Hello and welcome history friends patrons all to our special series on my PhD thesis. Last time we concluded on the rhetoric of NH in British politics, and we continue our conclusions here, with an assessment of NH’s political power, and its ability to both facilitate and constrain policymakers. I hope you’ve enjoyed the ride history friend, because here we wrap it all up, so I’d love to know your thoughts on all of this. Be sure to let me know, do you feel like your eyes have been opened regarding NH? Will you ever look at Victorian diplomacy the same way again? I certainly won’t, but I will take you to the final episode of this thesis. Thanks and enjoy.

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**II: National Honour – A Political Weapon**

This hypocrisy and inconsistency lead to the second research question – how contemporaries used national honour’s rhetoric to defend policy and criticise their opponents. The evidence reveals that one’s disposition towards a political party did not substantively affect contemporary views of national honour, at least initially. Palmerston’s lengthy stewardship of the Foreign Office may suggest that Whigs were more determined to defend national honour, but this mission was also claimed by Conservatives. Radical MPs were more variable, but their broad church of political views makes any efforts to classify their general position towards national honour difficult. Some could be critical, such as Lord Brougham’s rejection of the conventional interpretation of prestige.[[1]](#footnote-1) Others could be more persistent, such as Thomas Attwood’s Parliamentary campaign to present the abandonment of Poland as a stain on the national honour. John Bright consistently attacked an excessive interventionism, which he presented as detrimental to national honour.[[2]](#footnote-2) Where Radicals coalesced around the Whig interpretation of foreign policy, they supported the government’s defence of national honour. However, once the Conservatives enjoyed the support of Radical and Irish MPs, the picture became more complicated.

Nonetheless, in the five decades analysed here, it is possible to discern changes in how national honour was interpreted and expressed, during a period of shifting party identities. Before these adjustments were made in party disposition, however, one notes that Palmerston’s focus on national honour increased his popularity and made him indispensable to the Whigs. That Peel’s administration grappled with extensive domestic questions may have reduced his opportunities to present a truly Conservative conception of national honour in the 1840s. Yet, one could argue that Aberdeen’s tenure as Foreign Secretary emphasised the same principles of compromise and forbearance which Disraeli’s Conservatives later balked at. The Don Pacifico Affair confirmed Palmerston’s status as the great defender of British interests and honour, but the establishment of the Liberal Party suggested that Palmerston would face challenges from old Peelites and Radicals within the new party if he pursued a confrontational policy.

In the aftermath of the Crimean War, there was a palpable desire to avoid foreign entanglements, and husband British resources. That Britain’s lead in industry, finance, and military strength was increasingly challenged by the United States and Germany presented further obstacles. This shift in the balance of power was arguably confirmed in the failure of the Schleswig-Holstein policy, though Palmerston’s durable reputation stunted Tory electoral aspirations thereafter. The post-Palmerston period reveals further alterations. Thus, William Gladstone’s turn towards a more moralising species of honour was met by Benjamin Disraeli’s reorientation of the Conservative Party, which was arguably Palmerstonian in its emphasis on national honour and prestige. These transformations did discomfort traditionalists, as shown in Earl Derby’s rejection of prestige, and his defection to the Liberal Party in the 1880s. Popular dissatisfaction with Disraeli’s brand of Conservativism arguably brought Gladstone his second premiership in 1880. Yet, it may be argued that Gladstone’s unsuccessful emphasis on a moral species of national honour within a ‘Concert of Europe’ both horrified the imperialist members of the Liberal Party, and facilitated the Conservative domination of party politics in the late nineteenth century.[[3]](#footnote-3)

These political developments were also reflected in the dramatic rise of the press. Palmerston’s recognition of the importance of these extra-Parliamentary resources is well-documented. By cultivating close connections with sympathetic editors and journalists, Palmerston enhanced his profile as the defender of British honour. His legacy was arguably imitated by Aberdeen, who utilised *The Times* and *Quarterly Review* to great effect in his struggles with the United States. Political dispositions among newspapers could change with the appointment of new editors, as seen in the reorientation of the *Morning Chronicle* and *Morning Post*, which effectively switched sides by the end of Palmerston’s career. *The Times*’ predominance did not negate the potency of regional newspapers, which could apply appreciable pressure upon the government’s conception of national honour.Some, like the *London Evening Standard*, *Daily News*, or *Manchester Guardian* adhered to a consistent political position. Nonetheless, as these organs represented the primary connection which Britons had to the public sphere, their contribution to the debate cannot be ignored. Indeed, the media’s participation in these crises reveal further evidence of a dynamic rhetorical landscape which influenced public debate around national honour.

During the period under examination here, the scholar of national honour is denied a professedly Whig, Conservative, or Liberal species of the ethic, as the rhetoric was adapted to the changing political circumstances. Compounding this challenge of classification was the fact that MPs adopted inconsistent positions. Sir Robert Peel critiqued the logic of maintaining the Russo-Dutch Loan when in opposition, yet insisted that British good faith and honour required its maintenance a decade later. Conservatives complained of the forbearance policy adopted towards Spain in 1848, and demanded satisfaction, yet two years later urged forbearance and even arbitration in Palmerston’s standoff with Greece. But Palmerston was guilty of this inconsistency too; he lambasted the Webster-Ashburton Treaty as a dishonourable submission, despite being prepared to accept a less favourable arbitrated settlement a decade before.[[4]](#footnote-4) Further, while Palmerston pressed that British obligations justified intervention in the civil wars of Portugal and Spain, he ultimately retreated from similar obligations to Denmark thirty years later.

If national honour was as immovable and uncompromising as contemporaries claimed, one would expect greater consistency in its application. However, if one takes the position that national honour was also a political tool, then it is not surprising to see it leveraged by the government and the opposition, regardless of the circumstances. It was rare for the opposition to express satisfaction with the government’s presentation of events, and even minor episodes could draw harsh rhetoric. In a debate over the 1860 Anglo-French commercial treaty, Conservatives pressed that the agreement would bring dishonour in addition to financial ruin.[[5]](#footnote-5) Such positions were possible because of national honour’s rhetorically pliable status; contemporaries presented the most demanding interpretation of national honour, or emphasised neglected elements of the ethic, to justify their opposition. Faced with these attacks, the government responded – as seen in the Schleswig-Holstein crisis – by reasoning that opposition figures refused to clarify whether they would follow a different policy.

Occasionally, this opposition descended into farce, particularly when referring to crises in hyperbolic language. Emphasising the comparatively minor Spanish expulsion of Ambassador Bulwer from Madrid as the greatest injury Britain ever suffered, or as ‘unparalleled’ in her history, may appear ridiculous. Yet, these claims were fused with a sense of nostalgia, and reminded Britons of their triumphant record of supremacy. Contemporaries even reflected fondly on Oliver Cromwell as an example of a British figure who once brooked no insult, and pressed for maximum satisfaction whatever the consequences.[[6]](#footnote-6) Turning these sentiments against the government emphasised the damage which had been done to the country. In the Spanish case, critics claimed that the diffusion of ruinously pacific, liberal principles had reduced the willingness to engage in risk for the sake of national honour. It did not seem to matter that in 1848 the divided Conservatives had no intention of making war against Spain. In making these challenges to the Ministerial interpretation of national honour, opposition figures took advantage of the fact that they would not have to pursue the policy they recommended. This opened the opposition to a charge of cynicism, yet this contrarian behaviour was so common in political debate as to have become routine.

Contemporaries could at least agree that an insulted national honour would have to be vindicated. Indeed, a high premium was placed upon this right to vindication. War with China might encourage opportunistic rivals to take advantage of British distraction, but Palmerston asserted that this unfavourable strategic position must not deter Britain from acquiring reparations. Similarly, although in 1861 some lamented that pressing for vindication might place Britain and the Confederacy on the same side, this regrettable outcome could not deter the government from its ‘sacred’ task of redeeming national honour.[[7]](#footnote-7) This sense of damaged honour could rally political opinion behind a certain policy, but as the above evidence suggests, the scenario had to be relatively free from complexity or controversy to work. One is struck by the straightforward nature of the Trent Affair, which saw even the Conservatives united behind Palmerston’s policy of seeking satisfaction. Of course, this did not prevent opposition figures from later criticising the degree of satisfaction as insufficient, considering the lack of an apology from Washington.[[8]](#footnote-8)

If it is the case that opposition figures made their positions as obstinate as possible, then this obstinacy was aided by the rhetoric of national honour. The ethic’s political value was not merely in its popular appeal or resonance, then, but also its versatility, which could be adapted to the circumstances. This did not mean opposition figures were consistently belligerent. When the government determined upon a military response against China, the opposition ‘got a cold fit,’ and pleaded for a peaceful solution.[[9]](#footnote-9) Conversely, when pacific options were prioritised, it was claimed that offending powers would mistake British moderation for weakness, and seek to take advantage. Such was the contentious nature of nineteenth century opposition politics, yet it is striking how extensively the rhetoric of national honour featured in these debates.

Furthermore, although the ethic was publicly prioritised, and could facilitate political victory, it was also inherently demanding. One is struck by the constraints placed upon Benjamin Disraeli’s policy during the Eastern Crisis, largely due to his reframing of prestige as an ethic which required that Britain be involved, or at least directly consulted, in any major foreign development. These claims were certainly aided by the prevailing sense of Russophobia and jingoism, which increased pressure on the Prime Minister. When he returned from the Berlin Congress after acquiring ‘Peace with Honour,’ it seemed Disraeli had outmanoeuvred his critics and seized a popular triumph. Yet, these high expectations proved disastrous when Britain was challenged by Afghanistan, the Boers, and the Zulus all within the year. Facing defeat in these three theatres, Disraeli failed to meet the high standards in prestige he set for himself, yet it may be argued that such an uncompromising version of prestige was always unsustainable. Indeed, it is significant that thirty years before the Eastern Crisis, Disraeli criticised this species of hypersensitive prestige as insufficient, and overvalued.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**III: National Honour – Facilitating and Constraining**

This highlights the third research aim – the extent to which national honour constrained or facilitated policy. Further to this aim, it is worth reflecting on the honour-script which Avner Offer presented. Offer described a code of honour which was inherently demanding and uncompromising. It established certain standards of behaviour, and consisted of a formula which was widely accepted. In the main, this formula consisted of acquiring redress for insult, upholding obligations, and avoiding policies which might be described as dishonourable. Although Offer considered the honour-script in the context of 1914, it may be argued that the concept does help explain foreign policy debates in the preceding period. The prevailing sensitivity to insult, and the commonly expressed determination to acquire satisfaction, appear to validate Offer’s presentation of honour as inherently rigid. However, this research project has demonstrated that exceptions to this script did exist. Although the formula was familiar to contemporaries, it was not akin to law.

There were moments where the government either failed to adhere to this honour-script, or bypassed it entirely. Forbearance did not fit within the honour-script, yet such behaviour was regularly referenced, either by Ministers attempting to avoid conflict, such as towards Spain in 1848, or where opposition figures intended to pressure the government by insisting that alternative options existed, such as towards Greece in 1850. One could argue that Aberdeen’s effort to reclassify the Oregon dispute as one of rights, rather than national honour, also violated the honour-script. Arbitration posed additional challenges, though it may be argued that arbitration was a developing concept in the nineteenth century, and that nations were hesitant to subject concerns of national honour to foreign judgement. Typically, contemporaries were eager to be seen to mediate as a third party, and Palmerston highlighted this role as evidence of Britain’s high esteem among contemporary powers.[[11]](#footnote-11) If the honour-script was as inviolable as Offer described, there would be no political or ideological space for these exceptions in Britain or in any other nation. It is thus contended here that the decision to abide by the honour-script was influenced by the context and circumstances of foreign confrontations. A degree of pragmatism is palpable in these decisions, and one discerns that the potential for victory also influenced the decision either to press these ideas or to withdraw from them.

Yet, in defence of the honour-script, it may be argued that Disraeli in 1878 – like Melbourne in 1840, or Palmerston in 1861 – felt constrained to seek satisfaction because of it. Conversely, one could argue that it was not merely a fear of failure which motivated this behaviour, but also the fear of being criticised *for* those failures. In this sense, the honour-script may be viewed not merely as a policy guide, but also as a source of legitimacy for opposition attacks. As it was commonly asserted that the government was dutybound to uphold national honour, the government which failed to do so could expect to be expelled from office by a disgusted electorate. Perhaps the best way to avoid this outcome was to acquire a satisfactory result. Conflict with China and Afghanistan provoked extensive challenges against the immoral conception and mismanagement of these policies, yet the spectacle of triumph made direct criticism much more difficult thereafter, and greatly aided Sir Robert Peel’s self-image as the Prime Minister who redeemed national honour no matter the cost.

British obligations may also be viewed as a constraint in this respect, since their linkage to the honour-script moved statesmen to pursue policies which would otherwise have been rejected. The obligation Britain incurred to defend Portugal and Spain forced Palmerston to expend energy and resources in campaigns which were not particularly popular, even when successful. Yet, the evidence reveals that contemporaries understood these obligations in conditional terms. According to the honour-script, Britain should have engaged in war with the Germans for the sake of its Danish obligations in 1864. That these obligations were undermined by a lack of enthusiasm for war, and by pointing to Danish violations of its own obligations, must count against the honour-script’s accuracy. Further, Russia’s repeated violations of the Treaty of Vienna provoked several debates on Poland, but Palmerston refused to countenance intervention in the name of British obligations in both 1830 and 1863.

The honour-script prescribed standards which could constrain contemporaries, and render them vulnerable to criticism. However, the honour-script was subject to the versatile nature of national honour itself. Due to its preponderance of synonyms, it was possible to argue that diametrically opposed policies were still consistent with national honour’s tenets. Thus, when equipped with notions of good faith and credit, Ministers facilitated the maintenance of the Russian-Dutch Loan, a result which would otherwise have been as politically impossible as it was legally questionable.[[12]](#footnote-12) To renege on these financial obligations would have been ruinous to Britain’s reputation for liquidity, and contemporaries even claimed that Britain should set a higher standard for credit, regardless of what its rivals intended.[[13]](#footnote-13) As Ministers covered this policy in the rhetoric of honour, the opposition criticised their obfuscation, but they could not impede the government’s determination to continue the payments to Russia.[[14]](#footnote-14) The honour-script was thus compromised by honour’s lexicon, which blurred the lines between what was honourable and what was not. Furthermore, it may be argued that even where national honour constrained the government, this constraint was not always unwelcome.

Even the receipt of insult could facilitate a convenient political victory. Palmerston’s dogged pursuit of satisfaction in Greece may have discomforted friend and foe alike, but his (arguably controversial) triumph demonstrated that being seen to acquire redress was a popular imperative. It may be argued that Palmerston’s skill was predicated on his ability to determine which insults were likely to accrue him a political victory. He also spurned confrontation with powers where the national honour was not at stake, and criticised his opponents for needlessly raising the temperature.[[15]](#footnote-15) In contrast, rather than escalate the war of words over Oregon, Aberdeen reimagined the confrontation as one which was subject to the mutual compromise of Anglo-American rights. One could argue that Aberdeen was compelled to undertake this private campaign for the sake of his public reputation, and that high standards of national honour placed constraints upon him, which he avoided only by changing the nature of the dispute.

Ultimately, it should be noted that Avner Offer presented the honour-script in the context of the turbulent year of 1914. It is contended that the honour-script represents a useful formula which can explain contemporary decisions, but its narrow scope and inflexibility is exposed by the complexity of the period examined here. Although there is not space to assess the period 1880 to 1914, it may be the case that the honour-script became *more* rigid before the First World War. It is possible to argue that the contemporaries of 1914, unlike their Victorian predecessors, were less concerned with the implications of their decisions for the electorate, and were more animated by strategic concerns.[[16]](#footnote-16) This suggests that a pursuit of national honour could compliment prevailing expectations; it was politically impossible for Britain to exit Afghanistan following the 1842 catastrophe in Kabul, despite the immense costs involved in a punitive campaign. That a damaged military reputation would contaminate opinions of British power in India was a powerful incentive, communicated through a rhetoric which emphasised disgrace, shame, and dishonour if the defeat was left unavenged.

What emerges from this study is a prevailing belief system, expressed through a rhetoric which could both inflict political damage, and facilitate striking political triumph. National honour was difficult to define, and due to its preponderance of synonyms, it could mean different things to different actors. It was sufficiently malleable to facilitate a policy of belligerent confrontation, or to justify magnanimous conciliation. National honour’s extensive lexicon was familiar and popular among Britons, but this placed immense pressure on statesmen to uphold and satisfy it. The language of honour could be hyperbolic, inconsistent, intolerant, impatient, cynical, and opportunistic, but it could also be moulded to circumstances with sufficient political skill. Whenever it could be claimed that British honour was at stake, Ministers, their opponents, and the press leveraged the ethic’s rhetoric to make their case to the public and political establishment.

However successful they were in these campaigns, no statesmen of the period could afford to ignore national honour, whether they sat in Cabinet or on the opposition benches. This rhetoric of honour existed in the forefront of British foreign policy, and was inseparable from the numerable crises which characterised the fifty-year period under examination. Contemporaries commonly articulated that a threat to national honour would rally the country behind the government, regardless of their political disposition, but these figures were also more than willing to use its rhetoric if they sensed an opportunity. This is the ‘compelling linguistic evidence’ which Allen Hertz noted in his assessment of honour’s role in international affairs.[[17]](#footnote-17) But if national honour’s rhetorical power was rooted in its status as a widely accepted belief system, then contemporaries clearly recognised this power, and sought to use it for their own purposes.

The rhetoric produced by the subsequent debates represent an unparalleled opportunity both to ascertain the function of national honour, and to measure its influence upon Victorian public discourse. Indeed, the rhetoric of national honour was so common, it may be argued that statesman who failed to develop their skills in leveraging it would be outmatched by their political opponents, or outpaced by events. Those that managed to master its inherent contradictions and pitfalls could succeed on the political stage. The more circumspect might have reflected that national honour was a difficult master to satisfy. Indeed, while the rhetoric of honour may be classed as a political weapon, it was less a silver bullet for policymakers, than a double-edged sword.

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If you’ve made it this far, then you are now more educated on the rhetoric of NH than 99.9% of the world, so congratulations. Use this power wisely. Seriously though, hopefully you now understand why the study of NH fascinates and excites me. Looking at its position in diplomacy, and the rhetoric which accompanied it in a political setting, tells us a great deal about the political culture and beliefs of the time. It also shows us that Victorian statesmen, if they wished to be successful, had to be shrewd and opportunistic in their use of this rhetoric. It could be a powerful weapon in their hands, but it was just as possible that the opposition would sharpen this weapon for their own ends, based on their own interpretations. It wasn’t just that everyone made some effort to use this language then, but the fact that so many people used it in such varied ways, and for often widely divergent reasons.

NH’s versatility struck me as particularly interesting, and the deeper I investigated, the more I came to believe that, like most things, the belief system which has now virtually vanished from our world was incredibly complicated. Injecting a degree of nuance into this research shows us that NH could be two things at once. It was something believed in, but also something powerful, and recognised for this power. Those that served as the conduit of this power enjoyed ups and downs in their careers, but we return again to the point that we can’t discount all of this talk merely as window dressing. If you consider the amount of pontificating in politics today, it’s easy to imagine that among the powdered whigs and candlelight, contemporaries could turn these speeches into performances, which makes it even harder to determine if they were believers or opportunists. You'll note I never intended to answer this question, because unless we know what was in Palmerston’s head, we cannot know for certain whether NH was his be all and end all, or simply a favourite topic for his grimy soapbox. The truth, as usual, is somewhere in between.

We also have to consider the media’s role in all of this. So what do you think, is a newspaper likely to do better in a mid-Victorian town if it focuses on nitty gritty social issues, with a stern tone and moralising message, or if it emphasises the exceptionalism of Britain, talks up its power and influence, and underlines the importance of repelling any threat to this position. Newspapers could have elements of all these things of course, but it is worth asking whether the prevalence of NH rhetoric in the media was a matter of writing about what was popular, and thus, what sold copies, or whether, on the other theoretical hand, the editors and writers of these newspapers brought forward their own views, which gradually educated and persuaded the public. Again, frustratingly, it is likely a mixture of both.

Well that’s great Zack, can you answer anything conclusively in this conclusion? Well, what I can do is present this understudied, and vastly underrated belief system to you in this incomplete form. Yes, people believed different things about NH, but it was unquestionably part of the ideological and I would argue, cultural zeitgeist, reinforced by the traditions and literature of the period. There was a sliding scale of belief, but a willingness to stand up against reported insults to the country’s NH. Politicians recognised this resonance, and worked both to emphasise these insults in cases where the pressure would help them, and also understated or modified it in situations where it could constrain. They were not always successful in this, but it is obvious that they tried, and that no contemporary of Victorian politics could have afforded to do anything less.

This research presents questions for those that see diplomacy in more pragmatic terms, concerned only with the accumulation of power, land, and resources. These were certainly motivating factors, but where this cold assessment of what Britain might gain from a crisis made for uncomfortable reading, governments harnessed an incredibly sophisticated and diverse rhetoric, which could overcome objections in law, strategy, and even morality, in the name of this greater good of NH. Scholars of Victorian history should look to NH’s presence in this long period, particularly in international relations. It may reveal more of the period, and help flesh out the characters who made these decisions, and shaped the world we live in. It is on that note I would like to end. Thanks so much for going on this journey with me. It has been a pleasure to share this labour of many years of hard work with you, and I hope you were able to follow without getting bogged down in the text, or my many tangents. Before we go, yes, AOB is still coming next, but while I don’t have an exact date, you patrons will be the first to know when I do. That being said, my name is Zack, this has been the final episode of our thesis series, and I’ll be seeing you all soon.

1. He rejected the idea that Britain was required to show her power to rivals, in order to receive respect. Brougham, HL Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 39-41. Earlier in Brougham’s career, however, he gave the following warning to the Commons in the event that Britain did not maintain her honour, cautioning that Britain’s rivals ‘…will not assail us by any direct and immediate measures, but will accustom us, by degrees, to bear first, one thing, and then another, till at last, when they come to that point at which we necessarily must stop, we shall find that we have lost the golden opportunity of resisting them with success; and having lost with it that which, to individuals, is everything, and to nations almost everything, namely, our honour; we shall be driven at their good time, and not at our own, to wage a long. and sanguinary, and, perhaps, unsuccessful struggle, against those whom we could have resisted successfully, had we resisted them in the outset of their aggressions.’ Lord Brougham HC Deb 3 Feb 1824 vol 10, cc. 60-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘I believe nothing more firmly and unchangeably than this, that the past policy of the English Government with regard to various matters connected with the continent of Europe has been a policy not tending to her honour, not good for her people, disastrous to her finances, and, I am sure, most needlessly meddling, and of no advantage whatever to Europe.’ Bright, HC Deb, 26 March 1860 vol 157, cc. 1266-1267. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Charmley, *Splendid Isolation?*, pp. 174-182. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Chapter One. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. George Bentinck even declared ‘a war would be less prejudicial both to the honour and the interests of the country than the final ratification of the Treaty… Although war might be disastrous, it could never be disgraceful to this country, which he considered the adoption of this Treaty would be; and war would be cheaper in every respect, for he believed that the financial ruin which this Treaty inevitably involved would be of a character to which the expense of all former wars—to use the expression sanctioned by high authority in that House—would be a mere fleabite in comparison… For these reasons he begged to express his cordial dissent to the ratification of the Treaty—a treaty which could only have been concocted by those who were alike indifferent to the honour and blind to the interests of the country.’ HC Deb 9 March 1860 vol 157, cc.279-281. Earl Grey agreed, and claimed the Treaty inflicted ‘a stain on the honour of England in the eyes of Europe.’ Earl Grey, HL Deb 15 March 1860 vol 157, cc. 578-579. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Lord Dudley Stuart, HC Deb 17 March 1837 vol 37, cc. 651-653. Stuart was careful to clarify that ‘He did not wish it to be understood, that it was exactly this mode of proceeding which he should advise the noble Minister for Foreign Affairs to pursue on the present occasion; but he must state his opinion, that the want of vigour and alacrity to defend the honour of the country which the noble Lord had displayed, was most culpable.’ *Ibid*, cc. 652-653. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *The Spectator*, quoted in *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 Dec 1861. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Baron Kingsdown, HL Deb 6 Feb 1862 vol 165, cc. 47-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *The Globe*, 21 March 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Disraeli, HC Deb 23 June 1842 vol 64, cc. 498-499. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Palmerston, HC Deb 4 Feb 1836 vol 31, cc. 84-85. As Samuel Laing discerned: ‘The natural and humane desire participated in by all to stop the effusion of blood and a wish to keep up the influence of the country in Europe, combined with the traditions and pre-possessions of the Foreign Office, which taught that the honour of the country was lost if we did not exchange a certain amount of correspondence with other countries whenever a fresh settlement took place in Europe, rendered that office peculiarly inclined to offer the mediation of this country in cases of foreign disputes.’ Samuel Laing, HC Deb 20 July 1866 vol 184, cc. 1219-1220. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. As the Solicitor General Sir John Campbell asserted at the time, ‘the good faith and the honour of the country required us to pay this money; and he was sure, he said, that, under such circumstances, the House would support his Majesty's Ministers in discharging such a national obligation.’ HC Deb 20 July 1832 vol 14, cc. 597-599. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Thus in a Commons session of 1847, Lord Dalmeny – father of Prime Minister Rosebery – ‘Remember that our public credit, that fabric so vast and apparently so substantial, which has resisted, and can resist, external shocks and internal convulsion, would dissolve into air before the faintest breath of distrust. It can withstand the earthquake; it can defy the storm. Glance on it with suspicion, and it crumbles into dust. We are pre-eminent in this, that we alone of all nations, whether ancient or modern, have blended the vigour of commercial enterprise with the lofty virtues of chivalry. Other commercial States have trampled on the principles of public morality in their ardent pursuit of gain. We alone have combined, in an auspicious union, the energy of the merchant with the honour of the gentleman. For this we are indebted to that happy fusion, in our constitution, of aristocracy and democracy, by which the restless vigour of the one is ennobled by the exalted integrity of the other. Shall we then stoop from this proud pre-eminence, to sink ourselves to the level of States that are as bankrupt in honour as in purse? Foreign nations have sometimes disputed our justice—they never, as yet, have doubted our probity. Foreign nations have sometimes arraigned our ambition—they never have breathed a whisper against our honour.’ HC Deb 11 March 1847 vol 90, cc. 1176-1178. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. As one opposition figure complained, ‘Much was then said about national honour, with the view, perhaps, of hindering the House from forming a distinct judgment upon the subject immediately before it. The delusion succeeded; the evidence was refused; and since they had to remain in the dark, their vote of that night could only be based upon such documents as were already before the House.’ Sir Richard Vyvyan, HC Deb 20 July 1832 vol 14, cc. 569-570 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. As Palmerston asserted in an 1834 speech to his constituents: ‘Without entering into any details on the system of policy pursued, which may be improper in this place, I may say that the principle pursued has been, to maintain the honour of the country, and to truckle to none. Though we have been accused of truckling to France, we have made France our friend instead of our enemy. And this remarkable circumstance ought never to be forgotten that while the Tories here have accused us of truckling to France, the Republicans of France have accused her of truckling to England. Thus the two parties, whose object it was to involve the two nations in war, have each accused its own government of sacrificing the national honour for the purpose of maintaining peace. The reproach is as unfounded in England as it is in France… Thus we have preserved peace, not only without any sacrifice of the national honour, but also by affording to liberty a progress that must be congenial to the feelings of every Englishman.’ *London Evening Standard*, 9 Dec 1834. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The author suggested this in *A Matter of Honour: Great Britain in the First World War*, pp. 111-114. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Hertz. ‘Honour's Role in the International States' System,’ 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)