



*The first Kifs this Ten Years! — or — the meeting of Britannia & Citizen François.*

"The First Kiss" (1803) by James Gillray (1756–1815). Creative Commons.

## The Inevitable Collapse of Peace

### A Study of the Weaknesses of the Peace of Amiens

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Franco-British negotiations during the French Revolutionary Wars were, by necessity, a tortuous process. That Revolutionary French and contemporary British political systems were each grounded in ideological positions which were in many ways irreconcilable was bad enough, but there was also the matter of two diametrically opposed political systems *and* a historical enmity which reached back over five centuries. That neither France nor the first two Coalitions could sustain widespread success long enough to force a peace made the peace process infinitely more difficult as each side had a tendency to seize on momentary success as a sign that the other was on the verge of collapse. The general internal instability of the French Directory -- the primary governing body of France from November 1795 until the end of 1799

-- and William Grenville's increasingly uncompromising stance as Foreign Secretary from 1791 to 1801 ended all reasonable hope of a truce, let alone a full peace.

Taking these factors into consideration, it is impressive that the Peace of Amiens could be negotiated at all. The earlier attempts at a general peace in 1796, '97, and '99 had each fallen apart, and it required six months of tedious and painstaking negotiations for each of the Peace Preliminaries and the eventual Treaty itself. Only the unique circumstances of 1801-1802 allowed the successful negotiation of the Peace of Amiens, and these same circumstances dictated that the Peace could not have been much more than the truce it ended up being. The first half of the paper will deal with why Britain and France needed the Peace of Amiens, and the second half

will deal with how national interests of both countries meant that those regimes could not have maintained peace in the long term. Both countries needed the peace at the time it was signed, neither country could have agreed to terms different than those that they did, and the terms of the treaty doomed it to failure from the start.

The event which most directly dictated both the arrival and crumbling of the Peace was the return of Napoleon Bonaparte from his campaigns in Italy, Egypt, and the Holy Land in September 1799. At the time, Bonaparte was one of Revolutionary France's most successful and most famous generals. Within two months of his return he had participated in one military *coup* and then effectively staged a second, purely political, *coup* in the immediate aftermath. The net result was his election as First Consul and the abolition of the Directory. Within a month of his assumption of the role of First Consul, Bonaparte had sent letters offering peace to Britain and Austria, the only nations still actively fighting France. Whether these were genuine attempts at peace or simply an attempt by the Consulate to placate a French public tired of revolutionary politics and war is difficult to say.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, Austria and Britain did not, indeed could not, take up the French overtures. The primary issue was the instability of the new Consulate. Bonaparte faced an active insurrection for the first several months of his leadership. He was the target of some dozen assassination attempts in his first year as Consul, and he was unable to bring elements of the military, especially General Moreau's forces along the Rhine, into line with his new regime.<sup>2</sup> The Coalition powers had no reason to believe that Bonaparte could bring France to make a peace and, even if he could, they had reason to doubt that he would last long enough in power to make a peace treaty worth the effort.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, the French diplomatic notes failed to include any specifics as a basis for negotiation and, in the British case, Bonaparte's addressing the note directly to the King rather than his ministers insulted the Cabinet in general and angered Grenville in particular.<sup>4</sup> That the Directory, a body whose makeup (and policies) changed regularly and which was under almost constant threat of being overturned, had been ousted could be seen as a sign of growing stability in France. This was especially true as Bonaparte gained ever more control over the direction of the government- one man is, theoretically, easier to deal with and predict than an unstable council. Nonetheless the British refused to take Bonaparte seriously.

This changed with the renewal of fighting in June of 1800. Bonaparte won a decisive victory against the Austrians at Marengo, who quickly signed a temporary armistice. The First Consul offered to extend the armistice to Britain on both land and sea while he also renewed his offer to negotiate a full peace treaty. These diplomatic messages were delivered by Louis Guillaume Otto, a German-born French diplomat, the French commissioner in London on matters of prisoners of war and senior French diplomat in Britain during the lead up to the Peace.<sup>5</sup> The initial response of the Coalition was the renewal of the anti-French alliance, complete with a British subsidy to the Austrians and a mutual promise to sign no separate peace.<sup>6</sup> Otto and Grenville continued to exchange notes through the summer and fall of 1800, but could not reach an agreement on an armistice as the British refused to lift the blockade of French-held ports. The Franco-Austrian peace talks also broke down and their armistice expired in November. It was the further development of the military situation that broke the log-jam, as the French won another major victory against the Austrians at Hohenlinden in December and the terms for the next armistice were dictated by the French fifty miles from Vienna. Austria was soon forced from the war and a peace conference was organized in Lunéville.<sup>7</sup> Bonaparte's actions had both broken the Coalition's military power on the Continent and opened up a dialogue for peace talks with both Britain and Austria.

In the meantime, military moves in other theatres had also stoked both sides' appetites for peace. The British had spent the campaigning season raiding the Spanish coast with their only large offensive force before launching an invasion of Egypt, still occupied by Bonaparte's old army. Spain, France's primary ally since 1796, represented a target more suited to Britain's desire to avoid a pitched battle following the disaster in Flanders the previous year.<sup>8</sup> Egypt remained the apple of Bonaparte's eye due to both his own history there and his stated belief that Egypt was the key to expanding French influence in the East and winning a long-term colonial advantage over Britain.<sup>9</sup> The British invasion force, while outnumbered, continued to win in Egypt and quickly bottled the French up in Cairo, leaving the key to Bonaparte's imperial dreams in danger. French-occupied Malta was, similarly, besieged and on the verge of surrender. The island had been the jumping off point for Bonaparte's original invasion of Egypt and was perceived to be the key to sending reinforcements east or, failing that, to retaking Egypt at a later date. All of this combined to leave the First Consul with a desire to conclude at least an

1 Harold Deutsch, *The Genesis of Napoleonic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), ch. 2 is good on French war weariness and desire for political stability.

2 John Grainger, *The Amiens Truce: Britain and Bonaparte* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 5-6.

3 *Parliamentary Histories*, vol. XXXV, nos. 6 and 7, Grenville to Captain Rupert George, 29 August 1800.

4 Peter Jupp, *Lord Grenville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) p. 240.

*Parl. Hist.*, vol. XXXIV, cols. 1197-1198.

5 Grainger, pp. 5-9.

6 Ibid, p. 7.

7 Digby Smith, *The Napoleonic Wars Data Book* (London: Greenhill, 1998), pp. 190-192

8 Pupp, *Lord Grenville*, pp. 249-252 covers both the actions in the Mediterranean and the reasons for them.

9 Piers Machesy, *British Victory in Egypt, 1801: The End of Napoleon's Conquest* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 53-55.

armistice under which he could resupply his beleaguered forces throughout the Mediterranean and leave France with a viable claim on Egypt and Malta at a peace conference.<sup>10</sup> This gave reason for France, more powerful than at any point so far in the post-revolution period, to come to the table.

Further impetus for negotiation came as a result of the situation in the Baltic. Throughout 1800, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark-Norway, and Russia had maintained an Armed Neutrality intent on resisting Britain's war policy of searching neutral shipping for contraband war goods bound for France and controlling neutral trade. Tsar Paul of Russia, an unpredictable man whose grip on the Russian throne and control over domestic Russian politics was less than absolute, had already pulled out of the Second Coalition over disputes with his former allies. Although he maintained a state of cold war with France, he had also organized an embargo of all British goods by the members of the Armed Neutrality. Additionally, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark had each agreed to pool their naval resources to resist British interference, although this cooperation could not be effected until the spring of 1801 due to the winter freezing of the Baltic ports.<sup>11</sup> The combined naval power of the League was estimated by the *Naval Chronicle* to equal some ninety ships of the line, a force numerically equal to the Royal Navy and one which, unlike the Royal Navy, could be concentrated at one point.<sup>12</sup> The League of Armed Neutrality was effectively a second anti-British bloc on the Continent, and a particularly dangerous one given the Royal Navy's appetite for Scandinavian naval stores.<sup>13</sup> The anti-British character of the League was further enhanced when Prussia occupied George III's Hanover in early 1801. These actions all influenced and were influenced by the ongoing Franco-Austrian peace talks and contributed greatly to Bonaparte's strong position vis-à-vis the Austro-British alliance.<sup>14</sup>

The strong position of France and the League unraveled in the last week of March 1801. The first and truly key step was the assassination of Tsar Paul by various domestic politicians. Following the assassination, his foreign policies were quickly re-evaluated by the successful plotters and Paul's heir, Alexander I. One of the new regime's first moves was the appointment of a known Anglophile (and one of the three leading plotters against Paul I), Nikita Petrovich Panin, as Foreign Minister. While Alexander I- then just 24 years old and surrounded by his father's murderers- would hardly be able to reverse all of Russian foreign policy immediately, Russian policy did cease to be overtly pro-French.<sup>15</sup> With Russia's participation and role within the League in doubt, events in the

Baltic further weakened the League's position, as Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson sailed his outnumbered force into a fight with the Danish fleet defending the straits against British entry into the Baltic Sea. Two-thirds of the Danish fleet was captured or destroyed, while the rest was badly damaged and left unable to fight.<sup>16</sup> With Russia now prepared to renege on its promise of naval cooperation, the Danish fleet neutralized, and the Prusso-Swedish fleet lacking sufficient strength to resist the British alone, the Armed Neutrality collapsed. The Baltic remained open to British trade and influence, and Russia was once again truly neutral and now more closely aligned to Britain.<sup>17</sup> France had lost its northern advantage. The combination of the collapse of the Armed Neutrality, Bonaparte's concerns over Egypt, Malta, and the Middle/Far East in general, and France's current inability (acknowledged by Bonaparte) to stage an invasion of the British Isles drove Bonaparte to consider honest peace talks.<sup>18</sup>

Britain was being brought to the table by the combined effects of a decade of war. Poor harvests in 1799 and 1800, combined with wartime inflation, had resulted in ever-increasing food prices and riots throughout Britain. Imports were sufficient to keep starvation away, but had little impact upon short- or mid-term prices. The use of both militia and regular army troops for internal security, further strained the British regular army at a time when disease and defeat made "strain" the default position.<sup>19</sup> The Irish rebellion of 1798 was still fresh in the Government's mind and required a similar use of garrison troops to tramp down potential unrest. Perhaps just as importantly, the resentment at wartime taxes had not dissipated with time- quite the opposite in fact- and many in Britain saw the war as the sole cause of the taxes, believing that they could be eliminated if the war itself could be. The erosion of public support for the war never fully materialized, but reached its height during the transitory period from the Directory to the Consulate.<sup>20</sup> Macroeconomically, the situation was no better. Unemployment had been steadily rising, as had the number of both business and personal bankruptcies. Inflation within the economy could not be wholly controlled by Government restrictions on the money supply, and British commerce still relied heavily on its (now closed) traditional markets on the Continent.<sup>21</sup> Nor was Britain's military position any better. Austria's defeat and Russia's withdrawal from the Second Coalition has already been covered, but British military achievements had been lackluster as well. The scars of the disastrous three-year

10 Ibid, pp.55-60.

11 Grainger, p. 18.

12 *Naval Chronicle*, vol. IV, pp. 158-160 and vol. V, pp. 83-88.

13 Alfred Crosby, *America, Russia, Hemp, and Napoleon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1965), p. 8.

14 Charles Fedorak, *Henry Addington, Prime Minister, 1801-1804* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 2002), pp. 50-54

15 Grainger, pp.26-27

16 Dudley Pope, *Great Gamble: Nelson at Copenhagen* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1972) pp. 259-301.

17 Grainger, pp. 26-27

18 Grainger, pp. 31-33.

19 Roger Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience, 1795-1803* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1986), ch. 9

20 Clive Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979) pp 85-92.

21 Fedorak, *Addington*, pp. 46-48



campaign in Flanders remained lurid and painful, and the army and militia both were short on artillery, small arms, and ammunition. The strain of a near-continuous eight year blockade were also showing on the Royal Navy, especially as the Armed Neutrality ensured that no naval stores could be exported from the Baltic until its dissolution. Ships and men both were worn.<sup>22</sup> Britain *required* a respite from the war.

There remained one final obstacle to serious negotiations: the government of William Pitt and Lord Grenville's presence at the head of the Foreign Office. Both had long opposed any treaty with France, even once Bonaparte took power. This obstacle was removed between January and March of 1801 when Pitt's government collapsed on the question of Catholic Emancipation. Throughout the war, Grenville and William Windham, the Secretary of War, had been two of the most determinedly anti-French men within the Cabinet, and both refused to serve in the government of Henry Addington, Speaker of the House of Commons and the King's choice to form a new government.<sup>23</sup> Addington, an ardent supporter of peace with France since 1797, saw the internal troubles as too pressing to allow any delay in seeking a peace.<sup>24</sup>

It should be noted that, despite Pitt and Grenville's absence, Addington's new government was hardly inexperienced or opposed by the outgoing group. Indeed, many of Addington's ministers had held minor office during Pitt's tenure.<sup>25</sup> However, the change in personnel was widely seen as indicating a major shift in Britain's responsiveness to peace proposals. This change was perhaps best personified by Lord Hawkesbury, the new Foreign Secretary. One of the least experienced men in the new government (that itself being something of a statement considering he had already served eight years in government office), Hawkesbury's desire to pursue peace with France was already known.<sup>26</sup> Within a week of taking up his ministry, Hawkesbury wrote to the French representative, Otto, openly stating that he wished to discuss peace terms. The French suggested an immediate general truce that Hawkesbury

immediately rejected due to Britain's favorable strong position in the colonies and on the oceans.<sup>27</sup> The issue in the opening weeks of the preliminary negotiations between Hawkesbury and Otto was uncertainty. It is important to note the timing of these exchanges and who knew what at the time the letters were written. Both sides knew that a French relief expedition had broken the blockade and was loose in the Mediterranean, that the Tsar was unlikely to retain power much longer (though he was still alive as far as they knew), and that Britain had a force in the Baltic opposing the Danes. Hawkesbury also knew that the Royal Navy had been encouraged to break up the Armed Neutrality and that an invasion of Egypt was due to begin at any time.<sup>28</sup> No one knew the final outcome of any of these actions. The negotiations began at a time when British counter-moves to French advantages were in the works but could easily end in disaster.

The initial negotiations from March and April of 1801 represented a pattern which would hold true for the rest of the year. From the initial overtures, Otto and Hawkesbury met and drew up a memorandum of initial positions between the two sides. The British vaguely agreed to return all their conquests while the French would evacuate Egypt. The French laid out a much more detailed plan in which all conquests would be returned save Egypt (to be held by France) and Franco-Dutch India, which would be retained by the British.<sup>29</sup> Hawkesbury, perhaps purposefully, waited several days for the arrival of news from Egypt and Denmark, and the subsequent strengthening of the British position, before going into detail regarding Britain's offers for territorial exchanges and the surrender of Egypt. Despite Britain's earlier vague assertion in support of the return of its conquests, Hawkesbury's list failed to mention the (fairly substantial) list of French, Dutch, and Spanish territory that Britain sought to retain.<sup>30</sup> Otto's response to this first concrete proposal, as would become the norm in these negotiations, can be best characterized as incomprehensible. Otto launched into a long list of minor and previously unmentioned grievances against the British, a list which included accusations of British involvement in assassination attempts against the First Consul, British aid to militant royalists within France, and attacks and slander directed at Bonaparte by elements of the British press. No substantive response was made to Hawkesbury's previous letter, save that Otto believed it best if further negotiation took place face to face.<sup>31</sup>

There is no record of these more private talks. Neither

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp. 49-50.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp. 32-39

Grainger, p. 24

<sup>24</sup> Addington to Pitt, 8 Oct. 1797, Chatam Papers, PRO 30/8/140

<sup>25</sup> John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: The Consuming Struggle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 528-536.

Their ability to cooperate is probably best illustrated by the situation which arose during the transition. After Pitt had announced his intention to resign, after Addington had been chosen to form a government and picked his ministers, and after all arrangements in Parliament had been made, but *before* the king could formally accept the resignation and set the wheels officially in motion to form a new government, George III fell ill and was unable to ratify any of these actions. For roughly a month the two cabinets functioned as a dual administration, sometimes meeting together, and generally managing to take all necessary action without serious delay or dispute.

<sup>26</sup> Earl of Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris First Earl of Malmesbury* (London: 1844), vol. IV, pp.52-53.

<sup>27</sup> British Library Addition Manuscript 38312, pp. 2-3, Otto to Hawkesbury, 2 April 1801.

BL Add Mss 38316, pp. 1-2, Hawkesbury to Otto, 2 April 1801.

<sup>28</sup> Grainger, pp. 31-33.

<sup>29</sup> BL Add Ms 38316, p.4, Memorandum by Hawkesbury, 12 April 1801.

<sup>30</sup> BL Add Ms 38316, pp. 2-3, Hawkesbury to Otto, 14 April 1801.

<sup>31</sup> BL Add Ms 38312, pp. 3-4, Otto to Hawkesbury, 16 April 1801.

Lord Malmesbury, a longtime, but now retired, diplomat who was often consulted by various ministers, nor Pitt, whom Hawkesbury often dined with and sought advice from, kept any known written record or commentary of the meetings between Hawkesbury and Otto, and no official notes were taken of the meetings themselves.<sup>32</sup> When these informal discussions ended six weeks later, no substantive progress had been made. The exchange of notes restarted in early June from roughly where they had left off, with Hawkesbury demanding an official response to Britain's terms from mid-April and a clear understanding by the French that Britain also expected to gain from the terms.<sup>33</sup> Over two weeks passed before Otto sent a reply, this during a time when Consular France had no meaningful diplomatic, military, or political actions underway, a time in which Bonaparte could have fairly easily devoted his energies to negotiations with Britain if he had so chosen.<sup>34</sup> The pattern of demand, response, reply based around trivialities, followed by a stoppage of negotiation, is one that would replay itself two or three more times during 1801, and also one that was perpetuated by both sides at various times throughout the process. That said, the primary delays were undoubtedly caused by the French: the two month-long halts to the negotiations in June and September were caused by the French and undertaken at the two peaks of Bonaparte's initial military buildup along the Channel Coast.<sup>35</sup> It would not be until September 30th that the Peace Preliminaries would be agreed upon by Otto and Hawkesbury.

Beyond the tedious length and tenor of the negotiations were the feelings engendered on both sides during the process. Addington and, especially, Hawkesbury became more and more obstinate regarding the terms as time went on. Each delay or focus on trivialities, such as Napoleon's offense at the British press, was followed by a hardening of the British position and most of the concessions on the table would be withdrawn and talks would reset.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, French self-contradictions and maneuvering was generally treated with mock seriousness before being completely disregarded and asking for a direct reply to previous British proposals.<sup>37</sup> Effectively, it was Hawkesbury repeating himself until Otto, Napoleon, and Talleyrand could not delay with equivocations or trivialities. As the final terms of the Peace Preliminaries reflected, nearly word for word, Hawkesbury's letter of 14 April, this tactic apparently proved quite effective.

The delays and vacillating also bore on others outside the government. Pitt and Grenville, opposed to peace from the start, were also sinking deeper and deeper into antipathy and distrust towards Bonaparte, the negotiations, and Addington's

ministry. Pitt remained cordial and publicly supportive of Addington for some time, much to Grenville's chagrin.<sup>38</sup> But Pitt and Grenville's attitudes meant that, should Addington's ministry fall, any negotiations or peace reached through those negotiations would fall with it.<sup>39</sup> Parliamentary politics meant that, at least in Addington's opinion, Pitt's approval was necessary for the continuance of Addington's ministry.<sup>40</sup> The end result of this politicking was that Addington needed the Peace for both fulfillment of national interests as well as the political capital which a popular peace would bring. However, staying in power long enough to get a peace ratified required the approval of a man who, at least publicly, was quite skeptical of peace talks. And should Addington's ministry fall, it would, by necessity, be replaced by some combination of Pitt and Grenville, the men who had refused to conduct any substantive negotiation and, in Grenville's case, denounced every subsequent attempt at peace.<sup>41</sup> The conditions under which all of these requisites could be fulfilled were exceedingly slim.

Furthermore, while the official ratification of the Peace Preliminaries in November 1801 ended all fighting and began the process of British demobilization, military action would continue to affect the tenor of the talks. This was especially true of the planned French expedition to retake Saint Domingue from the rebelling slaves who had seized the island. The French had made clear they wished to send such an expedition, but months of negotiation on the matter between France and Britain produced little in the way of results, beyond the British developing an understanding that the French would sail solely from Brest with a force which would not hugely impact the balance of power in the West Indies. Nonetheless, when the fleet surprisingly sailed in December 1801 it did so from five ports and had evolved into a French, Spanish, and Dutch force twice the size that the British had been led to expect. Only by sending every non-demobilized ship of the line left in home waters to trail the Bonapartist expedition were the British able to maintain something close to naval parity in the West Indies, a strategic necessity for Britain.

While France had never specifically lied about the size and nature of the expedition, they *had* known what British assumptions were and failed to correct them. It is doubtful that this was an oversight on the part of the French, and it is symptomatic of a serious flaw in British assumptions throughout the negotiations: that matters not directly negotiated between the two governments, such as the status of the Batavian Republic and Switzerland, the condition of Louisiana, or the naval balance of power, would simply revert to the *status quo ante*, a state of affairs France had no interest in seeing restored.

However, it is extremely important not to put the entirety of the blame upon France or Bonaparte, for Britain

32 Malmesbury, *Diaries*, IV, p. 57.

33 BL Add Ms 38316, pp. 4-6, Hawkesbury to Otto, 6 June 1801.

34 Grainger, pp. 38-41.

35 Ibid, pp. 45-46.

36 BL Add Mss 38316, pp. 4-6, Hawkesbury to Otto, 6 June 1801

37 BL Add Mss 38316, pp. 6-8, Hawkesbury to Otto, 25 June 1801

38 Jupp, *Grenville*, pp. 315-319.

39 Ehrman, *Pitt*, pp. 563-571.

40 Fedorak, *Addington*, pp. 44-45.

41 Grenville to Addington, 14 October 1801  
Fedorak, *Addington*, pp. 108-111.

also had little interest in seeing the *status quo* back in place. Ceylon, much of Dutch Guiana, Trinidad, and Tobago were all territories that even the Addington government refused to even talk about relinquishing.<sup>42</sup> Just as importantly, a consensus was forming within the Government over the importance of British retention of the Maltese islands, though this would take over a year to harden into a near-universal resolve.<sup>43</sup>

Malta was to prove the primary sticking point throughout the negotiation of both the Peace Preliminaries and the treaty itself. The Peace Preliminaries had effectively put the question of what to do with Malta on hold until the actual negotiations could settle the question, and the negotiators had decided to put the question off until last.<sup>44</sup> The negotiators for the treaty itself were Joseph Bonaparte, elder brother of Napoleon and future King of Naples, Sicily, and Spain for France and Lord Charles Cornwallis, a senior general during the American War and Governor-General of India until 1793 for Britain. Both were closely supervised by their respective governments. The delay over the Maltese question was due to the incredibly complicated legal status of Malta and the unfortunate state of the Order of the Knights of St. John, the *de jure* owners of the island. Bonaparte had occupied Malta at the outset of the expedition in which he conquered Egypt, but the French garrison manning the immense fortifications on the island had been under siege by a peasant revolt since September 1798. However, the besiegers lacked any means to breach or assault the fortresses, even after British and Neapolitan troops arrived to bolster the siege. The French surrendered in September 1800 and the British took up occupation of the island, much to the chagrin of the Maltese, who had not liked the Knights or the French who replaced them and had little interest in seeing the British be the next on a list of foreign occupiers.<sup>45</sup> The question of what to do with the island became one of security concerns for Britain and ambitions for France.

The strategic value of Malta had been made clear during Napoleon's Mediterranean campaign, when the French had used Malta as the jumping off point for a landing at Alexandria. With it having been agreed early on that Egypt was to be evacuated by all British troops, another such strike by France would be theoretically simple if a force could be dispatched from such a relatively close point as Malta.<sup>46</sup> The islands location was made even more important by Britain's agreement (again, early on in the negotiations) to relinquish Minorca and Port Mahon, the staging point for operations in the central and western Mediterranean since its recapture by Britain in 1798. Without Mahon or a similar base deeper in

the Mediterranean, any French force would find it fairly easy to slip out of Toulon, stop off in Malta for resupply and a harbor, and carry onward to Egypt, especially in the early stages of a renewed war before any blockade of Southern France could be reestablished from far-off Gibraltar.<sup>47</sup> Malta had to remain either British or neutral. However, no neutral party with the strength to fend off prospective French aggression could be found. The Knights of St. John had the strongest claim to the island but their membership was small and scattered across Europe and their income was virtually nonexistent following the seizure of their properties in France, Spain, and Flanders during the Revolutionary Wars.<sup>48</sup> The Neapolitans were similarly unacceptable, as the French armies and puppet-states in Northern Italy would find it all too easy to exert pressure on Naples and Sicily. The Russians showed some interest in acting as "guarantor" of the island's neutrality, and had a legal claim through the (widely challenged) election of Tsar Paul as Grandmaster of the Order of St. John following the Order's loss of the island to France. This hope, however, died with Tsar Paul, as Alexander showed no interest in taking up the mantle of Grandmaster.<sup>49</sup> In the end, Malta was returned to the Knights and security would be provided by a small Neapolitan garrison with political guarantees of neutrality provided by Prussia (which wanted nothing to do with the island), Russia (which was not a party to the Treaty of Amiens), France, and Britain. This segment of the final treaty was enormously complicated and caused a great deal of disquiet among Addington's Cabinet, including both himself and Hawkesbury.<sup>50</sup> The great importance of Malta, to French ambitions and to British security, meant that the two sides could not have realistically been expected to adhere to terms which effectively left Malta as a lightly defended open city against any potential aggressor.

While Malta was the most important sticking point (and, indeed, the only issue which nearly derailed the negotiations), it was not the only one. Land transfers, compensation for third parties which had gained or lost out in the wars, the status of Hanover and the House of Orange-Nassau, repatriation and payment of expenses for prisoners of war, British activity within France to weaken Bonaparte's regime, treatment of Bonaparte by the British press, the meddling of Grenville, the future of the various "independent" republics on the French periphery, the future of commerce between Britain and the Continent...all of these issues

<sup>42</sup> Hawkesbury to Otto, 18 June 1801.

<sup>43</sup> Grainger, pp. 156-159

Fedorak, *Addington*, p. 108.

<sup>44</sup> Ross, *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, pp.

524-525, Hawkesbury to Cornwallis, 14 November 1801.

Ross, pp. 530-532 Cornwallis to Hawkesbury, 20 November 1801.

<sup>45</sup> Grainger, pp.8-11.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 76-79 for details of the treaty.

<sup>47</sup> Ross, pp. 524-525 Hawkesbury to Cornwallis, 14 November 1801.

<sup>48</sup> Grainger, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Grainger, p. 11, pp. 38-40, p. 77.

Small wonder, that, as it was knights of the Order which had made up Tsar Paul's bodyguard...the same bodyguard which had unlocked the doors to the Tsar's chambers for the assassins.

<sup>50</sup> Grainger, 79-80

Cornwallis Papers, PRO 30/11/267, Hawkesbury to Cornwallis, 12 February 1802

required painstaking negotiation.<sup>51</sup> I list them above in no particular order to emphasize the number of issues, great and small and even insignificant, upon which the two sides had to compromise. The number of problems to be resolved, all hotly contested by one side or the other, was another key reason for the unstable nature of the Peace brought on by the Treaty of Amiens. Should Addington lose power, the Treaty would likely fail. Should Napoleon twitch wrong in the Mediterranean, the Treaty would likely fail. Should Naples, Prussia, and Russia prove reluctant to get involved with enforcing a treaty that they had no part in negotiating, the treaty would likely fail.

The final reason for the Treaty's instability and pre-determined failure was two-pronged: the actions taken by Britain and France during and after the negotiations of the treaty and that those actions were predicated on the anticipation, by both Britain and France, that the treaty was to be more of a truce than a truly permanent peace. Throughout 1802, Bonaparte initiated aggressive action throughout Europe. The aforementioned Treaty of Lunéville had ordained the convention of a Holy Roman Diet in Regensburg to detail the various annexations, consolidations, and territorial transfers which would occur within the Empire's sphere. With Austria prostrate, France dominated the conference and took large chunks of land along the western periphery of the Empire. To compensate those landholders who would be affected, and to buy off the larger Holy Roman powers whose votes would be needed to approve the treaty, Imperial (Austrian) lands and the small ecclesiastical holdings which dotted the Empire were annexed by the states nearest them. Germanic powers friendliest to France benefited the most from this. The Hapsburgs were the biggest losers.<sup>52</sup> The treaties of both Lunéville and Amiens had included provisions calling for the independence and set-borders of the Batavian (Dutch), Helvetic (Swiss), and Northern Italian Republics which had been established by the French during the Revolutionary Wars. Since those treaties had been ratified, the Italian Republics had been reorganized into one unit which had then elected Bonaparte as its President and French garrisons had remained in place throughout Holland (later participating in a *coup* to place Bonapartists in control of the Republic). Further, the French had repeatedly interfered with the Swiss cantons to influence the ascendant powers and keep them pliable.<sup>53</sup> This would end with the collapse of the Helvetic government and reoccupation by French troops and the drafting of another Franco-friendly (though less centralist) constitution. Regions not dealt with by the two treaties were no safer from the French: Etruria in Italy now had a Bonapartist king and a French garrison, Parma and Tuscany both remained occupied by the French Army, and Elba had been ceded to France. French aggrandizement at the *Diet* and abuse of the terms of the two treaties does not appear to have

been surprising to the British, but it was hardly the sign of a power finished with expansion, something which would have been almost as clear then as it is now.<sup>54</sup>

The British, for their part, seemed to never completely decide upon their course vis-à-vis the implementation of the Treaty. Throughout the September and October of 1802, as the Helvetic Republic was disintegrating into civil war, Lord Hawkesbury and Addington's ministry were engaged in negotiations with the anti-French oligarchs who had seized control of Berne and dissolved the Republic. On October 9, Hawkesbury informed a British middleman in Paris who was in contact with a representative of the anti-French party that the Cabinet had decided to take steps to ensuring Swiss independence from France.<sup>55</sup> Whether they (or the Swiss) realized that this was effectively an invitation to restart a European war is unclear. It seems obvious that aiding in the dissolution of a French puppet state and guaranteeing the independence of the state which supplants that puppet would lead to a war, especially when France had such clear security concerns in Switzerland (Russo-Austrian invasion forces had advanced through "neutral" Switzerland in 1798 and 1799). That Britain would have few peaceful means of aiding the independence of Switzerland should France pursue a more forceful approach should have been abundantly clear to anyone with access to a map of Europe. It is unclear what the British hoped to accomplish with this maneuver. In the event, it did not matter. Napoleon became aware of attempts by the Swiss oligarchs to contact Austria, Russian, and British representatives and ordered the immediate reoccupation and reorganization of Switzerland. Hawkesbury's note of support to the oligarchs reached Konstanz only for its courier to learn that the oligarchs had fled Switzerland and their representatives had submitted wholly to French terms.<sup>56</sup>

British actions regarding the repatriation of colonial holdings had also been less than forthright. Malta's turnover to the Knights had been plagued by delays beyond the control of the British or French, but the return of the Cape of Good Hope, Dutch Guiana, and French India had all been inexplicably delayed with both sides blaming the other for not following through on their part of the treaty.<sup>57</sup> Both Britain and France had simply been slow to implement the return, and there seems to be no evidence of bad faith by either party (except, perhaps, by Governor-General Wellesley in India who was reprimanded by Hobart for his lethargic implementation of the Treaty).<sup>58</sup> The suspension of all territorial returns to Bonapartist control became official Government policy on October 17, 1802 (barely a week after the Cabinet decided to intervene in Switzerland and four days before the middleman in Paris would report that the Swiss adventure had been derailed). Lord Hobart, Secretary

<sup>51</sup> *Parl. Hist.* vol. XXXVI, pp. 337-564

Grainger, pp. 60-72.

<sup>52</sup> Grainger, pp. 118-120

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-125

<sup>55</sup> Fedorak, *Addington*, pp. 112-114.

<sup>56</sup> Fedorak, *Addington*, pp. 116-120.

<sup>57</sup> Grainger, pp. 79-80

<sup>58</sup> Hobart to Wellesley, 5 May 1802.



of State for War and the Colonies, dispatched orders to India, the Cape, and Malta instructing them to retain control of areas due for evacuation as per the Treaty.<sup>59</sup> That this move came so soon after the British attempt to adopt a provocative stance in Switzerland is suspicious. However, that these steps should be taken in the wake of Bonaparte's twisting of the terms of both Amiens and Lunéville seems perfectly reasonable.

By all available accounts, Addington, as late as September 1802, fully intended to return Malta and see the terms of the treaty enforced.<sup>60</sup> This was not a desire fully shared by the rest of the Cabinet, and certainly not by the various personalities outside the Government.<sup>61</sup> If this is indeed the case, then it was the British response to perceived French provocation, rather than British bad faith, which most assuredly doomed the treaty. In any case it is clear that both sides had irreconcilable issues with the Treaty. In the end, which party caused the final break that doomed the Treaty of Amiens matters less than the fact that it was sentenced to failure from the start. Whether it was Napoleon's undeniable ambition, British desire to ensure security at any cost, historical animosity, domestic politics, petty grievances, or some combination of the above, the Treaty of Amiens simply could not have lasted significantly longer than it did without one side or the other completely abandoning their national interests. Just as importantly, the intensive and tenuous negotiations pretty clearly show that the Treaty itself could not have been constructed any other way than the way it was and still been acceptable to all parties. Despite all that, both sides needed the Treaty in order to best press those same national interests which consigned the Treaty to fail. Britain could not have readily supported further war with France, France could not stage an effective invasion of Britain, both economies were ailing and in need of a respite, and both nations were led by newly-minted political regimes still trying to solidify their legitimacy and political position. The Treaty of Amiens seems to be one of those rare occasions where longstanding circumstances conspired to dictate events in a specific and interdependent way which simply *could not* have been altered in any realistic fashion.

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<sup>59</sup> Hobart to Wellesley, 17 October 1802.

<sup>60</sup> Addington to Pitt, 18 September 1802.

<sup>61</sup> Whitworth to Hawkesbury, 3 February 1803.

FO323/4, Hawkesbury to Whitworth, 27 September 1802.



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