

THE
SEVEN YEARS WAR
IN **EUROPE 1756–1763**

FRANZ A. J. SZABO



The Seven Years War
in Europe, 1756–1763

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The Seven Years War in Europe, 1756–1763

Franz A.J. Szabo

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In memory of my grandfathers

Franz Bauer (1885–1955)
and Mihály Szabó (1886–1956)

Veterans of Austria–Hungary’s last war
who sparked my interest in history

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Preface

On the evening of Friday 13 April 1945, Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels excitedly phoned General Theodor Busse, commander of the German 9th Army on the Eastern Front, and announced: ‘The Czarina is dead!’ During the final weeks of the death agony of the Third Reich the Propaganda Minister had been assiduously drawing the attention of the Führer, Adolf Hitler – or GRÖFAZ (the German acronym for ‘greatest commander of all time’), as his acolytes called him – to the apparently similar hopeless situation faced by the King of Prussia nearly two centuries earlier. Certain defeat was averted in that case when the King’s bitter enemy, the Czarina of Russia, died and was succeeded by an heir of completely different views whose reversal of Russian foreign policy was the salvation of Prussia. News of the death of the American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, now suddenly held out promise of a similarly startling collapse of the Allied coalition against Germany. The illusion was quickly shattered, but Hitler’s identification with ‘the Great’ Frederick was not. The patriotic legend of the Prussian King as founder of German greatness was central to his understanding of history, and it was a portrait of the same King that was the decorative centrepiece of the Führer’s headquarters right to the bunker in the last weeks of the war. Goebbels did all he could to reinforce the parallels between the two in Hitler’s mind, even if he privately confessed to his diary that the Führer was unfortunately simply not ‘Fritzish’ enough. In his view Hitler was too soft and lacked the utter and complete ruthlessness of Frederick.

The anecdote reflects well the extraordinary power the story of Frederick II’s fortuitous escape from sure defeat in the Seven Years War had on subsequent generations. Frederick II would never have become Frederick ‘the Great’ of romantic legend had the Seven Years War ended in Prussia’s defeat. In many ways, therefore, the Seven Years War was seen as the great turning point in German history in which Prussia’s ‘German mission’ was confirmed. Ironically the same war played a similar crucial role in the

understanding that subsequent generations of Britons had of their history. For it was in this war that ‘The Great Commoner,’ William Pitt, steered his country to global greatness and that Britain’s church bells were worn threadbare with ringing for victories. Yet these two stirring dramas took place on entirely different stages. ‘The Seven Years War’ is thus a deceptive description for the great conflict that engulfed Europe and much of Europe’s global colonial periphery in the middle of the eighteenth century, for, in effect, it encompassed two quite distinct though interrelated struggles, which neither began nor ended simultaneously. It is no accident that Americans prefer to call it ‘The French and Indian War’ while Germans generally refer to it as the ‘Third Silesian War.’ Much like the Second World War, with its Pacific and European dimensions, or the great struggles at the beginning of the eighteenth century, which are subsumed under the names ‘The War of the Spanish Succession’ and ‘The Great Northern War,’ the Seven Years War could best be understood as two concurrent wars. Certainly the Seven Years War presents historians with two quite distinct sets of problems, and it could be argued that the most profitable historiographical approach to the war would be to analyse its two component parts separately. This is particularly true if we consider the backgrounds, contexts and broader social and economic developments of these two parts of the war, for each was the outcome of quite a distinct dynamic, and each had quite distinct ramifications for Europe as a whole. On the other hand, Anglo–French conflict did have a continental dimension, and it was here that the two wars overlapped. While the Seven Years War was undoubtedly waged within two quite discrete contexts, and while the ‘Modern Wars in Perspective’ series therefore devotes two separate volumes to this mid-century conflict, the current volume deals not only with the ‘Third Silesian War,’ but with all aspects of the conflict on the European continent.

The map of Europe has been radically transformed since the eighteenth century and the ethnographic composition and distribution of Central and Eastern Europe has changed along with it. This poses a perennial problem for the historian of whether to choose historic or contemporary place names in the narrative. I have opted for the former in large part because this is how they appear in the sources and in the bulk of the international literature since then. In practice this means that most place names in the key battle zones of the Seven Years War are given in German, but in all cases where the contemporary name of a location differs, I have given the current name in brackets on first mention. I have also adopted a uniform policy on dates and weights and measures. Britain introduced the

Gregorian calendar in 1752, but Russia retained the old style (Julian) calendar until the Revolution. Hence many of the dates appearing in Russian sources are old style. I have rendered all these into Gregorian dates. Contemporary international metric units have been adopted for all measurements. Hence, for example, Russian versts or German or British miles have all been given in kilometres. I have not attempted to rationalise the currencies of the time and I have identified the denominations separately for each country. In order to relate the currency values to each other, the following rough exchange rates should be borne in mind:

British £ sterling	German Reichstaler	Austrian Gulden	Austrian Ducats	French Livres	Russian Roubles
1	6	9	2	22.5	3

The great military historian of the eighteenth-century wars Christopher Duffy has estimated that an Austrian Kreuzer had the approximate purchasing power of US\$ 1.00 in 2000. Though it is difficult to relate eighteenth- to twenty-first-century purchasing patterns, this nevertheless does give a rough indication of relative values. By that standard the following ‘exchange rates’ would apply:

British £ sterling	German Reichstaler	Austrian Gulden	Austrian Ducats	French Livres	Russian Roubles
\$540	\$90	\$60	\$270	\$24	\$180

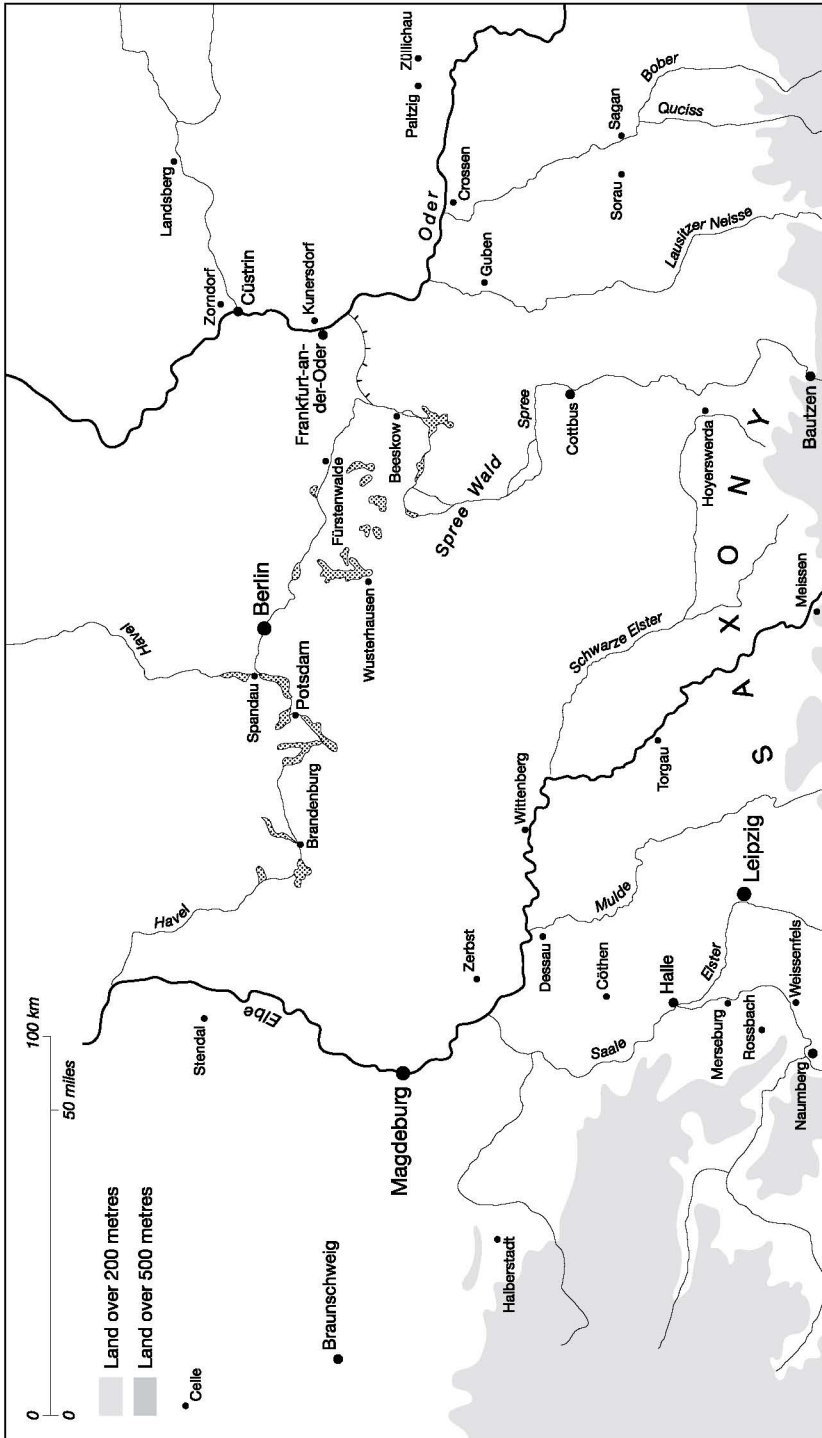
I am indebted to the editors of Longman Press, and particularly to the series editor, Hamish Scott, for giving me the opportunity – and offering me the challenge – of attempting to present the history of the continental Seven Years War in a single volume that is both scholarly and accessible to the general reader. I also want to thank them for the patience they have shown with the delays to which this manuscript has been subjected as a result of my assumption of a time-consuming administrative position at the University of Alberta. My analysis of the war is the product of over 30 years of teaching in the field, and has been influenced by so many friends, colleagues and students that I would be hard pressed to list them all. I do, however, wish to express my gratitude to all who will remember having discussed, debated and disputed so many aspects of this war with me over the years. Though the literature on the Seven Years War is

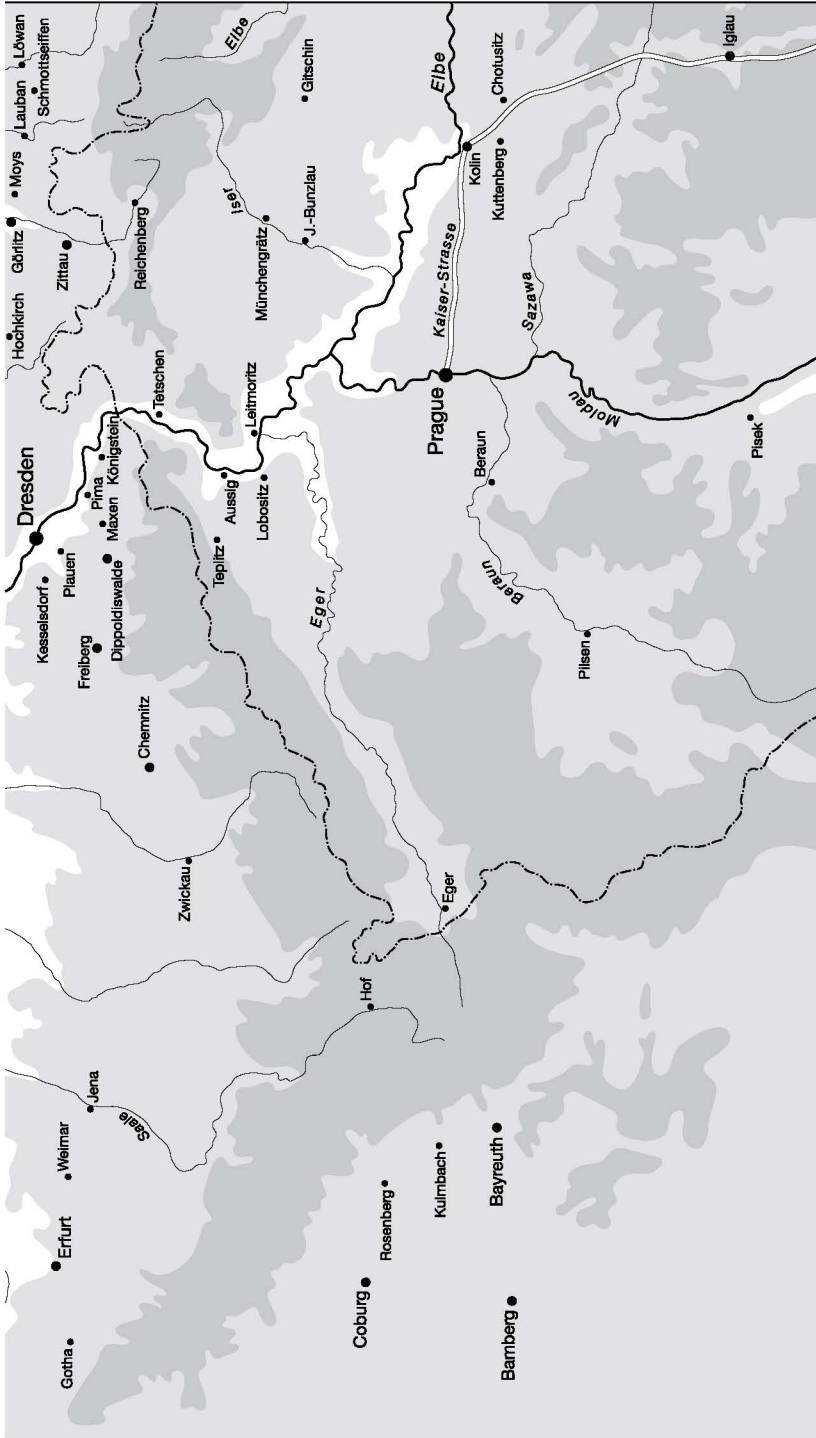
enormous, it seemed to me that the Austrian side of the story had been less researched than the others. This was in part caused by the disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which prevented that power from producing an official or semi-official history of the war of the kind that existed for all the other belligerents. I have therefore supplemented my reading of the published sources with selected materials from the Austrian State Archives, whose staff I would also like to thank for its invaluable assistance over the years. This archival research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, whose grants in the initial phases of this project proved indispensable. The extraordinary resources of the library of the University of Alberta and the efficiency of its staff made this book easier to write in Edmonton, Canada, than in most other places in North America, and I am therefore also indebted to the foresight of the generation of colleagues who built the collection into one of the strongest on the North American continent. Finally, I want to thank my family – my wife Kateryna and my children Anton and Elisabeth – for their cheerful patience with what must have appeared as an interminable preoccupation with this project.

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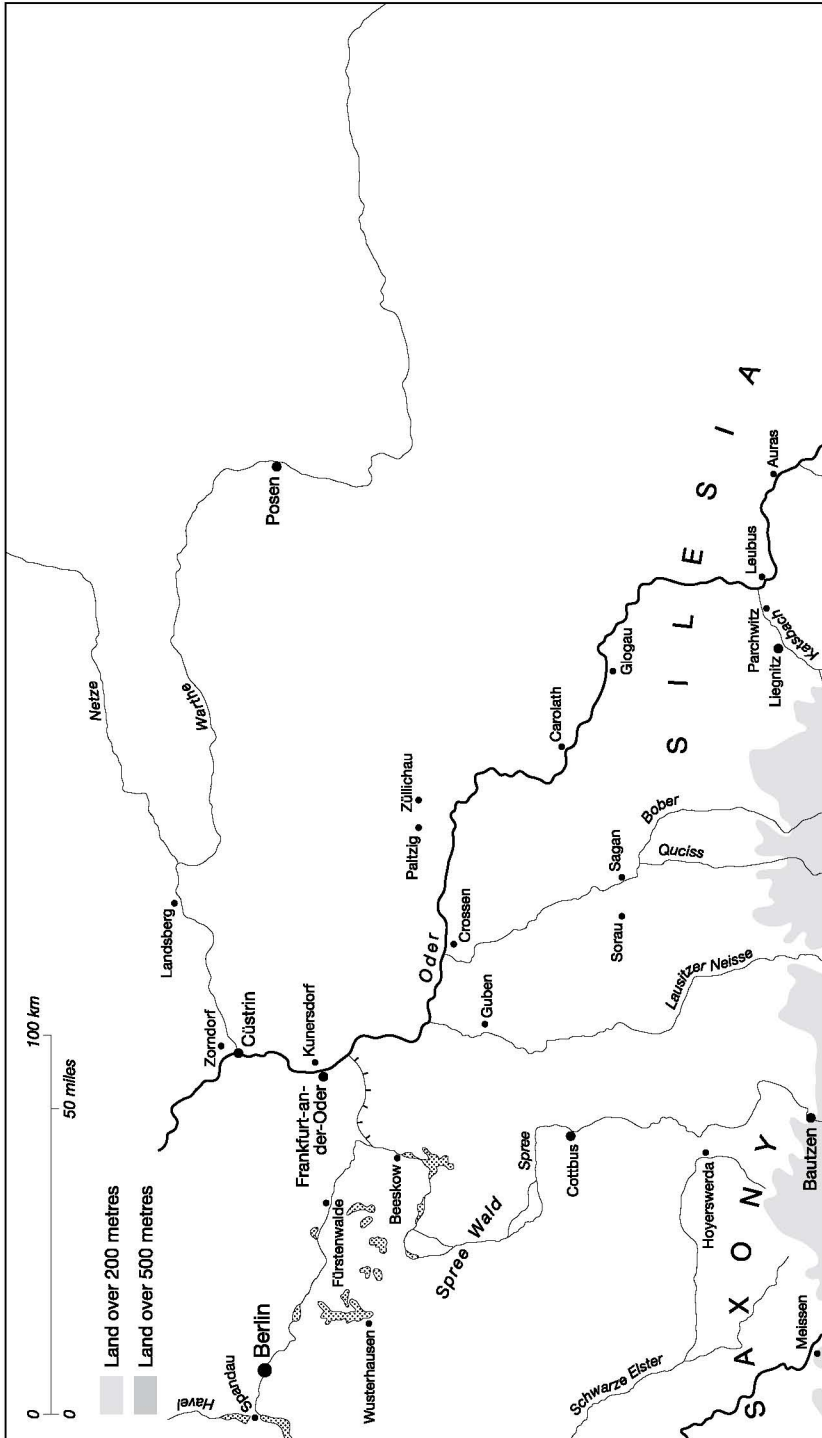


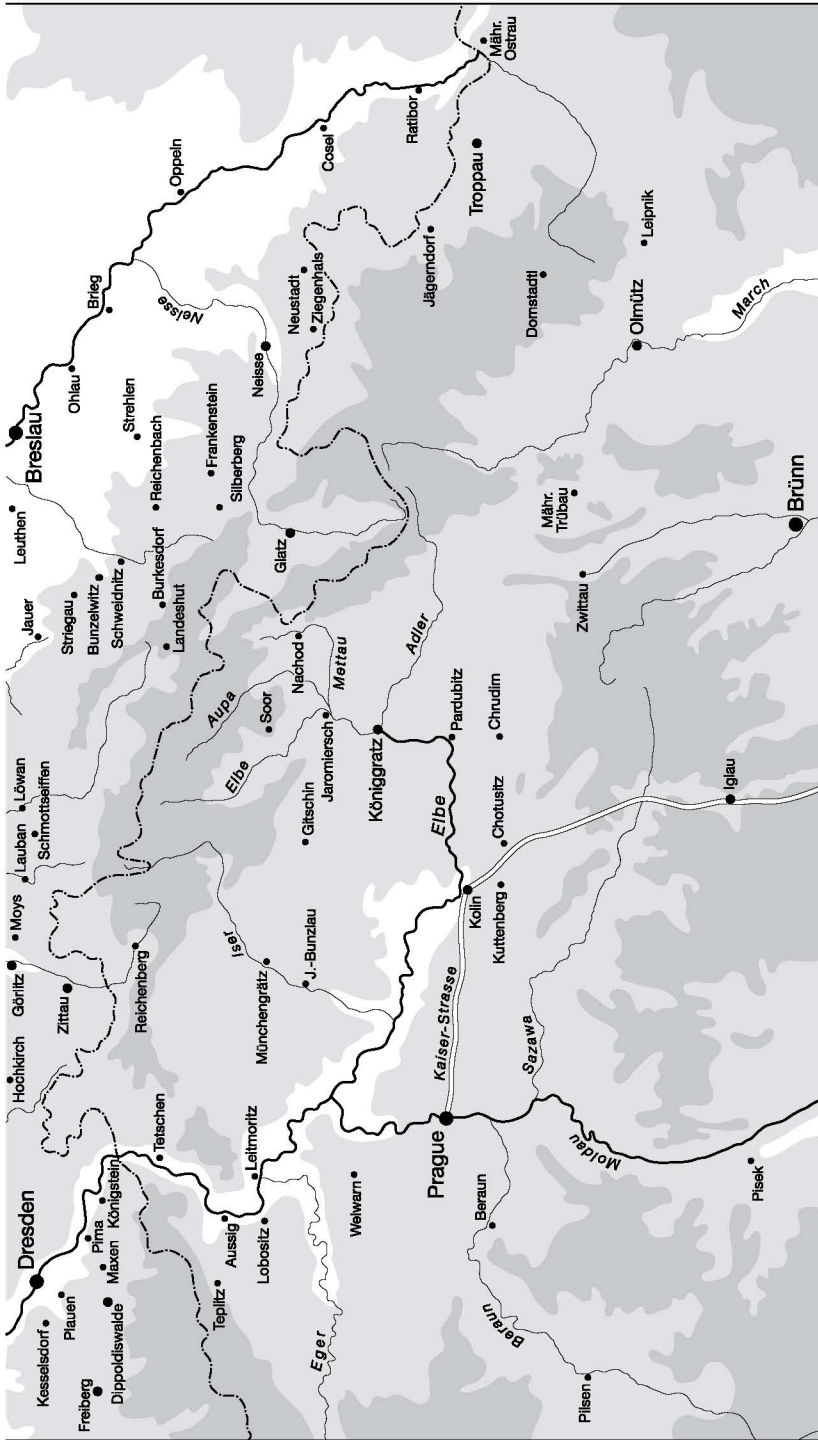
MAP 1 *The Pomerania-Brandenburg-Prussian Theatre of Operations*
 (from Duffy, Christopher, *Frederick the Great: A Military Life* (Taylor & Francis, 1988. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK))





MAP 2 *The Saxon and Bohemian Theatre of Operations*
 (from Duffy, Christopher, *Frederick the Great: A Military Life* (Taylor & Francis, 1988. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK))





MAP 3 *The Silesian and Moravian Theatre of Operations*
 (from Duffy, Christopher, *Frederick the Great: A Military Life* (Taylor & Francis, 1988. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK))



MAP 4 *The Westphalian Theatre of Operations*

(from Savory, Sir Reginald, *His Britannic Majesty's Army in Germany during the Seven Years War* (Oxford University Press, 1966))



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Introduction

The outbreak of the Seven Years War on the European continent bore many similarities to the outbreak of the First World War. As Germany did in 1914, so Prussia in 1756, feeling threatened by encirclement by an entente of three European powers, opted for launching a preventative war against what was perceived to be the most implacable of the three enemies. And just as Germany launched its offensive against France by first overrunning Belgium, so Prussia launched its offensive against Austria by first overrunning Saxony. The violation of Belgian neutrality in turn widened the scope of the war by guaranteeing Britain's entry into it, while the Prussian aggression of 1756 brought defensive alliances into effect that also resulted in a larger war than Prussia had originally intended to fight. It is therefore not surprising that in the century and a half following the Seven Years War the responsibility for its outbreak was as passionately disputed as the origins of the First World War this past century. The question of whether Prussia's initiation of the war was merely a defensive gesture against the offensive plans of Austria, or whether it too had offensive territorial ambitions and the war therefore was merely a clash of two offensives, was hotly debated in the late nineteenth century.¹ A whole new dimension was added to this debate when the early twentieth-century publication of Russian documents seemed to show that the real impetus

¹ The principal proponent of the defensive thesis was Albert Naudé in 'Beiträge zur Entstehungsgeschichte des siebenjährigen Krieges,' *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte* Part I: VIII (1895), pp. 523–618, Part II: IX (1897), pp. 101–328, while the thesis of two colliding offences was proposed by Max Lehmann in *Friedrich der Große und der Ursprung des siebenjährigen Krieges* (Leipzig, 1894).

for the war came from Russian ambitions.² In recent years British historians have also demonstrated that the British foreign minister – albeit unwittingly – was the decisive individual in bringing about the international conditions that led to the Prussian aggression.³ While these debates have enhanced our understanding of the immediate events preceding the conflict, they have tended to distract attention from the actual cause of the war. For the origins of the Seven Years War cannot be understood outside the context of the previous conflict, the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), of which it was a mere continuation. The various peace treaties concluded at the end of this first mid-century war were widely recognised as little more than an armistice, which merely postponed decision on the main issues at stake. The two mid-century wars must therefore be seen as an integral whole and causes sought in the origins of the original conflict.

The mid-century wars grew out of and eventually transformed an international ‘system’ that had emerged in response to Louis XIV’s aggressions in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. That pattern of international relations had seemed to crystallise a two-century evolution and to result in the development of a relatively clear-cut balance of power. The centrepiece of this equilibrium was the long-standing Habsburg–Bourbon rivalry, which began with a French fear of encirclement by the Habsburgs in the sixteenth century, but evolved into a widespread fear of French hegemonic ambitions by the beginning of the eighteenth. Habsburg resistance

² The documents were originally published in 1912 in Volume 136 of *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva* [Collection of the Imperial Russian Historical Society], but made little impact on the international historical debate on the origins of the Seven Years War until they were almost simultaneously brought to the attention of the Western world by Herbert Butterfield in a 1951 Glasgow lecture subsequently published as ‘The Reconstruction of an Historical Episode: The History of the Enquiry into the Origins of the Seven Years War,’ in Herbert Butterfield, ed., *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 142–167, and by Walther Mediger in *Moskau’s Weg nach Europa: Der Aufstieg Russlands zum europäischen Machtstaat im Zeitalter Friedrichs des Grossen* (Berlin, 1952), esp. pp. 582–666. The arguments were subsequently repeated in the flawed and critically poorly received Herbert H. Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968).

³ D.B. Horn, ‘The Duke of Newcastle and the Origins of the Diplomatic Revolution,’ in J.H. Elliott and K.G. Koenigsberger, eds, *The Diversity of History: Essays in honour of Sir Herbert Butterfield* (London, 1970), pp. 247–268. Cf. *idem.*, ‘The Diplomatic Revolution,’ in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. VII: *The Old Regime, 1713–63* edited by J.O. Lindsay (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 440–464.

to French expansionism was assisted and subsidised by Europe's maritime commercial powers, Britain and the Netherlands, while France, in turn, attempted to destabilise the Habsburg Monarchy's rear by alliance with Sweden, a forward Polish policy, and surreptitious aid to the Ottoman Empire. The Habsburgs, for their part, attempted to overcome the disadvantages of this French 'eastern barrier' by supporting the ambitions of a rising Russia. The notion that this constellation embodied a 'natural order' was a widespread assumption, and many a political theorist waxed eloquent about the capacity of this system to guarantee ongoing peace among the European powers.

What is therefore noteworthy in the quarter century following the death of Louis XIV is how fluid this supposed 'natural order' turned out to be. Implacable enemies were in turn allies, and even alliances cemented by family ties turned into enmities. The most important element of instability in this period was the ambitions of Spain following the division of its empire as a result of the War of the Spanish Succession. In the wake of the extinction of the Spanish line of the House of Habsburg, Spain's Iberian and colonial possessions passed to the Bourbons, while most of its continental possessions in Italy and the Low Countries passed to the Austrian Habsburgs. Neither party was entirely satisfied with this settlement, but Spanish determination to recover some ground on the Italian peninsula was certainly the most dynamic factor European statesmen had to take into account. The erosion of France's 'eastern bloc' by Austrian and Russian victories, and a growing commercial appetite among Britain's bellicose merchants, with their simplistic mercantilist assumptions, added further elements of instability. For the most part, however, conflicts in this era concerned what might be called peripheral adjustments to an international system whose tone was permeated by a reasonable recognition of limits on the part of most leading statesmen, and whose objectives were largely the stabilisation and refinement of an imperfect but satisfactory equilibrium.⁴

To this fluid but largely predictable pattern of international relations came a meteor whose impact was to introduce a new and fully unexpected element into the equation, which perforce altered all hitherto existing calculations. This was the notorious 'Rape of Silesia.' In December 1740 the young and ambitious new King of Prussia and Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick II, in defiance of his country's international commitments, attacked

⁴ The best general introduction to these developments is Derek McKay and H.M. Scott, *The Rise of the Great Powers, 1648–1815* (London and NY, 1983), pp. 1–158.

what he perceived to be a vulnerable heiress to the Habsburg Monarchy, Archduchess, Queen and, later, Empress Maria Theresia, to despoil her of some of her richest lands. Neither vaguely legitimate claims to some Silesian duchies, nor revenge for a putative mishandling of his father by a Habsburg emperor motivated Frederick. He characterised the dynastic claims manufactured by his zealous court archivist as ‘the work of an excellent charlatan,’ and he even briefly indulged in the illusion that an amicable relationship with his victim was possible after the rape. Years later Frederick confessed with almost brutal frankness that he was driven by a desire for the limelight and for historical immortality, and that his action was triggered by an assessment of the weakness of the Habsburg Monarchy.⁵ If modern historians can characterise the risky and reckless forward policy of Wilhelmine Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century as a *va banque* ‘grasp for world power’ (*Griff nach der Weltmacht*), Frederick’s was avowedly a very similar all-or-nothing ‘grasp for great power status’ (*Griff nach der Grossmacht*). As he himself put it, ‘I intend to either assert my [great] power status or see everything go to ruins so that the very name of Prussia will be buried with me.’⁶ He undertook this gamble for no reason other than he thought he could get away with it.

Frederick II is one of the central figures of the mid-century wars, if not the central figure. He is certainly the animating force, without which neither the magnitude nor the portentousness of the wars would be conceivable. Prussophile, German nationalist and Nazi historians have stampeded to dub Frederick ‘the Great,’ and Western historiography has all too frequently fallen in line. But for all his comparatively modest accomplishments as an ‘enlightened despot,’ his undoubted military and administrative talents or, for that matter, his glamorous reputation as a prodigious if self-serving author⁷ or as a pedestrian composer and flute player, he only had the makings of a noteworthy, not an outstanding, monarch of his century. As one

⁵ Frederick II, ‘Histoire de Mon Temps,’ *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand* 31 Vols, J.D.E. Preuss, ed., (Berlin, 1846–1857) II, pp. 54–55.

⁶ Cited in Johannes Kunisch, *Friedrich der Grosse: Der König und seine Zeit* (Munich, 2004), p. 213.

⁷ The most telling assessment of Frederick’s literary talents came from the pen of Sir Andrew Mitchell, the British envoy: ‘The point of Frederic’s character at which, according to some, the sublime and the ridiculous meet, is that in which he differs from all the men of his class, ancient or modern, as far as we have evidence to judge; namely that strange delight he took in the short intervals he could snatch, in the midst of that

of his more critical biographers has well pointed out, without the conquest and successful retention of Silesia, Frederick II would hardly have become 'Frederick the Great.'⁸ Before World War II, even moderate German historians were wont to argue that Frederick's Silesian larceny was 'justified by history' because it laid the cornerstone of future Prussian and German greatness.⁹ After 1945 such justifications are hardly seemly, and many German historians have since attempted to shift the analytical ground a bit without altering the substance of the Frederickean myth. While the motivations for such a historiographical rearguard action are understandable – if only all too transparent – the centrepiece of Frederick II's historical immortality remains the felony he himself had earmarked for this purpose.

It is therefore all the more important to point out how close-run this conquest was, and how fortuitously Frederick escaped with his booty intact. The politically decisive battle of Mollwitz in April 1741, which confirmed Frederick in the possession of his occupied province for the time being, was not militarily as decisive or convincing a victory. It substantiated Frederick's perception that Austrian potential was not inconsiderable, and would be brought to bear on him alone if the conflict was not broadened. Thus, while desperately trying to avoid being involved in a protracted war himself, he realised that an extended and broad-ranging international conflict, which would distract and drain Habsburg energies,

turbulent and perilous life, in writing sheets on sheets of verses, of which it is perhaps hardly a correct character to say that they were bad, but which might be more correctly described as 'so middling; bad were better.' Andrew Bisset, ed., *Memoirs and Papers of Sir Andrew Mitchell, KB, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from the Court of Great Britain to the Court of Prussia, from 1756 to 1771* 2 Vols, (London, 1850) II, p. 119 [henceforth cited as *Mitchell Memoirs*].

⁸ Rudolf Augstein, *Preußens Friedrich und die Deutschen* 2nd edition (Frankfurt a/M, 1981), p. 191.

⁹ Thus Gerhard Ritter in the original edition of his biography of the King, *Friedrich der Grosse* (Leipzig, 1936), p. 100. In the postwar edition (Heidelberg, 1954) the passage was changed to read: 'He thereby laid the foundation for Prussia's greatness; and as long as its rise continued his action could be regarded as justified by history.' The English translation, *Frederick the Great: A Historical Profile*, translated by Peter Paret (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1968), p. 81, eliminated any reference to justification by history. Cf. Eberhard Kessel: 'Today [1934!] antipathy [to Frederick's actions] has given way to an understandable reverence for the greatness of the achievement of his absolutism.' In 'Friedrich der Große im Wandel der kriegsgeschichten Überlieferungen,' in *Militärgeschichte und Kriegstheorie in neuerer Zeit: Ausgewählte Aufsätze* ed. by Johannes Kunisch (Berlin, 1987), p. 57.

was necessary for him to make good his larceny. In this he was fortunate indeed, for Mollwitz strengthened the political position of France's most notorious hawk: the Marshal Charles-Louis-Auguste Foucquet de Belle-Isle. Inspired by visions of a complete destruction and dismemberment of France's 'hereditary enemy', Belle-Isle pressed for an abandonment of the policy of moderation that even a thoroughly sobered Louis XIV had urged on his successors in his final days, and managed to effect a resurrection of the hegemonic ambitions of the 'Sun King' at his strident height. The Alliance of Nymphenburg and its attendant treaties, which brought together the predatory claims of a French-sponsored anti-Habsburg coalition (Spain, Bavaria, Saxony and Prussia), aimed at nothing less than the destruction of Austria as a European power and the uncontested dominance of the German state complex by France. Full dismemberment of the Habsburg Monarchy thus became the key objective of the subsequent military campaigns, in what has become known as the War of the Austrian Succession.

The sudden emergence of Prussia as a significant factor on the European political scene also had repercussions further east. By 1741 French forward policy in Eastern Europe seemed to make great advances even in Russia itself as the apparently Francophile daughter of Peter the Great, Elizabeth, seized power in November 1741 with the full support of the French ambassador. It was also at the recommendation of the French ambassador that Elizabeth appointed Alexander Petrovich Bestuzhev-Ryumin to the important office of Vice-Chancellor and effective foreign minister of Russia. Bestuzhev's assessments of Russia's geo-political interests soon recognised that the principal objective of French policy was to hem in Russian expansion and to undercut Russia's interests, particularly in Sweden and Poland. Reasoning that Austro-Prussian hostility would be ongoing as long as Prussia remained in possession of Silesia, he concluded that France's anti-Habsburg policy had won a new ally, who thereby lent France's 'eastern barrier' a whole new capacity for military intervention. Prussia, which seemed to have a common interest with Austria and Russia on the Polish question in the 1720s and 1730s, now appeared to defect from the '*entente cordiale* of the three black eagles.' This conviction gained force as Prussia increasingly appeared to encourage anti-Russian tendencies in the 'barrier' states. An attempt by the French and Prussian ambassadors in Russia to topple Bestuzhev in 1744 then had the opposite effect. Bestuzhev was promoted to Chancellor, and fully won the empress for his anti-Prussian policies. In 1746 the Russian alliance with Austria was renewed, and was the beginning of the determination by both empresses to crush the upstart Prussians. In the subsequent year another alliance was

concluded with Britain, which seemed to herald a full return to the traditional alliance system.¹⁰

It is perhaps a symptom of both the stability and fluidity of the international system in operation since 1715 that British policies at the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession initially remained ambivalent. After some flirtation with the prospect of playing a mediating and pacifying role, British policies became more clear-cut with a change of domestic administration and a growing perception of the new danger of French hegemony. This relapse into the patterns of the War of the Spanish Succession, as well as Frederick II's ready perfidy with any and all allies, soon led to startling Habsburg military victories and a collapse of the French initiative in Germany. A reassessment of French policies, which ensued in 1743, however, did not lead to an abandonment, but to a broadening and refocusing of France's hegemonic ambitions. Beginning with the second family compact with the Bourbons of Spain in October 1743 – which now gave the conflict a colonial dimension otherwise still very secondary in everyone's consideration – through France's formal declarations of war on Britain and Austria, its initiation of a concerted campaign to conquer the Austrian Netherlands, the intensification of the naval conflict on the high seas, through to the plans for an invasion of England and the fomenting of the Jacobite rebellion in Scotland, the targeted objective for France decisively shifted from a destruction of Austria to a destruction of Britain.

In the face of these onslaughts, Britain faced some distressing months, especially during 1745. The victories it did achieve on the high seas, but especially the capture of Louisbourg in Canada by a colonial militia, therefore assumed all the more importance. The latter, in particular, of limited significance in the grand strategic scheme of things, was psychologically critical, not only as a moral boost but as the beginning of the systematic penetration of global trade issues and colonial priorities into a broader spectrum of political opinion in Britain. As British fortunes began to recover with successes in Italy and the defeat of Jacobites, the tables began to turn. Now many confident British elites were ready to embark on their own forward policy designed to humble France, and the war could well

¹⁰ Mediger, pp. 181–329; Michael G. Müller, 'Rußland und der Siebenjährige Krieg,' *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas* XXVIII (1980), pp. 202–208; *idem.*, 'Das "Petrinische Erbe": Russische Grossmachtpolitik bis 1762,' in Klaus Zernack, ed., *Vom Randstaat zur Hegemonialmacht* Vol. 2 of M. Hellmann, K. Zernack and G. Schramm, eds, *Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands* (Stuttgart, 1985), pp. 433–437.

have dragged on several more years had the more bellicose voices on all sides had the upper hand.

What ultimately silenced these voices and placed limitations on the ambitions of all combatants were fiscal realities. If there is one dimension of the mid-century wars that historians have tended to examine in greater detail in recent years than ever before, it is their financial impact on the combatants. Despite the apparently modest scale of the military operations in comparison with wars at the beginning and at the end of the eighteenth century, the relative costs of these conflicts reached unprecedented heights. In the Seven Years War statesmen were disconcerted to discover that, within only a few months, military expenditures escalated to threefold of what even the most liberal pre-war estimates had suggested. In the War of the Austrian Succession, only the Habsburg Monarchy had begun with critical shortfalls due to a plethora of loans contracted in the previous two decades, which ate up ordinary revenues and almost doubled the national debt. But in the war itself almost all the participants brought themselves to the verge of paralysing their respective economies. By 1747 French overseas trade was so crippled, and revenue streams were so reduced, that the minister of finance could only forecast the gloomiest scenarios if peace were not re-established immediately. Even Britain, which had acted as a continental paymaster, saw what were considered such unacceptable increases both in taxes and the national debt that talk of national bankruptcy was rife. Such concerns certainly acted as powerful incentives to bring the conflict to an end.¹¹

The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen), which ended the War of the Austrian Succession, therefore, was essentially a peace of exhaustion. By basically restoring the status quo, it solved none of Europe's international problems. Only Frederick II, who had manoeuvred in and out of the war with a mixture of deft duplicity and sheer luck, had thereby managed to retain Silesia, and in this way created a whole new problem. Otherwise the peace left few participants satisfied, and no participants feeling secure. Indeed, certain antagonisms were clearly aggravated, though the question of which alliance combinations would best serve the future interests of each of the powers was still left open. Apologists for Frederick have attempted to suggest that seeing the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (and the

¹¹ The best introduction to the War of the Austrian Succession with a full listing of the literature on the subject is Reed Browning, *The War of the Austrian Succession* (London and NY, 1993). See also the relevant volume in this series, M.S. Anderson, *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740–1748* (London and NY, 1995).

earlier Austro–Prussian Peace of Dresden) as a mere armistice in an ongoing mid-century conflict is a facile *ex post facto* argument, because, it is suggested, the ‘ideas and expectations’ of the principals do not bear this out.¹² In fact, the ‘ideas and expectations’ of the principals point exactly in this direction.

The principal Austrian negotiator at the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle and subsequent State Chancellor, or Foreign Minister, of the Habsburg Monarchy, Count (later Prince) Wenzel Anton Kaunitz-Rietberg, had already come to the conclusion during the previous war that the rape of Silesia made a fundamental change in Austrian policy imperative. Having been reared in the tradition of the so-called ‘Bohemian Party’ at the Habsburg Court, which had long argued for a reorientation of priorities from peripheral non-contiguous territories in Italy or the Low Countries to the central core triad of the Habsburg Monarchy (Austria, Bohemia and Hungary), he now successfully argued for the subordination of peripheral priorities to those of the centre. In a decisive policy memorandum shortly after returning from the peace negotiations he made it abundantly clear that the ‘first and principal’ premise of Austrian policy had henceforth to be that the loss of Silesia could not be tolerated. Austrian policy was therefore primarily to be focused on weakening Prussia and recovering the lost province.¹³ Similarly, Frederick II, in a confidential ‘Testament’ drawn up

¹² Cf. the polemical apologia by Winfried Baumgart, ‘Der Ausbruch des Siebenjährigen Krieges: Zum gegenwärtigen Forschungsstand,’ *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* XI (1972), pp. 157–165. The anti-armistice argument on p. 163.

¹³ The full memorandum has been published in Reiner Pommerin and Lothar Schilling, eds, ‘Denkschrift des Grafen Kaunitz zur mächtropolitischen Konstellation nach dem Aachener Frieden von 1748,’ in Johannes Kunisch, ed., *Expansion und Gleichgewicht: Studien zur europäischen Mächtropolitik des ancien régime* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 165–239. The passage cited on p. 208. Kaunitz’s policies analysed in William J. McGill, ‘The Roots of Policy: Kaunitz in Italy and the Netherlands, 1742–1846,’ *Central European History* I (1968), pp. 131–149; *idem.*, ‘Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rittberg and the Conference of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1748,’ *Duquesne Review* XIV (1969), pp. 154–167; *idem.*, ‘The Roots of Policy: Kaunitz in Vienna and Versailles, 1749–1753,’ *Journal of Modern History* XLIII (1971), pp. 229–235; Lothar Schilling, *Kaunitz und das Renversement des alliances: Studien zur außenpolitischen Konzeption Wenzel Anton Kaunitz* (Berlin, 1994), pp. 16–213; Harm Klüeting, *Die Lehre von der Macht der Staaten: Das außenpolitische Machtproblem in der ‘politischen Wissenschaft’ und in der praktischen Politik im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 167–235; Franz A.J. Szabo, ‘Wenzel Anton Kaunitz-Rietberg und seine Zeit: Bemerkungen zum 200. Todestag des Staatskanzlers,’ in Grete Klingenstein and Franz A.J. Szabo, eds, *Staatskanzler Wenzel*

for his successors in 1752 – and hence embodying his candid sentiments – stated unequivocally that, because Austria was the country Prussia had ‘most deeply injured,’ peace with her was a mere armistice. The loss of Silesia would never be accepted, and hence enmity to Austria was the basis of all Prussian policy. Everything else was ‘marginal and could be ignored.’ It was therefore quite clear to Frederick that the 1745 Peace of Dresden was not the final word on the subject. Already in 1749 and again in 1750 he fully expected the war to break out in 1754 or 1755.¹⁴ He in any case expected another conflict to erupt soon over the issue of the Polish Succession and saw this as the moment when ‘the fortunes of war’ would render the final verdict on whether Austria or Prussia would be the dominant power in Germany. Though he confessed that he did not have ‘a clear conscience’ when it came to Maria Theresa, still he could not help but conclude that, when the conflict was finally renewed, Prussia was in an excellent position to continue its expansionist drive. He admitted ‘I very much would like to tear Bohemia away from her,’ which he then planned to exchange for the much-coveted Electorate of Saxony. What is more, his vision for the renewal of the war clearly echoed the previous conflict, as it was equally focused on the destruction of the Habsburg Monarchy. For, in addition to his own conquest of Bohemia, he expected the French to take the Austrian Netherlands, the Sardinians to take Lombardy, the Turks to take Hungary and the Bavarians to revive their claims on Tyrol and Upper Austria. The essence of realising these ambitions, however, ‘consists more of profiting from favourable conjunctures’ than of preparing a specific plan.¹⁵ Bestuzhev, for his part, remained consistent in his argument that Prussia exceeded its natural bounds by its conquest of Silesia and thereby

Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg, 1711–1794: Neue Perspektiven zu Politik und Kultur der europäischen Aufklärung (Graz, 1995), pp. 11–14. On Kaunitz’s background and education, see the definitive Grete Klingenstein, *Der Aufstieg des Hauses Kaunitz: Studien zur Herkunft und Bildung des Staatskanzlers Wenzel Anton* (Göttingen, 1975), which supersedes all the older literature.

¹⁴ Reinhold Koser, *Geschichte Friedrichs des Großen* 4 Vols (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1912–1914) I, pp. 558, 638.

¹⁵ Frederick’s ‘Political Testaments,’ written in French, were only published in 1920 after the fall of the German Empire and the Hohenzollern dynasty as a supplementary volume to Johann Gustav Droysen, *et al.*, eds, *Politische Correspondenz Friedrich’s des Grossen* 47 Vols to date (Berlin, 1879–) [henceforth cited as PC]. The supplementary volume, *Die Politischen Testamente Friedrich’s des Grossen* (Berlin, 1920) was edited by Gustav Berthold Volz and appeared in German translation as *Friedrich der Grosse, Die Politischen Testamente* translated by Friedrich v. Oppeln-Bronikowski (Berlin,

had become an ambitious expansionist power and danger to Russia. That a preventative war against Prussia was necessary to reduce the power of Frederick was equally axiomatic to him, and it only remained to find a suitable *casus foederis*. He had hoped to intervene on Austria's side during the War of the Austrian Succession, but the Austro-Prussian Peace of Dresden pre-empted that. In 1749 he hoped in vain to find a pretext for war against Prussia in the plans of Frederick's sister, Luise Ulrike, the Queen of Sweden, to overthrow the Swedish parliamentary system. By 1755 a preventative war against Prussia was recognised as imminent by the governing circles of St Petersburg, and when a war cabinet – properly the Imperial Court Conference – was established in March 1756, it was with the avowed purpose of launching an attack on Prussia.¹⁶

While Austria, Prussia and Russia fully expected and planned for a renewal of the conflict over whether Frederick's grasp for great power status would succeed, there were voices in Britain and France that felt the Anglo-French settlement of 1748 could be lived with. It seems relatively clear that both the Foreign Minister of France, Antoine-Louis Rouillé, and the main director of British foreign policy, Secretary of State for the Southern Department and after 1754 First Lord of the Treasury, Thomas Pelham-Holles, the Duke of Newcastle, wished to avoid war if possible, though neither was optimistic that it was likely. Both got drawn into an escalating series of confrontations largely beyond their control, that also had their origins in the unwillingness of the individuals involved to regard the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle as anything more than a respite. Ironically that impetus came above all from the colonial periphery. Traditionally, European wars had a ripple effect on the Americas; now an American conflict decisively accelerated prospects of a European war. As the significance of world trade was brought into clearer focus by both French and English statesmen, the importance of North American developments became increasingly apparent. Dynamic population growth among the English colonists also added an unstable element. A surging population meant a

1922; second edition, Munich, 1936). The passages cited are on pages 40–41, 52, 59, 67 and 74 of the original PC edition. Efforts by the legion of Frederick's apologists to reduce these comments to the status of mere speculation have been effectively refuted by Erika Bosbach, *Die 'Rêveries Politiques' in Friedrich des Grossen Politischem Testament von 1752: Historisch-politische Erläuterung* (Cologne, Graz, 1960).

¹⁶ Sergei M. Soloviev, *History of Russia* 48 Vols, Peter von Wahlde, *et al.*, eds and trans., (Gulf Breeze, FL, 1976), XXXVIII, pp. 52–72, 114–146; Medinger, pp. 582–627; Müller, 'Das "Petrinische Erbe"', pp. 437–440.

surging market for the mother country's products and a corresponding enhancement of that market's importance. At the same time, the commercial prosperity of the Americas only whetted the colonists' appetite for more, and land hunger made them cast a greedy eye on the territories of the vastly outnumbered though militarily better organised New France, and of the technologically less advanced and inconveniently in the way indigenous peoples. Driven by an ambitious agenda, but militarily too weak to effect it themselves; reckless in its implementation, but lacking proper coordination to carry it through, the British colonies increasingly drew the mother country into the American vortex. French colonial authorities adopted an equally confrontational attitude, with the result that increasing pressures were brought to bear on the two countries' respective foreign ministers and the conflict rapidly escalated, first to an undeclared and finally to a declared war between Britain and France.¹⁷

This had momentous consequences, not only for North America but also for Europe. Developing an ever sharper focus on global trade issues, and increasingly drawn into first covert, then overt war with France by the actions of its self-willed but demanding colonists, Britain sought to cover its continental flanks as best it could. The last war had shown that France could compensate for colonial defeats by conquests on the European continent, where Britain had two vital areas of interest. The first was the Austrian Netherlands, which was Britain's commercial door to the continent, and which Newcastle for one described as 'a kind of common country' shared by Austria, Britain and the Dutch.¹⁸ The second was the German Electorate of Hanover, whose ruler was also King of Britain. While Hanover was in theory a completely separate state, it was clear that the interests of the King could hardly be ignored. As Anglo–French relations degenerated towards war, Newcastle looked to the traditional continental alliance system to defend Hanover and the Austrian Netherlands. The problem was that one of the lynchpins of that system, Holland – properly the United Netherlands – had been in slow decline throughout the

¹⁷ The gradual escalation of the colonial conflict into an Anglo–French war is best described in Patrice Louis-René Higonnet, 'The Origins of the Seven Years War,' *Journal of Modern History* XL (1968), pp. 57–90. Cf. the recent Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years War* (Lincoln, Nebraska and London, 2005), pp. 1–9, 12–19. For the impact of the colonial conflict on the European state system, Mediger, pp. 481–509.

¹⁸ Horn, 'Newcastle . . .,' p. 257.

eighteenth century and now was rapidly moving towards a formal declaration of neutrality in the Anglo–French conflict.¹⁹ At the same time the threat to Hanover in particular was much enhanced by a powerful new Prussia allied to France. The only counterweight available was Russia, still regarded by the British as a peripheral potential auxiliary mercenary rather than as a great power. Negotiations with Russia on a Subsidy Treaty proved arduous, and in the final analysis were only concluded in September 1755 when the Austrians made it a precondition of any Austrian participation in the defence of the Low Countries in an Anglo–French war. The agreement provided for a corps of 55,000 Russians to be mobilised for the defence of Hanover, the mere threat of which it was hoped would protect the Electorate from an attack by Prussia. However, the Convention was overtaken by events and was in the event never ratified.²⁰

Austria and Russia, of course, saw the benefits of the Subsidy Treaty in a completely different light. Russia's resolve to reduce Prussian power, which it shared with Austria, was constrained by the poor state of Russian finances in mid-century and the subsidy allowed it to place an army within striking distance of Prussia without additional cost. Newcastle's intention, of course, was precisely the opposite. He wished to create an international constellation that would preserve the peace in Germany, so that Britain could concentrate its undivided attention on the conflict with France. It had long been the Achilles heel in British foreign policy that it never saw clearly enough how other powers perceived their own self-interest, and Newcastle completely failed to grasp Austria and Russia's primary policy objective. As a result he now proceeded to compound the problem. Because the intention of the Russian Subsidy Treaty was to neutralise Prussia, Newcastle had not kept its negotiation a secret from Frederick II. Frederick, for his part, however, more clearly understood what was at stake and saw the threat the Subsidy Treaty posed for him. Expecting little effective assistance from France on the continent, he feared a potential attack on Prussia from all sides: Russia in the east, Austria and Saxony in the south and Hanover, supported by Britain and Britain's German mercenaries, from the west. Thus, when Newcastle proposed an Anglo–Prussian Convention aimed at neutralising Germany during the Anglo–French conflict,

¹⁹ Alice Clare Carter, *The Dutch Republic in Europe in the Seven Years War* (London, 1971), pp. 16–68.

²⁰ On the development of the idea of Russia as a counterweight to Prussia in the defence of Hanover, see Mediger, pp. 330–480.

Frederick eagerly grasped it. Though he certainly had an ongoing expansionist agenda and was prepared to seize opportunities as they arose, his immediate policy was dominated by fear of Austrian revenge. At the moment a 'favourable conjuncture' to activate his ongoing expansionist agenda was absent, and what he needed, as he told his brother, was more time 'to implement some necessary and essential measures' before a forward policy could be contemplated. Unable to conceive an Austro–French rapprochement within the realm of the possible, and persuaded that Russia was an obedient puppet of Britain, he was confident an agreement with Britain would effectively isolate Austria and scotch its revanchism. In January 1756 he signed the Convention of Westminster with Britain, by which the two courts agreed not to attack each other's territories and to preserve the peace in Germany by preventing any other power from entering it. With that Frederick was persuaded he had 'won' the year 1757. 'After that we will have to see if the conjunctures are favourable or unfavourable, for that will determine [our] course of action.'²¹ Neither signatory regarded this accord as a fundamental change of alliance system, but merely as a supplementary *ad hoc* adjustment of it. Britain felt that its ally, Austria, was thereby protected from a Prussian attack and Prussia felt that it had done France a service by helping to neutralise the continent so that it could concentrate on its colonial interests. They were both wrong, and as a result quickly achieved the opposite of what both Britain and Prussia desired.

Austria, already soured by Britain's almost callous indifference to the Habsburgs' primary concern with Silesia in the previous war, abandoned the long-standing British option. Russia, far more independent of British subsidies than Prussia assumed and far more hostile to Prussia than Britain had understood, stopped being ready to act as British surrogate and mercenary. France, angered at Prussian duplicity and afraid of isolation in its already blazing colonial war with England, saw that a compromise with Austria was necessary. The result was a dramatic realignment of alliances that is generally known as the 'Diplomatic Revolution.' Rather than a simple turning from one firm European alliance system to another, it was, in fact, not really so revolutionary. In many ways it was a return to the kind of flexible policy of the 1715–1740 period, though this time freedom of action was more constrained by greater implacability in Anglo–French

²¹ Gustav Berthold Volz, ed., *Briefwechsel Friedrichs des Großen mit seinem Bruder Prinz August Wilhelm* by Friedrich von Oppeln-Bronikowki (Leipzig, n.d. [1927]), p. 247, No. 420.

rivalry, and by a clear shift of Habsburg priorities to the Prussian threat.²² The Austrian foreign minister, Kaunitz, having successfully persuaded Maria Theresa and the governing circles of Vienna that enmity to France had to be subordinated to enmity to Prussia, had unsuccessfully attempted for some time to follow up on earlier precedents dating back to the days of Louis XIV to bring about Habsburg–Bourbon reconciliation so that Austria could concentrate more effectively on Prussia.²³ Upon learning of the Anglo–Prussian discussions in the summer of 1755 the Austrians re-initiated their efforts to secure French neutrality in the event of a war with Prussia. While the French were still suspicious of Austrian motives, King Louis XV nevertheless authorised negotiations with the Austrian ambassador, Georg Adam von Starhemberg, though these were not conducted by his pro-Prussian foreign minister but by the abbé François Joachim de Pierre de Bernis – a protégé of the ‘official’ if no longer active royal mistress, Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, the marquise de Pompadour. The discussions were rocky and tentative for the balance of the year, but under the impact of the Convention of Westminster the tone of the negotiations changed and led to quick results.²⁴

In February France decided not to renew its alliance with Prussia (due to expire in June) and on 1 May 1756 Austria and France signed a neutrality pact and a defensive alliance, which are collectively known as the First Treaty of Versailles. The neutrality pact provided for Austrian neutrality in the Anglo–French conflict and a reciprocal French guarantee not to attack Habsburg territories, particularly the Austrian Netherlands. In the defensive treaty the signatories undertook to assist each other with an auxiliary corps of 24,000 if the other was attacked, though the Anglo–French war was explicitly excepted. The most important secret provisions of the Treaty required the signatories to assist each other if attacked by an ally of Britain

²² Still the best introduction to the Diplomatic Revolution, Horn, ‘Diplomatic Revolution,’ pp. 440–464. See also Walter L. Dorn, *Competition for Empire, 1740–1763* (NY, 1940, 1963), pp. 292–317 and McKay and Scott, *Rise of the Great Powers*, pp. 181–192.

²³ Cf. Max Braubach, *Versailles und Wien von Ludwig XIV. bis Kaunitz: Die Vorstadien der diplomatischen Revolution im 18. Jahrhundert* (Bonn, 1952).

²⁴ While Richard Waddington, *Louis XV et le reversement des alliances* (Paris, 1896) and [Albert] Broglie, *L’alliance autrichienne* (Paris, 1897), remain the standard works on these negotiations and on the First Treaty of Versailles the most important modern corrective is the unpublished John Charles Batzel, ‘Austria and the First Three Treaties of Versailles, 1755–1758,’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, Brown University, 1974), pp. 82–150. Cf. also Alfred Ritter von Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresias* 10 Vols (Vienna, 1863, 1879) IV, pp. 439–446.

and to begin negotiations for an offensive alliance. Nowhere in the treaty, however, was there an agreement, as asserted by the principal modern Prussian apologist, for ‘the total destruction of Prussia’²⁵ – in fact, Prussia was not even mentioned. Kaunitz felt that Austria had now ‘crossed the Rubicon,’²⁶ but in France the feeling was widespread that the treaty would guarantee the peace of Europe.²⁷ Ironically, even the first countermeasure France took on the European continent in the as yet undeclared colonial war with Britain was primarily aimed at acquiring a bargaining chip to force a peaceful colonial settlement. In April 1756 the French Mediterranean fleet under the command of admiral Roland-Michel Barrin, Marquis de La Galissonnière escorted a landing force of 15,000 men under Marshall Louis-François-Armand Vignerot du Plessis, the duke of Richelieu, to the British-held island of Minorca. A British relief naval force under Admiral John Byng was defeated by La Galissonnière, and by the end of June the last British defenders of the island had capitulated. However, rather than bring about peace, the French assault on Minorca had the opposite effect. When news of the French landing reached London in early May it resulted in a formal declaration of war against France on 17 May. The French reciprocated on 9 June.²⁸

²⁵ Johannes Kunisch, *Das Mirakel des Hauses Brandenburg: Studien zum Verhältnis von Kabinettpolitik und Kriegführung im Zeitalter des Siebenjährigen Krieges* (Munich, Vienna, 1978), pp. 9 and 22. The assertion appears to have been based on a corrupted rendering of the Second Treaty of Versailles, which posits the goal of ‘the reduction of the power of Prussia.’ The evocative phrase ‘the total destruction of Prussia’ was much repeated by Kunisch’s disciples (e.g., Peter Baumgart, ‘Epochen der Preussischen Monarchie in 18. Jahrhundert,’ *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* VI (1979), pp. 306–307) and by some of the English-language literature. It was effectively refuted by Müller, ‘Rußland und der Siebenjährige Krieg,’ pp. 208–215 (esp. pp. 209–210). More recently (in *Friedrich*, p. 334) Kunisch has retreated from his original assertion, now citing the phrase only as part of a dispatch by Starhemberg in which he reports that Louis XV did not wish to see a total destruction of Prussia. Unfortunately, the source that Kunisch cites for this (p. 589, fn. 13) makes no reference whatsoever to any Starhemberg report.

²⁶ Arnold Schaefer, *Geschichte des siebenjährigen Kriegs* 2 Vols [volume 2 in two parts] (Berlin, 1867–1874) I, 158.

²⁷ Waddington, *Louis XV*, p. 338; Broglie, *L’alliance autrichienne*, pp. 378–380, 387–390.

²⁸ [Charles Pierre Victor] Pajol, *Les Guerres sous Louis XV* 7 Vols, (Paris 1881–1891) VI, pp. 1–29; Edouard-Louis-Maxime Guillon, *Port-Mahon: La France à Minorque sous Louis XV (1756–1763)* (Paris, 1894), pp. 11–70; Waddington, *Louis XV*,

The Convention of Westminster and the Treaty of Versailles dealt a devastating blow to Bestuzhev's plans and ultimately his position, but changed nothing with respect to Russia's determination to reduce the power of the King of Prussia. Bestuzhev's hostility to Prussia was largely informed by the view that as an ally of France Prussia gave new vigour to France's 'eastern barrier,' which he was determined to undermine. Now Britain appeared to betray Russia with its simultaneous dealings with Frederick and Austria was quickly moving towards reconciliation with France. These developments immensely strengthened the Francophile party at the Russian Court. Led by Elizabeth's favourite, Ivan Ivanovich Shuvalov, and his cousins, the brothers Peter Ivanovich and Alexander Ivanovich Shuvalov, the grouping included Bestuzhev's bitter rival, the Vice-Chancellor Mikhail Larionovich Vorontsov. While this group was opposed to the British connection, it had the same virulent anti-Prussian views as Bestuzhev. Though the Chancellor was retained in his position for the moment, the virtual control of foreign policy he had exercised was broken. The establishment of the Conference in March 1756 marked the beginning of policy being formulated by a collective body. It soon turned out, however, that the Conference was more than ready to accelerate offensive action against Prussia. It voted to approach Vienna with a plan for an immediate attack and began preparations to mobilise the Russian army.²⁹ Ironically the ascent of the pro-French party would ultimately also lead to the weakening of the French 'eastern barrier.' During the War of the Austrian Succession Louis XV had personally schemed to enhance France's 'eastern barrier' through secret diplomacy that bypassed the French Foreign Ministry. This was known as the 'the king's secret (*secret du roi*)' and consisted of an extensive royal private correspondence with the French ambassador in Warsaw, Count Charles François Broglie, as well as other diplomats, and was designed to enhance French influence in Poland, Sweden

pp. 454–460; G. Lacour-Gayet, *La Marine militaire de la France sous le règne de Louis XV* 2nd ed. (Paris, 1910), pp. 270–301; Julian S. Corbett, *The Seven Years War: A Study in British Combined Strategy* (London, 2001), pp. 71–102 [This is the modern edition of *England in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Combined Strategy* 2 Vols (London, 1907; second edition, 1918). All subsequent citations refer to this modern edition.]; Dull, pp. 50–54.

²⁹ Soloviev XL, pp. 157–171; Mediger, pp. 617–626; Kaplan, pp. 3–56; Evgeny V. Anisimov, *Empress Elizabeth: Her Reign and Her Russia, 1741–1761* ed. and trans. by John T. Alexander (Gulf Breeze, FL, 1995), pp. 109–113.

and the Ottoman Empire. As a result of the new friendship with Russia, as has been pointed out, ‘French influence was being retracted from Poland, and Russia was quietly and efficiently filling the void.’³⁰

The Austrian response to the Russian proposal was positive and planning began for an attack on Prussia that summer. But as Russia was counting on a substantial French subsidy to be paid through Austria and had also decided to attack Prussia only in concert with Vienna, while Austria, for its part, was not yet sure how France would react to such an attack nor that its own army was ready for an offensive, it became evident to Kaunitz that a 1756 Austro–Russian summer offensive might be premature. The Russians were accordingly urged to delay their attack until 1757. For a few weeks the determined Russians pressed ahead on their own, somewhat resentful at the Austrian delay, but they finally agreed to halt their preparations. Bestuzhev remained unconvinced, and in order to accelerate the war tried to provoke Prussia into acting first. In July he proposed to the Conference that a Russian corps of 30,000 to 35,000 men be sent to shore up a vulnerable and possibly threatened Saxony – a signal which would undoubtedly lead Frederick to believe that preparations for a military offensive against him were being made and, presumably, to take countermeasures. The proposal was defeated at the urging of the Austrian ambassador, but Bestuzhev did not relent. He confided the Austro–Russian plans to the Dutch ambassador, whom he was certain would leak the secret to the Prussians – as he then in fact did.³¹

This intelligence contributed to Frederick’s growing anxiety about an imminent attack, though he still mistakenly believed Austria to be the main driving force. Realising that the Convention of Westminster had not been a brilliant stroke to buy him time but a fatal diplomatic error, Frederick II sought to rescue the situation with a military option. Looming encirclement, he calculated, could be broken before the mould set with a lightning strike against what he perceived to be the lynchpin of the Alliance: the Habsburg Monarchy. In a strategy that bore striking resemblance to German actions in 1914, he planned a preventative war with a quick assault on the German principality of Saxony, through which he planned an invasion of the Habsburg province of Bohemia. Being fully aware from his spy network that Austria was not yet prepared for war and that Russia had begun to

³⁰ On the effects of Franco–Russian relations on Poland during the Seven Years War, see L. Jay Oliva, *Misalliance: A Study of French Policy in Russia during the Seven Years War* (NY, 1964), pp. 95–108, 155–159 (citation on p. 158).

³¹ Mediger, pp. 626–627.

demobilise its army again, and having completed his own military preparation by early July,³² he was ready to strike. On 21 July he met with his Foreign Minister, Count Heinrich Podewils, and informed him of his intention to play the preventative war card. The minister quickly earned the royal anger when he tried to suggest that Frederick's conviction that an offensive alliance had been concluded against him was based on rumour and might not be the case. On the other hand, if he were perceived to be the aggressor, Podewils argued, defensive alliances would come into effect, which would entail 'numerous inconveniences and terrible consequences' for Prussia. Launching the war ten months later would give Prussia an opportunity to improve its 'current miserable [diplomatic] situation,' and enhance its chances of success. However, the minister soon saw that all his arguments were 'entirely fruitless and in vain,' and that they tended more 'to irritate rather than appease' the King. He was sent on his way 'rather drily' with the words: 'Farewell, Monsieur timid politics!'³³

The war manifesto justifying his actions was also already drafted in July, but Frederick delayed his attack until the end of August. By then it would be too late in the campaign season for either France or Russia to come to Austria or Saxony's aid, giving him a decided jump on his opponents in what he thought would be the decisive campaign in 1757. For Prussia the first two Silesian wars were short wars in which the objectives were quickly achieved. There was no reason for Frederick to assume a third Silesian war would be any different. Neither Prussian nor Austrian military preparations were now any longer a secret from each other, and Frederick used this awareness to have his ambassador in Vienna demand clarification of Austria's intentions. The issue at stake was no longer whether there would be a war or not, but simply to lure the Austrians into appearing to be the aggressors. In an audience of 26 July Maria Theresa responded by reading the Prussian ambassador a note that Kaunitz had prepared for her: the international delicate situation required her to take measures for the security of her lands but these measures threatened no one.³⁴ A second demand was met with the still truthful but evasive response that no offensive alliance had been concluded between Austria and her

³² Frederick to Prince Henry, 2 and 8 July 1756, PC XIII, pp. 5–6, 39, Nos 7,639 and 7,668. Spy reports appended to Frederick to Finckenstein, 4 July 1756, *ibid.*, pp. 14–16, No. 7,650.

³³ Podewils to Eichel, 22 July 1756, PC XIII, pp. 104–107, No. 7,735.

³⁴ Klinggräffen to Frederick, 27 July 1756, PC XIII, p. 163, No. 7,795.

allies. The third demand was in the form of a clear ultimatum, by which time, however, Frederick had already launched his attack on Saxony.³⁵ On 26 August he informed his brother that he was cutting the Gordian knot, adding with the pose of victim that was to intensify as the war wore on: ‘I am innocent of this war. I did what I could to prevent it.’³⁶ But as has been well pointed out, Frederick might very well have preferred not to have a war at this point – after all, the optimum ‘favourable conjuncture’ had not yet been established – but this is a long way from saying that he did not want any war. War always fitted into his political agenda.³⁷

Indeed, Frederick had been preparing for war virtually from the day that the previous conflict ended. The central treasuries of Brandenburg–Prussia had long been divided into two separate parts, one for civil (*Generalfinanzkasse*) and one for military revenues (*Generalkriegskasse*), and both Frederick II and his father, Frederick William I, took great care that the latter remained well funded and that none of its revenues were diverted to other purposes. Upon his accession Frederick found that his father had left him a war treasure of some 8 million Taler, which went a long way to finance the king’s first Silesian wars. After the Peace of Dresden Frederick made the restocking of the war treasury one of his highest priorities, as over 80 per cent of total state revenues were channelled for military purposes. Calculating that he needed 5 million Taler for a campaign, and that the state needed a military reserve fund large enough to wage four campaigns, he was already close to his objective by the summer of 1756 – at which point nearly 16.5 million Taler had been amassed. This sum was saved despite massive military expenditures in the decade before the war on a fortification programme, which was primarily designed to impede the expected invasion of Silesia. The defensive works of Kosel (Koźle), Neisse (Nysa), Glatz (Kłodzko), Schweidnitz (Świdnica), Brieg (Brzeg), Breslau (Wrocław) and Glogau (Głogów) in that province were either upgraded or newly established. In addition, by 1752 a reserve uniform for every infantryman, and reserve artillery ordinance for two campaigns had already been stored up, and by 1756 a sufficient supply of weapons had been stocked to double the cavalry and to increase the infantry by 50 per cent at any time.

³⁵ Mitchell to Holderness, 28 August 1756, PC XIII, p. 285, No. 7,922.

³⁶ Volz, *Briefwechsel*. pp. 266–267, No. 459.

³⁷ Mittenzwei, *Friedrich*, p. 106. On Frederick’s decision to go to war in the summer of 1756 cf. Koser, *Geschichte Friedrichs II*, pp. 360–380; von Arneth, *Maria Theresia IV*, pp. 479–486.

Supply magazines stood ready as early as 1752 to feed an army of 100,000 men for 18 months.³⁸

What made Prussia a formidable military power, however, was its ability to maintain a military establishment out of all proportion to its size. While most European powers regarded a soldier to civilian ratio of approximately 1:100 as a desirable goal, Prussia's ratio of approximately 1:30 – which by 1760 was to rise to 1:14³⁹ – certainly seemed to justify Montesquieu's famous quip that Prussia was not a country with an army but an army with a country! By the summer of 1756 the Prussian army had a nominal strength of 153,700 men, though this was still shy of Frederick's target of 180,000. The bulk of this force was made up of conscripts, which were raised through one of the earliest conscription systems introduced in Europe. Established in 1733 and known as the 'Canton System,' it divided the country into conscription districts – or cantons – each of which was assigned to a specific regiment. All able-bodied men in a canton were liable for service and those selected were inducted into the army for many years. The uniqueness of the system was that draftees, after training for a year, were thereafter called upon for only a few months of the year for retraining and manoeuvres. The balance of the time they could return to their farms, making it a very cost-efficient way to maintain a disproportionately large army. In addition to these regulars, supplementary reserves (*Überkomplete*, as they were known) of about 9,000 men for each regiment were called up and trained at local garrisons. As part of Frederick's preparations for a new war, the number of *Überkomplete* was doubled, and in this way trained native sons made up about 75 per cent of the Prussian army. The balance was made up of foreigners recruited or dragooned from all over Europe.⁴⁰

³⁸ Reinhold Koser, 'Der preussische Staatsschatz von 1740 bis 1756,' *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preussischen Geschichte* IV (1891), pp. 529–551; Lehman, pp. 1–3; Adelheid Simsch, 'Armee, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Preußens Kampf auf der "inneren Linie",' in Bernhard P. Kroener, ed., *Europa im Zeitalter Friedrichs des Großen: Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kriege* (Munich, Vienna, 1989), pp. 38–40.

³⁹ Comparative table in André Corvisier, *Armées et sociétés en Europe de 1494 à 1789* (Vendôme, 1976), p. 126. This volume is also available in English translation as *Armies and societies in Europe, 1494–1789*, translated by Abigail T. Siddall (Bloomington, 1979).

⁴⁰ The standard work on the peculiarities of the Prussian military system in the 18th century remains Otto Büsch, *Militärsystem und Sozialleben im alten Preußen, 1713–1807: Die Anfänge der sozialen Militarisierung der preußisch-deutschen Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1962, 2nd edn, 1981). Also available in an English translation:

There was little doubt that in mid-century the Prussian army was the most effective military instrument in Europe. There were a number of factors that contributed to this. The first was the emergence of a highly disciplined officer corps with a strong sense of duty. Frederick William I had purged the officer corps of all individuals, as Frederick II later put it, ‘whose conduct or birth did not correspond to a profession of men of honour,’⁴¹ and effectively co-opted the Prussian nobility into an officer caste with a highly developed *esprit de corps*.⁴² The second element was the realisation of Frederick that, even if he brought his army up to optimum size and supplied it effectively, he could still not hope to match the numbers that prospective enemies could bring to bear. Everything therefore depended on the combat effectiveness of his military establishment, and in the decade before the Seven Years War he devoted much of his energy to this challenge. Immediately following the Second Silesian War he set to work on a manuscript entitled ‘General Principles of War,’ which was completed in 1748 and then translated into German and circulated in strictest secrecy among his generals in 1753. The work was, in effect, a manual for his senior officers for the conduct of the upcoming war. Prussia could not afford a protracted war, he pointed out ominously, and its wars ‘must be short and lively.’ Prussia’s army therefore had to seek rapid decisions through decisive battles, in which everything depended ‘on speed of movement and on the necessity of offence.’ Breaking camp, marching, deploying from column to

Military System and Social Life in Old Regime Prussia, 1713–1807: The Beginnings of Social Militarization of Prusso-German Society translated by John G. Gagliardo (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1997). Cf. *idem.*, ‘Die Militarisierung von Staat und Gesellschaft im alten Preußen,’ in Manfred Schlenke, ed., *Preußen: Beiträge zu einer politischen Kultur* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1981), pp. 45–60; Curt Jany, *Geschichte der Preussischen Armee vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zum Jahre 1914* 4 Vols, (Berlin, 1928–1933) I, pp. 679–722; Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk: Das Problem des Militarismus in Deutschland*, Vol. I: *Die altpreussische Tradition* (Munich, 1965), pp. 25–49 [Ritter’s work is also available in an English translation: *The Sword and the Scepter; the Problem of Militarism in Germany* 4 Vols, translated by Heinz Norden (Coral Gables, FL, 1969)]; Peter Bachmann and Kurt Zeisler, *Der deutsche Militarismus vom 17. Jahrhundert bis 1917* 2nd edn, (Cologne, 1986), pp. 88–93; Bernhard Kroener, ‘Das Militärwesen, a) Armee und Staat,’ in Jürgen Ziechmann, ed., *Panorama der Friedericianischen Zeit: Friedrich der Große und seine Epoche* (Bremen, 1985), pp. 393–404; Simsch, pp. 44–45; Dennis E. Showalter, *The Wars of Frederick the Great* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 14–28.

⁴¹ *Oeuvres* I, p. 192.

⁴² Jany I, pp. 722–737.

line and firing faster than the enemy was the key to success.⁴³ Frederick's prescriptions were put into practice through merciless drill and repeated practice in manoeuvres, so that speed in the application of all military operations became the decisive advantage the Prussian army enjoyed in the early campaigns of the war. Also enhancing the striking power of the Prussian military was the reform of the heavy cavalry into the premier shock force of Europe, which, too, was to prove its mettle in Prussia's early victories.⁴⁴

One final element that enhanced speed in the Prussian military and diplomatic prosecution of the war was the decision-making process. Under Frederick Prussia was a true autocracy in which the government departments of the central administration (or General Directory) were less ministries in any modern sense of the word and more secretariats to carry out the king's will – though, of course, this did not mean the king's will was always carried out the way he might have wished.⁴⁵ Foreign policy, too, was conducted through a so-called 'Cabinet Ministry' (*Kabinettsministerium*) – 'cabinet' here was used in the German sense of the word and meant the king's personal office – which was made up of two ministers. Podewils remained first minister, or Chief of the Cabinet Ministry, until his death in 1760, but as a result of having questioned the king's wisdom in launching a preventative war, he was largely sidelined after 1756 and the king henceforth relied more on the younger second Cabinet Minister, Karl Wilhelm Finck von Finckenstein, as a dutiful instrument to carry out his will. After Podewils's death Finckenstein remained sole Cabinet Minister until the end of the war.⁴⁶ Above all, however, Frederick was his own commander-in-chief – the French term *roi-connétable* is frequently employed in the literature – and he jealously guarded to himself all the key strategic and tactical decisions of the Prussian war effort. Because the king was also the commander in the field there was therefore no gap between decision and implementation of the kind that constrained all other belligerents. This certainly speeded

⁴³ Frederick II, 'Les Principes généraux de la guerre, appliqués à la tactique et à la discipline des troupes prussiennes,' 2 April 1748, *Oeuvres* XXVIII, pp. 1–114.

⁴⁴ Jany II, pp. 304–341.

⁴⁵ Still the classic study on this, Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience, 1660–1815* (Cambridge, MA, 1958).

⁴⁶ H.M. Scott, 'Prussia's royal foreign minister: Frederick the Great and the administration of Prussian diplomacy,' in Robert Oresko, G.C. Gibbs, and H.M. Scott, eds, *Royal and republican sovereignty in early modern Europe: essays in memory of Ragnhild Hatton* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 500–526. Podewils was born in 1696, Finckenstein in 1714.

up the Prussian military response to its enemies, particularly as Prussia enjoyed the additional advantage of interior lines, but it also meant that Frederick was more directly personally responsible for Prussia's failures – if, ironically, not always for its successes.⁴⁷ Both in foreign and military policy Frederick was a micromanager, with all the advantages and disadvantages that entailed.

Austrian preparations for the war ensued under the shadow of the traumatic loss of the province of Silesia and the painful awareness of its military shortcoming in the War of the Austrian Succession. For the young Habsburg heiress, the future Empress Maria Theresa, it not only came as a shock that Silesia was so easily overrun by the Prussians, but even more so that Frederick II was subsequently able to support his entire army for a full year on Silesian revenues, while previously they had barely been able to support two Habsburg cavalry regiments.⁴⁸ The inability to meet the most elemental defensive needs of the Habsburg Monarchy therefore inspired a major administrative and fiscal reform whose primary objective was to guarantee the revenues deemed necessary to support a peacetime military establishment of 108,000 men. A new centralised Directory for Political and Financial Administration (*Directorium in publicis et cameralibus*) under the leadership of Count Friedrich Wilhelm Haugwitz revamped the taxation system and introduced the revolutionary principle of regular taxation of seigniorial lands in peacetime. New ten-year taxation agreements, or recesses, were negotiated with the provincial Estates of the Monarchy and revenues were raised dramatically. At the same time responsibility for raising and equipping a new professional army passed to the crown.⁴⁹ Now freed from

⁴⁷ The best introduction to Frederick as 'roi-connétable' is to be found in Theodor Schieder, *Friedrich der Große: Ein Königtum der Widersprüche* (Frankfurt a/M, Berlin, Vienna, 1983), pp. 341–364. Schieder's classic study is also available in a slightly abridged English translation as *Frederick the Great* ed. and trans. by Sabina Berkeley and H.M. Scott (London and NY, 2000). Citations are henceforth to the German edition. Cf. Theodor von Bernhardt, *Friedrich der Grosse als Feldherr*, 2 Vols (Berlin, 1881); Johannes Kunisch, *Das Mirakel des Hauses Brandenburg: Studien zum Verhältnis von Kabinettpolitik und Kriegführung im Zeitalter des Siebenjährigen Krieges* (Munich, Vienna, 1978).

⁴⁸ Josef Kallbrunner, ed., *Kaiserin Maria Theresias Politisches Testament* (Munich, 1952), p. 77. This is the modern edition of Alfred Ritter von Arneth, ed., 'Zwei Denkschriften der Kaiserin Maria Theresia,' *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* XLVII (1891), pp. 267–355.

⁴⁹ The standard work on the Haugwitz reforms is Friedrich Walter, *Die Geschichte der österreichischen Zentralverwaltung in der Zeit Maria Theresias (1740–1780)*

the pluralistic chaos created by the regimental proprietorship of ambitious 'military entrepreneurs' and the vicissitudes of Estates funding and control, the Austrian army undertook a dramatic programme of reform.

The administrative apparatus of the War Ministry, the so-called Aulic War Council (*Hofkriegsrat*), was rationalised, its personnel reduced, and brought under closer monarchical supervision in 1745. The next year the Commissariat for Military Supply (*Generalkriegskommissariat*) was given ministerial status in an effort to reduce friction within the War Ministry and to improve military economy.⁵⁰ Then, in the last months of the war, a military reform commission was instituted to review the entire range of technical reforms required to increase the performance level of the Habsburg army. Though chaired by the unfortunate Prince Charles Alexander of Lorraine, the emperor's brother and Austrian commander at the disastrous battles of Chotusitz, Hohenfriedenberg and Soor, there was no reluctance to recognise structural shortcomings and to begin with the implementation of fundamental change almost as soon as the war was over.⁵¹ The first concern was to augment troop strength, for while the Haugwitz reforms were designed to provide a secure revenue base for a standing army of 108,000 men, recruitment shortfalls remained a constant problem. In December 1748 the empress decreed ongoing or 'permanent recruitment' until all regimental quotas were filled, but this yielded such uneven results that an imperial patent was issued in August 1753 to provide for 'supplementary

Vol. 1, Section i of Heinrich Kretschmayr, ed., *Die Österreichische Zentralverwaltung*, Part II: *Von der Vereinigung der österreichischen und böhmischen Hofkanzlei bis zur Einrichtung der Ministerialverfassung (1749–1848)* (Vienna, 1938) [henceforth cited as ÖZV]. Some of Walter's arguments are no longer tenable and have been corrected in P.G.M. Dickson, *Finance and Government under Maria Theresia, 1740–1780* 2 Vols, (Oxford, 1987) I, pp. 207–329; II, pp. 1–35; and in Franz A.J. Szabo, *Kaunitz and enlightened absolutism, 1753–1780* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 73–83, 115–118.

⁵⁰ ÖZV II/1/i, 18–35; Oskar Regele, *Der Österreichische Hofkriegsrat, 1556–1848* (Vienna, 1949), p. 23; Jürg Zimmermann, *Militärverwaltung und Heeresaufbringung in Österreich bis 1806*, Vol. III of Gerhard Papke, ed., *Handbuch zur deutschen Militärgeschichte, 1648–1939* (Frankfurt a/M, 1965), pp. 69–71.

⁵¹ Großer Generalstab [Prussia/Germany], *Kriegsgeschichtliche Abteilung*, ed., *Die Kriege Friedrichs des Großen*, Part 3 *Der Siebenjährige Krieg, 1756–1763* 13 Vols (Berlin, 1901–1914) [henceforth cited as *Kriege Friedrichs*] I, pp. 130–151; Christopher Duffy, *The Austrian Army in the Seven Years War*, Volume 1: *Instrument of War* (Rosemont, IL, 2000), pp. 116–118. On the reforms in general see also Michael Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence: War, State and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1683–1797* (London, New York, 2003), pp. 303–318.

recruitment'. It created a reserve of 24,000 men to fill quotas in regiments that undershot recruitment goals, and provided the core of the casualties replacement pool during wartime.⁵² With the state assuming all responsibility for the military establishment, standardisation in equipment and training became the rule. Everything from weapons to flags and uniforms was subjected to normative specifications, and in many cases, particularly in the artillery branch, to substantial technical innovations.⁵³ Particularly significant was the introduction of a new Field Service Regulation, which acted as a service and drill manual, as well as a handbook of elementary tactics, and which enhanced discipline, coherence and uniformity in the ranks.⁵⁴

A larger, better trained and better equipped army, of course, required concomitant increases in both the quantity and quality of the officer corps. As Allmayer-Beck has pointed out, the more effectively troops of the line were drilled into a well-functioning but essentially mindless machine, the more the military establishment became dependent on the initiatives of a gifted and ambitious officer corps.⁵⁵ Even the illustrious Prince Eugene of Savoy late in life had found reason to complain about the indolence of individual officers, and the low level of qualification in the corps as a whole,⁵⁶ and an increase in the size of the army now only exacerbated these shortages. Prince Charles' military reform commission clearly recognised this problem and recommended enhancing the social status of officers, through 'special privileges, marks of honour and the like,' as a way of attracting

⁵² Alphons Freiherr von Wrede and Anton Semek, *Geschichte der k. und k. Wehrmacht: Die Regimenten, Corps, Branchen und Anstalten von 1618 bis Ende des XIX. Jahrhunderts* 5 Vols, (Vienna, 1898–1905) I, pp. 98–99; Zimmermann, pp. 103–104.

⁵³ Duffy, *Instrument of War*, pp. 129–133; *idem*, *The Army of Maria Theresia: The Armed Forces of Imperial Austria, 1740–1780* (North Pomfret, VT, Vancouver, London, 1977), *passim*; Hans Bleckwenn, 'Die Regimenten der Kaiserin,' in Direktion des Militärwissenschaftlichen Instituts, Vienna, ed., *Maria Theresia: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Heerwesens ihrer Zeit* (Graz, Vienna, Cologne, 1967), pp. 25–53.

⁵⁴ Alexander Balisch, 'Die Entstehung des Exerzierreglements von 1749,' *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchiv* XXVII (1974), pp. 170–194; *Kriege Friedrichs 3/I*, pp. 143–147. The Field Service Regulation itself is available in a facsimile reprint: [Georg Ortenburg, ed.,] *Regulament und Ordnung des gesammten Kaiserlich-Königlichen Fuß-Volcks von 1749: Faksimiledruck der Originalausgabe* 2 Vols, (Osnabrück, 1969).

⁵⁵ Johann Christoph Allmayer-Beck, 'Die Armee Maria Theresias und Josephs II.,' in Erich Zöllner and Hermann Möcker, eds, *Österreich im Zeitalter des aufgeklärten Absolutismus* (Vienna, 1983), p. 77.

⁵⁶ Max Braubach, *Prinz Eugen von Savoyen: Eine Biographie* 5 Vols, (Munich, Vienna, 1963–1965) V, pp. 217, 230.

suitable individuals to the service.⁵⁷ In February 1751 all officers in uniform were accordingly deemed presentable at court (*hoffähig*). Ennoblements were generously granted, liberal hunting rights were conferred, and by 1757 thirty years' service was rewarded with automatic ennoblement.⁵⁸ At the same time, efforts were made to upgrade the professional qualifications of officers by founding a military academy for young cadets at Wiener Neustadt, as well as a preparatory school for it in Vienna, and by upgrading the military engineering academy founded in 1717.⁵⁹ That all these measures began to bear fruit within a short period of time became evident from the army manoeuvres in the mid-1750s,⁶⁰ but on the whole the Austrians were not as ready for war in 1756 as they had hoped.

Though the nominal strength of the army was set at 177,500, despite all best efforts there were still substantial shortfalls in all branches of the service (10,000 in the infantry alone, for example). During the discussions of the reform commission there had been voices suggesting the introduction of a Prussian-style conscription system was necessary to reach manpower goals, but Maria Theresa was fundamentally opposed to what she regarded as little more than a form of slavery,⁶¹ and as a result Austria's primary means of raising troops was through recruitment and voluntary enlistment both in its own lands and abroad. Recruitment was in part undertaken by professional recruiting officers, but for the most part was still largely in the hands of Provincial Estates. Recruiting methods were frequently questionable, and certainly Estates were happy to dragoon vagabonds and petty criminals into the service. This naturally led to high

⁵⁷ Johann Christoph Allmayer-Beck, 'Wandlung im Heereswesen zur Zeit Maria Theresias,' in *Maria Theresia: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Heerwesens ihrer Zeit*, p. 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20; Thomas M. Barker, 'Military Nobility: The Daun Family and the Evolution of the Austrian Officer Corps,' in Gunther E. Rothenberg, Béla K. Király and Peter F. Sugar, eds, *East Central European Society and War in the Pre-Revolutionary Eighteenth Century* (Boulder, NY, 1982), pp. 137–139; the same article also in *idem.*, *Army, Aristocracy, Monarchy: Essays on War, Society, and Government in Austria, 1618–1780* (Boulder, CO, NY, 1982), pp. 128–146.

⁵⁹ Zimmermann, pp. 138–140; Allmayer-Beck, 'Wandlung im Heerwesen . . .,' pp. 21–22; *idem.*, 'The Establishment of the Theresian Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt,' in Gunther E. Rothenberg, Béla K. Király and Peter F. Sugar, eds, *East Central European Society and War in the Pre-Revolutionary Eighteenth Century* (Boulder, CO, NY, 1982), pp. 115–121.

⁶⁰ Duffy, *Instrument of War*, pp. 117–118, 137–191; Duffy, *Army of Maria Theresa*, pp. 166–167.

⁶¹ Arneth, *Maria Theresia IV*, p. 442.

rates of desertion. Further, enlistment was in theory for life, which was also a disincentive. However, in 1757 a six-year limited service was introduced in an effort to attract superior quality recruits. The initiative was so successful that eventually a full third of the army consisted of ‘limited service’ men.⁶²

The direction of the Austrian war effort was less complicated than the structures of government might have suggested. In the Habsburg Monarchy, operational decisions were made primarily by the monarch in consultation with the field commanders, with only minimal input from the Aulic War Council. In part this was a decision reached for sound military reasons, for officials in Vienna could hardly assess a military situation as well as the commander on the spot; in part it was the natural consequence of treating the War Ministry as the pasture to which senile old generals were put out to graze. Thus, for most of the Seven Years War, the nominal president of the Aulic War Council, Field Marshall Johann Joseph Harrach, was so incapable of carrying out the functions of his office that most meetings that required the War Council’s participation were attended by the ministry’s vice-president, the hardly more inspiring septuagenarian Field Marshall Reinhard Wilhelm Neipperg, the unlucky Austrian commander at the defeat of Mollwitz in the previous war.⁶³ In fact, the operational correspondence between the empress and her field commanders was effectively dominated by only one man, her foreign minister State Chancellor Kaunitz. All these so-called ‘Cabinet Directives’ (*Cabinet Schreiben*) were discussed between Kaunitz and the empress, the missives were then drafted in the Chancellery of State, and dispatched by that ministry’s officials after receiving royal approval. In addition, the Aulic War Council received repeated instructions to advise Kaunitz on specific details of troop movements and supply conditions, and to forward reports to him which they had received from front-line commanders. More importantly, letters from field commanders to the empress were invariably passed on to Kaunitz. The Chancellor was also in personal correspondence with all significant field commanders, Austrian military attachés with allied army corps, and a host of special envoys, so that he was clearly the one minister who was as fully informed on every facet of the military situation as the empress

⁶² Philip Haythornthwaite, *The Austrian Army, 1740–1780* 3 Vols (London, 1991–1995) I, pp. 6–7; II, pp. 5–7; Lehmann, pp. 13–25; Duffy, *Instrument of War*, pp. 192–197; Hochedlinger, pp. 291–293.

⁶³ Arneth, *Maria Theresia* VI, pp. 246–247; Regele, *Österreichische Hofkriegsrat*, pp. 58–60; Duffy, *Army of Maria Theresia*, pp. 18–19.

herself. Though the Habsburg Monarchy had a foreign policy advisory council known as the Privy Conference, chaired by the empress's consort, Holy Roman Emperor Francis I, the body increasingly evolved into a rubber stamp for Kaunitz's Foreign Ministry, so that in this respect, too, all the critical diplomatic decisions in the war effectively lay in the hands of the empress and her Chancellor, in whom she placed unlimited trust.⁶⁴

The Russian army seemed to have recourse to an unlimited supply of men, and was in that sense potentially the largest army in Europe. The vast majority of soldiers were raised through a relatively harsh but effective levy system introduced by Peter the Great and remaining in effect well into the nineteenth century. All taxable males were subject to military service, and individuals were selected from a pool of potential recruits by local nobles or government authorities on a number of criteria designed to distribute the burden of service relatively evenly among households and communities across Russia. Exemptions existed for professionals, clergymen and students, so that in effect most recruits were peasants. Notoriously docile and stoical, they repeatedly surprised Western observers by their unwavering steadfastness in the face of horrible losses. Service was for 25 years, but most recruits would never see home again. The nominal strength of the Russian army was well over 300,000, but Russian estimates suggest that on the eve of war the actual number of recruits lay somewhat over 230,000. However, all indications are that perhaps as many as half of these men succumbed to illness and disease brought about by the harshness of their living conditions before any ever reached the front, and the desertion rate hovered around 7 per cent. The most reliable estimates place the number surviving the hardships at about 144,000, and of these a good number remained in guards regiments in St Petersburg, and were employed to guard supply lines or other duties in the interior of Russia. The difference between nominal and effective strength was therefore dramatic, particularly in the cavalry, where shortage of horses was endemic.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Szabo, *Kaunitz*, pp. 44–55, 262–263.

⁶⁵ D. Masslowski, *Der Siebenjährige Krieg nach Russischer Darstellung* trans. by A.v. Drygalski, 3 Vols (Berlin, 1889–1893), pp. 1–52; John L. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia, 1462–1874* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 143–200; *idem.*, 'Die russische Armee im Siebenjährigen Krieg,' in Kroener, *Europa im Zeitalter Friedrichs*, pp. 135–138; Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West: Origins and Nature of Russian Military Power, 1700–1800* (London, Boston, Henley, 1981), pp. 125–135; Angus Konstam, *Russian Army of the Seven Years War* 2 Vols (London, 1996) I, pp. 19–20.

Peter the Great had also stipulated service requirements for his nobility. By the famous ‘Table of Ranks,’ drawn up in 1722, all nobles were required to serve the state for a period of 25 years. The Table of Ranks established equivalencies in rank among military, naval and civil service and set salary levels and status accordingly, and it was this system that provided some two-thirds of the Russian officer corps. The quality of officers in the lower ranks was generally poor, and most were at best semi-professional soldiers. Poorly trained – if at all – they could often only maintain discipline among the rank and file through raw physical force. Higher-ranking officers often moved from other civil service careers into the army and lacked any kind of military experience. On the other hand some officers were highly educated and extremely cultivated, so that the officer corps as a whole presented an extremely variegated picture from sophisticate to bumpkin. About a third of the higher-ranking officer corps was foreign born, and these tended to be much more professional. After the death of Peter the Great a Germanising trend set in which brought the Russian army closer to Western norms, but which elicited strong nativist resentment. Under Empress Elizabeth a backlash against foreign and especially German officers became clearly evident, and it frequently sowed suspicion and mistrust not only within the officer corps itself, but also towards Russia’s Austrian allies.⁶⁶

Supreme administration of the Russian army was in the hands of a ‘War Collegium,’ which appointed all officers down to lieutenant-colonel, could transfer officers to different commands and recommended regimental and divisional commanders to the empress. During wartime the Collegium was in theory required to coordinate with and assist the supreme commander of the army in all respects, but once the Imperial Court Conference was established in March 1756, it took over direction of the operational activities of the army as well as its supply and other administrative details. Within a year of the outbreak of the war the Collegium was so marginalised that it could lament its only source for battle casualty figures was the newspapers.⁶⁷ Nor did the Conference fulfil its function of bringing coherence and efficiency to the war effort by unifying defence and foreign policy. Rather, it did the opposite and brought complexity and delay. The Russian court was divided into three main factions, one Anglophile as represented by Bestuzhev, one Francophile as represented by the Shuvalovs and one Prussophile as represented by the crown prince. Unfortunately, Elizabeth appointed representatives of all three factions to the Conference, and

⁶⁶ Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar*, pp. 231–242; Duffy, *Russia’s Military Way*, pp. 136–156.

⁶⁷ Masslowski I, pp. 53–54.

in view of the fact that they detested one another it is not surprising that the resolutions and orders of the body were often incoherent and contradictory. As Fuller has pointed out, ‘domestic political considerations – the need to appease rival groups – thus took precedence over effective strategy-making’.⁶⁸

For well over a century France had the reputation of being the most formidable military power on the continent, and on paper it remained an impressive force. With a peacetime strength of about 130,000 men, it could mobilise up to 360,000 men in time of war – which did not include some 100,000 militia that guarded the French coast and provided a reserve for the main army. When fortress garrisons and other garrison regiments are deducted from this total, the French army at the onset of the war still numbered an impressive 200,000 men.⁶⁹ While about one fifth of the army was made up of high-quality and well-disciplined foreign regiments – among them Swiss, Bavarians, Hungarians, Irish and Piedmontese – the bulk of its rank and file was raised by voluntary enlistment within France itself. As was the case with all other European armies of the time, a fair share of petty criminals and vagabonds were to be found among them, but on the whole every class was represented. Indeed, the French army differed above all from its rivals by the high number of urban dwellers (by some estimates perhaps a third of the total) enlisted in it. Generally more self-assured and independent, townsmen could be difficult to control and resentments against noble officers often found expression in poor discipline. Standards of drill tended to lack uniformity and manoeuvring regulations appear to have been totally absent, and though a series of tactical ordinances were introduced prior to the Seven Years War, it was not until well into the war that improvements became evident.⁷⁰ The French army also had a disproportionately high number of officers in comparison with other European armies.⁷¹

⁶⁸ William C. Fuller, Jr, *Strategy and power in Russia, 1600–1914* (New York, 1992), p. 119. Cf. Masslowski I, p. 54; Kaplan, pp. 47–48.

⁶⁹ André Corvisier, *L’armée française de la fin du XVII^e siècle au ministère de Choiseul* 2 Vols (Paris, 1964) I, p. 55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *passim*; René Chartrand, *Louis XV’s Army* 5 Vols (London, 1996–1997); Lee Kennett, *The French Armies in the Seven Years’ War: A study in military organization and administration* (Durham, NC, 1967), pp. 72–87; Dorn, *Competition for Empire*, pp. 88–90; Jean Chagniot, ‘Le progrès de l’administration militaire,’ in André Corvisier, *et al.*, eds, *Histoire Militaire de la France*, Volume 2: *De 1715 à 1871* edited by Jean Delmas (Paris, 1992), pp. 35–54.

⁷¹ John Childs, *Armies and Warfare in Europe, 1648–1789* (Manchester, 1982), pp. 80–81; Corvisier, *Armées et sociétés en Europe*, p. 128.