CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE BRITISH POLITICAL PRESS AND MILITARY THOUGHT DURING THE SEVEN YEARS’ WAR

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Britain was the clearest beneficiary of the peace settlement of 1763, and attempts to explain its success have long drawn the attention of historians. Alongside arguments about the strength of the British “fiscal-military state” and traditional emphasis on energetic field commanders, debate continues about the importance of the Pitt-Newcastle government as a successful war ministry that was able to formulate and execute a sound grand strategy. Regardless of where one finds the origin of Britain’s ultimate success one question cannot be avoided. How did political expression compare with the ideas that contributed to military decision-making? Answering this question is essential. After all, both grand strategic and

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2 Granted, the concept of ‘public opinion’ is hard to define and difficult to gauge once defined, as Marie Peters explains in *Pitt and Popularity: The Patriot Minister and London Opinion During the Seven Years’ War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3–5, 22–24, but ‘public opinion’ generally consisted of conglomeration of the opinions of several constituencies and interest groups: the moneyed elite, the Whig establishment, the ‘City interest’, and the collective consensus of opinion, where it existed, in various other corporations and in the country.
strategic level decisions were the subject of considerable public debate.\textsuperscript{3} It is hardly surprising that discussion of military strategy could enter the political press. Historians of the eighteenth-century British press have already acknowledged the importance of news about foreign affairs, international diplomacy and European conflict.\textsuperscript{4} William Pitt the Elder’s decisions about the overall marshaling and allocation of Britain’s resources depended upon his ability to galvanize the political will of the nation.\textsuperscript{5} Britons, including some even outside the propertied classes and traditional elites, demanded a high degree of oversight of the government’s conduct of war. Indeed, the British public debated all levels of military decision-making: newspapers and political pamphleteers would even question a commander’s tactical decisions.\textsuperscript{6}

Writers and readers of the political press could hardly grapple with the issues of Britain’s global military effort without engaging some of the same issues about the conduct of war that appeared in another corpus of literature: the printed texts that shaped the strategic mindset of the British officer class. The ‘print revolution’ of early modern Europe had by the mid-eighteenth-century expanded considerably the influence of all kinds of printed material on public life. During a period before staff colleges and formalized general staffs and with few military academies, British officers of the mid-eighteenth century looked to no formally developed and articulated body of military doctrine. Instead the men who became army officers relied on a variety of means for education, many of which depended in turn upon the expanding print culture of eighteenth-century Britain. The material elements of British print culture included books on war; and these provided the eighteenth-century British officer class with a corpus of writing about armed conflict that shaped their

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\textsuperscript{3} M. John Cardwell, \textit{Arts and Arms: Literature, Politics and Patriotism during the Seven Years War} (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 9–14. This chapter uses the terms ‘grand strategy’; ‘strategy’; ‘strategic level’; ‘operational’; ‘operational-level’ and ‘tactical’ in their modern contexts; although eighteenth-century British officers did not use these terms themselves, they had a conception of the different levels of military decision-making; see for example use of the term “the grand manoeuvres of war” in Samuel Bever, \textit{The Cadet: A Military Treatise} (London: W. Johnston, 1756), 20.


\textsuperscript{5} Peters, \textit{Pitt and Popularity}, 1–3.

\textsuperscript{6} For example, see below regarding the political press treatment of the British landing of Rochefort; and Peters, \textit{Pitt and Popularity}, 94–102.