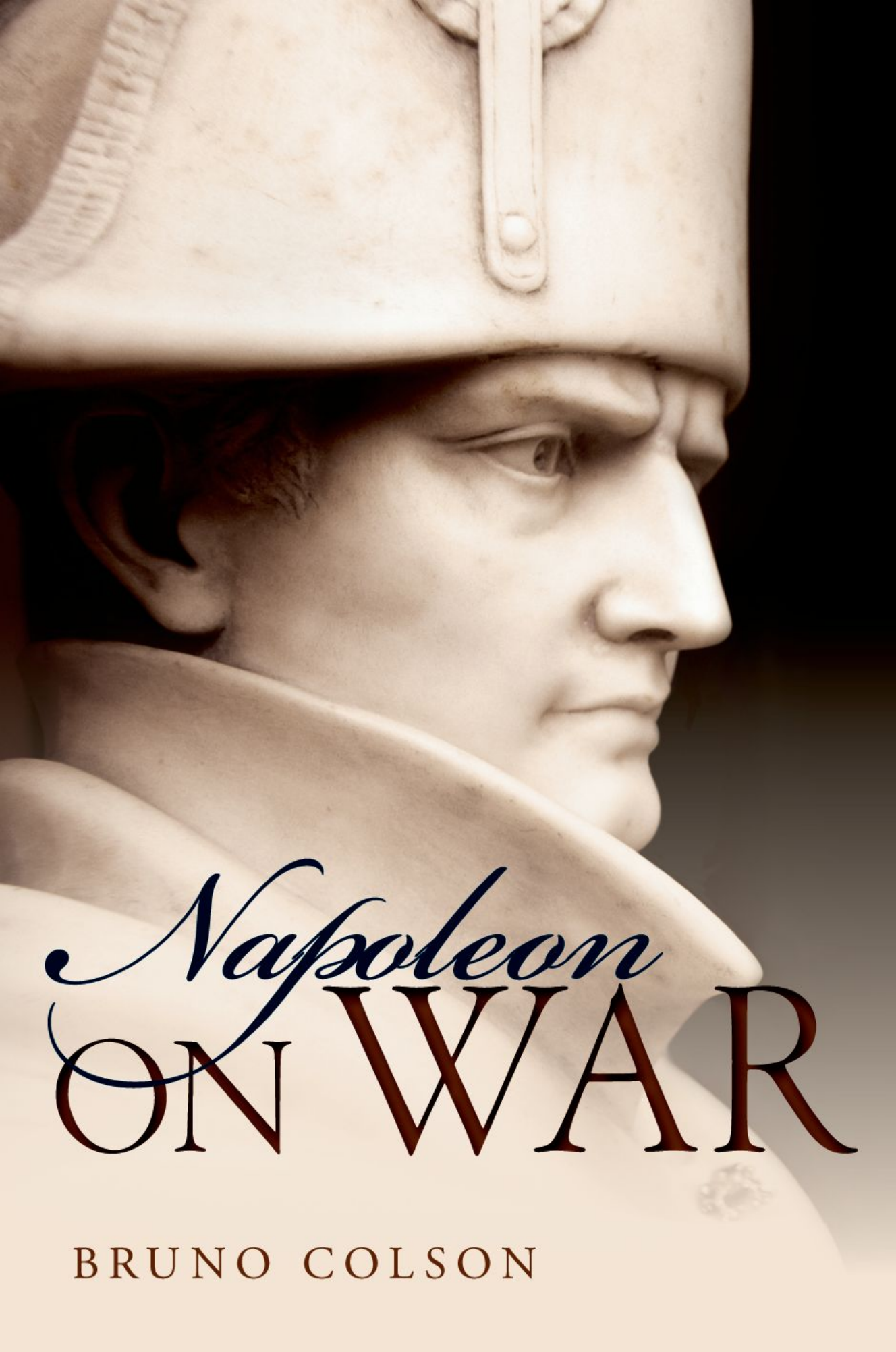

Napoleon ON WAR

BRUNO COLSON

NAPOLEON: ON WAR

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Introduction

You do not need to be French to regard Napoleon as the greatest warrior of all time. He fought as many battles as Alexander the Great, Caesar, and Frederick II of Prussia combined, on terrains, in climates, and against enemies that were very different from one another. His mastery of mass warfare and his ability to raise, organize, and equip numerous armies dramatically changed the art of war and marked the beginning of the modern era. Although his career ended in defeat and exile, this did not affect the esteem in which even his enemies held his military skills.[1] Whereas the reputation of most great military leaders is based on a spectacular success or a few victories, Napoleon won almost all the fifty pitched battles he fought.[2] In a way, officers the world over recognize themselves in him because he imparted to the military profession an intellectual basis and professionalism still affirmed today. At the same time, both academic and popular military history as currently conceived in the West was really born with the study of the Napoleonic Wars and the endeavour to draw lessons for military instruction from them.[3] Yet unlike other great commanders before him, such as Montecucoli and Maurice de Saxe,[4] Napoleon did not write a sustained work on the subject. On several occasions, however, he entertained such a project. Reflections on war pepper his correspondence, *Mémoires*, proclamations, and his writings on Saint Helena, where they have to be pinned down amid so much else.

This work has already been partially done and given rise to numerous collections of 'maxims' in several languages. One of the first was by the Count of La Roche-Aymon, who had emigrated at the start of the Revolution to serve in Condé's army and then in the Prussian army, before re-joining the French army under the Restoration with the rank of brigadier-general.[5] Other editions followed—in particular, those of Generals Burnod and Husson under the Second Empire.[6] That regime made it its duty to systematically publish the great man's words. In addition to the well-known

publication of the *Correspondance*, it sponsored an edition of Napoleon's opinions and judgements (not only in the military domain) in alphabetical order, under the editorship of Damas Hinard.[7] In 1898, Lieutenant-Colonel Grouard, author of numerous works on strategy and critical studies of military campaigns, took up some familiar maxims and glossed them with historical examples taken, in particular, from the war of 1870.[8] The origin of these collections was obscure and none of them supplied precise references to the sources of the maxims. The latter were transmitted from one edition to the next. However, it should be pointed out that, in order to feed himself, in 1838 Honoré de Balzac published a *Maximes et pensées de Napoléon* to which he added sentences of his own invention.[9] Frédéric Masson condemned this mystification, but the damage was done and it is likely that certain maxims attributable to Balzac have wormed their way into Napoleonic collections for good.[10] Thus, we probably owe the following sentences to the author of the *Comédie humaine*: 'In war, genius is thought in action'; 'The best soldier is not so much the one that fights as the one who marches.'

These maxims, and various others, are not to be found in the collection by Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Picard, head of the historical section of the army general staff, who in 1913 published what remains the most serious, properly referenced collection of the Emperor's key military texts.[11] In the intellectual climate favourable to Napoleon that preceded the First World War, Picard returned to the original texts. Of varying lengths, these were grouped into three categories: precepts, men, campaigns. In the first category, the quotations feature by titles, organized alphabetically. This straightforward list is interesting for its initial selection, but does not impose any coherence on Napoleon's scattered ideas and is not accompanied by any commentary. It is also marked by the concerns of its time when it comes to the choice of quotations. Nor does it take account of the diary kept on Saint Helena by General Bertrand, in which the Emperor's reflections on war are especially numerous and interesting. This diary had not been published at the time.

In 1965, a *Napoléon par Napoléon* appeared in three volumes.[12] The first two were a reprise of the dictionary by Damas Hinard, who went unmentioned. A preface by André Maurois was added to them. General Pierre-Marie Gallois provided the preface to the third volume, devoted to the art of war. Once again, what was involved was a reprise of maxims previously published by General Grisot and lacking any references.[13] André Palluel

performed more valuable work for the bicentenary of Napoleon's birth.[14] The provenance of the quotations, arranged alphabetically starting with 'abdication', was summarily indicated. No commentary was provided. In 1970, Generals Delmas and Lesouef produced a study on the art of war and Napoleon's campaigns, largely constructed from his letters and referring to the published collections of the correspondence. The work was therefore precise but, besides its limited distribution, it only took account of the correspondence.[15] The appearance of these fairly voluminous works did not prevent the proliferation of small collections of maxims wanting in any references, but very convenient for hard-pressed readers and publishers concerned about profitability.[16]

In England, a portion of the Count de Las Cases's notes containing maxims by Napoleon was published as early as 1820.[17] The presence of this text in the library of the Royal Military College at Sandhurst is attested three years later.[18] In the early 1830s, the British lieutenant-general Sir George C. D'Aguilar translated seventy-eight maxims that form the basis of the most widely diffused edition in the English language, reproduced by David Chandler as late as the start of the twenty-first century. Several editions of military rules and thoughts appeared in Russia in the nineteenth century and were very popular among officers. German, Spanish, Swedish, Venezuelan, and Canadian editions appeared.[19] Torn apart by the Civil War, the USA saw an edition in the North, reprinting D'Aguilar and prefaced by General Winfield Scott, and one in the Southern states.[20] 'Stonewall' Jackson, one of the best Confederate generals, had a copy in his field baggage.[21] The Second World War was the occasion for a new edition by a colonel in the US army, glossed and illustrated by campaigns familiar to Americans like the Civil War or the occupation of the Philippines in 1899.[22] Reinforcing this American tradition, Jay Luvaas, a professor at the US Army War College, was primarily interested in what Napoleon had to say about the art of command.[23] Familiar with Colonel Picard's edition, he took care to provide references and correctly stressed the interest of the letters to Joseph Bonaparte and Eugène de Beauharnais, in which Napoleon sought to convey the essentials of what made for a good general. Luvaas spent several years assembling and translating what Napoleon had said about the art of war. He put together a book where sources are cited, but sometimes second-hand.[24] Equipped with a precious index and a commentary reduced to a minimum, *Napoleon on the Art of War* groups the quotations in ten chapters, ranging from 'Creating the Fighting Force'

to 'The Operational Art'. That the book should end on this note is highly indicative of the context in which Luvaas completed his work. The 1980s were years of renewed interest in the 'operational level of war' in the US army.

Aside from the fact that Luvaas's work likewise takes no account of Bertrand's Saint Helena diary, my aim is broader and seeks to be more in tune with contemporary concerns. It will not be restricted to the art of war—i.e. the conduct of war—but will encompass the phenomenon of war in its entirety. Collections of texts by Napoleon on war have hitherto sought to unravel the mystery of his success by striving to identify his precepts and judgements and his way of seeing things. We shall take Napoleon not only as a master of the art of war, but also as a privileged witness of war in all its aspects. In other words, we shall be closer to Clausewitz than Jomini. We shall be so close to him that we shall organize the quotations from Napoleon in accordance with the titles of the books and, so far as is possible, the chapters of Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege* (*On War*).[25] A comparison between the two on certain points has already been sketched by Luvaas, who identifies several similarities.[26] Within chapters, we shall add specific section headings. This will make it possible not only to confer a certain logic, if only one of presentation, on the Emperor's ideas, but also to compare them with those of the Prussian general, who is an undisputed master of reflection on the Napoleonic Wars and war in general. The exercise might seem to resemble acrobatics, but it will be appreciated that if a commonality of ideas between these two figures emerges we shall have some indispensable reflections and analyses.

I am conscious of the difficulties of this undertaking. Napoleon's written statements, most of them dictated in the heat of the action or in reaction to things he read on Saint Helena, bring together a number of ideas and are often bound up with specific events. Various Napoleonic texts could figure in at least two chapters of *Vom Kriege*. But that work likewise contains repetitions. We lay no claim to summarize the whole of Clausewitz's treatise or to conduct a systematic comparison between the ideas of these two figures. We take from Clausewitz only what helps us to structure Napoleon's statements. In this regard, we shall also take into account the draft treatise on tactics that was to be added to *Vom Kriege*, which is devoted exclusively to strategy. By contrast, Clausewitz's historical works will be neglected. Prioritizing general reflections, we shall not compare analyses of any particular campaign. Such an exercise might be attempted in

connection with Frederick II's wars, for example, or the 1812 campaign in Russia. But it would assume such a scale that it would have to be the subject of specific works. Our classification of Napoleon's ideas in accordance with those of Clausewitz is open to challenge. But we have sought each time to grasp what seemed to us to be the dominant idea in the text cited. Instances of repetition are, meanwhile, unavoidable. Sometimes addressed to a general in the field, Napoleon's texts are inevitably much more succinct than the extended elaborations of Clausewitz, who allowed himself several years' reflection to compose a *magnum opus* which, as is well known, remained unfinished.

Readers will arrive at their own judgements, but we have been surprised by the comparative ease of situating quotations from Napoleon in the structure of *Vom Kriege*. That book, it should not be forgotten, was the result of a lifetime devoted to studying war as practised and illuminated by Napoleon.[27] Clausewitz, who read French, was aware of the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France* dictated by the Emperor to his companions on Saint Helena. In *Vom Kriege*, as we shall see, he makes several references to a specific passage. In his history of the first Italian campaign, he makes ample use of Napoleon's *Mémoires* as a source, comparing them with Austrian accounts and Jomini's narrative. He cites the pages of the edition he read and deplores a 'complete lack of sincerity', above all as regards troop numbers.[28] Less well known is the fact that in his exile Napoleon probably read a text by Clausewitz. It is attested that his library on Saint Helena contained a nine-volume collection of many pieces relating to the events of 1813 and 1814.[29] *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* refers to it.[30] Attributable to a publicist close to the Prussian military circles occupying Paris, this collection contained a 'Précis of the 1813 campaign up to the armistice of 6 June 1813 by M. de Kleisewitz' (*sic*).[31] This was the first translation of a work by Clausewitz and also the first non-anonymous publication during his lifetime, even if his name got somewhat mangled.[32]

Vom Kriege employs a veritable pedagogy to help its readers to understand war. Clausewitz does not so much teach as stimulate a desire to understand. We find in him not solutions, but incitements to curiosity. 'He is more of an animator than a teacher.'[33] He invites us to ponder the complexity of war, starting out from a few reference points. He is like one of the 'high-performance lenses of the military microscope'.[34] This 'lens' can help us to structure Napoleon's scattered ideas, especially given that the early years of the twenty-first century have witnessed a strong resurgence in Clausewitz

studies and *Vom Kriege* is better understood today than ever. The book is regarded as much more open to multiple, changing military situations. It was precisely written to permit of different appropriations. Its main interest consists in its enquiring spirit, its capacity of stimulation for understanding events, but also thoughts on war.[35] Clausewitz wished to lay the foundations of objective knowledge on the basis of which war as such could be analysed. This accounts for his enduring relevance. He provides us with guide lines for conducting our own critical analysis.[36] It is especially apt to use him to reach a better understanding of someone who was not only his contemporary, but also the veritable reference point of all his thinking and his career as a Prussian officer.

If he deals with concepts in less depth, Napoleon broaches subjects barely touched on, or completely absent from, Clausewitz: civil war, naval warfare, occupation, war in Muslim lands, siege warfare, the health of soldiers, the press. These categories will be added, but incorporated into those of *On War*, whose structure we shall follow faithfully, except that we shall omit a few chapters where we cannot relate statements by Napoleon to them. His experience was much vaster than Clausewitz's, not only because he was commander-in-chief, but because he waged war in many more places. For a twenty-first-century reader, the variety of situations encountered remains astounding. The Napoleonic Wars were not merely a series of major battles in which the artillery pounded, the infantry advanced in column or line under a hail of bullets, and the cavalry, swords drawn, charged to the sound of trumpets. In Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, General Bonaparte became acquainted with Muslim combatants with different traditions. In Spain, but also Italy, more so than in Germany or Austria, his troops had to confront the perennial problems of occupation and pacification. They had to develop counter-insurgency techniques. Even if he was not universally present, Napoleon dealt with all this in his correspondence and studied every aspect, geographical and historical, of his armies' theatres of operation. In other words, not only crucial aspects of recent conflicts, but sometimes even the sites of them, were studied by Napoleon. We shall not establish any parallel. Readers can make such comparisons as they wish. They will appreciate that the human aspects of war and command, dominated by the danger and stress of combat, are rediscovered from one age to the next and that Napoleon's words still supply food for thought.

The sources of these words have all been published, but not always with the requisite rigour. External criticism is called for and a return to certain

manuscripts dictated. Napoleon's written output was enormous given that his life was so short.[37] It can be divided into three periods: the early writings (reading notes, novels, philosophical, historical, military and political writings, a diary, and the start of the correspondence); the writings of the era of glory or power (the bulk of the correspondence, proclamations, speeches, reports, notes); and the Saint Helena writings.[38] From 1804 onwards, most of his writings are no longer in his own hand, but were dictated to secretaries or members of his entourage. It has to be admitted that nothing irrefutably proves the authenticity of writings by Napoleon. Many were shaped and more or less corrected by others. The Saint Helena writings are indeed by him, but his dictation was too rapid for the result to be literally exact.[39] As regards the letters proper, for its scholarly character and quasi-exhaustiveness the best edition is the *Correspondance générale* which is in the process of being published by Fayard and which now replaces the Second Empire edition of the *Correspondance* and subsequent supplements. Nevertheless, the latter remains useful because it includes texts other than letters: mémoires and notes on a military situation, proclamations to troops, army bulletins, and, in the last volumes, the Saint Helena writings. These had formed the object of a separate publication in 1867, under the title of *Commentaires*. But the version in the *Correspondance* is to be preferred, because it referred back to the manuscripts.[40]

Among the most interesting texts attributed to Napoleon is the 'Note on the political and military position of our armies in Piedmont and Spain' (1794). General Colin cites it at length in *L'Éducation militaire de Napoléon* and makes it a basic element of his work. General Camon, another major interpreter of Napoleonic warfare, cites it in practically all his books. Yet the text is unsigned. Camon specifies that it was sent on 1 Thermidor Year II to the Committee of Public Safety by the young Robespierre (Augustin), and that 'the author is certainly General Bonaparte'.[41] Artillery commander of the army of Italy, Bonaparte is said to have sent the report on 19 July 1794 to Augustin Robespierre, the representative of the people with this army.[42] The note figures in the collection of Napoleon's correspondence in the archives of the Service historique de la Défense (SHD) in Vincennes.[43] The analytical report accompanying the piece does indeed attribute it to General 'Buonaparte' and identifies the writing of Junot, his aide de camp, who stayed with him and who wrote his various memoirs at his dictation. Comparison with other pieces confirms it.[44] The note escaped the editors of the Second Empire *Correspondance*, because it was under the name of the

younger Robespierre. Lazare Carnot, member of the Committee of Public Safety, wrote his date of reception on Junot's manuscript: '1 Thermidor Year II' (19 July 1794). The note was published for the first time by Edmond Bonnal de Ganges, who was curator at the Dépôt de la guerre, the predecessor of the SHD.[45] General Colin recognized not only Junot's handwriting, but also the special paper used on the general staff of the artillery of the army of Italy, 'paper of which no sample is to be found in the archives aside from pieces signed by Bonaparte or of which he is the attested author. More than these material details, the style and organization of the ideas reveal the Napoleonic origin of this mémoire. It is impossible to believe that one of the Robespierres, used to a rambling rhetoric, one day discovered the secret of this potent concision.'[46] As a result of having assiduously frequented Napoleon's style in preparing this collection, we are in a position to share General Colin's opinion. Jean Tulard has likewise reprinted the note in his anthology of Napoleon's writings.[47]

Napoleon's dictations on Saint Helena, entitled *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France*, represent an important source for our subject.[48] In them we find a critical account of several campaigns. Of those he conducted, Napoleon had time to recount only the campaigns in Italy, Egypt, and Belgium. But he also described those involving different theatres, like Germany in 1796 and Switzerland in 1799. He also addressed the wars of Julius Caesar, Turenne, and Frederick II. All these accounts are food for thought on war. Finally, the Emperor dictated commentaries on authors whom he read, among them historians and theorists like Generals Jomini and Rogniat. The latter's *Considérations sur l'art de la guerre* were sent to him on 4 December 1818 in a batch of twenty-eight volumes bought by a British businessman, among which were Mathieu Dumas's *Précis des événements militaires*, the first volume of *Victoires, conquêtes . . . des Français, de 1792 à 1815*, and the history of the Portuguese campaign by General Paul Thiébault.[49] At the start of the year, Napoleon had drawn up a list of books of whose publication he had learned, and which he wished to receive. He read Rogniat's *Considérations* between February and April 1819 and dictated eighteen notes about them to the mamluk Ali.[50] These notes represent one of Napoleon's most interesting texts on war.[51] Obviously, we must take account of his desire to refute anything that blamed his intentions and his actions. The dictations went through various subsequent stages. Philippe Gonnard and Nada Tomiche have clearly explained the working methods of Napoleon and his collaborators.[52] For these texts, the

Second Empire edition of the *Correspondance* is still essential where it indicates that it was based on the original manuscript.[53] When this edition indicates that it is based on the *Mémoires* dictated to Gourgaud and Montholon, we have referred to them. The first edition of the *Mémoires* (1823–5) was read by Clausewitz.[54] When they are not drawn from the correspondence, most of these 'military maxims' attributed to Napoleon derive from these dictated accounts and commentaries.

Then there are the accounts by the companions at Saint Helena, who recount numerous statements by Napoleon in direct or indirect style. As is well known, Count de Las Cases's *Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* enjoyed enormous success on its appearance in 1823–4. Like the *Mémoires* dictated to the generals, Gonnard is insistent that this work—the product of two hands—does indeed represent what Napoleon meant.[55] He shows himself in a favourable light, as a precursor of liberalism and a Romantic hero.[56] This work is in fact Napoleon's real political testament, the last piece in the construction of his legend. We shall cite it in the 1830 edition, where Las Cases was able to restore passages suppressed under the Bourbons.[57] On each occasion we have compared this text with that of the first edition, reprinted with annotations and critical comments by Marcel Dunan, to note that the text has not been subject to alteration apart from accents or punctuation marks.[58] The narrative of Barry O'Meara, the Emperor's Irish doctor, is also a reliable source when it recounts Napoleon's words.[59] On principle, we must be more distrustful of the Corsican doctor Antommarchi.[60] However, he conveys some interesting remarks by Napoleon, which he manifestly could not have invented.

But among the 'Saint Helenian' accounts, it is the journals of Gourgaud and Bertrand, written on a daily basis, which have emerged as the richest sources for our purposes. Naturally, these generals hailing from the 'educated armed forces'—artillery and engineering, respectively—were particularly attentive to the Emperor's comments on military affairs. They were also better placed to understand and elicit them. For Philippe Gonnard, Gourgaud's natural candour renders his text even more reliable than Las Cases's. The conversations undergo no retouching in it. Not only do they take place between service companions but, unlike Las Cases's text, they were not intended for publication.[61] Belatedly, however, they were published—first of all by Viscount Grouchy and Antoine Guillois, and then by Octave Aubry.[62] These editions contain some errors in people's names. We have corrected them by reference to the manuscript. The latter,

conserved in the Archives nationales, contains some lacunae, appears in relative chronological disorder, and does not contain any indication of folios or pages.[63] Gourgaud employed minuscule handwriting to hide his text. This does not facilitate its decipherment.[64] The editions involve a degree of interpretation because the notes do not always form complete sentences. We shall cite Gourgaud's journal in its original manuscript version, with reference to the pages of Aubry's edition in brackets.

As for Bertrand's notebooks, they are ignored by Philippe Gonnard and by all the Napoleonic military collections, even the most complete among them. They were only published from 1949 onwards by Paul Fleuriot de Langle.[65] Conserved in the Archives nationales, they are practically shorthand.[66] The order of the notebooks has been altered and does not always correspond to the published text. Proper nouns only have their initial letter and many words are shortened. We have been able to certify that Paul Fleuriot de Langle took some liberties with the original text. Some passages are omitted; others are inverted. Some abbreviations are poorly conveyed. In the round, however, the Emperor's ideas are correctly re-transcribed. With a few exceptions, there are no significant errors of sense. In several places, the manuscript is so difficult to read that we have not been able to decipher it clearly. Furthermore, Fleuriot de Langle legitimately re-transcribes in direct speech words by Napoleon that Bertrand always gives in indirect speech. We shall do likewise. We shall also supply punctuation in a text written in haste that is practically bereft of any. We shall refer to the manuscript in the fairly disordered state in which we found it in 2010–11, indicating the handwritten pagination added in pencil. Reference to the pages of Fleuriot de Langle's edition will always be given in brackets. The praise bestowed on Gourgaud's manuscript by Philippe Gonnard also applies to Bertrand's text, which is actually the most realistic of all when it comes to Napoleon's last moments. Bertrand remained on Saint Helena to the end, whereas Gourgaud left the island in March 1818. Not only do Bertrand's notebooks cover the whole period of exile but, on a military level, they are even more interesting because their author was older than Gourgaud and had enjoyed more significant commands.

Finally, while they were published before the diaries of Gourgaud and Bertrand, the *Récits de la captivité* of the Count of Montholon were written only around 1846, on the basis of personal notes and a reading of Las Cases's *Mémorial*.[67] They also seem to contain borrowings from Gourgaud's text, but clumsy ones where the meaning is sometimes distorted. Montholon

wrote too late, in a context where the Napoleonic legend was already flourishing.[68] A 'court general', he did not have as much experience of war as Gourgaud and Bertrand. We have therefore made very little use of his *Récits*.

The final category of sources is the *Mémoires* of all those who rubbed shoulders with Napoleon prior to his exile to Saint Helena. Readers will appreciate that here we were obliged to include only those characters most likely to have spoken to Napoleon and to have heard him. When it comes to marshals and generals, the circle of chroniclers to whom Napoleon might have confided some profound reflection on war is very small: only Caulaincourt, Gouvion Saint-Cyr, and Marmont have proved interesting. Curiously, the *Mémoires* of civilians are more numerous in recounting remarks of a high calibre on war: Chaptal, Gohier, Roederer, Mme de Rémusat, Thibaudeau. Obviously, we must distrust certain *Mémoires* and have recourse to Jean Tulard's indispensable critical bibliography, with additions by Jacques Garnier.[69] This leads us to the important issue of internal criticism of Napoleon's statements.

Prefacing an edition of the 'maxims', David Chandler acknowledges that their 'practical' value is open to dispute.[70] When he wrote to his subordinates, Napoleon gave them orders or advice in connection with a specific situation; he rarely conveyed considerations of a general kind. It must be admitted at once that Napoleon's thought is difficult to pin down because he himself clouded the issue from the start. He always displayed a great deal of opportunism and, above all, advocated adapting to circumstances in war. It is therefore possible to detect contradictions in him, especially in his correspondence, depending on the context. He always sought to achieve his goals by any possible means; and that precludes accepting at face value any statement of his intentions. Deceiving opponents as to his own intentions was a fundamental aspect of his way of waging war. While, as we shall see in his texts, he extolled honour as an essential value of the military profession, we are entitled to ask if his predominant characteristic was not pragmatism.[71] We know to what extent Napoleon cultivated his legend from his first campaign in Italy, and also how far he created his image not only as a liberal hero, but also as an infallible general, on Saint Helena. In all his statements, we must suspect self-dramatization, self-representation, and self-glorification. On Saint Helena, in particular, he sought to fashion his image for new generations. He also had to respond to the campaigns of denigration organized against him by the 'ultra' political forces of the Restoration.

As Antoine Casanova has aptly put it, 'Napoleon elaborated a multiplicity of reflections in which were intermingled a conscious effort at apologetics, imaginary and illusory solutions to the contradictions he had experienced and that haunted him, and pertinent lucidity.'[72] A dispassionate study of his texts requires making a certain selection from them, offering a critical commentary on them, and comparing them with serious works of scholarship.

Unlike David Chandler, we shall not seek to establish a body of sound advice for military men. It exists, but that is not our objective. We want to identify as accurately as possible what Napoleon understood of war, and how he saw it. We also hope to avoid a pitfall by prioritizing ideas—general and theoretical considerations—over events. The latter will figure solely as background, above all to thoughts derived from the correspondence and shown by specific examples. Like people, they will be elaborated on, or provided with bibliographical references, only if that proves indispensable to understanding Napoleon's thinking or to refuting an allegation whose falsity has been demonstrated by rigorous studies. As a matter of principle, unless indispensable for appreciating an important idea, we shall not enter into a critical analysis of Napoleon's campaigns. The extent to which the Emperor's version has marked the military history of this period, particularly in France, cannot be overstated. A number of myths are hard to dispel. However, various recent works make it possible to correct traditional versions. In this sense too, a critical collection such as the one we are proposing is timely. By focusing on theoretical or general considerations on war, we shall be on firmer ground. Similarly, when Napoleon commented on the campaigns of Turenne, Prince Eugène of Savoy, or Frederick II of Prussia, he was more likely to assess them objectively than his own campaigns. Furthermore, Napoleon constructed his legend more as regards the political aims and principles he attributed to himself than in his account of the facts.[73] We must also distinguish between texts. The journals of his companions on Saint Helena contain self-critical reflections that sometimes contradict the positions adopted in the dictations. Napoleon was more sincere in private conversation than in the texts he wished to bequeath to posterity.

His style offers glimpses of his charisma. Napoleon's sentences are always gripping. They have lost nothing of their magnetic power and can still inspire energy and strength of character not only in an officer, but in any man of action. Jules Bertaut has formulated the powers of attraction of the Napoleonic sentence very well: 'Short or extended, cutting or subtle,

spontaneous or undulating, it nearly always surprises us by the experience with which it is charged, as well as by the profound views that it lets slip. It can be discussed, contested, execrated. But what cannot be denied is its robustness or the extent of its impact.'[74] Haste pervades all Napoleon's writings, especially his correspondence. He got into the habit of going straight to the point 'by simple arguments with terse formulas'.[75] He had his favourite expressions and often employed *reductio ad absurdum* and contrasting words or formulas. His way of arguing was that of the patriots of the Revolution and nineteenth-century nationalists. It consisted in systematically employing a crushing rhetoric that makes any incident, even a minor one, an affair of state and an issue of principle.[76] He created a simple, vibrant, highly vigorous style for himself: the 'lion's claw' referred to by Sainte-Beuve.[77] General Lewal, founder of the École supérieure de guerre, was less taken in by the form and more concerned with the substance: 'An admirable stage director, without always bothering about accuracy, he [Napoleon] loved to strike the imagination, to fix in people's minds a concise image so as to lodge it there profoundly. His terse, incisive speech, full of antitheses in the manner of oracles, had an air of mysterious profundity. Thoughts were often cloaked in it and could be variously interpreted.'[78] On Saint Helena, he had more time to spare and access to a lot of books. His dictations were sometimes less vivacious but more elevated, less spontaneous but more suggestive, smacking of self-justification and a desire to write for posterity. Napoleon had undeniable qualities as a writer.[79]

Our goal being not merely to publish fine pages or morsels of eloquence, readers will be invited, in the wake of General Lewal, to prioritize the analytical significance of the Emperor's remarks.[80] Occasional comparisons with Clausewitz will aid this. We shall not include plans of military organization intended to prompt discussion, or whose content touches on unduly specific material details, such as the infantryman's equipment, the size of an entrenchment, or the structure of bridges on stilts. Such considerations do not figure in *On War*. To facilitate reading and sketch an analysis of Napoleon's ideas, we shall link his texts by means of a commentary in which comparisons with Clausewitz will be a regular feature. Not all of Napoleon's texts will be subject to commentary or close criticism.[81] Far too many aspects are mentioned that would require a great deal of cross-checking—for example, as regards the law of nations. Only links with the ideas of Clausewitz, much more clearly defined today, will be subject to sustained treatment, as implied by the title of our book. We have introduced

punctuation into manuscript texts where it was lacking; respected the punctuation of edited texts; adapted and standardized the spelling of certain proper nouns (Annibal = Hannibal); and corrected the most disconcerting archaisms. We have placed in square brackets what might be required to render a text intelligible. In total, these minor corrections are very few in number.

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BOOK I

The Nature of War

Napoleon already possessed a certain idea of war from his Corsican childhood. Ceded to France by Genoa in 1768, the Island of Beauty was torn apart by opposed parties and remained under French military command during the young Napoleon's early years. From the outset, society must have seemed to him to be naturally stamped by violence. In September 1786, when he had his first semester's leave as a young officer, he returned to his native isle with a trunk of books including the works of Plutarch, Plato, Cicero, Cornelius Nepos,[1] Livy, and Tacitus, translated into French, as well as those of Montaigne, Montesquieu, and Abbé Raynal.[2] Noting thoughts by which he was struck, he expanded his intellectual horizons and conferred a historical and philosophical dimension on his ideas on war, which he regarded as one of the main motors of human activity.[3] The outbreak of the French Revolution only served to confirm him in this impression. But before it broke out, he had undergone training as an officer and resolutely embraced the ethics of this profession, dominated by the sense of honour. Unlike Clausewitz, he was much concerned with the relations between war and law. For Clausewitz war was '*an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will*. Force, to counter opposing force, equips itself with the inventions of art and science. Attached to force are certain self-imposed, imperceptible limitations hardly worth mentioning, known as international law and custom, but they scarcely weaken it.'[4]

I

What is War?

At the age of 22, I had the same ideas on war as I did afterwards.[1]

This sentence establishes a continuity that might be a cause for surprise. In 1791, Napoleon had completed his military training and had his first appointments in an artillery regiment. General Colin has demonstrated the truth of the claim. Prior to undertaking his first Italian campaign, Napoleon already possessed a set of ideas about war that were not to change fundamentally. His early writings contain the main ideas of his system of war.[2] A similar observation has been made of Clausewitz by several of the best specialists on his work.[3]

The officer's ethics

Napoleon was trained in military schools where he learned the code of honour of officers of the *ancien régime*. His correspondence would always preserve traces of this. Thus, he often wrote to his opponents in the most courteous of terms. Before the start of operations in his first Italian campaign, he wrote to the Austrian general Colli[4] that he held a high opinion of his soldiers:

> I have too high an opinion of you to think that you would go to any extreme that would be disavowed by a man of honour and which would make rivers of blood flow. You would be culpable in the eyes of all Europe and of your army in particular.[5]

He wrote for an exchange of prisoners or in the hope that the relevant governments would succeed in agreeing peace.[6] His desire to limit the war also emerges from his orders not to ravage the conquered country.[7] A letter to the commander of the Austrian army trapped in Mantua in October 1796 indicates his humane conception of war, even if it is also an incitement to surrender:

> Monsieur, the siege of Mantua is more disastrous for humanity than two campaigns. The brave man must confront danger, but not the plague of a swamp. Your cavalry, which is so precious, is without fodder; your garrison, which is so numerous, is poorly fed; thousands of sick men need fresh air, medicines in abundance, and healthy nourishment: here are plenty of causes of destruction. It is, I believe, in the spirit of war and the interest of both armies to come to an arrangement. Render to the Emperor your person, your cavalry, and your infantry; surrender to us Mantua: we shall all gain thereby—and humanity more so than us.[8]

The 'spirit of war' is to come to an agreement. In other words, it does not involve a blind unleashing of violence, a fight to the death. The notion of war involves the adversaries adhering to a certain number of rules, which are advantageous to both of them. Napoleon's conception of war remained bound up with that of the officers of the *ancien régime*, of the nobility and its sense of honour. For Napoleon, military men, whatever their camp, belonged to the same family inasmuch as they shared the same values, the same ethic. On Saint Helena, he talked with British officers on several occasions. When the regiment responsible for guarding Napoleon—the 53rd infantry—left on another mission, its officers came to take their leave of him. The Emperor questioned them on their years of service, their wounds. He stated that he was very satisfied with the regiment and would always be pleased to hear good news of it.[9] A few days later, on the departure of the 53rd, he thought of mounting his horse in uniform to salute them. But on reflection he told himself that it would look like he was chasing after the English—something that would pain his supporters in France.[10] Political considerations prompted him not to follow his first inclination as a military man.

'I know of no namby-pamby war'

The development of a military ethic based on a code of honour characterized wars in Europe from the late seventeenth century. This ideal came into contradiction with the natural violence of war:

> Turenne was an honest man, but his troops looted. That's the reality of the history of war, not the romance.[11]

In 1814, the French could have fought harder, challenged the allies more for victory:

> So France conducted itself very badly for me. During Cannae,[12] the Romans redoubled their efforts, but that was because everyone was afraid of being raped, having their throat cut, being pillaged. That is waging war, whereas in modern wars everything happens in namby-pamby fashion.[13]

Gourgaud continues:

> Wednesday, 7 [January 1818]—His Majesty is in a bad mood, rises and says that in our day peoples make war in namby-pamby fashion. 'When appropriate, formerly the defeated were massacred or violated or enslaved. If I had done that in Vienna, the Russians would not have arrived in such good shape in Paris. War is a serious business.' I say to His Majesty that if everyone was killed, victory would be more difficult, people would defend themselves more, that the musket has created equality between men, and I cite Spain. There we conducted ourselves as in the past and the whole population rose up and drove us out. His Majesty gets annoyed, says that if He had stayed in Spain, it would have been subjugated [. . .].
>
> Sunday, 25 [January 1818]—[. . .] The Emperor talks about artillery and would like a cannon firing two feet above the parapet; then he chats about Masséna: 'He could have held out another ten days in Genoa.[14] It is said that people were dying of hunger. Bah! You will never get me to believe that he couldn't have held out another ten days. He had 16,000 men in the garrison and the population was 160,000. He could have found supplies by seizing them from the inhabitants. A few old women, some old men, etc., would have died, but after all he would have held Genoa. If one has humanity, always humanity, one should not wage war. I know of no namby-pamby war.'[15]

These sentences are of capital interest when it comes to understanding the nature of war. Napoleon distinguishes between war as he was obliged to wage it in the context of a civilized modern Europe and the true character of war, where no holds are barred. In a message to the Senate in November 1806, he had already evoked a more violent form of war, as in antiquity, but this time it was a question of justifying the harsh occupation of Prussia until a general peace, as well as the imposition of a blockade on the British Isles:

> It has cost us to have the interests of private persons depend on quarrels between kings and to revert, after so many years of civilization, to the principles that characterized the barbarism of the early ages of nations. But we have been forced for the good of our peoples and our allies to employ the same weapons against the common enemy as he employed against us.[16]

In signing the Berlin decree establishing the blockade of Great Britain, Napoleon endorsed the idea that the war should be fought to the bitter end: one of the two adversaries must cave in; no compromise was possible.[17]

Clausewitz likewise reckoned that war as such could not be made sentimentally: 'Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat any enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst.'[18] He too characterized war as 'a serious means to a serious end'.[19] It was right for the European nations to adopt among themselves certain rules limiting violence, but these rules pre-existed war as such. They formed part of a superior socio-political context. Ferocious hatred could always resurface in civilized nations because any war could generate such sentiments. In fact, war was a mutual act in which violence could theoretically be unlimited. As a concept, war naturally went to extremes and could entail unlimited use of force. Clausewitz expressed in minute detail what Napoleon merely evoked. But each of them perceived the same thing. The Napoleonic Wars were not 'total wars' in the sense given the term in the twentieth century, but they began to portend them. We shall return to this key question a little later and again at the end of Book VIII.

Civil wars

Napoleon ventured a few general considerations on civil wars in connection with the Vendée, to which Clausewitz devoted a short study:[20]

> It is because all the parties resemble one another: once the civilian torches are lit, military leaders are merely means to victory; but it is the crowd that governs. [...]
>
> This is the peculiarity of revolts: equality of interests starts them, the union of passions continues them, and they invariably end up in civil war, which establishes itself in the revolts themselves. [...]
>
> In civil wars, it is not given to every man to know how to behave; something more than military prudence is required; what is needed is wisdom, knowledge of men ... [...]
>
> In party wars, he who is conquered one day is discouraged for a long time. It is above all in civil wars that good fortune is needed.[21]

At the start of the Consulate, the general charged with pacifying the départements of the west was urged to trust those who submitted, to conciliate priests, and to facilitate the travel of the leaders who wished to go to Paris. He also received the following instruction:

> If you wage war, do so with rapidity and severity; that is the only way of rendering it less prolonged and, consequently, less deplorable for humanity.[22]

On Saint Helena, Napoleon had this to say about the war between Caesar and Pompey:

> It is Rome that needed to be taken care of; that is where Pompey should have concentrated all his forces. At the start of civil wars, all the troops must be concentrated because they electrify one another and take confidence in the strength of the party; they attach themselves to it and remain loyal to it.[23]

Some notes on the restoration of French authority on Saint-Domingue deliver the paradoxical observation that

> [. . .] civil wars, rather than enfeebling, re-temper and toughen peoples.[24]

By contrast, the troops who serve in this kind of war gradually forget how to fight a regular army. From Italy, in October 1796, General Bonaparte wrote as follows of the new generals sent to him:

> Anyone who comes to us from the Vendée is not accustomed to proper warfare; we make the same criticism of the troops, but they get hardened.[25]

Napoleon occasionally characterized the conflicts between European countries as civil wars. During a reception for the diplomatic corps and members of the British Parliament on 15 fructidor (2 September 1802) in a Europe pacified by the Treaty of Amiens, he confided to Charles James Fox, the leader of the Whig party and supporter of a rapprochement with France:

> There are only two nations, the East and the West. France, England, and Spain have the same customs, the same religion, and the same ideas, pretty much. It is simply a family. Those who wish to create war between them want civil war.[26]

Was this reflection, prophesying the 'clash of civilizations' and the unity of Europe, merely an ad hoc quip? Or does it reflect Napoleon's true thinking? The Egyptian campaign had given him experience of war with Orientals. We must turn to other allusions to war and peace between Europeans to define his position more clearly.

War and peace

A long conversation with a state counsellor, at a time when Europe was at peace following the Treaty of Amiens, but before the proclamation of the Consulate for life, or between late March and early August 1802, is highly illuminating on Napoleon's relationship to war and peace:

FIRST CONSUL: [. . .] England fears us and the continental powers do not like us. Given this, how can we hope for a strong peace! Besides, do you think that a peace lasting five years or more suits the form and circumstances of our government?

STATE COUNSELLOR: I think this break would suit France very well after ten years of war.

FIRST CONSUL: You misunderstand me: I am not questioning whether a genuine, robust peace is good for a well-established state; I am asking whether ours is sufficiently such as not to still have need of victories.

STATE COUNSELLOR: I haven't thought enough about such a serious question to answer categorically: all I can say, or rather what I feel, is that a state which can only be consolidated through war is in a very unfortunate situation.

FIRST CONSUL: The greatest misfortune would be to misjudge its situation, because one can cater for it when one knows it. Now, tell me: do you believe in the continuing hostility of these governments that have nevertheless just signed the peace?

STATE COUNSELLOR: It would be very difficult for me not to believe in it.

FIRST CONSUL: So then, draw the conclusion! If these governments always have war at heart, if they are bound to renew it one day, it would be better for it to be sooner than later. For every day weakens the impression in them of their last defeats and tends to diminish among us the prestige of our last victories. All the advantage therefore lies with them.

STATE COUNSELLOR: But, citizen consul, do you discount the advantage you can take of peace to organize the interior?

FIRST CONSUL: I was going to come to that. Certainly, that major consideration has not escaped my mind and, even in the midst of war, I have demonstrated that I do not neglect what concerns institutions and good order at home. I will not stop there; there is still a lot to be done. But aren't military successes more necessary to dazzle and contain the interior? Remember that a First Consul does not resemble those kings by the grace of God who regard their states as an heirloom. Their power has old habits for auxiliaries. Among us, by contrast, such old habits are obstacles. Today's French government resembles nothing surrounding it. Hated by its

neighbours, compelled to contain in the interior several classes of malcontents, to impress so many enemies it requires dramatic gestures and, consequently, war.

STATE COUNSELLOR: Citizen consul, I admit that you have much more to do to consolidate your government than do the neighbouring kings to maintain theirs. On the one hand, however, Europe is not unaware that you are capable of conquering and, in order to remember it, does not need you to supply new proof every year; and on the other, peacetime activities are not always low key and you can command admiration by great works.

FIRST CONSUL: Regarded from a distance, old victories have scarcely any impact and great works of art do not make a great impression except on those who see them; and that is a small number of people. My intention is indeed to multiply such works; the future will perhaps be more attached to me for them than for my victories. But for the present there is nothing that can resonate as much as military success: that is what I think; it is an unhappy situation. To consolidate itself, a new government like ours must, I repeat, dazzle and astound.

STATE COUNSELLOR: Your government, citizen consul, is not, it seems to me, completely new-born. It has assumed a manly garb since Marengo: ruled by someone strong-minded, and supported by the arms of thirty million inhabitants, it occupies a rather distinguished place among the governments of Europe.

FIRST CONSUL: So, my dear friend, you think that suffices? One must *come first of all or succumb*.

STATE COUNSELLOR: And to obtain that result, you see nothing but war?

FIRST CONSUL: Yes, citizen . . . I shall tolerate peace if our neighbours can keep it. But if they force me to take up arms again before they are blunted by softness or prolonged inaction, I shall view that as an advantage.

STATE COUNSELLOR: Citizen consul, what duration do you assign to this state of anxiety which, in the very midst of peace, causes war to be missed?

FIRST CONSUL: My dear friend, I am not sufficiently informed about the future to answer that question. But I feel that to hope for more robustness and good faith in peace treaties, either the form of the governments around us must approximate to ours, or our political institutions must be rather more in harmony with theirs. There is always a spirit of war between old monarchies and a completely new republic. That is the root of European discord.

STATE COUNSELLOR: But can't this hostile spirit be contained by recent memories and stopped by the attitude you adopt?

FIRST CONSULT: Palliatives are not remedies. In our position, I regard any peace as a brief truce and my ten-year appointment[27] as destined to wage war virtually uninterrupted. My successors will do what they can. (This was before the lifetime Consulate.)[28] Besides, don't think that I want to break the peace; no, I will certainly not play the role of aggressor. I have too much

> interest in leaving the initiative to the foreigners. I know them well: they will be the first to take up arms again or to furnish me with just grounds for taking them up again. I will be ready for any eventuality.
>
> STATE COUNSELLOR: So, citizen consul, what I feared a few moments ago is precisely what you are hoping for.
>
> FIRST CONSUL: I am waiting; and my principle is that war is preferable to an ephemeral peace. We shall see what the latter will turn out to be. At this moment, it is a great prize. It seals recognition of my government by the one that resisted it longest: that is the most important thing. As for the rest—that's to say, the future—depending on circumstances.[29]

In this remarkable dialogue, Napoleon makes a systemic analysis of international relations *avant la lettre*. As Raymond Aron was to write much later, he regarded the heterogeneous character of the state system as the primary cause of war.[30] To stay with the theoretical analysis of international relations, we shall not be astonished also to find in Napoleon's mouth acutely 'realist' reflections:

> [...] to this moment, I had no idea that Austria wanted to go to war. But the military system is to meet force with force, and sound politics has it that one squares off as soon as a force appears to threaten you.[31]

In 1807, Napoleon recalled the very Roman idea

> [...] that the moment one speaks of peace is the time when it is necessary to increase preparations and multiply resources.[32]

We shall not be surprised either that, shortly after Austerlitz, he reprimanded his brother Joseph for having proclaimed rather too soon that peace was going to be signed, as if the French, who had just won such a stunning victory, desired it most:

> My brother, it was completely unnecessary to announce the dispatch of the plenipotentiaries so emphatically and to fire the gun. That is a good way of lulling the national spirit and giving foreigners a false idea of our internal situation. It is not by crying 'Peace!' that one obtains it. I had not wanted to put that in a bulletin; *a fortiori* it should not have been announced at the display. Peace is a meaningless word; what we need is a glorious peace. I therefore find nothing more impolitic and more false than what has been done in Paris on this occasion.[33]

The concept of 'glorious peace' is in part derived from the *ancien régime*. In fact, any transaction restricting his hegemony over the continent was unacceptable to Napoleon.[34] Two days later, he added:

> You will see that peace, however advantageous I am able to make it, will be deemed disadvantageous by the same persons who demand it so insistently, because they are idiots and ignoramuses who are incapable of knowing anything about it. It is quite ridiculous of them never to stop repeating that people want peace, as if peace meant something: what matters are the conditions.[35]

In 1807, he offered this definition:

> Peace is a marriage that depends on a union of wills.[36]

The same idea was noted by Bertrand on Saint Helena. The notion of peace must meet certain criteria:

> The way to have peace is not to say that one can no longer wage war. Peace is the diagonal between two forces; it is a capitulation between two struggling forces. If one is destroyed, there is no peace.[37]

French historians generally acknowledge the role played by Napoleon's impatient, domineering personality in the succession of wars between 1803—year of the rupture of the Amiens peace—and 1815. However, they stress the legacy of revolutionary politics—Napoleon making it a point of honour to preserve the conquests of the *Grande Nation*—and also the continuity with the *ancien régime*'s great power rivalries.[38] British and American historians place more emphasis on Napoleon's thirst for glory and his inability to envisage a peace necessarily based on certain concessions to opponents.[39] Napoleon was not a monster, writes Charles Esdaile. Under his regime, political executions were very rare and the number of political prisoners was very small. Napoleon could be charming and his generosity was well known. However, his behaviour suggests that a policy of peace, with its corollaries of trust and self-limitation, was incompatible with his personality. The febrile nature of his mind, which led him to pass very rapidly from one plan to the next, also intervened. Without going so far as to claim that the prospect of a battle gave him physical satisfaction, Esdaile does not regard it as unreasonable to think that military triumph filled a gap in his personal life. The dialogue with Thibaudeau cited above clearly indicates that Napoleon needed military glory for political reasons. Esdaile believes that he also needed it for personal reasons.[40] For Steven Englund, Napoleon was more of a disciple of Hobbes than of Rousseau. He had a pessimistic view of human relations: the state of nature was a permanent struggle for domination. He was incapable of making peace. It has to be said that, in the value-system of the

age, triumph on the battlefield represented the *nec plus ultra* of glory and greatness. Englund rightly stresses the need to take this factor into account. Although the world wars have fundamentally altered attitudes, the 'shiver' still prompted by Napoleon's name is certainly marked by fear and disapproval. But even today it still contains an element of admiration and doubtless also of fear for the attraction it exercises over us.[41]

Napoleon himself recognized that, while it did not 'need' war, his regime could not pass up on opportunities to achieve military success. In June 1813, during the armistice, Napoleon wrote to Archchancellor Cambacérès, who was responsible for carrying out his orders in Paris, a letter in which all the nuances of his position are clearly evident:

> The Police Minister, in his policing notes (with which in general I am very satisfied, because of the details they contain and the frequent proof of his zeal I detect in them), seems to seek to render me pacific. This cannot have any result, and is wounding to me, because it assumes that I am not pacific. I want peace, but not a peace that has me taking up arms again three months later and which is dishonourable. I know the situation of my finances and the Empire better than him; there is therefore nothing to tell me on that score. Get him to understand what is discourteous about his manner. I am not a braggart; I do not make a profession of war and no one is more pacific than me. But the solemnity of peace, the desire that it should be an enduring one, and the circumstances in which my empire finds itself will be decisive in my deliberations on the subject.[42]

Having received Cambacérès' reply, the Emperor continued to elaborate on his thinking twelve days later:

> I have received your letter of 23 June. All the ministers' idle talk about peace does the greatest harm to my affairs. For everyone is aware of it and I have seen more than twenty letters from foreign ministers who write at home that peace is desired at any cost in Paris; that my ministers request it of me every day. This is how one ends up making peace impossible; and the fault is above all the Police Minister's. Instead of this pacific tone, a rather more bellicose tone should be adopted. People in Paris have some very wrong ideas if they think that peace depends on me. The enemies' claims are excessive, and I know full well that a peace which does not conform to people's opinion in France of the power of the Empire would be very unfavourably regarded by everyone.[43]

We can clearly see the core of Napoleon's Machiavellian realism, his highly Corsican sense of honour, his idea that French opinion would support him only if he secured an advantageous peace—all this forming an intellectual

system in which he was trapped, preventing him from understanding French war weariness. Napoleon required too much of peace—he made it too lofty an ideal—whereas it is always based on a degree of compromise. Ultimately, his temperament, his culture, his personal history, and the history of France since 1789 had accustomed him to war and had in a sense led him to be afraid of peace, out of a fear of diminution. This was his drama, but also that of millions of European men and women.

2

War and Law

While they increased the involvement of nations, the wars of the Revolution and Empire did not completely call into question the principles of international law and the laws of war, tacitly established in the late seventeenth century. Contrary to the idealized image we are sometimes given, they were not that much better respected under the *ancien régime*.[1] As is well known, on several occasions Napoleon ignored the law of nations, as when he had the Duke of Enghien abducted in the Grand Duchy of Baden, or when he transformed the Italian republic into a kingdom in defiance of the Treaty of Lunéville. Napoleon's armies sometimes crossed through neutral territories: Piacenza's manoeuvre in May 1796 was carried out via the Duchy of Parma and in 1805 Bernadotte's corps passed through the Prussian territory of Anspach.[2] Confronted with operational necessities, Napoleon had few scruples. It is true that territorial divisions were still so complex and principalities so numerous that the armies of the great powers often took no account of them. The allies themselves violated Swiss neutrality in late 1813 and early 1814 to invade France.[3] Alongside this, Napoleon's correspondence indicates that he attributed a certain importance to the law of nations and, even more so, to *jus in bello*—that is, to the legal framework governing certain situations in war.

The rules for surrendering fortified towns

For the Swiss jurist Emer de Vattel, 'wise and humane' generals should persuade the commander of a fortified town not to pointlessly await the bitter end and offer him an honourable, advantageous surrender. 'If he stubbornly resists, and is finally forced to place himself at the mercy of the conqueror', he adds, 'one may employ against him and his people the full severity of the laws of war. But that law never extends to taking the life of an

enemy who lays down his arms, unless he has been guilty of some crime against the victor.'[4] If the commander decides to resist an attack, he knows that he is risking the lives of all its inhabitants, military and civilian, as well as their property. For Georges-Frédéric de Martens, if a place is taken by storm, 'the garrison must place itself at the mercy of the victor; the only thing that can be requested is its life and it is not against the laws of war to give the place over to looting'.[5] These are the laws to which General Bonaparte sometimes alluded. In connection with a post wrested with considerable force from the Austrians, he writes:

> General Koebloes himself defended La Chiusa with 500 grenadiers.[6] By the laws of war, those 500 men should have been put to the sword. But this barbaric law has always been ignored and never practised by the French army.[7]

In Egypt, Bonaparte had it explained to the Arab commander of El-Arich fort that 'the laws of war, among all peoples, are that the garrison of a town taken by storm is to be put to the sword'. He enjoined him to send two men to determine the details of a surrender 'in conformity with what is practised in such circumstances among all the civilized peoples of the earth'.[8]

At Jaffa, by way of response, the governor had General Bonaparte's envoy beheaded. When the assault that was then ordered succeeded, Bonaparte wrote:

> At 5 o'clock, we were masters of the town which, for twenty-four hours, was given over to pillaging and all the horrors of war, which have never seemed so hideous to me. 4,000 of the Djezzar's[9] troops were put to the sword; there were 800 gunners. Part of the civilian population was massacred.[10]

War had become crueller. However, even if he denies it, we can ponder Bonaparte's insensitivity to the horrors of war once he deemed it necessary to resort to them for political reasons.[11] For Steven Englund, 'Bonaparte . . . had Caesar's capacity to make morally or spiritually perilous decisions without blinking.'[12] Among the campaigns conducted by him, those in Egypt and Syria were the cruellest. In Italy and Spain too, he prescribed severe measures while invoking the law of war. This applied to the Calabrian rebels in 1806:

> Severe examples are necessary. I imagine that we have had this village pillaged by the soldiers. That is how we must treat villages that rebel. This is the law of war, but it is also a duty laid down by politics.[13]

The town of Cuenca in Spain was taken by storm in 1808:

> The town has been pillaged: it is the law of war, since it was taken arms in hand.[14]

No capitulation in open country

The surrender of a place of war in accordance with the modalities and conditions evoked above has no equivalent when it comes to operations in open country. Napoleon strove to clarify this point in an extended reflection on Saint Helena:

> Do the laws of war, the principles of war, authorize a general to order his soldiers to lay down their arms, to surrender them to their enemies, and to make a whole corps prisoners of war? The issue is not in doubt when it comes to the garrison of a place of war. But the governor of a place is in a separate category. The laws of all nations authorize him to lay down arms when he lacks supplies, his defences are in ruins, and he has resisted several attacks. In fact, a place is a war machine that forms a whole, which has a role, a prescribed, determined, and known destination. A small number of men, protected by this fortification, defend themselves, stop the enemy, and preserve the depot entrusted to them against the attacks of a large number of men. But when these fortifications are destroyed, and no longer offer any protection to the garrison, it is right and reasonable to authorize the commander to do what he deems most appropriate in the interests of his troops. Contrary conduct would be pointless and would also have the disadvantage of exposing the population of a whole town—the elderly, women, and children. When a place is invested, the prince and supreme commander charged with the defence of this boundary know that it can protect the garrison and hold the enemy only for a period of time and that, once this time has passed and the defences have been destroyed, the garrison will lay down its arms. All civilized peoples have been in agreement on this subject, and there has only ever been discussion of the extent of the defence to be mounted by a governor prior to surrendering. It is true that there are some generals—Villars is among them[15]—who think that a governor must never surrender, but *in extremis* blow up the fortifications and force a passage at night through the besieging army; or, when the first of these is not feasible, to at least escape with his garrison and save his men. Governors who have adopted this course of action have re-joined their army with three-quarters of their garrison.
>
> From the fact that the laws and practices of all nations have expressly authorized the commanders of strongholds to surrender their arms in providing for their interests, and have never authorized any general to compel his soldiers to lay down their arms in any other instance, we can venture that no prince, no republic, no military law has authorized them to. The sovereign or country enjoins obedience to their general and superiors on the part of junior officers and soldiers, on everything consistent with the good or the honour of

the service. Weapons are assigned to the soldier with the military pledge to defend them to the death. A general has received orders and instructions to employ his troops for the defence of the homeland: how can he have the authority to order his soldiers to hand over their weapons and receive chains?

There are virtually no battles where a few companies of light infantrymen or grenadiers, often a few battalions, are not momentarily encircled in houses, cemeteries, woods. The captain or battalion leader who, once he has registered the fact that he is encircled, effects his surrender would betray his prince or his honour. There are virtually no battles where the conduct followed in similar circumstances has not determined victory. Now, a lieutenant-general is to an army what a battalion leader is to a division. The surrender of an encircled corps, during either a battle or an active campaign, is a contract all of whose beneficial clauses are in favour of the contracting parties and all of whose onerous clauses are for the prince and the army's other soldiers. To escape danger only to render the position of one's comrades more dangerous is obviously an act of cowardice. A soldier who said to a cavalry commander: 'Here is my musket, let me go home to my village', would be a deserter in the face of the enemy; the law would condemn him to death. What else does a division general, battalion leader, or captain do when he says: 'Let me go home, or receive me among you, and I will give you my weapons'? There is but one honourable way of being made a prisoner of war and that is to be captured alone, arms in hand, when one can no longer make use of them. That is how François I, King Jean,[16] and so many brave men of all nations, were captured. In this way of surrendering arms no conditions are attached and there cannot be any way of doing it with honour. One is granted one's life because one is powerless to take that of the enemy, who leaves you yours as a form of retaliation because the law of nations would have it thus.

The dangers of authorizing officers and generals to lay down arms in personal surrender, in a different context from that where they form the garrison of a stronghold, are indisputable. It destroys the martial spirit of a nation, undermines honour, opens the door to cowards, timid men, even to misled brave men. If military law pronounced severe penalties against generals, officers, and soldiers who laid down their arms by surrendering, such an expedient would never occur to military men to escape from difficult straits. Their only remaining resource would be valour or obstinacy—and how much they have been seen to do! [. . .]

What, then, should a general who is encircled by superior forces do? We cannot give any other response than that of old Horace.[17] In an extraordinary situation, what is required is extraordinary resolution: the more stubborn the resistance, the greater the chances of receiving aid or breaking through. How many impossible things have been done by resolute men, with no recourse but death! The more resistance you put up, the more of the enemy you will kill, and the fewer troops he will have that day or the next to direct against the

army's other corps. This issue does not seem to us to be amenable to any other solution, without sacrificing a nation's military spirit and exposing oneself to the greatest misfortunes.

Should legislation authorize a general who is encircled far from his army by greatly superior forces, and who has put up a stubborn fight, to disperse his army at night, entrusting to each individual his own salvation and indicating a more or less remote rallying point? This is open to debate. But there is no doubt that a general who adopted such a course of action in a desperate situation would save three-quarters of his people and—which is more precious than men—he would save himself from the dishonour of handing over his arms and flags as the result of a contract that stipulates advantages for individuals at the expense of the army and homeland.[18]

Very exercised about this point, Napoleon returned to it:

One must not surrender in the open. One must accept that as one's most basic principle. In this instance, it is necessary to decimate like the Romans. Dupont and Sérurier surrendered in the heart of the countryside in Italy.[19] They would not have done so with good military laws. [...] One can throw down arms, but not capitulate to save one's baggage. One must know how to die. War is against nature. [...] A vessel must not surrender in a battle; it causes the battle to be lost, because the guns that were targeted on it are now trained on another. If the vessel is alone, that is different: it can surrender; it is in the position of a fortified place.[20]

'Perfidious Albion'

Issuing from a line of Tuscan and Corsican lawyers, Napoleon had an elevated idea of law—what it authorized and what it proscribed. For a disciple of Machiavelli, he attached a sometimes naive importance to it.[21] In the face of the British, who had a much more pragmatic conception of it in accordance with their interests ('*Dieu et mon droit*'), he waxed indignant, particularly when they disavowed the agreement made by one of their generals with the French army of Egypt—something that overturned 'all the ideas of the law of nations':

[...] it is inconceivable that so much bad faith, so much impudence and ferocity could direct the cabinet of a nation which is so enlightened and worthy in so many respects that it is cited as an example.[22]

Evidence had been furnished to the First Consul of the involvement of the London government in an attempt to assassinate him. He made known his

feelings through the intermediary of his Foreign Relations Minister, Talleyrand:

> The state of war that exists between the two peoples has doubtless shattered some of the links that naturally unite neighbouring peoples. But although the English and the French are at war, are they any the less, either of them, a civilized, European nation? And does the law of nations, which softens the evils of war, not proscribe according protection to monsters who dishonour human nature?[23]

Prisoners were normally clothed and fed by the country holding them. But a British commissioner now demanded clothing for French prisoners in England. He found himself reminded of the customs of the law of nations:

> The Minister of Foreign Relations will make it known to this commissioner that the French government will not depart from what is established between the civilized powers of Europe for the sake of its prisoners in England. It maintains and clothes Russian, German, and other prisoners and these governments create no difficulty about maintaining French prisoners. It is therefore for the British government to decide whether it wishes to depart from established customs and conventions.[24]

Himself a prisoner of the British on Saint Helena, Napoleon returned on numerous occasions to their conduct, which he saw as harsh and contrary to continental customs:

> Throughout the war, I never stopped offering an exchange of prisoners. But the British government, reckoning that it would have been advantageous to me, constantly refused on one pretext or another. I have nothing to say to that: in war politics comes before sentiment. But why be barbaric unnecessarily? And that is what they did when they found the number of their prisoners expanding. For our unfortunate compatriots, there then began the dreadful ordeal of the pontoons, with which the ancients would have enriched their hell if their imagination could have conceived them.[25]

Criticism of the British went back to the Convention and even to Bossuet, who was one of the first to accuse them of perfidy.[26] Napoleon merely continued the Anglophobia of the seventeenth century and the arguments of the Jacobins.[27] Nevertheless, as has been observed, he distinguished between the bad faith of the rulers and the qualities of the nation. In substance, he did not accept that British conduct was largely due to the distinction that he himself made between continental prisoners, generally well treated, and those of the United Kingdom. There was an attitude of suspicion on both sides, which happily did not extend to the battlefield,

where the troops of the two belligerents, especially in the Iberian peninsula, always fought in chivalrous fashion, as if to demarcate themselves from godless and lawless guerrillas.[28] The British pontoons reminded Napoleon of an inglorious episode in the career of Julius Caesar, who had exhibited gratuitous cruelty towards the Gauls of the Vannes region, massacring the senators and selling the population at auction:

> One cannot but detest Caesar's behaviour towards the senate of Vannes. These people had not rebelled; they had provided hostages and promised to live in peace. But they were fully in possession of their freedom and all their rights. No doubt they had given Caesar grounds to wage war on them, but not to violate the law of nations in their regard and to abuse his victory in such an atrocious fashion. This conduct was not just; it was even less politic. Such means never accomplish their end; they exasperate and revolt nations. The punishment of a few leaders is all that justice and politics permit; to treat prisoners well is an important rule. The British have broken this rule of politics and morality by putting French prisoners on pontoons—something that has rendered them odious throughout the continent.[29]

Respect for the law of nations and military laws

The laws of war were invoked to justify the intervention in Venetian affairs in 1797:

> The republic of Venice was a neighbour of the army of Italy. The laws of war assign the preservation of order in the country which is the theatre of war to the general. As the great Frederick said, 'Where there is war, there is no free country.'[30]

Before commencing the Austerlitz campaign, the Emperor relied on the law of nations to launch the Grande Armée against Austria, which was assembling troops around Bavaria. He told Talleyrand, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to make it known to Vienna:

> [...] that in every country of the world unjustified arming on the borders of one's neighbour is tantamount to a declaration of war, and that there is no shadow of a doubt that Austria is arming today.[31]

At the end of September 1806, a war was in the offing with Prussia. But as long as it was not declared, Napoleon stressed to his marshals that language should be pacific and no hostilities should occur.[32]

Having returned from the island of Elba in April 1815, Napoleon was outlawed by Europe. Communications with France were broken, but war was not yet declared. The Emperor fretted about this conduct to Caulaincourt, his Minister of Foreign Affairs:

> Monsieur le Duc de Vicence, you would do well to give orders at Strasbourg, to the prefect and the general, to ask the other side's general and civil authorities why they do not let the cabinet's couriers pass. The object of war being to bring peace, to interrupt communications is to act contrary to the law of nations. Have someone sent to Baden and write to the minister how surprising this conduct is. Ask him if we are at war or peace.[33]

In his army, he was keen that military laws should be scrupulously respected, especially as regards soldiers—in other words, the weakest. In Cairo, he wrote this letter to Berthier:

> Citizen general, you will find attached a report of the French military personnel held in the citadel. See, I beg you, to sending an officer of the general staff there to make a more detailed one for me—above all, whether military law, which grants senior officers the right to imprison soldiers for a certain number of days, has not been broken; whether several soldiers are not being held even though the duration of their detention pronounced by military councils has expired; finally, whether the sentences of the military councils are in conformity with the laws and whether the review councils requested by the condemned have been granted them.
>
> You will appreciate to what extent this officer's mission concerns order and humanity.[34]

Partisans were not entitled to be treated as soldiers. If they were captured, they became prisoners of state, not of war, as Berthier was informed in June 1813:

> The Prussian officers and the officer of Lützow's general staff are to be regarded as prisoners of state, and sent incommunicado to Mainz, where they will be put in a state prison, without being granted permission to write. The same will be done to Captain Colomb and all the partisan commanders. Formerly, the custom of war was to have them hanged.[35]

The law of nations on land and at sea

Napoleon developed his thinking on war and law predominantly in connection with the conflict with Britain. The long passage that follows

compares the law of nations on land and at sea. The issue of neutrality is treated in depth in it. These questions were of particular concern to Napoleon. The pages he devoted to them on Saint Helena attest to the salience of this fundamental disagreement between the French and British powers. Such was the backdrop to the wars of the Revolution and Empire:

> In the centuries of barbarism, the law of nations was the same on land as at sea. The individuals of enemy nations were taken prisoner, either because they had been captured arms in hand or because they were mere inhabitants; and they escaped slavery only by paying a ransom. Movable property, and even landed property, was wholly or partially confiscated. Civilization soon asserted itself and completely changed the law of nations in land war, without having the same impact on war at sea. So that, as if they were two forms of reason and justice, things are regulated by two different systems of law. The law of nations in land war does not lead to the despoliation of private individuals or a change in the status of persons. War only impacts on the government. Thus, properties do not change hands; shops and their merchandise remain intact; people remain free. The only ones treated as prisoners of war are individuals seized with arms in hand and forming part of the military corps. This change has greatly reduced the evils of war. It makes conquering a nation easier and war less bloody and less disastrous. A conquered province makes a pledge and, should the victor require it, provides hostages and hands over weapons. Taxes are collected for the benefit of the victor, who, if he deems it necessary, establishes an extraordinary tax either to take care of the maintenance of his army or to indemnify himself for the expenses occasioned by the war. But this tax has no relationship with the value of the goods in shops; it is simply a greater or lesser proportional increase in ordinary taxes. This is rarely equivalent to a year of those raised by the prince and it is imposed on the whole state, so that it never entails the ruin of any individual.
>
> The law of nations governing maritime war has remained in its state of utter barbarism: the property of private individuals is confiscated; non-combatants are taken prisoner. When two nations are at war, all of their vessels, whether at sea or in port, are liable to be confiscated; and the individuals on board them are made prisoners of war. Thus, in a patent contradiction, a British vessel (in the event of a war between France and Britain) that is found in the port of Nantes—e.g. when war is declared—will be confiscated. The men on board will be prisoners of war, even if they are non-combatants and simple citizens. By contrast, a shop containing British goods belonging to Englishmen living in the same town will be neither sequestrated nor confiscated; and British merchants travelling in France will not be prisoners of war and will be afforded right of passage and the passports required to leave French territory. A British vessel that is sailing and seized by a French ships will be confiscated, even though its cargo belongs to private individuals; the individuals on board it will

> be prisoners of war, even though they are non-combatants. Yet a convoy of 100 carts of goods belonging to Englishmen, and crossing French territory at the moment of the breach between the two powers, will not be seized.
>
> In land war, even the territorial property owned by foreign subjects is not subject to confiscation; at the very most it will be sequestered. The laws governing land war are therefore more in conformity with civilization and the well-being of private individuals. And it is to be hoped that a time will come when the same liberal ideas are extended to war at sea and that the naval forces of the two powers can fight without occasioning the confiscation of merchant ships and without taking simple merchant seamen or non-military passengers prisoner. Trade would then be conducted between belligerent nations on sea as it is on land, in the midst of the battles fought by armies.[36]

In following the prescriptions of the law of nations outlined by Gentili, Grotius, Vattel, and others, the European powers had succeeded in confining war to combatant forces.[37] This development had begun in the late seventeenth century and become fully established in the eighteenth. Despite the introduction of a stronger national dimension with the French Revolution, war in the Napoleonic era was limited to armies for most of the time. There is a body of evidence proving that the troops of the Grande Armée maintained rather cordial relations with the German populations in 1805 and 1806. The attitude of the Austrians was less welcoming in 1809 and in 1813 the recalcitrance of the inhabitants manifested itself in Silesia and, to a lesser extent, in Saxony. But these populations were never targeted by punitive measures that formed part of a plan. While they suffered from the presence of troops, requisition was subject to compensation. Armies alone were the object of the adversaries' strategic designs. Bombardment of towns was rare. Vienna was briefly subject to one in 1809. Battles did not cause any civilian casualties.[38] The war in Spain involved part of the population, but that mainly concerned organized groups. The relationship between the French armies and the Spanish was not invariably stamped with as much hatred as is generally believed. People often make the mistake of projecting onto the Napoleonic Wars nationalist drives that only flourished in the twentieth century. Obviously, a step was taken in the direction of 'total war', but it was gradual.[39] Like all his contemporaries, Napoleon had been formed in the spirit of the Enlightenment and regarded war as a controlled clash between armies. The extent to which he adhered to the limitations fixed by the law of nations has not been sufficiently stressed. The following little-known text clearly indicates it. Here we also find that

Napoleon stresses an imbalance in the Franco-British confrontation. On land, where France was dominant, the law of nations did not allow people to do as they saw fit. At sea, where Britain ruled, law was practically nonexistent. Britain did as it wished. Napoleon pursued his thoughts:

> The sea is the property of all nations; it extends over three-quarters of the globe and creates a bond between the different peoples. A vessel at sea full of merchandise is subject to the civil and criminal law of its sovereign, just as if it were within his estates. A vessel under sail may be regarded as a floating colony, in the sense that all nations have equal sovereignty over the seas. Were the merchant ships of warring powers able to sail unhindered, *a fortiori* no inspection could be made of neutral ones. However, since it is agreed in principle that the merchant vessels of belligerent powers can be confiscated, the right for all belligerent warships to verify the flag of the neutral vessels they encounter was bound to follow. For, were it an enemy, they would have the right to confiscate it. Hence visitation rights, which all powers have recognized by various treaties; hence the right of belligerent vessels to send their longboats alongside neutral merchant vessels, to ask to see their papers and thus verify their flag. All treaties have intended that this right should be exercised with all possible consideration; that the armed vessel should be kept out of gun range; and that only two or three men should embark on the ship being visited, so that there will be no atmosphere of force and violence. It has been recognized that a vessel belongs to the power whose flag it flies when it is furnished with valid passports and consignments, and when the captain and half the crew are nationals. All powers have committed themselves by various treaties to prohibiting their neutral subjects from trading in contraband with powers at war; and by that title they have designated war munitions, such as powder, bullets, bombs, muskets, saddles, bridles, cuirasses, etc. Any vessel with such objects on board is considered to have disobeyed the commands of its sovereign, since the latter is committed to prohibiting his subjects from engaging in such trade; and such contraband objects are confiscated.
>
> Searches made by cruising vessels were therefore no longer a straightforward visit to verify the flag; and, in the name of the sovereign whose flag graced the vessel visited, the cruiser exercised a new right of search to check whether the vessel contained contraband items. Men from the enemy nation—but only combatants—were assimilated to contraband objects. Thus, this inspection was not a derogation from the principle that the flag covers cargoes.
>
> Soon a third case arose. Neutral vessels presented themselves wishing to enter places under siege that were blockaded by enemy squadrons. These neutral vessels were not carrying war munitions, but food, wood, wine, and other merchandise which could be of service to the besieged place and prolong its defence. After lengthy discussions between the powers, they

> agreed by various treaties that, in instances where a place was genuinely under blockade, so that there was clear danger in a vessel trying to enter it, the commander of the blockade could forbid the neutral vessel entry and confiscate it if, notwithstanding this interdiction, it used force or cunning to gain admittance.
>
> Thus, maritime laws are based on these principles: 1. The flag covers cargoes. 2. A neutral vessel can be inspected by a belligerent vessel to confirm its flag and its cargo—that it is not contraband. 3. Contraband is restricted to war munitions.[40] 4. Neutral vessels can be prevented from entering a place if it is under siege, provided that the blockade is real and that there is a clear danger in entering. These principles form the maritime law of neutrals, because the various governments have freely and by treaties committed themselves to respecting them and having them respected by their subjects. The different maritime powers—Holland, Portugal, Spain, France, England, Sweden, Denmark, and Russia—have at several times and subsequently contracted their commitments with one another, which have been proclaimed in general peace treaties, such as those of Westphalia in 1646 [*sic*] and Utrecht in 1712.[41]

It was through his reading that Napoleon acquired his knowledge of international law and here he offers a veritable lecture, prior to his analysis of Britain's conduct:

> In the American war in 1778, England claimed: 1. That commodities for building vessels, such as wood, hemp, tar, etc., were contraband; 2. That a neutral vessel did indeed have the right to sail from a friendly port to an enemy port, but that it could not traffic from one enemy port to another; 3. That neutral vessels could not sail from the colony to an enemy country; 4. That neutral powers did not have the right to have their merchant vessels escorted by war ships or, in cases where they did, they were not exempt from inspection.[42]

These claims prompted the indignation of what was not yet called the 'international community', but which corresponded to it. Great Britain did not then dare to apply such measures, but the context of the wars against revolutionary France from 1793 onwards permitted it to do so.

3
Military Genius

Having a genius for war

> Achilles was the son of a goddess and a mortal: such is the image of the genius for war. The divine part is everything that derives from moral considerations of character, skill, the interests of your opponent, opinion, the spirit of the soldier who is strong and victorious, weak and beaten, depending on whether he believes himself to be. The terrestrial part is the weapons, the entrenchments, the positions, the battle orders—everything that pertains to the combination of material things.[1]

We note in this definition that the 'divine' part contains everything that is non-material but important for war. Alongside character and skill, the opponent's interests cover the whole element of interaction in war—what Clausewitz called 'reciprocal action'.[2] The soldier's opinion and spirit also refer to the 'moral forces' to which we shall return in Book III. What Napoleon provides here is a veritable definition of war via its main components. Clausewitz also employs the notion of genius in the sense of a happy combination. By it he understands 'a very highly developed mental aptitude for a particular occupation'.[3] The notion involves a harmonious combination of forces, where one can be predominant, but none must conflict with the others. It assumes a high intellectual level and hence an epoch of high civilization. This was the case in Rome and France, says Clausewitz.

One has a genius for war from birth or one does not. Napoleon lamented to state councillor Roederer that his brother Joseph, placed on the Spanish throne, was not a military man:

> For my part, I am, because it is the special gift I received at birth; it is my life, my habit. Everywhere I have been, I have commanded. At the age of 23, I commanded the long siege of Toulon. I commanded in Paris in Vendémiaire; I swept off the soldiers in Italy as soon as I presented myself there. I was born for that.[4]

For Napoleon, success in war was not the result of chance, even if the latter was present in events and always had to be reckoned with. The genius of great generals was indisputable:

> No sustained great acts are the work of chance and fortune; they always derive from calculation and genius. One rarely sees great men fail in their most perilous endeavours. Take Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal, the great Gustavus,[5] and others: they always succeed. Is it because they had good fortune that they became great men? No, but because being great men, they proved capable of mastering good fortune. When one wishes to study the springs of their success, one is completely astonished to see that they had done everything to achieve it.[6]

Such 'mastery of good fortune' by the great war leaders is even more clearly explained in a conversation of 1804 reported by Mme de Rémusat:

> Military science, he said, consists in accurately calculating all the possibilities first of all, and then exactly, well-nigh mathematically, calculating the share of chance. This is the point where one must not make a mistake and where a decimal more or a decimal less can alter everything. This division between science and chance only suits the head of a genius, for wherever there is creation it is required, and certainly the greatest improvisation of the human mind is conferring existence on what does not possess it. Chance therefore always remains a mystery for mediocre minds and becomes a reality for superior men. Turenne scarcely thought of it and only had a method. I think, he added smiling, that I would have beaten him. Condé[7] suspected it more than him, but it was out of impetuousness that he gave himself to it. Prince Eugène [of Savoy][8] is one of those who appreciated it best.[9]

Napoleon also confided to Mme de Rémusat how he had subsequently developed his spirit of geometry, and then his spirit of finesse, during his training:

> I was raised, he said, at the École militaire and only showed an aptitude for the exact sciences there. Everyone said of me: 'That's a child who will be suited only to geometry.' [...] When I went into service, I was bored in my garrisons; I began to read novels and this reading interested me greatly. I tried to write some and that added some vagary to my imagination; it intermingled with the positive knowledge I had acquired and I often amused myself by dreaming and then assessing my dreams by the compass of my reason. I threw myself mentally into an ideal world, and I tried to find out precisely how it differed from the world I lived in.[10]