CHAPTER VII

Prussia: The State as Machine

FREDERICK II in 1740 inherited from his choleric father a small but well-knit, bureaucratic state machine, which supported a remarkably large and well-trained army. Frederick accepted as his lifework the task of perfecting this engine of war and of making himself its sole head and director, its prime mover. He was his own minister of foreign affairs and his own commander in chief of the armies. While he sought advice from collegiate boards, though not often from individual civil servants who might thus come to exercise undue personal influence over him, he allowed no important decision in the government of the kingdom of Prussia to be arrived at without being submitted to the prior scrutiny of the monarch. Here was a centralized administration, a complete bureaucracy, a monolith. Frederick imitated Louis XIV's practices of state organization and improved upon them with such absolutist zeal that the famous: "I am the State" was more applicable in his kingdom than it had ever been in the French monarchy. Prussia was small enough so that, with a tremendous expenditure of energy and relentless application to the most minute problems of government, the King personally could supervise the whole
of his domain without being forced to delegate significant authority.

Frederick's concept of the state and his view of the role of the sovereign were set forth with Gallic clarity in his *Political Testament of 1752*, not published in full until after the First World War, so nakedly frank were its revelations of the mainsprings of Prussian power:

A well conducted government ought to have a system as coherent as a system of philosophy, so that all measures are well reasoned, and finance, policy, and the army are coordinated to the same end: namely, the integration of the state and the increase of its power. Now a system can only emanate from a single brain; it must be the sovereign's. Idleness, pleasure-seeking, and imbecility are the causes that keep princes from the noble task of securing the happiness of their people. ... The sovereign is the first servant of the state.¹

What is arresting about this first Testament is not its formulation of a rationale of government, novel though its principles were, but the fact that this ideal of an autocracy imposed upon the state to further its aggrandizement was actually put into practice during his own and succeeding reigns. His rêveries politiques, as he called the daydreams about his dynastic plans, became stark realities, if not in his lifetime, then within a few generations. For more than a hundred and fifty years after his death, his complete identification of the civilian and the military state and the demand for blind obedience to this monster remained embedded in the Prussian character.

Frederick was an animated administrative automaton, an embodiment of the reason of state. It is characteristic that he welcomed to his court the French philosopher Julien de

¹ *Die Politischen Testamente Friedrich's des Grossen*, p. 38.
La Mettrie (1709–1751), the notorious author of *Man the Machine*, and wrote a eulogy upon him after his death. (A passion for food was what these two materialists had in common.) There was a touch of genius in Frederick: he was an intellectual, a poetaster, a flute player, and on occasion a brilliant writer. He was the philosopher-king, immured in his work cabinet, emerging only for his regular inspection tours and to make war with a cold brilliance that has seldom been matched in recorded history. Frederick was a machine, and he created a military nation-state in his own image.

**Civil Servants**

The Prussian officials, cogs in this bureaucratic machine, were under the continual supervision and suspicion of their master. He evolved an intricate system of spies on his own administrators, and dismissals were frequent. No Prussian bureaucrat had a proprietary sense of security in his office like the French official who had bought his sinecure; the Prussian could be sent to Spandau prison without trial. Officials had to pass stringent examinations after they had gone through courses in “ceneralism,” that eighteenth-century German equivalent for the precepts of public administration. A recent historian of the eighteenth-century Prussian system has aptly contrasted the training of the Prussian with that of the contemporary French civil servant. While the French official was almost always a lawyer, who thought in terms of the abstractions of Roman law to which the realities of France, pockmarked with feudal remnants, could not be made to conform even under a centralized monarchy, in Prussia the civil servant had studied his native agriculture, knew the prevailing economic ideas, and could cope with
financial problems and an accounting system. Since Prussian industry, except for state-sponsored enterprises, was negligible in this period, Frederick's bureaucracy had no rival in attracting the talent of commoners. Though the nobility was favored in the distribution of high office in the state, on all administrative levels aristocrat and commoner were intermingled as they were in contemporary British commercial enterprises. This was one of the great strengths of the system.

*The Administrative Structure*

The whole administrative structure was built up so that a small state, originally poor in natural resources, could maintain an army continually at war. The Prussian nobles were made into a ruling caste in the army and into responsible administrators on their great landed estates. They were not allowed to become decorative idlers. They had to serve and to govern. The whole of the nobility was in the army on active duty for life. Officers were chosen for high command primarily upon their show of extraordinary ability, their sense of discipline, and their devotion to the sovereign. The army officered by nobles was the core of the state; it became its reason for existence. On the landed estates, especially in the east, the Prussian Junkers were the administrators of the police and of local justice for their peasants. The position of the Junkers was in marked contrast with that of the French nobility, which had been uprooted from the soil. Power over the peasantry was the Junkers' reward for subservience to the Prussian monarch.

Beneath the king, the Prussian central bureaucratic mechanism was controlled by a General Directory of Ministers, who shared responsibility for all decisions. In the provinces the chief agents of the system were the Councilors of Taxes
whose function it was to draw as much revenue as possible out of the Prussian economy. Frederick derived his monies from crown lands, woods, mills, subsidies, tithes, ferry-dues, tolls, salt, fisheries, game licenses, stamped paper, registration of deeds, taxes on employment, an excise on all commodities coming into the towns, whether necessities or luxuries, and on all merchandise. In addition, he billeted soldiers and levied fees on those who wished to purchase substitute recruits. Frederick had no use for tax farmers, who took a cut of the royal income, as was the practice in France. He exacted the taxes with the "utmost rigor" but his people did not complain, he maintained, because he collected the revenues in his own name and did not employ secondary extortioners.

Given an ill-favored land with limited potentialities, the Prussian kings tried to balance their budgets and finance their wars by a penny-pinching reduction of expenditures for everything useless. No towns dared to lay out funds for embellishments without royal approval, which was rarely forthcoming. Shrewdly enough, the tax-collecting functions were vested in the same local agency whose officers soberly fostered the improvement of agricultural and industrial techniques. These officials whipped the people into ever-greater feats of production by sheer hard work, in order that Prussia might enjoy a favorable balance of trade and have the necessary bullion to feed the army, which would increase the state's weight in the European equilibrium.

In addition to squeezing the peasants and townspeople, the state itself took the initiative in fully utilizing Prussia's meager resources. Frederick drained swamps, dredged rivers, built roads, and distributed land to ex-soldiers. He established a company, taking most of the shares himself, for
foreign trade and shipping. He opened a state bank in 1765. And he sent bureaucrats to England to learn the new industrial techniques and buy machinery for use in the state-owned mines, copper mills, cannon foundries, and saltworks.

A vast output of paper reports kept the Prussian bureaucratic machine going. The reports usually grew out of the collective deliberations of boards and committees, and had an impersonal tone in keeping with the dehumanized character of the administration. In time it was inevitable that this rigid bureaucracy should bog down in its own system. Fear inspired by the monarch who was chief executive became so great that he was often fed information which was pleasing rather than true. As a matter of fact the whole state machine did not render a very brilliant account of itself during the early Napoleonic Wars, when its daemonic head was no longer there to provide the impetus. Nevertheless, for purposes of eighteenth-century warfare it was by far the most effective military instrument in Europe. During the Seven Years' War this tiny state, with only a subvention from Britain, held off the mighty empires of Austria, France, and Russia.

Efficiency and Despotism

There was no independent municipal life in Prussia, since urban areas were subject to the same central administrative controls as the rest of the kingdom. However, there were patent rewards for submitting to this despotism. The sanitation in the towns was exemplary; religious toleration was a reality; and the requirements of manufacturers were sufficiently respected to allow them to break through the restrictions imposed by the old guilds and corporations.

It has been maintained that eighteenth-century Prussia
could not have survived among the great powers, much less extended its hegemony, without the imposition of this harsh administrative system. Such bureaucratic uniformities were clearly unnecessary for the growth of Britain with its common nationality on a compact island. Keeping united the dispersed pieces of the Prussian state scattered over Germany—tiny territorial enclaves and greater areas bordering on Russia, Poland, Austria, Sweden, Saxony—was no mean task. Prussia did not even have a body of law for all her parts until the end of the century. Be that as it may, the emergence of Prussia in the eighteenth century created a new state prototype in Europe, a state with a drillmaster administration based on principles of unquestioning obedience and total regimentation, directed toward the development of unbridled and unlimited military power. This view of man and the state was later imposed upon the whole of Germany, and in our time at one critical moment threatened to engulf the continent.
CHAPTER VIII

Russia: The Servile State

AFTER the death of Peter the Great in 1725, the Russian nobles reacted with violence against his centralizing governmental system. Peter had sought to transform them into servants of the state whose preferment would depend upon their badge of service rather than upon their ancient lineage. The aristocratic revolt against the monarchy in eighteenth-century Russia assumed more bloody and sinister forms than the parallel movement in France. In Russia there were palace intrigues, cabals among the boyars, tsars assassinated. An aroused nobility recouped its traditional powers under the reign of weak and dissolute monarchs. By the time Catherine acceded to the throne in 1762, the Tsarina was no longer the scourge of the nobility but their representative, the first among the peers in the Kremlin. The noble countermovement against tsarist absolutism had been successful in large measure.

The eighteenth century has been aptly called the golden age of the Russian nobility. Concretely, the phrase meant the organization of a servile state and the extension of the absolute powers of the nobility over millions of peasants who had previously remained outside their jurisdiction. Serfdom reached its zenith during the period, at a time when
in western Europe there was a general trend toward emancipation. At the same time that the nobles were being granted a greater number of privileges than they had previously enjoyed, they were being absolved from obligations which had been imposed upon them by Peter the Great. In 1762 an imperial manifesto conceded to them the right to serve the state or not at their own will, except in times of public emergency. In 1785 a Nobles’ Charter confirmed and extended their various privileges. The nobility were loyal to Catherine II as a symbol of the empire, but they supported her only because she frankly and explicitly considered herself a representative of their class.

*Serfs on the Manor and on the Tsar’s Domains*

The nobles had absolute power on their own estates. Villagers attached to a lord obeyed the orders of his steward and labored under conditions not fundamentally dissimilar from those of Roman slaves in the country villas, despite a somewhat different status in law. The servile peasant or the servile worker in the courtyard of the manor house could utilize a portion of his time for self-employment, but such earnings had also been permitted to many Roman slaves. The legal protection vouchsafed the person of the Russian serf by the Tsarina’s reform decrees was nominal. There is only a handful of recorded cases when a servile peasant could and did manage to appeal to Catherine’s justice over the head of a noble. Murder and brigandage committed by peasants were traditionally reserved for trial in state courts, but the judgment of most offenses committed on a noble estate was held in the manor court, where cruel corporal punishments and exile to Siberia were carelessly meted out. There was no effective sanction against the abusive treat-
ment of serfs, even their torture unto death, at the hands of the lord of the manor.

To the peasant, his noble master was the source of all authority and beyond its bounds he knew nothing. In general practice, serfs usually were attached to the soil after the manner of western European mediaeval serfdom and were transferred to a new lord when land was alienated; but serfs could be sold off the estate, either alone or along with members of their family, depending upon the will of the lord. During the course of the latter half of the century, the peasant’s dues were doubled when commuted into money payments. Servile labor varied from about three days a week to total servitude on the estate. Manumission was not unheard of, but usually it was the sick and the aged serfs who were liberated to beggary and death.

As mining and manufacturing enterprises were established, the serfs employed in these industries were organized under a work system almost identical with slave labor in the Roman mines. The Russian state had no consistent policy about the purchase of serfs by industrial entrepreneurs of the merchant class. While Peter the Great had allowed the practice, the privilege was subsequently abrogated, then renewed and modified a number of times. No disparagement was attached to the fact that a noble, through his deputy, was in control of a mining or a manufacturing enterprise, and many aristocrats operated mines, workshops, and smelters on their own estates. The contemporary western European conflict between the nobility and the bourgeoisie was only embryonic in Russia. Whatever industry there was tended to be devoted primarily to the manufacture of goods for the direct war purchasing order of the state or for the luxury demands of the crown. At one point Russia
had exported pig iron, copper, linen, and tobacco to the markets of Europe. Even after Russian goods had been pushed out by British competition, however, they still had an assured domestic market, and the industrial units tended to be large. Often the mills and factories were controlled by noble favorites such as Catherine’s lover Potemkin.

The number of peasants belonging to a given lord varied greatly, from a few handfuls on tiny holdings to great armies of more than 80,000 “souls.” While in 1762 half a million peasants were still registered as freeholders, there was a growing tendency to assimilate them with state peasants, serfs attached to the tsar’s domains, through the imposition of onerous dues and taxes. Within narrow limits the state peasants exercised certain functions of self-government in their villages, but in general the powers and practices of officials of the central government who supervised agglomerations of state peasants were no different from those of the stewards on proprietary estates.

Extension of Serfdom

During the course of the century secularization of church lands converted about 2,000,000 former ecclesiastical serfs into state peasants who paid money dues. Simultaneously about an equal number of state peasants were delivered into proprietary bondage by Tsarina Catherine and Tsar Paul I through land grants to their noble friends. As the Tsarina pushed the frontiers of Muscovite Russia to the southeast the system of serfdom was further extended. It is estimated that by the end of the century 19,500,000 “souls” were bondaged on noble estates and 14,500,000 “souls” were state peasants, comprising a total of 34,000,000 in a servile state out of a population of 36,000,000. In France the monarchy
was constrained to support its nobility by the multiplication of pensions and the emoluments of honorific offices; in Russia the state peasants and the land they tilled were the only coin of the realm available to the central government in quantity for distribution as rewards.

This extension of serfdom was not accomplished without a series of sporadic revolts both among the serfs of proprietary estates and the peasants in the state-owned mines and lands. Drovers of peasants fled to the steppe to escape servitude and were hunted like wild game. The culmination of these outbursts was Pugachev’s uprising in 1773, the last great peasant rebellion. Throughout the empire a vast social war of the lower classes was unloosed. Pugachev was a Cossack leader who declared himself tsar and roused a movement in which were intermingled the resentments of the Don Cossack tribesmen against the incursions of the government from Moscow into the territory to which they had migrated on the Kuban, the Terek, and the Ural, and the grievances of the peasants throughout eastern Russia against the added burdens of serfdom being imposed upon them. At first the imperial forces which moved against Pugachev were routed in pitched battles. The families of landed proprietors were slaughtered and their estates ravaged by the serfs. But these early victories were followed by an imperial vengeance which repressed the rebels with a wild fury. Recollections of these encounters lingered in the memory of the Russian peasantry for generations.

*The Façade of Reform*

In the early reformist years of her reign, Catherine’s approach to Russian problems was naive. She believed that a large population was central to the prosperity of her em-
pire, and in typical eighteenth-century fashion, she longed to bring about the desirable increase by salutary decrees:

Russia is not only greatly deficient in the number of her Inhabitants; but at the same Time, extends her Dominion over immense Tracts of Land; which are neither peopled nor improved. And therefore, in a Country so circumstanced, too much Encouragement can never be given to the Propagation of the human Species. The Peasants generally have twelve, fifteen, and even twenty Children by one Marriage; but it rarely happens, that one Fourth of these ever attains to the Age of Maturity. There must therefore be some Fault, either in their Nourriture, in their Way of Living, or Method of Education, which occasions this prodigious Loss and disappoints the Hopes of the Empire. How flourishing would the State of this Empire be, if we could but ward off, or prevent this fatal Evil by proper Regulations!  

The passion for promulgating evils out of existence and inaugurating the reign of reason by drafting beneficent laws persisted throughout her reign. In 1767 Catherine had assembled a commission representing various social classes to draft a code of laws for all of Russia, on the basis of an imperial Instruction into which she had poured many clichés drawn from her reading in Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws (1748) and the Italian penologist Cesare Beccaria’s On Crimes and Punishments (1764). When Catherine’s instructions said: “The Equality of the Citizens consists in this; that they should be subject to the same Laws,” she was prating the standard verbiage of the philosophical moderates. She continued:

1 William Fiddian Reddaway, ed., Documents of Catherine the Great; the Correspondence with Voltaire and the Instruction of 1767, in the English Text of 1768 (Cambridge [Eng.], 1931), chap. xii, nos. 265–266, p. 257.
General or political Liberty does not consist in that licentious Notion, *That a Man may do whatever he pleases*. In a State or Assemblage of People that live together in a Community, where there are Laws, Liberty can only consist *in doing that which every One ought to do, and not to be constrained to do that which One ought not to do*. . . . Liberty is the Right of doing whatsoever the Laws allow.²

This splendid venture earned her the plaudits of the French intellectuals, who called her a great “législatrice” and “star of the north.” The abstractions of the *Instruction* remained dead letters, as alien to the realities of Russia as the décor of Versailles in the ancient Muscovite capital. Both were modish imitations of the French.

The Russian administrative system remained loose and chaotic, despite some departmental reorganization at its center. Local officials were not carefully supervised or checked, and peculation was rampant. It has been estimated that barely a third of the vast tax collections ever reached the imperial treasury. In this respect as in most others, the “enlightenment” of Catherine’s regime was a figment of the credulity of the western European *philosophes*.

Balance of Power in War and Peace

EUROPE forms a political system in which the Nations inhabiting this part of the world are bound together by their relations and various interests into a single body. It is no longer, as in former times, a confused heap of detached parts, each of which had but little concern for the lot of the others, and rarely troubled itself over what did not immediately affect it. The constant attention of sovereigns to all that goes on, the custom of resident ministers, the continual negotiations that take place, make of modern Europe a sort of Republic, whose members—each independent, but all bound together by a common interest—unite for the maintenance of order and the preservation of liberty. This is what has given rise to the well-known principle of the balance of power, by which is meant an arrangement of affairs so that no State shall be in a position to have absolute mastery and dominate over the others.¹

This definition by the Swiss jurist Emeric de Vattel, who was overimpressed with the unique interrelatedness of the powers in his own age, is the most commonly quoted eighteenth-century formulation of the principle—not the practice—of the balance of power system.

Machiavelli had come close to the idea of a balance of power in his political theory; the doctrine had been practiced by states and empires for thousands of years before him; but not until the eighteenth century was the term in general use, with full awareness of its implications, in all the chancelleries of Europe. The English phrase and its French equivalent, *équilibre européen*, first became current about 1700.

The concept of a "balance" was derived from the language of the physicist, whose discoveries had had so powerful an impact on European consciousness. As royal ministers discoursed on a system of the balance of power among the chief nations of the continent, they reasoned in a manner which they believed to accord with good scientific method and principles. They marshaled a set of facts about the expanding or contracting economies, the resources, and the military intentions of the various states, and then drew deductions which became the point of departure for their own national policy. The political advisers of the great monarchs discussed alliances and alignments as if these "combinations," as they called them, were chemical formulae. The whole vocabulary of international politics was an adaptation from the materialist philosophy and scientific language of the age. In 1773, for example, the Duc de Broglie, secret agent of the king, presented the dying Louis XV with a memorandum which purported to be a realistic summation of all the elements involved in the European balance of power. He entitled his memorial: *Reasoned hypotheses on the present position of France in the political system of Europe and conversely the position of Europe with respect to France. Finally, the new combinations which should or might result from the various relationships in the political system of*
Europe. The study was prefaced with the maxim: "No effects without causes."

The new diplomacy took for granted that the self-interest of the kingdom and "reason of state" were unquestioned absolutes. Even when monarchs gave justifications for their declarations of war they rarely claimed that they were fighting for the triumph of a religious or moral principle. A state frankly sought preponderance over its neighbors, whom it purposed to outweigh in the naked struggle of power politics. There were no abstract ideals for which nations went to war and men perished.

Upsetting the Balance of Power

The balance of political power, like any physical balance, was a delicate equilibrium of opposing or rival forces, dependent on their strength remaining relatively equal. The conception was a static one, in harmony with the eighteenth-century view of a mechanical universe. All the elements in the European political system were, like atomic weights, absolute and finite. Ideally they had to be so arranged on the scale of power that they created a state of equilibrium known as peace. If there was imbalance resulting from change, there had to be a restoration of the ideal order by a rearrangement of the weights on both sides of the scale.

This balance of power was precarious. It was in constant danger of being upset by a monarch's dying without issue, which immediately set the powers into agitated motion to gain possession of the vacant throne; by a marriage among royal families which unduly strengthened one power; by the accession to the throne of a great empire of a woman or of a madman, revealing obvious signs of frailty in a state and whetting the appetites of its neighbors; or by the emergence
of a monarch blunt and voracious who was possessed by the ambition to win glory and power through war and did not give a fig for the whole European equilibrium.

If any state was in the process of becoming enlarged too quickly at the expense of weak members—Russia extending herself into Turkey and Poland, for example—the other powers had to be appeased by being given a share in the booty. Feeble Poland was declared to be a danger to the European equilibrium because it was in a state of anarchy and a temptation to its aggressive neighbors. This was the theoretical justification for the infamous Partition of Poland in 1772. The balance of power was a principle of peace as long as there were readily available territories for the great dynasts to divide or exchange by arrangement. But when, in the name of balance of power, covetous hands were raised to grab the lands of a neighbor who had waxed too fat, war was the likely outcome of the encroachment. Such wars, waged for specific territorial objectives, were usually concluded, however, before a combatant reached the point of utter defeat which would have spelled unconditional surrender. Thus there was opportunity for negotiation, and a formula would be devised in accordance with which a juggling of the status of satellite areas and dependencies of the great powers compensated them in one part of Europe for military losses in another. Sometimes the two armies fought each other to a standstill, then withdrew, reserving a decisive test of strength for another occasion. The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, at which both sides, the British and the French, restored their colonial conquests to the status quo ante bellum, was typical enough of the outcome of armed contests in the first half of the century.
Foreign Intelligence

In the attempt of each state to evolve a rational system of foreign policy, the gathering of information about the war potential and designs of all other European powers became an important function of the ministries of foreign affairs. It was an age of secret diplomacy and the first widespread use of intelligence agents who despatched reports on morale, on economic resources, and on the key personalities in office in the rival states. Diplomacy was conducted with an intricate apparatus of codes and courier systems, presumably designed to assure secrecy. In practice, however, there were few major diplomatic maneuvers, secret treaties, or minor personal affairs of the reigning sovereigns which were not known simultaneously in all of the five great courts of Europe. Both special emissaries and official ambassadors seem to have had rather easy access to the innermost cabinets of most of the European courts to which they were accredited. In this game of kings, dynastic power politics, the gossips and the loose-tongued traitors and informers—male, female, or androgyne like the notorious Chevalier d'Eon—kept intelligence flowing constantly in all directions across the continent. The cabinet of Frederick II was something of an exception in this respect as in many others. The King was almost psychopathically suspicious, and the stringent security measures of his court helped him to achieve a few of the only real diplomatic and military surprises in the century.
Eighteenth-Century Warfare: Its Magnitude and Character

Students of the magnitude of wars have noted that in proportion to its population the Age of Reason was less bloody than the seventeenth century and not quite so pacific as the nineteenth. If the War of the Spanish Succession which ended in 1713 is attached to the seventeenth century and the coalitions against the French Revolution are reckoned to the score of the nineteenth, the picture is much more striking. It shows an unusually long period of relative peace on the European continent from the Treaty of Utrecht to the outbreak of the French Revolution.

Eighteenth-century war was literally an extension of politics, as Clausewitz later wrote, and diplomacy was the fine art of avoiding or settling wars. The wars were therefore qualitatively and quantitatively different from the conflicts of the twentieth century in which ideologies, mass armies, and novel instruments of destruction altered the fundamental character of human combat. The casualties of war in our own century have already exceeded those of the whole of the eighteenth at least tenfold, though the population has only doubled. These statistics are not very precise, but as a contemporary sociologist of war has remarked, the refined techniques of the scientific laboratory are not necessary in a butcher shop.

Eighteenth-century wars never altogether lost their chivalric aspect—as in that memorable exchange between the British and the French at Fontenoy in 1745: there is a story that the rival commanders exhorted each other with courteous protestations, "Sir, you fire first!" The brilliant maneuver of an enemy commander was appreciated as an act
of virtuosity. Cruel treatment of prisoners was not general, though in this sphere too Frederick II was a conspicuous innovator, forcing prisoners of war to join his own decimated troops as replacements.

*Militarism and Pacifism*

Not even professional practitioners of war like the Belgian Prince Karl Joseph de Ligne (1735–1814), who had led armies for seven different nations and had exchanged witticisms with monarchs in every major court in Europe, extolled the virtues of war in twentieth-century fascist dithyrambs. What he wrote of the “noblest of the scourges” was rather characteristic of members of his class, who regarded war as a necessary periodic bleeding of the people:

Peace is a time of apathy when there is perhaps more evil than in wartime, but it is not as evident, because its course is slower. I would be the first to detest war if sickness, bad administration, hunger, an almost universal aspect of discontent, yea, of mutiny and near revolt, were not the consequence of a long peace. . . . At the end of three years of war, the army needs to rest up, especially if there have been many hard engagements and daring undertakings; but at the end of ten years of peace, the best army must inevitably decline. It is difficult to remain in the same position. . . . What does not ascend almost always declines.2

At the same time, there was also a strong antimilitarist trend in the age. It produced two grand projects of universal peace, one by a French moralist, the Abbé St. Pierre (1658–1743), and one by the German philosopher Immanuel

---

Kant (1724–1804). Confirmed pacifists such as the British statesman Robert Walpole (1676–1745) and the French Prime Minister Cardinal Fleury held power and kept the peace for decades. Walpole's brilliant son Horace could sardonically strip the art of war of its noble pretensions. "Every age has some ostentatious system to excuse the havoc it commits. Conquest, honour, chivalry, religion, balance of power, commerce, no matter what, mankind must bleed, and take a term for a reason." \(^8\) Though they lived by the favor of the great monarchs, the *philosophes* loathed war and were violent in their denunciation of the "despoilers of provinces" and the "infamous thieves . . . bathed in the blood and tears of the peoples." The ideal of the useful and agreeable was beginning to compete with the glorious. The figure of the conquering hero idealized by French neoclassicism lost its enchantment for the poets of the eighteenth century. "The boast of heroism in this enlightened age," wrote Oliver Goldsmith, "is justly regarded as a qualification of a very subordinate rank, and mankind now begin to look with becoming horror on these foes to man." \(^4\)

**Recruitment of Armies**

Eighteenth-century armies were recruited by hiring or impressment with or without the benefit of persuasive intoxicants. At one time the army of France had about half and Prussia a third of its men from foreign parts; only toward the end of the century was conscription more generally in-

---


roduced. Of all the great states Russia alone had an army composed of native serfs. The Romanovs had no money with which to purchase troops, hence in the eighteenth century they began to throw into European battles their seemingly endless supply of peasant soldiers. Though most European army officers were natives of the state they served, key commanders in the field were often foreigners who passed from one court to another, selling their strategic and tactical skills without being considered traitors as long as they fought well for their masters of the moment. The practice of the condottieri had survived. Mercenary troops lacked the fervor of the national armies of the following centuries and those who died in battle were regarded not as martyrs but as soldiers who had merely succumbed to the hazards of their profession.

Since the conflicts of the century were wars of armies, not of peoples, a line of demarcation was drawn between battle among enemy troops and a general ravaging of the countryside. This sparing of civilians was less a symptom of growing humanitarianism among the enlightened despots than a consequence of the requirements of military discipline, for if the riffraff which had been impressed or hired for the armies had been allowed a measure of personal freedom, they would have disappeared among the civilian population. A few acts of pillage, because they were unusual, became engraved on the memory of mankind.

The French and Prussian Armies

After his death, the French army forged by Louis XIV steadily declined until it ceased to be the most formidable military force on the continent. It was weighted down with a superabundance of officers, for this was the chief
occupation permissible to a nobility whose numbers were being regularly augmented with new creations. The appointment of marshals and general officers depended less on competence than on court intrigue at Versailles, and a fast rotation of command often paralyzed military operations in the middle of a campaign. An indifferent French nobility stood at the head of an army drawn from the dregs of society and bought in the market of mercenaries. This explains in part at least the defeat on the European battlefields of the richest and most populated state of the continent.

The outstanding military phenomenon of the century was the army of Frederick II of Prussia. His officer corps was a closely knit body of nobles endowed with special privileges and weighted with duties and obligations. Since Frederick II could not always afford to buy troops as the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs did, he sent press gangs into the weaker German states, denuding whole villages of their male population.

The iron discipline which Frederick II imposed on the Prussian army became the model for generations of military leaders. Prussian drill was the attempt to kill the nascent reasoning power and to curb the refractory spirit of the impressed soldier. It was the policy of the "Old Fritz" to make a soldier fear the enemy less than he dreaded his own officers. This, he believed, was the way to win victories out of all proportion to the number of his troops and the limited resources of his kingdom. The officers had to devote a substantial proportion of their energies to forestalling desertions from this military servitude, but an instrument of warfare was thus created which, because it was used with signal success, was emulated by other monarchs.
Status of the Powers after Utrecht

A balance of power system had been deliberately embodied in the Peace of Utrecht (1713) which ended the War of the Spanish Succession, and with minor exceptions it was maintained through negotiation and without war for about a quarter of a century thereafter. In the compromises reached by this international treaty, Philip of Bourbon, grandson of Louis XIV, was finally recognized as king of Spain, but it was explicitly set forth that the "security and liberties of Europe could by no means bear the union of the Kingdoms of France and Spain under one and the same King." On the other side of the balance, Austria was granted possession of the Spanish Netherlands, Naples, Milan, and Sardinia, a dispersed empire almost impossible to administer and defend; and England acquired strong points, islands, and colonies—Gibraltar, Minorca, Nova Scotia, Hudson Bay, and Newfoundland. The Duchy of Savoy and the Electorate of Brandenburg were elevated from their low status and recognized by the powers as kingdoms.

Europe presented the appearance of a great multiplicity of states, but until the middle of the eighteenth century there were only two major rival dynastic land powers on the continent, each with a system of satellites, the House of Bourbon and the House of Hapsburg—both Catholic Defenders of the Faith. In the early years of the century, a combination of Protestant maritime powers, the British and the Dutch, had contained the expansive monarchy of Louis XIV and by supporting the rival House of Hapsburg had prevented him from possessing the continent.

In the second half of the century, the situation in Eu-
rope was complicated by the appearance of two new forces of magnitude in the east, Russia and Prussia. The Russian Empire, a great sprawling land mass, began to achieve a measure of centralized state organization akin to that of the western powers, and concomitantly it acquired vast new territories by penetrating toward the south and the southeast, gobbling away great chunks from the Mohammedan powers of Turkey and Persia and creating new frontiers. Once the Russian flank was protected in the west by the Partition of Poland, this dynamic imperialism seized huge areas whose significance was hardly recognized at the time. The Treaty of Küchük Kainarja (1774) opened the Black Sea, the Bosporus, and the Dardanelles to the hitherto landlocked empire. Russia on the Adriatic and Russia in Constantinople became the next goals of this persistent drive.

With Frederick II, a monarch came to the throne of Prussia who had appropriately masked his political philosophy in a treatise entitled Anti-Machiavel, of which Voltaire in his Memoirs remarked with superb insight: "If Machiavelli had had a prince for disciple, the first thing he would have advised him to do would have been to write against Machiavelli." *Frederick's passion for strategic aggrandizement, his aggressions against the House of Hapsburg and small German states, were major factors in upsetting the eighteenth-century balance of power. They were the immediate causes of the bloodiest wars of the age.

Spain, Holland, and Sweden, great powers in the seventeenth century, were now in eclipse. England sent her pounds sterling into the European wars, but committed only

a small number of men. Her attention had already become focused upon the overseas empire.

**Diplomatic Revolution in Mid-Century**

As a consequence of the emergence of Prussia, about the middle of the century a great diplomatic revolution occurred on the continent. In 1740, when Frederick marched against Austria (War of the Austrian Succession), the French had made common cause with him. England had ranged itself by the side of the young Empress, sending money and ships to harass France and right the balance of opposing forces. In 1756 France abruptly switched from support of Prussia, which could grow only at Austrian expense, to a full-blown defensive and offensive alliance with the traditional Hapsburg enemy. The marriage of Marie Antoinette, daughter of Maria Theresa, to the future king of France was to become the dynastic symbol of the union. The Austrian ambassador to France, Prince von Kaunitz, had been the pivotal figure in effecting the realignment of Europe. It was a diplomatic somersault of great moment: the two land empires, ancient rivals for the supremacy of the continent, hard pressed by two expansive kingdoms, the British and the Prussians, who had once been their clients, resolved to change their “political systems,” in the language of the chancelleries. The Duc de Broglie, in his secret memorial to the King in 1773, denounced the Austrian orientation as the primary cause of French military decline. He believed that the Alliance of 1756 had brought an emphasis on land rather than on maritime war, with the result that “by an incredible displacement France seems to have lost her rank at the head of the great powers.”
The Seven Years' War on the Continent

Frederick II of Prussia challenged the Bourbon-Hapsburg alliance with a flagrant breach of international mores, the invasion of Saxony without warning in September 1756—the opening thrust of the Seven Years' War. The great continental powers resolved to crush the upstart violator who had eschewed the formalities of law and the customs of the Holy Roman Empire to which he belonged. Frederick was literally encircled by Russia, Sweden, France, and Austria. It was England who came to the rescue of the Hohenzollern, as had France earlier in the century, and thus helped forge the state which less than 200 years later brought her to the edge of the abyss. England used the instruments of religious propaganda to rouse sympathy for the Protestant monarchy of Prussia and sent heavy subsidies, notwithstanding King George II's description of Frederick as a "mischiefous rascal . . . the most dangerous and ill-disposed prince in Europe."

In succoring the Prussians, England was proceeding in accordance with her general "political system," a system of strategy whose lodestar was France. To checkmate France, distract her on the continent by feeding the military ambitions of her enemies, and thus handicap her in the struggle for overseas colonies, was for eighteenth-century Britain the path to commercial supremacy. British pounds helped to keep the Prussian army in the field despite severe losses and such crushing defeats that Frederick at one desperate moment contemplated suicide. After years of indecisive combat Frederick's grim tenacity and extraordinary military genius, plus the withdrawal of Russia, compelled Austria to sue for peace, though the bedraggled remnants of
the Prussian forces hardly resembled a victorious army.

In the meantime, with the European war prolonged and France heavily engaged, England had a chance to administer the final coup to her rival on the continents of Asia and America.

*Colonial Warfare between France and England*

On the sea lanes to the world outside of Europe and on the frontiers of colonial settlements, the contest between England and France in alliance with Spain had continued virtually throughout the century. The colonial wars were waged for the right to trade with the new settlements, for the possession of treasure and fertile soil, and for the promise of long future exploitation. The fighting was not always characterized by the charming battle manners of some European engagements. In North America the settlers and mercenaries on both sides hired Indian savages whom they stimulated with the rival firewaters of the European contenders. (In the final reckoning, the British rum won over the French brandy.) The long-drawn-out skirmishes neither began with formal declarations nor were they ended by the treaties of peace, though the fiercest encounters tended to coincide with the renewal of warfare in Europe. The conflict ceased only when one of the participants had been totally eliminated.

In 1738 the representatives of the merchant class in the British Parliament, impatient to break the Franco-Spanish monopoly of trade with South America and bitter over Spanish search of British ships for contraband, were roused to white fury by a Captain Jenkins who told of his mutilation at the hands of the Spaniards—he actually exhibited a cut-off ear. Prime Minister Robert Walpole, reluctantly
breaking a long period of peace with the Bourbons of France and Spain, launched the War of Jenkins’ Ear, which lasted for about a decade, a counterpart to the War of the Austrian Succession in Europe and similarly inconclusive. Again, during the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) on the continent, when French military resources were heavily committed against Frederick, the overseas struggle between France and Britain was rekindled with new violence (the French and Indian War). After a long series of colonial affrays, peace in 1763 found England in possession of Canada and India—substantial recompense for the gallant captain’s disfigurement.

The final outcome of the colonial struggle revealed profound differences in the British and French constitutions, even as it was prophetic of the realignment of great powers in the next century. France and Britain had each chosen to develop the military arm best suited to the national interest as interpreted by the most vocal elements in the state. In Britain, dominated by rich merchants and landowners, there was universal recognition that commerce was the source of the nation’s wealth, and there was a Parliament where colonial interests could obtain a hearing. Protected by the Channel from continental armies, Britain poured her strength into the building of a merchant marine and a navy which could protect the trade with her colonial settlements and could carry them effective military aid at times of crisis.

It was otherwise with the French colonial settlements and the merchants who stood to profit from the overseas trade. Without an assembly where they could present their needs, their future rested upon the vicissitudes of court favor. Hostile voices were raised against them. The nobility, eating up the substance of the state in pensions, resented and ridi-
culed expenditures on what they considered the barren wastelands of North America. The middle-class intellectuals were too preoccupied with their crusade for religious and governmental reform to concern themselves with the outposts of empire. Voltaire paraded his indifference: "You know," he wrote, "these two nations [England and France] are at war for a few acres of snow in Canada, and that they are spending more on this fine war than all Canada is worth. It is beyond my poor capacity to tell you whether there are more madmen in one country than in the other. . . ." 6 The French mercantilists, too, cared nothing for Canada, because it supplied no new products for the realm.

Underestimating the colonial possessions, the French made the occupation of more land in Europe the goal of their military policy and dedicated their resources to maintaining an army for continental warfare. The defense of the empire was given only secondary consideration, and the great navy built by Louis XIV was allowed to decline until it became nothing more than a fleet of privateers harassing Britain's commerce with her colonies; by the second half of the century it no longer played a vital role in protecting the prestige and power of France. Without adequate military and financial support from the mother country, the neglected colonies in Asia and the New World inevitably slipped from French control.

Consequences of the Seven Years' War

Though Europe had been profusely bled, its political boundaries were only slightly altered by the Treaty of Hu-

bustsburgh (1763) between Austria and Prussia; the changes on other continental land masses, embodied in the Treaty of Paris of the same year, were, however, momentous.

England's support of the Prussian soldier-king's lawless rampage had paid munificent dividends. The French had been ousted from India, where English hegemony was now assured. Canada passed from French to English hands, Spain gave up Florida, and the French were evicted from their posts along the Ohio, removing the obstacle to westward expansion by the British colonists. Senegal, too, with its profitable West African slave trade, became a British prize. In short, Britain emerged from the Seven Years' War the preponderant maritime and colonial power in the world.

The new British colonial empire had been bought for a song. On the battlefield of Plassey in 1757, where the French were virtually eliminated from India, the British general Robert Clive commanded 3,000 men, of whom 900 were Europeans, and of these only 20 men fell. William Pitt, the Great Commoner who directed the war, estimated that Canada was won with 1,500 lives. In contrast with England, the cost of the war to Prussia was enormous. Its total population of about 4,500,000 was diminished by 500,000, Frederick wrote, and the war devastation in Brandenburg resembled the continental ravages of the previous century rather than contemporary battlefields. While Britain acquired whole continents beyond the seas, Frederick was merely secured in his possession of Silesia, snatched some twenty years before.

"What did France lose? The world, nothing more!" 7 was the bitter lament of her nineteenth-century nationalist

historian Michelet. Of a once-mighty empire, she now retained only two islands off Newfoundland and fishing rights in the St. Lawrence, in addition to some West Indian islands valuable for their sugar and other exotic crops. But the French monarchy, not perceiving the historic worth of its vast colonial losses, was unable to sense the depth of humiliation to which it had sunk at the Peace of Paris. Indeed, the Duc de Choiseul thought he had turned a shrewd diplomatic trick when he exchanged Canada for the Antilles, which had been captured by the English during the war and which they relinquished the more readily to appease British West Indian interests fearful of the competition of cheaper French West Indian sugar within the British Empire. Colonial power had become the monopoly of England. The Seven Years’ War left France the mere continental state which she has remained ever since, despite feverish nineteenth-century attempts to rebuild the semblance of an empire.

**Territorial Changes, 1714–1783**

During the century, the continental states had jostled one another for position, trying to gain possession of the greatest possible extent of territory, exchanging bits of land here and there, perpetrating sneak invasions when a neighbor was engaged on another front, cannibalizing the weak. Though the European boundaries of dynastic states were altered, the reapportionment of lands was effected with only one full-scale blood-letting, the Seven Years’ War. In summary, these are the major territorial reallocations which occurred in Europe from the Peace of Utrecht to the Treaty of Paris in 1783: France acquired the Duchy of Lorraine;
Prussia was swollen with accretions from Poland and the Silesia of the Hapsburgs; Russia ate away large segments of the Turkish Empire; Austria won principalities in northern Italy and the Balkans; the Bourbons of Spain wrested the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies from Austria; Poland was torn apart by her three neighbors; France was restored the right of fortifying Dunkirk; and Minorca was returned to Spain.

The underlying mechanism of the balance of power in Europe had worked after a fashion, resulting in a series of coalitions against any one state which appeared on the verge of achieving marked preponderance. Europe had united against the France of Louis XIV; then, in the War for the Austrian Succession, the powers pounced on the Hapsburgs, who had acquired 4,000 square miles in the treaties of Rastadt (1714) and Passarowitz (1718); then on Prussia in the Seven Years’ War. A similar maneuver was perpetrated against Britain during the War for American Independence. Each time, in the process of creating a grand alliance and triumphing over the adversary, a new power, a member of the alliance, would emerge swollen with victories. In its turn, the dominant state had to be humbled by another alignment. The victory of the grand alliance in the war for American Independence—the defeat of England by a combination of the American colonials, the Dutch, the French, and the Spanish, supported by the menacing neutrality of Russia—led political commentators to declare that England, too, had met its nemesis and was entering a decline. At the moment when the French monarchy was overtaken by the great Revolution of 1789, her agents were plotting, rather lamely, to be sure, a descent on England and the renewal of a full-scale attack in India.
The American Revolution

The American Revolution has a many-sided significance in the history of the eighteenth century, apart from its role in balance-of-power politics. It may be considered as a War of Independence, in which rising nationalist forces on a new continent threw off the mother country’s yoke and proclaimed the existence of a sovereign people. As a struggle for liberation it was the predecessor of a long line of nationalist revolutions in Europe and South America against the major dynastic states.

It also spelled the end of the simple mercantilist policy in accordance with which a mother country exploited colonies solely for her own economic benefit, prohibiting them from developing native industries which might be competitive with her own and restricting the growth of their commerce in order to expand her own merchant marine. The imposition of Navigation Acts governing American trade, the levying of irksome taxes, and a feint at the strict enforcement of these unpopular measures were futile attempts to carry out a policy of penalizing productive colonial pioneers for the benefit of British industrial and commercial lobbies who had access to the offices of the crown. After the defeat of France in 1763, the colonists no longer feared invasion from Canada and they could dispense with that protective service which the mother country had once provided. Though at first they rebelled only against the regulation of their economy by a government in which they had no direct representation, they soon came to question the worth of any tie with a remote land across the sea.

Far more momentous than the skirmishes, small battles, and protracted sieges of the Revolutionary War was the
intellectual contagion of the revolutionary spirit generated in America. The American Revolution was led by men who had been nurtured on the writings of Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Meeting at Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, they proclaimed "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind" and announced the social contract theory of the European political philosophers as the official policy of their new federation. Moreover, they proceeded to act upon this social contract theory, which, as expounded in Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690) and Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762), had justified the right of revolution against tyrants. In a Declaration of Independence they dissolved the contract with their sovereign in a rational, formal manner, meticulously listing their grievances. What is more amazing, they succeeded in maintaining their principles against the greatest maritime power in the world. The right of revolution was put into actual practice. It is one of the ironies of history that the continental autocrats, in their zeal to humble Britain, were the prime sustainers of these American rebels.

The success of the American Revolution exerted an immediate and significant ideological influence on Europe. In France, one of the parties of government reform called itself "les américains," and the language of American state constitutions reverberates in the text of the Declaration of the Rights of Man adopted by the French Constituent Assembly. The Americans of the Revolution were the embodiment of the ideals of the moderates among the *philosophes*. The American was the natural man, making his way in the wilderness without a king, without an aristocracy, without a dominant clergy. He was clothed in reason and he believed in science and in productive labor. Benjamin
Franklin, the revolutionary emissary to France, was a composite of American virtues, and when he embraced the dying Voltaire at a session of the French Academy in 1778, men were moved to weep.

The American revolutionaries had derived sustenance from eighteenth-century English and French thinkers. In turn, the new union established across the Atlantic was proof for Europeans that the moral and social ideals of the Age of Reason could in fact become the foundation of a free society. In a pamphlet published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1786 entitled *Influence of the American Revolution on Europe*, the great French mathematician and philosopher Marie Jean de Condorcet (1743–1794) sensed the full import of the American experience for the Old World. It was not enough, he maintained, that the great principles of his age

be written in the books of the *philosophes* and in the hearts of virtuous men. It is necessary that the poor and ignorant man be able to read them in the example of a great people. America has given us this example. The act which declared its independence is a simple and sublime exposition of these rights so sacred and so long forgotten. . . . The spectacle of a great people where the rights of man are respected is useful to all others, despite differences of climate, of customs, and of constitutions. . . . It becomes apparent what effect the enjoyment of these rights has on general well-being. The man who has never feared an outrage on his person acquires a nobler and gentler soul; he whose property is always secure finds it easy to be honest; the citizen who is subject only to law has more patriotism and courage.8
