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The cannon balls of Louis XIV's *Ultima Ratio Reges*¹ contrast sharply with Vattel's *cri de coeur* that 'A dwarf is as much a man as a giant; a small republic is no less a sovereign state than the most powerful kingdom.'² These images bear testament to the incommensurable gap which divided early modern diplomatic theory from practice. The French Revolution sought to erect an edifice which would bridge this chasm. Alas, the deputies of the Constituent Assembly, despite their noble intentions, depressingly hurtled into a familiar vortex, where appeals to natural law hid naked military aggression and strategic egocentrism. Whether this outcome was inevitable or contingent on circumstances continues to pose a dilemma for historical writing on the early Revolution.³ Unsympathetic interpretations point an accusatory finger at the Assembly's unilateral annexation of the Papal Comtat Venaissan and the usurpation of the sovereign rights of the German princes in Alsace.⁴ On the other side of the historiographical divide, optimists paint, in portentous terms, the Constituent's 'eternal renunciation of war as an instrument of conquest.'⁵ Any simple interpretation, which views 1789 as a dawn or dusk, runs the risk of deeply underestimating the complexities of the competing processes unleashed by the slow collapse of the Bourbon Monarchy.

This article will seek to gauge the question of the French Revolution's impact on diplomatic practice from a different perspective, namely that of the ambassadors and foreign ministers resident in Paris. The unpublished despatches of these diplomats and Parisian police reports help to shed new light on the French Revolution's gradual alienation from the international relations system of the *ancien régime*. This process was not simply a question of a downward spiral, but one in which both foreign diplomats and the politicians in the National Assembly came to realise they were, quite literally, speaking different languages. It is true that, ultimately, a new vision of international relations did emerge, but this was not a linear process. Unstable dualisms characterised the years 1789-1791 rather than any

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¹ John Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle, The French Army, 1610–1715* (Cambridge, 1997); & John Lynn, *The Wars of Louis XIV, 1667-1714* (London, 1999)

² Emer de Vattel, *Le droit des gens ou Principes de la loi naturelle appliqués à la conduite et aux affaires des nations et des souverains*, 2 vols (London, 1758), I, 11.

³ TCW Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London, 1986)

⁴ Pierre Gaxotte, *La Révolution Française* (Paris, 1928), pp.228-33.

⁵ Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution française*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1967), I, 764.

farsighted vision of statesmanship. From a more medium term perspective, Linda and Marsha Frey have argued recently that: ‘the assault on diplomats was part of the larger assault on diplomacy and the Old Regime, for intrinsic to the French revolutionary vision of establishing a new revolutionary order at home and abroad was the jettisoning of the old order and everything associated with it.’⁶ This article endorses such an assessment, but from a different perspective. Unlike the Frey sisters’ work, it is not a prosopographical and behavioural analysis of the careers of the emissaries despatched abroad to represent the revolution in the 1790s. It explores the opposite end of the spectrum, by examining the contrasting reactions of various members of the diplomatic corps in Paris to the unfolding revolutionary drama. Some embraced 1789 with enthusiasm, others immediately perceived it as a threat. Very few had as extreme a reaction as the Bailli de Guiran La Brillane, the minister plenipotentiary for the order of Malta, who died of apoplexy on hearing the news that the properties of his chivalric order would not be exempted from becoming *biens nationaux*.⁷ Diplomats, in general, reacted to the Revolution according to the dynastic interests and balance of power politics which characterised the *ancien régime*.⁸ The new language of the National Assembly was entirely alien to their world. Indeed, it would take these aristocratic ambassadors almost two years, and in some cases longer, to comprehend fully the reverberations of 1789 on the international arena.

Diplomacy, in the eighteenth century, was intimately linked to a sovereign prince’s physical body and presence.⁹ Ambassadors, ministers plenipotentiary and *chargés d’affaires* did not represent states, let alone nations, but were the physical proxies of their sovereign lords. They were accredited to the court of the Rex Christianissimus. They mediated and kept open the channels of communication between princes who constantly competed over the fiscal-military resources of the European mainland and for colonies overseas.¹⁰ Choiseul had, pessimistically, lamented in 1760 that France had ceased to be a great power.¹¹ Understandable from a military perspective, especially in the depressing context of the Seven

⁶ Linda and Marsha Frey, “Proven Patriots” *the French Diplomatic Corps 1789-1799* (St Andrews, 2011) p.3; & for an earlier version of this wider thesis see Frey & Frey, ‘The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over”: The French Revolutionary Attack on Diplomatic Practice,’ in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (1993).

⁷ Alain Blondy, *L’Ordre de Malte au XVIII^{ième} siècle des dernières splendeurs à la ruine* (Paris, 2002), pp.286-88.

⁸ M.S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy 1450-1919* (London, 1993), ch.2; Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London, 2011), ch.4; -, ‘Essay and Reflection: On the ‘Old System’ and the ‘Diplomatic Revolution’ of the Eighteenth’ *The International History Review*, Vol. 12, (1990); & Lucien Bély, *L’art de la paix en Europe: Naissance de la diplomatie moderne XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2007).

⁹ Lucien Bély, *La Société des princes* (Paris, 1999), pp.387-536.

¹⁰ Paul W Schroder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848* (Oxford, 1994), chs.1-2.

¹¹ Anderson, *Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, p.173.

Years War, in term of cultural influence and soft power this observation was decidedly an exaggeration.¹² After all, Marc Fumaroli, in a persuasive anthology, has described the eighteenth century as the moment ‘when Europe spoke French.’¹³ There is much to sustain this interpretative thrust. One need only think of the example of the baron von Grimm who, during his long stint as the minister plenipotentiary for the duke of Saxe-Gotha in Paris, also unofficially acted as a proselyte for French culture. From 1753-1793 his influential periodical, the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique* provided a hungry European public with a digest of the latest publications, plays, operas, cultural and fashionable innovations which were gripping the Parisian public.¹⁴ Famously, he included among his subscribers Catherine II, Frederick II, Gustave III and Stanislas II Augustus. The cultural and intellectual influence which Paris exerted over the elites and courts of Europe seems, despite recent revisionism, hard to dismiss offhand.¹⁵ In spite of the military reversals of the century, French *savoir-vivre* and intellectual controversies continued to captivate the attention of foreign admirers. It was the *apogée* of European Francophilia.¹⁶

A palpable repercussion of this international prestige was that Paris remained the most important diplomatic centre and listening post in Europe. The Almanach Royal of 1789 lists thirty-one resident ambassadors and Ministers Plenipotentiaries accredited to the Court of France.¹⁷ A very impressive figure when one considers that most continental princes at the time barely maintained half a dozen permanent representatives abroad at any one time. Paris was in some ways a European school for diplomacy. Especially when one compares it to major diplomatic centres like London, Vienna, Rome and Madrid which did not receive as many regular diplomatic agents from the sovereign lords of the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁸ Yet, behind this backdrop of officialdom lurked a less than limpid world, inhabited by innumerable extraordinary representatives, unofficial agents, spies and culture brokers, who employed less licit means to further their masters’ dynastic interests.¹⁹

¹² Orville Murphy, *The Diplomatic Retreat of France and Public Opinion on the Eve of the French Revolution 1783-1789* (Washington DC, 1998).

¹³ Marc Fumaroli, *Quand l'Europe parlait français* (Paris, 2001); & Antoine de Rivarol, *Discours de l'Universalité de la langue Française, qui a remporté le prix de l'academie de Berlin* (Berlin, 1784), p.49.

¹⁴ Fumaroli, *Quand l'Europe parlait français*, pp.351-73 .

¹⁵ Ibid pp.155-172, 303-25, & 574-611; & cf. Pierre Yves Beaurepaire, *Le mythe de l'Europe française au XVIII siècle. Diplomatie, culture et sociabilités au temps des Lumières le mythe de l'Europe française* (Paris, 2008), esp. L'introduction.

¹⁶ Ibid; & Louis-Antoine marquis de Caraccioli, *L'Europe française* (Turin, 1776), préface & Ch. XXXIX.

¹⁷ Anon., *Almanach Royal* (Paris, 1789), pp.154-156.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, pp.123-127.

¹⁹ Hugues Marquis, ‘L'espionnage britannique et la fin de l'Ancien Régime,’ *Histoire, Économie et Société*, vol.17 (1998); & Lucien Bély, *Espions Et Ambassadeurs Au Temps De Louis XIV* (Paris, 1998).

Ambassadors and minor diplomats formed a close-knit community within Paris.²⁰ They hosted lavish dinners, balls and other *divertissements* from their rented and sumptuously furnished *hôtels particuliers*. Foreign ministers shared a strong collaborative spirit. So much so that, during the 1780s, they even established a gentleman's club, on the English model, exclusively reserved for members of the *corps diplomatique* which was, somewhat unimaginatively, designated *le club des ambassadeurs*. From the police reports of the *contrôle des Etrangers*, and Antoine Liliti's work on Salons, it is possible to reconstruct their daily lives in great detail.²¹ Indeed in May 1790 one police inspector went so far as to note the quasi-incestuous nature of ambassadorial society in Paris:

Lord Fitzgerald has a decided taste for pretty and worldly women. He has been for sometime an assiduous visitor of the Portuguese ambassador's wife. One even suspects that Her Excellency today prefers him to the Baron Goltz, the Prussian envoy, who was her preferred lover for a long time. The ambassador is always in bed by ten, in this way, Madame ambassador can pass the evening with whomsoever she pleases.²²

Diplomats were extremely well integrated into the Parisian *beau monde*. They frequented the best Salons, like those of the marquise de la Vaupalière or that of the duchesse de la Vallière.²³ Here they grabbed hold of any useful snippets of information and gossip (political or otherwise) which they could include in their weekly despatches. Resident ministers were also assiduous in their attendance at all the cultural activities this great European city had to offer. The opera, *comédie Française* and *théâtre des Italiens* were filled with diplomats who eagerly took note of changes in taste, mood and fashion.²⁴ Effectively, foreign representatives became indistinguishable from the French nobility. Indeed, in some cases, marriage alliances solidified their ties to the Second Estate. For instance, the Genoese Minister, the marchese di Spinola, had married one of the daughters of the influential duc de Lévis, and the marques de Souza, ambassador of his most Faithful Majesty, had wedded the rich heiress Mlle de

²⁰ Jean Baillou ed., *Les Affaires Étrangères et le Corps Diplomatique Français*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1984), I, 252-59; & A.A. Caiani, *Louis XVI and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2012), pp.87-99.

²¹ A[rchives des] A[ffaires] E[trangeres], Série Contrôle des Etrangères, Cartons 76-82 ; & Antoine Liliti, *Le Monde des Salons, Sociabilité et Mondainité à Paris au XVIII^{ième} siècle* (Paris, 2005), pp.127-133, 136-147 & ch.9

²² AAE, Contrôle, Carton 77, fol.38.

²³ Ibid, Carton 76.

²⁴ Ibid.

Canillac.²⁵ These men had the same taste, social outlook and lifestyle as their French hosts, the only significant difference was the fabulous wealth which the ambassadors of the great powers could deploy at whim. The *corps diplomatique* exerted an important social, economic and cultural influence on Paris, however it would be wrong to circumscribe their role to urban sociability.

It was an ambassador's close contact with the king of France, and his court, that defined his role and *raison d'être*. Indeed, their very lifestyle proves that, rather than constituting a dichotomy, *la cour et la ville* existed in symbiosis.²⁶ The diplomatic calendar was set, regulated and characterised by the ceremonial rhythms and *étiquette* of Versailles. Audiences *d'arrivé, de congé*, compliments to the princes of the blood, entertainments and official suppers with the *ministre des affaires étrangères* were among the most important duties which occupied ambassadorial schedules.²⁷ On average, diplomats were expected to attend court once a week, generally Tuesday, and more often during seasonal royal festivities. Since the end of the sixteenth century, as its international standing grew, the court of France had developed a sophisticated bureaucratic, logistical and ceremonial apparatus, which attempted to integrate foreign grandees into the court's elaborate internal hierarchy.²⁸

The *introduceurs des ambassadeurs* and the archivists of the foreign ministry developed protocols and symbolic routines, which sought to integrate and establish the status of diplomats at court.²⁹ A strict precedence, anchored in tradition, military power, family ties and religion, continued to define the international pecking order among the nations of Europe.³⁰ Reciprocity was at the heart of the system. A delicate balance had to be maintained between the claims to pre-eminence of the Rex Christissimus and the competing pretensions of his brother monarchs. Only through mutual compromise could a favourable equilibrium be maintained. This is why, in 1803, Gerard Rayneval, *premier commis* in the foreign ministry since Vergennes' time, still believed that an ambassador's chief role was 'de se rendre agréable, d'inspirer de la confiance, de se faire considérer.'³¹ Affability was of the utmost importance and was a springboard for diplomatic success. Such an ethos meant that the *corps diplomatique* of the 1780s was contradistinguished by its *ancien régime* ethos. Noble honour,

²⁵ Lilti, *Le Monde des Salons*, p.127.

²⁶ Ibid, 73-79.

²⁷ Baillou, *Les Affaires Étrangères et le Corps Diplomatique Français*, I, 241-52.

²⁸ Ibid, pp.242-43.

²⁹ Auguste Boppe, *Les Introduceurs des Ambassadeurs* (Paris, 1901).

³⁰ William Roosen, 'Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach,' *Journal of Modern History*, vol.52 (1980).

³¹ Joseph Matthais Gérard de Rayneval, *Institutions du Droit de la nature et des gens* (Paris, 1803), p.364.

a courtly mindset, respect for hierarchy and monarchical sovereign authority were essential features of the diplomatic *Weltanschauung*. Only by playing by these rules could ambassadors protect privileges, exemptions and immunities, which were still granted at monarchical whim rather than guaranteed under international law.³²

From the earliest days of the Revolution, the presence of the *corps diplomatique* would give rise to problems. After all, these foreign magnates were to be exempted from the gradual destruction of privilege, feudalism and titles of nobility. They quickly came to be perceived, with some reason, as a counter-revolutionary fifth column. In his *Nouveaux Paris*, Louis Sébastien Mercier described them in far from flattering terms:

Emissaries: able scoundrels that are vomited into our midst by foreign courts and who remain always in their pay. They hover over us, in order to find out our secrets and excite our passions. If you are weak, they praise your prudence; if you are prudent, they accuse you of weakness. They call your courage temerity; your justice cruelty. Welcome them and they conspire publicly; threaten them and they will conspire in the shadows. Only yesterday they assassinated our patriots, today they attend their funerals and bestow divine honours on their victims. They simply await the moment when they can stab us all in the back.³³

Mercier's caricature captures well the attitude of the press and revolutionary public toward diplomats in the capital. The argument ran that a regenerated Nation, which had abandoned military aggrandisement, had no need to employ a small army of spies and intriguers. One of the direct consequences of the upheavals of the October days was that Paris, after roughly a century, once again became a court city and an administrative centre.³⁴ The immediate problems, which faced government in these early days, were largely logistical. Without the facilities afforded by the enormous palace complex of Versailles, the ministerial bureaucracy of the crown had to find accommodation within the city's precincts. This *déménagement* would take the better part of 1790 to be completed. The *ministère des affaires étrangères* weathered the move well by renting three *hôtels particuliers*: two in the rue de Bourbon and another in rue de l'Université.³⁵ However, the bulk of its archives, records and library

³² Linda and Marsha Frey, *The History of Diplomatic Immunity* (Ohio, 1999), chs.6-7.

³³ Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris* (Paris, 1984), pp.288-89.

³⁴ Philip Mansel, *The Court of France 1789-1830* (Cambridge, 1991), intro. & ch.1.

³⁵ Frédéric Masson, *Le Département des Affaires Étrangères pendant la Révolution, 1787-1804* (Paris, 1877), pp.68-70

remained in Versailles.³⁶ One could speculate that the comte de Montmorin doubted the move would be permanent. Equally, diplomatic rhythms received something of a shake-up in 1790. Foreign ministers, no longer facing the, not insignificant, costs of travelling to Versailles, started to attend court on a twice weekly basis (more if one considers the *jeux de la reine* on Thursdays).³⁷ The arrival of the court and foreign ministry in Paris doubled the contact between Louis XVI and the representatives of his brother monarchs. Whether this was a natural consequence of greater proximity or part of a larger counter-revolutionary conspiracy is difficult to unravel. What is certain is that these emissaries came to be viewed by the Parisian populace as members of the detested *cour de Tuileries*. The fortunes of the *corps diplomatique* were inextricably intertwined with that of the Bourbon Monarchy.

For at the heart of the matter lay a fundamental and competing understanding of the nature of sovereignty. The abbé Sieyès stated in his celebrated pamphlet ‘What is the Third Estate?’ that the Nation was the supreme font of political legitimacy.

What is a Nation? A body of associates living under a common law and represented by the same legislature.³⁸

Sieyès’ (and the revolutionaries’) Nation was fundamentally different from later nineteenth century formulations.³⁹ Most importantly, Monarchy received no mention or accommodation in this definition. The consequences of this omission were to be momentous. The regenerated Nation was a collective fiction (or community to use Benedict Anderson’s formulation). It was on behalf of the ‘imaginary’ body of all French citizens that, in 1789, the Third Estate had arrogated the prerogatives of sovereign power by declaring itself to be a National Assembly.⁴⁰ The Nation in 1789, on the whole, was a relatively neutral term. Supposed national characteristics, mores, customs and traditions only started to seep into this concept during the maelstrom of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.⁴¹ The Nation, as a concept, in the early 1790s was supposed to justify and legitimise the Assembly’s ambitious program

³⁶ Basile Baudez, Elisabeth & Emmanuel Pénicaud, *Les Hôtels de la Guerre et des Affaires Étrangères à Versailles* (Paris, 2010), pp.90-99.

³⁷ Albert Mousset, *Un Témoin Ignoré de la Révolution, Le Comte de Fernán Núñez Ambassadeur d’Espagne à Paris 1787-1791* (Paris, 1924), p.93-96.

³⁸ Emmanuel Sieyès, *Qu’est-ce que le tiers état?* (Paris, 1789), p.8.

³⁹ For a famous later definition see Ernest Renan, *Ce que c’est qu’une nation* (Paris, 1882)

⁴⁰ Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.244–5.

⁴¹ Michael Rowe, ‘The French Revolution, Napoleon and Nationalism in Europe,’ in John Breuilly ed, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford, 2013), ch.7.

to reform the administrative apparatus of the state.⁴² This agenda necessitated that the old edifice be dismantled.

Those intermediate bodies, which had been so characteristic of the composite nature of the Bourbon monarchy, faced extinction.⁴³ Given this grim prospect, it is hardly surprising that the Parlement of Rennes protested against its dissolution and argued that it represented a Breton Nation. The lawyer-infested Constituent Assembly was all too familiar with how the judicial remonstrances and jurisdictional quibbles of the *ancien régime* had blunted the Bourbon monarchy's administrative efficiency. They were determined not to go down the same road. The comte de Mirabeau, during what became known as the *bataille des Bretons*, quickly countered all appeals to regional particularism by reminding his colleagues that in a 'real Nation' an *imperium in imperio* could not exist.⁴⁴ Indeed the so-called Breton nation was nothing of the sort! It was the feudal residue left behind by Anne de Bretagne's marriage contract to Charles VIII. In an age of reason, where the laws of nature took precedence over obscure barbaric traditions, it could claim no legal validity. The Breton Parlement and Estates were the emanation of a privileged society of orders and thus inimical to the very reality of Nationhood. The nobility of Brittany was forced to recognise that the regenerated France had shredded the old rule book. This new political mindset was sufficiently problematic when applied to domestic affairs, and it caused great disarray when transported to the international domain.

Most of the deputies of the Constituent Assembly had a solid grounding in both classical and contemporary jurisprudence.⁴⁵ They were familiar with the concept of *ius gentium*, or law of nations, which regulated (or, more accurately, purported to do so) early international relations. Unlike the haphazard and *ad hoc* nature of existing agreements, precedents and regulations, the revolutionaries had a distinctly more classical vision of this body of law. The Roman *ius gentium* had, in antiquity, granted concessions and truces to unconquered barbarians outside of the imperial borders.⁴⁶ The civilised Roman world, however, did not negotiate with lesser peoples on an equal footing.⁴⁷ It did not feel honour

⁴² Isser Woloch, *The New Regime, Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789-1820s* (New York, 1996).

⁴³ John Elliott, 'A Europe of composite monarchies', *Past and Present*, no.137 (1992)

⁴⁴ Henri Carré, *La fin des Parlements 1788-1790* (Paris, 1912), 158-165.

⁴⁵ Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture 1789 – 1790* (Pennsylvania, 1996), Part 1; Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right, Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago, 2011); & Robert Blackman, 'Did Cicero swear the Tennis Court Oath?' *French History*, vol.28 (2014), pp.471-497.

⁴⁶ Stephen Neff, *War and the Law of Nations: A General History* (Cambridge, 2008), Intro.

⁴⁷ One need only think of Anchises famous statement of the Imperial mission in Virgil's Aeneid book six. 'Rome, tis thine alone, with awful sway, To rule mankind, and make the world obey, Disposing peace and war

bound to respect its temporary agreements, and would break them when the dictates of expediency and ‘liberty’ demanded it. Reciprocity, balance of power and precedent were practices that had little hope of survival, given the principles adopted by those elected to the revolutionary assemblies of the 1790s. Like the Roman statesmen on whom they modelled their behaviour, these reforming politicians believed that France, regenerated by its purifying Revolution, could not be bound to honour agreements with feudal and unenlightened monarchies.⁴⁸ It was up to the world to imitate or match France’s progress, not for the Revolution to make compromises. After all, the language of universalism and cosmopolitanism, which so distinguished 1789, did hide some distrust and intolerance of cultural and political difference.⁴⁹

In the immediate aftermath of the storming of the Bastille, diplomats were perplexed and unsure, whether the disorders they had witnessed would have wider consequences outside of the hexagon. Reactions varied, to a degree, but unbridled enthusiasm was decidedly an exception. As Thomas Jefferson wrapped up his Parisian mission, he actively praised France’s ‘juridical Revolution’ and hosted some dinners for the leaders of the National Assembly.⁵⁰ He effectively participated in revolutionary politics by inspiring and helping Lafayette write a preliminary draft of the declaration of the Rights of Man.⁵¹ The ‘sage of Monticello’ was sympathetic to the radical minority of the assembly. The papers of the *Contrôle des Etrangers* reveal that a contingent of eminent foreigners (especially British) came to view the French Revolution at work. Indeed, in 1790 the Salle du Manège, where the Constituent Assembly held its sessions, became a stopping point on many Grand Tours. For instance, the young Russian count Stroganoff attended the debates of the assembly with his tutor, the future Conventional Romme, as part of his legislative education.⁵² Others, like Lord Mountstewart, were so assiduous in their attendance of all political gatherings, including the Jacobin club, that the police of Paris suspected that he was a British spy on a secret mission.⁵³

by thy own majestic sway; To tame the proud, the fetter’d slave to free: These are imperial arts, and worthy thee.’

⁴⁸ Albert Sorel, *L’Europe et la Révolution Française*, 8 vols (Paris, 1885), II, pp.105-114.

⁴⁹ Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France, The Treatment of Foreigners 1789-1799* (Oxford, 2000).

⁵⁰ Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1948-1981), II, 230-33.

⁵¹ Ibid, II, 223. & Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette in the French Revolution: Through the October Days* (Chicago, 1969).

⁵² AAE, Contrôle, Carton 76, fol.48; Stroganoff’s tutor was none other than the radical and future regicide Gilbert Romme. Catherine the Great was none too pleased about the negative influence this radical tutor seemed to be exerting on the son of one of her most powerful nobles. See, V-M Daline, ‘Gilbert Romme, Pavel Stroganoff et la Cour de St Pétersbourg à propos du retour de Stroganov en Russie,’ in Jean Ehrard ed., *Gilbert Romme 1750-1795 et son temps* (Riom, 1965), pp.69-81.

⁵³ AAE, Contrôle, Carton 76, fos. 42-91 & Carton 77, fos. 20-78.

The marques de Souza, the Portuguese ambassador, was the member of the diplomatic corps who appeared most frequently in the Assembly's visitors' gallery. It is difficult to gauge the impact this had on the advice he returned to the Braganzian court but, as the police noted with some jocularly, the ambassadress was grateful for his frequent absences which allowed her to pursue her own 'affairs.'⁵⁴

However, for the vast majority of foreign ministers, the Bourbon's monarchy's loss of authority was an unsettling event. They were to experience mistreatment, the violation of their immunities and some danger from the very outset. The best known case is that of the comte de Mercy-Argenteau, the ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor. He left Paris almost immediately after the fall of the Bastille and headed for the relative safety of his country residence.⁵⁵ His British colleague, the duke of Dorset, noted: 'the situation of count Mercy, the Imperial ambassador, must be very disagreeable; a constant guard is kept around his Hotel and everything that goes out or in examined most narrowly lest he should hold a correspondence with the Queen.'⁵⁶ For the remainder of his Embassy he rarely returned to the capital and, when he did, he tended to arrive nocturnally.⁵⁷ These secret meetings did not endear him to the radical sections of the city which, not without reason, suspected that he was encouraging the Queen's counter-revolutionary stance and designs.⁵⁸ Within days, the duke of Dorset was equally at the receiving end of the unwelcome attention of the Paris Municipality. There were rumours circulating that he was paying unspecified agitators to stoke a counter-revolution. The Commune decided to intercept his despatches and, much to their chagrin, discovered that his correspondence was in effect innocuous.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Dorset was publicly perceived as compromised, and the violation of his freedom of communication made his recall inevitable. The British legation remained in the hands of the *chargé d'affaires*, Lord Robert Stephen Fitzgerald, for the better part of a year.⁶⁰

While some of this mistreatment can be put down to traditional French Austro- and Anglophobia, the case of the Venetian ambassador is decidedly more difficult to explain. On 22 August 1789, the chevalier Capello, Minister Plenipotentiary for the Republic of St Mark,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ A. Guérin, 'Séquestres Révolutionnaires, la maison de campagne du Comte de Mercy-Argenteau à Chennevières', *Revue de l'histoire de Versailles et de Seine et Oise*, 32 (1930).

⁵⁶ Oscar Browning ed. *Despatches from Paris 1784-1790*, 2 vols (London, 1910), despatch no. 33, 22 July 1789, pp.248.

⁵⁷ AAE, Contrôle, Carton 76, fol.94.

⁵⁸ Munro Price, 'Mirabeau and the Court: Some New Evidence,' *French Historical Studies* vol.29, (2006), pp.37-75.

⁵⁹ AP VIII:287 & 342.

⁶⁰ T[he] N[ational] A[rchives Kew], FO27, 33A-36.

received a note ordering him, as a member of the Parisian National Guard, to sentry duty in his district of Saint-Martin-des-Champs.⁶¹ The reason why a foreigner residing in Paris should have been included in the lists of citizens liable for National Guard duty is entirely mysterious.⁶² All that is known with certainty is that the chevalier had no intention of being forced into an embarrassing corner. He ignored the summons and headed to Versailles to attend the celebrations for the feast day of Saint-Louis. Here he, discreetly, protested his inclusion among the National Guard and received the support of his ambassadorial confrères. In this particular instance the court calendar saved the chevalier Capello from the tricky task of explaining the concept of diplomatic immunity to the activists of his district. The political culture of the Revolution, as the Frey sisters argue, was highly unsympathetic to old style diplomacy.⁶³

The Assembly only gradually encroached on the royal monopoly over foreign policy which was the *métier du roi par excellence*.⁶⁴ The deputies' interest in international relations was piqued by specific circumstances. On 10 December, a minor diplomatic incident highlighted the fragility of Louis XVI's hold on power. The revolt of the Austrian Netherlands had reached a turning point.⁶⁵ The rebels of Brabant decided to send Vandernoot as an emissary to seek French assistance and gain recognition of their declaration of independence.⁶⁶ The king, as Joseph II's ally and brother-in-law, had refused to either receive this plenipotentiary or recognise his credentials. Vandernoot, going against standard diplomatic practice, contacted the National Assembly directly. While nothing was decided immediately, this Belgian affair did highlight that the legislative branch was latently rivalling the monarchical executive when it came to external relations with other European powers. Vandernoot, not a man to take a hint, resumed his quest to receive accreditation in 1790. By March his case reappeared on the debating floor of the Assembly.⁶⁷ In the end, the marquis de Lafayette defused the situation with the novel claim that the Belgian congress: 'did not seem

⁶¹ A[rchivio di] S[tato]V[enezia], Filza 263, dispaccio no.196, 31 August 1789.

⁶² One could suggest that the district authorities perhaps felt that as the representative of a Republic the chevalier Cappello might be inclined to publicly show support for the Revolution. For the National Guard refer to Roger Dupuy, *La Garde Nationale 1789-1872* (Paris, 2010); & Dale Lothrop Clifford, 'The National Guard and the Parisian Community, 1789–1790,' *French Historical Studies*, 16 (1990), 851–64.

⁶³ Frey & Frey, 'The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over,' pp.707-15.

⁶⁴ Bely, *Société des Princes*, pp.7-40.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 493

⁶⁶ Flatteringly described as an 'a witless lawyer, a mediocre intriguer, a verbose and bold orator,' in Louis Philippe comte de Ségur, *Histoire des Principaux Evénements du Règne de F. Guillaume II Roi de Prusse et Tableau Politique de l'Europe depuis 1786 jusqu'en 1796, ou l'An 4 de la République ; contenant un précis des révolutions de Brabant, de Hollande, de Pologne et de France*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1800) II, 147.

⁶⁷ A[rchives] P[arlementaires], XII:206.

to possess those *bona fides* which emanate from the sovereign power of the people.’⁶⁸ The Belgians were denied real nationhood. The king’s determination not to receive Vandernoot was respected, but the Assembly had, to a certain extent, arrogated, quietly, the right to supervise the monarch’s conduct of foreign relations. Equally perplexing was that the Austrian treaty of Alliance was disregarded in the deputies’ deliberations.⁶⁹

The ambassadors did not silently tolerate such disregard for the laws of nations. Archbishop Dugnani, the papal nuncio, and doyen of the *corps diplomatique*, presented Montmorin with a collective note of protest in November 1789.⁷⁰ The Minister of Foreign Affairs forwarded these concerns, regarding the safety of diplomats in Paris, to the President of the National Assembly. After a brief debate, on 12 December the deputies decided that the well-being of ambassadors fell under the remit of the executive power and decreed that nobody should breach their privileges, exemptions and immunities.⁷¹ The flashpoints and rhythms of the Revolutionary maelstrom were to affect considerably the ability of these diplomats to fulfil their functions. During the feast of the federation in 1790, the carriage of the countess of Fernán Núñez, the Spanish ambassadress, was attacked.⁷² The crowd was incensed that anybody should still have the audacity to bear coats of arms and employ livered servants. These emblems of feudal obscurantism had been banned under the terms of the decree which abolished titles of nobility on 19 June.⁷³ Alas the people of Paris had forgotten (or perhaps did not care) that *corps diplomatique* had been specifically exempted from the provisions of this law. A year later the crisis over the civil constitution of the clergy witnessed the burning in effigy of the Pope and his Nuncio in public. Archbishop Dugnani, wisely, decided to take the waters in Aix en Savoie as a means of effecting a discreet departure.⁷⁴ His attempt to have his silverware shipped to Milan in May 1791 sparked a minor riot. Crowds surrounded the Apostolic Nuncio’s coachman who was trying to transfer these valuables to his Italian bankers for shipping. It required all the powers of persuasion of the police commissioner of the Beaubourg district to persuade the populace that this was not a covert attempt to fund counter-revolution, but a legitimate transfer of property. After a

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Thomas E. Kaiser, ‘Who’s afraid of Marie-Antoinette, diplomacy, Austrophobia and the Queen,’ *French History*, vol.14 (2000); & by the same author, ‘La fin du renversement des alliances, la France, l’Autriche et la déclaration de guerre du 20 avril 1792,’ *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no.351 (2008).

⁷⁰ Zeffiro Ciuffoletti, *Parigi – Firenze 1789–1794: I dispacci del residente toscano nella capitale francese al governo granducale* (Florence, 1990), pp.86–7.

⁷¹ AP XI:516

⁷² Frey & Frey, *The History of Diplomatic Immunity*, pp.315-318.

⁷³ William Doyle, *Aristocracy and its Enemies in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford, 2009), chs. 7 & 8.

⁷⁴ ASVe, Dispacci degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato, Francia filza 264, dispaccio no.44, 30 maggio 1791.

standoff of several hours, the unfortunate coachman was allowed to return to the Nunciature.⁷⁵ Foreigners were always easy suspects, but ambassadors, as the agents of foreign princes, seemed natural enemies of the Revolution.

It would be tempting to list more incidents and miscommunications between the *corps diplomatique* and France's new legislative authorities.⁷⁶ Yet, this would present a skewed tableau of the realities which confronted foreign diplomats in Paris. Essentially, the internal disorder and turmoil facing the new constitutional monarchy not only left a domestic power vacuum, but also seemed to generate an international one, whose ultimate consequences were difficult to predict. Indeed, the European powers welcomed the military and naval mutinies which engulfed France's armed forces in 1790.⁷⁷ For the emissaries of foreign powers the revolution of 1789 was only one of many variables which influenced the diplomatic checkerboard. TCW Blanning eloquently reminds us that during this time the 'Eastern question' (which would remain insoluble for the better part of a century) captivated the attention of the Europe's ministerial cabinets much more than the fall of the Bastille which, in many ways, represented a side show in comparison.⁷⁸ The early French Revolution embodied as much an opportunity to the *corps diplomatique* as it did a breakdown in the international order. Indeed diplomats from Austria, Prussia, Russia and Poland increased their activities in Paris in the hope of profiting from French weakness.

The contraction of the Ottoman Balkans, due to military collapse, heralded the prospect of an unstoppable Russian south-western advance.⁷⁹ Neighbouring powers, such as the Habsburg and Prussian monarchies, witnessed the far from welcome arrival of this Slavic monolith on their eastern borders.⁸⁰ They began to seek the means of ensuring their strategic security. A significant territorial realignment became necessary in order to avoid a massive military conflagration on a continental scale.⁸¹ The empires of the east turned their attention to that traditional buffer state: the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania. Indeed Albert Sorel

⁷⁵ A[rchives de la] P[refecture de] P[olice de Paris], Aa 72 Section Beaubourg, fol.15.

⁷⁶ Frey & Frey, *The History of Diplomatic Immunity*, ch.8.

⁷⁷ Samuel F. Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution, The Role and Development of the Line Army* (Oxford, 1978); William S Cormack, *Revolution & Political Conflict in the French Navy 1789-1794* (Cambridge, 1995); & Ségur, *Histoire des Principaux Evénements du Règne de F. Guillaume II Roi*, II, 94.

⁷⁸ Albert Sorel, *La Question d'Orient au XVIII^{ème} siècle* (Paris, 1889).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hamish Scott, *The Emergence of the Eastern Powers, 1756-1775* (Cambridge, 2001), chs. 7-8 & conc.

⁸¹ For a first hand vision of the extent of the negotiations taking place between the Great Powers see, Bornislaw Dembinski ed., *Documents relatifs à l'histoire du deuxième et troisième partage de la Pologne, Tome Premier Politique de la Russie et de la Prusse à l'égard de la Pologne depuis l'ouverture de la Diète de Quatre ans jusqu'à la promulgation de la Constitution du 3Mai 1791* (Lvov, 1902), esp introduction.

observed, in his *opus magnus*, that the twin dethronements of Louis XVI and Stanislas II Auguste:

were not unforeseen coincidences that emerged from opposing conspiracies. These were parallel designs, which led to [momentous] consequences, that were conceived and developed simultaneously. There is a link between these [two events], so to speak, that forms a common thread in this history, and the influence that the one exerted on the other determined events in Europe during the French Revolution.⁸²

A detailed analysis of the circumstances which led to the second partition of Poland in 1793 is unnecessary here. There are many excellent diplomatic studies which deal with this epic tragi-comedy in depth.⁸³ However, this wider international context deeply influenced the behaviour and calculations of the *corps diplomatique* in Paris. In some ways it explains the diplomatic wait and see mentality that characterised the year 1790. Ambassadors and other foreign diplomats had to wear two hats at the same time. They not only sought to understand the internal dynamics of the Revolution, but also speculated whether this unexpected circumstance could be useful to their princes' foreign policy objectives. For example, on 21 June 1790, the marquis de Cordon, the Piedmontese Minister in Paris, in a ciphered despatch, provided his monarch with a detailed report of the latest intelligence from the banks of the Vistula.⁸⁴ Similarly, his Genoese counterpart stated, in August, that 'we have just received notification that the court of Berlin has concluded with Poland a treaty of alliance and commerce. This news has produced the greatest sensation here and it is predicted, with some reason, that war in Germany is now inevitable.'⁸⁵ The threat of war seemed firmly anchored in the east in 1790. Only gradually did the *corps diplomatique* (indeed Edmund Burke was the only overt interventionist at this time) come to perceive revolutionary France as a threat to the international order.⁸⁶

⁸² Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution*, II, 458.

⁸³ For detailed studies see, Robert Lord, *The Second Partition of Poland, A Study in Diplomatic History* (Cambridge, MA, 1915); & Jerzy Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland, 1772, 1793 & 1795* (1999), chs. 5 & 6

⁸⁴ A[rchivio di] S[tato]T[orino], Francia Lettere Ministri Mazzo 236, Francia 1790 lettere orig Marchese de Cordon al Re ed al Ministro, 21 juin 1790 dépêche no.91.

⁸⁵ A[rchivio di] S[tato] G[enova], Archivio Segreto Lettere Ministri Francia 2262, 5 agosto 1790; & later in 1791 the minister plenipotentiary for Parma celebrated the peaceful revolution which had taken place in Poland and which was grounded in true reason (the contrast with France seems implicit), in A[rchivio di] S[tato] P[arma], Carteggio Borbonico Estero Francia 82, 22 maggio 1791.

⁸⁶ Jennifer Welsh, *Edmund Burke and International Relations: The Commonwealth of Europe and the Crusade against the French Revolution* (Basingstoke, 1995).

Historically, Poland had been a vital chess piece in France's European grand strategy (both official and secret) and foreign prestige (both official and secret).⁸⁷ Yet, defeat in the Seven Years War, and the Primate of Gniezno's insult to the marquis de Paulmy, France's ambassador in Warsaw during the election diet of 1764, had altered the situation.⁸⁸ The ministerial cabinets of Versailles had had to face the reality that they no longer possessed sufficient prestige to influence affairs east of the Elbe.⁸⁹ It was one of those remarkable historic co-incidences that the fiscal implosion of the Bourbon Monarchy coincided, almost exactly, with the Polish Commonwealth's last-ditch attempt to reform its moribund state apparatus. The French Revolution completely reversed both the French monarchy's and *corps diplomatiques*' perception of the Eastern Question. After nearly thirty years of interruption, Franco-Polish relations were to resume underneath the shadow of the Bastille. Poland sent the cosmopolitan Tuscan, Filippo Mazzei, to act as an unofficial agent and, from 1790, as *chargé d'affaires*.⁹⁰ As an active participant in the American War of independence, this Italo-American was initially an enthusiastic supporter of the events he witnessed.⁹¹ He assured his Polish sovereign on 7 August 1789 that 'France will avail herself of her pre-eminence in order to maintain peace as much as it is possible throughout the entire world.'⁹² The tone was that of an enlightened activist rather than that of a professional diplomat. A more seasoned emissary would have been more sober in expectations and conduct. His mission was exceedingly delicate, and came on the back of the dismal failure of a similar enterprise entrusted to the American adventurer the Chevalier Littlepage in 1788.⁹³ In essence, it seems⁹⁴ that Mazzei was to seek out some sort of French alliance or, failing that, to influence French public opinion positively in favour of the reforms being introduced by the four year Sejm. Without the political fallout of 1789, the Polish monarchy would have never attempted such a radical gambit. Despite the diplomatic character of his position, Mazzei actively

⁸⁷ Indeed there had even been a joint project to colonise Madagascar in the 1770s which probably aimed to stop English expansion in the Indian Ocean. For the bizarre tale of Béniowski expedition see, Lydia Scher-Zembitska, *L'aigle et le phénix, un siècle de relations franco-polonaises 1732-1832* (Paris, 2001), pp.143-151 ; & Gilles Perrault, *Le Secret du Roi*, 3 vols (Paris,1992), I, pp.539-46.

⁸⁸ H. M. Scott, 'France and the Polish Throne, 1763-1764,' *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 53, No. 132 (1975), p.385.

⁸⁹ Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution*, I, 293-97.

⁹⁰ Margherita Marchione, *Philip Mazzei, World Citizen* (Landham, 1994); Witold Łukaszewicz, *Filippo Mazzei, Giuseppe Mazzini saggi sui rapporti italo-polacchi* (Warsaw, 1970); & Edoardo Tortarolo, *Illuminismo e rivoluzioni, biografia politica di Filippo Mazzei* (Milan, 1976).

⁹¹ Giancarlo Masini, *How Florence invented America, Vespucci, Verrazzano, & Mazzei and their contribution to the conception of the New World* (New York, 1998).

⁹² Margherita Marchione ed., *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, 3 vols. (Prato, 1983), II, 181-182.

⁹³ Nell Nolladay Bond, *Lewis Littlepage* (Richmond, 1970), pp.108-155.

⁹⁴ Alas his official instructions seem to have been during the Warsaw uprising of 1944.

involved himself in French domestic affairs. In 1789 he collaborated with Condorcet in publishing a new translation of the English Bill of Rights.⁹⁵ Later, he not only joined the influential think tank the *société de 89*, but was on its steering committee as corresponding secretary.⁹⁶ He even tried to have Stanislas II August elected to its membership.⁹⁷ This was an honour which his Polish Master declined, as he suspected that it would not please Louis XVI.⁹⁸

The exchange of three hundred and sixty letters between this agent and his royal master bear testament to the last king of Poland's hopes that Revolutionary Paris could provide some assistance to his own royal-republic's precarious position. Disillusionment was not slow in setting-in and already, by November 1789, Stanislas II described eloquently how comparisons between the political upheavals occurring in the opposite extremities of Europe only bore superficial resemblances:

If I could get you to know Poland as well as you know France, you would be surprised at the many analogies shown by the course of events in the two countries, with essential and capital differences, however. One is that there was no royal despotism to destroy here, but that there is foreign encroachment to destroy, an encroachment being fought and to be fought for still many years on all sides. The other is that in all that takes place here only that part of the nation known as the nobles is involved.⁹⁹

France and Poland were players in the same international tournament, but their respective processes of internal regeneration diverged significantly in both cultural and practical terms. For the better part of the year, Mazzei was taken-in by the vacuous promises of support for the Sejm's reforms given by Lafayette and his circle.¹⁰⁰ This Tuscan *philosophe* was a witty and knowledgeable correspondent, who passionately depicted France's political transitions, but as a diplomat he was a mediocrity, who did not possess the phlegm required to play the game. In September 1790 he received the title of *chargé d'affaires*. Yet, by this time, it was a

⁹⁵ Filippo Mazzei and Condorcet, *Déclaration des droits: traduite de l'anglais avec l'original à côté* (Paris, 1789) ; & also notable publishing success was Mazzei's opus magnus : *Recherches Historiques et Politiques sur les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique Septentrionale*, 4 vols (Paris, 1788).

⁹⁶ Marchione, *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondance*, II, 448; & anon., *Règlements de la Société de 1789 et liste de ses membres* (Paris, 1790), pp.9-10 & 48.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, II, 333.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, II, 344-45 & 361-63

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, II, 230.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, II, 236-37.

mere sinecure, which was meant to prepare the way for the arrival, in April 1791, of Poland's first resident minister to France in twenty-six years, Count Oraczewski.¹⁰¹ Indeed, by December 1790, Stanislas was beginning to question his representative's revolutionary zeal and reminded him of the dangers of partisanship.

I do not believe I need tell you that as an employee of a foreign court and nation, you must avoid all that might make you look like a partisan, not to mention the possibility of your becoming openly embroiled with someone or other. I certainly do not expect you to break off relations with Messrs de la Rochefoucauld, de Liancourt, de Lafayette, Condorcet, Bailly and others of that stamp [...] but you are surely too sensible to take a dislike to persons, otherwise estimable, who believe that the whole French Revolution is nothing but destruction without re-edification and hence that it is only a misfortune.¹⁰²

From this point onwards, Mazzei's initial zeal decidedly cooled down. He had hoped that friendship with Revolutionary France could strengthen Poland's bargaining position. However, the powerlessness of Louis XVI and the treatment of the Catholic church sobered his expectations.¹⁰³ As time progressed, it became clear that his moderate Fayette friends could only deliver more good intentions when it came to the 'Eastern Question.' The secondary objective of Mazzei's mission was yet another lost cause. He had been instructed by his Polish master to try to save the properties of the order of Malta from confiscation.¹⁰⁴ He received respectful thanks for his interest from Montmorin but everything short of any formal undertaking to protect the possessions of the knights of Saint John.¹⁰⁵

These failures did not deter the *Ministère Etrangère* from renewing its historical diplomatic interest in Eastern Europe. Louis XVI and his ministers actively tried to keep their Polish options open.¹⁰⁶ In February 1792, the recently appointed French ambassador to Warsaw, the comte Descorches de St Croix, drafted several articles for a treaty of amity.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, II, 434 & 453; & Branislaw Dembiński, *Misja Oraczewskiego, posta polskiego w Paryżu 1791-92* (Krakow, 1900); Paul Doyon, 'La mission diplomatique de Descorches en Pologne,' *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* (1925- 1928) ; and Julien Grossbart, 'La politique polonaise de la Révolution française jusqu'aux traités de Bâle,' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, No.31 (1929), 34-55.

¹⁰² Ibid, II, 470.

¹⁰³ Ibid,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 374-75 & 402.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 422-23.

¹⁰⁶ Indeed since the time of Vergennes Louis XVI had regretted France's inability to pre-empt the first partition. See Munro Price and John Hardman eds, *Louis XVI and the comte de Vergennes, correspondence 1774-1788* (Oxford, 1998), pp.159, 165, 277 & 355.

Article seven of this document stated that : ‘French or Polish subjects who reside in either country will be treated like their own citizens, as foreigners who are most welcome.’¹⁰⁷ Given the political instability this treaty never came into effect. It laid the groundwork for France becoming the preferred destination of Polish exiles for the better part of the nineteenth century. The Poles were under the impression that their cause and that of the Revolution were the same. For two decades they would fight with distinction in both the armies of the republic and the empire.¹⁰⁸

In the end, the Polish mission to Paris achieved little, though it proved a decided distraction for the ministers of Austria, Prussia and Russia. The French Revolution was not perceived immediately as a danger in the realm of international relations, on the contrary, it seemed to offer a number of possibilities for the reconfiguration of the Eastern side of the European continent. Indeed Sorel went so far as to accuse the Prussian envoy, baron Goltz, of having led a political as well as a press campaign against Marie Antoinette to distract French attention from Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁹ He even suggested that, the future mayor of Paris and Girondin, Pétion de Villeneuve may have been secretly employed by Prussia as an *agent provocateur*.¹¹⁰ The appearance, in Paris in 1791, of the somewhat shady Jewish-Prussian financier Ephraim was probably connected to the Polish question.¹¹¹ This agent of Frederick William II’s was despatched to France, it seems, to negotiate some sort of treaty or arrangement that would ensure neutrality when it came to Polish matters.¹¹² Ephraim seems to have exerted a certain prurient fascination for the police of Paris, who kept him and his *danseuse* mistress under tight surveillance. He met discreetly with the baron Golz, almost daily, and seems to have had a budget of over half a million livres at his disposal.¹¹³ He opened something akin to a press office where, with the help of two secretaries, he sent regular missives to Berlin. Unfortunately, the *commissaires de police* were never able to penetrate his mission’s ultimate objectives. Shortly after the flight to Varennes, as a

¹⁰⁷ Scher-Zembitska, *L’aigle et le phénix*, pp.184-185

¹⁰⁸ Léonard Chodźko, *Histoire des légions polonaises en Italie, sous le commandement du général Dombrowski* 2 vols. (Paris, 1829) ; & Jan V. Chelminski, *L’armée du Duché de Varsovie, ou, La contribution polonaise dans les rangs de la Grande Armée* (Paris, 2001).

¹⁰⁹ Indeed it seems Goltz under-estimated the dangers posed by France as late as 1792. See, Henryck Kocoj, ‘La Révolution française vue par Bernard Guillaume Goltz, envoyé de Prusse à Paris,’ *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, N°312, (1998), pp. 301-310.

¹¹⁰ Sorel, *L’Europe et la Révolution*, II, 24-26.

¹¹¹ AAE, Contrôle, Carton 79, fos. 17-56; Carton 80, fos. 41-93; & Carton, 81, fos. 2-107.

¹¹² Sorel, *L’Europe et la Révolution*, II, 156-64

¹¹³ Rudolf Maurits freiherr Klinckowström, *Le comte de Fersen et la cour de France : Extraits des papiers du grand maréchal de Suède, comte Jean Axel de Fersen*, 2 vols (Paris, 1878), I, 29, 83,& 87.

preventative measure, he was arrested.¹¹⁴ His activities had alarmed the Parisian public, who suspected him of being a counter-revolutionary financier trying to flood the French market with counterfeit *assignats*. In the end, Ephraim failed to keep a sufficiently low profile and was forced to leave France precipitously.

The first years of the 1790s created an uncertain atmosphere, where most foreign agents continued to act according to the traditional norms of *ancien régime* diplomacy. They remained committed to their prince's dynastic interests. They showed little appetite for a concerted international effort against the Revolution. The only exception, perhaps, was the kingdom of Sardinia, where the comte d'Artois had sought refuge. Early disturbances from revolutionary agitators in Savoy greatly concerned the court of Turin. As early as May 1790 the marquis de Cordon, the Piedmontese Minister, wrote the following ciphered note to Victor Amadeus III:

After all, it is public knowledge that the chief authors of the Revolution do all in their power, through sinister manoeuvrings, to pervert the peoples of adjoining states and I have learnt that they have managed unfortunately even to give rise to troubles in our own homeland. I hope that one will take promptly vigorous measures to smother such disturbances immediately.¹¹⁵

Very unwisely, the marquis actively involved himself in counter-revolutionary projects. The *comité des recherches* of the Commune de Paris found some of his letters among the papers seized in the affaire Maillebois.¹¹⁶ This was a conspiracy, which aimed to restore Louis XVI to full power through armed force. Cordon, therefore, had to leave discreetly Paris shortly after the feast of the federation.¹¹⁷ Though this was a serious incident, it still fell into the mould of the old diplomacy. The marquis was acting in the interests of his prince rather than with a view to stabilising a European state system.

Much more perplexing was the rhetoric emanating from the Assembly's debates on the right of declaring war and making peace during the Nootka Sound crisis. Britain and

¹¹⁴ A[Rchives] N[ationales], D XXIX (Comité de recherches de l'Assemblée Nationale), Carton 31bis, dossier 323, fol.12 & 34, dossier 355, fol.3.

¹¹⁵ ASTo, Francia Lettere Ministri Mazzo 236, Francia 1790 lettere orig Marchese de Cordon al Re ed al Ministro, 21 mai 1790 depeche no.41.

¹¹⁶ Barry Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris 1789-1790* (Cambridge, 2002).

¹¹⁷ ASTo, Francia Lettere Ministri Mazzo 236, Francia 1790 lettere orig Marchese de Cordon al Re ed al Ministro,, Depeche no.103.

Spain came to blows over a shipping incident on the Pacific coast of North America.¹¹⁸ Under the terms of the Family Compact, Spain asked France to support its territorial claims. Louis XVI requested that the assembly provide him with the financial means of arming fourteen ships of the line. This triggered, in mid May 1790, an intense debate in the Assembly on who ultimately held the reins of foreign policy; crown or Legislative Assembly. The baron de Menou opened the debate on 15 May by declaring:

It is therefore essential to legislate on [who holds] the right of declaring war or making peace; afterwards we shall decide which of the two nations is in the right. If Spain is [in the wrong] we must use all our influence to mediate [in this dispute] and encourage her to yield; if England is wrong and she refuses to accept justice we should not just arm fourteen vessels but [mobilize] all our land and seas forces. Only at this point will we show Europe that this is not a ministerial war, but a national one.¹¹⁹

Certainly the prospect of arrogating the Monarchy's power, to determine foreign policy, made the deputies feel a sense of excitement for this radical new political departure. On the 18th day of the same month, the Alsatian Reubell denied that reciprocal obligations could exist among states:

Treaties of alliance represent nothing but the ability to raise taxes and ruin the state's treasury; to bestow this right on the king is to give him the constitutional right to sell men like flocks of sheep. The executive power should decide the quantity and where to deploy our forces: a great nation should have no other ally except providence, its own power and justice.¹²⁰

The debate was a stormy one for the Constituent Assembly.¹²¹ Although divergent views were expressed throughout the May crisis, ultimately, the deputies' vindication of natural law removed the few constraints that had traditionally structured *ancien régime* foreign

¹¹⁸ Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution*, II, 84-91.

¹¹⁹ AP XV:518.

¹²⁰ Ibid, XV:564.

¹²¹ Barry Rothaus 'The Emergence of Legislative Control over Foreign Policy in the Constituent Assembly 1789-1791,' (unpublished PH.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1968).

relations.¹²² Treaties that emanated from the cabinets of princes, it was argued, had little or no validity. Only nations, with representative national assemblies, could legitimately enter into negotiations. The subversive potential of these assumptions was not immediately clear. Most of the *corps diplomatique* believed that these positions were mere postures and that, at heart, France could not really wish to disrupt Europe's balance of power while her army was in disarray. During the subsequent year, France unilaterally rejected its foreign commitments by annexing papal territory and repudiating the provisions of the treaty of Westphalia. Such a denial of international obligations started to convince these diplomats that they were no longer dealing with the Bourbon monarchy, but with a state that had increasingly gone rogue. Henry Kissinger has argued, compellingly, that Revolutionary states have prophetic visions when it comes to international affairs.¹²³ No one better epitomised this tendency than Maximilien de Robespierre: 'it is from France that freedom and happiness of the world should begin.'¹²⁴ The road between pacifism and belligerence was paradoxically exceedingly narrow.

Despite such warning signals, most members of the *corps diplomatique* found it difficult to take the National Assembly seriously. Monsieur Porte, the Piedmontese *chargé d'affaires*, described with seething irony, in May 1791, how:

The assembly took four days to discuss if one could annex Avignon, five further days to decide if coloured people could be active citizens and currently amuses itself, these past three or four days, with determining the organisation of future legislatures. Despite all this, it is now almost two years since the land tax has failed to be established, consequently it is not being paid and there are about thirty other bills that remain mere drafts [...] This is akin to watching a man going to a shop to buy furniture while his house is burning down.'¹²⁵

While this quip hardly converted into a manifesto for armed intervention, it did show that diplomats seriously underestimated the revolutionaries' seriousness in redefining the

¹²² Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right*, pp. pp.38-40, & 152-169.

¹²³ Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822* (London, 1996), pp.1-6 & 312-32.

¹²⁴ AP XV:516.

¹²⁵ ASTo, Francia Lettere Ministri Mazzo 237, Lettere Orig Porta incaricato d affari 1791-1792, dépeche no.39 21 mai 1791.

foundation of international legitimacy. The regenerated French Nation was following a new trajectory and little compromise with the *ancien régime* past was possible.

The period after June 1791 was to be one of the most trying months for the *corps diplomatique*. The ambassadors had attended court like clockwork on 19 June. The surveillance reports of the *contrôle des étrangers* reveal that on: ‘21,22,23,24 [June] the ambassadors and ministers have not been seen anywhere during these days.’¹²⁶ There is little doubt that the flight to Varennes was a truly international venture.¹²⁷ The work of generations of historians, and most recently Munro Price, reveals that it was an Austro, Russo, Swedish and Spanish endeavour. Alan Blondy seems to have debunked the legend that the order of Malta provided over a million livres for this failed flight.¹²⁸ This being said, the Bailli de Virieu minister for the knights of St John and Parma was decidedly unfavourable to the Revolution. Regardless of whether or not Malta participated in the enterprise, it was punished by the Assembly with the abolition of the orders of Chivalry in the subsequent month.¹²⁹ On 25 June the *corps diplomatique* assembled as a body on the terrace of the ambassador of Venice’s residence at the porte Saint Martin. Here, while they dined, they watched the sombre procession escorting a captive king back to his palace-prison.¹³⁰ This spectacle was something akin to a funeral wake. In many ways, this grim *cortège* heralded not just the end of constitutional monarchy, but also indicated that Paris’ days as a hub for aristocratic diplomacy were entering their twilight. Fernán Núñez had already, on 23 June, written to Montmorin demanding that the residences of diplomats be guarded to ensure the safety of their residents.¹³¹ Very soon the ambassador would have to deny paranoid rumours that Spain had invaded and taken the city of Pau. The Revolutionary public, with some justification, interpreted Varennes as a prelude for an armed coalition of European princes against France.¹³² Radical opinion was mistaken in substance. This badly botched flight was the last resort of old school diplomacy. It was naively hoped that taking the king out of the capital,

¹²⁶ AAE, Contrôle, Carton 80, fol.45.

¹²⁷ Munro Price, *The Fall of the French Monarchy: Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and the Baron De Breteuil* (London, 2003), pp.136-168.

¹²⁸ Blondy, *L’Ordre de Malte au XVIIIème siècle*, pp.302-303.

¹²⁹ Doyle, *Aristocracy and its Enemies*, pp.257-59; & Caiani, *Louis XVI and the French Revolution*, pp.160-191.

¹³⁰ AAE, Contrôle, Carton 80, fol.58.

¹³¹ A[rchivio di] S[tato]Ve[netia], Dispacci degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato Francia filza 264, dispaccio no. 48 28 giugno 1791.

¹³² A[rchivio di] S[tato]P[arma], Carteggio Borbonico Estero Francia 82, 31 Luglio 1791 ‘One speaks here much of the coalition that is being formed by the majority of European powers against France. [France] in turn is making great preparations for its own defence. It seems clear that a peace has been signed between the Russians and the Ottomans.’

and placing him in a position of strength, would permit the conditions for a renegotiation of the constitutional settlement.¹³³ In the end this catastrophic blunder on the part of the *ancien régime* monarchy allowed the Assembly to form the impression that the hexagon was held in the tentacular grip of a massive European counter-revolutionary conspiracy.

By the time the Legislative Assembly started its deliberations in October, the *corps diplomatique* had been decimated by flight. France's closest allies had recalled their representatives. Rome, Turin, Vienna, Madrid and Naples no longer believed that a negotiated settlement with France was possible.¹³⁴ Jefferson's successor as American Minister, Gouverneur Morris, assumed the mantle of Mirabeau, and was advising the court on how best to act in the present precarious circumstances.¹³⁵ As is well known, the new deputies elected to the Legislative Assembly in this climate of international distrust upped the stakes in their rejection of the old European international system.¹³⁶ The most important legacy of the last years of the *corps diplomatique* in Paris was one of misjudgement and miscommunication. Put simply, the noble emissaries of European princes did not take the assembly seriously, and constantly believed that it would collapse under the weight of the anarchy they perceived it was fomenting. The despatches of these ministers were full of disdain for the reform program of 1789 and depicted France as a Nation on the brink of military collapse. As Tim Blanning justly points out, for war to occur you need two players who think they can win. Austria and Prussia, with the encouragement of their brother princes, began to think, despite their notable military commitments in the East, that they could reap an early victory on the Rhine.¹³⁷ The Revolutionary decade was characterised by unholy alliances. The Austro-Prussian one of 1791 was but the first of many such pacts (perhaps more shocking was the Russo-Turkish *entente* of 1799).

Most of the *corps diplomatique* in France had been instructed to maintain the peace in Western Europe. Their reaction to revolution was generally one of bewilderment. In a minority of cases, it was seen as an exploitable opportunity. Until Varennes, every attempt was made to resume normal working relations with the court of the Tuileries. In the end, ambassadors were accredited to a physical body: Louis XVI. As the Revolution eroded his

¹³³ Price, *The Fall of the French Monarchy*, ch.8 ; & Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), passim.

¹³⁴ Anon, *Almanach Royal* (Paris, 1792), pp.184-186.

¹³⁵ Anne Cary Morris, *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris*, 2 vols. (New York, 1888), I,363-67.

¹³⁶ Blanning, *Origins of the Revolutionary Wars*, pp.99-113.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, pp.23-27 & 113-119. ; Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, p.182; & Thomas Naff, 'Reform and the Conduct of Ottoman Diplomacy in the Reign of Selim III, 1789-1807,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 83, No. 3 (1963).

residual monarchical powers, the emissaries of Europe's princes were negotiating with an individual monarch who was unable to give any binding assurance or commitment. The decline of the *corps diplomatique* followed the same downward trajectory as the Revolution's failed experiment with constitutional monarchy. The Bourbon crown, under pressure from foreign warfare, collapsed on 10 August 1792. By this time, the relationship between revolutionary deputies and old school diplomats had already hardened into what can only be described as a dialogue of the deaf.