of the French royal family. The infamous Brunswick Manifesto of 25 July articulated the determination of Francis II and Frederick William II to severely punish the revolutionaries if they harmed the Bourbons.63 Pitt and Grenville received exhortations to follow suit from émigrés as well as from Gower.64

59 Black, *British Foreign Policy*, 394.
60 Gower to Grenville, 6 July 1792, in *Dropmore*, 2:288.
61 Grenville to Gower, 13 July 1792, in ibid., 2:291.
62 Black, *British Foreign Policy*, 396.
64 Pitt to Grenville, 9 August 1792, in *Dropmore*, 2:299.
However, the British ministers remained cautious, not wishing to compromise British neutrality for an empty gesture.65

The Parisian reaction to the Brunswick Manifesto vindicated British caution, but also rendered British neutrality more precarious. The storming of the Tuileries Palace on 10 August and the subsequent suspension of the monarchy demonstrated the ineffectiveness of threatening the revolutionaries.66 Despite a genuine fear of Prussian retribution, rhetoric overpowered reason.67 The suspension of the French monarchy also caused an interruption in formal diplomatic recognition. Diplomats accredited to Louis XVI lost their negotiating authority, thus precipitating a mass exodus of foreign diplomats from Paris that included Gower. The Cabinet decided to recall him due to both the danger to his safety and the nullification of his credentials.68 They perceived such a step as necessary to maintain British neutrality. Gower’s continued presence would imply recognition of the republican government and place Britain openly at odds with Austro-Prussian war aims. Although disappointed with the recall of Gower, the French accepted the measure to maintain positive relations.69 In order to preserve lines of communication with France and avoid serious misunderstandings, the Cabinet allowed Chauvelin to remain in London in an unofficial capacity.70

Later in August, a new French Foreign Minister, Pierre-Henri-Hélène-Marie Lebrun-Tondu, resumed efforts to bring the British into the war on the as a French ally. He sent an additional envoy to aid Chauvelin with instructions to press the British to convert the commercial treaty of 1786 into a defensive alliance between the two powers. Lebrun took a conciliatory

65 Black, *British Foreign Policy*, 397-98.
66 Burges to Grenville, 15 August 1792, in *Dropmore*, 2:301.
69 “Note in Answer to the Communication made by Earl Gower, the English Ambassador”, in ibid., 1:233.
70 Black, *British Foreign Policy*, 398-400.
approach, reviving the offer to cede the island of Tobago in return for a British loan. In addition, he disavowed all notions of a French-sponsored revolution in the Dutch Republic and drew a sharp distinction between it and the Austrian Netherlands.71

Despite his favorable response to French overtures in July, the political upheaval and violence of August made Grenville reluctant to entertain the new French proposals. The September Massacres that followed turned the opinion of even British liberals against the French Revolution.72 London maintained official neutrality, but expressed concern over the safety of the former French royal family.73 The Cabinet also privately voiced hope in the success of the German powers.74 Both the French and their enemies found the British position unsatisfactory.75

In a letter to Auckland on 6 November, Grenville explained that he insisted on neutrality not for lack of confidence in British strength, but due to a sincere belief that such a course best served the interests of the Anglo-Dutch alliance. However, he acknowledged that “every hour’s respite gives us fresh resources for meeting the moment of action.” The Foreign Secretary argued that war fanned the revolutionary flame in France and increased the likelihood of its spreading to Britain and the United Provinces. With regard to the Austro-Prussian invasion, he commented: “I never expected the Austrian and Prussian enterprise likely to succeed to any good purpose.”76

Grenville composed a similar letter to his older brother the next day to explain the British position and his views on continental affairs:

I bless God, that we had the wit to keep ourselves out of the glorious enterprise of the combined armies, and that we were not tempted by the hope of sharing the spoils in the

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71 Black, *British Foreign Policy*, 400.
72 Barnes, *George III*, 254.
73 Aust to Grenville, 8 September 1792, in *Dropmore*, 2:310; Burges to Auckland, 21 September 1792, in *Auckland*, 2:444.
74 Grenville to Auckland, 4 August 1792, in *Auckland*, 2:425.
75 George III to Grenville, 8 September 1792, in *Dropmore*, 2:310.
76 Grenville to Auckland, November 6, 1792, in *Auckland*, 2:464.
division of France, nor by the prospect of crushing all democratic principles all over the world at one blow. But having so sturdily resisted all solicitation to join in these plans, we have been punished for our obstinacy by having been kept in profound ignorance of the details by which they were to be executed, and even of the course of events, as far as that could be done, which occurred during the progress of the enterprise. Now that it has failed, we must expect these deep politicians to return to the charge, and to beg us to help them out of the pit into which they wanted to help us. But they have as yet been in no hurry to begin this pleasant communication, and most assuredly we are in no disposition to urge them on faster.

He then offered insightful yet optimistic speculations on the future conduct of Europe’s interested parties:

The Emperor must feel that he has now got an enemy whom he must devour, or be devoured by it. And the governing party at Paris has very many very obvious reasons for continuing the war. The rest of the empire will give their contingent, unless they have been lucky enough to be forced to sign a capitulation of neutrality. The King of Sardinia and Italy will defend themselves as they can, which will probably be very ill. What Spain will do, she does not know, and therefore certainly we do not. Portugal and Holland will do what we please. We shall do nothing. Sweden and Denmark can do nothing, and Russia has enough else to do, and has neither the will nor the means of doing much against France. And there is the tableau of Europe for the next year, according to my almanac.77

As with British foreign policy throughout the preceding decade, Grenville’s views reveal a determination to preserve peace and the European status quo as much as possible within the limits of British resources. The letters also reveal that Grenville harbored no inherent animosity toward a Republican France. By these accounts, British neutrality seems primarily motivated by two factors: the desire to minimize the threat of domestic revolution and suspicion regarding the intentions of the German powers.

However, the Prussian defeat at Valmy on 20 September 1792 caused almost as much concern in London as it did elation in Paris.78 As Prussian troops retreated in October, the French advanced on all fronts, invading Savoy, reaching the Rhine, and advancing into the

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77 Grenville to Buckingham, 7 November 1792, in Court and Cabinets, 2:221-25.
Austrian Netherlands. French military success in the autumn of 1792 precipitated a series of crises for Anglo-French relations. After spending the majority of the year on the defensive, the French under General Charles-François du Périer Dumouriez mounted an offensive into the Austrian Netherlands on 3 November 1792. Following a resounding French victory at Jemappes on 6 November, Austrian forces evacuated Belgium. The withdrawal left nothing between French forces and the Dutch border. The government of the Austrian Netherlands fled from Brussels to the city of Ruremonde, which belonged to the Austrian provinces but lay within Dutch territory. Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, James Bland Burges, contemplated the meaning of this step:

> When I consider the situation of that town, and see it so surrounded as it is with the Dutch territory, I feel inclined to think the choice of it may, in a great degree, have been influenced by the hope, in the first place, of being safe from a pursuit, from a supposed unwillingness on the part of the French to encroach on the territory of Holland, and, in the next, from the expectation that events must infallibly happen to oblige Holland, and, of course, England, to take an active part against France.

Grenville remained confident in the merit and ultimate success of Anglo-Dutch neutrality, but the close proximity of French troops aroused considerable fear of invasion or subversion in the United Provinces.

> By the time Grenville’s letter of 6 November reached Auckland at The Hague, news of Jemappes and the French advance lent new urgency to the question of Dutch security.

Auckland suggested diplomatic steps to avert a crisis in the Low Countries. He proposed an Anglo-Dutch offer of mediation between France and the Austro-Prussian alliance. As founding principles for such mediation, Auckland suggested formal recognition of the French Republic in return for the safety of the royal family and French acceptance of the territorial status quo.

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81 Burges to Auckland, 13 November 1792, in *Auckland*, 2:467-68.
82 Grenville to Auckland, November 6, 1792, in *Auckland*, 2:464.
initiate the mediation process, he recommended secret communications with Austria and Prussia
to ascertain “their views and wishes relative to the manner of closing the war.”\textsuperscript{83}

In response to Jemappes and Auckland’s suggestions, Grenville initiated several measures that amounted to a policy calculated to deter French aggression. First, he issued a statement of support for the Dutch Republic against any French interference in Dutch affairs including both military invasion and political intrigue.\textsuperscript{84} He instituted an Anglo-Dutch ban on grain exports to France in an effort to add material weight to his diplomatic assertion. In addition, he heeded Auckland’s advice to initiate talks with the Austrians and Prussians concerning their war aims.\textsuperscript{85}

Before receiving Grenville’s response, Auckland penned a second letter on 15 November to reiterate his proposals. He described the state of Dutch domestic politics as “critical both from within and from without.”\textsuperscript{86} Internally, the success of French arms led to a revival of the Patriot party and a threat of internal revolution.\textsuperscript{87} Externally, Auckland feared that Dumouriez might show less discretion and respect for neutrality than the government in Paris. The ambassador reiterated his belief that formal recognition of the French Republic and mediation offers to Austria and Prussia offered the best prospect of averting disaster. He added that such negotiations conformed to British neutrality and suggested sending an envoy to Paris to ensure the safety of the royal family.\textsuperscript{88} Upon receipt of Grenville’s letter the following day, Auckland responded with his approval of the measures taken.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{83} Auckland to Grenville, 9 November 1792, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:329.
\textsuperscript{84} “Declaration”, in Debrett, \textit{Collection}, 1:247.
\textsuperscript{85} Grenville to Auckland, 13 November 1792, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:332; Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 410-11.
\textsuperscript{86} Auckland to Grenville, 15 November 1792, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:334.
\textsuperscript{87} Schama, \textit{Patriots and Liberators}, 163-70.
\textsuperscript{88} Auckland to Grenville, 15 November 1792, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:334.
\textsuperscript{89} Auckland to Grenville, 16 November 1792, in ibid., 2:335.
Unlike the other measures adopted in Grenville’s letter of 13 November, the question of offering recognition to Republican France required considerable deliberation within the government. Such recognition constituted a reversal of British policy since the recall of Gower and threatened to alienate Austria and Prussia. Consequently, Grenville requested the king’s opinion on 25 November. Responding the same day, George III expressed reluctance to sanction the behavior of the revolutionaries. He doubted that the German powers would accept British mediation. However, he conceded the necessity of exploring all options for maintaining peace.

The French National Convention’s November Decrees finally shattered hopes for mediation or a sustainable peace between the British monarchy and the French Revolution. The first decree, issued on 16 November 1792, declared the river Scheldt open to navigation and asserted the right of French armies to pursue the Austrians into neutral territory. Both measures compromised the sovereignty and security of the Dutch Republic and openly violated the provisions of earlier treaties. Grenville described the measure as “a concerted plan to drive us to extremities.”

On 19 November, the second decree increased the scope of French antagonism. The National Convention boldly declared its willingness to support any people wishing to reclaim their liberty. This effectively constituted a general statement of support for rebels and revolutionaries throughout Europe. Such a measure threatened both Britain and the United

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92 Ehrman, Reluctant Transition, 206.
93 The 1648 Treaty of Münster established the Dutch right to close the Scheldt River. As noted, the Treaty of Fontainebleau confirmed that right on 8 November 1785. Barnes, George III, 256; Schama, Patriots and Liberators, 156; Jones, Britain and the World, 260; Schroeder, Transformation, 113-17; Rose, Great War, 71-72.
94 Grenville to Auckland, 27 November 1792, in Dropmore, 2:344.
95 The full text may be found in Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860: Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises, 127 Vols. (Paris, 1879-1913), 53:472-74. For an English translation of the relevant text, see Blanning, French Revolutionary Wars, 92.
Provinces. In the latter, William V’s grasp on power remained tenuous, and the simmering discontent of the Patriot movement perpetually threatened to rekindle civil war.\footnote{Auckland to Morton Eden, 7 December 1792, in Auckland, 2:472; Blanning, Origins, 139.} In Britain, domestic unrest partially inspired by the French Revolution made the decrees appear especially malicious. Dissent within Britain grew from several factors; including parliamentary reform, higher food prices as a result of a poor harvest, religious conflict with catholic minorities in Scotland and Ireland, and some of the same social discontent that wracked France.\footnote{Auckland to Morton Eden, 7 December 1792, in ibid., 2:472; Grenville to Buckingham, 7 November 1792, Buckingham to Grenville, 8, 15, and 18 November 1792, Auckland to Grenville, 26 November 1792, and Grenville to Auckland, 27 November 1792, in Dropmore, 2:221, 326, 333, 336, 341, 344; Duffy, “British War Policy,” 3-4; Ehrman, Reluctant Transition, 213-33; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 225.}

On 26 November, Grenville and his colleagues learned of the French decrees. Dumouriez received specific instructions to pursue the Austrians into the Dutch Republic, and a French warship set sail for the Scheldt to accelerate the siege of Antwerp. War seemed certain, and Grenville informed Auckland that further negotiations served only to delay the inevitable breach. Nonetheless, negotiations continued. Grenville demanded explanations for French action from Chauvelin. The Frenchman merely asserted the natural rights of French soldiers to pursue their enemies and of the Belgian people to enjoy the right of navigation on the Scheldt. Pitt engaged in a similar exchange in an unofficial meeting with Hugues-Bernard Maret, a member of the French foreign ministry.\footnote{Maret to Lebrun, 2 December 1792, in Debrett, Collection, 1:252-55.} The British rejected these claims as unacceptable and insisted on the recognition of existing treaties that closed the Scheldt and prevented the passage of French troops through neutral territory.\footnote{Black, British Foreign Policy, 418-19.}

In December, the French changed their policy toward the Dutch to conform to their decree of 19 November. Lebrun altered previous promises not to support a revolution in the Dutch Republic. Instead, he declared that the French would not invade the Netherlands. In
return, he demanded that the British renounce the right to defend the Orangist regime against a Patriot revolution. The concurrent trial of Louis XVI and the radical politics that accompanied it rendered compromise politically untenable for French politicians and diplomats. The French hoped to avoid war with the British while simultaneously asking them to abandon their commitment to support William V against a French-backed revolution.\(^{100}\)

Informal concessions from both parties prevented an immediate escalation to war. The Dutch allowed French ships to pass unmolested up the Scheldt, and the National Convention restrained Dumouriez from violating Dutch neutrality.\(^{101}\) However, renewed French demands for formal diplomatic recognition brought Anglo-French relations back to a point of crisis. For the remainder of December 1792 and into January 1793, Anglo-French relations stalled on the question of official recognition. The French demanded British recognition as a precondition for further negotiations.\(^{102}\) The British flatly rejected this. Grenville countered with his own demand that the French abandon their expansionist policies in the Low Countries and their claim to annul treaties on the basis of arbitrary natural right.\(^{103}\) Despite the breakdown of diplomatic relations, neither side pushed the disputes far enough to draw a declaration of war.\(^{104}\)

Meanwhile, Grenville renewed efforts to build a European consensus on the appropriate response to French aggression. A Russian proposal of 19 December recommended a coalition against France. In response, Grenville sent proposals for armed mediation to Prussia, Spain, the United Provinces, Russia, and Austria on 28 and 29 December. He urged the Dutch and

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\(^{101}\) Fortescue, *British Army*, 4:57.

\(^{102}\) Chauvelin to Grenville, 27 December 1792, in Debrett, *Collection*, 1:256-58.

\(^{103}\) Grenville to Chauvelin, 31 December 1792, in ibid., 1:259-62; Ward and Gooch, *Cambridge History*, 231-33.

Portuguese to mobilize for war to lend these proposals added weight. The Austro-Prussian response on 12 January proved problematic. They declared their intention to restore the French monarchy and seek territorial indemnification. The first objective destroyed all chance of mediation on the basis of recognizing the French Republic. The second, which included a Russo-Prussian partition of Poland and Austria’s Belgium-Bavaria exchange project, conflicted with British continental interests and foreign policy principles. Most significantly, the exchange project threatened to permanently compromise the security of Dutch Republic even as the British prepared to go to war to defend it.

The execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793 constituted a point of no return in the collapse of diplomacy. Louis’s death aroused tremendous anger throughout Britain, and the British government ordered Chauvelin to leave the country by 1 February. Anticipating the onset of war following Chauvelin’s expulsion, George III sent orders for the mobilization of 13,000 Hanoverians to defend the Dutch. The French envoy returned to Paris on 29 January; two days later the outraged National Convention voted unanimously to declare war on Great Britain and the United Provinces. The Convention immediately ordered Dumouriez to attack the Dutch and instructed Dutch Patriots to rise up against the Orangist regime. In this way, war began between the Anglo-Dutch alliance and the French over Dutch sovereignty and security.

In the midst of this diplomatic breach, Dumouriez wrote to Auckland on 23 January to request a conference between the two of them to preserve peace in a mutually beneficial manner. London received word of this overture on 2 February before hearing of the French

105 Grenville to Auckland, 29 December 1792, in Dropmore, 2:361; Ward and Gooch, Cambridge History, 229-31.
107 Grenville to Chauvelin, 24 January 1793, in Debrett, Collection, 1:277.
108 Black, British Foreign Policy, 447-55.
109 Auckland to Grenville, 1 February 1793, in Dropmore, 2:377.
declaration of war, and Grenville sent Auckland instructions to negotiate with the French general. The British held little hope in the preservation of peace, but they hoped to use the conference with Dumouriez to buy time to mobilize for war.\textsuperscript{110} News of the National Convention’s declaration of war truncated this last effort to maintain peace.\textsuperscript{111}

The British commitment to neutrality throughout 1792 successfully averted hostilities until French aggression left no opening for peace. The decrees of 16 and 19 November encapsulate the British casus belli and concerns about Revolutionary France. Fundamentally, the British went to war to protect their national and colonial security interests in the United Provinces and oppose France’s insurrectionary foreign policy.\textsuperscript{112} In the words of Grenville: “This government, adhering to the maxims which it has followed for more than a century, will also never see with indifference, that France shall make herself, either directly or indirectly, sovereign of the Low Countries, or general arbitress of the rights and liberties of Europe.”\textsuperscript{113} As Great Britain entered the conflict, the existing war between France and the Austro-Prussian alliance suggested that the German powers would provide natural partners for the British. However, their stated war aims conflicted with British foreign policy almost as much as France’s aggressive goals. Consequently, the problem of ensuring the security of the Netherlands posed substantial problems that required a combination of diplomatic and military solutions.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} Grenville to Auckland, 3 February 1793, in ibid., 2:377.
\item \textsuperscript{111} George III to Grenville, 9 February 1793, in ibid., 2:378; Black, \textit{British Foreign Policy}, 453.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Blanning, \textit{Origins}, 138, 158; Ward and Gooch, \textit{Cambridge History}, 228.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Grenville to Chauvelin, 31 December 1792, in Cobbett, \textit{Parliamentary History}, 30:255.
\end{itemize}
CHAPTER 4
FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES

Allied defeats in autumn 1792, particularly Jemappes on 6 November, forced British ministers to consider war against France. By the end of November, French conquest of the Austrian Netherlands and aggressive policies toward neutral states, especially the United Provinces, challenged Anglo-Dutch neutrality.\(^1\) Unwilling to accept the National Convention’s November decrees, Pitt and his colleagues confronted the probability of war after spending a decade working for peace. Initial mobilization aimed to deter French aggression rather than defeat French arms. In addition, the government carefully orchestrated the manner of the descent to war to galvanize parliamentary support and public opinion.\(^2\) Nonetheless, the collapse of negotiations and French declaration of war on 1 February caught the British poorly prepared to defend their interests in the Low Countries. Consequently, the British initially pursued a reactive strategy based on available resources and opportunities rather than a considered plan.

British participation in the Flanders campaign originated unintentionally as a reaction to Dumouriez’s invasion of the United Provinces and Dutch pleas for material assistance. Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany hastily embarked for Hellevoetsluis on 25 February with 1,971 men to support the Dutch.\(^3\) Aware of the British army’s weakness, the Cabinet viewed the expedition as a temporary expedient to demonstrate Britain’s commitment to its ally. They

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\(^1\) Specifically, the National Convention’s decrees of 16 and 19 November 1792 asserted the right of French armies to pursue its enemies through neutral territory, opened the Scheldt River, and declared open support for revolutionaries in other states. These decrees violated existing treaties and threatened Anglo-Dutch security in two ways. First, the opening of the Scheldt violated Dutch sovereignty and put France in a position to dominate the Low Countries militarily and economically. Second, support for foreign revolutionaries seemed specifically directed against Britain and the United Provinces as both states suffered from considerable domestic unrest. The Orangists in the United Provinces dealt with a constant threat of a pro-France, Patriot uprising. In Britain, a radical reform movement held the potential to turn violent, particularly with French support. See the second chapter for more detail.

\(^2\) With regard to the nebulous subject of public opinion, this chapter will focus on ministerial perceptions of popular sentiments rather than attempting to ascertain public opinion directly. This approach coincides with the focus on the government’s preparations for war.

\(^3\) Calvert, *Calvert*, 20-22.
hoped to inspire the Dutch to greater exertions until the sufficient mobilization of Dutch resources, the success of Austrian armies farther south, or French acceptance of British terms ended the threat of a French invasion.⁴

Based on their expectation of peace, British ministers had made few plans or preparations for war in 1792. British diplomats initially collected information on the war and the progress of the Revolution as spectators. Notably, British Ambassador to The Hague, Auckland, forwarded a report on the dismal state of French finances to London at Pitt’s request. Although this information later colored Pitt’s opinion of France’s capacity to wage war, it served primarily as economic and not military intelligence at the time.⁵

Throughout the summer of 1792, Auckland proved the most vocal proponent of precautionary measures to prepare for and deter a war with France. He primarily conveyed Dutch concerns to his superiors. The closer proximity of the Dutch to the conflict made them more alert to the dangers of French success. On 29 May, Auckland reported unfavorably on Dutch readiness and relayed Dutch Grand Pensionary Spiegel’s request for the presence of a British squadron. For his part, Spiegel gave orders to increase the Dutch fleet to wartime strength.⁶

Auckland relayed another similar request on 5 June 1792. By his account, the Dutch expressed confidence in their defensive capabilities in the event of a French attack from Dunkirk. Nonetheless, they requested the presence of a British squadron to demonstrate Anglo-Dutch solidarity. They claimed that such a gesture “would have an excellent effect in respect to France, to Austria and Prussia, to the Dutch Patriots, and above all, in respect to the internal cabals

⁵ Auckland to Grenville, 9 January 1792, in *Dropmore*, 2:250.
⁶ Auckland to Grenville, 29 May 1792, in ibid., 2:275.
The ambassador reiterated the request in more measured terms on 15 June. He suggested that the presence of a British squadron would have a positive impact, but commented: “I do not think, however, that the Republic is exposed to any foreign or domestic dangers sufficient to interrupt the general plan and arrangements of our naval service.” The concerns relayed in Auckland’s letters made little impression in London and received only non-committal or overtly negative replies. In this atmosphere of confidence in British neutrality, George III prorogued Parliament on 15 June for the remainder of the summer and autumn.

Dutch military resources offered little reason for confidence in the security of the United Provinces. The States General voted to curb spending on both the army and the navy in 1791. The Dutch Navy possessed approximately seventy ships of varying size, but suffered from a severe lack of organization and leadership. Dutch politics also reduced the effective power of the Dutch army. Although the army officially numbered 43,000 men in 1792, strong Dutch prejudices against the centralization of military power limited the field army to 16,000 men while the rest remained under provincial authority. Through neglect and subordination to financial considerations, Dutch cavalry and artillery deteriorated in both training and equipment.

Austro-Prussian military reverses beginning with Valmy on 20 September 1792 altered the situation. The French capitalized on their initial success by conquering Savoy, Nice, and much of the German Rhineland. This manifestation of French aggression caused considerable concern in London regarding the revolutionaries’ intentions. On 16 October, Pitt wrote to Grenville to discuss the possibility of British intervention. He noted that “the French retaining

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7 Auckland to Grenville, 5 June 1792, in Dropmore, 2:277.
8 Auckland to Grenville, 15 June 1792, in ibid., 2:279.
9 Grenville to Auckland, 21 July 1792, in Auckland, 2:419.
Savoy, or any other acquisition great or small, might be argued to come within the description of
un nouvel ordre de choses.”11 In keeping with British foreign policy of the preceding decade, French disruption of the territorial status quo prompted the first considerations of intervention.

French military success also encouraged malcontents in Britain and the United Provinces.12 Reform societies such as the Friends of the People, the Society for Constitutional Information, and the London Corresponding Society openly celebrated the success of French arms. The flood of émigrés that inundated Britain following the September Massacres further destabilized the country.13 In addition, Catholic unrest in Ireland threatened to erupt into open revolt. To complicate the already tense domestic situation, a rainy harvest season foreshadowed a poor harvest and high food prices.14

As a previous Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, George Nugent-Temple-Grenville, first Marquess of Buckingham, advised his brother, the foreign secretary, that the Irish situation demanded substantial military preparations. On 23 September 1792, he claimed that “there is not a post in Ireland which could hold out for 24 hours, nor is there any precaution which can prevent, at this moment, the Protestants from being driven into the sea from the four corners of Ireland.” To remedy the situation, he recommended an increase of 20,000 men to maintain order.15 Buckingham continued to emphasize these points throughout October and into

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11 Pitt to Grenville, 16 October 1792, in Dropmore, 2:322.
12 Mori, William Pitt, 108.
13 The September Massacres began in response to the Prussian capture of Verdun on 20 August 1792. The fall of Verdun seemed to open the way to Paris, and a general fear of the actualization of the Brunswick Manifesto threw the Parisians into a panic. The revolutionary mob stormed prisons and churches to kill any who might betray the city to the advancing Prussian army. By the time the chaos subsided, 1,400 priests and prisoners had been killed. This atmosphere of mob violence drove many of the remaining priests and nobles to emigrate if they possessed the resources to do so. Oscar Browning, ed., The Despatches of Earl Gower, English Ambassador at Paris from June 1790 to August 1792 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885) 221-35.
15 Buckingham to Grenville, 23 September 1792, in Dropmore, 2:318.
November, emphasizing the detrimental impact of high food prices on the already volatile situation.\textsuperscript{16}

From mid-October to late November 1792, the British maintained vigilance in both domestic and foreign affairs but made few moves to prepare for war. Pitt and Grenville received repeated requests for reassurances both from Auckland and the Dutch ambassador in London. The Dutch ambassador sought a declaration of support to deter French aggression.\textsuperscript{17} In response to the Austrian defeat at Jemappes, Auckland requested a similar declaration as part of a broader effort to preempt hostilities through mediation.\textsuperscript{18} Grenville answered both requests and enclosed a declaration of support for the United Provinces in a dispatch to Auckland on 13 November. In the accompanying letter, Grenville commented: “I trust the declaration to the States will produce its effect both in Holland and in France. If not, we are committed, and must make the best of it.”\textsuperscript{19} Auckland delivered the declaration on 16 November to the relief of the Dutch States General.\textsuperscript{20} Despite ostensible commitment to the defense of the United Provinces, the British trusted to diplomatic deterrence rather than military preparation and continued to anticipate peace.

News of the National Convention’s November Decrees ended realistic hopes for peace. The Cabinet reluctantly confronted a paradox of policy. With less than 14,000 men stationed on the home islands, the British army lacked the strength to meet the obligations that the government’s policies incurred. Continued internal unrest both in the British Isles and in the United Provinces demanded a military presence to maintain order. In a letter to his brother on 25

\textsuperscript{16} Buckingham to Grenville, 7 and 14 October and 9, 15, and 18 November 1792, in Dropmore, 2:320-21, 326, 333, 336.
\textsuperscript{17} Pitt to Grenville, 5-12 November 1792, in ibid., 2:328.
\textsuperscript{18} Auckland to Grenville, 9 and 15 November 1792, in ibid., 2:329
\textsuperscript{19} Grenville to Auckland, 13 November 1792, in ibid., 2:332; Burges to Auckland, 13 November 1792, in Auckland, 2:467.
\textsuperscript{20} “Declaration” and “Answer”, 16 November 1792, in Debrett, Collection, 1:247-48.
November, Grenville acknowledged that “the army, though I trust still steady, is too small to be depended on. We must look to individual exertions, and to the Militia.” In the same letter, he explained the ministry’s plan to summon the militia and supplement it with volunteers “on the first appearance of tumult.”

Buckingham replied with two letters on 27 November commenting on the poor state of the militia and offering several recommendations for strengthening it. The foreign secretary reiterated his resolutions on 29 November. He declared the ministry’s intention to raise the militia within a few days due to “the total inadequacy of our military force to the necessary exertions.”

George III expressed similar sentiments in a letter to Grenville on 26 November 1792. Despite dire reports from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the king denied requests to send additional troops to Ireland. He consented to the augmentation of existing forces in Ireland, but refused to divert troops from England in the midst of domestic unrest and the threat of war with France.

To enhance Britain’s military position, the ministry initiated several tentative mobilization measures. For the navy, it raised the number of seamen from 16,000 to 20,000, mobilized the thirteen guardships, and offered a bounty to recruit sailors. With regard to the army, recruiting orders on 17 November began the process of bringing its skeletal regiments up to full strength.

Concurrently, Grenville and Auckland exchanged a series of letters concerning the United Provinces. On 26 November 1792, Grenville wrote to Auckland to describe the

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21 Grenville to Buckingham, 25 November 1792, in Court and Cabinets, 2:228.
22 Buckingham to Grenville, 27 November 1792, in Dropmore, 2:344-46.
23 Grenville to Buckingham, 29 November 1792, in Court and Cabinets, 2:230.
24 George III to Grenville, 26 November 1792, in Dropmore, 2:341.
25 The British maintained several ships of the line in commission with minimal crews during peacetime to quickly augment the navy in the event of war. Impressment quickly provided the necessary manpower to man these ships and augment the regular fleet. Blanning, Origins, 141.
26 Mori, William Pitt, 126.
government’s position. He explained that the Cabinet ministers believed the French sought war. The foreign secretary also emphasized the importance of entering the war defensively to secure public support: “A very few days must now probably decide this question, and we feel very unwilling to afford anything like a pretext which could diminish the strong impression to be expected here from so unprovoked an attack.” Grenville went on to request any Dutch intelligence on French naval activity out of Brest. He downplayed the danger of internal unrest in Britain and expressed concern about the sufficiency of British naval supplies.27 The following day, Grenville penned a short addendum to inform Auckland of the decree of 16 November. The foreign secretary reiterated his belief that the French hoped to drive the British and Dutch to war.28

Also on 26 November 1792, Auckland wrote Grenville to express his views on the situation and offer advice:

I conceive that we have four principal objects of attention.
1. To keep down disturbances and sedition in the interior.
2. To make some respectable naval preparation, accompanied by the most explicit, unequivocal declarations of our disposition to peace, and of our resolution, at the same time, to repel and chastise all unjust provocations.
3. To ascertain whether there are any possible means to effectuate a pacification, and to use every effort for that purpose.
4. To bring the minds of His Majesty’s subjects of every class to a serious reflection on the blessings which they are risking in pursuit of a bubble.

Auckland emphasized the importance of peace for maintaining internal stability within both the Dutch Republic and Britain. To underscore the danger of domestic upheaval in the Netherlands, he enclosed an intercepted dispatch detailing Dumouriez’s connection with the Patriots. However, he also advised military preparations both to deter French aggression and to respond

27 Grenville to Auckland, 26 November 1792, in Dropmore, 2:341.
28 Grenville to Auckland, 27 November 1792, in ibid., 2:344.
effectively in the event of war. For Auckland, armed Anglo-Dutch mediation represented the best possible outcome of the continental crisis. He renewed calls on 2 December for a British squadron to impress France as well as domestic radicals.

On 1 December, the government mobilized “two-thirds of all the Militias of the counties on the east coast from Scotland to London, which, together with Cumberland, Westmoreland and Kent, give us a strength of about 5,100 men.” Legally, the administration could take this measure only in response to rebellion, insurrection, or invasion. In addition, raising the militia with Parliament in recess required it to reconvene within fourteen days. As Parliament stood prorogued until 3 January 1793, this ministerial measure prompted an emergency meeting.

In his speech to Parliament on 13 December, the king ascribed the calling of the militia to a fear of insurrection. The king’s speech precipitated considerable debate on the legality of the Cabinet’s actions. In both the House of Lords and the House of Commons, members of the opposition denied the existence of an insurrection. They accused the government of summoning the militia illegally to prepare for war with France. Grenville defended the government’s actions in the House of Lords, and Home Secretary Henry Dundas defended them in the House of Commons. Both men emphasized the danger posed by French-supported radical reformers in Britain. They alluded to the decrees of 16 and 19 November as evidence of French determination to pursue a revolutionary foreign policy. Although the government enjoyed general support in both houses, neither Grenville nor Dundas explicitly identified the supposed insurrection for which they called the militia.

29 Auckland to Grenville, 26 November 1792, in Dropmore, 2:341.
30 Auckland to Grenville, 3 December 1792, in ibid., 2:350.
31 Grenville to Buckingham, 1 December 1792, in Court and Cabinets, 2:231.
32 Mori, William Pitt, 123, 129.
33 “Proclamation for calling out the Militia, and assembling the Parliament”, in Debrett, Collection, 1:389.
The specific justification for this mobilization remains contested. Fearing an insurrection in Scotland, Dundas requested additional troops to maintain order there on 24 November. In addition, agitation by Catholics and French-supported radicals in Ireland continued to alarm the government.\(^{35}\) In contrast, the opposition identified widespread loyalist agitation as proof against the government’s fears.\(^{36}\) Fundamentally, Pitt’s administration preempted any insurrectionary activity with vigorous action. Two pieces of legislation support the notion that the government feared French subversion more than native radicalism. Ministers discussed the possible suspension of *habeas corpus*, a measure largely directed against domestic malcontents, but abandoned the idea by 16 December 1793. In contrast, the Alien Act passed on 15 December aimed to bring the substantial émigré population under control and limit French espionage.\(^{37}\)

The opposition’s accusation that the supposed insurrections served as a cloak for warlike preparations gains credibility from Grenville’s letters. The foreign secretary’s aforementioned correspondence with his brother and with Auckland reveals an expectation of war with France. In addition, he acknowledged the inadequacy of the British army for meeting the twin challenges of internal and external security. Any expansion of the army required parliamentary consent. However, with Parliament prorogued, the administration lacked the means to obtain its approval. The act of summoning the militia provided the only means for the Cabinet to force Parliament to reconvene.\(^{38}\) After the legislature gathered, the ministry quickly proposed new army estimates.

The debate on these estimates as well as on a royal request for an augmentation of the army continued until 1 February 1793.\textsuperscript{39}

After raising the militia, Grenville expressed renewed confidence to Auckland in a letter of 4 December 1792. He contended that the French relied on their revolutionary foreign policy to render Britain and the United Provinces impotent through internal dissent. He asserted the importance of firm resistance to dispel any illusions of the effectiveness of this policy.

Regarding “the comparative state of our preparations with those of France,” he professed that “our confidence on that head is very great indeed.” The foreign secretary presumed victory in the battle for public opinion, asserting that “every hour’s exertion gives vigor to people’s minds, which were dispirited while nothing was apparently done; and I trust that the meeting of Parliament, on which all depends, will be very satisfactory.”\textsuperscript{40} The rise of loyalist associations in reaction to Francophile radicals gave Grenville good cause for optimism. Pitt’s administration benefitted from pro-government petitions from these organizations and garnered broad public support through moderate official statements. The government encouraged but did not generate such loyalty. By relying on spontaneous expressions of loyalty, the ministry successfully fought revolutionary diplomacy with British patriotism.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39} Cobbett, \textit{Parliamentary History}, 30:170-337.


\textsuperscript{41} Founded 20 November 1792 at the Crown and Anchor Tavern by John Reeves, the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Levellers and Republicans constitutes one of the most prominent examples of these loyalist associations. For more information on popular loyalist agitation, see the following sources. Mori, \textit{William Pitt}, 129, 133; Michael Duffy, “William Pitt and the Origins of the Loyalist Association...
The Cabinet took a more overt measure to prepare for war with France on 5 December by mobilizing “the Militias of the maritime counties from Kent to Cornwall, inclusive, and those of Berks, Bucks, Herts, and Surrey.” Writing his brother to alert him of this decision, Grenville provided significant insight into the government’s motivation:

The reason of the addition is partly the increasing prospect of hostilities with France, and partly the motives stated in your letter. Our object at first was to limit the number, in order not to give too great an alarm. The spirit of the people is evidently rising, and I trust that we shall have energy enough in the country to enable the Government to assert its true situation in Europe and to maintain its dignity.

In this letter, Grenville conveyed an overriding concern to engage in war with France only with certain public support. The Ochakov affair of 1791 demonstrated the dangers and ultimate impossibility of embarking on a militant foreign policy without sufficient popular support. By assembling the militia in stages, the administration avoided public panic. Such a forceful demonstration also diminished the influence of radical reform groups. The consequent assembly of Parliament allowed the government to proceed with transparency in its efforts to avoid war.

As part of this effort, the administration published unrecognized French Ambassador Bernard-François marquis de Chauvelin’s inflammatory correspondence with Grenville. Four days later, the king requested an augmentation of the British military. To gain support for the government, these measures ensured that the public perceived the war as essentially defensive.


42 Grenville to Buckingham, 5 December 1792, in Court and Cabinets, 2:232.
43 Ibid. In the letter to which Grenville refers, Buckingham recommended additional mobilization to prevent mobs from gaining access to militia armories. Buckingham to Grenville, 2 December 1792, in Dropmore, 2:348.
44 Despite objections from the ever-antagonistic Charles James Fox, the ministry enjoyed overwhelming support in both houses including “the most respectable part of Opposition.” Spencer to Auckland, 18 December 1792, in Auckland, 2:474; Black, Parliament and Foreign Policy, 127-28.
45 Buckingham to Grenville, 20 January 1793, in Dropmore, 2:369.
In this manner, Grenville hoped to preclude a repetition of the Ochakov failure in the developing crisis in the Low Countries.46

As the Cabinet took steps to strengthen its hand for war with France, Auckland maintained an apprehensive vigil at The Hague. Along with the news that the government summoned the militia, he relayed a report of the Dutch situation to his brother, Morton Eden, on 7 December.47 According to Auckland, the Patriots posed a considerable threat. Nonetheless, he remained optimistic about Stadtholder William V’s ability to retain power. He believed the Patriots too weak to overthrow the government without the direct support of an invading French army. Auckland also alluded to Dutch preparations and noted additional British efforts to mobilize and strengthen the Royal Navy through bounties for new sailors.48 In a letter to Grenville the following day, he declared that “we are here at the height of our crisis; but I have hopes that it will end well. The English example and weight have saved us.”49

On 18 December, Grenville wrote to Auckland expressing a mixture of hope and fear regarding the Anglo-Dutch situation:

Nothing can exceed the good dispositions of this country in the present moment. The change within the last three weeks is little less than miraculous. God grant that it may last long enough to enable us to act with that vigor which can alone preserve us. If this disposition flags, and the country relapses into indifferrence or fear, we shall still be municipalized; but if we can maintain the present spirit, it will enable us to talk to France in the tone which British Ministers ought to use under such circumstances as the present, and to crush the seditious disposition here. Everything now depends on vigorous preparations in Holland, and even what cannot be done in fact should be done in appearance. If things come to extremities, the land forces of the Republic will, as it seems to me, be most miserably deficient, and it is the part in which we can least help her. I should be sorry that the whole reliance should be on Prussia.50

46 For a discussion of the parliamentary and public dimensions of British foreign policy in full, see Black, Debating Foreign Policy and Black, Parliament and Foreign Policy.
47 Morton Eden served as the British Ambassador to Prussia at this time.
48 Auckland to Morton Eden, 7 December 1792, in Auckland, 2:472.
49 Auckland to Grenville, 8 December 1792, in Dropmore, 2:353.
50 Grenville to Auckland, 18 December 1792, in ibid., 2:359.
The foreign secretary continued to hope for peace, but anticipated war. He recognized that his ability to take a firm stand in foreign policy depended entirely on popular support. Based on reports from internal contacts, Grenville believed that the government retained the loyalty of the people.\textsuperscript{51} Even thus supported, he acknowledged Britain’s inability to provide the Dutch with substantial support on land. This British deficiency placed the burden of defense on questionable Dutch military preparedness.

Grenville also tentatively acknowledged Prussian support in compliance with the terms of the Triple Alliance as an option. His reluctance to place greater hope in Prussian activity stemmed from the weakness of the Triple Alliance after Ochakov and Prussia’s preoccupation with Poland and the Rhine theater. He made no mention of Austria as no treaty then in effect bound Vienna to defend the United Provinces. Spiegel requested assistance from the Prussians in accord with the Triple Alliance and received vague promises of Prussian reinforcements.\textsuperscript{52}

As the New Year approached, British politicians expressed misplaced confidence in their country’s readiness for war. In the Commons, Charles James Fox opposed the anticipated war with France on moral rather than material grounds. In defending the ministry’s actions, Dundas expressed the belief that Britain’s superior economic strength would guarantee success in war. Parliament debated the army estimates on 24 December, but the discussion stalled on questions regarding the king’s prerogative to dismiss officers at will. The legislators dropped the subject until the king requested an augmentation of forces one month later.\textsuperscript{53}

Dutch preparations dominated ministerial concerns after Christmas 1792. On 27 December, the Cabinet resolved to send a small squadron to the Dutch port of Vlissingen.

\textsuperscript{51} Craysfort to Grenville, 10 December 1792, in Dropmore, 2:354.
\textsuperscript{52} Spiegel to Rhede, 24 December 1792, in Brieven en Negotiatien van Mr. L. P. Van de Spiegel, Als Raadpensionaris van Holland, 4 Vols. (Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1803), 1:1.
\textsuperscript{53} Cobbett, Parliamentary History, 30:170-238.
(Flushing) at the mouth of the Scheldt River. They placed this squadron under Auckland’s authority. The commander also received instructions to ascertain the extent of the French threat and return any unnecessary ships to the Downs. Grenville relayed this information to Auckland in a letter dated 29 December. He lamented the minimal Dutch military preparations and emphasized the desirability of returning the ships to England quickly. To this subtle exhortation to prod the United Provinces into activity, Grenville added an even more serious concern about Dutch intentions:

From some means of information I suspect that it enters into the head of some of the Dutch Ministers that England can be made the principal in this war, and Holland the ally, furnishing her contingent and carrying on her commerce with France. The extravagance of such an idea can only be equaled by its want of all good faith. You will, of course, not hint that you have any such suspicion, but you will endeavor soon and explicitly to bring it to its point. The Government here could not stand the reproach of such dupery; and if there is such an idea, the sooner we wash our hands of it the better; and Holland will then last as a country about three weeks more.

Grenville fully intended to honor Britain’s commitment to its Dutch ally, but he insisted that the Dutch Republic accept its share of the responsibility for its own defense. On 2 January 1793, Auckland dispelled Grenville’s fears of Dutch duplicity and asserted that “they are fully sensible that these Provinces would be the great object of attack; and, in truth, as far as their crippled means go, honorably and zealously disposed.”

Grenville emphasized Dutch responsibility in another letter to Auckland on 1 January 1793. He explained that Whitehall intended to follow the Dutch lead in responding to French infractions of Dutch sovereignty vis-à-vis the Scheldt River. That same day, the foreign secretary wrote a second letter to Auckland labeled “private and secret” to address the issue of

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54 The squadron included the fifty-gun *H. M. S. Assistance* as well as two frigates from the Downs and several smaller ships. Cabinet Minute, 27 December 1792, in Aspinall, *Later Correspondence*, 1:634.
55 Grenville to Auckland, 29 December 1792, in *Dropmore*, 2:361.
56 Auckland to Grenville, 2 January 1793, in ibid., 2:362.
57 Grenville to Auckland, 1 January 1793, in ibid.
public support. He explained the ministry’s intention to present its evidence of plotted
insurrections to a secret parliamentary committee. Grenville requested that Auckland send any
information that might assist in this endeavor. He hoped to provide this committee with enough
information to convince them to back the government’s claim of revolutionary fomentation
throughout the country. Grenville placed importance on the support of such a committee as a
means to rally the public behind the government in the event of war.58

Grenville and Auckland continued to correspond on the state of Dutch preparedness
throughout January 1793. On 5 January, the foreign secretary reiterated his request for any
Dutch intelligence on the French navy. He also asked for a report on Dutch forces in the West
Indies and suggested that East Indian shipping begin sailing in convoys.59 Prior to receiving this
request, Auckland inadvertently answered the question in a letter on 6 January. The ambassador
sent his letter with the newly appointed Dutch governor of Demerary, who embarked for his post
by way of London. Auckland claimed that the appointee possessed extensive knowledge of the
Dutch situation in the West Indies and would provide the Cabinet useful intelligence.60

Auckland offered greater elaboration on the Dutch situation on 11 January 1793. He
remained optimistic about the strength of the Stadtholder’s government. Auckland continued to
hope for armed mediation rather than war, but acknowledged the increasing likelihood of
hostilities. With regard to Dutch readiness for war, he wrote:

It is possible that the war may become inevitable, or at least clearly expedient, and yet
that the time of commencing it may in some degree depend on us. If such a predicament
should take place I think it highly eligible, so far as the safety of this Republic is in
question, to postpone the explosion till the Austrian and Prussian reinforcements are
advanced to this side of the Rhine, and till the fermentations in Brabant are more ripened.

58 “Private and Secret,” Grenville to Auckland, 1 January 1793, in Dropmore, 2:362.
59 Grenville to Auckland, 5 January 1793, in ibid.
60 Auckland to Grenville, 6 January 1793, in ibid., 2:364.
In the meantime this Republic would be better prepared, probably as to the disposition of the interior, but certainly as to naval and military preparations, than she is at present.  

Despite his ostensible optimism, Auckland strongly recommended delaying hostilities. He recognized that the Dutch lacked sufficient strength to repel the French without substantial support from the Austrians and Prussians. On 15 January, Grenville replied with an exhortation to urge the Dutch to greater activity. He asserted that public support for a war to defend the United Provinces depended entirely on Dutch willingness to take responsibility for their own defense.  

On the same day, Auckland wrote of his laborious efforts to rouse the Dutch admiralty without substantial success.  

Subsequent letters indicate a deterioration of patience amid an increasingly stressful situation. On 21 January, Auckland criticized the withdrawal of the British squadron from Vlissingen. He acknowledged the military prudence of such a measure, but complained of the negative impression it produced in the Netherlands. On the following day, before receiving Auckland’s letter, Grenville wrote to the ambassador with equal frustration: “I am almost tired of harping on the same string of urging the Dutch Government to energy and exertion.” Grenville declared that the Dutch could only rely on their own resources in the event of a French invasion. Austrian and Prussian armies provided the only other prospects of relief, yet they remained beyond the Anglo-Dutch alliance’s authority to direct. The Dutch slowly recruited more men to fill the ranks of their small army and expressed doubts about the promised Prussian reinforcements.  

The foreign secretary expressed hope of an eventual understanding with the

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61 Auckland to Grenville, 11 January 1793, in Dropmore, 2:365.  
62 Grenville to Auckland, 15 January 1793, in ibid., 2:366.  
63 Auckland to Grenville, 15 January 1793, in ibid., 2:367.  
64 The king approved this measure on 13 January 1793. George III to Chatham, 13 January 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:642; Auckland to Grenville, 21 January 1793, in Dropmore, 2:370; Spiegel to Rhede, 14 January 1793, in Brieven en Negotiatien, 1:33.  
65 Spiegel to Nagell, 15 January 1793 and Spiegel to Rhede, 27 January 1793, in Brieven en Negotiatien, 1:38, 45.
Austrians, underscoring the lack of such an understanding at the time. Significantly, Grenville made no mention of a future British expedition as a possible asset.66

The execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793 increased the prospect of an Anglo-French war over the United Provinces from likely to inevitable. After receiving news of the execution on 23 January, the British government resolved to expel Chauvelin.67 On 24 January, Grenville conveyed a royal order to this effect to Chauvelin who left the following day.68 Grenville also wrote Auckland: “The business is now brought to its crisis, and I imagine that the next dispatch to you… will announce the commencement of hostilities.”69

Even before the death of the French king, George III took steps to bolster the Anglo-Dutch alliance’s continental resources as a reaction to the mounting French threat. On 19 January 1793, he expressed his intention to place his second son, the Duke of York, at the head of foreign troops under British command.70 In a letter to Pitt on 24 January, the king indicated that 13,155 Hanoverians would constitute these foreign troops. With regard to mobilization, he explained that they would march for the front eight weeks after receiving orders.71 Notably, the administration viewed this force as a temporary means of ensuring the security of the United Provinces. After meeting this objective, they hoped to redeploy it to some other theater.72

Meanwhile, Auckland continued to frantically assemble the resources available to him to respond to the anticipated French advance. On 25 January, he relayed Spiegel’s request for British troops. He attempted to render the request more palatable to the Cabinet by suggesting that such forces would be used for garrisons to free Dutch soldiers for front-line duty. Notably,

66 Grenville to Auckland, 22 January 1793, in Dropmore, 2:371.
68 Grenville to Chauvelin and Chauvelin to Grenville, 24 January 1793, in Debrett, Collection, 1:277-78.
69 Grenville, to Auckland, 24 January 1793, in Dropmore, 2:372.
70 York to George III, 19 January 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 1:645.
72 Mori, William Pitt, 145.
this first mention of deploying the British army on the continent came from The Hague rather than from London.73

On 29 January, Auckland requested a definitive statement of British policy regarding the precipitation of war. Evidently uncertain of the government’s stance, Auckland proposed several possibilities ranging from a British declaration of war to diplomatic silence and indefinite delay. He expressed his opinion, shared by the Dutch, that the continued postponement of war in favor of armed mediation remained the ideal policy. During the first week of February, Grenville and Auckland exchanged letters on a proposed peace conference with Dumouriez and the possibility of imposing armed mediation instead of resorting to war. Grenville expressed little hope in the conference but emphasized its importance in providing the Dutch with as long of a reprieve as possible. Auckland agreed and reiterated the hope that the discussions might produce a general European peace congress under Anglo-Dutch armed mediation.74

News of the French declaration of war on 9 February 1793 truncated the Dumouriez peace initiative as the National Convention ordered him to attack the United Provinces.75 This decision forced the British to transform preparations aimed at deterrence to a plan of campaign. Regardless, the British remained poorly equipped to fight a major European opponent. The eighty-one infantry battalions at London’s disposal remained under strength and widely dispersed. Nineteen battalions secured the Caribbean against the slave unrest engulfing neighboring French islands.76 Nine battalions guarded British interests in India, while Gibraltar, North America, and Ireland absorbed twenty-five. The remaining twenty-eight stood with the

73 Auckland to Grenville, 25 January 1793, in Dropmore, 2:374.
74 Auckland to Grenville, 29 January and 1 and 5 February 1793 and Grenville to Auckland, 3 February 1793, in ibid., 2:375, 377.
75 “Decree of War against Britain,” 1 February 1793, Debrett, Collection, 1:111.
76 The French Revolutionaries granted equal rights to blacks early in 1791, precipitating chaos in the French West Indies. An attempt to rescind the measure later in the year failed, and racial equality became law in April 1792. These conflicting messages from Paris led to racial warfare on many of the French islands. This prompted many French planters to flee to Jamaica and petition the British for asylum and the means to reclaim their plantations.
Guards and Cavalry on the island of Britain. Although supported by the militia and the recruitment efforts of November and December 1792, these battalions remained severely under strength. The outbreak of war prompted a more concerted effort to increase the army by 25,000 men beginning 11 February 1793. Yet persistent British refusal to institute conscription guaranteed sluggish recruitment. At the start of war, the British regular forces available for service on the continent numbered only 17,344 infantry and 3,730 artillerymen.

Conversely, the Royal Navy boasted approximately 18,000 seamen and 113 ships of the line in addition to smaller craft in 1792. Of that number, twenty-five ships of the line and fifty frigates remained in British home waters, while over twenty more ships of the line patrolled the Mediterranean. In January 1793, Parliament passed a measure to recruit an additional 9,000 men to bring the navy to a war footing. After receiving the French declaration of war, the government further increased the naval establishment to a total of 45,000 seamen on paper in February. This considerable force far exceeded France’s twenty-eight ships of the line and fifty-three frigates.

The British entered the conflict without a plan for defeating France. Given the weakness of the British army, the lack of continental support, and the superiority of British maritime resources, the Cabinet chose to pursue a predominantly naval strategy. Pitt believed that French financial weaknesses indicated a short and victorious war for Britain. Consequently,

78 Ibid., 4:938.
83 The Master General of the Ordinance, Charles Lennox, Duke of Richmond, submitted a “Plan for Internal Defence” to Pitt on 8 February 1793. This plan detailed the ideal response to a hostile landing in southern England and constituted the first concrete British operational plan of the War of the First Coalition. Ehrman, *Reluctant Transition*, 261.
Initial plans focused on using the Royal Navy to interdict French commerce and accelerate a financial collapse. In addition, Dundas mobilized British resources in the Caribbean to seize the French sugar islands. With this action, Dundas hoped to strike at France economically, bolster British finances, and gain diplomatic bargaining chips for subsequent negotiations. While this suited British resources, it failed to solve the more immediate problem of protecting the Low Countries from French expansion.

On the continent, Auckland organized the defense of the Netherlands against Dumouriez’s impending offensive. Despite his efforts throughout the preceding months, local resources remained insufficient. Dutch resolutions on 6 and 21 February raised the official strength of the Dutch army from 43,000 to 65,000 men. However, recruitment proceeded sluggishly, and effective Dutch strength remained substantially lower. From December 1792 to February 1793, Spiegel received repeated reports from the Dutch provincial governments complaining of inadequate defenses.

Auckland begged Grenville for reinforcements in successive letters on 14 and 15 February 1793. The ambassador’s Dutch colleagues harshly criticized the absence of tangible British assistance. On 14 February, he noted with concern:

Though I have no doubt that it was right to send back all our ships from Vlissingen, and though I can easily understand that it would be difficult and inexpedient for us to furnish even one or two English battalions, I ought not to conceal from you that it is a subject of doleful complaint to our friends, and of malignant triumph to our adversaries in this country, to say and to write that in this moment of extreme crisis, England leaves the Republic without a guinea, a soldier, or a ship, to get out of the scrape as well as she can! I have received some provoking remonstrances [sic] on this subject, to which it would not

84 Dundas acted partially in response to advice from French planter émigrés who had fled to Britain from the slave revolts on the French sugar islands. On 10 February he sent orders to Barbados for an attack on Tobago, and on 28 February he added instructions to assault Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and Mariegalante. Duffy, “British War Policy,” 8-9; Fortescue, British Army, 4:74-79; Mori, William Pitt, 146-47.
85 Auckland to Spencer, 19 February 1793, in Auckland, 2:499-500; Auckland to Grenville, 4 March 1793, in Dropmore, 2:382-83.
87 Some of these reports are contained in Brieven en Negociatien, 1:71-95.
be difficult to give answers. It is, however, a truth that the Republic may be considered at
least as an immense magazine including provisions, military chest, *et cetera*, and that the
success of the enemy against her would be of the most fatal consequence to the war. My
hopes, however, are better than they were; we are at last awakened. We have no news
from Dumouriez, either civil or military.⁸⁸

The next day, after a lengthy description of his needs, Auckland wrote:

> Men, commanders, ships, and money! We could not ask for more if this country were a
> part of Yorkshire; but I incline to think that it should be considered as such for the
> present; and if it is brought to a question whether we are to conquer it and to keep it, or
> whether Dumouriez is to do it, I have no doubt as to the decision; and it is under this
> principle that I suggest all I have here stated; and such farther measures as may suggest
> themselves to your Lordship and to His Majesty’s Ministers will, I trust, proceed on this
> idea.⁹⁹

Alone, the Dutch stood little chance of surviving the French attack. Moreover, the Dutch
faced the possibility of a French-supported revolution without adequate support from their ally.⁹⁰

The presence of Dutch Patriots with the French armies raised the disconcerting possibility that
substantial portions of the population might welcome the invaders as liberators. In his letters,
Auckland asserted the necessity of immediate military support to inspire the Dutch to greater
resistance against both internal and external threats.⁹¹ Unlike the Stadtholder’s government, Pitt
and his fellow ministers entered the war with France confident of public support. The ministry’s
careful political and diplomatic maneuvers since November demonstrated to the public their
commitment to peace.⁹² As a result, the government carried both Houses with ease in the
parliamentary debates regarding the augmentation of British forces and the French declaration of
war in early February.⁹³

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⁸⁸ Auckland to Grenville, 14 February 1793, in *Dropmore*, 2:379.
⁹⁹ Auckland to Grenville, 15 February 1793, in ibid., 2:380.
⁹¹ Auckland to Eden, 7 December 1792, in *Auckland*, 2:472-73; Auckland to Grenville, 8 December 1792, 25
January and 28 February 1793, in *Dropmore*, 2:353, 374, 381; Spiegel to Rhede, 18 February 1793, in *Brieven en
⁹² Storer to Auckland, 19 February 1793, in *Auckland*, 2:497.
⁹³ Dundas reported the divided state of the opposition to the king on 20 January 1793. By his account, Fox
commanded only forty-four votes, while thirty adhered to the pro-government Duke of Portland and thirty more
On 17 February 1793, Dumouriez invaded the United Provinces. He simultaneously declared friendship to the Dutch people and hostility to the House of Orange. Three days later, the British government heeded Auckland’s advice and ordered three Guard battalions to ready themselves for embarkation. That same day, Grenville informed the ambassador of these measures. He also emphasized their role as both auxiliary and temporary. Traditionally, British continental expeditions required previous agreements with European allies regarding the ends and means of fighting the war. The urgency of the Dutch situation forced Pitt’s administration to depart from this tradition. Uncomfortable with the expedition from the start, the Cabinet clearly stated its temporary nature and restricted its movement to within one day’s march of its port of disembarkation, Hellevoetsluis.

George III instructed the Duke of York to proceed to the continent on 24 February. On 25 February, the expeditionary force of 1,971 men marched to Greenwich amid great fanfare under the observation of the royal family. Commanded by General Gerard Lake, the battalions embarked on nine transports. Although the soldiers and the crowd demonstrated great enthusiasm, the small force lacked sufficient supplies or strength to make any significant military contribution to the defense of the Netherlands.

remained “doubtful.” Dundas to George III 20 January 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 1:646; Cobbett, Parliamentary History, 30:270-460.
94 “Dumouriez’s Manifesto to the Dutch,” 17 February 1793, in Debrett, Collection, 1:120.
95 “Return of his Majesty’s Hanoverian Forces taken into British Pay,” 22 February 1793, in ibid., 1:33; George III to Pitt, 20 February 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:9.
96 Grenville to Auckland, 20 February 1793, in Dropmore, 2:380.
97 Ehrman, Reluctant Transition, 263-64; York to George III, 28 February 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:10.
98 George III to Grenville, 24 February 1793, in Dropmore, 2:381; and Grenville to George III, 24 February 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:9.
99 Calvert, Calvert, 20.
100 By all accounts, the expedition exhibited patriotic élan. Sir Gilbert Elliot, first Earl of Minto wrote in his journal, “I got up at half after five yesterday morning to see the three battalions of Guards march off to Greenwich, where they embarked for Holland…. They were all animated by a spirit natural on the occasion, not to mention spirits of a different sort, of which they had more than one could wish…. On the whole, however, their zeal and eagerness to go on service, which does not promise to be child’s play, was very striking. The regret and dejection of those who were
Having boarded the transports on 25 February 1793, the soldiers waited two days at anchor for the fleet to be ready to sail. On 28 February, the convoy sailed at noon under the protection of two frigates. During their voyage, Dumouriez took Klundert on 25 February and Breda two days later. True to Auckland’s fears, the French gained substantial military supplies from the weakly defended Dutch fortresses, including 160 guns at Breda.

After a brief interval at anchor on the night of 28 February 1793, the British convoy reached Hellevoetsluis on the evening of 1 March. On 2 March, disembarkation began with the officers; it concluded on 5 March with the last of the rank and file. As the guards disembarked, Dumouriez continued his advance. He left detachments to besiege Bergen op Zoom, Steenbergen, Willemstad, and Geertruidenberg while the main army marched toward Moerdijk and Gorinchem. Geertruidenberg fell on 4 March; the French captured several boats to aid them in the often amphibious nature of warfare in the Low Countries.

The Duke of York arrived ahead of the guards and began assisting Auckland in marshalling the Dutch defenses. Largely unaware of the state or extent of Dutch military left was no less so. I saw myself a recruit… beg very hard to go… Two men stole down to Greenwich, and were detected in smuggling themselves into one of the transports; and I believe by mere dint of entreaty, and even by crying, when they were found out, they obtained the Duke of York’s leave to go…. The Grenadiers, when they began their march, sang ‘God save the King!’ of their own accord…. It is impossible to be more hearty in a war, or more satisfied of its necessity than the people here seem to be.” An anonymous officer poetically described a similar scene with a patriotic crowd providing drinks for the soldiers and the whole mass cheering their monarch. Minto, Minto, 2:118-20; Calvert, Calvert, 22-23; Anonymous, An Accurate and Impartial Narrative of the War by an Officer of the Guards (London: Cadell and Davies, 1796), 2-3.

The Royal Navy lacked ready designated transports to move the Guards and their nominal supplies, so the battalions boarded what spare craft the navy could muster. General Lake’s memoirs refer to the boats as colliers and to the passage to Holland as severely uncomfortable. Calvert also describes the poor state of the transports and noted the expedition’s lack of food and medical supplies. Hugh Pearse, Memoir of the Life and Military Services of Viscount Lake: Baron Lake of Delhi and Laswaree, 1744-1808 (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1908), 71; Calvert, Calvert, 23.

York to George III, 2 March 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:12.
Calvert, Calvert, 21-2.
Ibid., 16.

Sources disagree on the date of the York’s arrival. The dating of Auckland’s letters in the Dropmore Manuscripts places him in the United Provinces on 25 February, while the dating of the duke’s own letters in Aspinall’s collection suggests 27 February. This discrepancy appears to be a matter of editorial error. Given other demonstrable errors in the dating of letters in the Dropmore Manuscripts, this author prefers Aspinall’s chronology.
resources, the Cabinet necessarily left the defense in the hands of Auckland and York. On the morning of 28 February, York and Auckland held a conference with the Stadtholder and a Dutch admiral to determine the best means of halting the French advance, underscoring the absence of any existing plan. They determined the necessity of maintaining a strong naval presence in the Waal River and the Hollands Diep from Gorinchem to Hellevoetsluis. The Dutch spread twenty gunboats throughout this area as well as a frigate in the water near Willemstad to prevent the French from crossing to the north bank. They requested additional British ships to strengthen the naval cordon and particularly to guard Moerdijk. Lacking the authority to grant this wish directly, York forwarded the message to London.

With regard to the British troops, they decided to use one battalion to garrison Hellevoetsluis and another for the neighboring town of Brielle. The Dutch initially suggested placing the third battalion at Willemstad, but York refused. The fall of Breda and Klundert made Willemstad the next logical target for Dumouriez, and York’s instructions required him to avoid such a direct commitment if possible. William V proposed Dordrecht as a safer alternative on the north bank of the Waal. York consented on the condition that the Dutch provide for overland communications and a plan of evacuation in the event of French success.

On 4 March 1793, the 3rd Guards Regiment disembarked and marched for Brielle while the Coldstream Guards took their positions at Hellevoetsluis. On 5 March, the 1st Guards Regiment re-embarked on smaller transports to sail to Dordrecht. French artillery in the vicinity of Willemstad forced them to complete their journey on foot, and they arrived late that evening.

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Auckland to Grenville, 28 February 1793, in Dropmore, 2:381; York to George III, 27 February 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:10.
106 York to George III, 28 February 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:10; Grenville to Auckland, 1 March 1793, in Dropmore, 2:382.
107 Spiegel to Nagell, 19 February 1793, in Brieven en Negotiatien, 1:128-29.
108 York to George III, 28 February 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:10.
These battalions relieved the Dutch garrisons at each of the three towns, allowing them to join
the field army at Gorinchem.

Dutch military activity failed to impress the British soldiers who arrived to assist them.

On 2 March 1793, as he attempted to coordinate British forces with the Dutch defenses, York
complained:

> From the very great alarm in which every person except Admiral Kinsbergen appears to
be, and the little knowledge they appear to have themselves of the state in which they are,
and of the means to assist themselves out of that situation, makes me hesitate in putting
that confidence in what they say which I otherwise ought to do. It is hardly to be
believed that I have not as yet been able to find out from any one person how many
troops there are really fit for service in this country and how many can be got together in
order to repel any attack which may be made immediately.¹⁰⁹

Captain Harry Calvert observed indifference in the population of Hellevoetsluis despite the
presence of a major Dutch fleet and the sound of French guns at Willemstad. He found
Dordrecht little better and complained of an uncooperative population. These impressions and
the swift surrender of Breda seemed to indicate widespread ambivalence or hostility toward
William V and his British allies.¹¹⁰ Robert Brown, a corporal in the Coldstream Guards
expressed a better opinion of the Dutch, describing them as clean, kind, and generous. However,
he made little note of their military preparations.¹¹¹

In response to Grenville’s request for information on 1 March 1793, Auckland reported
an improvement in the military situation on 4 March. He explained that Austrian successes
combined with the arrival of British forces substantially boosted Dutch morale. Spiegel
substantiates this claim in a letter to the Dutch ambassador to Prussia on 5 March. He describes
the situation as critical but not hopeless and ascribes his optimism to the presence of British

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troops and rumors of Austrian victories near Maastricht. Auckland felt sufficiently confident
to express the hope that the danger would soon pass allowing British forces to leave. As Spiegel
applauded British forces, Auckland wrote a second letter to praise the Duke of York: “I have
never yet taken occasion to acknowledge in a private letter how much I have really been aided by
the cordiality, zeal, and good judgment of the Duke of York, during the eight days that he has
been here; he has enabled me to do more than I was able to accomplish in the eight preceding
weeks.” Grenville replied on 8 March with enthusiastic praise for Auckland that reflected their
belief that the gravest danger had passed.

Calvert also noted Austrian successes in his journal on 8 March 1793. At Jemappes,
Dumouriez had shattered the thin Austrian cordon in Belgium, forcing them to retreat to
Maastricht. A French detachment besieged Maastricht, while Dumouriez invaded the Dutch
Republic and the Austrian army regrouped. In 1792, the Belgian theater had been secondary to
the main Austro-Prussian offensive from Coblenz. During the winter, the Austrians shifted their
focus to the task of recovering Belgium. The Austrian army of approximately 20,000 men that
Dumouriez drove out of Belgium in November 1792 received substantial reinforcements and a
new commander. With a fresh army of 70,000 men, this commander, Field Marshal, Prince
Frederick Josias of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, attacked and defeated the French on 1 March 1793 at
Aldenhoven and subsequently forced them to lift the siege of Maastricht.

In a letter to his sister on 11 March 1793, Calvert suggested that the collapse of the
French right would render Dumouriez’s position in the United Provinces untenable. As the
Austrian revival threatened the east flank of the French offensive, the Anglo-Dutch defense

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112 Spiegel to Rhede, 5 March 1793, in Brieven en Negotiatien, 1:210-12.
113 Auckland to Grenville, 4 and 5 March 1793, and Grenville to Auckland, 8 March 1793, in Dropmore, 2:382-83.
114 Gunther Rothenberg, Napoleon's Great Adversaries: The Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army, 1792-1814
stiffened. On 6 March, York reported a noticeable increase in Dutch organization and vigor. William V consolidated Dutch military efforts by establishing unity of command in both the army and the navy. He placed Admiral Jan Hendrik van Kinsbergen in command of all Dutch ships in local waters, and he appointed his eldest son, William Frederick, Hereditary Prince of Orange, as overall commander of the Dutch army. The stadtholder’s younger son, Prince Frederick of Orange, held a subordinate command of about 3,000 Dutch soldiers at Gorinchem. Together, Kinsbergen and the Hereditary Prince of Orange received authority to defend the country by any means necessary. Although Calvert continued to harbor a low opinion of the Dutch, he acknowledged a growing energy in their defensive preparations.\(^{115}\)

As the tide turned, the Cabinet dispatched three more regiments to assist in the defense as well as additional naval support.\textsuperscript{116} On 13 March 1793, Auckland wrote to Grenville to report the end of the French offensive. He lamented the anticipated fall of Willemstad but asserted that the French would advance no further. Additionally, Auckland exhorted both the Austro-Prussian forces and his own government to press the French. With regard to British operations, he recommended an advance toward the Belgian port of Oostende and from there to Dunkirk.\textsuperscript{117}

Auckland’s suggestion marks a subtle turning point in the British participation in the Flanders campaign. The British faced the question of whether to withdraw their forces in the wake of a successful defense or to commit them to an offensive in conjunction with the Dutch, Prussians, and Austrians. Calvert reflected this uncertainty in a letter to his uncle on 17 March: “What is the general opinion in England in regard to our destination? Are we to guard the Dutch frontiers, or to join the allies, and drive the French out of Brabant; and in that case are we to push the war to French Flanders, or on the evacuation of the Dutch provinces, is the object of our expedition completed?”\textsuperscript{118}

To make the dilemma more striking, five days after suggesting an attack on Oostende and Dunkirk, Auckland delivered an address to the States General of the United Provinces declaring the British expedition no longer necessary. As such, he requested permission from the Dutch States General to send back British military forces. The Dutch had closed their ports as a security measure, not allowing any ships to enter or leave. Not wishing to lose their British reinforcements, the States General replied in the negative on the grounds that the French retained

\textsuperscript{116} Specifically, the 14\textsuperscript{th}, 37\textsuperscript{th}, and 53\textsuperscript{rd} Regiments of Foot. The recruitment efforts of 11 February 1793 brought these regiments up to full strength through an infusion of raw, untrained men. George III to York and Pitt to George III, 7 March 1793, in Aspinall, \textit{Later Correspondence}, 2:17; Fortescue, \textit{British Army}, 4:80-81.

\textsuperscript{117} Auckland to Grenville, 13 March 1793, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:384.

\textsuperscript{118} H. Calvert to J. Calvert, 17 March 1793, in \textit{Calvert}, 29.
two fortresses in Dutch territory. On 20 March, with the defense successful and lacking relevant instructions, Auckland wrote to Grenville again on the question of strategy. He professed ignorance of official policy and reiterated his recommendation for a coastal campaign from Antwerp to Dunkirk.

During this time, from 5 March to 1 April 1793, the British expedition remained stationary in the garrisons of Hellevoetsluis, Brielle, and Dordrecht. As intended, Dutch forces repelled the French near Gorinchem and withstood the siege of Willemstad while British troops occupied safer interior posts. Consequently, March remained uneventful for the British contingent with one notable exception at Willemstad. After conveying York to the United Provinces, the HMS *Syren*, a thirty-two gun frigate, remained in the Hollands Diep opposite Willemstad to prevent the French from attacking the city by sea. Before dawn on 15 March, forty-five men under the command of Lieutenant John Western took three gunboats to execute a diversion to relieve the garrison of Willemstad. Under the cover of night and fog, the three boats surprised a French battery with such heavy fire that the besiegers abandoned their guns. The British seamen landed in Willemstad in time to see a Dutch detachment retrieve the abandoned French guns. Although praised for his daring action of 15 March, Western’s initiative resulted in his death on 21 March. He attempted a similar attack on another French battery near Moerdijk with less success, becoming the first British officer killed in the war. Western’s comrades lamented his death, and, on 24 March, York had his body buried at Dordrecht with full military honors and a marble monument.

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119 “Memorial of his Excellency Lord Auckland to their High Mightinesses,” 18 March 1793 and “Reply of Their High Mightinesses,” 20 March 1793, in Debrett, *Collection*, 1:298-301.
120 Auckland to Grenville, 20 March 1793, in *Dropmore*, 2:386.
121 Calvert describes Western’s attack as a sortie from the boats by which the party “spiked the guns, and returned into the town without the loss of a man either killed or wounded, having killed thirty of the enemy, and taken nine prisoners: the officer who commanded the French refused to take quarter, which was offered to him.” Other sources either describe the attack in purely naval terms or omit it altogether. Calvert, *Calvert*, 29-33; William James, *The
Ultimately, the renewed Austrian offensive forced the French to withdraw from the United Provinces. Taking advantage of the slow Austrian advance, Dumouriez withdrew his main force from the United Provinces and concentrated against Coburg further south. The two armies met at the Battle of Neerwinden on 18 March 1793. This arduous Austrian victory broke Dumouriez’s capacity to resist their advance. After an unsuccessful attempt to stand at Louvain on 22 March, the French general negotiated an armistice with Coburg. The Austrian field marshal allowed Dumouriez to withdraw all French forces unmolested out of the Austrian Netherlands. In addition, the convention between the two commanders included an agreement whereby Dumouriez would lead his army to Paris to restore the monarchy. In return, the opposing armies would halt at the French frontier and receive the fortress of Condé as compensation.

Throughout this campaign, Coburg continuously corresponded with the Duke of York and Prince William of Orange in an attempt to direct their operations. Although George III respected Coburg as a military leader, he disapproved of this treatment of Anglo-Dutch forces. He observed to Pitt:

It is easy to see that the Prince of Coburg, though deserving every commendation for the activity and ability of his military conduct, is not void of negotiating qualities, and that, though it is impossible he should not be apprized that no concert as yet exists between this country and the two great German Courts on the best mode of repelling the French, yet he keeps calling both on the Duke of York and the Dutch as if he was empowered to call for unlimited assistance, and also states his own situation as much more perilous than can be the real fact.

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122 Calvert, Calvert, 48; Fortescue, British Army, 4:66-68.
123 “Report of Captain Crawfurd,” April 1793, in Dropmore, 2:390; Fortescue, British Army, 4:68.
Despite his dispute of form, George III fundamentally agreed with Coburg’s plans. He issued orders for the Anglo-Dutch forces to advance to Antwerp by way of Bergen op Zoom and from there to Dunkirk if possible to harass the French retreat. Letters from Pitt to Grenville on 30 March and 1 April indicate a much greater interest in West Indian expeditions and descents on the coast of France. With regard to the British expedition, Pitt suggested:

This, with the first column of the Hanoverians and perhaps of the Hessians (with such Dutch forces as can be spared) might, I think, probably be of great use, till the time the Austrian forces are fully collected. It might be employed to occupy Dunkirk and keep open a communication with the sea for stores and provisions, and, at the same time, in other respects facilitate the Austrian operations. Our further preparations would be proceeding in the meantime, and the Hanoverian and Hessian forces arriving, and, by the time our force is considerable enough to strike a blow in some other part of France, we may hope that the Austrians will be in strength sufficient to proceed without us.

Pitt continued to view the Flanders expedition as little more than a temporary expedient to ensure the security of the United Provinces.

In response to the negotiations with Dumouriez and the uncertainty surrounding the plans of each party with armies in the Low Countries, Coburg invited representatives from each army to a conference at Antwerp on 7 April 1793. Auckland forwarded this invitation to London on 31 March. Grenville relayed the king’s approval and specific instructions to the ambassador on 3 April. The foreign secretary noted that “the two leading points are the general plan of future operations, and the advantages to which the powers at war may respectively look.” With regard to the former point, Grenville favored the coastal plan of operations for British forces. With regard to the latter, he urged Auckland to oppose any Belgium-Bavaria exchange and recommend the annexation of French Flanders instead.

125 George III to Grenville, 29 March 1793, in Dropmore, 2:387; York to George III, 31 March 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:24; Mori, William Pitt, 148.
126 Pitt to Grenville, 30 March and 1 April 1793, in Dropmore, 2:388.
127 Auckland to Grenville, 31 March 1793, in Auckland, 3:3.
128 Grenville to Auckland, 3 April 1793, in ibid., 3:4.
The conference at Antwerp would mark a significant turning point in British operations in Flanders. Previously, George III and his Cabinet merely reacted to developments in the Low Countries. Throughout 1792, the government prepared for armed mediation and deterrence rather than a continental war. Even after the French declaration of war, the Cabinet hoped to achieve victory through economic warfare conducted at sea and in the colonies. The initial dispatch of British troops to the continent arose not from any prior plan, but rather from the desperate Dutch pleas for assistance. Small and unprepared for sustained operations, the expedition nevertheless demonstrated Britain’s commitment to its ally. Although it achieved little militarily, the expedition bolstered Dutch morale and brought Britain into close contact with the German powers. After arriving in the Low Countries, the British troops under the Duke of York reacted to French attacks and Dutch needs until the Austrian victory at Neerwinden removed the immediate threat. On 7 April 1793, Auckland and the Duke of York met with their Dutch, Austrian, and Prussian counterparts at Antwerp to develop a collective plan for future operations and regain the initiative.
CHAPTER 5

“SUPPOSED NECESSITY”

Two weeks after arriving at Hellevoetsluis, the British expedition to Flanders achieved its objectives. Austrian commander Prince Josias of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld’s victories over the French commanded by General Charles François Dumouriez at Neerwinden and Louvain on 18 and 22 March 1793 heralded the Austrian army’s triumphant return to Belgium. The corresponding French withdrawal ended the threat to the United Provinces and with it the purpose of the British army in the Low Countries. At the time of the expedition’s departure, Whitehall fully intended to withdraw it after the danger passed.¹ However, ongoing negotiations with the Austrians regarding the post-war settlement drew the British into more extensive operations in Flanders during 1793.²

Throughout March, Coburg corresponded with the commanders of the British and Dutch armies, Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany, and Prince William Frederick of Orange, respectively.³ The absence of any official agreement between London and Vienna on operations or indemnities rendered military cooperation in the Low Countries problematic. Neither York nor the British ambassador to The Hague, Lord Auckland, possessed the authority to commit British forces to an Austrian-led offensive. The British government refused to allow its army to fight for the German powers as long as their war remained distinct from the Anglo-Dutch war with France. For Whitehall, military coordination required diplomatic cooperation. To overcome these difficulties and address the opportunity presented by Dumouriez’s defection,

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¹ Pitt to Grenville, 30 March and 1 April 1793, in Dropmore, 2:388-89.
² Report of Captain Craufurd, April 1793, in ibid., 2:390; Rothenberg, Adversaries, 34-37.
³ The similar names of the male members of the Dutch royal family at this time often provide a source of confusion. This text will follow the naming conventions of the British primary sources and refer to Stadtholder William V, Prince of Orange, as William V or the Stadtholder; to William V’s eldest son, Prince William Frederick of Orange, as Prince William, the Hereditary Prince of Orange, or just the Prince of Orange; and to William V’s youngest son, Prince William George Frederick of Orange, as Prince Frederick. Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany will remain the Duke of York.
Coburg invited his British, Dutch, and Prussian colleagues to a conference at Antwerp scheduled for 7 April 1793.\textsuperscript{4} With the approval of their superiors, Auckland and York proceeded to the conference with the hope of transforming two separate wars fought by separate alliances into a single war fought by a unified coalition.

The Antwerp conference provided the British with an opportunity to fulfill their diplomatic objective of reaching an understanding with the German powers on the purpose of the war. Beginning with British Foreign Secretary William Wyndham Grenville’s approaches in mid-November 1792, the British sought an open discussion of intentions with Austria and Prussia. Grenville renewed his requests for explanations of intent on 28 and 29 December 1792. These overtures centered on British efforts to end the war through Anglo-Dutch armed mediation.

The Austro-Prussian response on 12 January 1793 ended realistic hopes of mediation and presented the British with a foreign policy paradox. On that day, the Austrian and Prussian envoys in London jointly declared their intention to restore the Bourbon monarchy to France and obtain indemnification for their efforts. Austro-Prussian insistence on a Bourbon restoration precluded negotiations with the French Revolutionaries. More troublingly, the desire for indemnities conflicted with British foreign policy objectives. Frederick William II of Prussia sought compensation in a second partition of Poland with Russia. Holy Roman Emperor Francis II of Austria proposed to exchange the troublesome and distant Austrian Netherlands for Bavaria. The British condemned the partition of an unoffending power like Poland on moral and commercial grounds. They also opposed the execution of the Belgium-Bavaria exchange for

\textsuperscript{4} The idea for this conference may have actually originated with Auckland. On 6 April 1793, he wrote to his secretary, Lord Henry Spencer, “A correspondence which took place some time ago between the Prince of Coburg and me has produced the proposition on his part of a conference at Anvers [Antwerp], which is to begin to-morrow evening.” Auckland to Spencer, 6 April 1793, in Auckland, 2:504.
strategic reasons. Austrian possession of Belgium established a barrier between the Low Countries and French ambitions. Conversely, Belgium in the hands of a minor prince presented no obstacle either to French arms or French influence. Paradoxically, the British found themselves militarily dependent on an Austro-Prussian alliance that fought for objectives they found unacceptable.5

Russia and Prussia quickly demonstrated the futility of opposing the Second Partition of Poland. On 14 January 1793, Prussian troops crossed the Polish border to occupy Frederick William’s share of the spoils. Nine days later, Russia and Prussia signed a guarantee of the new boundaries established in the partition. The British Cabinet recognized the fait accompli and promptly muted their protests. Although the British found the partition repugnant, it hardly threatened vital national security interests. As such, the administration conveyed nominal disapproval and expressed hope that minor disputes in the east would not preclude cooperation in the west against France.6

In contrast to the Second Partition of Poland, the Belgium-Bavaria exchange undermined primary British foreign policy imperatives. Grenville immediately sought to avert the exchange by any means necessary. On 27 January 1793, he learned that the Austrians hoped to gain Bavarian support by including the fortresses of Lille and Valenciennes from French Flanders in the exchange. Grenville embraced this idea and on 5 February proposed a variation of it to the Austrian ambassador to London, Johann Philipp, Count of Stadion-Warthausen. Grenville suggested that rather than cede the border fortresses of French Flanders to the Elector of Bavaria,

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5 Duffy, “British War Policy,” 4-6.

Austria should keep them as its indemnification for the war. This alternative compensation promised to reduce the vulnerability of the Austrian Netherlands and further entrench the Habsburgs in the region, theoretically satisfying both London and Vienna.7

Grenville’s opposition to the exchange combined with friction between the German allies contributed to political upheaval in Vienna. On October 25 1792, Frederick William II issued the Verbal Note of Merle to an Austrian delegation at Prussian Headquarters near Luxembourg. In the note, the king stated his intention to reduce Prussia’s commitment to the war with France to that of an Austrian auxiliary rather than a principle belligerent. In addition, he asserted that Prussia would execute the planned partition of Poland as compensation for its continued participation. In return, he guaranteed Prussian support for Austria’s exchange project in the future.8 The Austrians perceived the Verbal Note of Merle as little short of outright betrayal. Consequently, it weakened the foreign ministry of Johann Philipp, Count of Cobenzl, and Anton Spielmann. Cobenzl and Spielmann had risen to prominence with the Austro-Prussian rapprochement of 1791 as supporters of a Prussian alignment. The Verbal Note of Merle marked the apparent failure of a pro-Prussian policy.9

British resistance to the exchange staggered the already reeling Cobenzl ministry and prompted an Austrian political conference to resolve Vienna’s foreign policy crisis. In the conference, Cobenzl’s policies faced severe criticism. Many argued that Bavaria offered less economic value than the Austrian Netherlands and provided only superficial strategic benefits. In addition, the opposing ministers observed that the pursuit of the exchange left Prussia and Russia free to expand in the east. Cobenzl, as yet unaware of the Russo-Prussian fait accompli,

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7 Duffy, “British War Policy,” 17-18; Roider, Thugut, 103.
8 For the full text of the note, see Alfred von Vivenot and Heinrich von Zeissberg, eds., Quellen zur Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserpolitik Oesterreichs während der Französischen Revolutionskriege, 1790-1801, 5 Vols. (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1874), 2:292-93.
9 Schroeder, Transformation, 105-20.
asserted that the Prussians and Russians would only act with Austrian consent. He also expressed confidence in his ability to persuade the British to accept the exchange. Ultimately, the conference resulted in a resolution to seek a British alliance without abandoning the exchange.10

The weakened Austrian foreign ministry coasted until 23 March 1793. That day, the Russian and Prussian envoys jointly announced the Second Partition of Poland, dealing the final blow to Cobenzl’s policy. Cobenzl weakly attempted to justify himself, but Francis II recognized the need for a change.11 In the ensuing reorganization of the Austrian chancellery on 27 March, Cobenzl found himself in an Italian administrative post and Spielmann became a secondary Austrian delegate to the Imperial Diet at Regensburg.12 In Cobenzl’s place, Francis appointed an experienced diplomat, Franz Maria, Baron Thugut. Thugut represented a return to a more traditional Austrian foreign policy. He opposed the Prussian connection and showed no enthusiasm for the Belgium-Bavaria exchange. Thugut also expressed willingness to abandon the exchange to secure a British alliance. However, Austria’s search for adequate territorial compensations to counter the Second Partition of Poland dominated Thugut’s foreign policy. His rise to prominence ended Austrian reticence to pursue closer relations with the British. The April conference at Antwerp provided the first opportunity for negotiations in accordance with this new direction.13

On 31 March 1793, Auckland sent Captain William Bentinck to London with Coburg’s invitation and a letter for Grenville. In the letter, Auckland requested instructions regarding the proposed conference. He addressed the uncertain speed and reliability of communications by

10 Thugut’s Mémoire, 18 March 1793, in Vivenot, Quellen, 2:504-7; Roider, Thugut, 100-104.
11 P. Cobenzl to Francis, 23 March 1793, in Vivenot, Quellen, 2:507-16.
12 Francis II to P. Cobenzl and Francis II to Spielmann, March 1793, in ibid., 2:541-42.
13 Thugut’s Mémoire and Francis II to Thugut, March 1793, in ibid., 2:498-501, 544; Roider, Thugut, 105-25; Schroeder, Transformation, 121-25.
declaring his intent to attend the conference in the absence of official instructions. Grenville transmitted this information to George III who provided authorization for Auckland and the Duke of York to attend the conference and to advance the British army into the Austrian Netherlands. On 3 April, Grenville outlined British policy in his instructions to Auckland:

The two leading points are the general plan of future operations, and the advantages to which the powers at war may respectively look. The view which is entertained here on both those points leads His Majesty to wish strongly that the idea of proceeding without delay to the siege of Valenciennes and Lille may be adopted. Your Excellency is apprised of the decided preference with which his Majesty would see the plan of indemnification on the side of Flanders adopted by the Court of Vienna rather than the exchange of Bavaria; and besides the political reasons which would render the success of the former plan more desirable to this country than that of the latter, it is sufficiently evident that our military operations can much more easily be adapted to a combination with those of the Austrians in Flanders than elsewhere. You are therefore in all your conversations to point at the great advantage of the Austrians, looking to the acquisition of a new barrier in the Netherlands, rather than to the exchange of those provinces for Bavaria; a measure which by creating a dependent and weak power on the frontier of France, would so materially increase instead of diminishing her weight in the general scale of Europe.

With regard to operations, Grenville conveyed the king’s willingness for British forces to advance toward Dunkirk to bolster the right flank of the Austrian army. He insisted on more extensive negotiations to determine a precise plan of operations. The foreign secretary also refused to allow British or Hanoverian troops to serve under foreign command until London and Vienna reached a concrete agreement on operations and indemnities.

Auckland left The Hague for Antwerp on 6 April 1793 while York made the shorter trek from the British army’s encampment at Bergen op Zoom on 7 April. On the evening of 7 April, the British representatives joined their counterparts from the other armies. Prince William and the Grand Pensionary, Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel, represented the Dutch. The Austrian

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14 Coburg determined the necessity of such a conference on 29 March 1793. Auckland to Grenville, 31 March 1793, in Auckland, 3:3.
15 Grenville to George III, 3 April 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:25.
16 Grenville to Auckland, 3 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:5.
minister in Belgium, Count Franz Metternich, and the Austrian ambassador to The Hague, Count Louis Starhemberg, represented Vienna, while Coburg and his chief of staff, Karl Mack von Leiberich, represented the Austrian forces in the region. Field Marshal Alexander Friedrich von Knoblesdorff and Prussian ambassador to The Hague, Count Christoph von Keller, attended the conference as Prussian observers without negotiating authority.

Initial discussions at the conference addressed Dumouriez’s defection and the appropriate response. The French general had met with Coburg on 4 April 1793 to arrange terms by which he would turn his army on Paris and declare for constitutional monarchy. Their meeting prompted Coburg to issue a declaration the following day detailing his support for Dumouriez and the Constitution of 1791. Coburg’s declaration also renounced all possibility of conquering French territory as indemnities. Despite this, Dumouriez’s army refused to follow him except for approximately 2,000 combined infantry and cavalry.

Immediately upon Auckland’s arrival, Starhemberg privately showed him Coburg’s declaration and indicated its inconsistency with Austria’s official policy. During the conference, the delegates voiced unanimous opposition to the declaration and insisted on the need of a new document to retract the first and more accurately state the intentions of the attending states. Mack attempted to defend his commander’s action, arguing that Dumouriez provided the best chance to restore order in France. Although he predicted a lengthy and difficult campaign of conquest, his arguments made little impression on the diplomats. Metternich drafted the new statement and presented it to the conference on the evening of 8 April

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17 Franz Metternich was the father of the more famous Prince Klemens Wenzel Metternich.
18 Auckland to Grenville, 8 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:10; Sybel, French Revolution, 2:462.
19 “Proclamation of Prince the Marshal de Saxe-Coburg, General in Chief of the Armies of His Majesty the Emperor, to the French,” 5 April 1793, in Debrett, Collection, 1:140.
20 Sybel, French Revolution, 2:459-60.
21 Auckland to Grenville, 8 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:10.
22 Debrett, Collection, 1:141.
to general approbation.\textsuperscript{23} The new declaration, issued the following day, allowed Coburg to retract his previous statement with dignity.\textsuperscript{24}

With regard to operations, the delegates agreed on a preliminary plan subject to future negotiations. With the main Austro-Prussian army, Coburg planned to besiege the fortresses of French Flanders, including Condé, Valenciennes, Maubeuge, and Lille. Concurrently, the Duke of York and Prince of Orange agreed to station the Anglo-Dutch army on Coburg’s right flank. They planned to deploy half of their troops in a cordon from the Belgian port of Oostende to Veurne along the coast and from Veurne to Menen just north of Lille. The other half of the Anglo-Dutch army would remain in reserve for deployment as the situation developed.

The conference failed to resolve the question of indemnities. Auckland emphasized the importance of retaining the fortresses of French Flanders to improve the security of the Austrian Netherlands. He found Starhemberg and Metternich receptive to this assertion. Although non-committal on account of the ministerial changes in Vienna, they both expressed personal distaste for the exchange and preferred the expansion of the Austrian Netherlands. They also noted that the Bavarian elector would likely accept the exchange only if it included the border fortresses in question. Leaving the fate of the fortresses ambiguous, the Austrian and British delegates at least agreed on the necessity of conquering them.\textsuperscript{25}

In addition to questions of Austrian indemnification, Auckland and the Prince of Orange both indicated that their respective governments sought compensation for their contributions to the war. Auckland remained vague on the projected British indemnity, but he freely discussed the options for Dutch compensation with Metternich. He suggested cessions of territory from the

\textsuperscript{23} Sybel, \textit{French Revolution}, 2:463.
\textsuperscript{24} “Proclamation of Prince the Marshal de Saxe-Coburg, General in Chief of the Armies of His Majesty the Emperor and the Empire, to the French,” 9 April 1793, in Debrett, \textit{Collection}, 1:142.
\textsuperscript{25} Auckland to Grenville, 9 April 1793, in \textit{Auckland}, 3:12.
Austrian Netherlands near Antwerp or Maastricht. The question of a Dutch indemnity never received a satisfactory resolution and continued to sour relations between the two alliances throughout 1793. Notably, the British secured Austrian consent to the manner of conquering Dunkirk. The delegates agreed that York would command the siege of Dunkirk in the name of George III at such time as the campaign allowed. Although the British disavowed intentions of retaining the city, they insisted on a direct British occupation to ensure that they retained influence over the ultimate peace settlement in the Low Countries.

Following the conference, the generals returned to their armies and the diplomats to their posts. At The Hague, Auckland continued to discuss Anglo-Austrian operations and indemnities with Starhemberg. He also corresponded with the Governor-General of the Austrian Netherlands, Count Florimond Claude Mercy-Argenteau, on the subject. Mercy sought the vigorous prosecution of the campaign and the cultivation of good understanding between London and Vienna. Although appointed to go to London to negotiate an official convention between Austria and Britain on the war, Mercy’s duties in Belgium continually delayed his departure. Meanwhile, Grenville continued his discussions with Stadion in London while Auckland’s younger brother, Sir Morton Eden, represented British interests in Vienna. These communications produced little immediate effect as the ministerial changes in Vienna left Austrian policy in a state of uncertainty.  

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26 Auckland to Grenville, 9 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:12; Sybel, French Revolution, 2:463-64; Fortescue, British Army, 4:88. The insistence on an indemnity likely stemmed from Pitt or Dundas; Grenville expressed a decidedly negative opinion of the subject: “I tremble for the moment when we come to discuss that tender point of indemnities.” Grenville to St. Helens, 13 April 1793, in Dropmore, 2:392.  
27 York to George III, 31 August 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:82-84.  
28 Bentinck to Auckland, 10 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:15.  
30 “It is much to be regretted that there is not some person at the Austrian headquarters, on the part of that government, sufficiently informed of the system and views of the Combined Powers to give advice on the several new incidents, which are rather political than military.” Auckland to Grenville, 16 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:19.
negotiate a definitive arrangement with Britain, rendering Grenville’s talks with Stadion virtually meaningless.  

Concurrently, the British Guards advanced from Bergen op Zoom to Antwerp on 9 April 1793 to join York and the three regiments of line infantry sent to reinforce them. Captain Harry Calvert of the Guards observed that the quality of these regiments reflected the hasty recruitment that filled their ranks: “We remarked with concern that the recruits they had lately received were in general totally unfit for service, and inadequate to the fatigues of a campaign, being mostly either old men, or quite boys, extremely weak and short.” York offered a more politically prudent assessment. He described the recruits as “infinitely better than I expected” without specifying what he had expected. Rather than criticize the lot, he singled out the recruits of the 14th Regiment: “I should have thought them perfect pigmees [sic] if I had not seen afterwards some of the French at Antwerp to whom they were quite giants.”

This assortment of British troops marched toward Brugge on 13 April 1793 with Hanoverian auxiliaries trailing and Hessian reinforcements mustering at Hesse-Kassel. British forces reached Gent on 14 April to the joy of the local population. Captain Calvert and Corporal Robert Brown of the Coldstream Guards both reported the generous hospitality of the people of Gent. The army halted for one day before resuming its advance to Brugge by way of a canal. Brown reported substantial discomfort during the journey on account of snow and cramped conditions, but the army received some compensation in the form of another warm welcome at Brugge.

31 Grenville to Auckland, 16 April 1793, in ibid., 3:23.
32 Calvert, Calvert, 52.
33 York to George III, 12 April 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:27.
34 “Treaty between his Britannic Majesty and the Landgrave of Hesse Cassel,” in Debrett, Collection, 1:5-10.
35 Brown, Impartial Journal, 11; Calvert to his sister, 17 April 1793, Calvert, 56.
On 19 April 1793, Sir James Murray, the Duke of York’s adjutant-general, brought the royal commander fresh instructions from London. Whitehall empowered him to cooperate with Coburg but not take orders from him or place any British troops under foreign command. The instructions established Dunkirk as the British expedition’s primary objective. Henry Dundas, serving simultaneously as Home Secretary and War Secretary, justified this directive as a means to secure public support for the war:

The security of the Netherlands as a barrier to the ambition of France, and a frontier to the United Provinces, is a motive for acting so well understood by all thinking men, it may be felt and stated as truly a British interest. But you are well aware that there exists in this country many strong prejudices against continental wars; and, with many, a strong prepossession against the strength of this country being directed in any other channel than that of naval operations. It is extremely essential to meet those prejudices on as strong grounds as possible. The early capture of Dunkirk would operate most essentially in that point of view, and the expedition successfully conducted, under the command of a prince of the blood, would give much éclat to the commencement of the war. I trust, therefore, to your own discretion to enforce this topic with all your power in every conference on the subject; and by that and every other argument, to urge the Prince of Coburg to make the capture of Dunkirk one of the earliest objects of the campaign.36

Dundas viewed the campaign primarily through the lens of domestic politics. He recognized the importance of continued British participation for ensuring that Austria retained Belgium. However, the uncertainty surrounding Austrian intentions made a British commitment to a continental campaign politically dangerous. The ministry feared a major backlash in Parliament if the Cabinet committed British troops that assisted the Austrians with the Belgium-Bavaria exchange. Dunkirk provided the expedition with a politically defensible objective regardless of changes in Austrian policy.37

Citing this same letter from Dundas to Murray, Fortescue accuses the British ministers of designating the Flanders expedition as “an electioneering campaign, not a military one.” If, as Fortescue asserts, the Cabinet cared more for securing public support than winning the war in

36 Dundas to Murray, 16 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:23.
37 Fortescue, British Army, 4:89.
Flanders, the decision to maintain and reinforce an army engaged in an unpopular continental campaign seems odd. For the sake of public approval, the same resources could have been employed to strengthen naval and colonial assets. Dundas recognized the diplomatic importance of the Flanders campaign in maintaining an Austrian presence in the region. His letter simply reflects his concerns as the Home Secretary. Within the Cabinet, Dundas advised the other ministers on domestic issues; his letter to Murray reflects the intersection of domestic concerns with the campaign and not the entirety of British policy. Grenville and Auckland placed considerably less emphasis on Dunkirk and instead focused on using the campaign to influence Austria. The Duke of York and Murray concerned themselves with the immediate military problems. Ultimately, the British campaign served a combination of political, diplomatic, and military purposes, and each minister offered advice based on his sphere of authority.38

While at Brugge, Murray and York determined that the British expedition lacked the strength to assault Dunkirk.39 Consequently, they detached the feeble 37th and 53rd Regiments to hold Brugge and Oostende while the rest of the army marched south to assist Coburg with the siege of Condé.40 In this manner, York hoped “to take the attention of the enemy from Dunkirk” and influence them to divert reinforcements farther south.41 The army reached Tielt on 19 April and Kortrijk (Courtrai) the next day. On 23 April, they marched to Tournai. Two days later, York deposited his 14th Regiment at Tournai while the rest of his army joined the Coalition cordon at the neighboring village of Orcq. There, the British halted to guard Coburg’s right flank while awaiting reinforcements. These began to arrive with York’s younger brother, Prince

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38 Although Fortescue remains the standard work on the campaign, Michael Duffy and Jennifer Mori have correctly revised his assessment of Dundas’s intentions. Duffy, “A Particular Service,” 532; Fortescue, Four Lectures, 39; Mori, William Pitt, 153.
39 They likely arrived at this decision based on the intelligence obtained from a captured resident of Dunkirk referenced in a letter from the Duke of York to Grenville of 19 April 1793. York to Grenville, 19 April 1793, in Dropmore, 2:393; Fortescue, British Army, 4:89.
40 H. Calvert to J. Calvert, 16 April 1793, in Calvert, 67.
41 York to George III, 19 April 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:29.
Ernest Augustus, on 29 and 30 April while the Austrian and Prussian forces on the British left skirmished with the French at Maulde and Saint-Amand-les-Eaux.42

The union of the Austrian and British armies in late April mirrored a concurrent diplomatic convergence. On 14 April 1793, Thugut wrote to Mercy to indicate his willingness to abandon the exchange in favor of an expansion of the Austrian Netherlands. However, he argued that if the British wanted Austria to take French Flanders instead of Bavaria, they must help Coburg conquer it.43 The Austrians presented this to the British in more measured terms. Through Mercy and Stadion, they offered to temporarily renounce the exchange in return for either substantial British military assistance to conquer French Flanders or British diplomatic support for compensation from Poland.44 The British reacted poorly to this apparent haggling. Auckland accused the Austrians of relying “too much on the supposed necessity of our proceeding in the operations against France, without further explanation, and in whatever may best suit their present and future views.”45

Nonetheless, the Austrians demonstrated an interest in pursuing a British alliance and willingness to compromise on the form of indemnification for the war. The demands in these negotiations reflected the fundamental difference between the two wars that Thugut and Grenville sought to merge into one. For Thugut, the Austrian war remained essentially a struggle to maintain the balance of power in Eastern Europe. The Second Partition of Poland left Austria without compensation to balance the gains of its rivals. As such, Thugut insisted that Austria obtain equal compensation to maintain the balance of power.46 In contrast, the British

42 York to George III, 30 April and 3 May 1793, and Ernest to George III, 3 May 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:34-35; Auckland to Grenville, 6 May 1793, in Auckland, 3:54.
43 Roider, Thugut, 125-26.
45 Auckland to Grenville, 29 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:39.
46 Auckland to Grenville, 26 April 1793, in ibid., 3:35.
perceived their war as a defensive struggle to protect the Dutch Republic and contain French ambitions. Grenville expressed little interest in territorial changes and only approved of those that circumscribed France. Both London and Vienna gradually recognized Austrian indemnification at French expense along the border of the Austrian Netherlands as an acceptable compromise. The means of obtaining this compensation and each power’s role in the campaign remained unclear, and negotiations on all points continued well into the campaign.

Coburg produced a concrete plan of operations in early May. On 4 May, Mack delivered this plan to the Duke of York. The duke forwarded it to London for approval along with notice of his intention to adhere to it unless otherwise directed. The plan called for the armies to unite, besiege Condé, and obtain its surrender sometime in June. After gaining possession of Condé, Coburg proposed that the Coalition armies remain united and besiege Valenciennes. The Austrian commander expected Valenciennes to fall near the end of July. In return for British assistance in these sieges, Coburg promised to mask Lille and provide York with the necessary assistance to take Dunkirk.

While waiting for approval from London, a French attack drew the British into cooperative action with the Austro-Prussian forces. Dumouriez’s successor, Auguste Marie Henri Picot, Marquis de Dampierre probed the Austro-Prussian positions daily beginning on 1 May 1793. On 8 May, he launched a general assault to relieve Condé. That morning, York led the British contingent south from Orcq to Maulde to support the German forces. Dampierre’s

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47 Q. Craufurd to Auckland, 29 April 1793 and Auckland to Grenville, 14 May 1793, in *Auckland*, 3:41, 58.
48 Auckland lamented to Grenville that the absence of full agreement on the purpose of the war hindered effective military cooperation. The two powers repeatedly reached temporary agreements on the immediate plan of campaign only to have military contingency force alterations that required renewed negotiations. A treaty of cooperation held out the prospect of committing both powers diplomatically to the same ends thereby liberating their armies to cooperate without constant reference to their political superiors. Grenville expressed identical sentiments on the same day in a letter to Auckland. Auckland to Grenville and Grenville to Auckland, 23 April 1793, in ibid., 3:31-34; Roider, *Thugut*, 135; Schroeder, *Transformation*, 127-33.
attack gained limited success, initially pushing the Austrian and Prussian armies back. The Prussians under Knobelsdorff occupied Saint-Amand-les-Eaux on the Coalition right. French forces targeted the seam between the Austrian and Prussian armies at the center of the Coalition line. Consequently, Knobelsdorff faced a heavy French attack on his left. To reinforce the Prussians, the Guards along with one battalion of Hanoverians and one squadron of Austrian Hussars continued south from Maulde to Saint-Amand-les-Eaux and took a position on Knobelsdorff’s right in the early afternoon.

Faced with a persistent French assault, Knobelsdorff soon ordered his British reinforcements to mount a counterattack against the French on the ailing Prussian left flank. The Coldstream Guards led the advance and pushed the French back through the forest to the south until they encountered an entrenched French battery. British Colonel Lowther Pennington ordered the Guards to storm the battery. Grape shot from three nine-pound French cannons
inflicted seventy-three casualties on the British. Lacking adequate support, the Guards proved unable to carry the French position and instead fell back to the Prussian position at Saint-Amand-les-Eaux.\(^{50}\) Despite failing to take the French position, the British counterattack, combined with the mortal wounding of Dampierre, ended the French attack. On 9 and 10 May 1793, the Austro-Prussian armies counterattacked and pushed the disorganized French back to their camp at Famars. This sealed the Battle of Raismes as a Coalition victory. With the immediate threat over, York’s British forces returned to their encampments at Orcq near Tournai.\(^{51}\)

On 13 May 1793, York received his government’s approval of Coburg’s plan of campaign.\(^{52}\) Major-General Ralph Dundas delivered this message to the duke at Tournai along with four regiments of light dragoons.\(^{53}\) The new instructions allowed York to act as a component of the Coalition army. Consequently, the British army marched southeast from Tournai toward the main Austrian army at Quievrain during the daylight hours of 19 and 20 May. They reached the vicinity of Quievrain about 20 miles southeast of Tournai by the evening of the 20\(^{th}\).\(^{54}\) There they joined Prince Adolphus, another son of George III, and additional Hanoverian reinforcements that arrived on the previous day. In addition, the Dutch army advanced through northern Flanders and relieved the British garrisons of Oostende, Brugge, and Tournai. This allowed the 14\(^{th}\), 37\(^{th}\), and 53\(^{rd}\) Regiments to rejoin the main British army. The

\(^{52}\) York to George III, 14 May 1793, in Aspinall, *Later Correspondence*, 2:38.  
\(^{53}\) Specifically, the 7\(^{th}\), 11\(^{th}\), 15\(^{th}\), and 16\(^{th}\) Regiments of light dragoons. Calvert, *Calvert*, 73-74; Fortescue, *British Army*, 4:107.  
total British contingent at Quievrain numbered between 11,000 and 12,000 men led by three princes of the blood.\textsuperscript{55}

As the Allied army assembled at Quievrain, the French entrenched their positions on the ridge of Famars just south of Valenciennes as well as on a second height at Anzin to the north.\textsuperscript{56} On 22 May 1793, Coburg prepared to attack and dislodge the French at dawn the following day. The plan of attack that Mack devised involved the concurrent advance of nine columns across the Flanders front.\textsuperscript{57} On the right and northern flank of the army, Prince Frederick of Orange would lead a Dutch column south from Menen to Tourcoing. His elder brother, Prince William, would march south from Tournai to Orchies with a second Dutch column. South of the Dutch, the Prussians under Knobelsdorff would push from Saint-Amand-les-Eaux southwest toward Hasnon. In the vicinity of Valenciennes, General François, Count of Clerfayt’s Austrian column would attack the French position north of the city at Anzin while Lieutenant-Field Marshal Nikolaus Colloredo-Mels maintained a reserve south of Clerfayt to observe the city itself. An Austrian column at Bavay protected the far left and southern flank of the Allied army, while another Austrian column masked Le Quesnoy to protect the left flank of the main assault on Famars.\textsuperscript{58} According to Mack’s plan, two Anglo-Austrian columns would conduct the main attack on the French position. Austrian General Joseph Ferraris would lead a column that included the three British infantry regiments recently relieved from garrison duty. Coburg ordered this column to mount a frontal assault on the French position. Mack instructed York to

\textsuperscript{55} Adolphus to George III, 20 May 1793, in Aspinall, \textit{Later Correspondence}, 2:40; Calvert, \textit{Calvert}, 73-74; Fortescue, \textit{British Army}, 4:108.
\textsuperscript{56} The term “Allies” is anachronistic in reference to combined British and Austrian armies until 30 August 1793. It is nonetheless a convenient reference for the combined armies fighting France in Flanders.
\textsuperscript{57} Q. Craufurd to Auckland, 27 May 1793, in \textit{Auckland}, 3:69.
\textsuperscript{58} Fortescue, \textit{British Army}, 4:109-10.
lead the second column comprised of the remaining British troops supplemented by Austrian detachments to turn the French right flank.

Considerable marching fatigued the British units. With orders to be ready to march during the night, the army spent the evening fixing “some victuals as time and place would admit.” 59 The various components of the army began taking their positions at midnight. They commenced the attack as dawn began to dispel the thick fog that lay over the battlefield. As the British and Austrian columns approached, the French assailed them with artillery fire. Over the course of the morning of 23 May 1793, the column under Ferraris carried the forward French position east of the Rhonelle River and defended it against a cavalry charge. Meanwhile, York failed to force his way across the Rhonelle at Artres. Consequently, he divided his army, leaving the artillery and one-third of the infantry to pin the French. With the remainder, he forded the

river farther south. By evening, his column reached the base of the Famars heights, driving the
French from their forward positions. Facing the prospect of assaulting a fortified and elevated
French position with hungry and exhausted troops, the Duke of York chose to halt for the night.
He sent his cavalry to reconnoiter and harass the flanks of the French position and prepared to
assault it the following morning. The assault proved unnecessary as the French retreated during
the night, leaving the Allies in possession of the land around Valenciennes.60

In recognition of the Duke of York’s performance in the Battle of Famars, Coburg
offered him command of the siege of Valenciennes on 26 May 1793. The duke accepted the
command provisionally and wrote to London to report on the battle and seek approval of his new
command.61 Although the Cabinet expressed concern about committing the British expedition to
an inland siege, York received its approval on 7 June. The garrison immediately began
bombarding the besieging army while the Allies dug their own entrenchments and brought up
heavy artillery.62 Prior to the arrival of the siege guns, the garrison conducted several minor
sorties to harass the besieging troops and drop Revolutionary propaganda.63

Regarding Dunkirk, a bold French sally on 30 May 1793 exacerbated London’s fears of
inland commitments. British reinforcements in the form of four cavalry regiments arrived at
Oostende on 29 May.64 Dutch detachments at Veurne and Nieuwpoort constituted the only
immediate defense of the port of Oostende. Anticipating weak Dutch resistance and an
opportunity to capture disorganized British soldiers and shipping, Captain Lazare Carnot led the
French garrison of Dunkirk against Oostende. On 31 May, he successfully drove the Dutch from

60 York to George III, 24 May 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:41; Brown, Impartial Journal, 19-22;
Calvert, Calvert, 77; Fortescue, British Army, 4:110-11; MacKinnon, Coldstream, 2:39.
61 York to George III, 27 May 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:43
63 York to George III, 7 June 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:48; Calvert, Calvert, 77-82; Fortescue,
British Army, 4:111-12.
64 These regiments included the Royal Horse Guards and the 1st, 2nd, and 6th Dragoon Regiments.
Veurne after meeting insignificant resistance, but the campaign ended there. His poorly supplied forces disintegrated as the men plundered Veurne. The next day, one squadron of Austrian cavalry rectified the situation, driving the French troops from the Austrian Netherlands. York remarked with disgust: “It now remains to be seen whether the Dutch with 17,000 men can defend Austrian Flanders against the French, which till now has been always thought perfectly well guarded with about 4,000 men.” As a result of the sortie, the Cabinet demanded that York take appropriate measures to secure Oostende. Consequently, he reassigned the 37th regiment to the port along with two squadrons from the 3rd Dragoons.65

After the French attack on Veurne, June and July of 1793 remained relatively uneventful. On 14 June, the besiegers opened the first parallel and York summoned the garrison to surrender. In response to their refusal, the duke bombar ded the city with forty-eight twenty-four pound cannons, twenty-four mortars, and two batteries of twelve pound artillery. York arranged his artillery in fourteen batteries and maintained a continuous fire. The methodical siege of Valenciennes proceeded with few casualties.66

Throughout the siege, York reminded Coburg of his agreement to furnish the British with the resources to invest Dunkirk after the fall of Valenciennes. Despite joining the combined army, York remained focused on his government’s objectives. Using his position as the

66 For accounts of the siege, see York to George III, 14, 18, 21, and 25 June and 2, 5, 9, 16, 19, 23, and 26 July 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:50-65; Calvert, Calvert, 77-94; Brown, Impartial Journal, 26-56. These three sources offer distinct perspectives on British operations, particularly during the siege of Valenciennes. York’s correspondence addresses the problems of overall command including negotiations with the garrison, relations with the other commanders, and problems caused by poor discipline and supply. Captain Harry Calvert provides the perspective of an educated and thoughtful officer. He contemplates the diversity of the combined besieging army and offers moderately informed speculations on military and diplomatic matters. Corporal Robert Brown provides a perspective much nearer to that of a common soldier. He comments mostly on the situation of the soldiers, describing the intensity of enemy fire, the experience of digging trenches, conversations with deserters, and the weather. Brown reports rumors of military and diplomatic events but offers little to no speculation on them.
commander of British forces in Flanders, the duke maintained diplomatic pressure on the
Austrians to commit to the conquest of French Flanders.67

As the Duke of York bombarded Valenciennes, Grenville continued his efforts to unify
the ad-hoc coalition diplomatically. Prior to the siege, Grenville obtained conventions of
cooperation with Sardinia and Spain on 25 April and 25 May 1793, respectively.68 To these he
added Naples on 12 July and Prussia on 14 July.69 However, negotiations with Austria proved
more difficult. Both the Austrian and British governments directed their diplomatic and military
maneuvers to gain influence in the formation of the postwar settlement. In practice, this only
engendered suspicion as both powers endeavored to obtain firm commitments from the other
while keeping open their own options. Grenville sought a permanent, written Austrian
renunciation of the Belgium-Bavaria exchange without committing Britain to securing an
undefined alternative.70 Conversely, Thugut pursued British support for an Austrian indemnity
based on the principle of equivalent compensation for Russian and Prussian gains in the Second
Partition of Poland. He shrank from committing to any specific source for this compensation to
ensure that the acquisition of the Austrian indemnity did not depend on the fortunes of war in
any particular theater.71

Repeated British insistence on a campaign to secure Dunkirk and references to a Dutch
indemnity aroused Austrian fears that London meant to retain Dunkirk at the close of the war.72
Meanwhile, Austrian vagueness on the matter of compensation unnerved British ministers.73

Diplomats from both powers chastised their governments for apparently needless intransigence.

67 York to George III, 21 and 25 June and 9 July 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:53-54, 58.
68 Debrett, Collection, 1:10-15.
69 Ibid., 1:15-19.
70 Starhemberg to Thugut, 12 July 1793, in Vivenot, Quellen, 3:145-48.
71 Mercy to Thugut, 15 June 1793 and Thugut to L. Cobenzl, 16 June 1793, in ibid., 3:112-13; Auckland to
Grenville, 9 July 1793, in Dropmore, 2:404; Roider, Thugut, 134-36; Schroeder, Transformation, 134.
72 Eden to Auckland, undated, in Auckland, 3:68.
73 Dundas to Grenville, July 1793, in Dropmore, 2:407.
Eden wrote to Auckland: “I confess that the acquisition of Dunkirk appears also impolitic.” Concurrently, Mercy complained to Thugut of vague instructions for negotiating the matter of indemnities. Unable to reach an agreement, London and Vienna continued to “build too much on the supposed necessity of our proceeding in the operations against France, without further explanation, and in whatever may best suit their present and future views.” This criticism of the Austrians by Auckland applied equally to British conduct.

A mid-July lull in British diplomacy coincided with a lack of notable change in the Duke of York’s military situation. As British and Austrian batteries steadily reduced Valenciennes to rubble, they remained unmolested from external French forces. On 10 July 1793, a courier brought the Duke of York news of the fall of Condé. The Austrian army gained the fortress and captured the garrison. That same day, about 7,000 Hessian reinforcements arrived to bolster the Duke of York’s command. On 23 July, the combined army at Valenciennes finished setting their mines beneath one of the city’s redoubts. After minor delays, sappers detonated the mines late on the evening of 25 July, and the infantry successfully stormed the damaged horn-work. The following morning, York demanded the garrison’s surrender to prevent the inevitable carnage of storming the city. While waiting for the French commander’s reply, the

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74 Eden to Auckland, undated, in Auckland, 3:68.
75 Mercy to Thugut, 17 July 1793, in Vivenot, Quellen, 3:150.
76 Auckland to Grenville, 29 April 1793, in Auckland, 3:39.
77 York to George III, 10 July 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:59-60.
79 York to George III, 23 July 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:63.
80 York to George III, 26 July 1793, in ibid., 2:65.
Allies received word that Mainz surrendered to the Prussians. Captain Calvert eagerly relayed the news to the weary French garrison as they contemplated the British summons to capitulate.81

On 28 July, York received the surrender of Valenciennes in the name of Francis II. He awarded the garrison the honors of war and allowed its officers to return to France on parole. York took descriptions of the rank and file and forbade them from serving against the Coalition. The French briefly haggled with the duke on the terms, but their weak position forced them to concede most points. By design, the combined army assumed control of the city on 1 August 1793 – exactly seventy-nine years after George I ascended to the throne of Great Britain and Ireland.82

During the first week of August, the Coalition commanders debated whether to adhere to their original plan to divert York to Dunkirk with Austrian support or to continue their advance toward Paris instead. Coburg asked York to continue the campaign, but the duke refused, insisting on following his mandate to take Dunkirk. Ultimately, they reached a compromise whereby the combined army would advance and fight a general engagement before dividing.83

Somewhat anti-climactically, this led to the minor battle of Caesar’s Camp on 7 and 8 August 1793. On 6 August, the combined armies marched from Valenciennes toward Cambrai to fix the French for battle. The column under York’s command formed the left and southern flank of the Coalition advance. He encamped near Villers-en-Cauchies about eight miles northeast of Cambrai on the night of 6 August. Early the next morning, the British column continued its southwest march. It encountered light but constant French resistance throughout their twelve-mile march. York’s column ultimately ended the day at Masnières directly south of

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81 Calvert, Calvert, 88-94; Fortescue, British Army, 4:114.
82 York to George III, 28 July 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:66; Grenville to Auckland, 31 July 1793, in Auckland, 3:85; Calvert, Calvert, 95; Fortescue, British Army, 4:114; MacKinnon, Coldstream, 2:40.
83 York to George III, 2 and 6 August 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:69; Fortescue, British Army, 4:118; Sybel, French Revolution, 3:140.
Cambrai and thus beyond the southern flank of the French position. Meanwhile, heavier resistance stalled two Austrian columns farther north at Naves and Iwuy, about midway between Villers-en-Cauchies and Cambrai. On 8 August, the Duke of York advanced northward to the west of Cambrai in three columns to sever the French line of retreat. Perceiving the British flanking maneuver, the French withdrew and set fire to the town of Marquion to cover their retreat. The British column lacked sufficient cavalry to mount a significant pursuit, and the Austrian columns moved too slowly to inflict much damage on the retreating French. By the evening of 8 August, the Allies abandoned the pursuit and retired to their camps in possession of the battlefield.  

After the Battle of Caesar’s Camp, the Coalition received news that the Revolutionaries intended to put the deposed Bourbon queen, Marie Antoinette, on trial. As a close friend of the queen, Mercy exhorted the Austrian and British governments to press on to Paris to save her. He also wrote to Coburg directly, requesting that the combined armies abandon their methodical sieges for a rapid advance on the capital. The British refused to alter the proposed plan of campaign. London still lacked a definitive commitment from Vienna regarding the future of the Austrian Netherlands. Imposing conditions for military cooperation in Flanders provided the British leverage to influence Austria. Possession of Dunkirk in the name of George III promised a more concrete basis for negotiations. Consequently, the campaign to secure it superseded other concerns in the absence of a formal diplomatic agreement between Britain and Austria. The Austrian argument regarding Marie Antoinette’s safety failed to move the Cabinet. They suspected that a rapid advance would more likely hasten her death than prevent it. In compliance with his instructions, York insisted that Coburg honor his agreement to furnish Austrian forces for the British siege of Dunkirk.

After regrouping on 9 August 1793, the British army marched north to gather the forces designated for the Dunkirk campaign. On 10 August, it marched about fourteen miles to Marchiennes. The next day, the army continued eight miles further north to Orchies. There, York halted to gather his Austrian and Hanoverian detachments. By 14 August, he commanded

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85 Mercy resided in Paris in Austrian service from 1766 to 1790. In 1770, he arranged the marriage between Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to solidify the Franco-Austrian alliance. Thereafter, he advised and influenced Marie Antoinette. He assisted the royal family in the attempted flight to Varennes in 1791. At Brussels on 13 August 1793, Mr. Quentin Craufurd observed that on receiving news of the queen’s impending trial, “M. de Mercy, who is now here, was affected to a degree much beyond what I should have expected, and wrote to the Prince of Coburg to submit to his consideration whether, under the present circumstances, it would not be more advisable to reduce [Cambrai] and push on a body of troops toward Paris, than, immediately on receiving such information, fall back toward Le Quesnoy.” Q. Craufurd to Auckland, 13 August 1793, in Auckland, 3:110-11.
86 Loughborough to Auckland, 20 August 1793, in Auckland, 2:515
approximately 37,000 men from four different armies. The British contingent consisted of 5,200 infantry and 1,300 cavalry, the Austrians provided 10,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry, Hanover furnished 9,000 infantry and 1,600 cavalry, and Hesse-Kassel sent 5,500 infantry and 1,500 cavalry. The army numbered 29,700 infantry, 5,400 cavalry, and 1,900 artillerymen in total.88

Between 15 and 18 August 1793, the army continued its northward march in two parallel columns from Orchies to Menen on 18 August. A Dutch covering force to the west under the Prince of Orange guarded its line of march. A French attack on the Dutch position at Linselles arrested the army’s progress and precipitated a minor battle.89

The Battle of Linselles began with a Dutch attack on the lightly defended French posts near Tourcoing. Initially, they ejected the surprised French from successive positions. However, the Prince of Orange overextended his forces, and a French counterattack drove his army to Tourcoing. The beleaguered prince requested assistance from York, who sent the nearest available troops to salvage the situation. The three Guards regiments under General Gerard Lake marched for Linselles in the early afternoon while York prepared more extensive support. After a four-hour march, Lake arrived outside Linselles that evening with the 1,102 men of his three regiments.90 He found that the Dutch had fled, allowing twelve French battalions to occupy the town and entrench at least twelve guns.

Lake hoped to compensate for numerical inferiority with audacity and ordered his regiments to form a line, fire several volleys, and charge from their cover in a field of bean plants. The Guards ejected the French from the town at the cost of some 180 casualties.91 For

88 Calvert, Calvert, 104-5; Ditfurth, Hessen, 1:73; Fortescue, British Army, 4:120.
89 Brown, Impartial Journal, 64-5; Calvert, Calvert, 105-6.
90 The First Regiment of Guards contained 378 men, the Coldstream Guards included 346, and the Third Regiment of Guards numbered 378. Pearse, Lake, 79.
91 As Corporal Robert Brown of the Coldstream Guards describes the attack: “General Lake having made the proper disposition, the attack began. The 1st Regiment being in front of the column, began the attack, and the 3rd Regiment and Coldstream forming on their left with the utmost celerity, the whole line then rushed in upon the enemy with
this price, they captured the twelve guns as well as one regimental standard, seventy prisoners, and the town of Linselles. Lake offered no pursuit for lack of cavalry. Reinforcements that arrived several hours after the attack found the battle over. Lake’s victory earned him and the Guards tremendous approbation from George III and York. Conversely, the behavior of the Dutch army strained relations between the British and Dutch armies.92

The army regrouped on 19 August 1793 at Menen before resuming its march the following morning. York divided his army into a besieging and a covering force. He personally led the former and placed the latter under the command of Hanoverian Field Marshal Heinrich von Freytag. Freytag led his column of about 14,500 men through Ieper and west to Poperinge while York proceeded through Ieper and continued north to Boesinghen with the remaining 22,500.93

After their division, both Freytag and York encountered steady French resistance. Freytag continued northwest to establish cover for the besieging army. Between 21 and 26 August 1793, his forces pushed west to a position south of Dunkirk. Six days of constant skirmishing and artillery exchanges across a broad front won Freytag the region surrounding Bergues, a city about five miles south of Dunkirk. He then dispersed his forces in a twenty-one-mile cordon around the city to cover York’s position.94

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94 Accounts of Freytag’s advance describe considerable civilian resistance. Ernest lamented heavy casualties, “the most men fell being wounded out of the windows by the inhabitants.” Adolphus noted: “Some peasants of the two last villages fired at us, but they were punished; some killed and others monstrously thrashed. They had small pieces of cannon which were loaded full of nails and with which they wounded two Grenadiers.” Ernest, York, and
Concurrently, York maneuvered his army to initiate the anticipated siege of Dunkirk. He advanced to Veurne on 21 August 1793 without resistance. On 22 August, the duke marched west from Veurne to drive the French from their camp at Ghyvelde. After some resistance, the French fell back, leaving their camp in British hands. On 23 August, the British continued steadily westward for five miles and encamped in a line from the village of Leffrinckoucke on the coast to the neighboring town of Têteghem. The French mounted an abortive offensive on the morning of 24 August. The British counterattack brought the besieging force in position to commence the siege of Dunkirk.95

The attempted siege of Dunkirk differed from Valenciennes both diplomatically and militarily. With regard to diplomacy, Dunkirk represented leverage in the uncertainties of coalition politics. To ensure that the conquest of Dunkirk served British ends, London insisted that York undertake the siege not in the name of Holy Roman Emperor Francis II of Austria as at Valenciennes, but in the name of George III of Great Britain. British possession of Dunkirk promised to complement ongoing negotiations for an Anglo-Austrian alliance. As Grenville tried to persuade Thugut to commit to French Flanders as Austria’s compensation for the war, the British army would take Dunkirk ostensibly to offer it to Austria as part of that compensation. In addition, British possession of Dunkirk would allow Grenville to place conditions on the cession of the city, thereby forcing Austria to accept British views on contentious issues like the Dutch indemnity.96

96 The British attempted to persuade the Dutch to take French colonies as their indemnity to alleviate Austro-Dutch tension in the Low Countries, but to no avail. The Dutch refused to make the expenditure necessary to mount a colonial expedition, and the British refused to do it for them. Grenville to Auckland, 31 July 1793, in *Auckland*, 3:85; Duffy, “A particular service,” 529-37.
To reap the benefits of possessing Dunkirk, the British first needed to overcome the considerable military difficulties in laying siege to it. The aspiring besiegers lacked almost everything necessary to pursue the enterprise before them. They had no siege train and thus no guns either to assault the city or to defend themselves from French gunboats. Confusion and the absence of adequate resources reduced the amount of siege equipment sent to the expedition and delayed its arrival by two weeks. To York’s frustration, the expedition also lacked naval support to keep the gunboats away and blockade the city.97 On 26 August, he wrote to George III: “We are… very unfortunate in not having had any armed vessels or frigates along the coast in order to protect our flank from the enemy’s gun boats and cutters who are able now to lie along there and fire into our camp.”98 Each level of command overlooked this in the planning process, thinking it the responsibility of another party. As a result, the French enjoyed the unusual advantage of localized naval superiority at Dunkirk by virtue of the complete absence of British ships. Calvert complained of heavy fire from French vessels during the advance to the city, and Brown reported on 28 August: “The British shipping which were [sic] expected here as soon as the army, is not yet in sight, while the enemy have two frigates and other vessels cruising about the mouth of the port.”99

In addition, York’s army remained too small for its task even with the addition of the Austrian detachments.100 The Cabinet took little action to rectify this deficiency. Although an expedition destined for the West Indies sat idle in Britain, Dundas refrained from diverting it to Dunkirk until the insufficiency of the existing force became undeniable. The decision came too

97 Buckingham to Grenville, 2 September 1793, in Dropmore, 2:420; Calvert, Calvert, 114.
98 York to George III, 26 August 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:79-80.
99 Q. Craufurd to Auckland, 13 September 1793, in Auckland, 3:115-17; Brown, Impartial Journal, 73; Calvert, Calvert, 109.
100 London received intelligence to this effect well before British forces reached the outskirts of the city. Grenville to Dundas, 31 July 1793, in Dropmore, 2:409.
late, and the French attacked before they could arrive.101 In a letter to Grenville on 13 September, Buckingham identified 4,000 men in addition to ships and artillery waiting for deployment to other theaters that the government could have sent to the Duke of York.102 Although the Cabinet earnestly hoped for success in the siege of Dunkirk for diplomatic reasons, their military strategy gave higher priority to colonial and sea-based operations. Consequently, the expedition remained under-supported and vulnerable from both land and sea.103

York occupied such an unfavorable situation that the term “siege” describes the operation poorly. York and Freytag never fully surrounded the fortress on land. They covered only the southern and eastern approaches, leaving open French overland communications to the west. In addition, the absence of British naval support opened French seaborne communications. Moreover, York’s men faced difficulties finding drinking water in the brackish swamps around Dunkirk while the terrain rendered siege trenches impossible. The lack of siege artillery allowed the garrison of Dunkirk to bombard the British position without fear of significant reprisals. With increasing French forces to the south, substantial French garrisons at Dunkirk and Bergues, and constant harassment from French gunboats, it appeared that French General Jean Nicolas Houchard besieged York to a greater extent than York besieged Dunkirk. Lending credence to this, the British erected redoubts instead of digging trenches. Simultaneously, York developed plans not to assault Dunkirk but instead to repulse an assault from the city’s garrison.104

The long process of defeat at Dunkirk began with Houchard’s attack on the Dutch on 27 August 1793. The Prince of Orange occupied Tourcoing on the left flank of the British operation. After initially retreating from the French assault, the Dutch rallied and regained their

102 Buckingham to Grenville, 13 September 1793, in Dropmore, 2:423-24.
103 York to George III, 26 and 31 August and 3 September 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:79-87; Pitt to Auckland, 8 September 1793, in Auckland, 3:114; Calvert, Calvert, 111; Fortescue, British Army, 4:124-26.
original positions. Although inconclusive, the encounter frightened the Prince of Orange. He informed York of his intention to retreat to safety. York and Coburg persuaded the Prince of Orange to maintain his position only by dispatching small reinforcements of cavalry from their own overstretched armies. Regardless, this engagement reduced the threat that the Dutch posed to any French attack on the British position.105

After his attack on Tourcoing, Houchard assembled his army to assault Freytag’s positions. The Hanoverian probed the French positions on 5 September 1793 only to meet fierce resistance. On 6 September, Houchard initiated a broad assault on Freytag’s positions, initiating the Battle of Hondschoote. Reinforcements arriving from other parts of the Belgian theater increased the French army to 45,800 men. Houchard launched these against Freytag’s covering force in six columns that drove the Allies to Hondschoote. During the retreat, French soldiers captured Freytag and Adolphus, both of whom were wounded. Only the bold and timely charge of the Hanoverian grenadiers under Freytag’s subordinate, Johann Ludwig von Wallmoden, delivered the unfortunate Hanoverian field marshal and British prince from French custody. Simultaneously, a sortie from Dunkirk pinned York and prevented the concentration of his forces. At Hondschoote, Wallmoden assumed command of the Freytag’s corps and assembled it in a defensive position.106

On 7 September, Houchard attacked in the same manner, but achieved only minor gains due to his army’s exhaustion. However, armed with fresh troops, the French assaulted Wallmoden at Hondschoote again on 8 September while the garrison of Dunkirk pinned York with a sortie. The relentless French attack forced Wallmoden to withdraw to Veurne, leaving

105 York to George III, 31 August 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:82-84; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 1:221; Fortescue, British Armies, 4:128-29.
106 York to George III, 7 September 1793, and Adolphus to George III, 8 September 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:88-89; Q. Craufurd to Auckland, 13 September 1793, in Auckland, 3:115-18; Brown, Impartial Journal, 73-74; Calvert, Calvert, 119-21; Fortescue, British Army, 4:126-32.
York no option but to join him or face encirclement. Thus, the Battle of Hondeschoote ended and with it the siege of Dunkirk. Ten days later, in a letter to George III, York offered his thoughts on the failure:

I think, therefore, I am justified in saying that there were three grand causes which made the expedition miscarry. The first, owing to the promises and assurances I so repeatedly received from your Majesty’s ministers not being in any ways fulfilled, the second, owing to the alteration made in the plan of the campaign by the armies of the King of Prussia and of General Wurmsker, by which means the enemy was enabled to bring the whole army of the Moselle against the Field Marshal and me; and the third, owing to the Field Marshal’s own conduct.

Although self-serving, York’s diagnosis accurately describes the reasons for British failure at Dunkirk.¹⁰⁷

British aspirations of taking Dunkirk quickly faded in the face of this reversal. In addition to defeat in Flanders, several other diplomatic and military factors precipitated a change of priorities. Most importantly, Grenville and Starhemberg signed a convention of cooperation in London on 30 August 1793. This treaty effectively constituted a temporary alliance between Britain and Austria for the duration of the war with France. It contained six articles defining the parameters of their new relationship. The first article established the principle of full military cooperation. The second and third articles defined an embargo of French shipping and authorized both powers to enforce this embargo on neutral states. The fourth article forbade separate peace negotiations and established the status quo ante bellum, or modifications by mutual agreement, as the Anglo-Austrian peace program. Although not an explicit renunciation of the Belgium-Bavaria exchange project, the treaty bound Austria to seek British approval in any peace negotiations, effectively rendering the exchange impossible. The fifth article simply

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bound the two powers to defend each other if a third power attacked either of them, and the sixth article asserted their mutual intent to ratify a treaty.\textsuperscript{108}

The full military cooperation of this treaty stood in contrast to the limitations on military cooperation that often characterized more long-term alliances. For example, the Triple Alliance stipulated precise numbers of men or equivalent financial aid that each ally needed to furnish in the event of war. Similarly, British treaties with minor states such as Hesse-Kassel, Sardinia, and even Hanover specified limits of mutual commitment in terms of manpower and money. In addition, German princes often rented their armies to the British on the condition that they could only employ them in Europe. Significantly, the Anglo-Austrian alliance of 1793 includes none of these limitations, indicating full and unlimited mutual commitment to defeating France.

The alliance of 30 August 1793 represented the success of the British Flanders expedition as a diplomatic tool in the summer campaign. From late March to late August, the British Cabinet consistently used the presence of an independent British army as leverage to ensure that the Coalition campaign served British interests. By committing the expedition to assist the Austrian armies in the conquest of French Flanders, the Cabinet weaned Vienna away from the exchange project. Insistence on a campaign for Dunkirk under British command insulated the British ministers politically and drew Thugut into diplomatic dependence on Britain to obtain his desired indemnity. Although the siege of Dunkirk failed, formal Austrian commitment to a British-approved peace program rendered British acquisition of the city unnecessary.

Additional factors reduced the significance of Dunkirk in the autumn of 1793. The arrival of September drew ministerial focus away from Flanders and toward the Caribbean. Tropical expeditions operated on an inverse campaigning season from European expeditions to

\textsuperscript{108} "Convention between his Majesty the Emperor and his Britannic Majesty," 30 August 1793, in Debrett, \textit{Collection}, 1:19-20; Duffy, "British War Policy," 48-54.
minimize the effects of heat and disease.\textsuperscript{109} In addition to new endeavors in the Caribbean, Toulon defected to Admiral Samuel Hood on 26 August. This unforeseen opportunity, also in warmer latitudes, seemed to provide an alternative to the decreasingly important campaign in the Low Countries. The combination of diplomatic success and new opportunities diminished the significance of the Flanders expedition in the British Cabinet’s strategic thinking.\textsuperscript{110}


\textsuperscript{110} Pitt to Grenville, 7 September 1793, in \textit{Dropmore}, 2:422; Fortescue, \textit{British Army}, 4:132-33.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

In the alliance of 30 August 1793, Great Britain and Austria merged their separate wars with France into a single coalition effort. This achievement represented the success of the Flanders expedition as a British diplomatic tool. Having achieved its diplomatic purpose, the expedition continued to serve a military and political purpose in its attempt to take Dunkirk. Although no longer necessary for diplomatic leverage, Dunkirk remained attractive as a port for supplying Allied forces, undermining French privateers, and garnering domestic support for the continental war. However, these purposes remained secondary to the overall British war effort. The Royal Navy could just as easily deliver supplies through Oostende or Antwerp. French privateers constituted a minor irritation, but did not pose a serious strategic threat. Finally, the impending launch of more popular Caribbean expeditions reduced difficulties in justifying the war politically.¹

Defeat at the Battle of Hondschoote on 8 September 1793 ended the British attempt to take Dunkirk and forced London to reevaluate its role in the Flanders campaign. Increased French forces in the region placed a second attempt beyond the reach of available British resources. With a renewed campaign for Dunkirk both impractical and unnecessary, the expedition’s purpose shifted a third time. York’s army became a component of an Allied army under Coburg’s command while the Cabinet endeavored to siphon troops from it to pursue other exclusively British operations. Such redeployments proved difficult due to the integration of British and Austrian forces in Flanders. By using York’s expedition as diplomatic leverage in

¹ “Overseas victories were an effective and time-honored way of popularizing a war, insofar as that was possible.” Mori, William Pitt, 152.
the spring and summer, the British encouraged the Austrians to depend on a substantial British force in the Low Countries.

While York and Wallmoden retreated from Dunkirk and their defeat at Hondschoote, Pitt received word on 13 September 1793 of Toulon’s surrender to Admiral Hood. The prime minister declared this “a most fortunate event” and asserted that “many things ought to be done immediately to make the best use of the advantage; and particularly I should think we ought again to press the Emperor, and perhaps Spain, to send troops to act in that quarter.”

The simultaneous growth of a royalist rebellion in the Vendée and the arrival of the Caribbean campaign season drew ministerial attention back to its seaborne strategy. In the context of these more conventional and appealing opportunities, the Flanders expedition faded considerably in importance. Consequently, the Cabinet treated the expedition as a strategic reserve, attempting to recall and redistribute many of York’s units to other theaters.

Dundas assembled a Caribbean expedition in late August as York and Freytag fought their way into position around Dunkirk. In addition to reinforcing the existing units in the Caribbean, Dundas intended to send 10,118 men under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Grey and Vice-Admiral Sir John Jervis. Although originally scheduled to sail during the third week of September, difficulties in obtaining the necessary personnel as well as defeats in Flanders delayed the expedition’s departure. To salvage York’s position in Flanders after Hondschoote, Dundas dispatched eight battalions from Grey’s command to Oostende to secure York’s line of retreat. Nonetheless, the Cabinet continued to anticipate an expedition to the West Indies and intended to restore the battalions to Grey as soon as the military situation allowed.

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2 Pitt to Grenville, September 1793, in Dropmore, 2:422; Matheson, Dundas, 187.
3 Duffy, Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower, 44-45; Fortescue, British Army, 4:141.
Concurrently, the expansion of the royalist rebellion in the Vendée provided another option for employing British military resources against France. Pitt argued in favor of supporting the French royalists as a component of British war policy on 17 June 1793. However, lacking the resources to capitalize on the rebellion, the British took no action to support it. After attempts to establish contact with the Vendéans throughout 1793 failed, a French émigré acting as a British agent reached the rebel leaders. On 18 August, as General Lake rescued the Dutch at Linselles, the royalists wrote to the British government to request financial and material support as well as émigrés to lead them. Although the Cabinet took no immediate action based on this connection, they gained a strategic alternative to operations in Flanders.4

Thus, in mid-September 1793 the Cabinet could choose from four strategic options for conducting war against France: in Flanders, Toulon, the Caribbean, and the Vendée. The ministers, primarily Dundas, remained focused on Caribbean operations but also refused to abandon the other opportunities to concentrate British resources. Instead, they pursued a policy of temporary deployment, recalling units from one theater for redeployment to another at will. Consequently, York operated under the constant threat of losing any number of his men to other expeditions. No longer critical for diplomatic reasons, Flanders became a secondary theater in British strategic thinking.

Hondschoote rendered the British position in Flanders tenuous. York and Wallmoden retreated to Veurne on 9 September 1793, leaving much of their recently-acquired siege artillery behind for lack of transports. On 10 September the army regrouped and York returned his wounded brother, Adolphus, to England to recuperate. Meanwhile Houchard attempted to sever communications between the British and Austrian armies and force Coburg to lift the siege of Le

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Quesnoy by attacking the Dutch between them in the vicinity of Ieper. The French drove the Dutch from Menen and stood in position to envelop York. In a tone of bitter determination, the duke wrote to George III:

I find myself completely abandoned by everybody. I have therefore resolved to try, if possible, to save this country alone and shall therefore march this evening with all the troops under my command towards [Ieper]. Should I find it possible, I mean to attack the French army; if that is impracticable, I shall fall back and take up a position between [Nieuwpoort] and [Diksmuide]. Whatever may be the event, I can only say that I will do my best and that with such brave troops as I command, everything may be expected which man can do.

The intervention of an Austrian detachment under General Johann Peter Beaulieu halted the French advance and regained Menen, rendering this desperate march unnecessary.5

On the following day, Le Quesnoy surrendered to Coburg, enabling him to march to the aid of the beleaguered Dutch and British armies. York sent the army’s baggage to Oostende, and detached a garrison to Veurne while stretching the rest of the army in a nine-mile cordon from Nieuwpoort to Diksmuide. As York redeployed, the Austrians scored a resounding victory over a French detachment at Avesnes-le-Sec. Approximately 2,000 unsupported Austrian cavalry routed a French force of 7,000. They killed 1,500 men, took 1,500 more as prisoners, and captured twenty guns at the cost of sixty-nine of their own killed.6

On 13 September1793, another Dutch defeat in the vicinity of Menen balanced the Austrian victory from the previous day. Although the Dutch abandoned the front, Beaulieu maintained his position between Menen and Kortrijk to preserve the Allied line. Meanwhile York sent a combined Austro-British detachment to attempt to rally the Dutch. In light of the Dutch collapse, York ordered the garrison at Veurne to retreat to Nieuwpoort to consolidate his

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5 Furnes lies eighteen miles northwest of Ieper. York to George III, 10 September 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:90; Calvert, Calvert, 125-29.
6 York to George III, 14 September 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:92.
forces. That evening, the eight battalions from the Grey-Jervis expedition arrived at Oostende, much to York’s relief.\(^7\)

On the morning of 14 September 1793, York marched east from Diksmuide to Torhout to support the Dutch. At Torhout, he received a message from Beaulieu explaining his orders to coordinate with the duke and outlining his position near Kortrijk. York responded by advancing south from Torhout to Roeselare on 15 September to join the Austrian. That evening, Beaulieu repulsed an attack from Houchard. Assisted by the cavalry of York’s vanguard, he expelled the French from Menen. On the next day, York and Beaulieu moved their main armies to Menen. From there they exchanged messages discussing the plan for the rest of the campaign with Coburg. The Austrian commander-in-chief encamped with the Austrian army at Cysoing sixteen miles south of Menen. For the remainder of September, an Austrian detachment besieged Maubeuge while the rest of Coalition forces established a cordon from Nieuwpoort to the right flank of the besieging army.\(^8\)

As the armies settled into defensive positions, the British government turned its focus elsewhere. In a letter to his brother on 15 September 1793, Grenville dismissed the reversals in Flanders as immaterial and outlined the administration’s priorities. He argued that operations in Flanders “must be left to military decision,” and expressed a strong reluctance to do anything to undermine the West Indian expedition. According to Grenville, “a few towns more or less in

\(^7\) The Dutch retreat from Menen prompted George III to comment: “The Dutch have again been routed; so bad troops and so indifferent a General can scarcely be found out of Italy. York to George III, 14 September 1793 and George III to Grenville, 15 September 1793, in ibid., 2:92; Brown, Impartial Journal, 75-76; Calvert, Calvert, 128-31.

\(^8\) York to George III, 18 September 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:97-101; Craufurd to Auckland, 11 October 1793, in Auckland, 3:125; Brown, Impartial Journal, 76-77; Calvert, Calvert, 132; Fortescue, British Army, 4:142-44; Rothenberg, Adversaries, 39.
Flanders are certainly not unimportant; but I am much mistaken in my speculation if the business at Toulon is not decisive of the war.”

Grenville’s sudden ambivalence to the fortunes of the Flanders campaign, suggests a distinct hierarchy among the theaters for British military action in the autumn of 1793. The West Indian campaign remained central to British war policy, and ministers only grudgingly consented to measures to strengthen other operations at the expense of their Caribbean objectives. After its defection, Toulon quickly became London’s second strategic priority. The presence of the French Mediterranean Fleet, a vigorous rebellion and several Allies to contribute resources appealed to Pitt and his colleagues. As a theater of opportunity, Toulon required the British to adjust their plans to sustain operations there. While they could control the schedule for Caribbean expeditions, the Revolutionaries held the initiative in southern France, forcing the Allies to react to the evolving military situation at Toulon. Meanwhile, the Flanders campaign lost its urgency. After so fervently insisting on the expedition’s limits and objectives in the spring and summer, Whitehall deferred operational decisions to York and his subordinates.

Despite ministerial preference for Toulon and the Caribbean, George III remained dedicated to his son’s campaign in Flanders. Throughout September and October 1793, Dundas clashed with the king over the fate of York’s reinforcements from the Grey-Jervis expedition. In sending them, Dundas delayed the projected departure of the Caribbean expedition to the second week of October. He recalled them on 18 September to prepare for this embarkation and balked at delaying it further. However, George III complained that the recall starved York’s army of essential manpower. Dundas reiterated his belief in the greater importance of the West Indian expedition and placated the king with a promise to send two Irish cavalry regiments to Flanders.

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9 Grenville to Buckingham, 15 September 1793, in *Court and Cabinets*, 2:241.
10 In addition to the quoted messages from Pitt and Grenville, Dundas expressed similar sentiments, indicating virtual unanimity on the subject within the Cabinet. Mori, *William Pitt*, 156-57.
Consequently, the Grey-Jervis expedition regained its detached regiments only to lose them again later in September after the resulting weakness of the British position at Oostende alarmed the administration.\textsuperscript{11}

George III’s intercession on his son’s behalf prompted the Cabinet to seek an excuse to recall York. On 14 October 1793, Dundas wrote to the king to discuss York’s debts. He explained the need for 4,000 to 5,000 pounds to continue funding the debts but offered no solution for raising such a sum. George III angrily replied that York’s service in Flanders warranted support, not harassment, from the ministers. He expressed “disgust” that Dundas would raise the issue in a time of war without offering some solution along with it.\textsuperscript{12} On 16 October, Buckingham wrote to Grenville to suggest an alternative solution:

\begin{quote}
I have thought anxiously and repeatedly upon your difficulties since I last wrote; and an idea has occurred to me which… offers a solution for recalling the Duke of York. The British force in Flanders consists now of only six battalions of infantry; namely three of Guards, the 14\textsuperscript{th}, the 35\textsuperscript{th}, and the 54\textsuperscript{th}; the remainder is all cavalry. You are withdrawing the 19\textsuperscript{th}, 27\textsuperscript{th}, 42\textsuperscript{nd}, and 57\textsuperscript{th}; and you told me that you are sending 6,000 Germans to Toulon. Might it not be more feasible to withdraw the whole of the British infantry for the Toulon expedition, and leave in Flanders only our small body of 2,500 cavalry, which would not be a command for an officer of the duke’s situation…? It is possible that this might smooth difficulties in the King’s mind, as it would still leave the actual disposal of that combined force under our immediate orders; and you would, of course, replace this British infantry (now reduced to about 1,800 men) with part of the Hessians ordered [to] Toulon.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

While politicians endeavored to recall him, York maintained his position as a link between London and the Austrian army.

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12 Although not explicitly stated as a means to gain York’s recall, the manner and timing of this maneuver strongly imply such an intention. In addition, Dundas suddenly assisted the king with resolving the issue in early December after the departure of the West Indian and Vendéan expeditions ended the debate over manpower allocation. Dundas to George III, 14 October and 12 December 1793 and George III to Dundas, 14 October and 13 December 1793, in Aspinall, \textit{Later Correspondence}, 2:106-7.

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On 10 October 1793, York responded to instructions from both London and Vienna. From the British government, he received renewed requests to return the four regiments borrowed from the Grey-Jervis expedition. In compliance with this directive, York ordered the regiments to march from Menen to Oostende on 11 October. Simultaneously, Coburg informed the duke of a concentration of French forces at Cambrai, west of Maubeuge. He asked York to march to Cysoing with as many men as he could spare from his defensive position at Menen. Coburg hoped to concentrate his own forces to repulse the anticipated French attack with assistance from York’s column at Cysoing. York complied with Coburg’s request and marched from Menen on 10 October, leaving 6,000 men to hold the city.\textsuperscript{14}

York reached Cysoing on 11 October 1793 and halted there for two days. On 13 October Coburg learned that his Dutch auxiliaries refused to help defend his position against French forces concentrating at Cambrai. That evening, York received a letter from the Austrian commander requesting that he march to his aid with all the troops he could spare. The duke marched to assist the Austrians the following morning. On 15 October the British reinforcements reached the vicinity of Valenciennes and planned to join the Austrian right at Englefontaine the next day. York wrote to the king to explain his decision: “As the whole event, not only of this campaign, but of the whole war appears to depend upon forcing the enemy to an action and taking Maubeuge, I did not think it right to hesitate but immediately agreed.”\textsuperscript{15}

Late on the night of 15 October 1793, York received word that the French had attacked the Austrians that morning, initiating the Battle of Wattignies. In response to Coburg’s urging, York marched at dawn, reaching Englefontaine by midday. York’s arrival allowed the Austrians to shift additional forces from that position to bolster the right flank of their beleaguered army.


\textsuperscript{15} York to George III, 15 October 1793, in Aspinall, \textit{Later Correspondence}, 2:107-8.
Although the Austrian right held, the French forced their left, rendering the siege of Maubeuge untenable. Coburg retreated across the Sambre River on the night of 16 October, citing overwhelming French numerical superiority and devastating artillery as causes for the defeat. The following day, York and Coburg met to discuss their next course of action. Coburg considered a counterattack and asked the duke to maintain his position at Englefontaine.16

York and the main body of the British contingent remained at Englefontaine from 16 to 20 October 1793 without incident. However, on 21 October, the French launched a broad attack on the British position from Veurne to Cysoing. The assault met with mixed success. Although repulsed at many points, the French succeeded at Cysoing, Menen, and Veurne. Unaware of the extent of the French attack, York remained at Englefontaine on 22 October. The next day, Coburg sent him belated intelligence of French intentions and exhorted him to return to Tournai to ensure the integrity of the Allied line. While Coburg regrouped, York reached Tournai on 24 October and discovered the extent of the French operation.17

Along the coast, the French gained Veurne and bombarded Nieuwpoort. This coastal advance threatened the British supply base at Oostende. Possession of Oostende, allowed the Cabinet flexibility in sending and withdrawing forces to and from Flanders. Unwilling to lose this flexibility, Dundas dispatched four additional regiments under Grey’s command from the Caribbean expedition to stabilize that front. These joined the other four that had marched from Menen on 11 October to return to Britain. Murray, the local commander, pulled these regiments from their transports to assist in the defense.18

16 York to George III, 18 October 1793, in ibid., 2:108-9; Craufurd to Auckland, 18 October 1793, in Auckland, 3:131-33; Brown, Impartial Journal, 79-80; Calvert, Calvert, 149-57.
17 York to George III, 24 October 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:111; Brown, Impartial Journal, 79-81; Calvert, Calvert, 158-61.
Between 24 and 30 October, York regained his previous position. He placed Wallmoden in command of the detachment previously driven from Menen and gave him reinforcements and orders to retake the city. York also attacked the French at the town of Lannoy between Cysoing and Menen. With the loss of only one man, the British captured the town, gaining five guns, considerable ammunition and supplies, and some 160 prisoners. York’s northward march on the right flank of the French advance precipitated a general French retreat, which ended the assault on Nieuwpoort and the immediate threat to Oostende.19

During the first week of November 1793, Coburg sought another battle in compliance with orders from Vienna. However, in seeking an engagement, he and York only achieved a few inconsequential skirmishes before the cold and rain forced them to halt operations and take winter quarters. On 5 November, York noted: “The weather is so exceedingly bad that the troops are falling down prodigiously fast, and the horses, particularly those of the artillery, are dying like rotten sheep.” York’s army encamped in a cordon from Nieuwpoort south to Tournai, and Coburg’s forces occupied the north bank of the Sambre River from Le Quesnoy east to Charleroi. The opposing sides continued to skirmish throughout November, but no large engagements or changes of position occurred. Thus, the campaign of 1793 ended with half of the Belgian theater under British command.20

After the conclusion of an Anglo-Austrian alliance on 30 August 1793 and the defeat of the independent British campaign at Hondschoote on 8 September, York’s expedition lost its initial raison d’être. No longer necessary as a diplomatic tool, the Cabinet began to view and treat the expedition as a military resource. Militarily, the British administration expressed

19 York to George III, 27, 29, and 30 October 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:113-17; Brown, Impartial Journal, 81-84; Calvert, Calvert, 161-64.
20 York to George III, 5 November 1793, in Aspinall, Later Correspondence, 2:117; Brown, Impartial Journal, 84-86; Calvert, Calvert, 165-67; Fortescue, A History of the British Army, 4:147-49.
greater interest in expeditions to the West Indies, Toulon, and the Breton coast. Dundas endeavored to commandeer forces from Flanders to serve these other, higher priorities throughout the autumn campaign. However, he discovered that York’s troops constituted an integral part of the Allied army. Dundas found it impossible to withdraw the men he needed without compromising the integrity of York’s portion of the Allied cordon. In their spring and summer efforts to end their diplomatic isolation and encourage Austrian dependence on British arms, Pitt and his colleagues unintentionally sacrificed their own freedom of action.

British war policy throughout 1793 arose purposefully from four overriding foreign policy objectives that predated the war. First, beginning with his rise to power in 1783, Pitt sought to end the British diplomatic isolation and French dominance in Europe that prevailed after 1763. Second, he endeavored to supplant French influence over the Dutch Republic that followed the American War of Independence and the resulting Anglo-Dutch hostility. French domination of the Low Countries threatened British trade with Europe, the security of British colonies in Asia, and the security of Britain itself. After attaining some measure of success with the first two goals in 1788 with the Triple Alliance, Pitt made the preservation of the territorial status quo to maintain the favorable balance of power in Europe his third goal. In the Ochakov Crisis of 1791, the cost of Pitt’s efforts to maintain territorial stasis in Europe exceeded his base of domestic support. Parliamentary refusal to fund British mobilization for the Triple Alliance’s armed mediation of the Austro-Russian war with the Ottoman Empire forced Pitt into a humiliating diplomatic retreat. Thereafter, Pitt and his new foreign secretary, Grenville, adopted a fourth goal of avoiding similar humiliations in the future by making foreign policy decisions with careful considerations of their domestic ramifications. In the wake of the Ochakov affair, the British effectively lost their Prussian connection, leaving them again without a major ally in
Europe. Despite this failure, the Anglo-Dutch alliance survived and constituted a cornerstone of British foreign policy in the 1790s.

Schroeder correctly contextualizes the Anglo-Austrian diplomacy in the first years of the War of the First Coalition as a continuation of the preceding eighteenth-century balance of power struggles. However, he provides only limited discussion of military operations and their relationship to the ongoing negotiations. Duffy provides a more detailed operational and political analysis of the siege of Dunkirk and its role in British strategy, but his narrow focus excludes the significance of the remainder of the campaign and the broader diplomatic framework. This thesis bridges the gap between these two historians and offers a detailed analysis of the relationship between military operations and coalition diplomacy.

Britain and France went to war in February 1793 over the conventional issue of influence in the Low Countries. At the outbreak of war, Pitt’s peacetime foreign policy goals became pressing wartime objectives. The specter of Ochakov prompted the government to cautiously conduct its mobilization and final diplomacy with France in full view of the public to ensure domestic support for the anticipated war. Britain faced a war to defend its economic and strategic interests in the United Provinces without sufficient strength to do so or a major continental ally committed to British interests. The Cabinet dispatched the Duke of York and three battalions to the Netherlands as a symbolic gesture to defend its interests in the United Provinces. Throughout 1793, Grenville endeavored to end British diplomatic isolation through an alliance with Austria. British preference for the territorial status quo and Austrian insistence on compensation in the form of the Belgium-Bavaria exchange hindered alliance negotiations. To overcome these difficulties, the British converted their initially temporary and symbolic expedition to the Low Countries into a source of diplomatic leverage.
London persuaded Vienna to reach a compromise whereby the British would support Austrian indemnification on the condition that they take it from French Flanders. This upheld the British conception of the territorial status quo by maintaining Austria as a barrier to French influence in the Low Countries. Simultaneously, it granted Austria compensation for Russo-Prussian gains in the Second Partition of Poland. To ensure Austrian acceptance of this alternative, the Cabinet committed York’s expedition to assist in its conquest. The Cabinet insisted on an independent campaign to take Dunkirk as a politically defensible British contribution to the Austrian indemnity. The alliance of 30 August 1793 ended the need for such collateral, and defeat at Hondschoote rendered it impractical. In response to the formal union of British and Austrian war aims, the Cabinet no longer insisted on maintaining York’s expedition as an independent force and allowed closer cooperation with Austrian forces. No longer engaged in separate but converging wars against France, Britain and Austria began 1794 as allies in a single war to contain and curtail Revolutionary France.

After recovering Belgium in March of 1793, the Allies seemed to have a decisive stroke against Paris within their grasp. Dumouriez’s defection left the French forces in the region in a state of confusion and little able to effectively resist a concerted Allied offensive. This apparent opportunity to end the war has inspired the mistake narrative that dominates the historiography of the 1793 Allied campaign in Flanders. Schroeder claims that “the underlying assumption that military victory and the restoration of order in France were, or should have been, the real aims of the war… is unsound.” For British and Austrian statesmen, diplomatic objectives founded on the notion of a European balance of power outweighed military considerations. As a result, spring and summer operations in Flanders remained subordinate to Anglo-Austrian negotiations regarding the anticipated post-war settlement. The lack of understanding between London and
Vienna regarding the purpose of the war in particular and the definition of the balance of power in general made cooperation difficult. Both powers hesitated to commit fully to defeating France until they reached agreement on these broader issues.\textsuperscript{21}

On 30 August 1793, the Anglo-Austrian alliance against France established theoretical unity of purpose between London and Vienna and reduced their need to use their armies as diplomatic leverage against each other. However, by this time, their opportunity to crush a feeble France had passed. The ruthless consolidation of power under the Jacobin Committee of Public Safety in Paris and the famous \textit{levée en masse} of 23 August ended French weakness. London and Vienna finally achieved a working military alliance only to see their string of summer victories truncated by defeats at Hondschoote and Wattignies. The resurgent French army regained the initiative as the year drew to a close, and the Allies lost their opportunity for an early victory over Revolutionary France.\textsuperscript{22}

Although the history of the 1793 Flanders campaign of the War of the First Coalition remains a narrative of defeat, this thesis rejects the notion that British involvement in that campaign constituted a mistake. While the Duke of York’s expedition to the Low Countries in 1793 did little to defeat France, it served British interests perfectly. By bolstering the Dutch defense and subsequently assisting in the negotiation of an Anglo-Austrian alliance, the expedition theoretically achieved British war aims within a single campaign season. Subsequent defeat in the War of the First Coalition stemmed from the understandable Allied failure to anticipate the unprecedented French centralization of power and mobilization of resources.

\textsuperscript{21} Schroeder, \textit{Transformation}, 128-29.  
\textsuperscript{22} Rothenberg, \textit{Adversaries}, 37-38.
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