

Palmerston, Bonapartism, and Public Opinion:

1851, 1858, and how Tension Allowed for Strength in the Anglo-French Relationship

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Introduction

There are perhaps no leaders of nineteenth-century Europe who shaped the nature of continental relations as profoundly as did Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of the French, and Henry Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston. Bonapartism, the ideological legacy of that man who embodied a frightening combination of deft imperial authoritarianism, swift military expansion, and revolutionary secular values, lived on as a spectre decades after the death of its central messianic figure.¹ In the 1850s, at a time when Palmerston was at the zenith of his longstanding political career in which he essentially dictated British foreign policy, that spectre took on physical form when Louis Napoleon, nephew of the great Napoleon and president of the French Second Republic, staged a coup d'état and proclaimed himself Emperor Napoleon III of the Second French Empire. In Britain, this turn of events triggered great public anxiety, for while the French were always mistrusted in a general sense, the Bonaparte name carried with it a perceived threat of imperial challenge that could spell disaster for Britain's overseas interests, perhaps the nation's very survival.² In the event, however, and somewhat paradoxically, the 1850s saw an unprecedented Anglo-French cooperation that defied public opinion in many ways. This cooperation was essentially spearheaded by Lord Palmerston, who maintained a public identity as the "most English Minister" whilst simultaneously engaging in ostensibly preferential relations with a regime that seemed a revival of England's greatest anathema.³ How did such a dynamic come to pass?

¹ Philip Guedalla, *The Second Empire: Bonapartism, the Prince, the President, the Emperor* (London UK: Constable, 1922): 3; William C Smith, *Napoleon III: The Pursuit of Prestige* (London UK: Collins & Brown, 1991): 5.

² J.P Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001): 149.

³ Donald Southgate, *'The Most English Minister...': The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (London UK: Macmillan, 1966); David Brown, "Compelling but not Controlling? Palmerston and the Press, 1846-1855," *History*, 86 (January 2001): 42; David Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010): 322; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 170.

Palmerston's role as a public figure is far too complex for him to be summarized as simply a people's politician, relying on the backing will of the classes for his ultimate success.⁴ An expert manipulator of the press, Palmerston was able to mold popular opinion in a way that none of his contemporaries could have imagined doing for themselves.⁵ By many means, such as bribery – social or monetary – and providing access to confidential state business, Palmerston cultivated relationships with newspapers and individual journalists that facilitated a nationwide network of positive coverage. The immense popularity he was able to obtain among large swathes of the public through his press relationships was often the determining factor in his appointment to various Cabinet positions in various coalition governments.⁶ However, once in a high enough office, with enough impact to hold sway over the elite, public opinion became less of a critical force in Palmerston's career, however important it remained till the end of his life. That position helped Palmerston's overall dominance in foreign policy.⁷ In other words, Palmerston was able to rely on elite or popular support, in alteration, without ever becoming fully dependent on either.⁸ This created an almost ideal position from which to engage in his signature pragmatic style of foreign policy.

As foreign secretary, Palmerston was often criticized for acting on his own accord independent of Cabinet, drawing enmity from his superiors, in particular his Queen and her

⁴ Kenneth Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* (London UK: Allen Lane, 1982): xiii."

⁵ Paul Brighton, *Original Spin: Downing Street and the Press in Victorian Britain* (London UK: I.B Taurus, 2016): 131. Brighton quotes Cobden to illustrate the point that "Palmerston had 'made greater use of that means of creating an artificial public opinion than any minister since the time of Bolingbroke.'"

⁶ Brown, "Compelling but not Controlling," 44,47; Brown, *Palmerston*, 288.

⁷ *The Aberdeen Journal*, 3 April 1861. Palmerston's dominance is exhibited by the way, according to this paper's description, select foreign powers had "the habit, for a score of years, of keeping a sharper eye on the hustings of Tiverton [Palmerston's riding] than on all those of the metropolis put together."

⁸ Gregory A. Barton, *Lord Palmerston and the Empire of Trade* (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012):95; Laurence Fenton, "Origins of Animosity: Lord Palmerston and *The Times*, 1830-41," *Media History*, 16 (2010): 365; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 169; "Lord Palmerston and the Press," *The London Review*, 11 (11 November 1865): 505.

husband.⁹ At such times, an adeptness at press relations, and the corresponding ability to claim the support and interest of the people, was of great use; he usually had a means of popular defence. “You must remember,” wrote one anonymous adulator of Palmerston to the typically hostile *Times*, “how many irons the noble Lord has got at once in the fire, with what care he has been tending them all”.¹⁰ However, despite accusations of lacking principles, Palmerston’s actions were not shaped by a total reliance on popular support.¹¹ The “People’s Minister” was fiercely loyal to the service of what he considered the strict interests of the British state in foreign policy, which was always his primary domain.¹² While Palmerston’s foreign manoeuvrings were often enshrouded in popular imagery, they did not always correspond to the reigning zeitgeist of popular opinion. Hence, when Palmerston pushed for cooperation with the new Bonapartist regime in the early 1850s, he was acting in accordance with his perception of national interest, despite appearing to be acting otherwise.

The complex and, at face value at least, paradoxical nature of Lord Palmerston’s political standing was equaled by that of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Born to the brother of the conqueror of Europe, Louis Napoleon was raised in exile after the fall of his imperial dynasty. Finding himself heir apparent to the family’s legacy after the premature death of the emperor’s legitimate son, Louis Napoleon travelled the continent casually fighting in revolts in Italy while later

⁹ Brian Connell, *Regina vs Palmerston: The Correspondence between Queen Victoria and her Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, 1837-1865* (Garden City NY: Doubleday & co., 1961): 121-3; Parry, “Impact of Napoleon III,” 170; *The Letters of Queen Victoria: Volume II, 1844-1853*, eds. A.C Benson, Reginald Brett, and Viscount Esher (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 277-81.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 16 April 1849.

¹¹ Henry Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston, *Opinions and Policy of the Right Honourable Viscount Palmerston*, ed. George Henry Francis (London UK: Coburn & co., 1852): 498; Brown, “Compelling but not Controlling?” 58; Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London UK: Hamish Hamilton, 1981): 138; Bruce Kinzer, “Palmerston and Liberalism: 1855-1865,” *Canadian Journal of History*, 28 (1993): 307.

¹²Koss, *The Rise and Fall*, 74; Brown, *Palmerston*, 331, 334-6.

attempting two failed overthrows of the French monarchy.¹³ In 1848, after the republican revolution that toppled King Louis Philippe, Louis Napoleon was elected the first president of France on the basis of little more than his surname and the political ideology which promoted it.¹⁴ To his critics, Louis Napoleon was nothing more than an imitation of a great figure who held no claim to leadership other than the blood in his veins; the political treatises he wrote did less to articulate his political leanings than to simply idolise his own family.¹⁵ To Palmerston, however, the Bonaparte accession presented an opportunity. As an alternative to both a weak monarchy and the dangerously radical precedent of a republic, the prince president, and the prospect of political dynasty that came with him, was an asset for Britain rather than a threat. What is more, Louis Napoleon was a veritable Anglophile who had spent many years in his exile among the London elite, engaging with English friends and mistresses even as he rose to power in France.¹⁶ Indeed, while still celebrating his uncle's legacy and the imperial ambitions it embodied, Louis Napoleon wished to do so while maintaining amicable relations with England whenever possible.¹⁷ Therefore, when Louis Napoleon declared himself Emperor Napoleon III in 1852, an action ripe with symbolism threatening to Britain's continental and imperial interests, the result was actually a regime that Palmerston was able to use to benefit British national interest.

The particularities of the Anglo-French dynamic in the 1850s was an integral steppingstone to the sort of cooperative relationship that was later manifested in the Entente

¹³ *The Lieven-Palmerston Correspondence, 1828-1856*, trans. & ed. Lord Sudley (London UK: John Murray, 1943): 130, 156, 271-2, 300.

¹⁴ J.M Thompson. *Louis Napoleon and the Second Empire* (Oxford UK: Basil Blackwell, 1956): 86-9; John Bierman, *Napoleon III and his Carnival Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988): 91; Ernest D'Hauterive, *The Second Empire and its Downfall: The Correspondence of the Emperor Napoleon III and his Cousin Prince Napoleon*, trans. Herbert Wilson. 2nd ed. (Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970): 52.

¹⁵ Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, *Oeuvres de Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte* (Paris FR: Libraire Napoleonienne, 1848): 182-333; Victor Hugo. *Napoleon the Little* (1852; repr; The Floating Press, 2011): 30-1.

¹⁶ Ivor Guest. *Napoleon III in England* (London UK: British Technical & General Press, 1952): 78-9, 99; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 148.

¹⁷ Theo Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes* (London UK: Cassell, 1972): 12-3.

which ultimately saw the two nations fighting together in two of the most consequential wars in their respective histories.¹⁸ While Anglo-French relations did not immediately lead to friendship following Louis-Napoleon's rule – indeed, tensions in the Sudan nearly led to war between the two in the 1880s – the 1850s set a precedent for cooperation that was previously unthinkable. Indeed, cooperation did not depend purely on circumstance; it was policy. At the core of that development was the dynamic between Lord Palmerston, Napoleon III, and British popular opinion. Without a figure such as Palmerston, who was able to positively wield his aloof yet popular identity, utilising both elite and popular support, such a relationship with a Bonapartist regime would have been untenable.

Meanwhile, Napoleon III, who also projected a paradoxical image as a popular pariah, having immense support and the personal friendship of many in the elite while being ostracized and ridiculed by others, wielded his influence for the benefit of Palmerston and a vision of Anglo-French cooperation on a number of occasions in a tense diplomatic climate. A study of the interaction between Bonapartism and British popular opinion must therefore be engaged. Two interconnected events must be highlighted as illustrations of the adept manner in which Palmerston worked to balance French alliance with public relations and set the stage for Anglo-French cooperation. In 1851, Palmerston was removed from his position as foreign secretary in the government of Lord John Russell due to his statement of support for Napoleon's government following the latter's coup d'état. In 1858, following the attempted assassination of the French emperor by an Italian radical named Orsini, Palmerston again lost his office, this time that of prime minister, because of his attempt to introduce stricter laws for prosecuting foreign criminals at the behest of French authorities. On both occasions, Palmerston lost power due to a perceived

¹⁸ Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (Toronto: Penguin, 2013): xxiv-xxxv.

favour towards the authoritarian Napoleon.¹⁹ Both events also inspired panic in England at the prospect of French invasion.²⁰ And both crises provoked a general belief that Palmerston had lost his last fight: that his long political career lay in ruin.²¹ On both occasions, however, Palmerston soon regained office and influence; he even exploited the popular fear of French invasion by lobbying for increased naval defences.²² This did not reflect his general position towards cooperation with the French, though, and despite such rhetoric the French were never seen as a real threat. Indeed, Palmerston's two dismissals in 1851 and 1858 ultimately demonstrated his ability to manoeuvre outside the bounds of both popular and elite preferences in the interest of the state. As state interest was identified, in Palmerston's eyes, with a pragmatic yet tenable friendship with the French empire, a regime hated and feared by many of his supporters in both the private and the public spheres, his unique position allowed him to facilitate enduring cooperation between the countries despite any tensions at the public level.

“Puerile, Theatrical, and Vain”: Bonapartism and British Popular Opinion

British constitutional identity, often defined in large part through comparison with ostensibly more authoritarian states on the continent, was intensely strong during the mid-Victorian era.²³ The French, with their seemingly constant revolutions, supposed authoritarian leanings, and historical animosity towards the English, were the most profound target of critique

¹⁹ Southgate, *The Most English Minister*, 287-9, 438-9; Parry, “Impact of Napoleon III,” 169.

²⁰ Parry, “Impact of Napoleon III,” 157-9, 163.

²¹ Brown, *Palmerston*, 412.

²² Brown, *Palmerston*, 325; David Brown, “Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations, 1846-1865,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17 (2006): 687.

²³ Jeremy Black, *Britain and Europe: A Short History* (London UK: Hurst & Company, 2019): 110; Gerald Newman, “Anti-French Propaganda and British Liberal Nationalism in the Early Nineteenth Century: Suggestions Toward a General Interpretation,” *Victorian Studies*, 18 (1 June 1975): 387, 418; Parry, “Impact of Napoleon III,” 147.

in that regard.²⁴ In 1850, the penultimate year of the short-lived French Second Republic, the uncertain and inadequate foundations of that regime seemed obvious to many British onlookers.²⁵ The imperial revivalist ambitions of its president were foreseen due to more factors than just his name: Louis Napoleon's history of attempted coups was not easily forgotten, and his interventionist war in Italy against the burgeoning republic there, in order to restore the territorial integrity of the Papal states, was clearly a power grab.²⁶ The new president also chafed against the National Assembly to a degree that invited grave disfunction, a feature that seemed to English eyes the hallmark of a less evolved political culture.²⁷

Consequently, the coup of December 1851 struck the British people as more of an inevitability than a surprise.²⁸ Lack of surprise did not mean a lack of concern, however. While the prospect of a Bonaparte attempting an authoritarian takeover of the French government was not particularly surprising, the popular support backing the soon-to-be emperor was, and this was a general source of English anxiety.²⁹ While cynicism concerning the political misadventures across the English Channel was a general source of pride for many in Britain who cherished values of stability and gradual reform, Bonapartism was something of a different calibre than

²⁴ Elie Halevy, "English Public Opinion and the French Revolutions of the Nineteenth Century," in *Studies in Anglo-French History During the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds. Alfred Coville and Harold Temperley (Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967): 60; Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 92.

²⁵ *The Leeds Mercury*, 16 November 1850. Here is sketched a picture of French politics in which the then-President Napoleon and the National Assembly are at odds to an increasingly unworkable degree, though it is still stressed that Louis Napoleon has declared his unwillingness to stage a coup; *The Examiner*, 19 October 1850.

²⁶ *The Stirling Observer*, 7 June 1849; *The Newcastle Journal*, 11 December 1852; Thomas C. Jones and Robert Tombs, "The French Left in Exile: Quarante-huitards and Communards in London, 1848-80," in *A History of the French in London: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity*, ed. Debra Kelly and Martyn Cornick (London UK: University of London Press, 2013): 165-8.

²⁷ *The Northern Star*, 18 Aug, 1849 highlights the intrinsic incompetence of the republican assembly as well as the constituents, who are described as having overwhelmingly elected a President they hardly knew.

²⁸ Southgate, 'The Most English Minister', 286; Guest, *Napoleon III in England*, 99; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 148; *The Manchester Courier*, 8 Jan 1853; *The Examiner*, 13 December 1851.

²⁹ David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture: Perceptions and Introspections in an Age of Change* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997): 102; *The Morning Chronicle*, 22 Dec 1851.

even barricades in the Parisian streets. There was a tremendous ideological power in Bonapartism – folklore paired with a sense of purpose and a call for action that had implications both foreign and domestic.³⁰ Indeed, unlike a movement for republicanism, either liberal or more radical, which was generally prone to disfunction and fundamentally had domestic ambitions, Bonapartism carried with it an express desire for change at the level of foreign relations: territorial change, and aggrandisement.³¹ Essentially, the popular accession of Bonapartism meant the sudden and powerful success of a mindset that dwelt on the overturning of the standard set by the 1815 Congress of Vienna: the settlement which defined that status quo which the British dominated.³² By the time Louis Napoleon took up the title of Emperor Napoleon III, officially recognising his dead cousin, the Duke of Reichstadt/Napoleon II, as his legitimate predecessor on the imperial throne and eschewing all pretenses of republican continuity, the general population of Britain was rife with anxiety.³³ The elite of Britain feared this new challenge to the continental balance of power, while the public were anxious about the potentially bloody ramifications of conflict with a maniacal French emperor.

Napoleon III was not a difficult target for his many detractors. Intellectuals from across the continent provided an articulate foundation from which less refined popular publications could tacitly support their incessant jibes. The two most famous intellectual detractors of the new emperor, Victor Hugo and Karl Marx, both lived on British shores during Louis Napoleon's reign and both seized the opportunity to mock him for his ineffectual attempts to imitate and

³⁰ Guedalla, *The Second Empire*, 32, 156; *The Times*, 3 Dec 1851; Bierman, *Napoleon III*, 91.

³¹ Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945, Volume 1* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1973): 508-10; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 152.

³² Thompson, *Louis Napoleon*, 85; F.A Simpson, *The Rise of Louis Napoleon* (London UK: Routledge, 1909): 8; Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 82; Halevy, "French Revolutions," 57.

³³ Thompson, *Louis Napoleon*, 31; Barton, *Lord Palmerston*, 96; Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 10-1.

worship his uncle.³⁴ Both men portrayed the emperor as pathetically unoriginal and dangerously vain.³⁵ “Judging him apart from what he calls his ‘necessary acts,’ or his ‘great deeds,’” wrote Hugo, “he is a vulgar, commonplace personage, puerile, theatrical, and vain... He loves finery, display, feathers, embroidery, tinsel and spangles, big words, and grand titles, - everything that makes a noise and glitter, all the glassware of power.”³⁶ British periodicals, most notably *Punch*, would express similar sentiments to a much broader audience.³⁷ *Punch* particularly strove to reflect public opinion rather than drive it, so its portrayals of Louis Napoleon as a headstrong buffoon are indicative of more than just its cartoonists’ and writers’ opinions.³⁸ Some publications went so far as to question the popular support that Louis Napoleon so flamboyantly demonstrated through his plebiscites, with *Reynold’s Newspaper* noting the repressed police-heavy measures under which they had been conducted.³⁹ The emperor made such mockery even more pertinent due to his initial authoritarian control over public discourse in his country. Napoleon’s attempts to control French cartoonists and caricaturists and to prevent any negative portrayals of himself were a driving force in the readiness of periodicals such as *Punch* to

³⁴ Other intellectuals, such as Kinglake, whose history of the Crimean War emphasised Napoleon’s authoritarian oppression and accused the emperor of slaughtering his own people, Tennyson, who tried to support anti-French defence through patriotic poetry, and Dickens, whose *A Tale of Two Cities* is interpreted as a veiled critique of the oppressive Bonaparte regime, further perpetuated a grudge against the French; Alexander William Kinglake. *The Invasion of the Crimea: Its Origin and an Account of its Progress Down to the Death of Lord Raglan*. (1863; repr; Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 319. Elizabeth Woodward, “Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Coventry Patmore, and Alfred Tennyson on Napoleon III: The Hero-Poet and Carlylean Heroics,” *Victorian Poetry*, 44 (Winter 2006):545. Parry, “Impact of Napoleon III,” 153; *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 19 Feb 1863; *The Athenaeum*, 24 March 1883. Gareth Stedman Jones, “Some Notes on Karl Marx and the English Labour Movement,” *History Workshop*, no. 18 (Autumn 1884): 130

³⁵ Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852; repr; Elecbook, 2001): 141-4; Hugo, *Napoleon the Little*, 29.

³⁶ibid, 28; *The Hull Packet*, 15 Oct 1852.

³⁷ Douglas Jerrold, “Louis Napoleon Solomon!” *Punch* (22 May 1852): 218; Richard Scully, “The Cartoon Emperor: The Impact of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte on European Comic Art, 1848-1870,” *European Comic Art*, 4 (2011): 160-5.

³⁸M.H. Spielman, *The History of “Punch”* (London UK: Cassell & co., 1895): 108-10; Patrick Leary, *The Punch Brotherhood: Table Talk and Print Culture in Mid-Victorian London* (London UK: The British Library, 2010): 4-8.

³⁹ *Reynold’s Newspaper*, 28 Dec 1851; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 Dec 1851.

escalate their mockery of the autocrat's regime.⁴⁰ The fact that Louis Napoleon went so far as to ban *Punch* was worn by the magazine as a badge of honour long into the future.⁴¹ In such a way, the dual perceptions of renewed Bonapartist rule as a thing to be both mocked and feared was established in intellectual and popular forums in England.

Despite the prominent defamation, to some in Britain Napoleon III was to be neither mocked nor feared. Though he was criticized by many as a power-seeking dictator who took on any political cause that would gain him influence, others admired the combination of liberalism and centralized authority for which he purported to stand. Intellectuals such as Matthew Arnold and Elizabeth Browning attested that Britain might have something to learn from Louis Napoleon.⁴² To many republican-minded people in the British middle class, as well as Catholics, there was an admiration for the way Napoleon III defended national independence and Catholic interest on the international level.⁴³ Additionally, the fact that Louis Napoleon was a professed Anglophile, who claimed to desire friendship with the country which had been his home for several years, served to comfort many.⁴⁴ The prospect of a leader in France who could achieve a degree of stability whilst maintaining friendship with the British may have seemed a useful asset on the continent.⁴⁵ The Bourbons, the Orleanists, and the Second Republic were weak and insufficiently responsive to British interest – Bonaparte could be an improvement, if Britain

⁴⁰ Scully, "The Cartoon Emperor," 159.

⁴¹ *Punch* (30 April 1951).

⁴² Matthew Arnold, *Friendship's Garland: Being the Conversations, Letters, and Opinions of the Late Arminius Baron Von Thunder-Ten-Tronckh* (London UK: Smith, Elder, 1903): 159-61; Woodward, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Coventry Patmore, and Alfred Tennyson on Napoleon III," 543-4.

⁴³ Barton, *Lord Palmerston*, 112; Halevy, "French Revolutions," 56; *The Times*, 10 Jan 1873; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 154; Antony Taylor, "Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847-1865," *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (April 1994): 173-4.

⁴⁴ E.D. Steele. *Palmerston and Liberalism, 1855-1865* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 9; Anthony Evelyn M. Ashley, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston: 1846-1865* (London UK: Richard Bentley & Son, 1876): 285.

⁴⁵ Kenneth Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England, 1830-1902* (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1970): 71, 291, 314; Brown, "Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations," 679.

treated him the right way.⁴⁶ There was no great enthusiasm for Louis Napoleon. In fact, most of the newspaper coverage that was positively oriented towards him was due more to Lord Palmerston's influence than anything else.⁴⁷ However, British public opinion toward the new Bonapartist regime was indeed complicated, which allowed for pragmatic manoeuvrings by skilled manipulators such as Lord Palmerston.

The complexity of British attitudes toward the Second French Empire was most clearly manifested in the prevalent and sustained fear of invasion. Such a fear is largely understood by historians as a carryover from the Napoleonic wars, in which invasion was an ominous and continuous notion at the back of every English person's mind.⁴⁸ The idea that Napoleon III would avenge his uncle and finally do away with the British was a general motif in English representations.⁴⁹ That said, the prospect of invasion was both disregarded and perpetuated at different levels of society. While the idea that a swift and vehement overrunning of England's southern ports would be dangerously viable due to either a "steamship bridge" or even a "tunnel under the English Channel" was publicized, some thought otherwise.⁵⁰ Indeed, in parliament the threat of invasion was debated with great fervour, with many members discounting the ability of France to mount a force and execute such an expedition with either secrecy or swiftness. Richard Cobden declared the unlikelihood of a French invasion early on in Napoleon III's imperial reign, saying that it went against the emperor's narcissistic character to attempt such a move: "if he made war, [he] must do it through one of his generals. If that general was successful, he would eclipse him; if he was not, he would ruin him."

⁴⁶ Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, 70; *The Era*, 14 Dec 1851.

⁴⁷ John Grigg, *The History of the Times Volume II: The Tradition Established, 1841-1884*. (London UK: The Office of the Times, 1939):140, 149; Koss, *The Rise and Fall*, 135.

⁴⁸ Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 149; Scully, "The Cartoon Emperor," 160.

⁴⁹ Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture*, 102.

⁵⁰ Black, *Britain and Europe*, 113

In the muddled popular intensity of the invasion scares, Palmerston was able to pragmatically argue both sides of the debate. Although he was one of the biggest proponents of cooperation with the French during the first decade of Louis Napoleon's empire, Palmerston was also at the forefront of those politicians who were stoking the Francophobic flames among the general population.⁵¹ This was not necessarily a contradiction of Palmerston's principles – he genuinely thought that Britain and France should cooperate; but Britain's guard should never be let down. It was in the national interest to ally with those countries that posed the greatest threat, while displaying military strength to dissuade those same allies from breaking away. The fact that Louis Napoleon's regime embodied both a natural threat and a natural ally may have seemed a contradiction too obvious to take seriously; in the hands of Palmerston, however, such an arrangement was far superior to the alternatives.

“And So Unreasonable!”: The Coup D'état of 1851

In December 1851, shortly after Louis Napoleon shocked the continent by his rapid seizure of power, Palmerston, foreign secretary at the time, was attacked for his rash statement of support in a letter to the French foreign minister Count Walewski.⁵² Interestingly, despite the general anti-Bonapartist sentiment of the British, Palmerston's seeming goodwill toward the new dictator was not idiosyncratic.⁵³ Queen Victoria, on hearing of the Napoleonic coup, called the event “wonderful... like a story in a book or a play!” The problem with Palmerston's statement

⁵¹House of Commons Hansard, “Commons Sitting of Monday, May 3, 1852,” *UK Parliamentary Papers* (1852) <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0121p0-0002?accountid=14846>. (Palmerston is recorded as cheering “Hear, hear!” as Cobden mentions the proposed notion that Britain stood virtually defenceless against potential French attacks); Brown, *Palmerston*, 325.

⁵² Brown, *Palmerston*, 327; Newsome, *Victorian World Picture*, 102; Barton, *Lord Palmerston*, 91

⁵³ F.B Head, “Louis Napoleon and his Coup D'Etat,” *The Era*, 14 Dec 1851.

had less to do with the initial sympathies expressed than with his conduct.⁵⁴ Palmerston had gone over the government's head when he stated his support – behaviour for which he was notorious.⁵⁵ There was a famous and combative friction between the Queen and Palmerston, and for years she had been trying to sack her foreign minister to no avail.⁵⁶ Lord John Russell, the prime minister, also had tensions with his foreign secretary, but Palmerston was far too popular to simply throw out without excellent reason.⁵⁷ With the French coup, that reason seemed to have appeared. Despite the Queen's mawkish intrigue at the authoritarian proceedings, she was still level-headed enough to desire mere neutrality on her government's part concerning any formation the new French regime would take.⁵⁸ Regardless of any romantic pretenses, the unpopular and supposedly dangerous nature of a potential Bonapartist empire taking form was still a harsh reality. Therefore, when Palmerston sent a letter of official endorsement to the Bonapartist regime, a gesture that he defended on grounds of national self-interest, there was nonetheless an opportunity for action on the part of his political rivals.⁵⁹ Palmerston justified his actions on the grounds of international stability, writing to a friend that to him it seemed clear that,

the meeting of the assembly had placed the assembly & the President in such a state of antagonism that a conflict between them had obviously become inevitable and that it probably was true as asserted, that if the President had not dissolved the Assembly the Assembly would have tried to arrest him, &... it seemed... to be better for France & for the tranquility of Europe that the President should prevail over the Assembly than the Assembly over the President because the success of

⁵⁴ Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 3 (quote), 8.

⁵⁵ Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, 70; Laurence Guymier, "Pressing the French and Defending the Palmerstonian Line: Lord William Hervey and The Times, 1846-8," *Historical Research*, 87 (February 2014): 116-7.

⁵⁶ Kingsley Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston: A Study of Public Opinion in England before the Crimean War*, 2nd ed. (London UK: Hutchinson, 1963): 67-8.

⁵⁷ Southgate, *The Most English Minister*, 279; W. Baring Pemberton, *Lord Palmerston* (London UK: The Batchworth Press, 1954): 175.

⁵⁸ Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 7.

⁵⁹ Grigg, *The History of the Times Volume II*, 108; Southgate, *The Most English Minister*, 288; Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, 294, Bourne notes that Palmerston saw Bonaparte as "a check to Jacobinism and a victory for constitutional monarchy," 71.

the Assembly who had no good candidate to offer for the government of France would probably lead to civil war.⁶⁰

Prime Minister Lord John Russell was nonetheless quick to denounce the context of Palmerston's letter; in his dismissal of Palmerston, he stated that the "question is not whether the president has been justified in dissolving the Assembly and annulling the constitution; but whether you were justified, as the Queen's Secretary of State, in expressing an opinion upon the subject."⁶¹ Hence, Bonaparte's coup was the occasion – in large part owing to the optics of Palmerston's support of a foreign dictator – but not necessarily the entire cause of his dismissal.

To the queen's dismay, Palmerston was not so easily retired. For someone as shrewd in shaping public perception, even being in league with a Bonaparte was not a severe enough blow to overtake the general popular affection for the now ex-minister. As Palmerston's wife wrote privately on the issue to a friend,

Public opinion is very much annoyed with Lord John [Russell], and sides wholeheartedly with my husband. So we are all impatiently awaiting ... to hear ... what reason Lord John can give for his extraordinary behaviour. And so unreasonable!⁶²

Indeed, many in the public were struck with much the same thought, and thus were surprised at the reasons given for Palmerston's fall from power. Many chose to blame the prime minister's jealousy as the true reason despite the clear evidence of the foreign secretary's misconduct. A popular song about the dismissal portrayed an irritable Cabinet:

They're done for by their snarling;
For small Lord John has been and gone
and turned adrift Lord Palmerston,

⁶⁰ *The Palmerston-Sullivan Letters*, ed. Kenneth Bourne (London UK: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1979): 298; Pemberton, *Lord Palmerston*, 188; Brown, *Palmerston*, 328.

⁶¹ "Letter from John Russell to Viscount Palmerston Dismissing Him as Foreign Secretary, 17 December 1851," in *Great Britain: Foreign Policy and the Span of Empire, 1689-1971: A Document History, Volume I*, ed. Joel H. Wiener (London UK: Chelsea House, 1972): 431.

⁶² *The Lieven-Palmerston Correspondence*, 298. Lady Palmerston's belief was somewhat supported in the press (see for instance, *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, 1 Jan 1852).

Amongst the lot the only don,
who didn't take care of number one;
Out spoke Home Secretary Gray,
I wish old Palmy was away,
Aye, turn him out they all did say,
For he's the people's darling.⁶³

Some chose rather not to believe that the foreign secretary, who had so readily championed liberalism throughout the continent, would side with Louis Napoleon, a man who would have the liberal international order overturned for reasons of familial and national pride.⁶⁴ *Punch* mocked such attitudes, satirically asking “Why did Lord Palmerston resign,” and answering itself, “because he couldn't help it.”⁶⁵ Such an ostensible paradox was summed up well by Lord Macaulay, who said in private conversation to the former French foreign minister, Guizot, “Après avoir été l'apôtre des idées libérales, il a été le martyr du pouvoir arbitraire.” (“After having been the apostle of liberal ideas, he was the martyr of arbitrary power.”)⁶⁶ Any general disbelief did not last long, however, and it was clear early on, especially when parliament reconvened in February, that Palmerston's disgrace was expressly connected to his act on behalf of Louis Napoleon.⁶⁷ The shame in such circumstances was truly undeniable.

Over the years, however, Palmerston had developed a political cushion of sorts that absorbed much of the distasteful opinion-related consequences that went along with being removed from high office. Indeed, Palmerston could already fall back on a legacy of past successes in foreign policy, mostly saving his tarnished image in 1851.⁶⁸ Palmerston was still basking in the glow of one of his most notable political triumphs, the Don Pacifico affair of the

⁶³ Quoted in, Martin, *Triumph of Lord Palmerston*, 70-1 (translated by author).

⁶⁴ Martin, *Triumph of Lord Palmerston*, 69; Brown, *Palmerston*, 330-5; *The Morning Chronicle*, 27 Dec 1851.

⁶⁵ Gilbert Beckett, “Why did Lord Palmerston Resign?” *Punch* (10 January 1852): 16.

⁶⁶ Quoted in, Martin, *Triumph of Lord Palmerston*, 69; see also Brown, *Palmerston*, 335.

⁶⁷ *The Morning Chronicle*, 27 Dec 1851.

⁶⁸ Brown, *Palmerston*, 331.

previous year. On that occasion, in perhaps the most famous speech of his long career, Palmerston evoked the glory of ancient Rome in defending the privileged status of British citizenship abroad.⁶⁹ “As the Roman, in days of old, held himself free from indignity, when he could say, *Civis Romanus sum*,” Palmerston declared then, “so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him from injustice and wrong.”⁷⁰ Most people in Britain saw Palmerston as being without peer in his field after that speech.⁷¹ Even his rivals could not deny the status he had achieved, although most chose to characterise it as due to ostentatious appeals to popular conceit rather than any clear instances of the foreign secretary’s ability.⁷² Therefore, while the occasion of Palmerston’s dismissal may have been expected to be a political death sentence, he had built up enough political capital so as not to be done over by it.

A stark indication that Palmerston’s dismissal was likely due more to personal than policy-related reasons is the fact that the official attitude toward Louis Napoleon’s regime remained generally the same after Palmerston left office.⁷³ Although the British government got rid of Palmerston, it was nevertheless the first major power to recognise Napoleon III as emperor of the French, a fact that, to Louis Napoleon, was a clear sign of a burgeoning special relationship between the two traditional enemies.⁷⁴ It was also evident to the new emperor that

⁶⁹ David Brown, “The Power of Public Opinion: Palmerston and the Crisis of December 1851,” *Parliamentary History*, 20 (2001): 335,339-40; Pemberton, *Lord Palmerston*, 181, 184; Parry, “Impact of Napoleon III,” 156.

⁷⁰ House of Commons Hansard, “Commons Sitting of Tuesday, June 25, 1850,” *UK Parliamentary Papers* (1850) <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0112p0-0006?accountid=14846>

⁷¹ Laurence Fenton, *Palmerston and the Times: Foreign Policy, the Press and Public Opinion in Mid-Victorian Britain* (New York: I.B Taurus & Co., 2012): 115.

⁷² *The Times*, 29 Dec 1851; Pemberton, *Lord Palmerston*, 176; Parry, “Impact of Napoleon III,” 169.

⁷³ Brown, *Palmerston*, 328-9; Barton, *Lord Palmerston*, 93.

⁷⁴ Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 11.

this newly amicable relationship was largely Palmerston's initiative.⁷⁵ Indeed, over the coming years Napoleon III was to throw his diplomatic weight behind Palmerston, presumably in thanks for his favourable actions in 1851.⁷⁶ Russell's government and its Conservative successor continued in a direction that had been labelled reckless when undertaken by Palmerston, and this was an advantage to the newly deposed minister, who could portray himself as having fallen victim to corrupt intrigues during his crusade for British interest.⁷⁷ Palmerston turned the imagery of foreign influence on its head by characterising the situation as having been masterminded by his political opponents, who were themselves ostensibly working at the behest of foreign interests, whether it be the deposed Orleanists or even the Germans.⁷⁸ With time, Palmerston seemed to emerge as the only minister sufficiently adept to balance relations with the new French regime with a defence of British influence and prestige.

This strategy may be seen as part of the rationale for Palmerston's vehement support for bolstering English sea defence in the face of the new French Imperial threat. This campaign, which was strongest when Palmerston was Home Secretary in the Aberdeen government (1852-5), fit in with the ethos of constant British action to maintain its position at the top of the international hierarchy.⁷⁹ It also implicitly illustrated the way that relations between Britain and an otherwise unpredictable neighbour such as Bonaparte could break down if someone as

⁷⁵ Brown, "Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations," 680-2; Geoffrey Hicks, "An Overlooked Entente: Lord Malmesbury, Anglo-French Relations and the Conservatives' Recognition of the Second Empire, 1852," *History*, 92 (April 2007): 188; Grigg, *History of the Times Volume II*, 147.

⁷⁶ Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, 9, 46; H. Hearder, "Napoleon III's Threat to Break Off Diplomatic Relations during the Crisis over the Orsini Attempt in 1858," *The English Historical Review*, 72 (July 1857): 481.

⁷⁷ Brown, "Power of Public Opinion," 351.

⁷⁸ Martin, *Triumph of Lord Palmerston*, 69; Karl Marx, *The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston*, ed. Eleanor Marx (Bolton ON: Origami, 2020): 5.

⁷⁹ House of Commons Hansard, "Commons Sitting 29 March 1852."; David Roberts, "Lord Palmerston at the Home Office." *The Historian*, 21 (November 1958): 78-9; Geoffrey Hicks, *Peace, War and Party Politics: The Conservatives and Europe, 1846-59* (Manchester UK: Manchester University Press, 2008): 129.

capable as Palmerston were not at the helm.⁸⁰ If Palmerston could show himself to have a particular rapprochement with the emperor, while maintaining the perception that it was himself and not Napoleon who held the lion's share of influence in the relationship, then he would be able to benefit both himself and his state.⁸¹ That Napoleon III was not so easily manipulated was some obstacle to that public relations strategy. This became particularly clear during the Crimean War (1853-6), in which France and Britain joined together in an alliance rendered uneasy by constant English anxiety that they should be outshone in any way.⁸² In 1855 Palmerston completed an outstanding comeback when he became prime minister, being seen by many as the only man strong enough to clean up the mess that the war had become. His appointment was welcomed by the French emperor, who hoped that Palmerston could perhaps help mend the already strained Anglo-French alliance.⁸³ Palmerston's efforts to do so would trigger his next fall from power just three years later.

Political Theatre: The Orsini Affair of 1858

Napoleon III liked to think himself a liberal despite the flagrant authoritarian measures he instituted in consolidation of his new empire.⁸⁴ Desperate for a popular image, he tried to illustrate his liberalism by referenda, under universal male suffrage, which showcased popular support for his coup d'état and later his accession to the imperial throne. Both votes came out in

⁸⁰ Brown, "Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations," 682.

⁸¹ Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, 9.

⁸² Black, *Britain and Europe*, 114; Guest, *Napoleon III in England*, 100; Scully, "The Cartoon Emperor," 165; Muriel E. Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica?: British Foreign Policy 1789-1914* (London UK: Routledge, 1989): 109.

⁸³ Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 74; Brown, *Palmerston*, 379; David Steele, "Three British Prime Ministers and the Survival of the Ottoman Empire, 1855-1902," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 50 (2014): 52; Taylor, "Palmerston and Radicalism," 166.

⁸⁴ Bierman, *Napoleon III*, 98-9; Sudhir Hazareesingh, "Bonapartism as the Progenitor of Democracy: The Paradoxical Case of the French Second Empire," in *Dictatorship in History and Theory, Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Peter Baehr and Melvin Richter (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 131, 136.

his favour, the first with ninety-four percent and the second with seventy-eight percent.⁸⁵ The emperor's social policies, too, apart from vicious censorship and undercover surveillance, were designed to portray an air of enlightened liberalism among the archaic despotism; the liberal policies increased over time, from token measures of universal male suffrage to a more tolerant and open political system.⁸⁶ Many in France saw those measures as mere political theatre.⁸⁷ Abroad, Napoleon III's image was even more contested, particularly when it came to Italy.⁸⁸ As a youth in exile, Louis Napoleon had fought with Italian rebels against Austrian occupation; his brother had even died while fighting for that cause.⁸⁹ As well, later in his reign, Napoleon would be the strongest ally of Count Cavour and the Kingdom of Sardinia in its fight to unite the Italian states under a single crown.⁹⁰ However, Napoleon had also, while president of the French Republic, spearheaded an invasion and occupation of Rome in order to wipe out the burgeoning Roman Republic and restore the territory of the Roman Catholic Church; French troops would occupy the city until the Empire's fall.⁹¹ Also, in return for aiding Sardinia, France would annex the Italian Duchy of Savoy against the popular will of its inhabitants.⁹² This dichotomous

⁸⁵ Thompson, *Louis Napoleon*, 123-4, 136; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 154

⁸⁶ Scully, "The Cartoon Emperor," 179; Hazareesingh, "Bonapartism as the Progenitor of Democracy," 131.

⁸⁷ Melvin Richter, "Tocqueville and French Nineteenth-Century Conceptualizations of the Two Bonapartes and Their Empires," in *Dictatorship in History and Theory, Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Peter Baehr and Melvin Richter (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 98.

⁸⁸ "Letter from Henry John Temple, third Viscount Palmerston, to Sir G.C Lewis regarding Diplomatic Relations with France and Austria relative to Italy, 6 January 1860," Docref=PP/GC/LE/214, *Palmerston Papers*, University of Southampton Archives, Southampton UK.

⁸⁹ James F. Mcmillan, *Napoleon III* (London UK: Routledge, 1991): 9-10.

⁹⁰ Mcmillan, *Napoleon III*, 83-4; MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace*, 320.

⁹¹ Owain Wright, "British Foreign Policy and the Italian Occupation of Rome, 1870." *The International History Review*, 34 (2012): 163; UK House of Commons "Papers Respecting French Occupation at Rome," *UK Parliamentary Papers* (1862) <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1862-038791?accountid=14846>; Halevy, "French Revolutions," 58; Percival Leigh, "A Popish Picture of Palmerston," *Punch*, 34, (27 March 1858): 132.

⁹² G. Pages, "The Annexation of Savoy and the Crisis in Anglo-French Relation, January-April 1860," in *Studies in Anglo-French History During the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds. Alfred Coville and Harold Temperley. 2nd ed. (Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967): 83; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 153; Harold Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy from Pitt (1792) To Salisbury (1902)*, Revised Edition (London UK: Routledge, 2018): 165; Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, 102.

relationship with Italian independence, alongside the hypocritical liberal image of French imperial society, spurred many radicals abroad to despise the Bonaparte regime and plot against it.

Hence, in England, which had long accepted a role as the temporary home of foreign exiles, a group of Chartists and foreign republicans hatched a plot against Napoleon III. In January 1858, a bomb exploded under the emperor's carriage in the streets of Paris, sparing Louis Napoleon and his wife but killing twenty bystanders and leaving 150 injured.⁹³ The actual perpetrator of the attack, Felice Orsini, was an Italian radical who had in fact become a minor public figure in Britain due to a couple of books he had published recounting his escapades fighting for his country's independence and unity.⁹⁴ Across Britain, despite distrust of the Bonapartes and a general fervour for Italian unification, statements of support and thanksgiving at the imperial couple's survival resounded.⁹⁵ This was particularly the case because Napoleon's wife, Eugenie, who was a generally sympathetic figure, had been an intended victim.⁹⁶ However, the initial sympathy generated in the popular British response to the crisis was dissipated by the vehemence displayed by the French, who viewed the fact that the assassin, his accomplices, and all their equipment had come over from England as a grave betrayal. The French government contacted Palmerston, requesting that some action be taken to prevent any such event from happening again.⁹⁷

⁹³ Brown, *Palmerston*, 409; Thompson, *Louis Napoleon*, 177; Guest, *Napoleon III in England*, 154.

⁹⁴ Marco Pinfari, "Exploring the Terrorist Nature of Political Assassinations: A Reinterpretation of the Orsini Attentat," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21 (2009): 585.

⁹⁵ *The People*, 23 Jan 1858; *The Glasgow Herald*, 22 Jan 1858; Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 87; Pandleimon Hionidis, "Mid-Victorian Liberalism and Foreign Affairs: 'Cretan Atrocities' and Liberal Responses, 1866-69," *The Historian*, 77 (2015): 723.

⁹⁶ Keri Yousif, "Fame and Foils: Empress Eugenie, Princess Mathilde, and the Boundaries of Biography." *Dix-Neuf*, 23 (2019): 119; Bierman, *Napoleon III*, 178.

⁹⁷ Brown, *Palmerston*, 409; Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 88.

Palmerston accepted his country's responsibility. While England had long prided itself on its free treatment of foreigners, the optics of the situation were undeniably negative; to be seen as the breeding ground for terrorists was to be seen as disrespectful of the integrity of foreign societies, and thus worthy of disrespect itself.⁹⁸ Palmerston's government introduced the Conspiracy to Murder Bill, a law that would escalate, at least nominally, the provisions for prosecuting alien criminals on British soil.⁹⁹ At first, the bill, which sought to increase the punishment for conspiracy within Britain to murder someone outside the country from a misdemeanour to a felony, enjoyed adequate parliamentary support.¹⁰⁰ Politically, Palmerston was riding high due to his recent election victory.¹⁰¹ However, there was a growing sense of popular animosity toward the French and their presumed desire to influence the beloved English constitution. Many were fearful when the emperor said, "I do not fear to say... that... the present danger does not lie in the excessive prerogative of power, but rather in the absence of repressive laws."¹⁰² Would the despot dare to demand such measures in England? What truly stoked the fires of hatred were the actions of a select group of French colonels, who wrote a letter to their emperor demanding radical retribution against Britain for its betrayal.¹⁰³ That letter, which was published in the state-influenced French newspaper *Le Moniteur*, was generally assumed by the British public to have been sanctioned by Napoleon himself.¹⁰⁴ A wave of Francophobia swept

⁹⁸ Brown, *Palmerston*, 409; Bernard Porter, "'Bureau and Barrack': Early Victoria Attitudes Towards the Continent," *Victorian Studies*, 27 (Summer 1984): 407-8.

⁹⁹ UK House of Commons, "Bill to Amend Law Relating to Conspiracy to Murder," *UK Parliamentary Papers* (10 February 1858) <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1857-033829?accountid=14846>.; Southgate, *The Most English Minister*, 428..

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Brown, *Palmerston*, 404; Southgate, *The Most English Minister*, 428; Grigg, *History of the Times Volume II*, 324.

¹⁰² *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Jan 1858.

¹⁰³ "Decline and Fall of Lord Palmerston's Ministry," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 57 (March 1858): 387-8; Barton, *Lord Palmerston*, 111; Barton, *Lord Palmerston*, 111; Scully, "The Cartoon Emperor," 166-7.

¹⁰⁴ "Decline and Fall of Lord Palmerston's Ministry," 388; *The Era*, 21 March 1858.

the country, with many people once again fearing the island might be invaded by the barbarians of the continent.¹⁰⁵

Palmerston's bill soon became an obvious target of criticism. In the House of Commons, an amendment was introduced by the radical MP Milner Gibson which essentially stipulated that the official French demands be denied.¹⁰⁶ In the ensuing debate, the bill was attacked for its ineffectiveness in stopping any potential crime better than the laws and practices it would be replacing, and also for the way it appeared to have been simply dictated by French outrage. In response, Palmerston evoked the spirit of reform for which many of his opponents claimed to stand:

We have been told by my noble Friend behind me (Lord John Russell), who I always imagined claimed to be a reformer of the law, that we ought to stand by the ancient law of the country, and because this offence of conspiracy for a long course of time has been simply a misdemeanour we ought to refuse to apply the grace punishment attaching to felony.

Palmerston's appeal to the culture of reform, which so many of his Liberal colleagues prided themselves on perpetuating, was paired with a shaming of his country's indignant attitude towards its responsibility for the near death of a neighbouring sovereign:

[U]nfortunately it is a fact that men have plotted crimes in England and from England have issued for their perpetration. When we are told by the right hon. Gentleman and others that we ought to have answered that despatch of Count Walewski with an indignant refutation, I say, unfortunately facts prevented our making that indignant refutation.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Brown, "Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations," 683-4; Bierman, *Napoleon III*, 179; Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 88; Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 157. The new French naval base at Cherbourg was interpreted as a sign of increased aggression; see *Punch* (19 November 1859).

¹⁰⁶ House of Commons Hansard, "Commons Sitting of Tuesday, February 9, 1858," *UK Parliamentary Papers* (1858) <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0148p0-0013?accountid=14846>; Brown, *Palmerston*, 411.

¹⁰⁷ House of Commons Hansard, "Commons, February 9, 1858." The debate also centred around the hypocrisy of Louis-Napoleon, who was characterised as a rebel and terrorist himself due to his two attempted coups in the past.

The amendment carried, however, and Palmerston viewed the defeat as grounds for resignation.¹⁰⁸ Although the bill was not evidently a matter of great importance to the government's stability, the prime minister took it as such.¹⁰⁹ The popular disfavour in which Palmerston found himself, turbulent enough to see him heckled as he rode through Hyde Park, exhausted his will to command his majority government.¹¹⁰ So ended Palmerston's first premiership and first comeback.

Among the elite and the popular classes alike, Palmerston's latest downfall seemed sufficiently dramatic to be his last. Palmerston, in his early seventies, was no longer the oratorically vibrant and politically adept demagogue that once he had seemed. In both body and rhetoric, he seemed equally weak in parliament.¹¹¹ A loss of support was felt everywhere, in the public and private spheres.¹¹² There was an air of hypocrisy about Palmerston at this time. Lord Aberdeen said it was "Whimsical... that the man who for so many years had reproached me for unworthy concessions to foreign powers, should have been overthrown in consequence of a similar accusation."¹¹³ Though the newspapers that were under his wing refrained from criticizing Palmerston's actions outrightly, others, such as *The Times*, which had only recently pledged itself to supporting Palmerston, would offer only tacit support.¹¹⁴ Papers of Tory or radical leaning heralded the fall of the reckless Viscount, reveling in the characterisation of his policies as having been driven by French influence behind the scenes; such an accusation had some purchase in a country that remembered how, two centuries earlier, King Charles II had

¹⁰⁸ Muriel Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston* (Cardiff UK: GPC, 1987): 104.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Palmerston*, 411.

¹¹⁰ Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston*, 104.

¹¹¹ Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston*, 104; Brown, *Palmerston*, 412; Joseph S. Meisel, "Humour and Insult in the House of Commons: The Case of Palmerston and Disraeli," *Parliamentary History*, 28 (2009): 240.

¹¹² Brown, *Palmerston*, 412.

¹¹³ Quoted in, Brown, *Palmerston*, 412.

¹¹⁴ Fenton, *Palmerston and the Times*, 142-4; Fenton, "Origins of Animosity," 365; Grigg, *History of the Times Volume II*, 325.

been bribed by the autocratic Louis XIV.¹¹⁵ *Fraser's Magazine*, a Tory-affiliated publication, expressed a view that had been particularly impervious to Palmerston's appeals to reform in his defence of the Bill:

... [W]e object to change the laws of England at such a time and under the dictation of the French Emperor, his entourage, and a certain portion of his army. It remained for Lord Palmerston, who has been ostentatiously called the Minister – not of France, of Prussia, or of Russia – but of England, to propose this un-English measure... But Lords Campbell and Brougham maintain the sufficiency of the existing law to punish such crimes... The French Government knows as well as we do that the measure will not prevent conspiracies... It leads the French nation to believe that we are not unwilling to alter our laws, if threats and pressure sufficient be used; and the principle once allowed, we shall no doubt be called on some day to make still greater and greater changes to please the continental powers... The debate on the Premier's application for leave to introduce this Bill was a refreshing one to those who have been sickened by the adulation of the Emperor Napoleon.¹¹⁶

Palmerston's defence of the bill, using allusions to the spirit of reform, was seen as disingenuous given his coldness towards reform in general.¹¹⁷ Indeed, in direct violation of Palmerston's popular title of "Minister of England", he was in fact outrightly shaming England's constitution. In some opinions, even Louis Napoleon, who issued an apology to the British government for any conduct which might have embarrassed its national pride, was viewed as more honourable than Palmerston.¹¹⁸ Palmerston's image, now tarnished by accusations of both foreign corruption and senility, was greatly diminished.

Even at his lowest moment, however, Palmerston was still not one to retire. One may speculate as to what his historical legacy would have been had he retired in either 1851 or 1858:

¹¹⁵ Brown, *Palmerston*, 410; "Charles II and Louis XIV," *The Saturday Review*, 67 (5 January 1889): 20.

¹¹⁶ "Decline and Fall of Lord Palmerston's Ministry," 388-9.

¹¹⁷ Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III," 169; Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years*, 315; Taylor, "Palmerston and Radicalism," 173; B.K. Martin, "The Resignation of Lord Palmerston in 1853: Extracts from Unpublished Letters of Queen Victoria and Lord Aberdeen," *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, 1 (1923): 108; Bruce L. Kinzer, "High Politicians: Palmerston, Peel, Gladstone," *Victorian Review*, 18 (Winter 1992): 67-8; T.G. Otte, "Old Diplomacy: Reflections on the Foreign Office before 1914," *Contemporary British History*, 18, (2004):37.

¹¹⁸ "Palmerston's Accommodation Bill," *The Saturday Review*, 5 (13 February 1858): 150-1

in either year he would have been of sufficient age to do so, being 67 and 73 years old respectively.¹¹⁹ However, in opposition to the new, seemingly doomed, Conservative government of Lord Derby, Palmerston remained unrelenting.¹²⁰ In November 1858 he even embarked on a visit to the French emperor in order to patch up relations. It was widely acknowledged that the optics of the trip were “open to misconstruction” and that “it would also create political capital for Palmerston’s opponents,” but the ex-prime minister did so nonetheless, and without remorse, in the name of his grand strategic scheme.¹²¹ In conjunction with his unrelenting political activity, Palmerston’s strongest press allies were able to draw on his past exploits to ensure positive coverage without having to engage with recent failures.¹²² Thus, Palmerston’s resignation would turn out to be a politically expedient move in order to manage his movements in the face of his many political enemies during a moment of failure.¹²³ Faced with extreme unpopularity over his latest actions, Palmerston seized an opportunity to temporarily resign in favour of an uneasy coalition that, as Paul Ziegler says, “would act as caretakers until a new political alignment could be formed.”¹²⁴ When Derby inevitably proved unable to maintain the confidence of the House, it was Palmerston who, in 1859, once again

¹¹⁹ Marx, *The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston*, 3. “With one foot in the grave, [Palmerston] is supposed not yet to have begun his trues career.” Brown, *Palmerston*, 412-4. Brown shows that Palmerston, after his resignation, seemed to be preparing for retirement – making investments and going on holiday; Grigg, *History of the Times Volume II*, 329.

¹²⁰ Brown, *Palmerston*, 423-9.

¹²¹ “Part of a Letter from Sir G. Grey to Henry John Temple, third Viscount Palmerston, Regarding a Proposed Visit and the Government Reform Bill, 9 November 1858” #Docref=PP/GC/GR/2516, *Palmerston Papers*, University of Southampton Archives, Southampton UK; *Palmerston-Sullivan Letter*, 315; Aronson, *Queen Victoria and the Bonapartes*, 91; *The Hampshire Advertiser*, 28 Aug 1858.

¹²² *The Morning Post*, 26 Feb 1858.

¹²³ T.A Jenkins, *The Liberal Ascendancy, 1830-1886* (London UK: Palgrave, 1994): 76.

¹²⁴ Paul R. Ziegler. *Palmerston* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 102.

stepped in as the only man able to build a coalition.¹²⁵ His ultimate triumph ensure the survival of the French alliance, despite public distaste for it.¹²⁶

Continuing Anglo-French Relations: Tenable yet Precarious

Anglo-French relations during the overlapping periods of rule by Palmerston and Louis Napoleon were not devoid of tension and threatening circumstances. Palmerston himself engaged in veritable fearmongering toward the French to gain domestic political points after his dismissal in 1851. As well, during his second premiership, even after having stood his ground in solidarity with Napoleon, Palmerston was eager to highlight the ways that France threatened British interests in Egypt and China.¹²⁷ Even in times of alliance, such as the Crimean and the Second Opium Wars, Anglo-French tensions remained high due to an inherent sense of competition underlying the balance of military contribution to the conflicts.¹²⁸ As the Second French Empire became progressively liberalised, Napoleon III also engaged in more adventurous imperial projects. Thus, the uncertainty of the Anglo-French relationship continued even in times of reform.¹²⁹ Indeed, with the fall of the Napoleonic regime in 1871 and the rise of the Third Republic in France, instability still characterized the Anglo-French relationship, with war very nearly breaking out between the countries in the 1880s.¹³⁰ However, the degree of cooperation between the countries under Palmerston and Napoleon III, particularly given the conditions

¹²⁵ Angus Hawkins, *British Party Politics, 1852-1886* (London UK: Macmillan, 1998): 79-80

¹²⁶ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 9 May 1858.

¹²⁷ "Palmerston to J.T. Delane (editor of *The Times*), 16 December 1859," in *Foreign Policy of Victorian England*, by Kenneth Bourne (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1970): 345

¹²⁸ Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 157.

¹²⁹ Pages, "Annexation of Savoy," 90-2; Christina Carroll, "Imperial Ideologies in the Second Empire: The Mexican Expedition and the Royaume Arabe," *French Historical Studies*, 42 (February 2019): 67-8; *The Hull Packet* (30 Jan 1863): 5.

¹³⁰ L.C.B Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History 1837-1901* (London UK: Routledge, 1973): 227

under which it occurred, was unprecedented. Once incessant distrust progressively gave way to some public sympathy for the emperor, culminating in a large degree of it towards the Bonapartes at their ousting in 1870.¹³¹ British relations with the Second Empire ended by setting an example upon which to draw in the future Entente of the early twentieth century.

Under the restoration Bourbon monarchy that followed the Congress of Vienna, and even the “liberal” July monarchy which followed it, France was not seen as a good ally or neighbour in mainstream Britain.¹³² The Bourbons were neither loved nor ultimately accepted by the general French populace. Many saw that line’s deposition and replacement with the Duc D’Orleans in 1830 as the throwing-off of a yoke imposed by the victorious powers in 1815.¹³³ However, even as King Louis Philippe, Orleans was insufficiently popular to reconcile political consolidation with the unrelenting revolutionary legacy that had become embedded in French national identity.¹³⁴ Though ostensibly liberalized, and essentially imposed, and despite the apparent existence of an *entente cordiale* between English and French ministers, the British found the French monarchy to be an uneasy partner.¹³⁵ Therefore, when a Bonaparte eventually came to power on the continent, it was not really as if a friend were being replaced with an enemy. To Palmerston, it was also clear that Bonapartism, which straddled the line between revolutionary and conservative, provided a flexible atmosphere that was previously not possible.

¹³¹ Halevy, “French Revolutions,” 59; Brown, “Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations,” 686; Albert Venn Dicey, “Louis Napoleon: 1851 and 1873,” *Fortnightly Review*, 13 (February 1873): 197.

¹³² House of Commons Hansard, “Commons Sitting of Monday, February 8, 1858,” *UK Parliamentary Papers* (1858) <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0148p0-0012?accountid=14846>.

¹³³ Lewis Cass, *France: Its King, Court and Government by an American* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1840): 18-9; Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years*, 314.

¹³⁴ Jean-Claude Caron, “Louis-Philippe Face A L’opinion Publique, Ou L’impossible Reconciliation Des Francais, 1830-1835,” *French Historical Studies*, 30 (2007): 620-1

¹³⁵ Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years*, 336-8; Ashley, *Viscount Palmerston*, 270; *The Examiner*, 24 Dec 1842.

It was necessary for someone like Palmerston, who was infamously pragmatic, to find a path through such dangerous terrain as diplomacy with a Bonaparte.¹³⁶ The styles of Napoleon III and Palmerston – both of whom used rhetoric about national liberation in Europe for their own country’s benefit – matched up nearly perfectly to navigate the tension that their respective policies caused in Anglo-French relations.¹³⁷ The integral role of pragmatism is best illustrated in Palmerston’s speech regarding British national interest,

We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow... It is our duty not to pass too hard a judgement upon others, because they do not exactly see things in the same light as we see; and it is our duty not lightly to engage this country in the frightful responsibilities of war...¹³⁸

Though that last sentence may seem ironic in consideration of Palmerston’s well-known propensity toward “gunboat diplomacy”, it is nonetheless indicative of the attitude he desired to take towards powers like France.¹³⁹ For Palmerston’s Britain, it was not enough for the government to unduly combat, support, or simply tolerate the Bonapartist regime. The British public often wanted to fight; Napoleon himself wanted a friend; and many of Palmerston’s patrician contemporaries wanted mere toleration.¹⁴⁰ But French imperial ambition would not be checked by any one of those options. The need for balance between the intense desire of France to reinstate its hegemony over continental Europe and over the Catholic world, coupled with Britain’s aloof desire for fractured balance on the continent, meant that Palmerston could not have domination. He could, however, have influence.

¹³⁶ Parry, *Impact of Napoleon III*, 170.

¹³⁷ Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years*, 332-3; Parry, “Impact of Napoleon III,” 153.

¹³⁸ House of Commons Hansard, “Commons Sitting of Wednesday, March 1, 1848,” UK Parliamentary Papers (1848) <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0097p0-0002?accountid=14846>.

¹³⁹ Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston*, 103.

¹⁴⁰ “Lord Palmerston and France,” *The Saturday Review*, 7 (11 June 1859): 703.

It was therefore not owing to any grand scheme of Palmerston's that a degree of stability was introduced in the Anglo-French dynamic of the nineteenth century. It was rather a balancing of numerous factors, ranging from the Napoleonic ambitions of the Second French Empire, British public opinion towards that Empire, and the hateful memories its symbolism aroused, as well as Palmerston's prideful monopolisation of British foreign policy. These factors came to a head in both 1851 and 1858. In both years, Palmerston, the pariah of government who built a space for his distinctive style by leveraging his popularity in the press, made seemingly fatal slip-ups in the name of his pragmatic strategy for checking France's potential power grabbing.¹⁴¹ Palmerston was not sacrificing his principle for the benefit of his "friend", as some combative newspapers would state. Indeed, Palmerston privately expressed an intense dislike for Louis Napoleon and the ideas for which he stood: "I hate the man, I detest the system, but it is the only thing for the present."¹⁴² Palmerston was working towards a broader purpose.

Palmerston had also intensely disliked the July Monarchy and its foreign minister Guizot. The difference now was the presence of the same continent-wide superpower ambitions that had been personified in Napoleon III's infamous uncle. In Napoleon III there was no desire for cooperation: there was a need. That need must be understood to ascertain why Palmerston felt it necessary to support unprecedented free trade with France in the 1860 Cobden-Chevalier Treaty. Free trade was the logical development of the Palmerstonian conviction that cooperation – one may even say a degree of integration – was the greatest remedy to Anglo-French tensions.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ David Brown, "Diplomacy and the Fourth Estate: The Role of the Press in British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston," in *On the Fringes of Diplomacy: Influences on British Foreign Policy, 1800-1945*, eds. John Fisher and Antony Best (London UK: Routledge, 2011): 49.

¹⁴² Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, 9.

¹⁴³ Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 157; "Cobden Treaty: Treaty of Commerce between Great Britain and France, 23 January 1860," in *Great Britain: Foreign Policy and the Span of Empire, 1689-1971: A Document History*, ed. Joel H. Wiener (London UK: Chelsea House, 1972): 442.

This required a degree of separation between elite and public views of Napoleon III at the outset.¹⁴⁴ To the British public, as to much of the continent, Louis Napoleon may have seemed a sort of clown doing an impression of his uncle. In reality, the emperor was capable of drastically upsetting the balance of power.

Palmerston therefore set a precedent advocating cooperation with France. As his most recent biographer notes, although the relationship between Palmerston's Britain and Louis Napoleon's France was not coated in the romantic notions that characterised the hopeful diplomacy between the countries in the 1830s, that absence in fact makes the Palmerstonian alliance even more notable.¹⁴⁵ Palmerston instigated intense cooperation despite intense public tension. His dismissal from the Foreign Office in 1851 and his resignation from the premiership in 1858 were thus important watershed moments in the development of Anglo-French relations from historic national enemies to partners.¹⁴⁶ Both years saw an immensely popular minister make political stands for good relations with Bonapartist France, chaffing against the clear sympathies of the same people whom he so ostentatiously courted. Though that same minister would engage in Francophobic fears to boost defences against potential invasion, that rhetoric was merely political in purpose; naval defences were morale boosting domestically and maintained a steady lead for the British in the arms race internationally.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, despite such rhetoric, the French emperor maintained that Palmerston was the best British minister with whom to deal.¹⁴⁸ Stable relations between Britain and the indecipherable Napoleon III required

¹⁴⁴ "The French Alliance," *The Saturday Review*, 7 (25 June 1859): 765; Brown, "Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations," 681.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, "Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations," 688.

¹⁴⁶ Arthur Lyon Cross, "Palmerston and Louis Napoleon," *The American Historical Review*, 21 (October 1915): 100.

¹⁴⁷ Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 160; Woodward, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Coventry Patmore, and Alfred Tennyson on Napoleon III," 545.

¹⁴⁸ Hearder, "Napoleon III's Threat," 481.

open preparations for potential conflict both to assuage the concerns of the British people and to dissuade potential French aggression.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, Palmerston deployed public fear of Napoleon, in conjunction with an established trust in his own abilities, to assert that he was the only man capable of steering foreign relations correctly. Palmerston set a precedent that relatively stable relations with France, including military cooperation in both largescale wars as well as imperial conflicts, were possible, even if it entailed dealing with a regime as seemingly threatening as the Bonapartists. The “preference” that Palmerston was seen to have shown France would be echoed in the early twentieth century when Britain chose to side with its Gallic neighbours rather than its Germanic cousins.

Conclusion

The Second French Empire, a regime which had all the potential to become a great thorn in the side of Victorian Britain during the decade in which it reached new heights of influence, therefore became an unexpected ally. Despite the pervasive tension that wracked both countries during the crises surrounding the 1851 coup and the 1858 Orsini Affair, Palmerston led the effort to achieve and maintain an improbable degree of amicability between Britain and a new Napoleonic France.¹⁵⁰ The “Most English Minister” had enough popular support to deploy an accumulated social capital in the elite realm, which accordingly lessened any reliance on public opinion that he would otherwise have needed. This position at the forefront of both elite and popular class consciousness allowed Palmerston to act in the apparently idiosyncratic ways that his pragmatic principles at time required. Whenever intense public backlash emerged against his seemingly excessive support of the Napoleonic regime, both in unequivocally supporting its

¹⁴⁹ Brown, “Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations,” 683.

¹⁵⁰ Pinfari, “Exploring the Terrorist Nature,” 583.

usurpation of power and in sacrificing the pride of the English constitution for its security, Palmerston was able to rebound quickly, to the surprise of many of his contemporaries.

Bonapartism was a powerful and evocative force in the decades following the fall of the First French Empire, the Congress of Vienna, and the emergence of Britain as the world's first global superpower. As an increasingly tangible political ideology, Bonapartism manifested as a desire to overturn the status quo so that France might regain the place in the world that Napoleon had briefly secured for it. To many in Britain, the emergence of a new Bonapartist state out of the ashes of the liberal monarchy envisioned in 1830, as well as the reformed republic envisioned in 1848, was synonymous with imminent risk of invasion. Shaking off that perception was for the most part impossible, even in the midst of alliance with the new emperor and his continuous reassurances of peaceful intentions toward Britain. The change in direction that Palmerston heralded did not necessitate an instant change in feeling among the general population.

Palmerston was no democrat, and he believed in a healthy separation between the people and the direction of foreign policy, despite the way he wielded those policies for political gain and the benefit of his own self image. As the crises of 1851 and 1858 show, even a masterful manipulator of the press such as Palmerston could not align popular opinion with a policy that involved making concessions to France. Even though there was some sympathy with Louis Napoleon among the British, the degree to which Palmerston sought to cooperate with the emperor far exceeded what the majority of Britons wanted.

Nevertheless, Palmerston maintained his liberal patriotic image whilst pushing British foreign policy in the direction of greater cooperation with France during the years in which it was ruled by an autocrat who sought to emulate Britain's greatest foe.¹⁵¹ Though not the only

¹⁵¹ Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 160; Taylor, "Palmerston and Radicalism," 176.

British politician working for Anglo-French rapprochement, Palmerston was able to encourage increasingly positive relations between the two countries despite the apparent character of its regime.¹⁵² He achieved such a balance through various pragmatic political moves, as illustrated by the case studies of 1851 and 1858 as explored above. Both years saw Palmerston achieve a balance between his own political self-interest and the furtherance of British foreign policy. Palmerston's unprecedented ability to mold popular opinion still had its limitations; his great strength, as displayed after his political losses in those years, was an ability to identify those limitations and work around them when need be. Though seen as rash by his contemporary detractors, Palmerston in fact used his position to forge a pragmatic foundation for Anglo-French alliance.

¹⁵² Parry, "Impact of Napoleon III," 149.

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