Jeremy Black. *British Politics and Foreign Policy, 1744–57: Mid-Century Crisis*. London: Routledge, 2016. Pp. 267. $124.95 (cloth).
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Few historians of British early modern politics, press, and European diplomacy can match the number of books Jeremy Black has published, especially in recent years, including the three books complementing this recent volume, *Debating Foreign Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2011), *Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of George I, 1714–1727* (2014), and *Politics and Foreign Policy, 1727–44* (2014). Black's project in this book covering thirteen years during the mid-century is to highlight the internal squabbles and policy divisions among Britain's ministry, Parliament, and king. Focusing on the conflicts enables Black to reveal the internal difficulties that had palpable impact on imperial developments in European wars and in North America. Black also shows how imperial developments elsewhere affected Britain's internal political structure. Black's purpose is to show how foreign policy was "dominated by both foreign and domestic pressures" (x).

Black's argument is that the period from 1744 to 1757 is not typically called a crisis but rather a triumphal period in British history, one that usually has mapped Britain's "rise to greatness and unprecedented global power by 1763" (vii). Only in historical hindsight have we been able to assume a narrative of a "rise" to greatness. Black emphasizes how this era was marked by internal and external pressures. Internally, fears of a Jacobite uprising were fairly constant. Externally, Britain was driven from the Netherlands after unsuccessful wartime experiences during the War of the Austrian Succession, resulting in the ascendancy of France. Britain's old alliance system of defense "could not deliver the anticipated results, either militarily or diplomatically," which indicated a failure in foreign policy. By the 1750s, Britain's "flawed alliance system, with Austria, the United Provinces [the modern Netherlands], and Russia, collapsed" (viii). The contemporary perception was that Britain was in the middle of a series of major failures. With anxiety about French invasions in Britain and the Mediterranean, Robert Darcy, fourth Earl of Holdernesse "discerned a fundamental threat" from France and Austria. The book thus examines the "uncertainties" and the "counterfactuals of what might have happened" (ix) if Britain had not won the Seven Years' War.

Black's point is that it has been easy for historians to have composed a triumph narrative for these years, concluding with Britain's happy success at the end of the war; during this era, however, triumph seemed impossible. Black's approach is both thematic and chronological. The early chapters treat the problems in foreign policy deliberations from the standpoint of administrative structures and the themes of policy during this period. Succeeding chapters (seven, the bulk of the book) address particular moments in the series of crises that characterize the era, from the time when French warships were in the Channel in 1744 and a Jacobite army in Derby in 1745 to the revolution in diplomatic efforts and the aftermath in 1756 and 1757. Each chapter points to how the era was marked more by crisis than by continuities. Throughout the book, Black focuses on why English people might have conceived they lived in a time of crisis and how the different crises emerged and were addressed in policy.

In speaking about "the means of policy," Black identifies the different spheres within the administrative structure that were frequently in tension with other spheres, whether internally or externally. Key players in the development of foreign policy, the king and Parliament, were still, in effect, learning their roles. Ambiguities regarding the power dynamic resulted from the concept of parliamentary monarchy being a relatively new political system. Ambiguities also arose from the views of King George II, who left few records, who relied on the correspondence and meetings of his ministers for the conveyance of his political program, and who conceived his role primarily as a specialist in foreign (external) policy. Sensitive to the tone and importance of foreign negotiations, George II conceived of himself as an international

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leader whose goals were to defend not just England but Hanover from attacks by France and Prussia. He considered that, as king, his should be the leading role in military affairs. By contrast, ministers—advisers to the king, leaders of the treasury, and political leaders of state—held relatively fluid positions, even though they were the leading political agents internally, with regard to the king's relation to Parliament and to colonial relations, and externally, with regard to diplomatic relations with other state powers. A "range of ministers … spoke to foreign envoys," and a "range of ministers spoke in Parliament on foreign policy" (34, 35). Yet, Parliament was, Black says, "a key means of foreign policy" (36): Parliament agreed to support the king's foreign goals of protecting Hanover, should it be attacked, but only if recognition were given to Parliament's legitimate support of and control over British rights. In all of these areas, different groups used the press to work out their agendas and publicize their views, thus creating in the press a significant vehicle to sway public opinion. Amid the different means by which foreign policy would be implemented were struggles about the competing issues demanding attending: efforts in Europe versus North America, concerns over religious practice and toleration, the balance of interests and balance of power, problems with allies, and the flow of information. These years would see sufficient changes taking place, such that the role and function of the state would be redefined.

Black approaches the era chronologically for much of the book, breaking discussions roughly two-year periods from 1744 through 1757. Black's distinctive contribution to scholarship of this era is his reliance on state papers held in both public and private hands. The book is rich with refined detail about who is in and who is out of favor at particular times, and it describes fully the political contentions being faced by King George II and others including John Carteret, second Earl of Granville; the Pelham brothers (Henry and his older brother, Thomas Pelham-Holles); John Russell, fourth Duke of Bedford; John Montagu, fourth Earl of Sandwich; Henry Fox; Joseph Yorke; Holdernesse, and still more. The strength of the book—Black's rich analysis of political wrangling over policy—is also its downfall. The specialized detail will appeal to many scholars, but because the book lacks narrative flow, it will likely be less useful for more general audiences of, say, undergraduate students and general readers interested in history. Even so, the narrowness of the detail is fascinating, and Black ably proves his point that "The relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy … remained … troubled" (232) during this era, and later, despite Britain's great victories that soon followed this period.

Carla Mulford, Penn State University

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In his recent novel, *The Sense of an Ending* (2012), Julian Barnes describes a school history lesson in which students are asked to characterize the reign of Henry VIII. No one knows how to answer, and someone finally ventures, "There was unrest, sir" (Barnes 5). The narrator sees unrest as a kind of fundamental truth about the past, and the novel ends with the statement, "There is great unrest" (Barnes 163). "Unrest," or, indeed change in any of its forms, has not typically been a term assigned to the period called the Middle Ages, which has remained in popular conceptions largely "static and stagnant" (2), despite many recent scholarly attempts to complicate earlier accounts of homogeneity in its religious beliefs and practices, ethnicities, and economies. Positing change as the defining factor of the medieval world is

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