British Communications and Diplomacy in the Eighteenth Century[1]

DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY the secretaries of state conducted British diplomacy in accordance with the king's directions either through foreign diplomats in London, or through British diplomats at foreign courts. The choice of place, varying with circumstances, was not a matter of indifference. By selecting London for negotiations, the king and secretaries of state were able to exert direct influence over their course; to use the Secret Office and the Deciphering Branch to intercept and read the correspondence of the foreign diplomats concerned when sent by post; and to assist the breaking of their unbroken ciphers by giving them documents for transmission to their courts, and use as 'cribs' when sent by post in cipher.[2] From the point of view of the secretaries of state, however, these advantages were liable to prove a source of embarrassment on constitutional and political grounds. Negotiations in London not only increased their responsibility but also restricted their initiative. Since they were often unable to retain documents justifying their conduct, they tended to become 'personally responsible for measures which ought to rest on written instructions'.[3] Moreover, they were directly controlled by the king, who was usually able to observe their execution of his orders by reading the intercepted correspondence of the foreign diplomats.[4] In addition, they were exposed to possible criticism from those members of

[1]The unpublished sources here used include; in the British Museum, the Additional Manuscripts (Add. MSS.) and the Stowe MSS.; in the Public Record Office, the Foreign Office Papers (F.O.) and State Papers (S.P.); and in the Prior's Kitchen Durham, the Grey MSS. In accordance with eighteenth-century practice, no distinction is here drawn between codes and ciphers.

[2]See my *Post Office in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 65–70. The work of the Secret Office and Deciphering Branch survives in the form of hundreds of copies of intercepted despatches, or interceptions, of considerable historical value. For instance, the British Museum contains the Willes MSS. (Add. MSS. 24321, 32253–32309, 45518–23) consisting of decipher charts, interceptions, and reports *c.* 1710–1844; while the Public Record Office contains a series of interceptions 1726–66 (S.P. 107/1–109), and 1825–8 (F.O. 360/3–5), as well as a large number scattered among the Colonial Office Papers (e.g. C.O. 5/40), and State Papers under relevant dates.

[3]*Journal and Correspondence of William Lord Auckland*, ed. bishop of Bath and Wells (4 vols., London, 1861–2), ii. 394–5.

[4]*Private Correspondence of Chesterfield and Newcastle*, ed. Sir R. Lodge (Camden Soc. 1930), pp. 124, 128–9; *Letters from George III to Lord Bute*, ed. R. Sedgwick (London, 1939), p. 170; *Correspondence of King George III from 1760 to December 1783*, ed. Sir J. Fortescue (6 vols., London, 1927–8), iii. No. 1410; iv. no. 2833; vi. no. 4308.

the cabinet who were on the distribution list of interceptions and were able to follow the course of the negotiations in the same way as the king.[1]

On the other hand when foreign courts were selected for negotiation, the secretaries of state were able to share some of their responsibility with leading colleagues in the cabinet by circulating important drafts before despatch; to retain copies of instructions; and to preserve stricter secrecy at home, as well as more personal initiative, by corresponding privately with British diplomats abroad.[2] In practice this method of negotiation was generally chosen,[3] although it necessarily transferred to foreign governments the advantages which the British enjoyed in London. Despite the risks involved, the conduct of diplomacy abroad was the accepted 'English plan'.[4]

These risks varied with the degree of security maintained by British ministers with their staffs at home and abroad, and the security of British communications.[5] Since foreign governments sought to intercept and read British and other correspondence,[6] personal discretion and cipher security, often interrelated, were important factors in the conduct of diplomacy.[7] The maintenance of cipher security depended on the adoption of precautionary measures including the use of reliable couriers to prevent interception, the protection of correspondence at foreign post offices, the skilful preparation of ciphers, their protection when in use; and conversely, on the ability of foreign cryptographers to defeat the purpose of these measures.

British couriers, though occasionally robbed *en route*,[8] provided the safest means of communication.[9] They were usually King's Messengers or private

[1]P. C. Yorke, *Life and Correspondence of Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1913), ii. 110–11; H[istorical] M[anuscripts] C[ommission], *10th Rept., pt. i, Weston Underwood MSS.*, pp. 355, 358; *Post Office*, pp. 152–3.

[2]*Auckland Correspondence, loc. cit.*; *The Jenkinson Papers 1760–6*, ed. N. S. Jucker (London, 1949), pp. 4–5; *Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox*, ed. Lord John Russell (4 vols., London, 1853–7), ii. 137–9, 157.

[3]The names of many important negotiations and treaties are significant in this connexion: e.g. Gertruydenberg, 1710; Utrecht, 1713; Hanover, 1725; Seville, 1729; the Pardo, 1739; Aix-la-Chappelle, 1748; Paris, 1763; Versailles, 1783; Lille, 1797; Amiens, 1802, etc.; though exceptions can be cited, e.g. Westminster, 1716 and 1756.

[4]*Auckland Correspondence, loc. cit.*

[5]*Memorials of Fox*, i. 381; ii. 137; H.M.C. *Polwarth MSS.*, iv. 128–9, 133; *Various (vi), Knox MSS.*, pp. 282, 285.

[6]H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, i. 196, 379, 539, 558–9; iii. 98, 122; iv. 128–9, 133; *Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir Robert Murray Keith*, ed. G. Smyth (2 vols., London, 1849), ii. 520; *The Paget Papers*, ed. Sir A. B. Paget (2 vols., London, 1896), ii. 45, 58, 134; E. Vaillé, *Le Cabinet Noir* (Paris, 1950), pp. 106–207, 316.

[7]Add. MSS. 32255, fos. 68, 148, 152, 179.

[8]V. Wheeler-Holohan, *History of the King's Messengers* (London, 1935), p. 159; *Private Correspondence of Lord Granville Leveson Gower*, ed. Countess Granville (2 vols., London, 1916), i. 166.

[9]*Letters and Correspondence of Lord Bolingbroke*, ed. G. Parke (2 vols., London, 1798), i. 375; ii. 511; H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, i. 103; iii. 122; *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot*, ed. F. Bamford and the duke of Wellington (2 vols., London, 1950), i. 287.

servants employed by the secretaries of state or diplomats abroad;[1] or diplomats or members of their staff travelling to and from foreign courts,[2] or under special orders.[3] In addition, Hanoverian couriers sometimes provided a safe opportunity for British ministers.[4] The use of other foreign couriers was 'highly incautious'[5] unless the correspondence entrusted to them was unimportant,[6] or their employers were acting very closely with the British ministers.[7] In practice, however, there were generally few British couriers available, and their services were expensive. There were only forty King's Messengers, controlled by the lord chamberlain, and employed in a variety of ways. Until 1772 the secretaries of state were obliged to apply for their services. Sixteen of them were specially attached to their offices in 1772 for foreign service, and thirty in 1795 for all purposes.[8] The number of reliable servants was also limited, and their use was liable to cause inconvenience, repayment of their travelling expenses being delayed for many months.[9] Moreover, the movements of couriers, especially King's Messengers, attracted attention[10]; and frequent services at any court, while protecting correspondence, tended to suggest its significance.[11] Accordingly, services were generally restricted. Weekly or fortnightly services were maintained with Paris, the Hague, and Hanover during a royal visit; but those with more[12] distant courts were usually infrequent.[13] Couriers were sometimes sent across the Channel, and sometimes provided a shuttle service between diplomats abroad and the ports used by the Post Office Packets, especially Calais and Helvoetsluys.[14]

Accordingly British courier services were usually confined to the transmission of most secret correspondence. Diplomatic correspondence consisted

[1]Wheeler-Holohan, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 32, 51; H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, iii. 281; iv. 1, 76–7.

[2]G. G. Butler, *Colonel St. Paul of Ewart, Soldier and Diplomat*, (2 vols. London, 1911), i. p. lxxvi. [3]*Correspondence of Lord G. Leveson Gower, loc. cit.*

[4]H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, ii. 326, 351; Yorke, *op. cit.*, iii. 105.

[5]Fortescue, *op. cit.*, vi. no. 3823.

[6]*Paget Papers*, ii. 45, 48, 58; H.M.C., *Dropmore MSS.*, ii. 280.

[7]*Keith Correspondence*, ii. 333, 434.

[8]Wheeler-Holohan, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–33, 51, 155–7, 216–19.

[9]H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, ii. 72; *Paget Papers*, ii. 9.

[10]Fortescue, *op. cit.*, v. no. 2937.

[11]H.M.C., *Weston Underwood MSS.*, p. 436; *Paget Papers*, ii. 213.

[12]H.M.C., *Bathurst MSS.*, pp. 689–90; *Calendar of Home Office Papers 1766–9*, p. 95; *Butler, loc. cit.*; *Correspondence of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham*, ed. W. Taylor and J. H. Pringle (4 vols., London, 1838), i. 42.

[13]W. Coxe, *Memoirs of the Life and Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford* (3 vols., London, 1798), ii. 574; *Despatches and Correspondence of John, second Earl of Buckinghamshire*, ed. A. A. Collyer (Camden. Soc., 2 vols., 1900), i. 75, 228; H.M.C., *Weston Underwood MSS.*, p. 331; *Correspondence Despatches and Other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh*, ed. marquess of Londonderry, 3rd ser. (4 vols., London, 1853), iii. (xi), 102, 117.

[14]H.M.C., *Bathurst MSS.*, pp. 689–90; *Dropmore MSS.*, ii. 409; *Polwarth MSS.*, iv. 13–14; *Keith Correspondence*, ii. 293, 296, 450, 526–7; Add. MSS. 32253, fos. 311, 325, 352.

of ciphers; official despatches containing formal instructions and factual reports; and private letters containing confidential instructions and reports, together with personal opinions and suggestions.[1] Couriers were used to carry ciphers,[2] very important despatches,[3] and private letters, usually *en clair*, though occasionally in cipher.[4] Ordinary despatches were usually sent by post in cipher.[5] Occasionally private letters were also sent by post in cipher[6]; and occasionally a despatch was deliberately sent *en clair* by post in order to be read by a foreign government *en route*.[7] British diplomats at the great courts, and those where British diplomacy became especially active, were expected to write to London by every post.[8] All were expected to keep their colleagues as well as the secretaries of state informed of developments at their courts.[9] They sometimes also served the Electoral government unobtrusively as agents or observers, corresponding with the privy council (regency) at Hanover, and with Hanoverian diplomats at foreign courts.[10] Many British despatches were sent to diplomats under flying seal,[11] and much private correspondence passed between them on the continent,[12] either by courier or by post, when they used cipher as a rule, or lacking a common cipher, occasionally invisible ink.[13] The volume of British diplomatic correspondence sent by post was always very large.[14]

The protection of British correspondence at foreign post offices was at best incomplete, restricted, and spasmodic. The Dutch post office, providing a link between London and Northern courts,[15] and the Imperial Post Office in the Austrian Netherlands, were both subjected to occasional British influence in the first half of the century through the post masters at Amsterdam,[16] Leyden,[17] Rotterdam[18] and Brussels.[19] This influence, declining by

[1] *Memorials of Fox*, ii. 137–9; *Castlereagh Correspondence*, 2nd ser. (4 vols., London, 1851), ii. (vi), 420.

[2] Butler, *loc. cit.*; H.M.C., *Dropmore MSS.*, ii. 378; Add. MSS. 32254, fo. 308.

[3] Coxe, *op. cit.*, iii. 142; Fortescue, *op. cit.*, iv. no. 2842; vi. nos. 3822–3.

[4] *Memorials of Fox*, i. 381; *Paget Papers*, i. 187; ii. 45, 48, 58; *Castlereagh Correspondence*, 3rd ser., ii. (x), 56.

[5] Jucker, *loc. cit.*; *Castlereagh Correspondence*, 3rd ser., ii. (x), 122; Add. MSS. 32253, fo. 311.

[6] H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, iv. 19, 44–5, 128–9.

[7] A. Cobban, *Ambassadors and Secret Agents* (London, 1954), p. 51.

[8] H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, i. 655; *Dropmore MSS.*, vi. 251.

[9] H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, i. 29; *Paget Papers*, i. 201.

[10] H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, i. 395–6, 437, 443, 466, 527, 539–40; ii. 326, 351; Sir R. Lodge, *Great Britain and Prussia in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1923), p. 9.

[11] H.M.C., *Weston Underwood MSS.*, pp. 259, 263, 272; *Keith Correspondence*, ii. 458, 462, 517

[12] *Keith Correspondence*, ii. 167, 265–6, 458, 488.

[13] H.M.C., *Dropmore MSS.*, vi. 40, 355; *Paget Papers*, i. 9, 53, 63, 70, 201.

[14] *Memorials of Fox*, ii. 155.

[15] H.M.C., *Dropmore MSS.*, ii. 280.

[16] *Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth Earl of Chesterfield*, ed. B. Dobrée (6 vols., London, 1932), ii. 73.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 149; H.M.C., *14th Rept., pt. ix, Buckinghamshire MSS.*, p. 22; *Polwarth MSS.*, i. 35; Stowe MSS. 230, fo. 97; Add. MSS. 32256, fo. 153.

[18] H.M.C., *Buckinghamshire MSS.*, p. 134; *Leeds MSS.*, p. 47.

[19] H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, iv. 233, 249; Coxe, *op. cit.*, ii. 284–5, 290.

mid-century, revived in Holland in 1788–94, though not in the Austrian Netherlands.[1] Similar influence was exerted at Hamburg[2] and Dantzig[3] in the reign of George I, and perhaps again at Hamburg at the end of the century.[4] But the only organization under permanent British influence was the Hanoverian post office, working closely with London in the supply of intelligence.[5] The Hanoverian system provided a safe channel for British correspondence in certain parts of North West Germany.[6] Elsewhere British correspondence was exposed to constant dangers, especially on routes controlled by the great courts.[7]

To protect correspondence, ciphers were issued to diplomats, though not as a rule to consuls.[8] The ciphers, sometimes prepared in the seventeenth century by untrained clerks,[9] were being prepared in the reign of George I by senior clerks in the offices of the secretaries of state.[10] Already, however, the decipherers recently attached to these offices for cryptographic work were reporting on the strength of new ciphers[11]; and from at least 1745 the Deciphering Branch was responsible for their preparation.[12] The ciphers were generally four figure codes, printed on large sheets, and in practice usually pasted on boards. They contained instructions for use and for the maintainance of security, including orders for the paraphrasing of any cipher text received or delivered at any court.[13] The Deciphering Branch had a very high opinion of these ciphers, reporting in mid-century that it was 'little less than impossible to find them out',[14] and in the early nineteenth century that 'no one for a great length of time (if at all) can possibly make the discovery'.[15] But their initial strength, largely due to the suppression of frequencies,

[1]H.M.C., *Dropmore MSS.*, ii. 131, 141, 160, 292.

[2]J. F. Chance, *The Alliance of Hanover* (London, 1923), p. 146, n. 1.

[3]H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, i. 360; Stowe MSS. 232, fo. 78; Add. MSS. 32253, fos. 125–31.

[4]*Castlereagh Correspondence*, 1st ser. (4 vols., London, 1848–9), i. 234, 247, 272–93.

[5]*Post Office*, pp. 67, 74, 152.

[6]The routes through the northern part of the Electorate from Wildeshausen and Nienburg to Hamburg and Hanover were controlled by the Electoral government. The route from Hanover to the southern part of the Electorate through the bishopric of Hildesheim was exposed to interference on the part of the Taxis posts subject to Austrian influence. Not all the British ministers realized the importance of this problem to the Elector (H. Bernhards, 'Zur Entwickelung des Postwesens in Braunschweig-Luneburg, vornehmlich der jungeren Linie Calenberg-Celle', *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Niedersachsen*, lxxvii (1912), 22–3, 48, 60–6, 82, 85; H.M.C. *Weston Underwood MSS.*, p. 246).

[7]*Infra*, p. 167, n. 3.

[8]Add. MSS. 32255, fos. 23, 146.

[9]Sir A. Bryant, *Samuel Pepys, the Man in the Making* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 79.

[10]S.P. 35/13, fo. 10.

[11]S.P. 35/46, fo. 47; Add. MSS. 45519, pt. i, Keill to (Under Secretary unnamed), 30 May 1714; pt. ii, Leathes to Craggs, 20 April, 18 May 1720; *Post Office*, pp. 127–31.

[12]Add. MSS. 32256, fos. 196–211; 32257, fos. 66–110.

[13]*Ibid.*; Butler, *loc. cit.*

[14]Add. MSS. 45520, pt. v, Willes to Wood, 20 Sept. 1758.

[15]Add. MSS. 45519, pt. iv, (Sir Francis Willes) to Lord Harrowby, 17 Sept. 1805.

proved in time a source of weakness. Since a new cipher in the late eighteenth century cost about £150, there was considerable reluctance to change them, and some remained in use for a dozen or so years.[1] Moreover the same ciphers were widely distributed. In 1772–3, for example, British diplomats at Paris, Stockholm, Turin, Florence, Naples and Venice, as well as the lieutenant-governor of Gibraltar, were all using the same series in varying degrees.[2] Necessarily, much correspondence in the same cipher accumulated in the hands of foreign cryptographers; while a breach of security at one court imperilled communications at others.

The protection of ciphers was generally defective. The secretaries of state, controlling the issue of ciphers, were responsible for cipher security.[3] Most of those appointed in the years 1714–60 possessed diplomatic experience, and most after 1760 lacked it.[4] Irrespective, however, of such experience, all of them were aware of the problem of cipher security, if only because they saw the deciphered interceptions from day to day.[5] But although they personally wrote letters and despatches,[6] they normally delegated the work of ciphering and deciphering British correspondence to their subordinates,[7] and were unable to exercise direct supervision even if they possessed some knowledge of the problem.[8] In general they seem to have paid little attention to it. Those without diplomatic experience learnt something in course of time.[9] But even those with considerable experience were capable of blunders. For example, Lord Rochford, after holding the highest appointments abroad, committed a serious breach of security in 1772 by ordering the despatch of copies of intercepted correspondence to a British diplomat on the continent.[10] (In the nineteenth century, Lord Palmerston, who studied the diplomatic interceptions with great care,[11] was a model of discretion;[12] while Lord

[1]Sir J. A. C. Tilley and Sir S. Gaselee, *The Foreign Office* (London, 1933), pp. 31, 148.

[2]Add. MSS. 32253, fo. 311; 32254, fos. 175, 195, 242. (Paris, Stockholm, and Turin had ciphers and deciphers KLMNOP; Florence, KLOP; Venice, K and L for use with Florence and M and N for all other purposes; Naples, M and N; and Gibraltar, O and P. In addition, Paris and Stockholm had 'the French cipher and decipher of 1763' for use in that language.)

[3]Butler, *op. cit.*, i. 88, 98.

[4]D. B. Horn 'The Diplomatic Experience of Secretaries of State', *History*, n.s. xli (1956), 94–9.

[5]*Post Office*, pp. 69–74.

[6]*Correspondence of John, fourth Duke of Bedford*, ed. Lord John Russell (3 vols., London, 1842–6), i. 512; H.M.C., *Dropmore MSS.*, v. 45.

[7]Jucker, *loc. cit.*; *Keith Correspondence*, ii. 221, 227.

[8]H.M.C., *Dropmore MSS.*, ii. 136; *Keith Correspondence*, ii. 47.

[9]*Correspondence of Charles, first Marquess Cornwallis*, ed. C. Ross (3 vols., London, 1859), i. 200, 204.

[10]Fortescue, *op. cit.*, ii. no. 1089.

[11]*Grey MSS.*, Palmerston to Grey, 12 March, 20 Sept., 18 Nov., 26 Dec. 1832; 7, 28 Jan., 30 June 1833; Grey to Palmerston, 4, 8 Sept. 1832; 5 Oct. 13, 19 Dec. 1833.

[12]F.O. 96/17, Palmerston's minutes, 23 May 1831, 26 Feb. 1832, 30 May 1833; F.O. 19/18, 5 Jan. 1836; 366/418, 5 Nov. 1839; S. Lane-Poole, *Life of the Rt. Hon. Stratford Canning* (2 vols., London, 1888), ii. 20; C. K. Webster, 'Lord Palmerston at work, 1830–41', *Studies in Anglo-French History*, ed. A. Couville and H. Temperley (Cambridge, 1935), p. 78.

Malmesbury, appointed after 1844 when they ceased,[1] was very much the reverse, once compromising current ciphers to make a fatuous joke at dinner.[2]) The under secretaries of state, responsible with senior clerks for ciphering and deciphering British diplomatic correspondence in London,[3] generally shared the relative indifference of their principals. Some were former clerks, but many lacked office training.[4] These certainly learnt something in course of time.[5] But only three under secretaries, Anthony Corbiere (*c.* 1728), Francis Willes (1772–5), and George Maddison (1782–3), each previously working in the Secret Office or Deciphering Branch, really knew about the problem.[6] Significantly, though Willes tried hard to improve the standard of cipher security, his efforts seem to have been largely ineffective,[7] and he was not altogether a success in office, where routine was considered more important.[8] (In the nineteenth century 'permanent' under secretaries like Backhouse were able to achieve some improvement, at least under Palmerston.[9])

British diplomats abroad committed many breaches of cipher security. Since carelessness abroad was very difficult to check from London, even if perceived, cipher security as a whole depended to a great extent on the personal capacity and discretion of the diplomats. Many were either very young, or inexperienced, or careless, or a combination of each.[10] Training was often considered unnecessary. Lord Chesterfield, for example, a former secretary of state, did not believe that his son, aged twenty, could possibly do any harm if appointed Resident at Venice.[11] Others shared this general opinion. In 1793, Herbert Taylor, aged seventeen, secretary of legation at Frankfort, was left as British representative at the king of Prussia's headquarters in complete ignorance of the dangers to which his despatches were exposed, and the harm his carelessness might cause.[12] Inexperienced diplomats, despite clear instructions in their code books, sometimes made gross blunders. In 1774, for example, John Strange, newly appointed to Venice, repeated *en clair* the contents of a despatch sent in cipher.[13] But some experienced diplomats were equally careless. In 1775 Sir Horace Mann, after

[1]*Post Office*, pp. 140–1.

[2]Earl of Malmesbury, *Memoirs of an Ex-Minister* (2 vols., London, 1884), ii. 174–5. (Malmesbury was nevertheless critical of Palmerston and proud of his own competence; *ibid.*, i. 247, 319.)

[3]Fortescue, *op. cit.*, v. no. 3335; *Correspondence of Lord G. Leveson Gower*, ii. 369.

[4]M. A. Thomson, *The Secretaries of State 1681–1782* (Oxford, 1932), pp. 131–2.

[5]Fortescue, *op. cit.*, vi. no. 4472; *Selections from the Letters and Correspondence of Sir James Bland Burges*, ed. J. Hutton (London, 1885), pp. 133, 243–4.

[6]*Post Office*, pp. 86, 94, 129–31. [7]Add. MSS. 32255, fos. 68, 152, 179, 215.

[8]Fortescue, *op. cit.*, iii. no. 1659; Add. MSS. 45518, pt. ii, Willes to Rochford, 11 Nov. 1775; to Carmarthen (1784).

[9]Add. MSS. 45518, pt. iv, Backhouse to F. Willes, junior, 24 May 1838; F.O. 366/418, Backhouse's memorandum 4 Nov., Palmerston's minute, 5 Nov. 1839.

[10]H.M.C., *Weston Underwood MSS.*, pp. 357, 385; *Dropmore MSS.*, vi. 270.

[11]*Chesterfield Letters*, v. 1925, 1934, 2033.

[12]*The Taylor Papers*, ed. E. Taylor (London, 1913), p. 21.

[13]Add. MSS. 32255, fo. 68. (For Strange's subsequent blunders, see fos. 152 179).

thirty-seven years at Florence, made the same mistake; and received the elementary warning that 'the knowledge of the subject of any letter in cipher is a very considerable aid to decipherers, whom you should endeavour rather to perplex than assist'.[1] Other diplomats ciphered documents received from foreign governments like Lord Hyndford at Berlin[2]; or entrusted despatches carelessly to foreign couriers like Thomas Wroughton at Warsaw or Lord Buckinghamshire at St. Petersburg, who even received a warning from the friendly Russian minister.[3]

British diplomats were expected to keep their ciphers under lock and key[4]; to use them personally or employ a reliable secretary[5]; and to leave them, together with other confidential papers, in the hands of 'some careful person' on departure from their courts.[6] But because of linguistic difficulties, especially at Northern courts, they tended to employ foreigners in secret work.[7] With no adequate supervision of diplomatic staff[8]; no legal definition of state secrets[9]; and no clear distinction between state and private papers,[10] security naturally suffered. Some of the foreigners employed were of doubtful character[11]. For example in 1746 Lord Chesterfield, secretary of state, advised Lord Sandwich, minister plenipotentiary at the Hague, to get rid of one of his staff named Fröhlick who was thought to be under Prussian influence.[12] Moreover, foreigners were sometimes left in charge of British missions in the absence of diplomats. For example, in October 1757, on the recall of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams from St. Petersburg, the embassy was left in charge of his secretary, a foreigner named Rineking; and in December 1757 Thomas Wroughton, then consul at St. Petersburg, warned Williams that Rineking was 'continually and publicly drunk and in the lowest company. What security from such a fellow?'[13] Lastly foreigners on occasion were able to retain possession of British code books. For example, in 1792 Lord Auckland, ambassador at the Hague, warned the secretary of state that Mrs. Ewart, the Prussian widow of the late British envoy extraordinary at

[1]Add. MSS. 32255, fo. 148.

[2]Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[3]*Buckinghamshire Correspondence*, i. 195, 198; ii. 11.

[4]*Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, first Earl of Malmesbury*, ed. Earl of Malmesbury (4 vols., London, 1844), iv. 413.

[5]H.M.C., *Polwarth MSS.*, iv. 44–5; *Weston Underwood MSS.*, p. 379; Richard, duke of Buckingham, *Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George III* (4 vols., London, 1853–5), ii. 416; *Keith Correspondence*, ii. 330; Add. MSS. 32255, fo. 152.

[6]*Paget Papers*, i. 166.

[7]Earl of Ilchester and Mrs. Langford-Brooke, *Life of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams* (London, 1929), pp. 161–4, 334; Yorke, *op. cit.*, ii. 153, n. 1; Add. MSS. 32256, fos. 235–7.

[8]Ilchester, *loc. cit.*

[9]Sir E. Hertslet, *Recollections of the Old Foreign Office* (London, 1901), pp. 46, 191–2.

[10]*Taylor Papers*, pp. 400–1.

[11]Ilchester, *loc. cit.*

[12]*Chesterfield Letters*, iii. 835.

[13]Ilchester, *op. cit.*, p. 412, n. 4.

Berlin, had received offers from the British opposition for the sale of her late husband's papers 'which by the by include all our ciphers in the hands of a foreigner'.[1]

The skill of foreign cryptographers remains a matter of conjecture, but there is no reason to suppose that it fell much below British standards.[2] Taking into account the relatively small use made of British couriers; the large amount of correspondence entrusted to the post; the small measure of protection afforded to it on the continent; and the inadequate attention paid to cipher security, it seems very probable that British correspondence was read frequently at least at the Austrian, French and Russian courts.[3] The 'English plan' accordingly prejudiced the interests of British diplomacy. It was, nevertheless, part of the price which the British paid for their peculiar form of constitutional government. Freedom of the press[4] and of parliamentary debate,[5] causing the government acute embarrassment at times, were also part of the price. But the effect of these disadvantages must not be exaggerated. The existence of common interests, together with the degree of power available on sea and land, usually mattered more than secrecy, at best only one factor, however important, in the outcome of negotiations.

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[1] *Auckland Correspondence*, ii. 435.

[2] *Supra*, p. 159, n. 2.

[3] Vaillé, *op. cit.*, pp. 157–8, 187–8, 316 n.; *Keith Correspondence*, ii. 520 n.; *Buckinghamshire Correspondence*, ii. 11; *Castlereagh Correspondence*, 3rd ser., iii. (xi), 102.

[4] E. Charteris, *William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, and the Seven Years War* (London, 1925), p. 125 n.

[5] I. R. Christie, *The End of North's Ministry 1780–2* (London, 1958), pp. 323–4.