Forging liberal states: Palmerston’s foreign policy and the rise of a constitutional monarchy in Spain, 1833–7*

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Abstract

British and Spanish historiography have consolidated the idea that Palmerston’s foreign policy toward Spain during the first Carlist War is representative of a ‘liberal phase’ in his career as foreign secretary. However, a close study of Palmerston’s private correspondence with his minister in Madrid, George Villiers, reveals that this compromise with liberalism actually masked a brute struggle with France for political ascendancy in Spain. Historiography considers realpolitik to appear only in his late career (c.1848–65), but this study of Palmerston’s approach to the Spanish Question reveals that it was the moving force of his foreign policy from the very beginning.

The reign of Ferdinand VII (1808, 1814–33) saw the beginning of the end of the old order in Spain. Upon his return to Spain the king took a detour towards Valencia instead of proceeding directly to Madrid. There awaited his nobles and sixty-nine pro-absolutist deputies who had walked away from the liberal Cortes assembled in Cádiz. They presented him with the so-called Manifesto of the Persians. According to legend, ancient Persians were allowed to enjoy five days of total anarchy between the death of one king and the ascension of another. Horrified by the ensuing lawlessness, the Persians ended up welcoming the new despotic ruler for the sake of order. The pro-absolutist deputies made the case that since Ferdinand’s absence, Spain had been in chaos; they ‘begged’ their God-appointed monarch to restore order to his desperate subjects, as the Persian kings of yore would have done. The Manifesto of the Persians thus served as the basis for the Decree of Valencia (4 May 1814), which abolished the 1812 liberal constitution, dissolved the Cádiz Cortes and restored the ancien régime. However, a revolution in January 1820 forced Ferdinand to accept liberalism, but with the military intervention of Bourbon France in 1823 he managed to once again consolidate absolutism, although he never fully restored the ancien régime. 1 Between 1823 and 1833 France held the diplomatic upper hand in Spain, since it was to its intervention that Ferdinand owed his throne.

The king died on 29 September 1833, leaving a widow, Queen María Cristina, and two daughters. Through the issuing of a pragmatic sanction (1830), Ferdinand had managed to abolish the 1713 Spanish law of succession, which would have prevented his daughters from succeeding him. Suddenly, infant Princess Isabella became heiress, displacing the infante Don Carlos, the king’s brother, who had always been heir presumptive. Upon Ferdinand’s death Don Carlos rejected the pragmatic sanction

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1 E. Laparra, Fernando VII: un rey deseado y detestado (Barcelona, 2018).
and proclaimed himself king (Carlos V), receiving the support of pro-absolutist factions, partisans of a total restoration of the ancien régime. Carlos’s supporters hence became known as ‘Carlists’. Spain’s liberals, although divided between the Moderados (conservatives, supporters of a charter that provided for government between Crown and Cortes, and traditionally considered pro-French) and the Progresistas (liberal-inclined, supporters of popular sovereignty and traditionally considered pro-British), stood behind young Queen Isabella and her mother, now queen regent, for her cause was the only chance of ensuring a political transition in the country. Thus the first Carlist War (1833–40), as the conflict became known, pitted against each other not only two claimants to the throne but also two sociopolitical structures: absolutism and liberalism.

The so-called ‘Spanish’ or ‘Iberian Question’ (neighbouring Portugal had been experiencing a civil war of a very similar nature to that of the Carlist War since 1828) also appeared to mirror an ideological schism at the very centre of the Concert of Europe. Britain and France had been definitely consolidated as ‘liberal powers’: the July Revolution in France had deposed the last Bourbons and brought the liberal Orleans to power. In Britain the Tories fell after decades in government. The liberal Whigs came to power with Earl Grey as leader, pressing for electoral reform at home and for an affinity with constitutionalism abroad. Anglo-French co-operation over affairs in the Netherlands and the Levant between 1830 and 1832 seemed to reflect the emergence of an ideological entente between them. The Western liberal powers thus supported three-year-old Isabella and her mother, the queen regent. The Eastern autocracies (Russia, Prussia and Austria) alongside Piedmont-Sardinia and the Papal States, supported Don Carlos. The wars in Iberia appeared to constitute an ideological polarization of Europe.

However, the analysis of the Spanish Question presented in this article suggests that the fracture that the historiography normally portrays as existing between the autocratic East and the liberal West was actually within the same liberal West, the unity of which has been taken for granted because of an assumed ideological affinity between France and Britain. This is a study of the private correspondence of Viscount Palmerston, the British foreign secretary, and the British minister in Madrid, Sir George Villiers, between 1833 and 1837. Unlike official dispatches or parliamentary debates, these letters were not destined for public eyes; they thus constitute a genuine account of the private thoughts and fears of both men, allowing the historian to have a first-hand insight into their political strategy. Historians have used the Palmerston–Villiers correspondence before, but in doing so they have usually focused on military affairs. Villiers made a detailed account of the war, and his letters constitute a rich source for British official opinions on the day-to-day course of the conflict. Whether as backing for their arguments about the miserable state of the Isabelino troops or as evidence of palace and cabinet intrigues, historians have used Villiers’s correspondence almost as if it constituted the account of an impartial observer. Villiers’s account has been used merely as a source of information on Spanish affairs; historians have not subjected it to a penetrating critical analysis to deal with its powerful

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2 See C. Esdaile, Spain in the Liberal Age: From Constitution to Civil War, 1808–1939 (Oxford, 2000); and R. Carr, Spain, 1808–1939 (Oxford, 1966).
3 E. Hobsbawn, The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848 (London, 1977), p. 147.
4 See e.g., E. Christiansen, Origins of Military Power in Spain (1800–1854) (Oxford, 1967); and A. Schubert, Espartero, el PACificador (Barcelona, 2018).
5 Villiers was keen to signal the deficiencies and weakness of the Isabelino army and military plans (Schubert, Espartero, pp. 152–4).
strategic and diplomatic significance. Scholars who have written diplomatic histories of the 1830s using the Palmerston–Villiers correspondence have tended to focus only on the letters concerning the early development of the Carlist War (c.1833–4), where much of what we might call the ‘liberal discourse’ is found – thus facilitating arguments about Britain’s intervention being motivated by ideology. However, in the latter part of the correspondence (from late 1834 to late 1837), this ideological discourse melts away, revealing that the liberal Anglo-French entente that historians speak of during this period is nowhere to be found, and that in fact Palmerston’s Spanish policy was directed primarily against France.

This argument is presented in three sections. The first demystifies the Quadruple Treaty (1834), an alliance between constitutional powers that historiography presents as the zenith of Palmerston’s liberal diplomacy and of Anglo-French understanding. The second section focuses on Palmerston’s strategy to achieve predominance in Spain: implanting liberal institutions in order to create a British client state. A third section will conclude by arguing that his foreign policy in the 1830s was consistently based on unideological realpolitik, contrary to the historiographical orthodoxy that presents Palmerston as a doctrinaire of Whiggism in his early years and as more pragmatic in his later career. This question about Palmerston being a realpolitiker actually broadens the debate about the ‘primacy of foreign policy’, the realist-flavoured conception that domestic politics are subordinated to diplomacy. The Spanish Question sheds light on Palmerston that presents him as a realistic policymaker, aware of his own (and others’) limitations when trying to achieve the national interest, rather than as an hermetic realist, uninfluenced by the domestic political climate. His policy considered constraints, such as the need to reduce financial debt or the reliability of agents in the field; Palmerston did not yield to irresponsible idealism but pursued a policy that was consistent with the reality of the moment.

Historiography, both British and Spanish, has analysed Palmerston’s Spanish policy as an episode of the diplomatic struggle between the liberal West and the autocratic East. Since the early twentieth century scholars have tended to regard the Europe of the 1830s as being ideologically divided between ‘Eastern despotism … and Western parliamentarism’. With long-serving Tory minister Lord Palmerston having recently crossed the floor of the House and inviting everyone ‘to drink to the cause of Liberalism all over the world’, Britain’s Whig government (1830–4, 1835–41) is typically seen

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6 Isabel Brudiel, e.g., used the correspondence to provide a ‘foreign’ (Villiers’s) opinion of the disorganization of the Spanish liberals. See I. Brudiel, Isabel II: una biografía (1830–1904) (Barcelona, 2018), p. 44. Carlos Marichal dealt with Villiers’s mission in Madrid and his influence on Spanish politics, but left unanswered the question of how his political interference fitted into Palmerston’s European grand strategy. See C. Marichal, Spain, 1834–1844: a New Society (London, 1977).

7 C. Webster, The Foreign Policy of Palmerston 1830–1841 (2 vols., London, 1951), i; J. Ridley, Lord Palmerston (London, 1970); D. Brown, Palmerston (New Haven, Conn., 2011); R. Bullen, ‘The great powers and the Iberian Peninsula 1815–48’, in Europe’s Balance of Power 1815–1848, ed. A. Sked (London, 1973), pp. 54–79; M. T. Menchén, ‘La Cuádruple Alianza (1834). La Península en un Sistema occidental’, Cuadernos de la Escuela Diplomática, ii (1989), 31–51; and M. Rodríguez, Gran Bretaña y España. Diplomacia, guerra, revolución y comercio (1833–1839) (Madrid, 1991).

8 B. Simms and W. Mulligan, ‘Introduction’, in The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660–2000, ed. B. Simms and W. Mulligan (New York, 2010), pp. 1–15, at p. 1. See also B. Simms, The Impact of Napoleon: Prussian High Politics, Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Executive, 1797–1806 (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 2–18; and B. Simms, ‘The return of the primacy of foreign policy’, German History, xxi (2003), 275–91.

9 F. Artz, Reaction and Revolution 1814–1832 (New York, 1934), p. 289.

10 Lord Palmerston to Laurence Sullivan, 1 Aug. 1830, in Mabell, Countess of Airlie, Lady Palmerston and Her Times (2 vols., London, 1922), i. 173.
as the epitome of this division. This interpretation presents ideological similarity as tantamount to diplomatic affinity, thus averting any possibility of serious confrontation between powers within the same bloc. Historians take the 1834 Quadruple Treaty between Britain, France, Portugal and Spain as the cohesive and binding element of ‘liberal Europe’ – as the reaction to the renewed compromise between the autocracies signed at the Münchengrätz conference (October 1833).\footnote{Webster, Foreign Policy, i. 349–50, 397; Ridley, Palmerston, pp. 160–2; Brown, Palmerston, pp. 181–2; Bullen, ‘The great powers and the Iberian Peninsula’, p. 56; Menchén, ‘Cuádruple’, pp. 31–7; and Rodríguez, Gran Bretaña y España, pp. 35–42.} In a Cold War–divided Europe this conception of the Quadruple as a ‘liberal alliance’ (that is, an Anglo–French pact based on liberal ideology directed against the encroachment of the autocracies) obscured historical subtleties and narrowed the scope of analysis of Palmerston’s foreign policy. A notable exception is the work of Mark Lawrence. In his recent histories of Spain’s civil wars of the 1830s and 1930s, Lawrence has argued that the Carlist War never represented an international struggle among ideological blocs.\footnote{M. Lawrence, The Spanish Civil Wars: a Comparative History of the First Carlist War and the Conflict of the 1930s (London, 2017); and M. Lawrence, Spain’s First Carlist War, 1833–1840 (New York, 2014).} He has also provided useful insight into the effects of foreign intervention in Spain. Particularly interesting is his argument about France’s abortive intervention in northern Spain in 1834 being one of the main causes of the rapid expansion of radicalism in late 1834–5. The lack of French support crippled Francisco Martínez de la Rosa’s moderate government (1834) and provoked a deep crisis within the regency.\footnote{Lawrence, Spain’s First Carlist War, pp. 85–8. For another interesting account of the intersection between European diplomacy and the Carlist War, see R. Bullen, ‘France and the problem of intervention in Spain’, Historical Journal, xx (1977), 363–93.} Lawrence’s compelling integration of the politics and calculations of the European powers into an otherwise‘national’ account of the Carlist War differentiates his account from traditional national histories of Carlism, both Spanish and British, which have not dealt with the foreign policy factor extensively.\footnote{Examples of national histories that largely ignore the importance of the foreign factor include, on the British side, Esdaile, Spain in the Liberal Age, pp. 72–87, and Carr, Spain, 1808–1936, pp. 155–69; and on the Spanish side, Brudiel, Isabel II, pp. 25–75, and M. Martorell and S. Juliá, Manual de historia política y social de España (1808–2011) (Barcelona, 2017), pp. 54–61. José Álvarez Junco, perhaps Spain’s leading scholar of the nineteenth century, presented Carlism and the Carlist War as a typical examples of post-Vienna violent reconfiguration of power – analogous to the Portuguese dynastic conflict (1826–33) or the Orleanist revolution in France. However, he still focused largely on an intellectual ‘national’ history of the emergence of liberalism, considerably underplaying the importance of international affairs other than Napoleon and his empire. See J. Álvarez Junco, Mater Dolorosa: La idea de España en el siglo XIX (Barcelona, 2016), pp. 357–66.} However, focusing primarily on the military involvement of Britain and other powers in the war, Lawrence leaves many of the broader questions concerning the subtleties of British diplomacy and grand strategy unanswered.

The interpretation of a polarized Europe thus remains dominant in both British and Spanish historiography, but it is certainly the latter that takes ideological polarization as the immutable background of international relations. Teresa Menchén, the leading Spanish historian on the topic,\footnote{Menchén is the only Spanish historian to have written a paper focusing entirely on the Quadruple.} acknowledges the existence of an Anglo–French entente cordiale – one that began with the July Revolution and reached its zenith with the 1834 treaty. Her interpretation is endorsed by other Spanish historians of the Carlist Wars, such as Manuel Rodríguez.\footnote{Rodríguez takes British intervention in Spain during the 1830s as part of a movement to promote liberalism, ignoring power realities such as the division within the ‘Western camp’. See M. Rodríguez, ‘La diplomacia británica y el triunfo del régimen liberal en España (1833–1839)’, Cuadernos de la Escuela Diplomática, ii (1989), 69–85, at pp. 70–1; and Rodríguez, Gran Bretaña y España, pp. 35–42.} The ‘spirit of the Quadruple’ endured, according to Menchén...
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and Rodríguez, until 1846/7, thus confirming a seventeen-year Anglo–French entente—a period basically amounting to the whole tenure of the July Monarchy (further reinforcing the idea that the alliance was sustained by the similarity between regimes). The arguments of these Spanish scholars are based on the assumption that Münchengrätz and the Quadruple represent an irreconcilable ideological division between an Eastern Holy Alliance and a Western liberal entente. But British historiography also endorses this interpretation, which fallaciously makes correlation equal causation: by implying that the Quadruple was a reaction to Münchengrätz, scholars have tried to present the Quadruple as the *ens necessarium* that would allow the existence of an ideologically polarized Europe (the *ens contingens*). It is dangerous to correlate these events because they were about very different things. The Quadruple Alliance—whether a ‘liberal’ alliance or not—was focused on the Iberian Peninsula. Münchengrätz was an Austro-Russian agreement to support Turkey; it was not a full renovation of the Holy Alliance nor a call to defend legitimist pretenders in Western Europe, as scholars, from Menchén to Charles Webster, have claimed. The idea that Austria gave Russia a blank cheque in the East in exchange for support for movements like Carlism does ‘less than justice to Metternich’s steadiness of purpose’—as G. H. Bolsover recognized many years ago. (The eagerness to meet with the Russians in Münchengrätz was actually rooted in Vienna’s genuine desire to prevent a Russo–French alliance or Russian expansion in South–East Europe.)

The case of Spanish historiography is different from British historiography in the sense that, although both histories correlate Münchengrätz and the Quadruple, Spanish scholars see the Quadruple as undeniable proof that the great powers (especially Britain and France) were drawn to each other by ideological affinity and not by national interests. It is through this lens that Spanish historians then view Palmerston’s Spanish policy. However, as the following will reveal, France and Britain were far from being allies when it came to Spain, regardless of their ideology. Not even the autocracies constituted a cohesive ideological bloc. This is something Alan Palmer warned against when he argued that the irreconcilable division between the liberal West and the autocratic East was ‘an oversimplification which some later writers have taken at face value’. The dichotomic division into ideological camps narrows the scope of interpretation of the different foreign policy objectives of the great powers.

There are several reasons that may have led Spanish historians to make these assumptions. First, it is worth considering the context in which they were writing. The work of Menchén and Rodríguez coincides chronologically with Spain’s transition

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17 Menchén, ‘Cuádruple’, pp. 31–7; and Rodríguez, _Gan Bretaña y España_, pp. 39–40.
18 Menchén, ‘Cuádruple’, p. 35.
19 See e.g., Ridley, _Lord Palmerston_, p. 162; Webster, _Foreign Policy_, i. 348–50; and D. Southgate, _The Most English Minister: the Policies and Politics of Palmerston_ (London, 1966), p. 76.
20 _Documents of Modern History: the Great Powers and the Near East 1774–1923_, ed. M. S. Anderson (London, 1970), p. 44.
21 Menchén, ‘Cuádruple’, p. 36; Webster, _Foreign Policy_, i. 349–51; and Artz, _Reaction and Revolution_, pp. 289–90.
22 G. H. Bolsover, ‘Palmerston, Metternich and the Eastern Question, 1834’, _English Historical Review_, li (1936), 237–56, at p. 240.
23 M. Sedivy, ‘From Adrianople to Münchengrätz: Metternich, Russia, and the Eastern Question, 1829–33’, _International History Review_, xxxii (2011), 205–33, at p. 207; and V. Puryear, _England, Russia and the Straits Question, 1844–1856_ (Hamden, Conn., 1965), pp. 22–3.
24 Menchén, ‘Cuádruple’, p. 34.
25 That the autocracies were cautious in their proceedings was a harsh truth the Carlists in Spain came to realize. Such was the coolness of Russia that by 1839 the Carlists acknowledged the futility of sustaining a diplomatic legation in St. Petersburg and recalled their last ambassador. For a detailed account of the Carlist mission to Russia, see J. Ramón de Urquijo, ‘El carlismo y Rusia’, _Hispania_, xlvi (1988), 599–623.
26 A. Palmer, _The Chancelleries of Europe: Hidden Diplomacy (1815–1914)_ (London, 2009), p. 87.
to democracy (1975–8) and full embracing of N.A.T.O. (1982) and the European Community (1986). The Cold War paradigm may well have influenced their writing and the imagery they wanted to transmit. The idea of Spain forming part of a Western liberal alliance that fought Eastern despotism perfectly fits with the discourse of a country that had abandoned authoritarianism (just like in 1833) and had embraced a coalition of freedom against the forces of Communist tyranny. The argument that an idealist liberal Britain supported the Isabelinos defended by Menchén and Rodríguez can also be seen as a rejection of previous interpretations of British foreign policy towards Spain. Historians writing during the Francoist dictatorship (1939–75) had resorted to a nationalist Spanish myth of ‘perfidious Albion’, considering British actions towards Spain in the Carlist War to be motivated by mere self-interest. Writing in 1969, for example, Suárez Verdaguer referred to Spain being ‘internationally insignificant after Trafalgar’ and presented the emergence of liberalism in 1833–4 as a direct consequence of British and French self-interested intervention.27 Other historians, especially those associated with Franco’s National Movement, such as Juan José Peña Ibáñez or Román Oyarzun, argued that Carlism was a movement of reaction and liberation against the noxious residue of the French 1808 invasion (in other words, liberalism). These accounts took liberalism as the enemy and the powers supporting it (Britain and France) as ill-intentioned foreigners – something that was consistent with the Francoist propaganda myth of the ‘enemy of the nation abroad’ or the ‘liberal-masonic conspiracy’.28 The debate continued into the 1980s, with neo–traditionalist historians, such as Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza, still arguing that Carlism had been a national upheaval against the foreign interference brought by the Isabelino Trojan horse.29 While Menchén’s and Rodríguez’s versions are not directly critical of the previous accounts, their emphasis on a British liberal internationalist mission illustrates a discernible tendency towards a more idealist reading of British intervention in Spain, opposed to previous more nationalistic histories.

The second and more important reason for the assumption of the existence of an ideologically polarized Europe in the 1830s is related to the utilization of primary sources – and it is one that applies to British historians too. There is a lack of academic work focused on the Quadruple itself; this alliance is treated as little more than an exemplary episode of diplomatic success in the scholarship dealing with Palmerston’s foreign policy. Thus historians who analyse the treaty always refer to the same sources. These include widely quoted passages from Palmerston’s correspondence with his brother, Sir William Temple; from Palmerston’s speeches in Parliament; and from the Palmerston–Villiers correspondence at the moment the Quadruple Treaty was negotiated and signed – that is to say, March/April 1834. Both Spanish and British historians (from Menchén to prominent Palmerston biographers like David Brown and Jasper Ridley) have based their interpretations of the Quadruple Alliance on what Palmerston told his brother in

27 F. Suárez Verdaguer, ‘La intervención extranjera en los comienzos del régimen liberal español’, Revista de Estudios Políticos, xiii–xiv (1944), 409–71, at p. 412.

28 Examples of traditionalist histories include J. Casariego, ‘Prólogo’, in F. de Paula Madrazo, Historia militar y política de Zumalacárregui (Valladolid, 1941), pp. vi–vii; R. Oyarzun, Historia del carlismo (Madrid, 1969); and J. J. Peña Ibáñez, Las guerras carlistas. Antecedente del alzamiento nacional de 1936 (San Sebastián, 1940).

29 González Bullón wrote in 1986 about legitimism and rejection of foreign involvement being the main elements of Carlism. He argued that the Carlist War had been a ‘popular uprising’ against the Isabelinos – puppets of foreign powers. See A. Bullón de Mendoza, ‘La intervención extranjera en la primera guerra carlista (notas para el estudio de un tema olvidado)’, Aportes, vi (1987), 38–65. For a further criticism of traditionalist and neo–traditionalist Spanish historiography regarding Carlism, see J. R. Urquijo, ‘Historiografía sobre la Primera Guerra Carlista’, Bulletin d’Histoire Contemporaine de l’Espagne, xvii–xviii (1993), 412–44.
April 1834. Great significance has also been placed on Palmerston’s famous quote about the ‘Western confederacy of Nations’ standing up to Metternich and Nicholas I. For example, Fabrice Bensimon argues that the liberal alliance was not a ‘bed of roses’ but still sees the Quadruple Alliance as the basis of a strategy against the ‘despotic northern courts’ rather than against France itself. Essentially, when dealing with Palmerston’s approach to the Spanish Question, historians have overplayed the significance of Palmerston’s discourse and taken a very narrow approach, concentrating on the fixed image of 1834; they have given very little attention to the later development of relations between Britain, Spain and France.

Analysing the Palmerston–Villiers private correspondence as a whole (from 1834 to 1838) – and not just the year (more specifically, the months) in which the major treaty of the period was signed – is crucial, for it is in the late stages of the correspondence that the liberal discourse that has misled many scholars fades away and reveals the true intentions of Palmerston. These were essentially about containing France, Britain’s main enemy, by binding its hands with a treaty, and transforming Spain into a British client through the promotion of liberal institutions. Palmerston was not supporting constitutionalism because of his Whig convictions but because it was Britain’s strategy to ensure ascendancy over Spain. The analysis of the Spanish Question presented in this article demonstrates that Palmerston was an unideological realpolitiker even at the beginning of his career as foreign secretary and not only in the post-1848 period, as is usually argued.

The Quadruple Treaty (22 April 1834) was a structural regulation of the armed intervention of the Western powers against Dom Miguel (the Portuguese legitimist pretender) and his ally Don Carlos in Portugal. However, the treaty never actually served that purpose. The Quadruple was a diplomatic manoeuvre with which Britain and France sought to destroy the other’s influence in the Iberian Peninsula (in the event, Britain came out on top). It was disguised in the language of liberalism to content British public opinion and send a word of warning to the autocratic powers abroad. The Quadruple is thus interesting for the historian of foreign policy because it was a subtle strategy aimed at overthrowing France’s long-lasting ascendancy in Madrid.
This is something that passes unnoticed to most scholars because when analysing the Quadruple Treaty, they tend to focus only on the year of the signature (1834) and not on the whole period in which it was in place (1834–8). Palmerston’s 1834 letters (with his brother William and with Villiers) are full of references to what could be considered a ‘liberal alliance’. It is a grave error in Palmerstonian historiography to consider that his speeches and proclamations are consistent with his policy. Words and actions seldom correlate when it comes to Palmerston: the factual difference between what he claimed and the policy he conducted in private is profound. The interpretation of Palmerston as the promotor of European liberalism – simply because of what he said in the Commons or because of what he told his brother about his moral duty to form a liberal alliance⁴⁰ – obscures the power calculations behind this apparently liberal project. These are revealed by Palmerston’s and Villiers’s later correspondence and by the memoirs and correspondence of the prince Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, the French representative; an idealistic desire to confront the autocracies is nowhere to be found in the Quadruple Alliance. This ‘realist light’ unveils a deep fracture within the Western liberal camp, contrary to argument that the Quadruple Alliance was a ‘liberal manifesto’⁴⁷ that represented the ideological affinity between the Whig government and Orleanist France.⁴⁸ The reasons that led Britain and France to the negotiating table had little do with a shared repulsion for absolutism, but rather with a genuine aspiration to contain each other’s influence in Spain.

Britain’s objective was to achieve ‘fresh power and new rights in the Peninsula’.⁴⁹ These would be attained by a reversal of the balance of power that since 1823, when France sent the Hundred Thousand Sons of St. Louis to restore absolutism, had placed Spain under France’s influence.⁵⁰ Prior to this point, Britain had experienced something close to powerlessness in Madrid: it could not get Spain to tackle the illegal Cuban slave trade, a major objective of British foreign policy;⁵¹ nor could it prevent Ferdinand VII from aiding the pro-absolutist party in the Portuguese civil war (1828–33) or implicitly supporting France’s invasion of Algiers (1830).⁵² French ascendancy over the Peninsula forced Britain into a change of strategy:⁵³ George Canning, foreign secretary (1822–7), consciously

⁴⁶ Manuel Rodríguez, e.g., bases his analysis of the character of Palmerston on parliamentary debates and speeches (some of which go back to 1828, when he was not in power). He does not consider the possibility, defended by historians such as Jonathan Parry or Paul Schroeder, that this was propaganda to achieve political benefit at home. See M. Rodríguez ‘La intervención británica en España durante el gobierno progresista de Mendizábal’, Hispania, xxxv (1975), 343–90, at pp. 346–8; J. Parry, The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830–1886 (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 150–2; and P. Schroeder, The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848 (Oxford, 1996), p. 729.

⁴⁷ L. Kelly, Talleyrand in London: the Master Diplomat’s Last Mission (London, 2017), p. 125.

⁴⁸ See Webster, Foreign Policy, i. 79–82; Chambers, The People’s Darling, p. 161; and M. Chamberlain, Lord Palmerston (Cardiff, 1987), p. 51.

⁴⁹ Villiers to Palmerston, 2 June 1834, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 148.

⁵⁰ Bullen, ‘The great powers and the Iberian Peninsula’, pp. 64–5.

⁵¹ See D. Murray, Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain, and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 86–95; and K. Hamilton and F. Shaikh, ‘Introduction’, in Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807–1875, ed. K. Hamilton and P. Salmon (Brighton, 2009), pp. 1–21.

⁵² For Spain’s support of the Migueists during the Portuguese civil war, see B. Collins, ‘The limits of British power: intervention in Portugal, 1820–30’, International History Review, xxxv (2013), 744–65; Bullen, ‘The great powers and the Iberian Peninsula’, pp. 54–64; and R. Bullen, ‘England, Spain and the Portuguese Question in 1833’, European Studies Review, iv (1974), 1–22. For Ferdinand’s support of France’s expedition to Algiers, see J. Vilar, ‘Relaciones comerciales y diplomáticas hispano-argelinas en las postrimerías de la Argelia otomana (1814–1830)’, Hispania, xxxvi (1976), 623–38, at pp. 637–38.

⁵³ George Canning to the duke of Wellington, 8 Nov. 1822, in Arthur, 2nd Duke of Wellington, Despatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur, Duke of Wellington (3 vols., London, 1867), i. 511; and Charles Stuart to Canning, 24 Oct. 1822, in Wellington, Despatches, i. 411.
pivoted towards Spanish America, hoping to obtain overseas the influence that France deprived Britain of in continental Europe. The shift towards the Americas was the recognition of a defeat: the British government ensured a sphere of influence for itself, knowing that it would have to accept the diplomatic preponderance of France in Europe; not supporting the Bourbons, now restored to their full powers, would have forsaken the tiniest possibility of influencing Spanish politics. Thus, when in 1833 the queen sided with the liberals to oppose the absolutist pretender, Britain saw the perfect opportunity to patronize a new regime in Spain and reverse the 1823 status quo. Considering the advance of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1832–3, the Spanish Question also became pivotal for British interests in the Western Mediterranean. However, for Palmerston it was not sufficient to suppress an absolutist movement that could give European autocrats an ally in Southern Europe; it was imperative also to prevent France (especially since the invasion of Algiers) from exploiting the emergence of a new regime – and raging civil war – to increase its power in Spain as it had done in 1823 at Britain's expense.

Since 1830 the views of Louis-Philippe, king of the French (1830–48), regarding an alliance with Britain had changed significantly: France now sought to reverse its isolation in Europe through a rapprochement with the autocracies, and especially with Austria. (This was also motivated by Louis-Philippe's own 'social' aspirations – 'he had no wish to remain a parvenu'.) The aged Talleyrand, now ambassador in London, had been trying to approach Britain since late 1833, ideally with the offer of a defensive alliance, precisely to present the autocracies with the prospect of an Anglo-French alliance so that they would become closer to France. Talleyrand actually represented a line of thought in the French establishment that advocated for an alliance with Austria in order not to depend on Britain. In other words: the path to Vienna went through London. French rapprochement with Britain (culminating in the Quadruple) was not motivated by fear of a renewed Holy Alliance – even though, for example, Russia saw its pacts with Austria as a weapon against France. Talleyrand actually thought that Münchengrätz was only an act 'to cover the defeat of [the autocracies’] policy’ regarding the Dutch-Belgian Question. They were, he thought, simply licking their wounds. France's desire to get closer to Britain in order to provoke the autocracies was quite a realist move; it did not stem from any ideologically based affinity with Britain or rejection of the Eastern

44 Canning's memorandum to Cabinet, 30 Nov. 1824, in Wellington, Despatches, ii. 358.
45 G. Butrón, ‘La quimera del mezzo termine. La contribución franco-británica a la caída del liberalismo peninsular’, Ayer, xli (2001), 63–84, at p. 81.
46 R. Bullen, ‘Party politics and foreign policy: Whigs, Tories and Iberian affairs 1830–1836’, Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, li (1978), 37–59, at p. 45; M. S. Anderson, The Eastern Question 1774–1923 (London, 1972), pp. 79–86; and C. J. Bartlett, Great Britain and Sea Power 1815–1853 (Oxford, 1961), pp. 88–95.
47 J. Swain, The Struggle for the Control of the Mediterranean Prior to 1848: a Study in Anglo-French Relations (Boston, Mass., 1933), p. 96.
48 H. A. C. Collingham and R. S. Alexander, The July Monarchy: a Political History of France 1830–1848 (London, 1988), p. 197. To a large extent, French foreign policy in the period – and the Spanish Question is a reflection of this – was driven by Louis-Philippe’s social climbing ambitions. Guy Antonetti recalls an anecdote of the marquis of Sémounville, who accompanied Louis-Philippe’s sons in their European tour to find a wife. In Vienna the two princes were not recognized socially by the Imperial Court. ‘Everybody has shaken their hand’, said Sémounville, ‘but nobody is close to them’. This caused severe distress to Louis-Philippe, who was obsessed with marrying his children into a grand dynasty to consolidate his own. See G. Antonetti, Louis-Philippe (Paris, 2002), p. 757.
49 Bullen, ‘The problem of intervention’, p. 364.
50 R. Bullen, ‘France and Europe, 1815–1848: the problem of defeat and recovery’, in Sked, Balance of Power, pp. 122–45, at p. 137.
51 W. B. Lincoln, Nicholas I, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russians (DeKalb, Ill., 1989), p. 198.
52 Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, ed. Duc de Broglie, trans. A. Hall (5 vols., London, 1892), v. 186.
powers. And yet this course of policy put France into a delicate position, especially after the beginning of the war between liberals and absolutists in Spain.

In order not to alienate the autocracies, France could not appear as a guarantor of the liberties in the Iberian Peninsula against the absolutist pretenders. However, it could neither support Dom Miguel and Don Carlos or seem detached from Iberia because this would have meant giving Britain carte blanche over the Peninsula. An Anglo–French agreement over the Iberian Question was crucial for France because it was its only way to safeguard the 1823 status quo that tacitly recognized Spain as France’s sphere of influence and Portugal as Britain’s. Palmerston, however, rejected any form of defensive alliance. He did not even envisage the Quadruple Treaty as a four-power pact. His original plan had actually been a Triple Alliance between Britain, Spain and Portugal – one to which France could be attached as a supportive power. France considered this proposal insulting because it gave them a second-rate power rank. By April 1834 Talleyrand was desperate to sign an agreement: if France continued its equidistant diplomacy (neither liberal nor conservative), Britain would have been left unchecked in both Portugal and Spain, for the Spanish government would have interpreted France’s rejection of the treaty as a detachment from ‘an agreement by means of which it might be possible to accomplish the pacification of the Peninsula’. Therefore, when Talleyrand managed to fully include France in the treaty, he presented it as a great triumph.

The reasons for Palmerston’s change of mind (from a Triple to a Quadruple) will be dealt with shortly, but it is first necessary to analyse how the claim that the Quadruple was a British victory can be sustained if Talleyrand presented it as a definitive French victory. It is important to interpret the account that Talleyrand sent back to Paris. Although the treaty evidently curtailed French influence, Talleyrand argued that the proximity to Britain would ‘make noise in Europe’: not enough to alienate the autocracies against France but sufficient to make them ‘work more energetically to separate us from England, and consequently be more friendly to us’. Talleyrand believed, and so he told the count of Rigny, his foreign minister, that the treaty fulfilled France’s main objectives: the prevention of the decline of its influence in Madrid and the assurance of the inviolability of Spanish territory. Talleyrand’s attitude and arguments could indeed be interpreted as the ambassador excusing himself in front of his government for not having been able to obtain a better deal. Indeed these power calculations were just speculations and by the 22 April 1834 the only reality was that French intervention was regulated while British was more arbitrary. Talleyrand could well have been exaggerating or lying about the benefits of the treaty. However, there is no reason to believe this. Talleyrand turned eighty on February 1834; he knew the London embassy would be his last post. He had even thought about resigning: ‘I felt I … was no longer necessary’, he wrote in September 1833, despite not having accomplished the Anglo–French defence treaty he had initially

53 Prince de Talleyrand to the count of Rigny, 13 Apr. 1834, in Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, v. 242.
54 Bullen, ‘The problem of intervention’, p. 370.
55 Palmerston to Villiers, 10 Apr. 1834, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 127.
56 Talleyrand to Rigny, 13 Apr. 1834, in Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, v. 240.
57 Talleyrand to Rigny, 13 Apr. 1834, in Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, v. 242.
58 Under Article IV of the treaty, French intervention was subject to the agreement of the other signatory powers. Under Article III, however, Britain was free to send unilateral naval support. For the full text of the treaty, see D. Gibler, International Military Alliances, 1648–2000 (Washington, D.C., 2004), p. 135.
59 Talleyrand to Rigny, 23 Apr. 1834, in Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, v. 256.
60 Talleyrand to Rigny, 23 Apr. 1834, in Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, v. 257.
61 W. M. Corin, Intervention and non-intervention: the Whig dilemma over foreign policy, 1830–1834 (unpublished Durham University Ph.D. thesis, 1975), p. 181.
desired. ‘My great age, my infirmities and the condition of my personal affairs … made me think that it was time to retire’. 62 This was a man who knew his time was over: there was no personal ambition behind his considerations, for there was no political credit at stake – at least not enough to change the significance of the name ‘Talleyrand’. The power calculations were not adulterated with any desire for further recognition: Talleyrand genuinely believed that the treaty had given France more space to manoeuvre with the autocracies. Interpretations of Talleyrand’s role in the drafting of the Quadruple fail to grasp this very realpolitik move. Linda Kelly presents it merely as a question of honour, which Talleyrand successfully safeguarded by managing France’s full inclusion in the treaty. 63 Alan Sked sees the Quadruple as lacking real significance and thus does not provide a thorough analysis of the negotiations or the power motivations that led to its conclusion. 64 But although the Quadruple ended up being an empty treaty, the power calculations that led Talleyrand to sign it cannot be ignored, and this is because they provide a fundamental insight into the main premise of Orleanist foreign policy: balancing the alliance with Britain with the desire to approach the autocracies. Palmerston knew this, hence why he never trusted the French as reliable partners. 65 Louis-Philippe’s equidistant policy was a determining factor in bringing about Palmerston’s anti-French Spanish policy.

Talleyrand presented the Quadruple as a victory, but it was Britain who gained the upper hand. Palmerston’s decision to include France in the treaty was consistent with his strategy of keeping it close to keep it in check. 66 Palmerston initially played by the rules of the traditional balance of power to keep France at bay: he emphasized that the Quadruple Alliance dealt specifically with Portuguese affairs and that therefore France (whose sphere of influence was Spain) had no reason to be fully included. ‘It is solely a question of an armed intervention in the affairs of Portugal, and we have precedents for this point’, Palmerston reminded Talleyrand. 67 Spain was included in the equation only because Don Carlos had taken refuge in Portugal alongside the Miguelists Britain sought to defeat. In a memorandum of early April 1834 the marquis of Miraflores, Spanish minister in London (1834), actually encouraged Palmerston to intervene in Portugal because ‘it was vital for the Spanish government’ to eject Don Carlos from Portuguese soil. 68 Palmerston was overplaying the Portuguese factor of the alliance to keep France out of Iberia. ‘Portugalizing’ Spain, as a way of making Spanish affairs a matter only of British concern, remained a goal of British policy throughout the period. 69

It could be argued nonetheless (this is what Talleyrand told Rigny) that the Quadruple also neutralized Britain’s free hand in Iberia. But this was no longer important for Palmerston, since once France was included, the Quadruple was amortized as an instrument of political control over Spain. Palmerston was not willing to share power with the French (the strategy he implemented to ensure British control of Spain will be analysed in the third section of this article). Even though the treaty was ‘empty’, in the long run it prevented unilateral French intervention in Spain, which would have

62 Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, v. 180.
63 Kelly, Talleyrand in London, pp. 118–28.
64 A. Sked, ‘Talleyrand and England, 1792–1838: a reinterpretation’, Diplomacy & Statecraft, xvii (2006), 647–64, at p. 659.
65 Villiers to Palmerston, 21 May 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 431.
66 Bullen, ‘France and Europe’, p. 137.
67 Palmerston to Talleyrand, 19 Apr. 1834, in Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand, v. 253 (my italics).
68 Marquis of Miraflores to Palmerston, 9 Apr. 1834, in Marqués de Miraflores, Memorias para escribir la historia contemporánea de los siete primeros años del reinado de Isabel II (Madrid, 1843), p. 43 (my translation).
69 Villiers to Palmerston, 30 Dec. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 578.
turned back the clock to 1808, when the Napoleonic invasion had triggered the brutal Peninsular War. It also halted France’s approximation to the autocracies, for it now appeared as a liberal power committed with the expulsion of the absolutist pretenders. Not surprisingly, Louis-Philippe tried to terminate María Cristina’s regency, by getting the French ambassador to persuade her to defect from the cause and flee the country, in order to free himself from treaty obligations. Even Talleyrand ended up thinking that it was ‘une alliance Palmerston’ rather than ‘une alliance anglaise’.

The Quadruple’s evolution in the late stages of the war reveals that it was not the ‘diplomatic expression of [Palmerston’s] firmly held Whiggish-liberal faith’, as David Brown argued. This is not how the foreign secretary viewed the treaty. In a private letter to Villiers, dated 22 September 1836, Palmerston argued that the Quadruple, even dead, ‘is still a restrain [sic] upon the French government and prevents them from taking openly part with Don Carlos’. This thought was corroborated a year later: ‘It is a lucky thing that we tied up the hands of France by the Quadruple Treaty; if she had been free she would have done still more mischief’. These letters reveal Palmerston’s consistent line of thought with regard to the true significance of the treaty and the enmity with France. The Quadruple was part of Palmerston’s strategy to prevent France from keeping Spain on its knees and dependent on it, ‘on the same principle that Russia wishes to keep Turkey barbarous and powerless’ (a direct correlation with Russia’s aggressive foreign policy). And he had reason to believe this was Louis-Philippe’s grand design: France had not only been making the Pyrenees a safe haven for the Carlist arms trade, but had also contributed to the proliferation of chaos in Spain, supporting Carlism and secessionism in Catalonia, and encouraging the Basque provinces to declare independence and place themselves under French protection. By September 1835, when the Carlists gained an upper hand as the Isabelino side swelled into revolution, Louis-Philippe even thought of recognizing Don Carlos as king. The autocracies, assembled at Toeplitz, sent envoys to Paris to persuade him of this, and pressured the pretender (who they financed) to moderate his regime in order to make it more attractive to the French. The autocracies guaranteed Louis-Philippe that the restored Carlist regime would ‘not disturb the tranquillity of France nor the stability of the government that rules her’. (Part of Louis-Philippe’s early reticence was due to fear that the triumph of Carlism would have strengthened the Legitimist cause in France.) The prospect of French intervention was also contributing to political chaos within Isabelino Spain, since the Moderados openly supported intervention while the Progresistas were strongly against

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70 Palmerston to Villiers, 28 July 1834; Villiers to Palmerston, 9 Apr. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, pp. 176, 408.
71 Villiers to Palmerston, 5 Nov. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 553.
72 R. Bullen, Palmerston, Guizot and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale (London, 1974), p. 13.
73 Brown, Palmerston, p. 182.
74 Palmerston to Villiers, 22 Sept. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 524.
75 Palmerston to Villiers, 20 Oct. 1837, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 724.
76 Palmerston to Villiers, 22 Sept. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 524.
77 Villiers to Palmerston, 9 Aug. 1835, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 276.
78 Villiers to Palmerston, 22 Aug. 1835, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 284.
79 Villiers to Palmerston, 15 Oct. 1835, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 305.
80 J. R. Urquijo, ‘Interferencias de las Cortes Conservadoras ante el Pretendiente Carlista’, Hispania, lxvi (2006), 583–631, at p. 596.
81 Mémorandum arrêté en commun par les trois Cabinets alliés à Toeplitz le 2 Octobre 1835, quoted in Urquijo, ‘Interferencias de las Cortes Conservadoras ante el Pretendiente Carlista’, p. 593.
82 P. Mosely, ‘Intervention and non-intervention in Spain, 1838-39’, Journal of Modern History, xiii (1941), 195–217, at p. 202.
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...it: the struggle between both parties ended up indirectly favouring both Carlists and revolutionaries.83 Britain grew conscious that French schemes were contributing to the weakening of the Isabelino side both domestically and abroad.

The Quadruple never represented a cordial Anglo-French understanding. On the contrary, the treaty 'was a less a symbol of the union of England and France in the defence of European liberalism than a confession of their still vigorous rivalry for influence over Spain', as Philip Mosely argued many years ago.84 The hints towards liberalism and against reaction were merely examples of Palmerston’s propaganda to present the Holy Alliance as ‘the dignified enemy’.85 Paul Schroeder reached this conclusion because unlike many other historians, he did look at the later stages of the Palmerston–Villiers correspondence.86 There was no irreconcilable ideological rift between liberal Britain and the autocratic powers. The autocracies, however despicable to the British mind, were part of Palmerston’s power game in the Iberian Peninsula. Already in early 1836 Carlist agents (like the count of La Alcudia, Don Carlos’s representative in Vienna) were reporting worrisome accounts about Britain’s secret talks with Austria and Prussia.87 By 1837 Villiers and Palmerston were considering replacing the long-dead Quadruple with a rapprochement with the autocracies in order to isolate France:88 Palmerston appealed to their ‘good feelings’ to help put an end to the war,89 and Villiers tried to convince them that Isabella represented moderation and stability while Carlos brought only war and subsequent revolution.90 This further evidences the schism within the liberal West and highlights the implausibility of the ideologically divided Europe argument. The situation that Palmerston was handling was one where there was a real danger of French political expansion into war-ridden Spain. Britain knew that there was a French strategy – Villiers called it the ‘Louis XIV system’ – aimed at exacerbating chaos in Spain in order to keep the country weak and subject to French influence. (The French objective, so the British thought, was to make things so bad that the government or the regent would unilaterally ask for massive French intervention.91) The Quadruple was an instrument to prevent France from developing this strategy on the ground. It was complemented by a parallel policy (conducted by Villiers in Madrid) with which Britain supported the creation of liberal institutions in Spain and progressively drew the country into its orbit.

* Preventing French intervention in Spain through the Quadruple Alliance was not quite enough for Palmerston, however. The second part of Palmerston’s strategy was about transforming Spain into a British client state to secure British interests in the Western Mediterranean. He hoped Spain would develop institutions analogous to Britain’s, ensuring the prevalence of a powerful constitutional monarchy, open to free trade and resistant to French interference. Britain’s idea of providing ‘friendly

83 As noted, the best account of the connection between the prospect of intervention and Spanish party politics is Lawrence, Spain’s First Carlist War.
84 Mosely, ‘Intervention and non-intervention’, p. 198.
85 Schroeder, Transformation, p. 729.
86 Jonathan Parry also makes reference to Schroeder’s argument (Parry, Politics of Patriotism, p. 151).
87 Madrid, Archivo de la Real Academia de la Historia, 9/5733 no. 386, Count of Alcudia to the Secretariat of State, 27 Feb. 1836. This letter was cyphered, remarking the importance of its content. It was reliable information, said Alcudia, because it came from Sir Frederick Lamb, British minister in Vienna, whose family connections (he was Lord Melbourne’s brother) allowed him to know perfectly the government’s intentions.
88 Villiers to Palmerston, 17 Dec. 1837, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 761.
89 Palmerston to Villiers, 30 Nov. 1837, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 747.
90 Villiers to Palmerston, 7 Oct. 1837, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 719.
91 Villiers to Palmerston, 15 Sept. 1835, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 291.
counsel and advice’ to allied powers was a euphemism for clientelism: through the influence of its agents, Britain would manipulate Spanish governments so they followed a policy line that served British strategic, commercial and political interests, while hindering those of France. As the Carlist War raged in the north, Villiers fought his own battle in Madrid to strengthen the Spanish liberal state in order to prevent a radical revolution that could bring about French intervention or the military triumph of Carlism. Villiers’s role is a fundamental part of Britain’s strategy to ‘make [Spain] English’, and yet it is generally ignored by British historiography, which reduces intervention in Spain to the military aid provided in the form of the British Legion and the naval squadrons sent to patrol the coasts. It is Spanish historiography that fills in the gap here. Although its interpretation of the wider geopolitical context is flawed, Spanish historiography has given a great deal of attention to the role of Villiers in the development of Spain’s liberal institutions: indeed, Manuel Rodríguez revealed Villiers’s fundamental role in drafting the 1834 Estatuto Real, completely refuting the existing literature on the topic. However, like other Spanish historians of the period, Rodríguez conceives this as part of Britain’s ideological compromise with European liberalism and does not situate it within a broader grand strategy of political intervention. The aim of this section is to analyse Villiers’s moves in Madrid, framing them within Palmerston’s broader strategy of French contention and incorporation of Spain into Britain’s orbit.

Palmerston pinned a lot of importance on Villiers’s mission because political intervention was the most effective way to ensure British influence in Spain. Military intervention was not part of his strategy to extend Britain’s sphere of influence into Spain. Although the Spanish regent was allowed to raise an army of volunteers in Britain (the British Auxiliary Legion, 1835) and British arms and naval power proved decisive in, for example, the Carlist siege of Bilbao (1836), Britain’s long-term strategic goals were served mainly by diplomacy and political interference. Military intervention was a complex and thorny issue. Under the provisions of the Quadruple Treaty, any intervention in Spain had to be done in concert between the signatories. If Britain decided to officially intervene, France would be legitimized to do so as well. As it has been previously outlined, this would have defeated the purpose of the ‘empty’ Quadruple Alliance, for France would have had carte blanche to send an army south of the Pyrenees, something that would have granted it ascendancy over Spain in the future – precisely what Palmerston wanted to avoid. Furthermore, direct military intervention would be too much for the other European powers to remain neutral about and might provoke a general war that Britain

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92 Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 3rd ser., xiv (2 Aug. 1832), col. 1067.
93 Villiers to Palmerston, 10 Oct. 1835, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 303.
94 On the political side, scholars make reference only to Britain’s interest in keeping Juan Álvarez Mendizábal in power in 1835–6 to get a commercial treaty and on the latter’s insistence on Britain granting Spain a government loan. There is no connection between Villiers’s work and Palmerston’s broader strategy. See Webster, Foreign Policy, i. 424–9; Ridley, Palmerston, pp. 196–9; and Chambers, The People’s Darling, p. 174. Hispanics writing about early Spanish liberalism mention the Estatuto but do not refer to Villiers’s participation in its creation or to his diplomatic activity. See Carr, Spain 1808–1939, p. 157; Esdaile, Spain in the Liberal Age, pp. 68–9; and S. Payne, ‘Spanish conservatism, 1834–1923’, Journal of Contemporary History, xiii (1978), 765–89, at p. 768.
95 Joaquín Villarroya, author of an authoritative study of the 1834 charter, argued that Francisco Martínez de la Rosa (prime minister) and Javier de Burgos (minister of public works) were the main authors of the Estatuto. However, Rodríguez proves Villiers’s participation in the creation of the Estatuto via his influence in the Regency Council. For a full account of Villiers’s role in drafting the charter, see M. Rodríguez, ‘El Estatuto Real de 1834. El embajador británico en la preparación y redacción del texto definitivo’, Revista de Estudios Políticos, xlv (1985), 69–85. For the previous interpretation, see J. Villarroya, El sistema político del Estatuto Real, 1834 (Madrid, 1968).
96 Palmerston to Villiers, 10 March 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 390.
was in no position to fight:97 the war debt, one of the main problems governments dealt with after 1815, limited military adventures.98 Much of the Whigs’ criticism of the Tories in 1828–30 had been about excessive expenditure on empire and foreign policy:99 they therefore could not ask parliament for funds to intervene in Spain if they wanted to preserve their political credibility.

The other reason Palmerston discarded military intervention was because he could not trust agents in the field. The problem of the ‘man-on-the-spot’ was quite common in the nineteenth century: policy (for example, the entente cordiale of 1842–6) could sometimes be jeopardized by the actions of individuals on the ground.100 But in the case of Palmerston’s policy in Spain in the 1830s, the man-on-the-spot argument has not been mentioned by historians – perhaps because Villiers, the main agent, was quite an exceptional minister, as Palmerston told him in many occasions.101 The most significant case of a British agent (the minister in Lisbon, Lord Howard de Walden) hindering state policy is detailed in the memoirs and correspondence of the marquis of Miraflores, who, as Spanish minister in London, discussed this ‘unpleasant event’ with Palmerston.102

In June 1834, as the Spanish army entered Portugal to fight the Carlists, the British legation in Lisbon granted Don Carlos refuge on board a British ship, the Donegal, and sailed him to Portsmouth.103 According to Miraflores, this was taken as a victory by the Carlists, who now considered the Quadruple to be powerless.104 Matters worsened when Walden and the British military envoy in Portugal, Lieutenant-Colonel William Wylde, embarked 260 Carlists and took them safely to Hamburg, accepting the jewels of the princess of Beira, Carlos’s sister-in-law (and later wife), as a deposit for the purchase of the ships.105 Miraflores was outraged. He accused Walden of being ‘an agent of Don Carlos’, who had deliberately threatened ‘the consolidation of the [liberal] political system in Spain’.106 260 outlaws had no possibility of regrouping themselves and threatening the regime if they had been abandoned in some Spanish beach, but safe in Hamburg, they were free to conspire again.107 Although Palmerston did not take action against Walden and Wylde, the issue brought about sufficient problems with the Spanish government for him to consider the reliability of his agents.108 When Carlos escaped Britain in mid July (against all of Palmerston’s predictions110) and returned to Spain to lead the war himself, it became evident that British agents had jeopardized Spain’s opportunity of crushing the insurrection in 1834. His presence fanned the flame of what had been only a provincial revolt; the war lasted until 1840.

97 Palmerston to Villiers, 28 July 1834, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 176.
98 F. Cruzet, The Victorian Economy (London, 1982), p. 101; and B. Hilton, Corn, Cash, Commerce: the Economic Policies of the Tory Governments 1815–1830 (Oxford, 1977), p. 33.
99 M. Taylor, ‘Empire and parliamentary reform: the 1832 Reform Act revisited’, in Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780–1830, ed. A. Burns and J. Innes (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 302–3.
100 For the problems of British and French agents in the 1840s, see M. Chamberlain, Lord Aberdeen (New York, 1983), ch. 19, 21; and D. McLean, ‘The Greek Revolution and the Anglo-French entente 1843-4’, English Historical Review, xcvi (1981), 117–29.
101 Palmerston to Villiers, 11 Feb. 1834, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 104.
102 Miraflores, Memorias para escribir la historia contemporánea, p. 70.
103 Miraflores to Palmerston, 16 June 1834, in Miraflores, Memorias para escribir la historia contemporánea, p. 84.
104 Miraflores, Memorias para escribir la historia contemporánea, pp. 74–9.
105 Miraflores, Memorias para escribir la historia contemporánea, p. 91.
106 Miraflores to Palmerston, 4 July 1834, in Miraflores, Memorias para escribir la historia contemporánea, p. 95.
107 Miraflores to Palmerston, 4 July 1834, p. 97.
108 Miraflores to Palmerston, 4 July 1834, p. 96.
109 Villiers to Palmerston, 27 July 1834, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 174.
110 Palmerston to Villiers, 15 July 1834, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 165.
The *Donegal* affair was not the only case of agents out of control in this period. The case of Lord Ingestre, sent in 1835 to patrol the Spanish coasts aboard H.M.S. *Tribune*, reveals that this man-on-the-spot problem was a major preoccupation for policymakers. Villiers was worried that Ingestre’s ‘Tory notions might interfere with his duty’. 111 Although Ingestre’s is not a case like Walden’s (he proved to be quite loyal), the fact that Villiers was worried about his Toryism suggests there was a genuine possibility of the individual notions of agents interfering with government plans. (Villiers’s fears were probably rooted on the fact that many Tories, like Lord Londonderry or the duke of Wellington, sympathized with Carlism. 112)

Palmerston thus relied on Villiers to accomplish something that could not have been achieved through force of arms. The principal objective was to prevent revolution, which had become a greater threat than Carlism itself. 113 If there was a revolution, France would intervene with the pretext of re-establishing order, brokering a settlement that included the Carlists and that totally discredited the constitutional monarchy. 114 Villiers had to maintain the liberal regime within an equilibrium that safeguarded the *juste milieu* (the balance between the old order and the new, the ‘reasonable form of liberty’ 115) and prevented revolution, reaction and their ultimate consequence (French intervention). This *juste milieu* policy was represented in events such as Villiers’s mediation to ensure a peaceful relationship between the Crown and the Cortes (reflected in the *Estatuo*) and his influence in dismantling the revolutionary juntas that were set up in the summer of 1835. 116

However, little attention has been paid to the *juste milieu* of British relations with France. Britain needed to keep an appearance of Anglo-French equilibrium in Spain. For this Villiers had to redirect the actions of Spanish ministers that might have endangered the equilibrium with France or provoked its intervention. An interesting example that has not been analysed by the historiography is Villiers’s decisive role in keeping the duke of Frías as ambassador in Paris despite the fact that Mendizábal, the prime minister, had wanted to recall him. 117 Even though Villiers himself detested Frías (whom he considered to be part of the reactionary camarilla that manipulated María Cristina and tried to set her against the Progresistas), keeping him in Paris was vital for Mendizábal’s government. 118 By late 1835 Mendizábal was in a complicated position: his negotiations with members of the revolutionary juntas had strained his relations with the Moderados (many of whom now conspired against him) 119 It would therefore have been impossible for Mendizábal to put another Moderado in Paris once Frías was recalled; no Moderado would want to present himself as close to someone like Mendizábal, who was of Jewish origin, had collaborated with the Exaltados (a radical revolutionary faction; Villiers called them ‘Jacobins’) and had fiercely opposed the count of Toreno, the grand Moderado prime minister. Even worse, if Frías was replaced with a revolutionary Exaltado that was ‘distasteful to His French Majesty’, 120 France could have taken it as a sign that revolution had triumphed.
in Spain and thus as a pretext to intervene. This example shows not only Villiers’s degree of power (appointing Spanish ambassadors to other countries) but also how Britain manipulated Spanish politics to secure a beneficial status quo. By supporting Frías, Villiers was guaranteeing the survival of Mendizábal’s pro-British ministry in the long run.

It was not easy to preserve this equilibrium. Sometimes, Spanish demands were not acceptable for Britain. As prime minister and later as minister for finance (1836–7), Mendizábal made huge efforts in trying to persuade Villiers to accept Spanish requests for a government loan. Britain would accede to this, however, only in exchange for a free trade and free navigation treaty, a deal that Mendizábal could not accept since the terms offered by Palmerston meant ruining national industries. (As regent from 1840 to 1843, Baldomero Espartero accepted a free trade treaty in 1842 but enraged the Catalan cotton industries: his decision triggered revolutionary turmoil in Barcelona, caused his downfall and strained Anglo–Spanish relations from that point onwards.) Equilibrium also proved complicated to preserve when Spain tried to stretch the British alliance too much: on several occasions, Villiers had to influence Spanish ministers whose pro–British policies might have damaged Anglo–French relations. In June 1835 the count of Toreno toughened his stance on France, expecting to be applauded by London and rewarded with greater British military support. However, Villiers warned him that Britain would not allow Spain to cause a rift between France and Britain, and although we are very fond of Spain we should not be disposed to pay the price of our friendship with [France].

Villiers would not allow Spain to influence Britain’s diplomacy. A year later, Villiers forced the prime minister, José de Calatrava, to amend the queen’s speech for the opening session of the Cortes so that it would not contain ‘invidious comparisons between France and Britain and nothing that should give offence to Louis-Philippe’. This was a delicate matter: Calatrava needed to present his Progresista government as successful by presenting Britain as his main ally and denouncing the ‘non-cooperation of France’—Calatrava did this to attack the Moderado Party, who had always supported French intervention. Villiers forced him to resolve this matter ‘with tact’. British strategy of predominance in Spain was, above all, stealthy. Keeping the balance meant manipulating Spanish policy even when it was openly favouring Britain. Villiers made sure France was given no reason to believe that Britain had the upper hand in Spain because that could provoke its intervention.

However, this policy of compromise did not mean Villiers was going to allow the power of France to increase to the detriment of Britain’s. This was seen in the autumn of 1837, when Spain asked for naval support against Morocco, and the French foreign minister, Count Molé, rapidly offered a combined Anglo–French–Spanish naval demonstration off the coast of Ceuta. This would have meant an implicit British recognition of French actions in Algeria. Villiers threatened to abandon Britain’s compromises with Spain if French naval presence was allowed in either Ceuta or Mahon, where France had also

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121 For an account of the negotiations between Villiers and Mendizábal regarding the government loan and commercial treaty, see M. Rodríguez, ‘Tratado de comercio hispano–británico, firmado Mendizábal y Villiers en 1835’, *Hispania*, xxxix (1979), 689–700.
122 See F. Armario Sánchez, ‘Relaciones entre España y Gran Bretaña durante la regencia de Espartero (1840–1843)’, *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea*, v (1984), 137–62.
123 Villiers to Palmerston, 29 June 1835, in *Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers*, p. 260.
124 Villiers to Palmerston, 24 Oct. 1836, in *Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers*, p. 540.
125 Villiers to Palmerston, 24 Oct. 1836, in *Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers*, p. 540.
126 The National Archives of the U.K., FO 72/476, no. 113, Villiers to Palmerston, 24 Aug. 1837.
127 Palmerston to Villiers, 5 Oct. 1837, in *Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers*, p. 718.
128 Villiers to Palmerston, 21 Oct. 1837, in *Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers*, p. 727.
asked for permission to use a strategically vital harbour. British naval preponderance in the seas of Spain – particularly in the Strait of Gibraltar – had to be assured. (This was one of the main points of British strategy with regards to Spain: already in 1833 Palmerston had pressured the Spanish government to ensure the security of British vessels in Spanish ports.) The project of British clientelism was about ensuring that Spanish governments would not step outside the line traced by Britain and would sustain British strategic and political interests while hindering those of other powers – and specifically those of France.

Villiers’s intervention consisted of a race to expand British influence before the French got hold of the Spanish regime and destabilized it or profited from it. He essentially was dismantling the ‘Louis XIV system’ from the inside. The greatest degree of French plots in Spain came in mid 1836. Upon the arrival in London of the Baron of Los Valles – a French outlaw, ennobled by Don Carlos and now serving as his ambassador – Palmerston learned that General Fernández de Córdova, commander-in-chief of the Isabelino army, was purposely mishandling the war to ‘let the Carlists take ahead to reduce the matter to a condition in which French aid must have been invoked as a necessity’. Louis-Philippe would have then sent an army into Spain and brokered the marriage between Carlos’s son and young Queen Isabella, appearing before the autocracies as the pacifier of Europe. This is a very serious claim and we do not know where Palmerston obtained this information (he claimed to have had this insight into these ‘secret manoeuvres’ only upon the arrival of Los Valles). But we know Palmerston was not the only one with this theory. In his response to the letter of 20 June 1836 (where Palmerston detailed the plot), Villiers said that he knew from Javier de Istúriz (prime minister, May to August 1836) that the regent had been distressed because she had ‘reason to believe that such [the same scheme that Palmerston outlined in his letter] was the project of Louis-Philippe’. Villiers did not think this possible and told Palmerston that Istúriz did not know where the queen had obtained this information, although there were plenty of potential sources (an agent in Paris the government did not know about, perhaps, or a member of her family in a European court). Essentially, Britain’s foreign secretary and Spain’s regent had access to the same information. The conspiracy Palmerston perceived confirmed to him that Spain had to be consolidated as a great power as soon as possible, for ‘no firm reliance could be placed on France’. French destabilization of Spain from within became apparent only a few weeks after Palmerston’s identification of the Córdova conspiracy, when a revolution in La Granja forced María Cristina to restore the 1812 radical constitution. Even though the revolution brought back the pro-British Progresistas, Palmerston saw the hand of France behind it. The revolution and the proclamation of the 1812 constitution made the autocracies turn their eye towards Spain fearing another revolution like the one of 1820, which had also forced Ferdinand VII to accept the 1812 constitution and had expanded elsewhere in Europe. If the autocracies

129 T.N.A., FO 72/476, no. 157, Palmerston to Villiers, 16 Nov. 1837.
130 Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Estado 5487, no. 192, Juan de Vidal to Francisco Cea Bermúdez, 25 Nov. 1833.
131 Palmerston to Villiers, 20 June 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 452.
132 Palmerston to Villiers, 20 June 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 454.
133 Palmerston to Villiers, 20 June 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 452.
134 Villiers to Palmerston, 2 July 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 461.
135 Villiers to Palmerston, 2 July 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 461.
136 Palmerston to Villiers, 26 Jan. 1837, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 594.
137 Palmerston to Villiers, 22 Sept. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 524.
138 Villiers to Palmerston, 21 Aug. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 494.
feared 1820 happening all over again, they might encourage the French to repeat 1823: this was precisely what France wanted, for never had its influence over Spain been as great as after the 1823 invasion that restored Ferdinand’s absolute monarchy. But the danger did not come only from the autocracies. Shocked by the La Granja revolution and increasingly worried about her personal security, María Cristina wrote to her brother, Ferdinand I, king of the Two Sicilies, and even to Louis-Philippe, hoping to manage a French intervention or, at least, an arbitrament of a pact with Don Carlos. The regent’s reaction to the revolution perfectly suited the purposes of the French.

It thus became crucial to confront the French menace by strengthening Spain’s capacity to resist foreign (French) interference. This was done by consolidating the institutional system after the revolutionary shock of 1836 with a new constitution (1837), which Villiers embraced as a solution for the divisions of the liberals. It was the perfect check against the excesses of the 1812 radical constitution, which instead of bringing more liberty would have unleashed anarchy and led the people to call for the reign of the Carlist Leviathan. Spain was fragile when institutions did not function, because ‘a representative government with no assembly is the weakest of all: it has not the vigour of despotism nor the power which representation affords’. Both Palmerston and Villiers had been firm opponents of the dissolution of the Cortes by Mendizábal in early 1836: it had been an ‘extreme impolicy’ that had left Spain in that limbo between despotism and parliamentarism that had proved to be a breeding ground for noxious French interference. It is not surprising that the moment of greatest French interference in Spanish affairs – when Mendizábal was toppled, Istúriz was imposed as prime minister, the French ‘recommended’ one of their marshals to head the Isabelino army and a revolution took place in La Granja – coincided with a period of institutional deadlock. It was precisely that situation that Palmerston’s strategy sought to reverse. The exertion of influence in Madrid was aimed at ensuring the continuation of a regime (liberalism) that Britain could manipulate to serve its strategic and political interests. Essentially, a liberal foreign policy is not the same thing as a foreign policy that favours liberalism. Palmerston supported constitutionalism in Madrid not because of an ideological commitment to promote liberalism, but because it was an opportunity for Britain to establish a client state relationship with Spain that would deprive France and the autocracies of influence in the Western Mediterranean. Liberalism was thus a tool for the pursuit of the national interest of Palmerston’s unideological realpolitik.

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David Brown argued that Palmerston’s character as a policymaker was constructed by a constant tension between his enlightened Whig personality (the idealpolitiker) and his defender of the balance of power personality (the realpolitiker). He described Palmerston as a ‘chameleon’, a creature of changing skin. According to Brown, the idealistic Jekyll and the realpolitik Hyde were always locked in struggle. Nonetheless, there were moments in which one of them was dominant. The 1830s, when Palmerston

139 Brudiel, Isabel II, pp. 50–1.
140 Villiers to Palmerston, 18 June 1837, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 665.
141 Villiers to Palmerston, 7 March 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 386.
142 Palmerston to Villiers, 3 Nov. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 549.
143 Palmerston to Villiers, 11 Feb. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 371.
144 Palmerston to Villiers, 6 Aug. 1836, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, pp. 486–7.
145 Brown, Palmerston, p. 300.
146 D. Brown, ‘The Fourteenth Earl and the “political chameleon”: changing views on Palmerston from Knowsley’, in Conservatism and British Foreign Policy, 1820–1920: the Derbys and Their World, ed. G. Hicks (Farnham, 2011), pp. 59–81.
supported constitutionalism in Spain and Portugal against the absolutist pretenders, constituted the idealist period; the 1848 revolutions, when he turned on the European liberals and allowed the autocracies to crush them, marked the rise of the cold-blooded realpolitiker. The tension between the realpolitiker and the idealpolitiker emerged because Palmerston’s liberal discourse of the 1830s (when he invited everyone ‘to drink to Liberalism all over the world’) severely contrasts with his actions in 1848. Brown and other scholars’ solution to the problem of Palmerston’s contradictory discourse and foreign policy was to introduce the idea of a dual personality and a transition: the early Palmerston was an idealist, while the late Palmerston was a realist whose liberal spirit had been adulterated by the impact of 1848.147

Yet the case of the Spanish Question reveals that the ‘early Palmerston’ was anything but an idealist. His foreign policy was not based on the ideals of expanding liberalism and confronting the autocracies but rather on a power calculation that saw in the Carlist War an opportunity to destroy French influence in Spain. Historians have been blind to this because they have relegated the ‘unideological’ Palmerston to the 1840s and 1850s, and have made the 1830s the realm of the ‘liberal’ Palmerston. The problem is that Palmerston’s words are contradictory: he was able to claim both that ‘Britain has no eternal allies and no permanent enemies; our interests are perpetual and eternal’ and that Britain ought to be ‘champion of justice and right’. But whatever the contradiction of his discourse, Palmerston’s actions reveal that he was not an idealist.

Scholars have been inclined to believe that there are two Palmerstons because of the difficulty in acknowledging that the Palmerston of the 1830s was lying when he presented himself as the leader of the liberal movement. Brown’s argument about Palmerston being the main vocal defender of liberalism and Lord Derby being the more ‘pragmatic’ Whig,148 has an implication – an implication that perhaps eludes Brown – of Palmerston’s liberalism being empty (‘vocal’, to use Brown’s word). Palmerston vehemently defended liberalism at home because he knew it gave a political benefit. By presenting Palmerston’s intervention in Spain as an expression of his liberal foreign policy, historians essentially buy into Palmerston’s electoral discourse. Palmerston wanted to appear as a liberal, a critic of the autocracies and close to France. It was a tactic to secure the crucial vote of a liberal-minded middle class that had an increasing interest in European affairs.149 (The Spanish Question had a powerful impact on the British public, which developed an empathy for what was considered a humanitarian catastrophe – as had been Greek independence in the 1820s.150) There may have been a personal dimension to all of this, but the crux of the matter is that Palmerston did not allow ideology to interfere in foreign policy. The analysis of his approach to the Spanish Question – from the orchestration of the ‘empty’ Quadruple Alliance to Villiers’s creation of a client state – reveals an unideological approach to policy; in other words, Palmerston’s foreign policy in the 1830s (supposedly his ‘liberal’ period), when he appeared close to liberal France and a defender of constitutionalism, was just as unideological as in 1848, when he condemned

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147 Brown, Palmerston, pp. 304–5.
148 Brown, ‘Political chameleon’, p. 64.
149 Due to the memories of the Peninsular War and the presence of Spanish liberal refugees in the 1820s, British public opinion developed a powerful philo-Hispanic sentiment. The correspondents of The Times and the Morning Chronicle in Madrid supplied news on the Spanish Question often stirring public feelings and troubling the government. See Villiers to Palmerston, 7 Nov. 1835, in Palmerston: Private Correspondence With Sir George Villiers, p. 324.
150 Eric Hobsbawm traced in British reactions to the Carlist atrocities a philo-Hispanic sentiment that would drive the international brigades of the 1930s (Hobsbawn, Revolution, p. 147).
the autocracies’ repression of liberal revolutions even though Britain had a moral compromise with the liberal cause. Though always a pragmatist, Palmerston was actually much more anti-French in the supposedly liberal 1830s than in the unideological 1840s and 1850s, when he conducted a rapprochement with the Second French Republic after the breakdown of Lord Aberdeen’s *entente cordiale* – something that curiously historians have neither suggested was due to an ideological alignment (like in the 1830s) nor that it was inspired by realpolitik. It is interesting how the ‘closeness’ (though really, profound enmity) to France in the 1830s because of the Quadruple Alliance has been interpreted as an expression of Palmerston’s liberal-Whiggish faith, but the post-1848 Anglo-French rapprochement has not been used to challenge the argument that Palmerston was a realpolitiker in the 1840s and 1850s.

The key to understanding Palmerston, therefore, is not to dissociate the ‘liberal’ Palmerston of the 1830s from the ‘realpolitik’ Palmerston of the 1840s and 1850s, but rather to dissociate Britain’s Palmerston from Europe’s Palmerston. The former was a political animal, a master manipulator of the press and public opinion (a populist, even); the latter was an unideological policymaker that sought to further British interests. Juxtaposing the British and the European Palmerston in an attempt to bring coherence to the contradiction between action and discourse leads either to assumptions of a dual personality or simply to a dead end. The latter can be seen in Jasper Ridley’s description of Palmerston’s simultaneous alliance in 1837 with Progresistas in Spain and conservatives in Portugal simply as ‘the strangest ideological alignment in foreign policy since Cardinal Richelieu supported the German Protestants’. This ‘strange ideological alignment’ can be understood only by taking account of realpolitik, the possibilist/realistic and unideological conception of policy. Ridley hints at it but without hitting the nail on the head: he mentions Richelieu, the father of *raison d’état* (the conceptual precedent of realpolitik), but does not manage to bell the cat.

Palmerston’s unideological Spanish policy is also not a case of the ‘primacy of foreign policy’ to the extent described by its scholarly exponents, in which domestic politics follow the tempo of international relations. Nor is it the other way round, as explored by Paul Kennedy, whereby domestic politics are responsible for the course adopted in foreign affairs. Palmerston maintained the worlds of foreign and domestic policy as separate spheres. It is often difficult to see this because he used a foreign policy discourse to influence public opinion, but on no occasion was the actual diplomacy of Britain designed to suit any purpose of domestic policy. (His use of a foreign policy discourse in domestic politics did, however, end up triggering a greater emphasis on domestic policy on the part of the Tories: after losing power in 1846, the Tories used foreign policy as a

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151 D. Brown, ‘Palmerston and Anglo-French relations, 1846–1865’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, xvii (2006), 675–92. Brown challenges the idea that upon returning to office in 1846, Palmerston had destroyed Aberdeen’s *entente cordiale* with François Guizot. He demonstrates how Palmerston was actually quite pro-French in the late part of his career.

152 Historians who acknowledge that, contrary to other Whigs, Palmerston always held to the Canningite idea of the balance of power as key for Europe’s stability, tend to concentrate solely on examples from the 1840s. One example is provided by Anthony Howe, who, in describing Palmerston as a realpolitiker as opposed to the liberal internationalism of Richard Cobden, focused on the period after the 1848 revolutions. See A. Howe, ‘Two faces of British power: Palmerston and Cobden’, in Brown and Taylor, *Palmerston Studies II*, pp. 166–93.

153 Ridley, *Palmerston*, p. 201.

154 J. Biew, *Realpolitik: a History* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 21–6.

155 H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), p. 103.

156 Simms, ‘Primacy’, p. 275.

157 P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865–1980* (London, 1981), pp. 68–73.
political weapon against Palmerston and, when they briefly returned to power in 1852, formulated foreign policy abroad to weaken the Whigs at home.\footnote{158} Palmerston was a realpolitiker in the sense that he was a possibilist who disdained idealism (idealism understood as the pursuit or desire of things that are within a Platonic world of ideas and not within reality). His realpolitik was put into words years later, in 1848, in a letter to the earl of Westmorland, who had been complaining about the difficulties posed by the European revolutions: ‘We must deal with things as they are’, Palmerston wrote, ‘and not as we would wish them to be’.\footnote{159} This premise is at the core of his Spanish policy in the 1830s. Palmerston’s strategy was formulated according to domestic constraints (the need to amortize debt, the decline of naval power after the disastrous 1831–3 Egyptian crisis).\footnote{160} Formulating foreign policy according to domestic constraints is precisely what makes Palmerston a realpolitiker. \textit{Realpolitik} means ‘thinking in terms of what is practically possible rather than of what it is ideally desirable’.\footnote{161} Palmerston dealt with things as they were (economic and naval crisis, reliability of agents) and did not push for irresponsible idealisms (full-scale military intervention, genuine co-operation with France). It is a very different thing to say that the state of things forced a change in his policy objectives: domestic constraints made him change the means, not the ends. (If they had led to the former, it could indeed be considered a case of the primacy of domestic policy.) Debates about the primacy of foreign or domestic policy essentially deal with state objectives: either foreign policy manages to change the domestic arena, or domestic policy shapes the national interest; realpolitik has to do with the means more than with the ends. Palmerston’s objective was always the same: securing British ascendancy in the Peninsula and destroying France’s sphere of influence over Spain. The means he employed were these: restraining France with the Quadruple Treaty and transforming Spain into a British client state from within via Villiers’s political intervention. The Spanish Question reveals that Palmerston did not serve an ideology other than British interests. Realpolitik was at the heart of his policy from the very beginning of his career as foreign secretary.