CHAPTER VIII
EUROPEAN RELATIONS WITH ASIA AND AFRICA

I. RELATIONS WITH ASIA

Three main developments may be seen in Europe's relations with Asia during this period—the rise of the English East India Company as one of the strongest governments in India, the expansion of English trade further east, and the widening and deepening of European knowledge of Asia. In the struggle for power that followed the disintegration of the Mughal empire the English company emerged as the ruler of the rich and fertile provinces of Bengal and Bihar and succeeded not only in excluding the French from effective participation in Indian politics but also in meeting the challenge of its chief rivals, the Marathas and Mysore. The company was now an Indian power, ruling those provinces on behalf of the Mughal emperor and reforming the administrative system that it found there. If its reforms had the effect of excluding Indians from high office, they also gave rise to a class of Indian landholders endowed with property rights and loyal to its rule. Indian investors were among the purchasers of its bonds to finance its campaigns against Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Indian goods were exported not only to Europe but also in the expansion of British trade to the eastern seas, past Dutch opposition, and to China, thus helping to pay for its rapidly growing tea exports to Europe. Although it was disappointed in its expectations of the profits of empire in India and had to seek the home government's help and submit to a measure of control, the profits of its China trade came to overshadow its losses elsewhere and it was saved from extinction. The Dutch company, on the other hand, was weakened by the interruption of its European trade during the American war and by growing competition in Asia, and did not long survive the establishment of an unsympathetic government at home. Meanwhile, the European interest in Chinese civilisation which had been fostered by the Jesuit missionaries was taken up by the philosophes, and the rococo taste for the exotic and grotesque in Chinese art was supplemented by the fashion for Chinese landscape-gardening with its feeling for nature. India came to attract more attention, as the English company's concern for her administrative problems stimulated an interest in her civilisation, and some of the company's servants became distinguished Orientalists. Just as they were prepared as officials to govern India by Indian methods, so as scholars they could assert that Indian literature and philosophy were worthy of
consideration on their own terms, which were not necessarily those of Europe.

When Clive secured from the Emperor Shah Alam, in 1765, the grant of the diwani, or civil administration, of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa,\(^1\) in return for an annual payment of tribute, he thought that the company would find it advantageous to rule under Mughal authority. The emperor might lack power, but he could still command respect and confer respectability. His approval might well be of value both in India and in Europe, for it could help not only to secure the loyalty of the company’s Indian subjects but also to ward off the jealousy of its European rivals. Even Parliament might feel reluctant to take over for the Crown territories that lay under the emperor’s authority, however nominal. To collect the revenues of Bengal and administer justice, which comprised its duties as diwan, the company appointed an Indian deputy, Muhammad Reza Khan, whom the nawab also appointed as his deputy to administer the executive government, which included the administration of criminal justice. As the company’s government in Bengal remarked with some satisfaction in 1767: ‘we may in our present circumstances be regarded as the spring which, concealed under the Shadow of the Nabob’s name, secretly gives motion to this vast Machine of Government’\(^2\). Clive himself forecast great profits from what seemed such an economical arrangement. He predicted a ‘clear gain’ of ‘£1,650,000 Sterling, which will defray all the Expense of the Investment, furnish the whole of the China Treasure, answer the demands of all your other Settlements in India, and leave a considerable Ballance in your Treasury besides’\(^3\). But the costs of administration proved greater and the revenue smaller than was expected, while in 1767 the ministry in England decided to exact an annual payment of £400,000 from the company. Speculators who had bought the company’s shares in the expectation of a continued rise in value used their influence to keep up the rate of dividend in spite of a financial crisis in 1772. When the company was finally forced to appeal to the government for help, there was little doubt that some form of political control would follow.\(^4\)

Although the company was in such difficulties, its servants seemed rich enough. The nabobs who returned with the spoils of the East were already disliked as upstarts. Now they were denounced as tyrants, and it was even said that their private trading activities had helped to promote famine
in Bengal. Besides lending the company £1,400,000 to tide it over its immediate distresses, the government tried to remedy the abuses to which its attention was being loudly called both in pamphlets and in Parliament. But its remedies made no fundamental change in the company’s administrative system, and produced conflict rather than reform. A governor-general and four councillors were appointed by name in the Regulating Act of 1773, but subsequent appointments were left to the company. Three of the councillors were sent out from England in the spirit of reformers, but the governor-general, Warren Hastings, was an old servant of the company, and had no power to override them. He was soon involved in conflict with them. A supreme court was established for the purpose of hearing complaints against the company’s servants and British subjects generally. But the extent of its jurisdiction was not clearly defined, and it was soon involved in conflict with the company’s Bengal government. The Madras and Bombay governments were forbidden to declare war or make treaties without the consent of the governor-general and council, but an exception was allowed for ‘cases of imminent necessity’, and this too left scope for controversy.

Meanwhile, the company itself had been modifying the ‘dual system’ established by Clive. The Court of Directors soon came to suspect that a substantial amount of revenue was being intercepted by an ‘immense number of Idle Sycophants’ before it could reach the public treasury. Some of the company’s European officials were sent into the districts as Supervisors, in 1769, to investigate. But in spite of the Bengal famine of 1770, which was thought to have carried off one-third of the inhabitants, the revenue for 1771 was, in the government’s words, ‘violently kept up to its Former Standard’. However, the court had decided that the company must take more part in the administration, and in 1771 ordered the Bengal government to ‘stand forth as dewan’. Muhammad Reza Khan was dismissed from his post as the company’s deputy, and there followed a period of experiment and argument. The Supervisors were turned into Collectors, but the court did not trust them, and they were soon withdrawn. Provincial councils of revenue were established, but without success. The Collectors had in the end to be restored to their districts. The problem before the government was how to ascertain the capacity of the land, but serious social consequences followed its decision to replace the annual revenue settlements with the zamindars by five-yearly leases which were put up to public auction. In the speculative bidding which the auctions encouraged many of the old zamindars were either outbid or forced to bid too high in their anxiety to retain their lands. The new policy
thus produced both economic distress and social dislocation, and the rights of the zamindars provoked controversy for the next two decades. It was argued on the one side that they were merely revenue farmers and on the other that they were hereditary landlords. Underlying the arguments about revenue policy was the assumption that the company's task was to follow Mughal practice. In fact, the term 'zamindar' was applied to a variety of persons ranging from recently appointed revenue farmers to rajas of ancient family. But during the decline of Mughal authority there was a general tendency for office to become hereditary, and the Court of Directors had some historical justification for their decision to prohibit the holding of further auctions, after the expiry of the five-year leases, on the ground that they were prejudicial to hereditary rights.

The zamindars were also affected by the changes in the judicial system which followed the company's decision to stand forth as diwan. In the decline of Mughal authority many of them had become the virtual rulers of their districts, for the nawab's justice did not run far beyond the chief towns. Now regular civil and criminal courts were set up. Again, there was much experiment and alteration. At first the Collectors were given charge of the civil courts, then the provincial councils of revenue, and in 1781 separate judges were appointed. Again, the assumption was, as Warren Hastings told Lord Mansfield, that 'no essential change was made in the ancient constitution of the province. It was only brought back to its original principles.' In accordance with the theory of the diwani, which included only civil justice, the criminal courts were left in the charge of Indian judges responsible to Muhammad Reza Khan, who still remained the nawab's deputy. Muslim law was administered in the criminal courts, and the personal law of the suitors, whether Hindu or Muslim, in the civil courts. How to ascertain that law was at first a problem. Collections and translations were made by scholars like Sir William Jones, and Hindu and Muslim legal advisers were appointed to the courts. This made the laws more rigid, even if their administration became less arbitrary. The zamindars themselves were made subject to the courts, and the new civil judges, acting as magistrates, were empowered to supervise their police administration. Local customs and immunities were already giving way to system and uniformity in the administration of justice.

However much the company professed its intention of restoring the true principles of Mughal administration, its connection with the emperor was sharply interrupted in 1771. Attempting a heroic recovery after their disaster at Panipat ten years before, the Marathas had sent a large force to northern India and persuaded the emperor to return to Delhi under their protection. Hastings stopped payment of the company's tribute and made light of the affair: the emperor's grant of the diwani was merely

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'a piece of paper', 'a very flimsy argument, not intrinsically worth three half' - the company held its territories by 'the best of all Titles, power'. The Marathas set more value on the emperor's prestige, but they were soon preoccupied with the struggle for power at Poona that followed the murder of the young Peshwa Narayan Rao in 1773.

The Bombay government was soon involved. In return for a promise of territory it rashly agreed to support the dead peshwa's uncle, Raghunath Rao, who claimed the succession but was suspected of complicity in the murder and was opposed by a council of regency under Nana Phadnis, who continued to administer the state on behalf of the peshwa's posthumous son, Sawai Madhav Rao. To support the claims of a rival to the throne was an established method of gaining influence, but the Bombay government overestimated both its own strength and Raghunath Rao's statesmanship. The result was a series of exhausting and fruitless campaigns, in which the Bengal government had to send help to Bombay. Haidar Ali, the vigorous soldier who had usurped power in Mysore, would have been a useful ally against the Marathas, but the Madras government provoked his hostility, and in 1780 he swept through the Carnatic to the walls of Madras. This was at a time when England was at war with the French and the Dutch, and the French were offering help both to the Maratha government and to Haidar Ali. The company's position seemed grave. But besides sending Sir Eyre Coote to Madras, Hastings succeeded in establishing peace with the Marathas by striking at Mahadji Sindhia, the most powerful and ambitious of the peshwa's overmighty subjects. After the fall of his fortress at Gwalior and his own defeat at Sipri, Sindhia agreed to use his influence with the Poona government. By the Treaty of Salbai (1782) the company promised not to support Raghunath Rao and the peshwa promised not to ally with other European nations, while Sindhia stood as guarantor for the proper observance of the treaty by both sides. This encouraged the disintegration of Maratha power. Sindhia, who had been growing impatient of control from Poona, was now treated as an independent prince by the company, which established a resident at his court. When the Mughal emperor asked for help to suppress local disorder, Hastings declined to intervene, and Sindhia was left free to devote his energies to establishing his influence at Delhi. Meanwhile, after Haidar's death, the company made peace with his son Tipu on the basis of a mutual restoration of conquests, and declined to join the Poona government in a fresh war against Mysore. But the growth of Sindhia's power in the north had given rise to alarm and resentment at Poona, and Nana Phadnis was soon asking the company to appoint a resident

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at the peshwa’s court as well. With the energies of its old enemies thus engaged, and with its residents in such strategic posts, the company was in a stronger position than ever before.

In England, however, the energetic policies of Warren Hastings had been watched with concern. He was represented as a warmonger impatient of restraint. Dundas likened him to ‘an Alexander or an Aurungzebe’. The Regulating Act had merely hampered the company’s government but provided no means of controlling it. The ministry had the right to see despatches from India, and in 1781 it also gained the right to veto the replies from the Court of Directors. But to carry through a policy of its own it had to rely on informal methods of influencing the court, and this was not always effective. On two occasions, after the ministry had persuaded the Court of Directors to recall Warren Hastings, the Court of Proprietors—the general body of shareholders—reversed the Directors’ decision. In 1784 Pitt’s India Act therefore established a permanent Board of Control, with the right of approving or amending the despatches to India. But the company still retained some power and much influence. The Court of Directors remained the governing body. The despatches from India were still addressed to the court, and its replies were still composed at the East-India House and signed by the Directors. But once a despatch had been approved by the Board of Control, it could not be altered by the Court of Proprietors. The Court of Directors still had the right of nomination to the coveted writeships in the company’s service. But in practice a share of this patronage was conceded to the President of the Board of Control. Governors-general and governors were still to be appointed by the Court of Directors, and were liable to recall by the Crown as well as by the court. But in practice the ministry chose, subject to the court’s approval.

This was, in short, a system of checks, and it encouraged deliberation at the expense of speed. But the slowness of communication with India had already left a large measure of discretion to the company’s governments there, and speed was therefore of less importance to the home government than it was to them. Warren Hastings, indeed, felt greatly hampered by the failure of the Regulating Act to enable him to override the obstacles to his authority. When the historian Ghulam Husain Khan, who wrote at this time, compared the company’s administration with that of an Indian ruler, he thought that one of its main defects was the slowness of decision that resulted from the council system of government. But an act of 1781 set limits between the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the company’s administration; in 1784 Pitt’s India Act strengthened the authority of the Bengal government over the foreign relations of the subordinate presidencies; in 1784 also the governor-general’s councillors
were reduced in number from four to three, and two years later he was empowered to override them in exceptional circumstances. Parliament was thus quite willing to strengthen the company’s Indian government once it had secured a firm voice in the company’s home government. The impeachment of Warren Hastings may have been evidence of Parliament’s intention to apply moral standards to Indian politics, but it arose out of a situation which was now ended. Philip Francis had been one of the councillors sent out under the Regulating Act, and as one of the chief organisers of the impeachment he was in effect trying to punish Hastings in England for what he had failed to prevent him from doing in India. There seems to be no positive evidence for the view that Dundas persuaded Pitt to support the impeachment because he was jealous of Hastings as a possible rival at the Board of Control. On the other hand, Hastings had allowed himself to be associated with interests that were opposing various Indian policies of the ministry.¹ But whatever the motives of those most responsible for the impeachment, the proceedings provided an outlet for the jealousies and suspicions that had been excited against the company since the days of Clive, and an occasion for many eloquent speeches to the effect that the rights of the governed were worthy of great consideration. Meanwhile, Pitt’s India Act had provided some security for the future. Henceforth, the company would be left to administer its territories in uneasy union with a Board of Control which could check any reckless impulse towards an empire which it could not support and any disposition towards corruption which it could not afford.

The loss of the American colonies and the dangers which had recently threatened the company in India seemed proof of the need for stability and caution. Besides the establishment of the Board of Control, some statutory restraints upon the company’s policies were attempted. Its dividend had already been fixed by statute. Pitt’s India Act warned it that ‘to pursue Schemes of Conquest and Extension of Dominion in India’ was ‘repugnant to the Wish, the Honour, and Policy of this Nation’, and prohibited aggressive policies.² Reports had reached England of the social consequences of the recent revenue policies in Bengal, and the company was directed by the same act to inquire into the grievances of the zamindars and establish ‘permanent rules’ for the payment of their rents.³ Similarly, the Court of Directors concluded that the zamindars were ‘discontented, many of them deprived of their Lands, overwhelmed by Debts, or reduced to beggary’. In general, the court condemned the Bengal government’s ‘disposition to experiment, without
urgent necessity or apparent cause'. The people might well think that there was 'no steadiness in our Government'.

The appointment of Lord Cornwallis as governor-general in 1786 indicated that the reforms desired by the home authorities would be carried out and that steadiness was likely to be a characteristic feature of the reformed administration. In spite of Yorktown, Cornwallis had a reputation for competence as well as integrity. Unlike his predecessors, he was not a servant of the company and was therefore involved neither in its traditions nor in its corruptions. Clive had forced the company's servants to sign covenants that they would not accept presents, but they were still engaged in private trade, although Hastings had ended that exemption of their goods from duty which had given them such an advantage over other merchants and which had so annoyed Mir Kasim as nawab. What particularly vexed the Directors was that the company's exports from India seemed of inferior quality to the goods which its servants sent home on their own account or sold to foreign companies. What particularly troubled Cornwallis was the discovery that nearly all the Collectors were engaged in private trade to the detriment of their administrative duties. They could hardly have been prevented from supplementing their meagre wages in this way unless those wages were increased. Cornwallis persuaded the Directors to sanction substantial increases and strictly prohibited private trade. Those who managed the company's commercial business were formed into an entirely separate branch of the service, and private trade was permitted them because of the practical difficulty of preventing it. Even so, they were henceforth to provide the company's investment not by lucrative contracts but as agents required to supervise production and render accounts. But if Cornwallis effected the separation of the covenanted civil service from commerce he also began its separation from Indian society. His other reforms had the effect of restricting high office to the members of that service, who were all Europeans. Once Indians had been excluded from responsibility they were soon thought to be unworthy of it, and the highly paid civilian who now had no Indian colleagues soon came to have few Indian friends.

Recoiling from the complicated and costly experiments of the Hastings period, the Court of Directors had decided that it would 'tend more to Simplicity, Energy, Justice and Economy' if the Collectors were given the powers of civil justice and the magisterial functions which had then been entrusted to separate judges. This change was welcomed by many of the company's servants as in closer accordance with Indian traditions. But the arrears of suits which soon accumulated led Cornwallis to the con-
clusion that the Collectors lacked the time for judicial work; he also
thought it dangerous to give them so much power. Only a system of
checks could ensure an impartial administration of justice, especially in
revenue cases. He therefore established a complete separation of powers
between the executive in the person of the collector and the judicature in
the person of a district judge who also acted as magistrate. Criminal
justice had hitherto been administered by Indian judges responsible to
Muhammad Reza Khan. Cornwallis thought that they would never con-
sent to the changes that he proposed to make in the Muslim criminal law,
and he replaced them by courts of circuit under English judges. The com-
pany was now openly encroaching upon the jurisdiction that Clive had
left to the nawab. There was no question of introducing the English
criminal law with its many capital offences. The execution of the Brahman
Nanda Kumar for forgery, under sentence of the Supreme Court, had
seemed a savage punishment in Indian eyes. But there were aspects of
the Muslim criminal law that seemed equally unjust or inhuman to the
English. Hastings had tried without success to persuade the Muslim
judges to assess the degree of a murderer’s guilt by considering his motives
rather than the type of weapon he had used. The Court of Directors had
cautiously suggested that the judges might be persuaded ‘to refrain from
ordering punishments of a cruel nature’—in other words mutilation.1
Cornwallis also objected strongly to the practice of allowing the next of
kin to pardon a murderer, on the ground that it enabled Brahmans to
escape punishment by virtue of their caste, since no Hindu would be a
party to the execution of a Brahman. In these and other respects the
criminal law was amended in accordance with English ideas. Imprison-
ment took the place of mutilation; murderers were to be judged by their
motives not their methods, and the victim’s next of kin lost the right of
pardon. In general, the judicial system became more rigid and detailed,
but also more systematic and uniform. There were no distinctions of
persons: Brahmans and non-Brahmans, Muslims and non-Muslims,
zamindars and peasants, were equal before the courts. Cornwallis did
not try to justify his reforms as a return to the best days of the Mughal
government. On the contrary, he claimed that ‘even during the vigour
of the ancient Constitution’ there was room for many abuses of power.2
Nor did he propose the wholesale introduction of English institutions.
When he could find a precedent for a reform in Muslim law, he appealed
to it. What he intended was the correction of ‘such parts of the Moho-
medan Law, as are most evidently Contrary to natural Justice and the
good of Society’.

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attending to the state of public opinion. He himself may well have thought that natural justice was more manifest in the institutions of England than in those of other countries. But one result of his reforms, at least, was a system of punishments less cruel than those of either English or Muslim criminal law. Nevertheless, in its separation of powers, in its reliance upon the written law, and in its undiscriminating but cumbersome procedure, the judicial system established by Cornwallis was more akin to English than to Indian ideas.

He also valued it as a necessary background to his revenue policy. Pitt’s India Act had called for ‘permanent rules’ to govern the amount of revenue payable by the zamindars. Cornwallis found them in ‘a general state of poverty and depression’, and decided that a fundamental change of system was essential. In 1793, he declared the government’s revenue demand to be unalterable. He thought that the zamindars would improve their lands if they knew that an increase in productivity would not be followed by an increase in the revenue demand. The zamindars, however diverse in status, would henceforth be regarded as a homogeneous class, endowed with property rights in their land, which they could sell to anyone without the government’s permission, and which the government itself could distrain and sell for non-payment of revenue. Whether the old zamindars survived seemed immaterial to Cornwallis: if they could not pay the revenue demanded, their lands would be sold to those who could. Possible buyers included those Indians, probably merchants, whom he knew to be investing in the company’s bonds and who, he thought, would have no other outlet for their savings once the public debt was discharged. Improvidence and incompetence would thus give way to thrift and efficiency. The rights of landed property would be protected by the judges from unjust encroachments even at the hands of the Collectors. Prompted by self-interest, a regenerated landowning aristocracy would develop the resources of the country and prove a loyal support to the government. Less protection was, however, provided for the rights of the peasants. The zamindars were supposed to give them decennial rental certificates (*pattas*), as a defence against unjust demands. But the peasants proved reluctant to confine to a decennial certificate rights the validity of which they considered everlasting and lands the extent and capacity of which they preferred to leave indefinite. The zamindars were also empowered to distrain and sell their tenants’ property for non-payment of rent. Cornwallis assumed that the zamindars would consider it to be in their own interests to have a prosperous and contented tenantry. But that was at a time when Bengal had not fully recovered from the effects of the famine of 1770, and tenants were none too easy to find. With the rise in population the zamindars had less reason for moderation. Besides, the strict enforcement of the sale laws tended to break the traditional bonds between zamindars and peasants by dis-
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possessing some of the old zamindars and forcing others to be equally strict with their tenants. At the same time, the zamindars as a class were required to disband their own local police and were deprived of their responsibilities for the preservation of law and order. Their function in the districts was to be merely an economic one, and economic self-interest was to be the only link between them and their tenants. As productivity increased, the revenue paid by the zamindars came to form a decreasing proportion of the country's wealth. Cornwallis had foreseen this, and assumed that the state would be able to meet its needs from the increased yield of commercial tariffs, but this proved to be an optimistic assumption. However, the growing wealth of the zamindars encouraged subletting, and layers of absentee landlords had eventually to be supported by the peasantry of Bengal. Just as an impersonal relationship between the officials and the people was to facilitate the rule of law, so an impersonal relationship between the zamindars and their tenants was to facilitate the working of economic laws. The permanent settlement did in fact provide some stability in rural Bengal, in which the country's resources could be developed, but the social cost was high. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that tenancy legislation was instituted there.

After the adventurous and erratic policies that the company's governments of the Hastings period had pursued towards the other Indian powers with so much danger and such little apparent profit, the home government had called for an end to schemes of war and conquest. When the Emperor Shah Alam was deposed and blinded by the Rohilla chief Ghulam Qadir in 1788, during the temporary weakness of Sindia, Cornwallis declined to intervene. On the other hand, he considered that a further war with Mysore could hardly be avoided, and determined that the company must not again be isolated in such circumstances. When the nizam proposed a fresh agreement with the company he explained that he was prevented by Parliament from concluding a new treaty but promised the help of the company’s troops when required, provided that they were not to be used against any of its allies. When specifying who those allies were, he pointedly excluded Tipu Sultan of Mysore. This has been criticised both as an evasion of the spirit of the act of 1784 and as a provocative gesture, although it may be doubted whether the warlike Tipu needed much provoking. The result of the ensuing war, in which the company was joined by the Marathas as well as the nizam, was that Tipu was deprived of half his territories, and Cornwallis could claim that 'we have effectually crippled our enemy without making our friends too formidable.'

Maratha power, indeed, seemed to be disintegrating from within. Sindia soon recovered his position at Delhi, restored Shah Alam in spite of his blindness and inflicted a grim revenge upon Ghulam Qadir. But as he
extended his power over northern India, Nana Phadnis at Poona became all the more suspicious of his ultimate aims, and encouraged the ambitions of his chief rival, Holkar, as a counterpoise. Nana’s suspicions seemed justified when Sindia moved south to Poona in 1792 and proceeded to establish his influence over the Peshwa. Holkar duly challenged his influence in the north, but was defeated at Lakheri. However, Mahadji Sindia’s triumph was only temporary, for he died in 1794, leaving a much less capable successor, and the main result of these struggles was merely to weaken the power of the Maratha confederacy and the authority of the Poona government. Meanwhile, the English company prospered.

The French company, on the other hand, did not long survive the Peace of Paris. France was then restored to the Indian possessions that she had held in 1749. But the English now had the mastery of Bengal, and Chandranagar could no longer be fortified. Even for the provision of its exports the company was dependent on English good will. But it lacked sufficient capital, and soon had to appeal to the government for help. The revelation of its financial position provoked such criticism that its privileges were suspended in 1769, and its territories were taken over by the Crown in 1770. But the government took little further interest in India, and when war broke out with England in 1778 the English found little difficulty in capturing the French possessions there. The arrival of a French fleet in Indian waters in 1782 and the landing of 3000 French troops in support of Haidar Ali caused consternation at Madras. The French troops failed to co-operate effectively with Haidar, but the French admiral de Suffren proved more than a match for the English admiral Hughes, and quickly took Negapatam and Trincomali, which the English had only recently taken from the Dutch. This put the English in a weak position, for they had no harbour on the Coromandel coast and had to go to Bombay both to refit and to shelter from the north-east monsoon between October and January. The French, on the other hand, were able to threaten the Bay of Bengal both from Trincomali, which had a good harbour that could be used all the year round, and also from Achin, in Sumatra, where Suffren decided to winter. But in the peace negotiations the English refused to countenance any revival of French political power in India. They agreed to restore the French possessions there but again refused to allow the fortification of Chandranagar. They would concede the French only a free, sure and independent commerce. But if the French could not revive the past they were determined not to surrender the future by allowing the English to hold Trincomali, which was therefore restored to the Dutch. The English had to be content with Negapatam, which, as Vergennes remarked, was ‘bien plus innocent’ in their hands than Trincomali. In their subsequent relations with Indian powers the French
continued to hint at expeditions that would one day drive the English out of India. But when Tipu’s ambassadors arrived in Paris in 1788 the government had nothing but compliments to offer them, and the ship in which they returned carried, unknown to them, the orders for the evacuation of French troops from India. The National Assembly decided in 1791 to send some troops to reinforce Pondicherry, but less than 400 in fact arrived, and on the outbreak of war in 1793 the English again had little difficulty in taking possession of the French settlements in India. The East India Company established by Calonne in 1785 made a promising start by concentrating on the India trade, but lost its monopoly in 1790 and was subsequently dissolved by the Convention. Only the French military adventurers survived to trouble the English. During this period many of them rendered good service to Indian powers, raising and training cavalry, infantry and artillery by European methods. Men like Madec under the emperor, Gentil under the nawab of Oudh, Raymond under the nizam and de Boigne under Sindia were only the most famous. Soldiers like these remained, to be distrusted by the English as much for the strength which they imparted to potential enemies as for any loyalty that they might retain for France.

While political and administrative considerations were thus determining the course of English power in India, its expansion beyond was determined more by economic considerations. Just as the philosophes welcomed France’s expulsion from Canada as diverting the country’s energies into more profitable channels, so the unrest in the American colonies seemed to many Englishmen to point to the advantages of an empire based on commerce rather than colonisation. Such considerations were more acceptable in English than in French governing circles. Even the younger Pitt declared that the main purpose of his India Act was to facilitate the progress of the company’s commerce. From the 1760s onwards Alexander Dalrymple, that restive servant of the company, had taken the lead in campaigning for voyages of discovery in Asia as a preliminary to the expansion of England’s trade. Such arguments were reinforced by the difficulties which the company experienced in paying for its growing exports of tea from China, especially when the supply of Spanish silver was interrupted by the outbreak of war with Spain in 1762, and it proved impossible to fill the gap from India.

The company had ceased to import silver into India after Plassey enabled it to pay for its exports with the public and private profits of empire, and the hoarding that accompanied political instability accentuated the shortage. Ghulam Husain Khan, among others, suspected that Bengal
was being drained of its treasure by Englishmen returning home with their fortunes, and the idea that the Industrial Revolution had been financed by 'Plassey plunder' was later developed by nationalist writers. In fact, the returning nabobs found it simpler and more profitable to remit their fortunes by buying bills of exchange from the European companies, which used the money in the purchase of goods to export from India. During this period, the chief exports to Europe remained cotton piece-goods, silk, saltpetre and pepper. But towards the end of it the European market was being invaded by English machine-made cottons, and the English company tried without much success to encourage other exports. Indigo, however, was successfully developed by private enterprise into a profitable export. The company realised that economic problems might be created by the export of goods without an equivalent in imports. In 1785 the Court of Directors wrote to Bengal: 'We conceive that there is a danger, lest by bringing to Europe too large an amount of the Revenues of those Countries in Goods for which no return is made, we should occasion a drain which our Territories may be unable to support.' But they decided none the less to increase their 'investment', or purchase of goods for Europe, consoling themselves with the thought that the Indian artisans who produced those goods would have been injured if the company bought less than usual. This idea subsequently re-emerged in the writings of those who defended British rule against nationalist criticisms. In general, whenever silver could be exported from Bengal, it was sent either to the other presidency governments in India or to China. The Court of Directors still hoped that some means could 'be found of supplying our China purchases from Bengal, without draining that Country of its circulating Specie, which should on no consideration be admitted of'. This problem was intensified by the stimulus which Pitt's Commutation Act of 1784 gave to the company's tea trade.

There was still a European market for Chinese silk, porcelain and exotic luxuries, but tea was the most important commodity during this period. England was the chief consumer, although the costs of war forced up the tea duties to a height that made smuggling very profitable. When the Commutation Act reduced the duties from 119 to 12½ per cent, the dominance of the English company over the trade was assured. The trade of the Danish and Swedish companies quickly declined, and the less reputable upstart companies suffered even more. The Dutch company, however, which had developed its own European markets, had never been so dependent on smugglers for its customers. Its extensive trade within Asia also enabled it to import large quantities of pepper, sandalwood,
spices and tin at Canton. But the English company was hard put to it to find means of paying for the great increase in its exports from China after 1784.¹ In addition to sending large amounts of silver it increased its imports of English woollens and lead, and even experimented with consignments of English tin and copper. The company's Indian governments did what they could, but a more important contribution to the closing of the gap in the balance of payments was made by the private merchants engaged in the 'country' or Asian trade. The company encouraged them to bring Indian goods—especially Bihar opium and Bombay cotton—to Canton, provided that they deposited the proceeds in its treasury there in return for its bills. This money it used to pay for its exports of tea. At the same time expansion of English trade with China imposed strains upon the Co-hong merchants' monopoly established by the Chinese authorities at Canton, while the company's monopoly was criticised by English manufacturers as preventing them from securing their fair share in that expansion. The two main objects of Macartney's mission to Peking in 1793 were to increase the facilities for English trade with China and to seek out fresh markets for British manufactures elsewhere in Asia. Secondary objects were to collect information about China and the Far East generally, to remedy the grievances of the English at Canton and to raise the English reputation in China. All that Macartney achieved, however, was the collection of information. It has been suggested that he would have been more successful if he had conformed to Chinese custom and kowtowed to the emperor, but it has also been argued that the Dutch mission which did perform the kowtow in the following year received worse treatment than Macartney. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the discourtesy endured by the Dutch on their journey to Peking resulted from the boorishness of local officials and was no part of imperial policy, and that on their return they were accorded particularly favourable treatment. But the Chinese government regarded all such missions as tribute-bearers, and saw no reason to change its system of trade.

When an English settlement was established at Balambangan off the north-east coast of Borneo in 1773 it was with the aim of attracting Chinese junks and of generally forwarding English trade with China and with what the Court of Directors called 'the unfrequented Parts of Asia'.² But the settlement was mismanaged and undefended, and two years later it was abandoned to Sulu plunderers. Again, when Francis Light, trader and ship's captain, urged the company to establish a settlement at Penang he stressed its usefulness not only as a harbour but also as a trading
station between India and China. This was a more successful enterprise, although the Bengal government was determined to refrain from political adventure in the neighbourhood. The sultan of Kedah indeed made the grant in the expectation of the company’s help against Siamese attack, but after establishing a settlement there in 1786 the government refused to conclude any sort of defensive alliance with him, and he continued to believe that he had been tricked. Penang did not entirely fulfil its early promise. But in the expansion of the China trade ‘country’ merchants from India were already forcing their way past Dutch opposition into the markets of Indonesia with Indian products to exchange for silver and local commodities to take to Canton, and in the peace treaty of 1784 the Dutch finally conceded freedom of navigation to British shipping in the eastern seas.

In spite of its economic difficulties during this period, the Dutch company was able to maintain its political power in Asia against local opposition. In Ceylon, the Dutch took the offensive against the king of Kandy because they thought that he had been encouraging opposition to their authority in the Colombo district. A Dutch force plundered Kandy in 1765, although it could not maintain itself there for long, and the treaty which was signed in the following year gave the Dutch sovereignty over the whole coastline of Ceylon. The Kandyian kingdom was now isolated from the outside world, and the king promised not to enter into any agreement with a foreign power, while the Dutch promised to defend him from foreign attack. But the British had no difficulty in capturing Trincomali in 1782, although they did not leave a strong enough garrison to defend it against Suffren. It was only restored to the Dutch because neither the English nor the French were prepared to see it in each other’s hands. The war also interrupted the company’s trade with Europe, and it had to turn to the home government for financial help. By sending a squadron under Van Braam the government enabled the company to repel the rising power of the Bugis who had seized control of Johore and were raiding Dutch posts in the Malacca straits. To counter a similar threat to their interests in Borneo, the Dutch established their influence in both the west and the south of the island by supporting rivals to the established rulers. But they were unable to sustain this effort, and in 1791 decided to withdraw. When Holland came under French control and the Batavian republic was founded, William V from his exile in England ordered the company’s officials in the East to hand over its territories to the English in order to save them from the French. Whatever the effect of these orders, the English in fact had no difficulty in taking control of the Cape, Ceylon, and the Dutch possessions in India, on the west coast of Sumatra, and in Malacca. Java they left for the time. In Holland, the company’s governing body was replaced by a government-controlled committee in 1795, and the company itself came to an end on 31 December 1799. Its financial condition had been a matter of concern
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to the home government for some years past, while its servants were still making their fortunes at its expense. The English company had only recently been saved by Cornwallis from the corruption of its own officials, and now that the profits of its growing China trade were overshadowing its losses elsewhere its charter could be renewed for another twenty years in 1793. The Dutch company was less fortunate, after the collapse of the state with which it had been so closely linked.

However, both in England and in Holland it was widely assumed that a career in the East was the quickest road to fortune and that those who went there had no other interest. Such an assumption was strengthened by the revelations of successive parliamentary inquiries in the Clive and Hastings era and by radical writings, especially those of the abbé Raynal which were extensively circulated in Europe. Indeed, the very appearance of cities like Calcutta, with its classical columns and porticoes, or Batavia, with its canals and Dutch-style brick houses, must have suggested that the Europeans living there were not much concerned with oriental notions of beauty. There almost seemed to be more appreciation of such things in Europe, when a Chinese pagoda was to be found at Kew, or in the English Garden at Munich, or when the Jesuit Attiret’s praise of Chinese landscape gardening, with its use of art to imitate nature, was taken up by Sir William Chambers, and the taste for Chinese gardens spread from England to France and Germany. But it could be argued that all this was far from being a genuine appreciation of oriental ideas for their own sake. A taste for irregularity, for the ‘beautiful disorder’ and ‘anti-symmetry’ which Attiret had praised, happened to coincide with the reaction against classicism.¹ Both in gardens and in houses Chinese and Gothic objects and motifs were equally acceptable, and were sometimes to be found side by side.

Again, when Europeans studied the civilisations of China and India they tended to study them not so much for their intrinsic interest as for their relationship to Christian Europe, often looking with particular attention for traces of the primitve language of mankind, or for traces of the religion that must, they thought, have prevailed before the Flood. The Jesuits were emphatic in their praise of Chinese civilisation in the face of accusations that they had compromised with paganism, while the Figurists among them professed to find references to Abraham or Noah in ancient Chinese texts. In India, when Francis Wilford’s pandits realised what he was looking for they forged a sacred text for him which contained the story of Shem, Ham and Japhet under the names of Sharma, Charma and Jyapeti, and even the great Sir William Jones was deceived. But such arguments were double-edged. If it could be suggested that Brahma was a corruption of Abraham it could also be suggested that Abraham was a

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corruption of Brahma. Thus Voltaire emphasised the antiquity as well as the enlightenment of what he considered to be the teachings of uncorrupted Hinduism. Perhaps India was the cradle of civilisation and Vedic Hinduism the primitive religion of mankind? What he took for an ancient Vedic text seems to have been in fact the work of a Christian missionary or convert, setting forth Hindu doctrines that seemed compatible with Christianity. When he praised the merits of Chinese civilisation and portrayed Confucianism as an enlightened Deism he placed much reliance on Jesuit sources. But his implication was that both China and India had had civilisations that were older and often more enlightened than those of Christian Europe, and Frederick the Great suggested that he was following the example of Tacitus, who praised the Germans in order to improve the Romans. To criticise one's own country by portraying the surprise or indignation of an enlightened oriental visitor was by now a favourite literary device, but the philosophes found in China a factual basis for their theories. Here was a truly benevolent despotism, where competitive examinations ensured that the administrators were as intelligent as philosophes, and the emperor governed according to natural law without the help—or hindrance—of revealed religion. Poivre exhorted the rulers of Europe to imitate the emperor of China, who so realised the importance of agriculture that he himself turned the first furrow of spring—a theme which was developed by Quesnay. The Physiocrats were not wholly uncritical, however, and there were some others—like Anson, or Grimm—who strongly dissented from the chorus of praise. But in general China was presented as a model for Europe.

Although Europeans still tended to look at Europe when they wrote about Asia, there was nevertheless a widening of interest during this period, and Voltaire had some right to criticise Bossuet for the limited scope of his Universal History. India, too, was attracting more attention, and service there awakened the interest of a select few in the civilisation, and especially the religion, of that country. Dow and Holwell, from whom Voltaire derived so much of his knowledge of Hinduism, had both served the English company there, and were anxious to stress the depth and subtlety that could be found in Hindu doctrines. Warren Hastings himself recommended the publication under official auspices of the English translation of the Bhagavad Gita that had been made by Charles Wilkins, another of the company's servants. As the company assumed greater administrative responsibilities it called forth the services of linguists and translators of Hindu and Muslim laws. A tradition of oriental scholarship was thus beginning, marked by the foundation of the Asiatic Society
of Bengal in 1784. The Society of Arts and Sciences had also been founded at Batavia in 1778, though with at first a less pronounced leaning to oriental studies. There also developed a realisation that European standards of taste were not the only ones to be considered. When Thomas Percy published some translations from Chinese literature in 1761 he thought it necessary to state apologetically that ‘examined by the laws of European criticism’ they were ‘liable to many objections’. But Wilkins’s Bhagavad Gita was published under the authority of the Court of Directors in 1785 with a prefatory letter from Warren Hastings to the effect that it should not be judged by ‘rules derived from the ancient or modern literature of Europe’ but on its own merits as a profound philosophical and theological work. Similarly, when Sir William Jones published his translation of Shakuntala, he praised Kalidasa as ‘the Shakspear of India’. Hastings and Jones even hoped to encourage the study of oriental literature in England. On the one hand, oriental literature had its own artistic and intellectual merits. On the other hand, Hastings hoped that a knowledge of works like the Gita would eradicate the tendency of his countrymen to despise Indians as uncivilised. Soon afterwards William Robertson was citing Wilkins’s Gita and Jones’s Shakuntala as evidence of the high standard of civilisation that India had attained, and drawing the moral that Europeans should improve their behaviour towards Indians. Again, when Marsden wrote his History of Sumatra he tried to show how offensive European manners must appear in that country: even in dancing, while Europeans often found the oriental style ‘ludicrous’, Sumatrans found the European style equally ‘ridiculous’. But these were exciting years of discovery. They were followed soon enough by an age in which oriental ways were dismissed as inefficient or despised as ungodly.

2. RELATIONS WITH AFRICA, 1763–93

By the later eighteenth century, Europeans were looking at Africa with new expectations and hopes. Malachy Postlethwayt, citing Leo Africanus, claimed that the continent and its peoples could produce not merely precious metals but ‘all the richest articles of the East and West India commerce’; ‘if once a turn for industry and the arts was introduced among them, a greater quantity of the European produce and manufactures might be exported thither than to any other country in the whole

3 Jones (trans.), Sacontala (Calcutta, 1789), p. v.
4 Robertson, Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India (London, 1791), pp. 288 ff.
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world'. Merchants and manufacturers seeking new markets, statesmen whose colonial systems had been damaged in war, dreamed similar dreams; and, in this period, some took tentative steps to discover what substance might lie behind them.

The primary need, if speculations based on Leo Africanus were to give way to credit-worthy enterprises, was for precise geographical knowledge. The aspiration to extend trade powerfully reinforced the interest which students of the developing natural sciences showed in Africa, as in other unexplored regions. Inspired by Linnaeus, many Swedish botanists made modest journeys into unfamiliar country, noting, like Sparrmann at the Cape, what economic potentialities the land seemed to hold, together with much miscellaneous sociological detail. Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and sponsor of botanical studies at Kew, also encouraged botanical collectors in Africa; among his correspondents was James Bruce, whose observations during his journeys in Abyssinia (1768–73) were inspired by a widely ranging scientific curiosity. In 1788 Banks was instrumental in founding the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the interior Parts of Africa. This dining-club of gentlemen prominent in scholarship and public life, though primarily concerned to advance knowledge, interested itself quite naturally in possible commercial developments; it deliberately concentrated its modest resources on the region believed to be the richest and most populous of Africa—the western Sudan.

The north-west received priority, even though considerable European settlement in Africa was found only in the extreme south. Here the European population numbered about 20,000 by the century's end, with an advancing frontier of settlement. Capetown alone had about 15,000 inhabitants, one-third Europeans; the owners of its more substantial and elegant houses enjoyed some of the urban amenities of contemporary Europe. The eighteenth century had brought little new immigration from Europe and until 1795 distinctions based on national origin tended to decrease, as the South African environment produced a distinctively colonial culture, unified by the Afrikaans language and by the widespread influence of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Economically, however, the future of the colony remained uncertain. The Netherlands East India Company did not greatly encourage production for export, regarding the Cape as a strategic base and a supplier of grain, meat and wine to its merchantmen rather than as a colony. Nor was it easy to suggest a staple for expanding commerce; this temperate region, not especially fertile, could offer little that Europe could not produce more efficiently at home. Abundant land allowed the colonists, as

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a whole, to attain a comfortable standard of life, but the role assigned to them in the Dutch economy, as regulated by fiscal and commercial restrictions of the company, held little promise of growth. By 1779 a patriot movement at the Cape was beginning to cite Locke, Grotius and Adam Smith in its demands for administrative reform and freer trade, wider civil rights and broader representation.

But from about the same time international rivalries were becoming the decisive influence in the fortunes of the region. Anglo-French conflicts in India, and the subsequent consolidation of British power there, made authorities in London anxious both to secure their own ‘half-way house’ to India, and to deny the use of Capetown to France. Dutch intervention in the American War; Admiral de Suffren’s occupation of the Cape, forestalling a British expedition, in 1781; the patronage later extended by the French to the ‘patriot’ opposition in the United Provinces—all indicated southern Africa as a growing area of imperial rivalries. Hence the invasion of the Netherlands by revolutionary France was liable to threaten Britain’s eastern, as well as her continental interests; it provided her with the opportunity to seize the Cape in 1795.1

The restless elements in South African society were Afrikaner frontiersmen of the eastern districts; patriarchal herdsmen and hunters, tougher, cruder in taste, even more resistant to government and restraint than the settled slave-owning farmers to the west.2 To secure the indivisible loan-farm of 6000 acres, which each member of each new generation came to regard as a birth-right, the trek-boers pushed on the frontiers of settlement until they met the Xosa, vanguard of the Bantu-speaking peoples who were moving gradually southwards, also seeking new pasturelands. The company’s government tried to separate the two peoples by defining a boundary line, but neither side would voluntarily limit its expansion. Gradually the Boers, strengthened by fire-arms and by a determination compounded of Calvinism, cupidity, fear, and hardening racial arrogance, pushed the frontier eastwards. In 1779 Xosa raids on Afrikaner cattle, not unprovoked, opened the ‘first Kaffir war’: after the successes of Boer commandos in 1781 the frontier was advanced to the Fish river. But this represented only an uneasy truce in the relations of the two peoples; many Xosa remained west of the Fish river (some trading with the Boers, or in their employment), while some Afrikaners crossed to the east of the river. During the drought of 1793 fighting was resumed, immediate responsibility at least lying with the Boer farmer Lindeque; Maynier, the government’s agent, made peace without driving the Xosa across the Fish river or recovering all stolen cattle. Conflicts continued; in 1795 the frontiersmen, angered by what they judged sentimental negrophilia on the part of
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government, rebelled, and proclaimed the independent frontier republic of Graaf Reinet. Although the aims of these Afrikaners were parochial, within their territorial limits they were being rigorously pursued; and they ran contrary to Postlethwayt’s dream of developing the economic potentialities of the native Africans.

North of the Fish river, European influence on the east coast was represented primarily by the declining Portuguese settlements in Mozambique; and here most of the colonists were Goanese or mulattoes. A few slaves were shipped to the Cape, and the Americas; but though traders occasionally talked of ‘new sources of traffic’ in these waters, few ever touched there on their journeys east. The French, with their thriving plantation colonies in the Mascarenes, had the strongest interest in obtaining slaves and supplies from East Africa or Madagascar, but their half-hearted attempt to re-establish political footholds on the latter island after 1768 petered out almost farcically in the hands of the Magyar adventurer Benyowski. In 1777 a French trader proposed that the government should establish a new colony at Kilwa, whence a new privileged company was to trade along the coasts for slaves and ivory, selling French fire-arms and brandy, and Indian cloth. This plan was intended primarily to give French merchants a share of the trade between East Africa and West Asia, hitherto controlled by the Omani Arabs; but the French authorities were unwilling to risk a conflict with Muscat, and left this relatively minor commerce under Arab protection. France was more interested in exercising political influence in the western approaches to India than in speculative plans for East African trade.

Similar considerations governed the powers’ relations with Egypt. A few Europeans appreciated the country’s commercial possibilities, both as an entrepôt for trade with Asia and as a terminal for African caravans; but actual trade remained small. This was partly because the resistance of the Mameluke Beys to the sultan’s authority produced political uncertainty and disorder, partly because of opposition from established interests. The British East India Company was anxious to protect its privileges in the oceanic trade-route; the Turks prohibited Christian commerce in the Red Sea, and were supported by the British Levant Company. When the beys, between 1766 and 1779, encouraged British ships from India to sail to Suez, both companies successfully urged the government to oppose such development. French traders did rather more business in Egypt; and some Frenchmen understood Egypt’s potential importance as a base for a new attack on British interests in Asia. Choiseul-Gouffier’s appointment as ambassador in Constantinople in 1784 initiated new attempts,
not yet successful, to cultivate French influence in Egypt. The British responded only erratically, although Egypt's strategic importance had been convincingly demonstrated during the American War, when urgent despatches to India first went by Suez. Their consulate in Cairo, re-established in 1786 to secure communications and counter French activities, was abolished in 1793 to save money—precisely when France revived hers.

European relations with the rest of the North African littoral are more relevant to Mediterranean than to African affairs. Commercially the regencies of Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers were most closely connected with the Levant, although the extent and stability of their commercial relations with southern Europe are often underrated. Resident European communities imported manufactured goods, some of which fed the trans-Saharan caravans, and exported grains, and other local produce, notably to Leghorn and Marseille. In Morocco also, strong rulers like Moulay Mohammed (1757–90) encouraged European merchants, while controlling the places and conditions of their trade. Interested Europeans occasionally proposed military operations in these North African states; Spain retained five small territorial footholds between Ceuta and Oran, and Portugal held Mazagan until 1769; but generally, Europe was satisfied with the protection afforded to existing trade, and sought no major transformation of political or economic relations with the Maghreb.

It was however increasingly appreciated that the Maghreb had a hinterland; that the Saharan caravan routes (by which several thousand slaves, with gold, ivory and other produce, reached the Mediterranean every year) might facilitate the opening of broader commerce with the western Sudan. The African Association at first favoured this approach to its work of exploration. In 1788 its first emissaries, Ledyard and Lucas, started respectively from Cairo and Tripoli; and though the former died and the latter turned back, the association was able to give substantially more precision to the African map by the unspectacular method of interrogating Sahara traders. But physical difficulties, combined with the resistance offered to foreign intrusion by those interested in the established pattern of trade, made the Sahara formidable to explorers and unpromising for mercantile enterprise. In 1790 the association's new agent, Houghton, began his exploration from the Gambia, as did Mungo Park in 1795. The west coast, where European influence was already most intense, was also the crucial area for its future development.
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In 1763 the economy of most of western Africa was dominated by the export of slaves across the Atlantic. The demand for plantation-labour was still expanding, and was checked only temporarily by the American War. The British led the way, often supplying French and Spanish colonies besides their own. French slave-dealers quickly recovered from the complete stoppage of the trade after the Seven Years War; after 1784, supported by government subsidies, they largely displaced the British in Angola. Portuguese slavers apparently continued to flourish; North American traders were shipping slaves even before independence; Spain claimed Fernando Po in 1778 in the hope of entering the trade; only the Dutch, and possibly the Danes, seem to have lost ground. No research has yet produced reliable figures of the scale, distribution and fluctuations of the slave-trade, but contemporary estimates converge sufficiently to suggest that during this period the average number of persons exported from western Africa was of the order of 80,000 annually. Probably over half of these sailed in English ships; the French carried perhaps a quarter.¹

Although slaves were by far West Africa’s most important export, they were not the only one. Gold and ivory were profitable to purchase as opportunity offered; but quantities were small. The elephant population of coastal regions declined; and men gradually learned to treat with prudent scepticism the alluring stories of rich African mines. The trade in dye-woods, carried directly home to Europe, employed a dozen British ships by 1788.² Gum from forests near the Senegal, essential in certain textile finishing processes, was a major object of international rivalry. Britain and France in turn, while established at St Louis, sought to direct the gum-trading Braknas and Trarzas exclusively towards Podore and river-ports, while the rival power tried to trade on the Atlantic coast, at Arguin or Portendic. But nowhere else was any African product sufficiently important to provide a staple for direct trade between Europe and Africa. The value of cargoes entering British ports direct from Africa in these thirty years remained only one-ninth that of British exports to Africa.³ Hides and wax, palm-oil and indigo, might be bought in small quantities to make up the cargo, and carried to Europe by way of the Americas; but labour remained the only commodity of major importance to the Atlantic economy which Africa could provide in bulk.

It was not then any peculiarly cruel twist of character which made Europeans concentrate upon the slave-trade—nor even, primarily, the desire of governments for tidily planned imperial economies. One feature of this period is the continual recurrence of projects, more or less vague and ill-informed, for the development of new crops and new markets

¹ The most detailed and authoritative of these estimates is probably that by Robert Norris, Accounts and Papers, 1789 (xxvi), Report...of the Committee of Council. Its figure of 74,200 seems rather too low.
² Ibid., part 1, evidence of Teaste, Deane.
³ Calculated from Accounts and Papers, 1789 (xxvi), and D. Macpherson, Annals of Commerce (London, 1805).
in western Africa. In 1766 Governor O'Hara of British Senegambia cherished wild hopes of European settlement in gold-bearing Galam, of supplies of cotton, rice, tobacco and indigo from the neighbouring countries, of a vast market for British manufactures still further east to be explored by agents attached to caravans on the Mediterranean coast. Meanwhile in Angola Pombal's energetic governor, Sousa Coutinho, was struggling to develop white settlement, commercial agriculture, even iron founding; and Abbé Demanet (later a promoter of the Senegal Company) was seeing in the Saloum and Casamance rivers, not only roads towards the gold mines, but sources of timber, indigo and other wild products. Demanet's notion that cotton and sugar might be cultivated on Bulama island was taken up by the governor whom he served as chaplain. In 1777 it was Britain's turn to seek substitutes for American colonies; Temple Luttrel, M.P., while attacking the existing organisation of British African interests, held out fantastic prospects of reaching the Nile by way of the Gambia river, thus opening great new markets for British goods, and rich sources of 'every valuable production we receive from America'. In 1785 the British government contemplated colonizing the upper Gambia with transported convicts. But hopes of using the Old World to redress the changing balance of the New were still based on inadequate geographical and agricultural knowledge.

In both Britain and France, the later eighteenth century saw a tendency towards the 'freeing' of African trade, in the limited sense that monopolies were ended, and that legislation sought to assure commercial opportunities to individual traders under the national flag. The corollary of this process was that governments, assuming administrative and military responsibilities formerly supported by the profits of privileged companies, themselves had to play more active roles. The British Company of Merchants trading to Africa, established in 1750 on the ruins of the Royal Africa Company's monopoly, was prohibited from corporate trading; it existed to elect an administrative committee which Parliament subsidised and charged with the management of existing forts in the interests of all British traders to Africa. Such a body might satisfy established merchants on the Gold Coast, though critics alleged inertia and profiteering; it was hardly qualified to administer conquered Senegal, with its inland trade and more complex frontier problems, nor to resist the continued rivalry of the French in that region. So in 1765 the Senegal
conquests were united with the older Gambian settlements in the colony of Senegambia, with a constitution constructed, ‘as far as differences of circumstances will permit’, on American models. But the British government did not command adequate machinery to administer such a colony, still less to realise O’Hara’s dreams; it reconciled itself without difficulty to the loss of the Senegal during the American War and handed back the Gambia fort to mercantile control.

In 1763 the French Compagnie des Indes gave up to the Crown the remains of their African establishments (retaining the fort at Whydah until 1767). Goree was placed under royal governors, who did their best to revive French fortunes on the mainland, leasing land around Dakar, re-establishing posts at Joal, Portudal and Albreda, and trying to divert interior trade away from the British in the Gambia. But they were weakly supported from Paris, and the colony served chiefly as a port of call for French slavers sailing further south. As usual in African settlements, conflicts arose within the colonial community; merchants complained that governors were abusing their position to their private profit, while governors and private traders joined in denouncing a new company which, under successive titles in the ’seventies and ’eighties, began to use influence in Paris to secure new privileges in Africa. It was the change in Atlantic naval power during the American War, not any superiority of African policy, which enabled France to reconquer St Louis in 1779. This gain was confirmed by the Treaty of Versailles, the British negotiators concentrating on securing access to the gum-trade at Portendic. Further south the balance of military operations had been more even, and the treaty contained no provision directly prejudicial to British leadership in the slave-trade.

But victory permitted the French government to undertake a deliberate extension of the range of its African policy. In the Senegal river itself the Senegal Company gradually obtained control; between 1786 and 1791 it held a monopoly of all trade between capes Blanco and Verde, and assumed responsibility for the colonial budget. But further south encouragement was given to private traders by subsidies for the carriage of slaves, and by annual naval cruises. Treaties were made with such coastal kingdoms as Saloum, in hope of diverting inland trade from the Gambia; in the Sierra Leone estuary Gambi Island, where Frenchmen had traded for some years, was acquired in January 1785. Instructions to Governor de Boufflers (November 1785) for the first time contained general information about French merchants even further south.1 In 1786 a French post was established at Amoku on the Gold Coast, and placed under the supervision of the governor of Whydah, who was also assigned a more active role in the protection and extension of French commerce from Cape Lahou to Ardra.2 Captain Landolph, on behalf of a St Malo house,

1 Schéfer, vol. i, pp. 128 ff., Mémoire du Roi, 18 November 1785.
2 Ibid. Instructions to Gourg, 23 November 1786.
established a factory in Warri, although without securing exclusive privileges for French commerce. A forward movement of some significance was cut short by the fall of the régime which initiated it.

Despite the increasing interest of 'projectors', and even of governments, in the interior, the direct impact of European trade on the peoples of West Africa remained restricted, in significance and in geographical extent. Europeans seldom moved more than a mile or two beyond the coasts and navigable estuaries; on the 'Grain Coast' it was customary for commerce to take place actually aboard the vessels as they lay off-shore. Only in the north of the slaving area were attempts made to establish trading posts any distance up-river, and with very mixed success. In the Gambia, traders regularly went above the island later known as MacCarthy's, and several voyages progressed beyond the Barrakunda falls. Up the Senegal, Podor was an important trading-centre, weakly garrisoned by the British and French in turn; and annual trading journeys were made as far as the ruined Fort St Joseph above the confluence with the Faleme. An agent of the Senegal Company travelled overland to this fort in 1786, but was killed after trading for a year. These conditions were quite exceptional; no other region yet contained waterways free from the worst obstacles to navigation, an economy not entirely dominated by the aspect of slaves, and inland states willing and able to protect European trade in return for stipulated benefits to themselves.

For elsewhere the most serious obstacles to inland penetration were not caused by difficult terrain, nor even by the prevalence of disease. African rulers, favourably established near the littoral, were reluctant to allow Europeans to pass into the territory of their neighbours lest their commercial monopoly should be endangered; even on the Senegal the Galam convoy had to run a gauntlet of hostile peoples on the middle stretches. Resolute Europeans could doubtless have overcome even this opposition, given sufficient incentive; but so long as slaves formed the staple of West African trade, little was to be gained by inland penetration. Without maintaining considerable military forces in Africa—which the profits of the trade could hardly support, and which nobody contemplated—Europeans could not go and capture their own slaves, still less transport them safely to the coast; they preferred delivery close to the ships. Hence, where the littoral peoples could provide ordered institutions and ensure a regular supply of slaves, the merchant's interest was to co-operate with them, paying the customary duties, observing local commercial practice, and accepting most of the restraints on movement which his customers prescribed. Such relationships could be far more stable than is commonly appreciated; not only did many isolated Europeans live for years in Africa in perfect personal security, but they commonly found it safe and

profitable to give very substantial credits, in the form of trade goods, to African brokers and middlemen.

And yet the cultural impact of Europe remained superficial. The dependence of Europeans on local suppliers might induce a certain interested respect for African institutions; racial arrogance was not an invariable characteristic of slave-traders, and the worst examples of European lawlessness or fraud were not the work of regular traders, who had reputations to keep up. But intimate social contacts rarely developed. Even where permanent trading establishments were formed on the mainland, Europeans often found it prudent to reduce their dealings with their neighbours to a minimum, and to conduct them according to more or less formalised procedures. Christian missions on any scale existed only in Angola and the Congo, where some attempts were made to develop the work of earlier generations; their influence appears rarely to have penetrated deeply.

Of course, African society responded in its own terms to changes in economic relationships. Sometimes, as in Ashanti and Dahomey, foreign trade increased the economic and military resources of an adaptable local dynasty, assisting it to fortify and extend its power. At Old Calabar, on the other hand, Efiks who had prospered by supplying European ships with slaves came to exercise extended political authority, especially in commercial matters, within the framework of traditional political institutions. These traders lived in imported wooden houses of two stories, corresponded in English with Liverpool merchants and are said to have founded their own English schools; Efik society was clearly being transformed by trade. Yet they, like most African peoples, had as yet taken little directly from Europe except a shrewd knowledge of commercial practice, and a taste for certain types of consumer goods.

The nearest approach to a genuine European colony in West Africa was St Louis, a town created by Frenchmen on an island in the Senegal river. The population restored to France in 1779 numbered 3018, including 383 Europeans and 777 mulattoes or free negroes; in about ten years the total was doubled, largely by voluntary immigration from the interior. Many Africans and mulattoes were artisans or petty traders, but others had made substantial fortunes on the trading voyage to Galam, which most Europeans preferred to avoid: The majority were Catholics, some Muslims; after 1779 French governors nominated a mayor from their number, charging him with local police duties. The Portuguese settlements of Bissau, Loanda, and Benguela, once impressive, now showed evidence of decline. Still, at Bissau many Africans and mulattoes were at least nominal Catholics, and rosaries and crucifixes figured among the
merchandise of slave-dealers; and substantial African traders, literate in Portuguese, navigated their own vessels as far as Lisbon. But at the Gold Coast settlements (hopefully called 'forts'), only a few African traders or servants, within the walls or in dependent villages, learned European skills or ideas. In 1780, 211 Africans were on the strength of the French fort at Whydah; this number was officially regarded as excessive, and five to six hundred served for ten British forts.

There was indeed some demand from coastal Africans for European education, often for a reason frankly stated: 'Read book, and learn to be rogue as well as white man.' A few reached Europe in search of it. Prince Boudakon of Warri learned court dances in Paris and played martial airs on the clarinet; and there were estimated to be fifty negro or mulatto school-children each year in Liverpool alone. Philip Quaque, after being educated and ordained in London, returned to Cape Coast in 1765 with an English wife, and opened a small school, chiefly for children in the forts. But in general, European footholds in West Africa remained self-contained enclaves of an alien culture, rather than bridgeheads for the diffusion of that culture through the continent.

In some regions, frontiers might be less rigidly drawn. Between the Gambia and Cape Mount, where Portuguese and British traders settled on the coast in relative isolation, a sort of Eurafrican commercial class came into being. Native Africans and mulattoes played important roles as principals or middlemen, trading on credit in inland areas which foreign merchants could not reach themselves. Wage-labourers, or 'grumettas', sometimes learned European skills; some British factories built substantial coasting vessels with local labour, slave-ships sometimes employed African seamen. In the Bight of Benin, where Portuguese mulattoes were being joined by negroes returned from slavery in Brazil, Captain Adams noted the growth of an export-trade in Yoruba cloth. Members of these commercial classes might speak a Portuguese or English patois, send their children to Europe for education, even profess Catholicism, repeating the Pater Noster and having their children baptised by the occasional visiting priest. Yet on the whole, the effects on African society of even the most intimate commercial contacts were surprisingly few and superficial. It is difficult to sustain the contemporary claim that contacts born of the slave-trade were gradually 'civilising' Africa.

Nor was such an effect being produced indirectly, by means of the actual goods imported in exchange for slaves. The great majority of these were textiles (many of Indian manufacture) and hardware; the ruling factor
was the local consumer. In parts of the Gold Coast, Brazilian tobacco was an essential item of trade; rum, brandy and other intoxicants were finding an expanding market, but remained merely subsidiary items. But even if few of Africa’s imports served to demoralise its people, neither were the goods received in return for men calculated to assist economic growth—productive implements are conspicuously lacking from the list. The most significant imports from an African point of view were firearms, powder and ammunition, which by 1775 had become essential and commanding articles in the trade. Despite the inferior quality of the guns used in trade, their possession often gave decisive power to the peoples possessing them. This was well understood by the kings of Dahomey, who fought several wars during the eighteenth century to ensure that the region’s imports were concentrated under their control at Whydah, and maintained the purchase of arms there as a royal monopoly.

The precise manner and degree in which the external slave-trade caused the degradation of African society remains a subject for debate. Many wars may have been started for the purpose of procuring slaves, but slaving was by no means the sole cause of African wars; in the nineteenth century ‘legitimate trade’ was likewise to produce many occasions of conflict. Nor were wars the only source of slaves; a few were kidnapped, some sold for debt; many were transported for witchcraft, murder or adultery. But even if compassion sometimes caused enemies of the trade to exaggerate its evil effects, one fundamental criticism may summarise the rest. The apparently insatiable demand for slaves at the coast made it extremely difficult for peoples whose economies were based on the export of men to adapt themselves and use their labour to increase the production of agricultural or forest crops. Even Postlethwayt, the apologist of the Royal Africa Company, had seen that the slave-trade ‘will ever obstruct the civilising of these people, and extending of the trade into the bowels of Africa’.

Clearly there was economic reason behind the philanthropic demand for the abolition of the slave-trade; but suggestions that abolition had become an economic necessity are another matter. By the 1780s economic changes in Europe were making the interests dependent on the slave-trade relatively less important. But since Africa produced no commodity of major importance to the new industries, and had not been proved capable of producing any, there was no evident necessity for the positive step of legislative abolition. In many undeveloped regions of the Americas there remained great demands for unskilled labour; indeed, the rising need for cotton by British spinners was likely to make such demands increase. As the nineteenth century would show, there was still an ample

1 Details of British exports to Africa, 1783–7, are in Accounts and Papers, 1789 (xxvi), part iv, Table A.
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economic basis, not merely for continuing the Atlantic slave-trade, but for considerable expansion.

Given the mercantilist assumptions, however, this was not necessarily true for every nation. The Danes had found that the demands for labour of their West Indian plantations—roughly 1200 new slaves annually—were too small to support a profitable slave-trade, whether by private merchants or privileged companies. In the 1780s they tried to encourage plantations of coffee and cotton on the eastern Gold Coast, but with small success.¹ In 1783 the governor of Christianborg tried to strengthen the Danish base by a forward military policy on the Volta, leading to the establishment of three new forts. But this merely increased the overhead costs of trade without altering the economic problem, and in 1792 the monarchy adopted a new policy. The Danish West Indies were to rely for labour on natural reproduction instead of foreign imports; for ten years the slave population of the islands, and the proportion of females, were to be built up, but from 1803 the African slave-trade would be forbidden to Danish subjects.²

Other states found it less simple to reconcile humanitarianism with sound policy. The French West Indies, notably Saint-Domingue, still required large importations of labour; and the eminent French opponents of the slave-trade became important only when class and racial conflicts in the Antilles forced such questions to the notice of the revolutionary assemblies. The Société des Amis des Noirs, founded in 1788, commanded intellectual respect by the distinction of its members—Brissot, Condorcet, Mirabeau, Lafayette, Sieyès among them—but the conditions for an effective movement of anti-slavery opinion hardly existed in France. Only forty-nine of the general cahiers submitted to the Estates General commented adversely on the institution of slavery and few of these were prepared to advocate more than the eventual abolition of the slave-trade.³

In Great Britain economic developments gradually pointed the path towards a new relationship with Africa. While the loss of America suggested a need for new sources of tropical produce, the growing manufacturing interests sought expanding markets. The West Indian plantations were relatively losing their importance in the imperial economy; their privileged position seemed less essential to national prosperity, and so became more vulnerable. Later, the far-sighted understood that declining fertility of the soil made fresh imports of labour less essential to the
British islands than to their rivals. The abolitionist movement was not due solely to a sudden access of national virtue; but neither is it wholly explicable in economic terms. Economic changes do not become universally apparent overnight; and many powerful people long believed that their own and the national fortunes depended on a continuance of the slave-trade. A parliament predominantly representing landed proprietors was strongly biased in favour of the rights of property, mercantilist economic doctrines, and West Indian privileges: even though economic change was allowing members to enjoy the luxury of a conscience, legislative action might have been long delayed had not humane and religious men deliberately challenged those consciences.¹

After the broadening in 1787 of a committee formed by Quakers four years earlier, the abolitionist campaign developed with surprising speed. Thomas Clarkson, its leading agent, used significantly new methods in his field investigations; he toured the country, measuring ships, inspecting documents, and interrogating innumerable seamen in order to bring exact information before the Privy Council, successive parliamentary committees and the articulate public. Much attention was given to testimony about African products which might, the slave-trade once abolished, feed a growing trade with Europe. Tracts and pamphlets, containing evidence as well as exhortation, were circulated in thousands; pious men and women in provincial towns organised petitions against the trade. Abolition was first debated in the Commons in 1788; Dolben’s Act, regulating the number of slaves a ship might carry, was passed that year; by 1792 the defenders had resorted to delaying-tactics, and the Commons approved in principle of abolition within four years. The battle was not won, and wartime developments further delayed the final decision; but progress had been surprisingly rapid.

The abolitionists did not limit their African policy to the prohibition of the export of slaves; many sought also a new economic basis for relations between Europe and Africa. Some supported the exploring projects of the African Association, and some promoted colonisation, notably at Sierra Leone. The settlement there originated when Granville Sharp and other philanthropists concerned for ‘the relief of the Black Poor’ in England took up the plan of Henry Smeathman, a naturalist, for an anti-slavery colony to develop the resources of that area. The government gave some assistance, and 411 settlers, black and white, left Plymouth in April 1787. Despite Sharp’s warm-hearted concern for details, the colony’s problems had not been realistically foreseen, and by 1791 only sixty-four of the original settlers could be reassembled. But meanwhile the project
had secured broader support through the Sierra Leone Company, incorporated by Parliament in 1791; the appointment as chairman of Henry Thornton, M.P., banker and evangelical churchman, promised a more business-like approach. It was now proposed to rely for the main body of colonists on Negro Loyalists, domiciled in Nova Scotia since the American war; 1196 of them sailed for Africa in January 1792.1

The dual aims of the new sponsors are reflected in their original instructions; the colony was to establish 'a Trade with Africa on the true principles of Commerce, carrying out British Manufactures and other articles of Traffick and bringing back African Produce in exchange', with the ultimate purpose of 'introducing to a vast country long detained in barbarism the blessings of Industry and Civilization'. Efforts were to be made to cultivate sugar and other crops within the settlement, and to open commerce with the far interior.2 The Directors did not recognise any conflict between humanitarian ideals and business sense. Though profits were not their chief aim, profits were ultimately expected, if only as a proof that the design was well-conceived. It is later writers who have alleged mercenary motives; one disgruntled contemporary judged the Directors 'a parcel of hypocritical puritans' whose methods were not commercial enough, and their own reports devote far more space to describing the progress of the settlers and denouncing the slave-trade than to defending the unhealthy balance sheet.3

It is unsatisfactory to regard Sierra Leone as an isolated venture by an uneasy alliance of covetous bankers and cranks. The economic aims were a direct development of the earlier projects for African development; the philanthropic purposes also were now shared by others. In 1779 a group of Swedenborgians had planned a Utopian colony in West Africa, which for a time attracted the less disinterested attention of Gustavus III.4 In 1792 a party of 275 settlers, the great majority British, embarked on an ill-planned and ill-fated attempt to develop plantations of sugar, cotton and indigo on the island of Bulama, using free African labour.5 Soon after the Nova Scotians reached Sierra Leone, neighbouring slave-dealers resumed attempts to grow plantation crops on Tasso Island.6 When considering the many errors of its sponsors, it is well to recall that Sierra
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Leone represents the best financed, most boldly conceived and most successful of many attempts to develop cultivation on the African coast and commerce with the far interior.

All the same, its success was only moderate. Disease killed many settlers in the early months, before proper buildings were erected; the peninsula proved disappointing agriculturally; the persistence of the slave-trade in the neighbourhood raised many difficulties. With weaker financial backing, the settlement might have collapsed. Yet the community which survived did transplant to Africa such various features of contemporary British culture as evangelical Christianity and juries: indeed, the previous colonial experience of the Nova Scotians made them too insistent on their political rights, too zealous in certain religious observances, to suit even the pious Directors. Surrounding districts were also influenced. Neighbouring cultivators sent foodstuffs for sale in Freetown; Mandinka traders from the Sudan brought gold, ivory and hides for sale; some local people sought schooling, or work at wages, in the settlement; settlers began to move out to trade in rivers from the Pongos to the Sherbro, and in 1794 two European servants of the company reached Futa Jallon.\(^1\) Within narrow limits, the new colony was beginning to change African society.

When war commenced in Europe, the possibilities of an expanding commerce in African produce were thus becoming more widely recognised and some small experiments had been made, with mixed success. But entrenched interests in the slave-trade, European and African, remained liable to prejudice any new departure; and the revolutionary war retarded and distorted the efforts of the abolitionists.

CHAPTER IX
EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, 1763–90

The settlement of 1763, which ended the Seven Years War in Europe and overseas, was in many ways the most important of the eighteenth century. The Peace of Paris established Britain as, with the exception of Spain, the greatest colonial power in the world. She was now clearly dominant in North America and had at least the possibility of dominating much of India. Simultaneously the Treaty of Hubertusburg saw the consolidation of Prussia’s position as one of the major powers of Europe, if not yet as a great power in the fullest sense of the term. Her retention of Silesia appeared to many contemporaries the greatest military achievement of the age; and the leadership of Frederick II seemed sufficient to counterbalance many of her material weaknesses.

A long period of peace, however, could hardly be expected, and indeed was not expected by most observers, after 1763. Neither Britain’s colonial and maritime predominance over France nor Prussian security against the Habsburgs was as yet beyond challenge. France’s pride had been deeply wounded by her failures during the war. Humiliation and anger were little reduced, desire for revenge on Britain little weakened, by the reflection that much of commercial value—most of her West Indian islands and her trading-posts in Africa and India—had been salvaged from the wreck of her overseas empire. Moreover Britain’s successes had aroused everywhere in western Europe a real fear that her sea-power might now be used to give her a monopoly of Europe’s overseas trade, and of possibilities of overseas expansion. Frederick II also found that his successes had, inevitably, earned him increased resentment as well as respect from his unsuccessful opponent. Maria Theresa was now tired and disillusioned by her experiences during the war, by the huge costs of the struggle which the Habsburg provinces were still poorly equipped to meet, and by the disappointment of victories which led nowhere. Henceforth her outlook on international affairs was to be cautious and pacific. But she never lost her intense personal dislike and distrust of the king of Prussia; while the traditional determination to assert Habsburg leadership in Germany was effectively represented in Vienna by the chancellor, Prince Kaunitz-Rittberg, and above all by the empress’s eldest son, the Archduke Joseph, whose influence was certain to grow as time went on.

It was clear therefore that Anglo-French jealousies and Austro-Prussian (or more accurately Habsburg-Hohenzollern) rivalries would influence international relations for many years to come. Side by side
with these by now well-established antagonisms, however, can be found a third factor, in some ways more important than either, which threatened the peace of Europe throughout the generation after 1763. This was the tragic and potentially dangerous situation in Poland. The weakness and misgovernment of the country, already great when the eighteenth century began, had been increasing for decades, and the Seven Years War saw Poland's effectiveness as a political and military force fall to a very low ebb indeed. In 1763 the plans for a partition of the country between her more powerful neighbours which had been appearing for over a century were still merely plans; but the likelihood of their eventual realisation was visibly increasing. The approaching death of Augustus III fore-shadowed another election to the Polish throne, with all the possibilities of internal disorder and international strife which this involved: when he died, early in October, the choice of his successor became at once the most pressing problem of European politics.

The fate of Poland, moreover, was likely to have repercussions on those of two other once-great and now declining states. These were Sweden and the Ottoman empire. The former had never recovered the international status lost as a result of her defeat in the Great Northern War, while her nobility was almost as factious and unpatriotic as that of Poland. The Turkish empire was declining hopelessly in military and political efficiency, mainly because of a religious conservatism, inspired by the learned and priestly class (ulema) and defended by the Janissaries, which was stronger than anything of the kind to be found elsewhere in Europe.

The history of European diplomacy during this period can therefore be written largely in terms of these three problems—Anglo-French rivalry at sea and overseas; Habsburg–Hohenzollern antagonism in Germany; and the Polish question. To them was added, from the end of the 1760s onwards, a fourth, that of Russo-Turkish relations. All, and especially the second and third, were interconnected; but each can be treated to a considerable extent in isolation. The fact that three of the four arose in central and eastern Europe meant that after 1763 the centre of interest and activity in European politics moved noticeably to the east. In the Rhineland, in the Low Countries, in the Italian peninsula, all for generations the scene of fierce international rivalry, the territorial position was now relatively stable. This was a marked contrast with the state of affairs in Poland or the Balkans. None of the west European powers, with the partial exception of France, could hope to have much direct influence on events in the eastern half of the continent; and none except France (and she only intermittently) really wished for such influence. The Anglo-French colonial rivalries of this period, whatever their long-term significance for the world, had little direct importance to the majority of Europeans. Many of the greatest European questions of this period did not originate in western Europe, and in their solution the western states played in general only minor roles.
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In the West the most important development of the 1760s was a marked recovery of strength and self-confidence by France. This recovery owed a good deal to the leadership of Étienne de Choiseul-Stainville, duc de Choiseul, a minister of energy though not of the highest abilities, and by the end of the decade it had placed the country in a position from which she might hope to regain in the near future some of the territory and prestige lost in the Seven Years War. This resurgence of French power and ambition can be seen in efforts during the 1760s to reorganise the army, and still more in the reconstruction of the French navy. More important still, Choiseul attempted systematically and successfully to consolidate and strengthen France’s wartime alliance with Spain, an alliance embodied in the Family Compact of August 1761. Throughout the period between the Peace of Paris and the French Revolution it was her Spanish alliance, far more than that of 1756 with Austria, which was the real pivot of French foreign policy. Choiseul himself in 1765 referred to the Austrian alliance as ‘precarious, very different from the fundamental alliance with Spain’, and told Louis XV that if Charles III of Spain became involved in a war with Britain he must be supported by France ‘in whatever condition your kingdom might find itself’.¹ The maintenance of good relations between Paris and Madrid was in some ways easier than might have been expected. In spite of its total lack of military or naval success the Franco-Spanish alliance survived the last years of the Seven Years War unshaken, in striking contrast to the de facto Anglo-Prussian alliance which had emerged in 1758 and broken up so disastrously and irrevocably in 1762. Charles III and his ministers were as alarmed and angered as the French by Britain’s maritime and colonial victories; while Britain’s possession of Gibraltar and recovery of Minorca produced a nagging sense of grievance in Madrid and led to endless petty Anglo-Spanish disputes. The ambitions of the French and Spanish governments were by no means always identical. But France and Spain had a certain fundamental unity in their mutual hostility to Britain, and the 1760s saw the alliance between them consolidated, most noticeably by a commercial treaty of 1768.

The war of revenge against Britain for which Choiseul began to plan at least as early as September 1765 was to be essentially maritime and colonial. He was determined not to be drawn into expensive and distracting military commitments in Europe, as his predecessors had been in 1756. Britain might be forced to disperse her energies and resources by threatening concentrations of troops in Flanders, Brittany or northern Spain, or by a Spanish attack on Portugal; but the war was not to become a European one. Hanover could be left untouched, and France’s energies must be concentrated on seizing British colonies, on helping the British colonists in North America if they should rebel against the mother-

country, and above all on carrying out a successful invasion of Britain herself.¹

These ideas were sensible; and they were to be applied with some effect by Choiseul’s successor, the comte de Vergennes, in the War of the American Revolution. But the British cabinets of the 1760s completely failed to understand the direction which French strategic thinking was now taking. Continental allies, they assumed, were still needed by Britain to divert to land warfare in Europe as much as possible of the strength of the Bourbon powers and to protect Hanover, which continued to be thought of as a hostage which history and geography had conspired to place at the mercy of France. To find such allies, however, was very difficult. Austria was still thought of by a good many Englishmen (not least by George III himself) as in some way the natural ally of Great Britain; but she was now bound to France by ties which she had clearly no intention of breaking. Frederick II, apart from the memory of the bitter Anglo-Prussian recriminations of 1762, rightly believed that an alliance with Britain was likely to draw him into a new Anglo-French war which he was determined to avoid. Moreover from 1764 onwards the international position of Prussia was secured by his alliance with Catherine II;² henceforth he had nothing to gain from a combination with Britain. Thus Russia was left as the only great European power with which Britain might hope to ally. Negotiations for an Anglo-Russian treaty began in 1762 and went on intermittently for over a decade before they pittered out. They failed because successive British governments, though they undoubtedly wished for Russia’s alliance, refused to pay the price which Catherine II set upon it. They refused to provide money on the scale which she demanded in order to bribe the Swedish Council and Senate, and thus keep them subject to Russian influence and immune to that of France. They refused to help her in securing the election of a Russian-sponsored candidate to the Polish throne after the death of Augustus III. Above all they refused to promise her support in case of a Turkish attack on her southern frontiers. In support of this refusal they pleaded the damage which might be done to Britain’s Levant trade by what would be taken in Constantinople as a demonstration of hostility; more probably it was inspired by a justified belief that a Russo-Turkish war was likely in the fairly near future and that Britain had nothing to gain by supporting the empress’s Near Eastern ambitions.

It was above all upon the ‘Turkish clause’ that the alliance negotiations broke down. But they several times appeared to be upon the point of success and aided the conclusion, in 1766, of an important Anglo-Russian commercial treaty. If they had succeeded the Anglo-Russian alliance
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would have become one of the main elements in the ‘Northern System’ which the Russian Foreign Minister, Count N. I. Panin, attempted to construct in the middle and later 1760s. This ambitious scheme, which seems to have been originated early in 1764 by Baron Korf, the Russian minister in Copenhagen, envisaged a great combination of Russia, Prussia, Britain, Sweden, Denmark and Poland against the Bourbon powers, and above all against France. Such an alliance, Panin hoped, would ‘draw Russia away from her continual dependence on others and place her...in such a position that she will be able to play an important role in the affairs of Europe, and also to preserve quiet and stability in the North’.¹ His schemes were not completely without result. They led him to think of a strengthened and rejuvenated Poland under Russian influence as Russia’s main future ally, in place of Austria, against the Ottoman empire; and this attitude had for a number of years some influence on Russia’s Polish policies. They also led to the conclusion in 1765 of a Russo-Danish alliance which helped to pave the way for the final settlement, two years later, of the long-standing dispute between the two states over Holstein.² But the Northern System projected by Panin, like so many schemes for extensive new combinations of states during the eighteenth century, was impossibly grandiose and unwieldy. Britain and Russia, as has been seen, failed to reach political as distinct from economic agreement. Frederick II, moreover, felt no enthusiasm for such a system. He wished to remain Catherine II’s only important ally, and therefore threw his influence at St Petersburg against the conclusion of a treaty with Britain; he disliked any strengthening of Poland, which might well check his own expansionist ambitions in that direction; and he was profoundly cynical about the real value of such a far-reaching political combination. With the outbreak of war between Russia and the Ottoman empire in September 1768 the Northern System rapidly faded into the background of European politics.

It is true that an alliance with Russia, even if it had been made, would have been of little use to Britain in an essentially maritime and colonial war with France such as Choiseul envisaged. Nevertheless her diplomatic isolation during the 1760s, combined with the spectacle of her internal political conflicts and the growth of unrest in America, did much to reduce her influence and prestige in Europe. France, by contrast, was clearly growing in strength and self-confidence. In 1766, on the death of Stanislaus Leszczynski, the Duchy of Lorraine at last became formally French territory under the terms of the Treaty of Vienna of 1735. More important from the standpoint of international relations, in 1768-9 the island of Corsica was conquered and annexed. Unable to repress the revolt against her rule there which had been in progress for many years,

¹ Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva, vol. lxxvii (St Petersburg, 1889), p. 25.
² See vol. vii, p. 350.
the republic of Genoa had agreed, in August 1764, to allow French troops to garrison five towns in the island. In May 1768 it signed with the French government a treaty by which, in effect, Corsica was sold to France in return for a payment of two million livres and a French guarantee of Genoa's mainland territory. It took the French a year to break the resistance of Pasquale Paoli, the Corsican insurgent leader, and his followers; but by June 1769 the island was completely in their hands. British protests, inspired partly by fear that the conquest might strengthen French naval power in the Mediterranean, proved completely ineffective. The cabinet was weak and divided, and by the autumn of 1768 had drifted into a sulk y acquiescence in France's action. Its supineness did much to reduce Britain's prestige in Europe, and in particular to confirm Catherine II's growing feeling that Britain was unlikely to prove an active or energetic ally.

Little more than a year later it seemed that the new Anglo-French struggle which the Corsican episode had failed to produce was about to break out. In June 1770 a Spanish expedition, despatched by the governor of Buenos Aires, took possession of the tiny British settlement of Port Egmont in the Falkland Islands. In London there was a burst of indignation, while in Madrid, where the Falkland Islands had always been regarded as Spanish territory, there was no willingness to make concessions or listen to British protests. An Anglo-Spanish war, for which both sides were making energetic preparations, seemed very near; and in such a war France would certainly be involved. If Choiseul had remained in power the war of revenge against Britain for which he had prepared might well have taken place, though he himself worked hard to achieve a peaceful settlement of the dispute. But his position at court had for some time been increasingly threatened by rival ministers, by the hostility of Madame du Barry, the king's mistress, and by extreme Catholic influences which disliked his internal policies. The result was that he was suddenly dismissed by the king in December 1770. Deprived of any immediate prospect of French help, the Spanish government had to give way. In January 1771 it agreed to restore Port Egmont to Britain, though it avoided any explicit renunciation of its claim to the Falkland Islands. The crisis had thus resulted in a British victory. But it was an incomplete victory, one which Britain owed to the weakness of Louis XV as much as to her own strength, and it did little to halt the steady decline of her prestige in Europe. 'In fact', wrote a sarcastic pamphleteer two years later, 'so magnanimous, so manly, so consistent have of late years been the measures of the British government, that notwithstanding our laurels and conquests we have contrived to draw upon ourselves contempt and indignity from every European potentate.'

More important than the questions of Corsica and the Falkland Islands, however, were the crises of the 1760s and early 1770s in eastern Europe.

As early as February 1763 a council of Russian statesmen and military leaders had decided that the next king of Poland must be a piast (Polish noble) and not a foreigner. In the months which followed Catherine II concentrated considerable bodies of troops on the Polish frontier, and also made arrangements for the bribing of influential Poles and the strengthening of the pro-Russian forces, led by the Czartoryski family, in Poland. It was known in St Petersburg that France would try to influence the next royal election, probably in favour of some member of the Saxon ruling house, which had provided the last two kings of Poland, and there was also a more serious fear of possible Turkish intervention. Catherine was therefore anxious to secure if possible British, Austrian or Prussian support for her Polish ambitions. It soon became clear that there was little to be hoped for from Britain; and the Austrian government, though it had no particular desire to oppose Russia in Poland, was the ally of France and therefore bound to some extent to share her anti-Russian attitude. Moreover Saxony would be a very useful ally for the Habsburgs in any future war in Germany; this in itself was a considerable argument for favouring a Saxon candidate for the Polish throne. There remained only Prussia. In February 1763 Frederick II began that long and insincere correspondence with Catherine which was to last almost until his death; by August he was able to send her a draft Russo-Prussian treaty of alliance. By October (Augustus III died on the fifth of that month) the empress regarded an alliance with Prussia as imminent; at the end of January 1764 a Russian draft sent to Frederick was accepted by him with only minor modifications; on 11 April the alliance was signed. It was to last for eight years, and each power promised military help to the other if it were attacked.\footnote{Except in case of a Turkish attack on Russia, or any attack on Prussian territory west of the Weser, when merely financial help was called for.} Each pledged itself to maintain the Swedish constitution of 1720 and, most important of all, guaranteed the existing Polish constitution (in other words the continuance of political chaos in Poland) and the elective character of the Polish monarchy. By a secret additional convention it was agreed that the two powers should support Stanislaus Poniatowski, Catherine’s former lover, as their candidate for the Polish throne. In September he was duly elected.

The events of 1763–4 made it clear that France, which regarded herself as the traditional protector of the Poles, could no longer exert much real influence in Poland. This was partly because of the disunity and disorganisation of French diplomacy there. Side by side with the official representative of France, the marquis de Paulmy, and often in conflict with him, worked members of Louis XV’s futile Secret, the network of agents which he had built up since the 1740s for the conduct of a secret personal diplomacy. Indeed the position was even more complicated than this, for sometimes these secret agents worked against each other,
or in ignorance of each other's existence. Above all, few French statesmen now really cared deeply about what happened in Poland. Their attention was focused on colonial and maritime affairs, on relations with Britain and Spain. The more necessary a reassertion of France's position against Britain, the greater the incentive to avoid being drawn deeply into the affairs of eastern Europe. In May 1763 the duc de Choiseul-Praslin, the French Foreign Minister and cousin of the great Choiseul, argued forcibly in a memorandum on French policy that France had now only a vague and indirect interest in the affairs of Sweden, Poland and the Ottoman empire, her former protégés, and that even a partition of Poland would probably be of little significance to her.

Nevertheless the French government could not see without anger the placing of a Russian puppet on the Polish throne. Not until a year after his election was Poniatowski recognised as king by France; and even then no French diplomatic representative was sent to Warsaw. It was humiliating to feel that French power and prestige were waning in eastern Europe, and both Choiseul and Louis XV were intensely anti-Russian. 'Everything that may plunge Russia into chaos and make her return to obscurity', wrote the king in September 1763, 'is favourable to our interests.'\(^1\) France by herself could do little to achieve this objective, and could expect little help in achieving it from her ally Austria. But the Turks, it seemed to many French statesmen, might well provide an effective weapon with which to halt and even reverse the growth of Russian power. In 1763–4 the French ambassador at Constantinople, the Chevalier de Vergennes, made strenuous efforts, on instructions from Paris, to persuade the Porte to support the Saxon candidate for the Polish throne and to oppose by force the entry of Russian troops into Poland. He had no success; and in July 1765 the Turkish government decided to recognise Poniatowski. Nevertheless French efforts to embroil the Turks with Russia continued, and Choiseul, with remarkable irresponsibility and lack of foresight, repeatedly urged upon Vergennes the need to provoke a Russo-Turkish war.\(^2\)

That war, however, when it broke out in September 1768, was the outcome not of French diplomacy in Constantinople but of events in Poland. As resistance to Russian influence increased there, and as Russian military control of the country began to be exerted more and more openly, fear and resentment rapidly grew at the Porte. The formation of the Confederation of Bar early in 1768 helped to bring matters to a head. In July Ukrainian irregulars (*haidamaki*) in pursuit of fleeing Confederates burnt the small town of Balta in Podolia, a clear violation of Turkish territory.
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The culprits were not strictly Russian soldiers, and the Russian government attempted to disclaim responsibility for their action, but in vain. On 6 October Obreskov, the Russian minister in Constantinople, was imprisoned in the castle of the Seven Towers and war between Russia and the Ottoman empire had begun.

The war was most unwelcome to Catherine II and her ministers. It involved new and very heavy commitments on Russia’s southern frontier. It complicated the Russian position in Poland. Above all it might lead to anti-Russian intervention in the Near East by one of the great European powers, most probably by Austria. Nevertheless they decided at once to wring all the advantage they could from the struggle with the Turks. In November 1768 a council at St Petersburg decided that Russia must obtain, when peace was made, freedom of navigation for her ships on the Black Sea (an objective of Russian policy since the reign of Peter I) and possession of a port there. She should also secure some extension of her territory at the expense of Poland. To these war-aims was soon added a third—that of establishing the khanate of the Crimea, whose territories embraced a huge area of the Black Sea steppe, as an independent state. This also was to some extent a traditional objective of Russian policy, and the idea of an eventual Russian annexation of the Crimea had already begun to take shape.¹ But the khanate had been for almost three centuries a Turkish satellite-state whose rulers were appointed by the sultan; and its continued subjection to Turkish control was regarded by the Porte as an indispensable protection against the growth of Russian power in the Black Sea area. The demand for its independence, therefore, was certain to be violently opposed in Constantinople. Nor did this demand complete the growing list of Russian war-aims. By 1770 it was generally agreed in St Petersburg that Russia must also annex the fortresses of Kerch and Yenikalé and thus control the Straits of Kerch leading from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea proper. Without this, possession of Azov itself, which had been achieved early in 1769, would be of little value. By the end of 1770, moreover, the Russian government was demanding that the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia be placed under its control for twenty-five years as an indemnity for Russia’s war expenses, and that the Kabardas, a large and ill-defined area east of the Sea of Azov, be annexed by Russia.

Russian war-aims were therefore very ambitious. Yet the brilliant successes won by the Russian army and navy in 1769–71² showed that there was a good chance of achieving many of them if there were no outside intervention in the struggle. By 1771, however, it had become clear that the powers of Europe were not willing to give Catherine II a completely free hand in the Near East. From the outbreak of the war

² See below, ch. xi, p. 324.
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Frederick II had been urging her to make peace as soon as possible, perhaps through joint mediation by Austria and Prussia. There were also offers of mediation by Britain (which Catherine might have been willing to accept) and by France (which she was determined to refuse). Above all the danger of some action by Austria to protect the Turks and prevent Russia exploiting her victories to the full could not be ignored. It was the possibility of an Austrian initiative of this kind, and of a resulting Austro-Russian war which would certainly involve Prussia, which so worried Frederick II.

His fears had some justification, for in the early months of the Russo-Turkish struggle Kaunitz was urging strongly in Vienna the need for active opposition to Russia in Poland and the Near East. He even suggested a possible rapprochement between Austria and Prussia based on the recovery of part of Silesia by the former and the compensation of the latter with the Russian-dominated duchy of Courland, which was formally still part of the Polish republic. His arguments had no result. Maria Theresa was determined to remain at peace. Joseph, who had succeeded his father as Holy Roman Emperor in 1765, had personal meetings with Frederick II at Neisse in Silesia in August 1769 and at Neustadt in Moravia in September 1770. But these, though they aroused much interest and speculation, had no significant results. Until early in 1771 Austria remained remarkably quiescent in face of the brilliant victories won by Russia. By early February of that year, however, Maria Theresa had decided that any further expansion of Russia must be resisted; and when in June the full extent of the Russian demands on Turkey became known in Vienna there was an explosion of alarm and indignation there. By then the Russian government had amended its terms so that only the independence of the Principalities, not their temporary transfer to Russian control, was demanded. But even this was too much for Kaunitz and Joseph II to stomach. Such a drastic truncation of the Ottoman empire, it was argued, would overthrow the European balance; and early in July, in great secrecy, an Austro-Turkish convention was signed in Constantinople. By this agreement (which was never ratified) Austria promised the Porte diplomatic support for the maintenance of the Ottoman empire’s territorial integrity. In return she was to be paid a large annual subsidy, which would be used for the strengthening of her army, and would also receive some territory in the western part of Wallachia. In July–September 1771 Austro-Russian relations remained very critical. Catherine II showed no disposition to give way over the Principalities, while the Austrian government began military preparations and negotiated in Paris for French help in the war with Russia which seemed certain to break out in the following spring.

But there was little real desire for war in Vienna and none in St Petersburg. On 5 September Maria Theresa assured Rohde, the Prussian
representative in Vienna, that she wished to maintain peace and if possible persuade the Turks to come to terms with Russia. This independent action by the empress, which was bound to weaken the effect produced in Berlin and St Petersburg by Austria’s belligerent attitude of the preceding months, intensely annoyed Kaunitz. But both he and Joseph II now saw that many of Catherine’s demands on the Turks could not be effectively resisted, and in particular that the creation of an independent state in the Crimea was inevitable. By October a kind of de facto compromise had been reached. It was now fairly clear that Austria would not oppose Russia’s creation of such a state, and that Russia would not object to the return of the Principalities to Turkish overlordship.

Quite apart from this, however, it had become likely several months earlier that territorial ambitions denied full expression in the Near East might find a safer and more convenient outlet in helpless and anarchic Poland. At the end of 1770 Prince Henry of Prussia, a younger brother of Frederick II, visited St Petersburg. He had already shown himself much more optimistic than his brother about the prospects of annexing West Prussia in the near future; and in October he had drawn up a scheme by which Austria, Russia and Prussia would jointly supervise Polish affairs. He made a good impression on Catherine II, and the visit had unexpected and most important results. On 8 January 1771 the empress suggested to him, in half-jocular fashion, a partition of Poland. Austria, she pointed out, had already occupied the two starosties of Zips,¹ and ‘why should not all of us take some?’ The Russian War Minister, Count Z. G. Chernyshev drove home the point by urging that Prussia should take the bishopric of Warmia (Ermeland) which formed a large Polish salient in East Prussia.²

Prince Henry eagerly welcomed the idea of a partition, and on his return to Berlin some weeks later he overcame his brother’s fears that Russia might benefit unduly from one. The result was that from early in 1771 Frederick II began to urge the Austrian government to accept a division of Poland as the best means of preserving international peace. In May he attempted to force the hands of Kaunitz and Maria Theresa by concluding a preliminary partition agreement with Russia. By the end of October Vienna had been brought to agree in principle to a partition. Though many questions of detail remained to be settled and Maria Theresa accepted the partition treaty, with much heart-searching, only in August 1772, the fate of the Republic was decided. The Russo-Turkish war and the Austro-Russian antagonism in the Balkans which sprang from it were not in any fundamental sense the causes of the first partition of Poland; but they undoubtedly did much to accelerate it and perhaps to determine the form it took.

¹ See below, ch. xii, p. 338.
Even after a partition of Poland had been agreed upon and the danger of active opposition from Austria had disappeared, Catherine II still found herself faced with the task of forcing the Turks to make peace on her terms. It proved a very difficult one. In August–September 1772 Russian and Turkish plenipotentiaries met at the little town of Foksiany in Moldavia; but negotiations quickly broke down over the insistence of the Turks that the sultan should retain at least the right of confirming the khan of the Crimea in the exercise of his powers, if not that of appointing him. When a new peace congress opened at Bucharest late in November the Russians gave way on this point, but fresh difficulties arose over the resistance of the Turks to the Russian annexation of Kerch and Yenikalé and over their wish to deny freedom of navigation on the Black Sea to Russian warships. The discussions dragged on fruitlessly till March 1773. To the Russian government this long delay in making peace was serious. The war had cost Russia great sacrifices which could not be indefinitely prolonged. From September 1773 onwards a considerable part of the country was convulsed by the great peasant revolt led by Pugachev.\(^1\) Above all Sweden, paralysed for decades by factional struggles and political corruption, seemed suddenly to have regained much of her unity and strength and become once more an active opponent of Russia in the Baltic.

For a number of years French policy in Stockholm had been directed not, as formerly, towards taking advantage of the struggles of the Swedish parties, but rather towards the strengthening of the Swedish monarchy. King Adolphus Frederick, who died in February 1771, was not the man to overthrow the Swedish constitution and unite the country behind a revived monarchy; but his son and successor, Gustavus III, young, energetic and physically brave, promised better things. He was visiting Paris when his father died, and was at once given promises of French financial help in a restoration of the power of the monarchy. His position during the first few months of his reign was very difficult, but in August 1772 he was able, by an almost bloodless coup d’état, to overthrow the Swedish constitution of 1720 and recover much of the position which the monarchy had formerly held.

The Swedish revolution was a great international event. To contemporaries it seemed a striking political victory for France, whose influence might now become dominant in Stockholm, and a severe setback for Russia, who might soon find herself at war with the triumphant Gustavus III. Neither of these impressions was completely justified. French proposals for a defensive alliance with Sweden had no result; partly because under the new constitution Gustavus could not make agreements with foreign powers without the approval of the Senate, and partly because Louis XV showed no wish to involve France in any new obligations to

\(^1\) See below, ch. xi, p. 313.
other states. The expected Russo-Swedish war did not break out, though for several months at the end of 1772 and early in 1773 the likelihood of one seemed very great. Catherine II was infuriated by events in Sweden; and in a struggle with Gustavus III she could rely on the active support of Denmark, where the fall of Struensee\(^1\) had brought pro-Russian forces back into power. Peace in the north was maintained, however, partly by the refusal of the British government to give Russia any support if she attacked Sweden and above all by the fact that Catherine II was still at grips with the Porte and had much of her military strength absorbed by the struggle. It was the break-up of the congress at Bucharest, and the resulting necessity for at least one more campaign against the Turks, which put paid to any effort by Russia to undo the effects of the *coup d'état* of August 1772. The empress was thus compelled to pay a considerable price in the Baltic for the successes she had won in the Balkans and the Black Sea littoral.

By the autumn of 1773 pessimism about the outcome of the war with Turkey was growing in Russian ruling circles. In September Count Chernyshev urged that the demand for Kerch and Yenikalé be given up to facilitate the making of peace, and there were even doubts whether the independence of the Crimea could be obtained. Catherine II now displayed the courage and energy which were to distinguish her in more than one crisis of her reign. In April 1774 Field-Marshal P. A. Rumiantsev, the Russian commander-in-chief, crossed the Danube on orders from St Petersburg. By the beginning of July the main Turkish army, under the Grand Vizier Muhsinzadé Pasha, was in grave danger of being cut off and surrounded by the Russian advance. Early in that month, therefore, Muhsinzadé suggested to Rumiantsev that peace negotiations be opened: on the 21st the peace treaty was signed in the Bulgarian village of Kutchuk-Kainardji. It was, as the delighted Catherine told Rumiantsev, 'one such as Russia had never had before'.\(^2\) It gave Russia the Kabardas, Kerch and Yenikalé, and a small area of territory between the lower courses of the rivers Bug and Dnieper with the mouth of the latter—in other words a secure though as yet limited foothold on the Black Sea. It gave her freedom of navigation on that sea and permitted her merchantmen to pass through the straits, closed for two centuries to all non-Turkish ships. It granted her the right to build an Orthodox church in Constantinople and, in a vague and potentially dangerous phrase, to make representations

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1 John Frederik Struensee, a German doctor who acquired great influence over the half-insane Christian VII of Denmark from 1768 onwards. He became the lover of the queen, Caroline Matilda, the younger sister of George III of England, and dominated the Danish government from the latter months of 1770 till he was overthrown by a conspiracy in January 1772. His brief rule was marked by very rapid and extensive, though sometimes ill-conceived, reforms in most aspects of Danish life, and by a temporary decline in Russian influence over the country's foreign policy.

2 *Sbornik*, vol. XIII (St Petersburg, 1874), p. 429.
to the Turkish government on behalf of it 'and those who serve it'. By a secret article the Porte agreed to pay a war indemnity of four and a half million roubles. Above all the Crimean khanate was to become an independent state: the sultan was to retain the right of investing the khan with his office, but this was to be a purely religious ceremony conveying no suggestion of political control.

From the Turkish point of view these terms, especially the independence of the Crimea, were disastrous. Not until January 1775 was the treaty very reluctantly ratified by the sultan. Even after this strenuous efforts were made to avoid compliance with its terms. In May 1775 the province known as the Bukovina, in northern Moldavia, was surrendered to the Austrians in the hope that this would buy off possible Habsburg hostility to the Ottoman empire and free the latter for more effective resistance to Russia. Above all Turkish intrigues and the threat of Turkish military action helped to keep the Crimea in constant turmoil. In March 1779, by the Convention of Ainali-Kavak, the main provisions of the Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji were repeated and the independence of the Crimea once more proclaimed, but even this was far from being a final settlement of the question.

The peace settlement of 1774 alarmed not merely the Turks but also some of the great powers of Europe. It seemed to foreshadow the creation of a great Russian fleet on the Black Sea, followed by a new and irresistible Russian onslaught on the tottering Ottoman empire. The collapse of that empire, which now seemed imminent, would mean an enormous accession of strength to Russia and raise immensely difficult problems. To France, which was the traditional ally of the Turks and did far more trade with the Levant than any other state, this prospect was especially unwelcome. But one of the main lessons of the events of 1768–74 had been that there was very little she (or any other west European power) could do to protect the victim-states, Poland and the Ottoman empire, which were now threatened by the advance of Russian power. France was geographically distant from these states and herself suffering from severe internal divisions. Her government, as has already been seen, was preoccupied after 1763 mainly with colonial and naval rivalry with Britain and thus unwilling to commit the country to quixotic adventures in eastern Europe. Moreover the few suggestions which were made during this period for French action, however limited, on behalf of the Poles or Turks were stultified by British hostility and distrust. Thus a suggestion in March 1772 by the French Foreign Minister, the duc d'Aiguillon, of Anglo-French diplomatic co-operation on behalf of the Poles aroused no response in London. In the spring of the following year a proposal to send a French squadron to the Levant as a gesture of support for the Turks had to be abandoned in face of British opposition. The Russo-Turkish war and the first partition of Poland emphasized a fact which
had been made visible by the Polish crisis of 1763–4—that western Europe on the one hand and eastern and central Europe on the other were, at least for the time being, separate political worlds, and that members of one were likely to have little influence on events in the other.

The War of American Independence is another illustration of this point. A great Anglo-French-Spanish struggle was waged, great changes in the colonial balance of power were achieved, without the states of eastern and central Europe having any important influence on the march of events. In the late summer and autumn of 1775 the British government had high hopes of hiring from Russia a corps of 20,000 infantry for use against the rebellious colonists; but by October it was clear that nothing would come of the idea. During the war there were several proposals for the restoration of peace through the good offices or mediation of Joseph II and Catherine II; but these again had no result. A suggestion by the British government in January 1781 that Russia might acquire Minorca in return for making peace between Britain, France and Spain on the terms agreed in 1762 also proved fruitless. It is true that the League of Armed Neutrality which Catherine II began to create early in 1780 proved a serious nuisance to Britain. In a declaration of 10 March to the belligerent governments the empress proclaimed a series of doctrines highly distasteful to Britain, though for the most part not new. (The declaration was largely copied from proposals made in September 1778 by the Danish statesman Bernstorff.) Neutral ships were to be free to navigate between the ports of the belligerents. Property belonging to the citizens of a belligerent state could not be seized on board a neutral vessel unless it were contraband. A blockade of any belligerent port, to be legal, must be effective. The Armed Neutrality, which was eventually joined by almost all the maritime states of Europe, was thus directed against British interference with neutral shipping and against the 'maritime rights' which the British government, like its predecessors, claimed to exercise in time of war. It seriously hampered the full exertion of British sea-power in the last years of the war. But it had no decisive influence on the outcome of the struggle; and before the end of the war in America the attention of Catherine II and her ministers was once more focused mainly on the Near East.

The French government was thus able to devote its energies to the struggle with Britain from 1778 onwards without the need, as in 1744–8 and 1756–63, to maintain large armies in Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. Yet the comte de Vergennes, who had become Foreign Minister in 1774 and was to retain the post till his death in 1787, had serious difficulties to face during both the war and the peace negotiations. Effective political co-operation between France and Spain was always very difficult. This was partly because Charles III, feeling that he had been abandoned by France in 1770 during the Falkland Islands crisis, was now unwilling
to follow a French lead. It was still more because the two states regarded the war from radically differing standpoints. The French government showed no unwillingness to recognise the independence of Britain's American colonies or to receive American diplomatic missions, as her recognition of the colonies in February 1778 and the subsequent enormous popularity of Franklin in Paris showed. Charles III of Spain, on the other hand, like almost all other European rulers, deeply disliked the idea of colonial rebellion, and as the ruler of a great empire in central and south America had every reason to fear the triumph of the colonists in the north. They might follow victory over Britain by attacking the Spanish colony of Louisiana; or, more serious, their example in achieving independence might find imitators in the Spanish dominions. American envoys were not officially received in Madrid. Not until the end of the war was American independence recognised by the Spanish government. Moreover Vergennes and his colleagues were not aiming primarily at the acquisition of territory. They wished to reduce the prestige and the dangerous maritime predominance of Great Britain; but the French empire of the future which they envisaged was to be essentially a commercial one based on relatively small gains in Newfoundland, the West Indies and India. To the Spanish government, on the other hand, substantial territorial gains at the expense of Britain—Florida, Minorca, possibly Jamaica, above all Gibraltar—were of supreme importance. It was not the urgings of Vergennes but the refusal of Britain to cede Gibraltar, and her rejection in March 1779 of Spanish mediation proposals inspired by the hope of recovering the fortress, which led to Spain's entry into the war.

Nor did the events of the war do much to unite France and Spain more effectively. There was little military or naval co-operation between them except in the unsuccessful siege of Gibraltar; and there were even Anglo-Spanish peace negotiations, though never very serious ones, for several months from the summer of 1780 onwards. France's other European ally in the struggle, the United Provinces, was little more reliable than Spain. Britain declared war on the Dutch in December 1780 because of the trade they persisted in carrying on with the American rebels, and above all because of their acceptance of Catherine II's invitation to join the Armed Neutrality. Her action inflicted great damage on Dutch trade. But it did not destroy the pro-British sympathies still felt by a good many people in the republic, not least by the Stadtholder William V himself. In 1781 there were fears in Paris that the Dutch (who also had not yet recognised the American colonies as independent) might make a separate peace with Britain.

Thus Britain, in spite of the military failures of the war,1 was in a fairly strong position vis-à-vis her European opponents when peace negotiations began in Paris and London in April 1782. She was facing not a real

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1 See ch. xvii, pp. 503-5.
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alliance but rather four separate antagonists—France, Spain, the Dutch and the Americans—whose interests were dissimilar and even conflicting. Lord Shelburne, the British Prime Minister, was able to exploit this position skilfully by signing a separate treaty with the colonists, much to Vergennes' annoyance, on 28 November 1782. Moreover the shakiness of France's financial position made the French minister anxious not to prolong the war, while Rodney's victory at The Saints in April and the defeat of the great Franco-Spanish attack on Gibraltar in September placed new and strong cards in the hands of the British negotiators.

Britain's losses to her European adversaries, when the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were finally agreed in January 1783, were thus a good deal less than had sometimes seemed probable. Vergennes, in spite of great efforts, could not secure for France the gains in India, producing a large territorial revenue, which he much desired. An extension of France's fishing-rights in Newfoundland, the acquisition of St Lucia and Tobago in the West Indies and of Senegal and Gorée in West Africa, were considerable gains from the point of view of French trade but not otherwise of great importance. Spain recovered Florida, and also Minorca which had been captured from Britain by a French expedition in February 1782. But the supreme prize, Gibraltar, eluded her. The efforts of the Spanish government to obtain it very nearly wrecked the negotiations, and both George III and Shelburne would have been willing to part with it in return for adequate compensation elsewhere—Puerto Rico or some combination of French islands in the West Indies were suggested. But public opinion in Britain refused to contemplate the cession of a fortress which had now, after its successful defence in the great siege of 1779–82, become what a contemporary called 'the Golden Image of English Idolatry'.

With the utmost reluctance, therefore, Spain made peace without recovering it. The treaty with the Dutch, the terms of which were agreed in September 1783, was signed in its definitive form only in May 1784. It provided for the cession to Britain of the trading-post of Negapatam in Ceylon and the grant to her of the right to navigate freely among the Dutch possessions in the East Indies.

Britain had been forced to recognise the independence of her former colonies; but apart from this great admission of defeat she lost little of real value in the negotiations of 1782–3. 'I thank Providence', wrote George III in January 1783, 'for having through so many difficulties, among which the want of Union and Zeal at home is not to be omitted, enabled so good a peace with France, Spain, and I trust soon the Dutch, to be concluded.' This was a fair summary, from the British point of view, of the European and Asiatic aspects of the settlement.
EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The political as well as geographical separation which now existed between events in America and those in Germany is well illustrated by the fact that the serious Austro-Prussian friction, culminating in war, which arose in the later 1770's, had hardly any effect on the War of the American Revolution.

The idea of acquiring the electorate of Bavaria, or at least part of it, had for nearly a century attracted statesmen in Vienna. In particular there had been, since the 1680's, several suggestions that the Spanish or Austrian Netherlands might be exchanged for the electorate. The benefits which the acquisition of Bavaria would confer on the Habsburg monarchy, by giving it a more compact block of territories centred on the Danube and by increasing its influence in Germany, were obvious. But for this very reason any effort by the Habsburgs to strengthen themselves in this way was certain to be bitterly opposed by Frederick II, who realised very well that Joseph II was anxious to acquire territory wherever it could be had and resentful of the restraining influence of his mother. At the beginning of 1778 it seemed that events had played into Austria's hands and that she was to acquire, by peaceful means, a large part of Bavaria. The Elector Maximilian-Joseph died on 30 December 1777. His successor was the Elector Palatine, Karl-Theodor of Sulzbach, who had no legitimate children but a considerable number of illegitimate ones for whom he was anxious to provide. The result was that in January 1778, within a few days of his succession, he agreed to recognise Habsburg claims to about a third of Bavaria (the territory in question was alleged in Vienna to be composed of lapsed Austrian, Bohemian and imperial fiefs). In return Karl-Theodor received the Order of the Golden Fleece for himself and relatively lavish provision for his illegitimate children.

This agreement displayed a remarkable disregard for legal rights, for even Maria Theresa admitted that the Habsburg claims in Bavaria were 'outdated and poorly based'.\(^1\) In particular it ignored the claims of the heir-presumptive to the electorate, the duke of Zweibrücken-Birkenfeld, while the Elector of Saxony also had claims to Maximilian-Joseph's allodial lands in Bavaria. Yet Kaunitz and Joseph II believed that they would encounter no very serious opposition to their plans. They hoped for diplomatic and if necessary military support from France, the ally of the Habsburgs since 1756, while Russia, the ally of Frederick II, seemed still too preoccupied in the Near East to be a serious opponent. Protests from Berlin were taken for granted, but Frederick II was now an old man unwilling to face a new war. Moreover he had dynastic ambitions of his own. The Franconian principalities of Ansbach and Bayreuth were ruled by a junior branch of the Hohenzollern family. If it died out, as seemed likely, the king wished the right of succession of the senior, Brandenburg,

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\(^1\) Maria Theresia und Joseph II. Ihr Briefwechsel, ed. A. von Arneth (Vienna, 1867–8), vol. ii, pp. 171–2.
branch to be recognised by the powers. Recognition of Frederick's claims to Ansbach and Bayreuth might thus be bartered against his recognition of the Habsburg claims in Bavaria.

Events were soon to show that a great miscalculation had been made in Vienna. The duke of Zweibrücken, under Prussian influence, violently opposed the sacrifice of his rights and the absorption of part of his inheritance into the Habsburg dominions. His attitude won a good deal of sympathy from the smaller German princes, to whom the aggressive and overbearing policies of Joseph seemed increasingly menacing. More serious, the attitudes of both France and Russia were much less favourable to Austria than had been expected. Catherine II (herself by birth a member of a minor German ruling family) disliked the idea of radical change in the political structure of Germany, though she was unlikely to act decisively there while Russo-Turkish tension remained as acute as it was in 1777-8. Above all the French government was quite unwilling to give Austria any support. Vergennes wished to continue the alliance of 1756 with the Habsburgs; but like Choiseul he refused to make it the foundation of France's foreign policy. Already in April 1777 he had told Louis XVI, in a long memorandum, that Austria derived far greater advantages from the alliance than France, and that the only real reason for continuing it was to preserve peace on the Continent and thus allow France to concentrate on her maritime and colonial rivalry with Britain. No extension of France's obligations under it should be considered, and in particular it was in France's interest to preserve the power of Prussia as a counterweight to that of the Habsburgs in central Europe. Even the acquisition of the Austrian Netherlands, he concluded, could not compensate France for a large growth of Austrian power. This attitude was maintained throughout the crisis of the following year. On 10 March 1778 the Baron de Breteuil, the French ambassador in Vienna, was told that the French government could not recognise an Austro-Prussian struggle over Bavaria as a casus foederis under the alliance of 1756 and that 'circumstances did not permit His Majesty to take any part but that of neutrality in the war which might break out in Germany'.

By the time this despatch was written Austro-Prussian tension was becoming acute. Neither power wanted war, and on 20 May the Prussian government put forward a complicated plan for a compromise settlement. This proposed that the Habsburgs should retain only two districts of Bavaria. In return they should cede to the Elector Palatine the duchies of Limburg and Gelders in the Netherlands, as well as the imperial fiefs which still remained dotted about Bavaria. The Elector of Saxony, as compensation for his alodial rights in Bavaria, would receive part of the Upper Palatinate and the imperial fiefs in Suabia. Austria would not oppose

2 Ibid. vol. vii, pp. 195-7.
the eventual union of Ansbach and Bayreuth with the electorate of Brandenburg or (an important provision from Frederick’s point of view) the exchange of these territories for Lusatia if the rulers of Prussia and Saxony agreed on this. The refusal of Joseph II and Kaunitz to accept these terms made war inevitable, and early in July Prussian forces crossed the Bohemian frontier.

The struggle which followed, in which Prussia was joined by Saxony, was of little military interest. There was hardly any fighting of significance and both armies suffered far heavier losses from desertion and disease than from battle casualties. Nor did the half-hearted fighting mean the end of negotiations between Berlin and Vienna. Only a few days after the outbreak of war Maria Theresa, without the knowledge of Joseph, sent Baron Thugut, a leading Austrian diplomat, to discuss a compromise settlement with the Prussian government. In August she offered, without success, to abandon the agreement made in January with the Elector Palatine if in return Frederick II would renounce the idea of uniting Ansbach and Bayreuth with Brandenburg. By the middle of that month the negotiations had been broken off. By mid-September the attitude of Catherine II, who, as Russo-Turkish tension relaxed, was increasingly stressing her determination to defend the rights of the German states, was causing growing concern in Vienna. Early in November the French government agreed, in spite of its preoccupation with the war against Britain, to act as joint mediator with Russia, and by the end of the year talks were in progress for a Russo-Prussian military convention which would provide for the despatch of a force of Russian auxiliaries to help in the struggle with Austria. Frederick was dissatisfied with what he considered the inadequate help offered him by Catherine; but it was now clear that Austria, which had won no military victories and could call on no effective support from any other power, would have to give way. On 16 February 1779 the government in Vienna accepted preliminaries which gave it only a small part of Bavaria and on 13 March the peace congress opened at Teschen in Austrian Silesia. Prince N. I. Repnin for Russia and Breteuil for France acted as mediators. The settlement which had emerged by 13 May, when the congress broke up, was embodied in a series of agreements between Austria, Prussia, the Elector Palatine and the Elector of Saxony. Austria received the part of Bavaria bounded by the Inn, the Danube and the Salza, and abandoned her other claims in the electorate. She also agreed not to oppose the eventual union of Ansbach and Bayreuth with Brandenburg. The Elector of Saxony received a money compensation for his allodial claims in Bavaria.

Frederick II was thus justified in claiming that the war had ended in a victory, though by no means an overwhelming one, for Prussia, and that ‘in the Empire we shall in future be thought of as a useful counterweight to the despotism of Austria’. More important, the struggle over the
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Bavarian succession had brought Russia into the affairs of Germany more clearly and explicitly than ever before. As a guarantor, with France, of the agreements of 1779, she obtained a position in German politics comparable to that enjoyed by France, as a guarantor of the Westphalian settlement, for the last four generations.

However, the check of 1778–9 had done nothing to reduce Joseph's hunger for territorial expansion. The death of his mother at the end of 1780 freed him from her moderating influence and aroused widespread fears that he might embark upon a series of aggressive adventures. Even before the death of Maria Theresa he had been envisaging an alliance with Russia which would isolate Prussia and link Austria with the strongest military power in Europe. Within six months of his assuming sole control of the Habsburg dominions the alliance had been made, in fact if not in form. It was embodied in an exchange of letters between the emperor and Catherine II in May 1781 by which each guaranteed the other's territories and the existing position in Poland. To this were soon added vague but alluring schemes for joint action against the Ottoman empire and a possible partition of its European territories. To Catherine the possibility of Austrian aid against the Turks had been the main reason for making the alliance; and it was to prove its value to her when, in April 1783, she ended the incessant confusion and upheavals in the Crimea by annexing the khanate to Russia. The efforts of the French government to resist the annexation by diplomatic means were hamstrung by the refusal of Joseph and Kaunitz to support them, and in January 1784, on French advice, the Porte recognised formally that the Crimea and the Kuban were now part of the Russian empire. Catherine, with some exaggeration, told the emperor that her success was 'due solely to the good offices which Your Imperial Majesty employed in favour of His ally'.

Joseph, to the surprise of some observers, did not take advantage of the Crimean crisis to seize Turkish territory for himself; but even before it ended his restless ambitions had begun to show themselves in the Netherlands. He had always objected to the closure of the river Scheldt to non-Dutch shipping laid down by the Treaty of Münster in 1648. To him it appeared not merely a humiliating check on the trade of his Netherlands dominions but also a clear infringement of the natural right of his subjects to use the river—and the idea of natural rights was already beginning to have considerable influence on thinking about international affairs. By 1781 he had determined to open the river to shipping. He began by forcing the Dutch, at the end of that year and in the early months of 1782, to withdraw their garrisons from the now useless barrier fortresses. This was followed, in October–November 1783, by a number

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of deliberately engineered frontier incidents and the seizure of three small Dutch forts, while the Austrian government made for the first time an open protest against the existing régime of the Scheldt. Early in April 1784 an attempt was made to send a merchantman down the river from Antwerp past the Dutch fort of Lillo; the ship was fired on by the guns of the fort. On 23 August Count Belgiojoso, the governor of the Austrian Netherlands, made a final demand for the opening of the Scheldt; in return the Austrian government would give up its territorial claims against the Dutch, of which the most important was to the territory of Maestricht. This proposal, which seemed to threaten gravely the commercial life of the United Provinces, stimulated a violently hostile reaction there, and on 8 October an Austrian ship which had left Antwerp for Ostend was captured by the Dutch near Sanftingen. The Austrian minister to the Hague was at once recalled, and war seemed on the point of breaking out.

That the crisis was settled peacefully, and once more in a way unsatisfactory to Joseph, was due partly to the attitude of France. Vergennes was disillusioned by the attitude of Austria to the Russian annexation of the Crimea and anxious to avoid any action which might throw the Dutch into the arms of Britain; as early as 21 May 1784 he had promised them French good offices in their dispute with the emperor. In spite of all the efforts of Marie-Antoinette and the Austrian ambassador in Paris, Mercy-Argenteau, Franco-Austrian relations deteriorated badly towards the end of 1784, and a French note to Vienna of 17 November made it clear that France would support the States-General, if necessary by force. Catherine II, the emperor’s new ally, did not oppose his ambitions; but she gave him no help beyond a note to the States-General in which she said that she recognised the justice of his demands and hoped that a settlement satisfactory to both sides would be found. Joseph’s willingness to come to terms with the Dutch was being increased, however, by another and quite different factor in the last months of 1784. He was now hoping to exchange the whole of the Austrian Netherlands for Bavaria, for in August his representative in Munich, Lehrbach, had opened negotiations with the Elector Karl-Theodor in the hope of realising this long-cherished Habsburg dream. By making concessions over the Scheldt, an issue of relatively minor importance, the emperor hoped to secure the consent of France to the exchange. French support on this issue would be particularly valuable to him because, though Karl-Theodor was quite willing to exchange Bavaria for the more valuable Netherlands, the duke of Zweibrücken, still the heir-presumptive to the electorate, was not, and the French government was thought to have considerable influence over him.

In the event Joseph secured neither the opening of the Scheldt nor the Bavaria–Netherlands exchange. At a meeting of the royal council at Versailles on 2 January 1785 it was decided that the acquisition of Bavaria might make Austria a threat to the French possession of Alsace, besides
dangerously increasing her influence in Italy and overthrowing the balance of power in Germany. French consent to it must therefore be dependent on that of Frederick II. This decision destroyed any possibility of the exchange being carried out; on 13 February Karl-Theodor issued a denial that it had ever been contemplated. In July Frederick II succeeded in forming in Berlin a union of Prussia, Saxony and Hanover, which was later joined by many of the smaller German states, Catholic as well as Protestant. This Füntenbund (League of Princes) was designed to maintain the status quo in the Empire. By a secret article of the treaty which united them its members promised to support each other in resisting any invasion or seizure of Bavaria. The blow to Joseph's prestige was considerable and the check to his German ambitions complete.

The negotiations for a settlement between the emperor and the Dutch, which were carried on in Paris under French auspices, dragged on for months like all those in which the States-General was concerned. Not until 8 November 1785 was the Treaty of Fontainebleau signed. It gave Joseph a little territory in Brabant and Limburg, complete possession of the Scheldt above Sanktingen, and the sum of ten million florins in return for the surrender of his claims to Maestricht. But the Scheldt remained closed; in essence the treaty was a defeat for the emperor.

The effective separation of the politics of eastern Europe from those of the west which became visible after 1762–3 began to disappear in the later 1780s. The outbreak of a new war between Russia and the Ottoman empire in August 1787 began a sequence of events which had produced by 1789–90, for the first time for a quarter of a century, a crisis of European as distinct from merely regional dimensions. Russia's Near Eastern ambitions were far from being satisfied by the annexation of the Crimea, and in the early 1780's Catherine II and her advisers were playing with grandiose schemes for further expansion. A 'Greek Empire' embracing not merely Constantinople and Greece proper but also Bulgaria, Thrace and Macedonia might be created, perhaps with her grandson the Grand Duke Constantine as ruler. Moldavia and Wallachia might be united to form an autonomous state under Russian influence, a 'Kingdom of Dacia' which might be ruled by the empress's favourite, Prince G. A. Potemkin. These schemes, however, were always dreams or aspirations rather than plans; the war of 1787 had more limited and specific causes. It sprang above all from Turkish resentment of the growth of Russian power in the Caucasus (where most of Georgia had become a Russian protectorate in the summer of 1783), from the efforts of the Porte to limit the activities of Russian consuls in the Ottoman empire and from its deposition of the pro-Russian hospodar of Wallachia.

The Russian government, as in 1768, was taken by surprise by the outbreak of the war, and in the early stages of the conflict its forces failed to
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win any very striking victory. Nor was its international position very happy. Joseph II could not deny that the _casus foederis_ under his alliance of 1781 with Catherine had arisen. But he entered the war, in February 1788, with extreme reluctance, and soon found that its demands were increasing the already great unpopularity of his régime in Hungary. More important, in July 1788 Gustavus III of Sweden, hoping to recover the Finnish territory lost at Åbo in 1743 and the Baltic provinces surrendered at Nystad in 1721, suddenly attacked Russia. For a moment he seemed to threaten St Petersburg, for the defence of which only a few thousand men were available. Above all the death of Frederick II in August 1786, and the new direction this had given to Prussian policy, meant that a powerful Anglo-Prussian combination had now emerged as a factor in European affairs for the first time since 1761 and seemed likely to take a hand in the affairs of the Near East.

In September 1787 a Prussian army, with British support, destroyed the power of the pro-French ‘Patriot’ party in the United Provinces and restored the former authority of the _stadtholder_, whose wife was the sister of Frederick William II. This was followed by the signature of an Anglo-Prussian convention at the beginning of October, of Anglo-Dutch and Prusso-Dutch treaties of alliance on 15 April 1788, and, much more important, of a defensive alliance between Britain and Prussia on 13 August 1788. This provided for mutual help in case of outside attack and a guarantee by both signatories of the integrity and constitution of the United Provinces. By the end of the summer of 1788 Joseph II, surrounded by difficulties, was acutely anxious at the prospect of having to face a Prussian attack on Bohemia and Moravia as well as a difficult struggle with the Turks in Bosnia and Serbia. By December Catherine had decided that the hope of creating a kingdom of Dacia must be abandoned. Moreover the virtual paralysis of France as a factor in international relations, as a result of her internal troubles from 1787 onwards, did a great deal to free the hands of Britain and Prussia for possible action against Russia and Austria. Negotiations which dragged on throughout 1788–90 for a combination of Russia, Austria, France and Spain, a grouping which would, under normal conditions, have done much to strengthen the position of Joseph and Catherine, eventually collapsed, largely because of the obvious worthlessness of France as an ally.

In fact Catherine’s difficulties were less serious than appeared on the surface. Gustavus III was facing serious discontent within Sweden (the hope of strengthening his domestic position by a successful war was one reason for his sudden attack on Russia) and within a few weeks of his declaration of war his military operations were temporarily paralysed by a serious mutiny in the Swedish army. Neither Britain nor Prussia approved of his attack on Catherine II and in September Denmark entered the fray against him in fulfilment of her alliance obligations to Russia.

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Within a matter of days a Danish army seemed on the point of capturing Göteborg. Only the intervention (without instructions from London) of Hugh Elliot, the British minister at Copenhagen, forced the Danes to agree on 9 October to a temporary armistice. Prussian threats to invade Jutland if they continued the struggle with Sweden forced them first to prolong the armistice and then to make peace with Gustavus III, but Sweden had been placed, by the rashness of her king, in greater danger than at any time since the end of the Great Northern War.

Against these setbacks Gustavus could set nothing but a rather ineffective alliance and subsidy treaty made with the Porte in July 1789 and some financial help from Britain and Prussia. His forces achieved little against the Russians apart from an important naval victory at Svenksund in July 1790. On 14 August of that year, therefore, he made peace with Catherine II at Verela in Finland. His attack on Russia had undoubtedly been of considerable value to the Turks, and it gave him for a time a key position in European politics; but Sweden gained nothing by it. By agreeing to the Treaty of Verela he broke his promise to the Porte to make no separate peace; and Turkey and her interests did not figure at all in the text. Almost as soon as it had been signed Gustavus, with typical inconsistency, opened negotiations for a Russo-Swedish-Danish alliance.

Even more helpful from the Russian point of view than the weakness of Sweden was the essential disunity of Great Britain and Prussia. Pitt had made the alliance of 1788 only after long hesitation and regarded it as an instrument for the maintenance of peace and stability in Europe, while the fate of the Ottoman empire still seemed to most British statesmen of minor importance. In Berlin, by contrast, the alliance was seen as a stepping-stone to important territorial gains and events in the Near East now dominated the political horizon, as they were to do until well into 1791. In return for large gains in the Balkans, it was hoped, Joseph II might be compelled by the armed mediation of Prussia to cede Galicia to the Poles. They, in exchange, would hand over to Prussia Danzig and Thorn, thus rounding off and greatly strengthening the eastern borders of the Prussian monarchy. This scheme, so typical in many ways of the international relations of the age, had been drawn up by Hertzberg, the Prussian Foreign Minister, in November 1787. It aroused no enthusiasm in London and from the beginning the members of the Anglo-Prussian alliance were at cross-purposes. Moreover the progress of the anti-Austrian revolution in the southern Netherlands led to the rise in 1789 of another source of Anglo-Prussian disagreement, since Prussian proposals that the independence of these provinces be recognised were totally unacceptable to the British government, which still hankered after some alliance with Austria.

Nevertheless by the early months of 1790 the position of Catherine II was becoming increasingly difficult. On 31 January Dietz, the Prussian
minister at Constantinople, signed with the Porte a treaty which provided for Prussia’s entry into the war in the spring of the following year and for the return to the Turks of the Crimea and all the territory they had lost since 1787. Two months later the Prussian government made with Poland, where anti-Russian forces were becoming increasingly strong, a treaty by which the two states guaranteed each other’s territories and promised each other aid in case of attack by some third power. In Berlin the military party was urging that Prussia should disregard the warnings and hesitations of Britain and launch an attack on Bohemia; after the collapse of Austria, which it was assumed must soon follow such an attack, terms could be imposed on Russia. The British government also was slowly and reluctantly moving into opposition to Catherine II. Increasingly the ministers in London were thinking of developing Poland as a source of the essential naval stores which had hitherto come from Russia; by the spring of 1790 the idea of a commercial treaty with the Poles and the ensuring for Polish trade of free access to the Black Sea as well as the Baltic was becoming central to British policy.

Above all the death of Joseph II on 20 February 1790 deprived Catherine of the help of her Austrian ally. His brother and successor, Leopold II, perhaps the most intelligent ruler of the age, was well aware of the dangerous international position of the Habsburg dominions. The threat which Prussia now offered to them must be averted, and Leopold at once wrote a personal letter to Frederick William II expressing his desire for better relations between the two states. Though Kaunitz was bitterly opposed to anything which looked like a surrender to Prussia, by April negotiations for a settlement of Austro-Prussian differences were under way. The continued insistence of Hertzberg on the cession of at least part of Galicia to Poland (and therefore, it was hoped, of Danzig and Thorn to Prussia) made agreement seem very unlikely; but a conference between representatives of the two powers opened at Reichenbach in Silesia on 26 June. On 11 July the weak and changeable Frederick William II, realising that the exchange plan was strongly opposed by Turkey and Poland as well as by Great Britain, suddenly decided to make an agreement with the Austrians on the basis of the status quo. Hertzberg’s schemes were jettisoned, and by the Convention of Reichenbach of 27 July Leopold II retained Galicia and agreed to make peace with the Porte through the mediation of Britain, Prussia and the Dutch. Prussia had won a superficial diplomatic victory at the price of temporarily sacrificing her expansionist ambitions; but Leopold had secured his essential objective—peace on reasonable and honourable terms.

The Convention of Reichenbach did not, of course, end the Russo-Turkish war. Not until January 1792 did Catherine II make peace with the Porte on terms which allowed her to push her south-western frontier
forward to the Dniester. The events which followed the Austro-Prussian settlement of July 1790 are, however, outside the scope of this chapter. By the time of the Reichenbach agreement the structure of international relations which had existed in 1763 had undergone at least two radical changes. Russia, in 1763 powerful but still remote and half-despised by western statesmen and diplomats, had shown a greater capacity for territorial expansion than any other European state and was now the greatest power on the continent. France, in 1763 still in most respects the greatest European state, now appeared to be doomed for many years to relative impotence in international affairs; the real nature of the change she was undergoing was still misunderstood by nearly all observers. The weaknesses of the Habsburg dominions, already clear under Charles VI and Maria Theresa, had been illuminated and in some ways increased by the career of Joseph II; those of Prussia were rapidly becoming more visible, and obviously Germany would remain, as in the past, an area of weakness and instability in European politics. Britain, her prestige and resources recovered from the defeats of the American Revolution, was still, in spite of Pitt’s new-found interest in the Near East, essentially isolationist—more so in many ways in 1790 than she had been in the 1760s.

Above all, the foundations were now laid for a great change in the questions around which European diplomatic activity revolved. Near Eastern issues, even to some extent Anglo-French colonial rivalries and the Habsburg-Hohenzollern feud in Germany, were soon to be pushed into the background. In their place would arise the problems posed by the existence of a new régime in France and by the destruction of Poland.