

## THE ROYAL NAVY AND THE FRENCH WARS: THE LONG-TERM BACKGROUND

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To understand the (British) Royal Navy at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, it is necessary to appreciate the extent to which they were not a new episode for the navy but rather the latest iteration of a repeated challenge that had existed since 1689. Moreover, the navy had institutional and career continuity, and indeed to a much greater extent than its Continental rivals. As a result, it is necessary to look at long-term continuities when trying to understand the Napoleonic Wars at sea. A key form of continuity was offered by the technology itself. The incremental process of naval improvement continued in the last decades of sail, but, with hindsight provided by subsequent technological developments, it is possible to see the period in terms of the use of yet greater resources of people, *materiel* and funds to use established means to pursue familiar military courses. The American and French Revolutions certainly did not bring changes in naval warfare comparable to those on land. Instead, the long-term growing stress on naval firepower continued to affect fleet structures. Whereas in 1720, there were only two warships displacing more than 3,000 tons, by 1815 nearly a fifth of the naval strength above 500 tons was in this category. In 1800-15, ships of 2,500-3,000 tons achieved greater importance, whereas those of 2,000-2,500 and 1,500-2,000 tons declined in number. These bigger ships were able to carry heavier guns. Whereas the average ship of the line in 1720 had 60 guns and was armed with 12- and 24-pounders, that of 1815 had 74 guns with 32- and 36-pounders on the lower deck. Nevertheless, this greater firepower did not lead to dramatic changes in naval warfare and it did not begin in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic period.

There were other improvements. Better signalling in the period 1790s-1810s helped to enhance the potential for tactical control. The invention of a system of ship construction using diagonal bracing in order to strengthen hulls and to prevent the arching of keels, was to increase the resilience of ships, and thus their sea and battle-worthiness, and to permit the building of longer two-deckers armed with 80 or 90 guns. These improvements helped make earlier ships appear redundant, certainly for the line of battle, but, although Seppings experimented in the 1800s at Plymouth and Chatham, the first ship built entirely on this principle, HMS *Howe*, was not launched until 1815. Diagonal framing was mainly significant after the introduction of steam made it important to build longer ships.

Strategic culture was another key continuity, and this continuity arose from diplomatic developments which repeatedly created a major challenge to Britain in the period 1689-1815. The nature of this challenge ensured that a powerful navy was a key aspect of the solution, thus providing a valuable instance of the challenge-and-response nature of military power; otherwise described in terms of a stress on tasking. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England/Britain had benefited from the ability to fight sequentially rather than simultaneously, a key goal for any power, major or minor. Thus, in the sixteenth century, conflict had been with France or Spain, and in the seventeenth century, with France, Spain or the Dutch. A combination between opponents was unusual. In the 1620s, England had been at war with both France and Spain, but the two had not been allied. In the late 1530s, the Habsburg Emperor, Charles V, and Francis I of France had allied against Henry VIII, and there had been grave concerns in England

about the possibility of an invasion. These, indeed, had led to the construction of coastal fortifications, as well as to an effort to build up Henry VIII's navy. In the event, however, the alliance did not last, and, instead, Henry was able to join with Charles against Francis.

This situation of sequential conflict greatly helped England in its warfare with the leading European naval powers, whether Spain in the late-sixteenth century, the Dutch in the three Anglo-Dutch Wars of 1652-74, and the French in the early stages of the Nine Years' War (1689-97). In most cases, moreover, the English were allied to, or co-operating with, other naval powers, notably with the Dutch against Spain in 1585-1604, with Louis XIV against the Dutch in the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-4), and with the Dutch (and Spain) against Louis XIV in the Nine Years' War. The value of this co-operation helped explain the problems created by the threat of co-operation between France and the Dutch at the time of the Second Anglo-Dutch War.

The Royal Navy surpassed the size of the French navy in the 1690s, but this achievement did not lead the other states to ally in an anti-hegemonic alliance, although the rhetoric of such an alliance was to play a role in French propaganda over the following century. Indeed, indicating the extent to which talk of threats was rhetoric as much as analysis, the British used this rhetoric when criticising Spanish attempts in 1738-9 to exclude them from trade with the Spanish New World. *The Citizen or, The Weekly Conversation of a Society of London Merchants on Trade, and other Public Affairs*, in its issue of 9 February 1739, claimed that 'the just Balance of Power amongst the European nations might as eventually be broken and destroyed, by an unjust and partial monopoly of the medium of commerce, as by any particular state engrossing to itself too large an extent of dominion, and other branches of power'.

Instead of uniting against Britain, and thus prefiguring the situation in both early 1780s and late 1790s, the Dutch and Spain joined England in the 1690s in co-operating against France. The situation changed, however, during the War of the Spanish Succession, in which England was engaged from 1702 to 1713; but this change

occurred as a result of dynastic factors and not due to opposition to Britain's naval position. The accession of Louis's grandson, Philip, Duke of Anjou, to the Spanish throne, as Philip V in 1700, led to an alliance of France and Spain opposed to that of England, the Dutch and Austria, but, after the war, this alliance disintegrated and, in the War of the Quadruple Alliance (1718-20), Britain, France, Austria and the Dutch were united against Spain. Thus, the British were able to defeat a Spanish fleet off Sicily in 1718 (the battle of Cape Passaro) and to mount an amphibious attack on the Spanish port of Vigo in 1719 without having to fear the opposition of France.

The same was true of British naval operations, and planned operations, against Spain in 1725-9: France was allied with Britain and the Dutch, as part of the Alliance of Hanover. Therefore, it was possible for Britain to blockade the Spanish ports of Cadiz and Porto Bello without fear of French military action, and that despite major French investment in the cargoes due to be brought back from the Americas in the blockaded ships.

However, this situation changed in the 1730s with the collapse of the Anglo-French alliance in 1731 and the replacement, in 1733, of Anglo-Spanish co-operation by that between France and Spain. The basis of this alliance was dynastic, the first of three Family Compacts between the Bourbon rulers of France and Spain, and this alliance established the diplomatic core of the challenge facing the Royal Navy. Allowing for periods of diplomatic co-operation between Britain and Spain, notably in the early 1750s, when Ferdinand VI of Spain was unwilling to heed French pressure for joint action, and of Anglo-Spanish military co-operation against Revolutionary France in 1793-5, for example at Toulon in 1793, this alignment of France and Spain provided a basic naval challenge to Britain, one that lasted until wrecked by Napoleon when he tried to take over Spain in 1808. The combination of French and Spanish warships at Trafalgar in 1805 demonstrated this challenge, and also how it survived changes in regime, as such co-operation had been seen in the battle of Toulon in 1744, and also when Spanish warships joined the French at Brest in preparing for the unsuccessful invasion of England in 1779.

The impact of this Franco-Spanish challenge was exacerbated by the extent to which Anglo-Dutch naval co-operation became less significant from the 1710s and, indeed, ceased from 1748. This change transformed the naval situation in the English Channel, the North Sea, and the Indian Ocean; and, thus, more generally. Instead, the two powers became enemies, fighting the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War in 1780-4, and again, after the French overran the Netherlands in 1795, during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Thus, French success in the Low Countries was an important strategic element for the struggle at sea, which, in turn, helped explain the decision to intervene there, in 1799, in the Walcheren expedition, in 1809, and again in 1814.

These shifts posed the key problem for the Royal Navy, as well as the individual problems of specific conjunctures, but they did not exhaust the diplomatic difficulties it confronted. In addition, two major rising naval powers were opposed to Britain in particular periods, although only one actually fought her. Russia became a key regional naval power under Peter the Great (r. 1689-1725), although part of its navy was very different to that of Britain, as it had a galley component essentially restricted to Baltic waters. Sir Cyril Wych, the British envoy, reported in 1742 that there were 130 galleys in St Petersburg in 'constant good order', each with three cannon and able to carry 200 troops and that 'with these they can make great and sudden ... irruptions'.<sup>1</sup> Such a force was not a threat to Britain, but it was to her allies. Russia came close to conflict with Britain in the early 1720s, both during the last stage of the Great Northern War and subsequently; but war was avoided, as it also was in 1791, during the Ochakov Crisis, and in the 1800s when Russia had periods of alliance with France, notably under Paul I in 1800-1 and after Napoleon and Alexander I signed the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807. By then, Russia was a wide-ranging naval power: indeed, aside from being powerful in the Baltic, its fleet had been

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<sup>1</sup> Wych to John, Lord Carteret, Secretary of State for the Northern Department, 10 Ap. 1742, London, National Archives, State Papers (hereafter NA. SP.) 91/31.

deployed to the Mediterranean against the Turks from 1769.

The British relationship with the USA, in contrast, became more hostile. Aside from the war of independence with Britain in 1775-83, the two powers waged the War of 1812 in 1812-15, and this conflict posed a challenge to British naval resources, not least as they struggled to develop a blockade of America's ports and to overcome American privateering while also fighting France.

The loss of the support of the one-time Thirteen Colonies was not significant in terms of the arithmetic of ships of the line, but was important for the manpower that had been contributed to the Royal Navy, both directly, and indirectly through the role of the merchant marine of the American colonies in British imperial trade, notably of the West Indies; and indeed manpower issues helped lead to the outbreak of the War of 1812. This point serves as a reminder that statistical measures of naval power in terms of numbers of warships need to be complemented by analysis of the manpower situation and also by an appreciation of the regional dynamics of naval power, not least if these dynamics related to far-flung empires.

If mention of America from 1775 does not exhaust the list of challenges facing the Royal Navy, it does provide an indication of their scale and range. The diplomatic dimension is crucial because it underlines the degree to which the navy had to cope with a situation shot through with unpredictability. Indeed, that was a key element in the peacetime British naval strategy, for the prospect of war, as in 1733-5 (when Britain was neutral in the War of the Polish Succession despite its Austrian alliance and, in 1735, sent a fleet to the Tagus when Spain threatened Portugal), might mean war with France or Spain, or both. In reacting to this situation of inherent uncertainty, the British therefore had to rely on diplomacy in order to lessen the build-up of an opposing coalition, intelligence, in order to ascertain what their opponents would do, and a strong navy. The three were linked, and it would be misleading to treat them separately.

The navy, itself, responded within existing technological and institutional constraints. There was no marked change in either in this period, a point that serves as a reminder about the danger of assuming that hegemonic military strength necessarily reflects the availability of particular technological and institutional advantages. The Royal Navy had some comparative advantages, but within a context of a system in which variations were relatively minor. French warships tended to be better-built in the mid-eighteenth century, while the British subsequently benefited from carronades and copper-bottoming, but neither advantage was decisive. Instead, British fire-discipline was a key element, one shown to have a devastating effect during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. This fire-discipline arose from training and experience; and not from technological advantage.

Challenges played a role in enhancing the British development of the advantages they possessed. Thus, the need to respond to the Seven Years' War (1756-63) helped ensure the emulation of French shipbuilding techniques, while copper-bottoming and carronades were pushed forward due to the War of American Independence (1775-83), which, from 1778, was also an Anglo-French war; and with Spain and the Dutch participating from 1779 and 1780 respectively. British fire-discipline benefited from the experience of frequent conflict.

In comparison, Britain only fought one naval war with a Western power between 1815 and 1914, the Crimean War with Russia in 1854-6, and yet there was a massive transformation in the Royal Navy, between 1815 and 1870, and, again, subsequently. In large part, this transformation arose from competition with other naval powers, notably France and, from the early 1900s, Germany; but the key point in comparing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that challenge itself does not lead to transformation.

Nor did it, in the eighteenth or the nineteenth centuries, for opponents who lacked naval predominance. Indeed, the latter generally responded to their weaker position by seeking to build-up strength, especially through a diffusion of the technology and personnel from the leading

power or powers. Thus, for example, Russia recruited British captains, sailors and shipwrights. It is notable that, in contrast, there was scant interest in the type of paradigm-shifting challenge presented by initiatives in mines and submarines. The latter were associated in particular with Robert Fulton, and he offered threats to British hegemony, pressing both France and the USA to take his inventions as an opportunity to overcome the British position. Despite the fact that France was at war with Britain, this route was not taken, which was probably an appropriate response to the possibility of effectively manufacturing any new system, but the net effect was to ensure that the Royal Navy was not challenged by any radically new system. This indeed was an aspect of the general military conservatism of the period. During the War of 1812, Fulton found support for naval steam-power in his native USA, but his work did not threaten the British position, no more than David Bushnell's successful effort to create a workable submarine had done during the War of American Independence.

Nor was the Royal Navy confronted with any significant development in the tactical, operational or strategic spheres. Indeed, in contrast to the development in the seventeenth century of professional navies, specialised fighting ships (neither, of course, began in that century), and line-ahead tactics, there was remarkably little change in the eighteenth. This point invites the question whether it is indeed appropriate to expect such change. Thus, the USA, having become the master of carrier warfare in the 1940s, has essentially maintained that paradigm of naval capability ever since. A similar point can be made about Britain and battleships earlier in the twentieth century.

There is scant sign of novelty being seen as the solution, which helps explain the emphasis placed by the British on command skills and character. Indeed, command was regarded as the key, alongside the efforts of the crews. This emphasis on command opens the question whether there were any particular efforts to teach command. The answer, in practice, was that the stress in all respects was on an incremental response to possibilities, and that this response

accorded with the cultural norms of the period. Indeed, such a response can also be seen in governance and the army, although a different emphasis can be presented if the stress is on the 'Financial Revolution' of the 1690s. At any rate, there was no comparison at sea, which indicates the limited responses available at sea in meeting the multiple challenges of the period: Britain has been seen as the setting for agricultural, industrial, financial, transport and political revolutions in the period 1689-1815, but not as one for a naval revolution.

The relevance of this point for the wider field of military change in this period is also suggestive. There is a tendency to argue that a military revolution arose from the French Revolution<sup>2</sup> and that, in combination with the supposed military revolution of 1560-1660, such military revolutions were possible, desirable, and the route to enhanced capability and success. These arguments, however, tell us more about contemporary and (later) scholarly discourses concerning military power and development, than they do concerning the far more complex processes involved. In particular, change tended to be incremental, the gaps in capability between armies (and navies) were smaller, and more contingent to circumstances, than are generally appreciated, and the nature of improvement was not always clear.

Similar points can be made about naval warfare in this period, and these points can be underlined by drawing attention to the variety of tasks that navies were expected to discharge. In particular, there was no one task, and thus no single measure of effectiveness. Britain's navy had the prime strategic requirement of protecting the homeland (as well as the colonies) from invasion, a task also seen with the Dutch navy during the Third Anglo-Dutch War, but a goal not shared by the navies of France, Spain, Russia or the USA; the last of which relied against invasion on the militia, on coastal fortifications, and on the vast extent of the country.

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<sup>2</sup> See David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston, 2007).

Again with the exception of the Dutch, the British navy had a role in preventing the interruption of trade routes that was not matched elsewhere. Such interruption posed a fundamental problem for the operation of the French and, to a lesser extent, Spanish economic systems, but there was nothing to match the British dependence, that of the economy, of credit and public finances, on overseas trade. This situation again posed a fundamental challenge to the British navy, because trade protection, like the sea denial involved in invasion prevention, was fundamentally reactive. It was necessary to block or react to the sailing of hostile warships and privateers; and that within a context in which intelligence (especially prior intelligence) was limited, and communications about any such sailing slow and not readily subject to confirmation. Toward the close of the period, there was a degree of improvement in the shape of the introduction of semaphores, but their impact was restricted. More serious was the extent to which balloons did not offer the capacity for aerial surveillance that later developments in powered flight were to provide.

Thus, the British navy was trapped by a set of tasks that forced it into a reactive operational stance. In September 1756, the First Lord of the Admiralty drew the attention of 'his ministerial colleagues to the dire consequences of the problems posed by blockade: 'My Lord Anson... represented the condition of the squadron under the command of Vice Admiral Boscawen, that the crews of the ships are very sickly, that the ships must necessarily return in order to be refitted, and that, upon the whole, the fleet would run the utmost hazard, were it to continue cruising off Brest, beyond the middle of the next month'.<sup>3</sup>

The following month, John, 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Bedford, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, complained about ineffectiveness as well, 'What have we been doing with our fleet this summer, but endeavouring to hedge in the cuckoo, which, as must always be the case, we have been utterly unable to effect? For many ships and forces have been stole away from the different ports of

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<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Minute, 29 Sept. 1756, London, British Library (hereafter BL.) Additional Manuscripts, 51376 fols 85-6.

France to America, and with this additional disadvantage, that whilst we are wearing out our ships and sailors by keeping the French fleet within their harbours, they are, without any waste of men or ships, getting themselves into a condition of being able to drive us off their coasts in a very short time'.<sup>4</sup>

Irritation with the blockade was seen with Charles Townshend's complaint that the navy was 'once more crying the hours off Brest under Lord Anson who, with the deportment, punctuality and terror of a London watchman, knocks every night at every French seaport in the Channel to see that all is at home and quiet within his station. The admiral is, I fear, better suited to this service than the fleet which might have been sent upon real duty'.<sup>5</sup>

Another form of reaction was provided by convoying trade, an arduous task that was important not only for commercial reasons but also for maintaining related political links.<sup>6</sup> There was also the need to respond to enemy operations on land and the potential threat they posed to maritime interests. Thus, in 1757, Robert, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Holderness, the Secretary of State for the Northern Department, wrote to William, Duke of Cumberland, commander of the army of allied German forces entrusted with the defence of Hanover.

*'In consequence of the hints thrown out in your Royal Highness's letters of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> instant, a man of war, a sloop, and two armed vessels are sent to the Ems, in order to see if they can choose such a position in that river as might (in case the enemy possess themselves of Emden), prevent the operation of any embarkation on board the small vessels of that country ... proper care will also be taken to have cruisers so stationed as to keep the mouth of the Elbe, and the Weser, free from any annoyance from the enemy'.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Bedford to Henry Fox, 14 Oct. 1756, Earl of Ilchester (ed.), *Letters to Henry Fox* (London, 1915), p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Townshend to his mother, Lady Townshend, BL. Blakeney papers vol. I, no. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Wych to Carteret, 10 Ap. 1742, NA. SP. 91/31.

<sup>7</sup> Holderness to Cumberland, 27 May 1757, BL. Egerton mss. 3442 fols 97-8.

The reactive stance is not the picture that generally emerges from popular accounts of naval operations, let alone battles, but the latter devote insufficient attention to the strain involved in more commonplace blockading. That, in fact, many battles arose as a result of aspects of blockade, and thus of the re-active strategy that was central to the use of British naval power, can be readily established by an consideration of the battles, and, not least, of their location.

However, the contemporary conception of British naval power was also very different. It was pro-active, not re-active, and that assumption posed a different form of challenge; one moreover that was accentuated by the nature of British public politics. The call to action was frequent, both in peacetime and during wars, and there was scant sense of any limits on what the navy could achieve. Thus, the *Monitor*, an influential, populist London paper, in its issue of 24 December 1757, declared:

*'A fleet is our best security: but then it is not to lie by our walls; nor be confined to the navigation of our own coasts. The way to deliver Rome from the rivalship and hostilities of the Carthaginians was to carry fire and sword upon the African coast. Employ the enemy at home, and he will never project hazardous invasions. Our fleets are able to bid defiance to all the maritime forces of Europe. And as the surest and most rational means to humble the ambition of France is to destroy her power by sea, and her trade from America; no service, but what is directed towards this salutary object of British politics, can be worthy of the attention of a British ministry'.<sup>8</sup>*

Moreover, failure led to savage criticism, as with the execution of two captains for failure in the Caribbean in 1702 and as Admiral Byng discovered in 1756. The press was very ready to condemn naval strategy and operations.<sup>9</sup>

As another source of pressure, Britain's allies could also expect much from the Royal Navy, Frederick II calling in 1758 for expeditions against the French coast capable of making

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<sup>8</sup> See also issues of 11 Mar. and 29 Ap. 1758.

<sup>9</sup> *Owen's Weekly Chronicle*, 15 Ap. 1758.

France withdraw troops from Germany.<sup>10</sup> To support such invasions, the *Monitor* of 29 April 1758 urged the construction of shallow-draft invasion boats each armed with twenty cannon and able to carry 100 marines.

The politics of strategy is a field that has attracted insufficient attention for the (long) eighteenth century; and not least because of the focus, instead, on the politics of naval command. Moreover, there has been a preference for focusing on strategy in operational terms, particularly the location of fleets, as in the discussion of the strategic grasp of John, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty during the War of American Independence.<sup>11</sup> This scholarship is of considerable value, but it does not exhaust the issue of strategy, and not least that of the wider politics of naval tasking and also the placing of naval requirements within British public culture and government. As an instance of the challenges posed by the latter, the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9 led to the replacement of a monarch, James II, with a deep personal commitment to the navy, by the first in a series without any such commitment. Although William III (r. 1689-1702) came to Britain by sea, he was very much a general. The latter preference was even more true of George I (r. 1714-27) and George II (r. 1727-60). As young men, they had gained important military experience, but on land and not at sea. Moreover, both men had a powerful commitment to their native Electorate of Hanover, which was not a naval power, and did not become one.

This attitude on the part of the Crown was taken further by the powerful and longstanding commitment to the army of royal princes, notably William, Duke of Cumberland and Frederick, Duke of York, the favourite sons of George II and George III respectively. In contrast, there was no such politically charged commitment to the navy. William IV, as Duke of Clarence, followed a naval career, but it proved abortive, and lacked

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Mitchell, envoy in Berlin, to Holderness, 9 Feb. 1758, NA. SP. 90/71.

<sup>11</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl: A Life of John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich, 1718-1792* (London, 1993).

weight. He was not given command during the Napoleonic Wars.

Royal attitudes were not central to the political position of the navy, but they were an element in the complex circumstances within which it had to operate. Parliament could prove more intrusive, not least in the shape of pressure when things went wrong, as they tended to in the early stages of most wars. The resulting controversies were in part an aspect of the problems stemming from an assumption of success. This assumption became more insistent because the Wars of the Spanish Succession (1702-13) and Quadruple Alliance (1718-20) did not leave any legacy of perceived failure.

As a result, the concerns of 1744-6, 1756, 1759 and 1779, about projected or possible French invasions, seemed unacceptable and the product of political and/or naval neglect. This situation underlined the political, and thus strategic, problems stemming from a re-active operational stance. The need to plan for acting against attempted invasion was not necessarily a result of failure, however much that might seem to be the case to elements in British public politics.

If the operational and political issues posed by invasion threats provided a key strategic problem, it was not one that changed greatly during the period. There were anxieties about invasion for most of the period; although the extent to which any invasion was seen as likely to enjoy domestic support varied greatly. The last, indeed, constituted a key element in the political challenge to naval power; for anxiety about domestic backing for invaders, whether, in particular, from Jacobites, notably in the 1690s and 1740s, or Irish rebels, created greater pressure for naval security and for an appearance of assured mastery. This situation lasted until the Irish risings of 1798 and, far less seriously, 1803; but, after that, the French naval threat was not seen in terms of exacerbating domestic disaffection. Thus, in 1805, the French naval threat was, first, of an invasion of Britain and then of intervening in the Mediterranean; but the domestic British response was far more unitedly hostile than on some previous occasions.

This last point serves as a reminder of the degree to which the (varied) response to the problems faced by British naval power in successive conflicts helped mould the politics of the following years. The Napoleonic Wars provided an appearance of British naval dominance not seen in the American Independence or French Revolutionary wars. There was no repetition of the large-scale indecisive battles of the former (Ushant, 1778; Virginia Capes 1781); nor of the naval mutinies (1797) and strategic problems of the latter: withdrawal from the Mediterranean, 1796; failure to prevent French forces landing in Ireland, 1798.

Instead, the arduous nature of the Mediterranean naval commitment after Trafalgar (1805), especially of the difficult blockade of Toulon, was overlooked in the post-war glow of remembered glory, a glow that created a problem for subsequent expectations, notably in the Crimean and First World Wars. Anxiety about France building up its navy after Trafalgar, an anxiety that focused on the dockyards of Antwerp was also forgotten by the public, although it played a role in the British government's attitude to the crisis caused by the Belgian Revolution of 1830. This anxiety led to the Walcheren expedition of 1809, as well as to later concern to ensure that any subsequent peace did not leave France in control of the port, which indeed had been the intention of the Austrian Chancellor, Metternich. Indeed, a key element of the politics and strategy of naval power related to bases, and thus to the military operations, planning priorities, and international negotiations bound up with their capture from opponents.

There was the related question of the expansion, at home and, even more, abroad, of the British system of bases, a system that, in turn, saw the interplay of naval criteria with imperial and domestic policy and politics; the latter, for example, to the fore in the bitter debate of 1786 over naval fortifications. The House of Commons then rejected the government's plan for fortifying Plymouth and Portsmouth, a measure regarded as necessary by the ministry not only to protect the key bases for a Western Squadron but also to free the fleet for wartime offensive operations.

This episode indicated the range of factors involved in naval politics and strategy, and also the danger of seeing results as a product of plans without noting the powerful mediation of these factors.

This emphasis on politics directs attention to naval power as the product of co-operation between interest groups, notably those that controlled and could finance warships. Such an analysis understands the role of intentionality and policy alongside the structural assessment of the societies and political cultures of these powers. This insight is a crucial one for understanding the challenges and responses of British naval power, as it locates this power in a different pattern of response to that affecting Britain's rivals. In particular, governmental support for the navy elsewhere could be extensive, but tended to lack the political, social and institutional grounding seen in Britain. As a consequence, there could be a mismatch elsewhere between governmental decisions to expand resources and build up naval strength, and, on the other hand, a more limited achievement in terms of the delivery of effective naval power, a point clearly seen with Russia under Peter the Great.

Relating naval power and strategy to politics is appropriate. A key element in eighteenth-century Britain was the lack of any unpacking of strategy and policy, a lack that reflected the absence of any institutional body specifically for strategic planning and execution, and also the tendency, in politics, government and political discussion, to see strategy and policy as one, and necessarily so. Institutional practices and political assumptions rested on important configurations reflecting linked constituencies of support. Britain's ability to respond to the challenges facing its naval power can in large part be explained by this situation. To an extent unmatched among the major European powers, British policymakers and the British political nation understood the implications of the remark in the *Monitor* of 18 March 1758 that no prince nor state ever arrived to any great superiority of power without the assistance of a powerful navy'.