The Wars of Louis XIV 1667–1714

John A. Lynn

THE WARS OF LOUIS XIV

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John A. Lynn

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To my sons,
Daniel Morgan Lynn
Nathanael Greene Lynn

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ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Archives de guerre
Lossky, *Louis XIV*	Andrew Lossky, *Louis XIV and the French Monarchy* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994)
Quincy, *Histoire militaire*	Charles Sévin, marquis de Quincy, *Histoire militaire de Louis le Grand roi de France* (7 vols; Paris, 1726)
Rousset, *Histoire de Louvois*	Camille Rousset, *Histoire de Louvois* (4 vols; Paris, 1862–64)
Wolf, *Louis XIV*	John B. Wolf, *Louis XIV* (New York, 1968)

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J. A. L.

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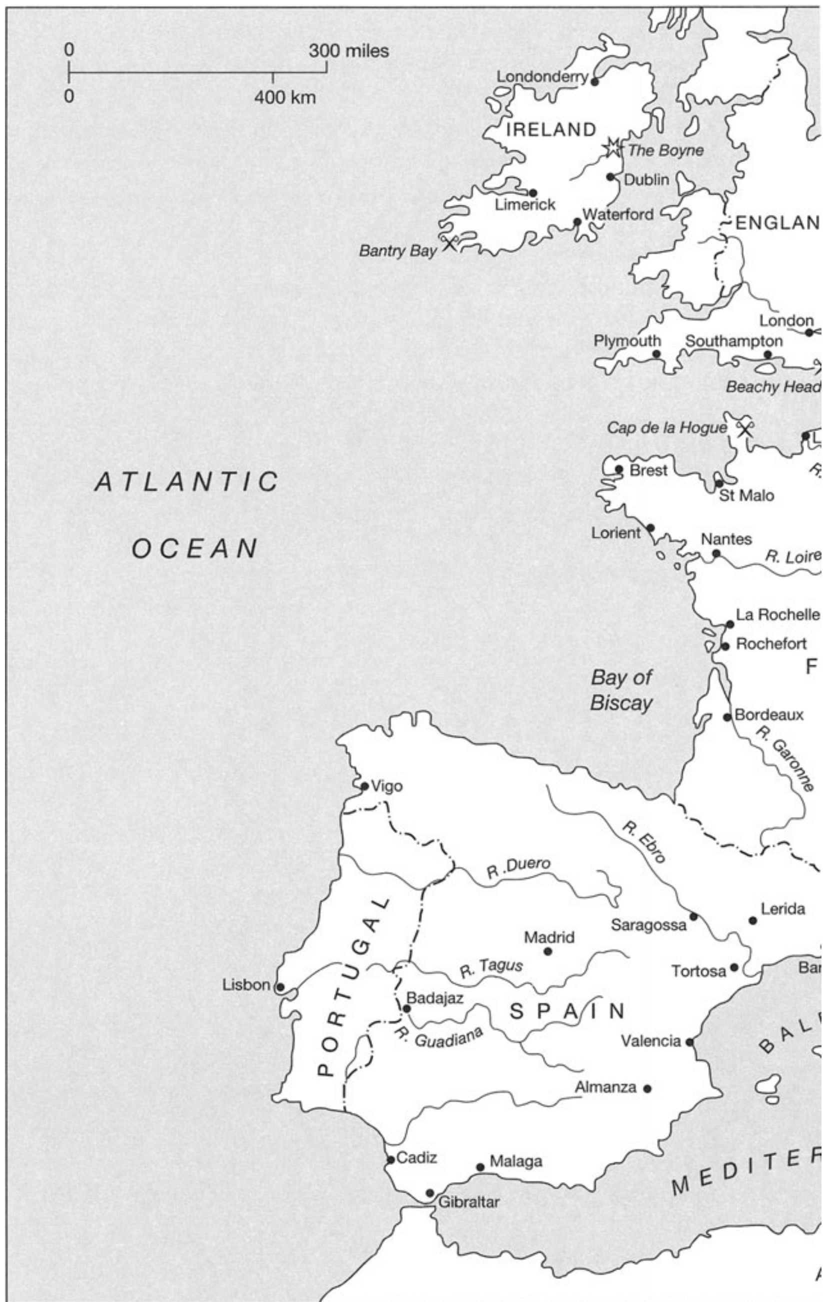

Europe in the era of Louis XIV

ORTH
SEA
Baltic Sea
R. Niemen
Texel
le Bay
Amsterdam
Antwerp
R. Rhine
Brussels
Cologne
Ramillies
Koblenz
Mainz
Verdun
Metz
Teul
LORRAINE
ALSACE
Stuttgart
Kehl
Blenhein
BAVARIA
Munich
Salzburg
Berlin
Dresden
R. Vistula
Warsaw
POLAND
HUNGARY
R. Danube
Vienna
Presburg
Raab
Ofen
(Buda Pest)
TRANSYLVANIA
R. Drave
R. Save
Belgrade
OTTOMAN EMPIRE
FRANCHE COMTE
Montbéliard
Berne
SWITZERLAND
SAVOY
Lyons
Milan
Turin
Pinerolo
GENOA
Genoa
Nice
Toulon
CORSICA
SARDINIA
Rome
NAPLES
Adriatic Sea
Stromboli
Palermo
Messina
SICILY
Augusta
AN SEA

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INTRODUCTION

Late in his reign, Louis XIV, the Sun King, sat for two state portraits by the court artist, Hyacinthe Rigaud. Standing in identical poses, the two images differ only in their attire. The first is the justly renowned portrait of the king as absolute monarch, wearing formal state robes, embroidered with *fleurs de lis* and lined with ermine. Crowned by a great wig, the regal head exhibits pride and power. In the second and relatively little-known painting, Louis addresses the onlooker with the same gaze, but now he is clad in armour. The right hand that rests upon a sceptre in the first portrait grasps a marshal's baton to symbolize military command in the second. Countless reproductions, including plates in many textbooks, have familiarized generations with the icon of Louis as monarch, but few have seen the image of Louis as general. This volume about the wars of Louis XIV chronicles the Sun King in armour.

It is a story worth the telling, but, surprisingly, it has been left largely untold. Look through any library catalogue or any bibliography of historical works in search of a book describing the wars of Louis XIV in their entirety. You will be disappointed. The only work to deal with them as a whole was published over two and a half centuries ago, and it can be found today only in the rare book collections of a handful of research libraries.[1] Within the modern literature of military history, the sole war fought by Louis XIV that has received considerable attention as a military phenomenon is the War of the Spanish Succession, but then it is mainly the duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene who dominate the narrative, which comes to the reader as an account of allied brilliance.

Some might argue that the wars of the great monarch have received adequate discussion in biographies of Louis XIV, and there

1 This volume, Charles Sévin, marquis de Quincy, *Histoire militaire de Louis le Grand roi de France* (7 vols; Paris, 1726), is a marvellous piece of work, carefully researched, highly detailed, and surprisingly well balanced most of the time. In fact, it served me as the single most useful source while writing this volume.

certainly have been plenty of these. Valuable studies by John B. Wolf, François Bluche, and Andrew Lossky are available today at good bookstores. While these historians deal with the wars as episodes in the king's life and as problems in foreign policy, they do not examine the campaigns as military enterprises. The authors are hardly to blame; there is so much to do just to recount the life of a monarch who reigned as boy and then man for over seventy years. While it is hard to imagine adding something of value here beyond what has already been written about the diplomacy of the wars, there is still much to be discovered concerning the clash of arms in the field and at sea.

Recognizing what yet needs to be said, this volume provides a military narrative and analysis of Louis's wars, with the conviction that this ultimately mattered quite a lot. War may be a continuation of politics by other means, but once these means are taken they become cardinal to the formation and implementation of policy and to the existence of those caught up in the maelstrom of violence. This military treatment will necessarily concentrate on the operational and strategic level, because the difficulty of covering fifty years of warfare in only 375 pages of text rules out presenting much tactical detail. Thus, campaigns show up reasonably well here, while few battles and sieges are described in anything other than cursory form.

There is a temptation in narrating the course of a war to move quickly from high point to high point in order to hold the reader's interest. However, if such a dramatic style were used in describing the wars of Louis XIV, the prose would distort the reality of what were all too often lethargic and inconclusive campaigns. When presenting these conflicts it is vital to tell the stories that did not happen, the battles not fought and the fronts where little was accomplished. To describe only the great confrontations would give an impression of action and energy that simply was not typical most of the time.

A central thesis of this work is that warfare during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries differed fundamentally from warfare as exemplified by Napoleon. The form of conflict fought by Louis XIV is defined here as 'war-as-process'. Five characteristics define war-as-process: the indecisive character of battle and siege, the slow tempo of operations, the strong resolve to make war feed war, the powerful influence of attrition, and the considerable emphasis given to ongoing diplomatic negotiations. I have chosen not to lay out this thesis in detail until the conclusion, when I can draw upon the evidence presented in the previous chapters to make my case, but it shapes the approach to this entire volume.

One intriguing aspect of adopting a military focus here is the prospect of exploring the ways in which contemporary military institutions and military culture set the parameters of warfare. Along with the approach of war-as-process, this is the most original aspect of these pages. It would appear, for example, that Louis's preference for siege warfare is best understood not simply in terms of some taste for details and rational order, but also by reference to the problems of contemporary logistics and his personal desire to make warfare predictable and limit its human costs.

Modern sensitivities often condemn war as a meaningless misfortune, and there is nothing particularly new about this view. Still, the wars of Louis XIV mattered. Of course, even if only their negative results are put in the balance, a tally of casualties is a tally of consequences, at least for those who have suffered directly. And some of the brutalities of war lived beyond the deaths of their victims. French excesses in devastating the Palatinate, 1688–89, created animosities that continued to torment Europe into the world wars of the twentieth century.

The wars of Louis XIV also had immense importance beyond the fate of the fallen and abused. For one thing, conflict changed the borders of Europe, and France in particular. Louis added significant parts of Flanders, Artois, and Hainault to France, as well as Franche-Comté and Alsace. His occupation of Lorraine laid the foundation for the absorption of that province in the eighteenth century. His conquests brought hundreds of thousands of individuals and millions of their descendants into France.

Perhaps the greatest impact of the wars upon France was not in augmenting its population but in augmenting the powers of central government and in creating a French nation. The wars of Louis XIV changed the government of France, as the monarchy struggled to feed the growing appetite of Mars. Meeting the needs of war required the state bureaucracy to expand in personnel and authority. While the process was certainly not as thorough as once imagined, local privileges and institutions diminished as those at the centre increased. Not all of Louis's government and financial innovations endured; some became casualties of war when Louis overturned reforms in order to find *ad hoc* sources of revenue. However, the overall change was very substantial, even if it was not revolutionary. In both substance and style, Louis's more bureaucratic and centralized monarchy served as a model for Europe. To the extent that war provided the rationale for government growth, it became an important force in the state formation.

More basically, but also more difficult to document, the wars of Louis XIV probably contributed to the growth of national consciousness in France. The unprecedented size of Louis's armed forces spread the experience of defending king and country throughout a large percentage of the population. As it struggled on the borders to keep the enemy from invading and exploiting France, the army became a protector of a country and a people. Moreover, men who never would have seen much of France in civilian life now marched its length and breadth. It is reasonable to infer that those who survived to be demobilized, and there were tens of thousands of such veterans, brought back and spread an idea of France and of being French. To be sure, historians who want to see widespread patriotic sentiment in 1709 put the cart before the horse. Military life did not express patriotism under Louis XIV; rather, it laid the foundation for nationalism in generations to come. The nationalism that inspired the defence of 1792 is best explained with some reference to the long wars of the Sun King. In the words of Fernand Braudel, 'Along with the monarchy, the army thus became the most active tool in *la formation unitaire* of France.'[2]

The immense consequences for France of the wars of Louis XIV, plus the lack of a unified treatment of those wars from a French perspective, justify a decidedly French approach here. Against the objection that it would be better to deal with these international conflicts from a thoroughly international perspective, one could respond that the need to fit the page limit and character of this series prohibits an exhaustive coverage from all points of view. In such a brief treatment, one could not adequately detail the politics of London, The Hague, and Vienna or the actions of their armies during their half-century struggle with France. It is more than enough to sketch decision-making at the French court in so slim a volume. All this would be a reasonable argument, yet the fact remains that even if this volume were twice as long, I would still choose to treat the subject as I have.

This volume is, in fact, one of a trilogy. The first, my *Giant of the Grand Siècle: The French Army, 1610–1715* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), describes the seventeenth-century army as an institution, complete with its tools and techniques of warfare. This present volume, the second instalment, details the wars fought by that army during the reign of the Sun King. The third, and yet

2 Fernand Braudel, *L'Identité de la France, I: Éspace et histoire* (Paris, 1986), p. 338.

unwritten, work will examine how that army and those wars shaped the state and government of France. Ultimately, those two portraits of Louis confront me with the greatest challenges – first, to demonstrate that Louis the supreme general is as important as Louis the absolute monarch, and, second, to demonstrate that the one could not have existed without the other.

1 PROLOGUE: INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNAL CONFLICT, 1495–1661

War dominated the days of the Sun King, and throughout his long life the great king knew war like a malevolent brother. When, as a young boy of four, Louis came to the throne in 1643, France had been at war for eight years; it would continue so until 1659. Both physically and spiritually, Louis was conceived in war. Even though this was the longest conflict of Louis's reign, historians do not include it among the 'wars of Louis XIV', for it was initiated by his father, Louis XIII, and directed by the two great first ministers, Cardinal Richelieu and Cardinal Mazarin. Louis only served his apprenticeship during this earlier conflict, and would not come into his own until after the death of Mazarin. Then as an adult, Louis engaged in five declared wars, two of them minor affairs – the War of Devolution (1667–68) and the War of the Reunions (1683–84) – and three of them major struggles – the Dutch War (1672–78), the Nine Years War (1688–97), and the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) – but his use of military force extended even beyond these conflicts.

Our drama begins when Louis personally took control of the French state, but to understand the challenges that faced him and his measures of triumph and tragedy in meeting them, we must first turn to the history of Europe and France itself long before Louis seized the reins of power. The past was, indeed, prologue for the great monarch.

EVENTS AND STRUGGLES, 1495–1661

The preceding hundred and sixty years bequeathed to Louis international and internal realities that provided context and cause for his use of armed force, for his wars. Great power conflict, religious turmoil, local revolt, and aristocratic independence all threatened the monarchy before the personal reign of Louis XIV, and he would have to confront every one of them himself, although not in the same manner as did his predecessors.

The long series of wars that pitted the French against the Habsburgs, a traditional conflict that continued through the reign of Louis XIV, can be traced back to the French invasion of Italy in 1495. After the insertion of French armies there, the Spanish sought to deny the peninsula to the Valois. Spain posed the greatest international threat to France throughout this period. Spain dominated the sixteenth century and continued to wield unmatched power well into the seventeenth. In contrast, Germany, loosely united as the Holy Roman Empire, but split religiously and politically, provided the French with allies as well as enemies. The Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor exercised more or less power as time passed, but by the mid-seventeenth century the empire was too weakened by the Thirty Years War to endanger France. This would not be a permanent situation, because the Austrian Habsburgs would grow in power considerably by the end of the century as they drove back the Ottoman Turks in the Balkans. Although the English fought against the French during the first half of the sixteenth century, the growing power of Spain eventually focused their energies on this common enemy. The Dutch Netherlands, or more properly the United Provinces, emerged as an important maritime power in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fought first the Spanish and then the English, but remained allies of the French well into the 1660s, for the French repeatedly aided them as a way of undermining the Spanish.

With seemingly invincible armies and formidable fleets Spain conquered and held an empire that encompassed continents, as the riches of the New World poured into its coffers. Even if Philip II (1556–98) knew frustration – his armadas failed in their goals, and he was unable to bring the rebellious Dutch to heel – he remained a world monarch of unequalled power and wealth. His successors continued to pose such a threat to France that Spanish power preoccupied Bourbon monarchs until the Treaty of the Pyrenees recognized French victory over their long-time rivals.

The French–Spanish confrontation began in Italy, where the French Valois monarchs tried to extend their control during a long series of wars, 1495–1559. Through most of this long struggle, the Spanish throne and that of the Holy Roman Empire in Germany were united in one monarch titled Carlos I as a Spanish king and Charles V as an emperor. Charles ruled an extensive domain unparalleled since the Roman empire. It was, in fact, too much for one man, so in 1556 he stepped down and split his vast holdings, giving Spain and its dependencies to his son Philip II, and the imperial title to his brother, Ferdinand I. The Spanish and German Habsburg lines

would never again reunite, but their policies were often in accord, and the French saw them, and often fought them, as a single foe.

Of the two Habsburg branches, the Spanish was unquestionably the more powerful, and its holdings literally surrounded France on its land borders. The Pyrenees separated France and Spain to the south, while Spanish territory and influence in northern Italy made that a hostile border for the French as well. On the northeast the Spanish held the Low Countries, from Flanders on the French frontier to what would become the Dutch Netherlands in the north. Linking the Low Countries to Spanish supply bases in Italy ran the 'Spanish Road', a string of territories such as the free country of Burgundy, or Franche-Comté, that belonged to Spain, certain small German principalities under Spanish influence, and obliging or overawed provinces, including certain Swiss cantons. The Spanish Road would become crucial when troubles broke out in the north.

The greatest sixteenth-century challenge to Spanish power came not from France or England but from dissatisfied elements in the Low Countries. The revolt they launched began both in the southern and northern Netherlands, but for a variety of reasons flourished best in the north, in what would become the United Provinces. The fighting, which went on from 1568 to 1648, goes by several names: the Revolt of the Netherlands, the Eighty Years War, and the Dutch Revolt. Feeling threatened by Spain, the French acted in accord with the Dutch; while, wishing to paralyse France, the Spanish intervened in domestic French quarrels.

And it was a time of troubles in France, because the French tore at each other in a series of religious civil wars, 1562–98. These civil wars were, indeed, fought between Catholic and Protestant parties, but they also involved other dimensions. The monarchy and its forces played a difficult middle game in an attempt to keep from being overwhelmed by either extreme. With different factions mustering contending forces, this was an era of private armies created and led by great nobles, *les grands*, who wished to assert their own power in opposition to that of the monarch. So the Wars of Religion brought not only sectarian strife, but also an assertion of aristocratic independence. The Spanish were quick to fish in these troubled waters. For a long time their meddling was restricted to aiding the extreme Catholic faction against both the Protestants and, from time to time, the monarchy. More than anything else, Philip II wanted simply to neutralize France and so leave himself a free hand in his other struggles. However, when the Bourbon head of the Protestant cause, Henri of Navarre, came into line to succeed to the French throne with the

death of Henri III (1574–89), the Catholic party refused to recognize him and the Spanish sent troops to defeat the Bourbon.

Henri IV (1589–1610) won over the Catholic majority by converting to Catholicism in 1593 and guaranteed toleration, security, and political power to the Protestant minority with the Edict of Nantes in 1598. That same year he concluded the Treaty of Vervins with Spain, ending a war that pitted Spain and the Catholic League against Henri for over decade. Thus, he brought peace to a France that had suffered nearly forty years of civil war. Henri IV did much to bind up France's wounds, even if they did not completely heal. Henri's victory was an additional setback to the Spanish, but they were still a force to be reckoned with. In 1610, as he was preparing to launch a new war against the Habsburgs, a Catholic fanatic assassinated the French king, and, thus, put an end to his work.

Henri's nine-year-old son became Louis XIII (1610–43), but while Louis remained a boy, real power passed into the hands of Henri's wife, Marie de Medici. Contentious great French lords troubled much of Louis's reign. They reasserted themselves while Marie served as regent by challenging her authority in petty rebellions and in threats of revolt that she quieted with bribes. In 1617, the young Louis XIII assumed power himself, but it did not end all turmoil. The armed risings, known as princes' wars, continued for some years. Armed resistance broke out sporadically into the 1630s. Gaston of Orléans, the brother of Louis XIII, played a conspicuous role fronting certain of these rebellious ventures, even heading a mercenary army invading France in 1632.

Louis appointed Armand du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu, as his first minister in 1624, a post he held until his death in 1642. With Louis's constant support, Richelieu pursued a series of strong policies. Above all he wished to break the Habsburg encirclement of France, but first he had to deal with a resurgence of religious civil war in 1625. The height of this struggle was the siege of the Protestant seaport La Rochelle, 1627–28. A new peace settlement with the Protestants in 1629 preserved their religious rights but ended the political and military privileges granted them by the Edict of Nantes – privileges that had constituted the Protestant community as a state within the greater state of France. In his efforts to quell opposition to the crown, Richelieu also concluded that he must labour to humble *les grands*, but here his success was more limited, as aristocratic conspiracy and revolt continued to shake the monarchy.

Meanwhile, the Thirty Years War (1618–48) dominated the international arena, as the Germanies were submerged in turmoil that

pitted the Catholic League and the emperor against their Protestant opponents. In 1621 fighting also broke out again in the Low Countries between Spain and the Dutch, and this struggle merged into the Thirty Years War. Richelieu wanted to aid the Dutch and the German Protestants, but did not believe France was ready to enter the war directly. After some efforts to block the Spanish Road, the French opted to back a proxy. King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden stood ready to commit himself to the Protestant cause in Germany, but lacked the resources. In 1630 the French supplied a subsidy to Gustavus, and he landed in northern Germany. His victories over imperial forces helped stall a Catholic and Habsburg juggernaut, but Gustavus was mortally wounded at the Battle of Lutzen in 1632. His lieutenants, however, continued to command Swedish forces ably until they suffered a terrible defeat at Nördlingen in 1634.

Richelieu then recognized that the French must enter the war directly in 1635, but neither he nor his king realized as they committed armies to battle that this war would last for twenty-five years. The war see-sawed back and forth. The French gained victories in 1635, but suffered a frightening invasion by Spanish forces in 1636. Then, in 1643, the young duke of Enghien won a crushing victory at Rocroi, where the French literally destroyed the Spanish forces that stood against them. This battle did not end the power of Spain, but it certainly put the lie to the reputation of Spanish infantry as invincible and demonstrated French military prowess. Soon Enghien assumed his father's title as Louis II, prince of Condé (1621–86), and became known as the Great Condé.

By Rocroi, however, much had changed. Richelieu died in 1642 and was succeeded as first minister by his protégé, the Italian-born cardinal Giulio Mazarini, better known as Jules Mazarin. Cardinal Mazarin held his new post until his own death in 1661. Three days before Rocroi, the sickly king also succumbed, and his young son, born in 1638, became Louis XIV. Just as in the case of his father some thirty years before, real power passed into the hands of the boy-king's mother, the regent Anne of Austria. Anne formed a political and personal attachment to Mazarin, who also served as the boy's protector, tutor, and surrogate father. Louis would learn the art of diplomacy from Mazarin, who skilfully guided French policy, although he endured continual challenges to his authority.

The need to raise more money to fight in the Thirty Years War drove the French monarchy to increase taxes dramatically. Claude Bullion, *surintendant des finances*, expected to levy 22,600,000 livres of direct taxes for 1634, but in 1635 this amount climbed

to 36,200,000, and by 1643, direct levies had risen to 72,600,000 livres.[1] Such tax hikes precipitated a series of municipal and regional tax revolts. The most important of these was the rising of the Nu-Pied rebels in Normandy in 1639, but this was simply one of many insurgencies that caused the monarchy to make war on French rebels as well as foreign enemies.

The Thirty Years War came to an end in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia, but while this brought peace to the Germanies, independence from Spain to the Dutch Netherlands, and independence from the German empire to the Swiss Confederation, it did not end the war between France and Spain, which continued for another eleven years. If anything, things got worse for the French monarchy, for while it was no longer necessary to maintain an army in Germany, a civil war known as the Fronde now shattered the internal peace of France from 1648 to 1653. In a sense the Fronde was the greatest of the tax revolts of the seventeenth century, because malcontents regarded payments imposed upon office-holders as one of their initial grievances; however, more was at stake. Expanded powers wielded by the monarchy and its provincial agents, *intendants*, came under attack; so the Fronde was also an assault on the growing authority of the monarchy at the expense of traditional institutions. In addition, the Fronde provided a new theatre for resistance by *les grands*, particularly the grandest of all – the *ducs et pairs* and others with particular power who enjoyed the highest standing at court. Actual fighting between royal and rebel forces ravaged much of France, the Parisian area being particularly hard hit.

The Spanish supplied aid and applied military pressure in conjunction with Frondeur rebels. Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, viscount Turenne (1611–75), probably Louis's greatest marshal, at first joined the Frondeurs, but then came over to the king. The Great Condé, the other dominant soldier of his age, travelled just the opposite course, first defending the monarchy and then leading a rebel army. When the teenaged Louis, with the aid and guidance of Mazarin, finally reestablished the authority of his government in 1653, Condé offered his sword to the Spanish against Louis. Eventually, in 1658 at the Battle of the Dunes, Marshal Turenne at the head of a royal army defeated Condé, who led Spanish forces that day. The Treaty of the Pyrenees signed the next year finally brought an end to the horrendous war between France and Spain.

1 Richard Bonney, *The King's Debts: Finance and Politics in France, 1589–61* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 177, 198n.

The Treaty of the Pyrenees recognized the new reality of Continental power: Spain had declined to second-rate status, while France now stood as Christian Europe's preeminent land power. Mazarin skilfully designed the treaty to recognize France's grandeur and to increase Bourbon claims to Spanish lands in the future. The Spanish king, Philip IV, handed over his daughter Marie Thérèse to be wife of the young Louis XIV. Although she renounced her claims to any claims on Spanish territory, contingent upon the paying of a considerable dowry, the French would eventually claim that her renunciation was void because the dowry went unpaid.

France poised at unquestioned greatness. Two years after this triumph, Mazarin died, and Louis, now twenty-two years old, believed himself capable of directing the state without a first minister. He proved himself correct and refused to vest any minister with such great power again. Louis's assertion of his own authority immediately after the death of Mazarin marked the start of the period known as the personal reign. The age of Louis XIV, and his wars, had begun.

THE STRATEGIC LEGACY OF MAZARIN

Twenty-five years of war, intensified by internal revolt, had sapped France, and it would be nearly a decade before the French embarked on war again. However, French victory over Spain and the consequent decline of that once great power left the way clear for Louis XIV to establish that Bourbon France stood alone in the first rank of European states.

Working from the premise that France required friends, the wise Mazarin created a network of alliances among German Protestant states and other principalities, such as Bavaria, that feared the Austrian Habsburgs. This put his Most Christian King, the king of France, in league with heretics, but French policy had to be guided by reason of state, not confessional bias, at least outside of France. Because smaller German states regarded the greater threat as a too-powerful emperor who might try to dominate Germany, France could pose as a defender of the liberties of the lesser states. During the negotiations that ended the Thirty Years War, Mazarin carefully respected his commitments to weaker allies, protecting their interests even when this prolonged the war.[2] While fighting still continued between France

2 Charles Derek Croxton, 'Peacemaking in Early Modern Europe: Cardinal Mazarin and the Congress of Westphalia, 1643–1648', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1995.

and Spain, Mazarin formed an alliance between neutral German states that became the League of the Rhine in 1658, thus breaking Habsburg encirclement. France viewed the League as a way of keeping Emperor Leopold from aiding the Spanish in the Netherlands, while the German states saw it as a way of keeping the emperor's troops from marching through their lands. In any case, it served the interests of all parties and also helped to shelter the French frontier. Mazarin was so clever in forging peace in 1659 that the historian Andrew Lossky claims, 'It can be said that never did France enjoy such near-perfect security on its frontiers as in the last years of Mazarin's life' – a security it had not experienced in the preceding three and a half centuries.[3]

Mazarin may have been so accommodating, and ultimately successful, in diplomacy and statecraft because he dealt from a position of weakness. His own situation as first minister was not really secure until the defeat of the Fronde. As an Italian, he was always seen as foreign, and even though nationalism was not a force at this time, a foreigner was still under suspicion. Mazarin suffered attacks during a scurrilous pamphlet war in which authors fired broadside after broadside at the cardinal. He was forced to leave court more than once, although Anne, the queen mother, continued to accept his counsel. In this difficult position he employed a finesse never practised by Richelieu before him, and, unfortunately, not typical of Louis XIV either. Mazarin also came to office when Spain was still strong, and France could not dictate. He saw Europe as a system with many players, and he regarded that French interests would best be served if it worked in concert with others.

Louis learned the art of diplomacy under Mazarin, but he eventually took a very different course. His plans to seize parts of the Spanish inheritance with the War of Devolution cost him the League of the Rhine, as members declined to renew their association in 1666 and 1667. Initially, Louis succeeded in isolating his foes, first in 1667 and again in 1672, but by the mid-1670s, France enjoyed the support of only a few friends while standing against large alliances. Mazarin's legacy was forgotten; or perhaps it would be better to say that Louis eventually came to see France as powerful enough to fight alone if it had to, and he was unwilling to accommodate the interests and outlooks of others.

3 Andrew Lossky, *Louis XIV and the French Monarchy* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994), p. 60.

THE DICTATES OF GEOGRAPHY

France as defined by the Treaty of the Pyrenees had four essentially different land borders, and these drew Louis's primary concern. As was the case with his predecessors, Louis gave much less thought to his considerable coastline. Geography made France a Continental power whose survival depended on defence of its frontiers. So while France also had hundreds of miles of coast on the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, strength at sea was much less essential than was strength on land. Given this, it is most impressive how Louis's finance minister, Colbert, was able to build a powerful navy by the 1680s, but it was sacrificed in order to concentrate resources upon the army after the first years of the Nine Years War. France had much to lose or gain on land, while a naval presence would be at best a luxury.

The greatest threat to Bourbon security came from the Spanish Netherlands to the northeast. Not only was it occupied by a rival power, but the rivers there flowed southward like the fingers of a hand grasping at France and threatening Paris. An extensive series of fortresses guarded this frontier, because no formidable natural barriers impeded an enemy driving south from that border to strike the French capital. Before 1659 the Spanish had sent armies into France along this route more than once. Both because of its key strategic value and because Louis hoped to gain territory there, he thought primarily of this frontier, and before advancing age prohibited him from campaigning with his armies, he would usually command in person in the Netherlands rather than elsewhere.

After 1659, the second major border area, the valleys of the Moselle and the Rhine, did not pose a threat to Paris as great as that to the north, but it still troubled Louis. The Treaty of Westphalia awarded France considerable lands in Alsace, along the Rhine. Alsace experienced a number of invasions during the Dutch War, and Louis became preoccupied with protecting his new province. In particular, Louis sought to make the Rhine a firm natural frontier, and so based his defence on it rather than depend upon a thick band of fortifications such as girded the Netherlands.

The third and fourth frontiers, those on the Pyrenees and the Alps, shared common characteristics. Both were buttressed by mountainous terrain. Both were Mediterranean fronts, as fighting in the Pyrenees inevitably concerned the western part of that range between Roussillon and Catalonia. Both were far from the heart of France, and thus remained subordinate fronts. And both were essentially

stable, with little to be lost or won. The only major exception to this rule was the allied invasion of Provence in 1707, but this threatened only Toulon, and was repulsed by the French.

LEGACIES OF INTERNAL DISCORD

Mazarin's international diplomacy was not the only strategic inheritance bequeathed to Louis. Various forms of internal discord had struck France and called forth military responses before 1659, and the wars of Louis XIV would encompass these intrastate struggles as well as the interstate clashes that pitted the French against foreign foes.

As explained above, religious turmoil stretched back at least a century before Louis came into his own in 1661. The resolution with French Protestants, or Huguenots, reached in 1629 promised to become a permanent settlement, combining Bourbon political unity with Protestant religious rights. But the preservation of religious diversity did not accord with Louis's sense of rational order nor with his self-serving belief that the Huguenots had become weak in conviction and few in number. In the 1680s, he tried to impose confessional unity on France with a combination of administrative action and military force. As will be seen, he then committed French troops to the virtual genocide of a Protestant community in the Alps, an act which remains the greatest stain on his reputation. During the War of the Spanish Succession, a final major Protestant rising challenged Louis in the Cévennes. Louis finally sent his greatest general at the time, Marshal Claude Villars, to put an end to this armed rebellion, which he did with a mixture of force and compromise. Thus, the history of religious discord continued throughout Louis's personal reign, although not with the intensity of earlier times.

Louis hoped to avoid the tax revolts that plagued France during the long war with Spain, 1635–59. He would, in fact, suffer far less from such risings than had Richelieu and Mazarin, but part of the price for internal peace would be heavy reliance on expensive, short-term credit instead of even higher levels of taxation. None the less, Louis's first great conflict, the Dutch War, brought local tax revolt, so he was unable to escape this fate entirely. Another form of armed unrest that so vexed his father and challenged Mazarin's regime, revolt by *les grands*, was very fresh in political memory when Louis took full authority in 1661. Louis adopted such successful measures against this sort of uprising that it would be the one kind of war that, while a major factor in the past, would not trouble him.

The history of French international and internal conflict provides essential background for understanding the wars of Louis XIV, both because it explains many of the problems inherited by Louis and because it allows us to appreciate what was novel about his reign. On the one hand, for example, the religious turmoil that had disturbed France for so long would threaten the monarchy again as it had before. On the other, Louis was able to assert his own unprecedented Continental preeminence because Mazarin had completed the defeat of Spain before Louis took the reins of power. Louis did not write on a blank slate, but neither was he bound by an iron rule of destiny. His actions would display both continuity and contrast with the past, making the story of the wars of Louis XIV all the more interesting, and all the more important.

Beyond the restraints imposed by the past and the possibilities it also presented, Louis worked within other parameters as well. He ruled within the context of 'absolute' monarchy, guided by his own aristocratic values. In addition, he commanded a much improved and refined army that shaped the operational and strategic character of his wars. Consequently, before this volume turns to Louis's wars themselves, the next two chapters will explore his regime and his armed forces.

2 LOUIS XIV, *GLOIRE*, AND STRATEGY

To speak of the conflicts fought in Western Europe from 1667 to 1714 as the wars of Louis XIV is more than a convenience, more than a shorthand manner of referring to a series of clashes simply because they all occurred during the reign of a single monarch. No, Louis so defined the causation and character of these contests that they did not simply take place while he was on the French throne; they were in very important ways *his* wars. Therefore, to label them as the wars of Louis XIV is to say a great deal about them.

To understand these wars, then, you must begin by understanding the king. This proud monarch, who accepted the sun as his emblem, stood at the centre of his universe; he chose his advisers and set his policies as he saw fit. During his unusually long reign, the strategic challenges that confronted him changed, and he met them with different responses, sometimes products of careful reflection and sometimes bursts of ill-considered arrogance. He grew up in a Europe overshadowed by Spanish power. As a young adult, the splendid Sun King, he led a France that had itself become the preeminent power on the Continent. In old age he grappled with coalitions that overmatched even the resources of mighty France, and death found him chastened. The history of the wars of Louis XIV is a story of a larger-than-life monarch and of his quest for glory – *gloire* – a quest that spanned more than half a century.

ABSOLUTISM UNDER LOUIS XIV

The France of Louis XIV lay somewhere between medieval and modern. Scholars continue to debate exactly where it was along that spectrum. In times past, historians were too willing to credit Louis with wrenching France from chaos to control, with imposing a rational, statist, and essentially modern stamp on society and government; they characterized Louis as an absolute monarch. Recently, historians have turned about to stress the continuities in French society and conclude that France remained essentially feudal, thus medieval, under

Louis.[1] They argue that Louis maintained his authority not by challenging traditional élites and institutions but by accommodating them; to such historians Louis was not essentially modern, hardly an absolutist. This volume takes a middle course, by accepting present-day scholarship concerning élites, provincial institutions, and state finance, but arguing none the less that Louis strengthened and rationalized royal authority in the central government and the military, and that he brooked no interference in matters of foreign policy and war. The change he wrought was great enough to merit a title, and 'absolutism' construed in this more limited sense still seems an appropriate label.[2]

In substance and style, Louis XIV defined the pattern of absolutism. An absolute monarch in Louis's mould was not a dictator; to cast him as such would be anachronistic. His authority knew limits set by tradition and necessity, and he exercised it while considering the privilege and power of existing élites. However, in those matters over which he claimed authority, most notably in matters dealing with the conduct of foreign policy and war and with military institutions, all highly relevant to this volume, he tolerated no interference from traditional power brokers. Here he set and managed policy on a daily basis within limits set by social, political, and financial necessity. He achieved his goals by both overwhelming and conciliating competitors for central authority during his lifetime. France's medieval representative assembly, the Estates General, had last met in 1614, and it would not assemble again until 1789. The great sovereign law courts of France, known as *parlements*, had attempted to assert their authority during the Fronde, but failed, and under Louis XIV they remained relatively docile. Louis also rendered his own government servants more obedient, both those at the centre and those in the provinces.

Louis designed his government to ensure his authority. True enough, the mechanisms of authority were becoming increasingly

1 See William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1985) for a thorough presentation of the 'feudal' Louis.

2 In a review of my *Giant of the Grand Siècle* posted on H-France in April 1998, Paul Sonnino argued that my restricted definition of absolutism should not be called 'absolutism' at all. He insists, 'Relative absolutism is a contradiction in terms.' Yet it seems to me that he says much the same thing in his *Louis XIV and the Origins of the Dutch War* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 7. Roger Mettam, in his review of *Giant of the Grand Siècle* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 June 1998, p. 10, uses the arguments and data presented in my book to attack absolutism, even though I continue to use the term. Again, I have no quarrel with Mettam's point; it comes down to a definition. In attacking older, all-encompassing concepts of absolutism we are in accord. I am simply willing to confine the term to the areas I examine most, military institutions and the conduct of war, where there was real change. This change was hardly total, but it was substantial enough to warrant a label.

bureaucratic, yet the monarch dominated. While Louis XIV sought to rule in a rational manner, he crafted his bureaucracy not to govern in his stead, but to ensure that he alone ruled. The fact that French bureaucracy later developed into a perpetual motion machine, as bureaucracies tend to do, is beside the point.

To a considerable degree, Louis limited or suppressed independent action among the agents of his authority, particularly in the case of his military commanders. More authority concentrated at court, under the direct supervision of the king. This made the roles of the king and those ministers and secretaries of state immediately around him all the more important, for at the top of the power structure stood very few individuals.

DECISION-MAKING AND THE FORMATION OF STRATEGY UNDER LOUIS

Louis XIV sat in the centre of the web; he insisted on debating issues, making decisions, and monitoring execution. Freed from the influence of traditional rivals, he exercised complete authority and responsibility for the formation of foreign policy and the drafting of strategy. He shared it only with those rare trusted advisers he called to aid him.

Louis could not expect to master every detail of government; rather he saw his role as making decisions based on common sense. This put him in need of experts. Five major administrative offices stood directly below Louis at the apex of the power pyramid. These numbered four secretaries of state – foreign affairs, war, navy, and royal household – and one controller-general of finances. While the bureaucratic departments of state, particularly war and foreign affairs, were expanded and rationalized during his regime, this did not threaten Louis's control.

The authority wielded by the small knot of advisers and administrative heads around Louis derived not from their own birth and wealth, but from the fact that Louis called upon them to serve. He scrupulously kept powerful nobles from old families, scions of the mighty military families, and the peers of France out of high bureaucratic posts and the councils. He once explained that 'it was not in my interest to seek men of a more eminent birth because having need above all to establish my own reputation, it was important that the public know by the rank of those whom I choose to serve me, that I had no intention of sharing my authority with them'.[3] Men he placed in power possessed legal and administrative backgrounds and came from families only recently ennobled. There were only rare exceptions:

3 Louis in André Corvisier, *Louvois* (Paris, 1983), p. 278.

Marshal Turenne, for example, enjoyed great influence over military policy in the 1660s.

Since the secretaries of state and the controller-general commanded considerable patronage, they accumulated networks of clients, men who depended on their good will and who in turn acted as their supporters. This gave Louis's major servants something of an independent power base. However, while such a network might aid a secretary in rising to power, maintaining himself in office, or in fending off his rivals, it was not a tool to assert independence against the will of the king. By ferociously pursuing and punishing his finance minister Fouquet in 1661, Louis gave notice to his premier advisers and administrators that he would not tolerate even the slightest threat to his authority.

Louis regularized the decision-making process in a series of councils. By chairing meetings of the most prominent councils, he kept his finger on the pulse of government affairs. Paramount amoung these councils was the *Conseil d'en haut*, or Council of State, which dealt with the most important matters, including war and peace issues. Those who sat on it could call themselves 'ministers' of state. Louis refused to set the membership of this council by ordinance, leaving himself free to choose the three, four, or five who regularly attended its meetings. He kept its size small to ensure secrecy. The most common members included the secretaries of state for foreign affairs and for war, as well as the controller-general of finances. Often the same man held more than one high office; thus Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–83) served as secretary of state for the navy and for the royal household, plus being controller-general of finances from 1669 to 1683. The post of secretary of state did not necessarily carry with it automatic *entrée* into the *Conseil*. One secretary of state for war, the marquis of Barbezieux (1668–1701), did not receive an invitation to the *Conseil d'en haut*, owing to his youth and profligate lifestyle, to the fact that the king was consciously trying to reduce the authority of his secretary of state for war, and to the king's preference for the opinions of the marquis of Chamlay (1650–1719), his personal military adviser. Louis kept control over this council in other ways as well. He expressly forbade his ministers to meet if he were not present.[4]

The members of the *Conseil* vied for influence amongst themselves. In fact, Louis encouraged dissension among his advisers so as to give

4 John C. Rule, 'Colbert de Torcy, an Emergent Bureaucracy, and the Formulation of French Foreign Policy, 1698–1715', in Ragnhild Hatton, ed., *Louis XIV and Europe* (Columbus, OH, 1976), p. 281.

himself leverage and leeway. Such conflicts most commonly pitted the two major ministerial families – the Le Telliers and the Colberts – against one another in battles over policy, patronage, and power.

Ministers differed at critical times. For example, as the Dutch War approached, the core of the *Conseil* was composed of Colbert plus the old secretary of state for war, Michel Le Tellier (1603–85), and the secretary of state for foreign affairs, Hugues de Lionne (1611–71). Understandably, Le Tellier regarded the approach of armed conflict without much misgiving, since it would place more power in his hands and in those of his son, the marquis of Louvois (1641–91), who also lobbied for war. In contrast, Colbert argued for winning the struggle with the Dutch by means short of a war on the Continent.[5] Although he believed that commerce was war, it was 'perpetual and peaceable war of wit and hard work', not an affair of battalions and cannon.[6] Only through continued peace could he continue his financial reforms and better the economic position of the monarchy. Lionne had his own priorities, hoping that Louis could avoid a war that would put in jeopardy the very favourable secret treaty contracted with the emperor in 1668 that partitioned the possessions of the Spanish king, Carlos II (1665–1700), much to Louis's advantage. Neither Colbert nor Lionne could moderate Louis's drive to war in this case. When the king's mind was firm, ministers eventually fell in behind their monarch, to further his will and to protect their own positions.

The *Conseil d'en haut* usually met on Sundays and Wednesdays, although when the need arose it convened on other days at the king's pleasure. Louis used his *Conseil* as he saw fit; however, at times he seems to have viewed it as an annoyance, since his elevated civil servants might try to temper or oppose his designs. Inside the council, members discarded the formalities of court. Discussions were extremely open and kept strictly confidential. There, ministers criticized the king's positions, though in public they dared not. After an issue was discussed and the ministers made their opinions known, Louis usually decided with the majority on the merits of the case.

Members of the *Conseil* were privy to information shared by them and the king alone. Louis often played his diplomatic games through secret treaties and covert payments, and only the ministers

5 This is the argument of Sonnino, *Louis XIV and the Origins of the Dutch War*, p. 7. 'Colbert, contrary to the scholarly consensus, was completely opposed to any war, but insisted on burying his head in the sand until it was too late. . . .'

6 Colbert in Pierre Clément, ed., *Lettres instructions et mémoires de Colbert*, vol. vi (1869), pp. 269–70, in Andrew Lossky, *Louis XIV and the French Monarchy* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994), p. 99.

of the *Conseil* knew the full range of these arrangements. Even high-placed diplomats remained in the dark as to the treaties and agreements that were not their direct concern.

Beyond his bureaucratic chiefs and the *Conseil*, Louis had need of military advisers. He turned to his leading generals, such as Turenne, Condé, Vauban, Luxembourg, and Villars, for specialized advice. In addition to such personal evaluations, Louis also appealed to periodic councils of war, which involved leading generals and the minister of war sitting as a group. In the case of the Dutch War, for example, Louis's first actual war plans evolved in consultation with the *Conseil d'en haut*. He then requested the Great Condé to examine its details. Condé sent out his own supporter, Chamilly, on an extended voyage of reconnaissance. After this intelligence gathering, Condé suggested major alterations in the campaign plan. Later, Condé charged his own fortifications expert, Descombes, to scout enemy fortresses. While Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707) was the most able military engineer of the day, he was Louvois's protégé, and Condé wanted to set his own man to the task.

For this system to function under the monarch's real, as well as theoretical, control, the king had to possess a great appetite for work – and Louis XIV did. He remained attentive and active during endless royal council meetings, only dozing off twice throughout his long reign, it was said. He wrote, 'I imposed upon myself the rule of working regularly twice a day two or three hours each time with divers persons of government, not counting the hours I spend myself or the time required for extraordinary affairs.'[7] Beyond time spent in council, he discussed matters of foreign policy, strategy, and operations with his secretaries of state and other experts, one on one. Even lesser officials conferred directly with the king on a regular basis.

The Dutch War witnessed an important change in the level and style of command Louis and the *Conseil d'en haut* asserted over operations and strategy. Circumstance and effort placed more immediate authority in the *Conseil d'en haut* and the secretary of state for war. Traditionally, major French commanders had enjoyed considerable independence in the field. Le Tellier described such independence in 1650: 'The army was a veritable republic and . . . the lieutenant generals considered their brigades like so many cantons.'[8]

In a sense, the two great commanders whom Louis inherited in 1661, Turenne and Condé, symbolized that independent style of

7 Louis in John B. Wolf, *Louis XIV* (New York, 1968), p. 168.
8 Le Tellier in Corvisier, *Louvois*, p. 80.

command. As unusually powerful nobles – the former held courtly rank as a sovereign prince, and the second bore the elevated status of a prince of the blood – they resented directives from the kind of bureaucrats who advised and served the king. These one-time rebels from the Fronde expected a high degree of autonomy and opposed the kind of bureaucratic absolutism that Louis sought to impose. Chafing under orders from the minister of war, Turenne complained that he saw 'the direction of armies in the hands of those who better merit the title of valet than that of captain, that the king had resolved to gather for himself alone the *gloire* of all the victories and that there would remain to the generals only the disgrace of their defeats'.[9]

A single year, 1675, removed both these key players: Turenne by death and Condé by retirement. From that point on Louis practised '*guerre de cabinet*', in which he and his civilian advisers, in consultation with military commanders, drafted strategic and operational policy from the seat of government. Generals might well lobby for their own plans, but they did not dictate actions. Louis was often with his main forces until age prohibited him from going into the field, but even when he was not there to take direct command on campaign, he commanded his armies from afar.

Louis's system demanded reasonable competence and dependable regularity, not outstanding genius. Louis and his minister of war, the marquis of Louvois, seemed more interested in exacting obedience from their officers than in creating or encouraging brilliance. In a revealing passage written in 1688, Chamlay, confidant of Louvois and later military adviser to Louis, boasted:

> The difference that exists between the present situation of the king's affairs and that of [the Dutch War] is that in those previous times, the fortune of His Majesty and of his kingdom was in the hands of men who, by being killed or by making a bad decision, could lose it in a moment, or at least compromise it in some way by the loss of a battle [from] which it had been difficult to reestablish. Whereas, presently, because of the great conquests that have been made, and because of the advantageous situation of the places that have been fortified, the king finds himself able to grant command of his armies to whomever it pleases him, without having anything to fear from the mediocre capacity of those to whom he confides it.[10]

9 Remarks of Turenne to Primi Visconti, in Jean-Baptiste Primi Visconti, *Mémoires sur la cour de Louis XIV, 1673–81*, ed. Jean-François Solnon (Paris, 1988), p. 63.

10 Chamlay, 27 October 1688, in Corvisier, *Louvois*, p. 459.

Chamlay believed that Louis enjoyed an optimal situation, in which advantageous frontiers and superior military institutions rendered excellence on the part of field commanders unnecessary. War could be controlled and rationalized by bureaucrats. The years 1675 and 1676 also marked a shift in French goals and strategy which accompanied the change in the style of command, but there will be more to say about this later.

THE LIMITS OF ABSOLUTISM: LOUIS'S INABILITY TO PAY FOR HIS WARS

Although Louis shaped French foreign policy and commanded his military forces, he never overcame the constant and crippling obstacles that kept him from efficiently mobilizing the wealth of France to support his wars. Money was truly the sinews of war, and the lack of it could lead to frustration and defeat. The financial weakness of the state demonstrated the limitations of absolutism, a form of government based on accommodation as well as authority. To get what he needed he had to secure the support of the nobility and powerful traditional bodies, such as the provincial estates. Heavy-handed compulsion risked sparking revolt, as it had during his childhood, so Louis avoided resistance by seeking compromise and by simply not trying to move some immovable objects. He found it was easier in the short run to borrow than to tax, but borrowing would eventually bankrupt the state.

Crisis came not because France was a poor region unable to match the wealth of its opponents. Quite to the contrary, seventeenth-century France was the richest and most populous state in Christian Europe, possessing resources adequate to great tasks. During the last few years of the century French authorities carried out the first official count of the population; from it Vauban concluded that France totalled 19,000,000 souls.[11] Agriculturally, France was rich; only the great famines of 1693–94 and 1709–10 reduced it to such material extremes that the feeding of great armies may have exceeded its means, but even then armies kept the field.

Louis's problem lay not in poverty, but in his inability to mobilize the very considerable wealth of France. The Sun King failed to cut the Gordian knot of war finance.[12] Mobilizing adequate funds to

11 Ernest Labrousse, Pierre Léon, Pierre Goubert, Jean Bouvier, Charles Carrière, and Paul Harsin, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, vol. ii (Paris, 1970), p. 12.

12 On war finance in the seventeenth century, see Daniel Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle* (Paris, 1984) and Françoise Bayard, *Le Monde des financiers*

sustain a major war without exhausting the state proved to be an administrative, political, and social problem too great even for Louis. Long war meant ruin, and Louis regularly backed himself into long wars.

Military success so often came down to a question of money; a state with cash to pay could buy men and material. French government finances lay in shambles by the late 1650s. Given time and peace, however, some reform was possible. While it used to be fashionable to credit Colbert with a transformation of monarchical finances, it is now agreed that though he accomplished significant reforms, he was unable to revamp Bourbon finances in a revolutionary manner. Without taking anything away from him, it is fair to say that whoever occupied the office of controller-general of finances after 1661 would have been able to carry out a modest reform.[13] The *sine qua non* for such reform was not Colbert's genius but the return of peace. Colbert enjoyed the good fortune of serving during more than a decade of peace, interrupted only by the relatively minor crisis of the War of Devolution. The Dutch War cut short much of the progress he made.

Reform required the ability to tax by regular and rational means and to live within those means; however, warfare quickly outstripped the level of moneys produced by taxation. Driving up tax rates during wartime could at best only cover part of the increased demands of warfare, and at worst higher taxes could bring resistance and rebellion. Consequently, Louis handled the increased expenses primarily through borrowing. But since Colbert made no fundamental change in French methods of securing credit, as soon as the regular flow of tax revenues proved insufficient, the state resorted to familiar and destructive expedients. These expedients came primarily as short-term credit measures.

'By 1661, the royal finances had been almost entirely subverted by the search for short-term credit,' writes historian Julian Dent.[14] To win over new creditors, government financiers awarded creditors

au XVIIe siècle (Paris, 1988). For the period before 1661 see as well Julian Dent, *Crisis in Finance* (New York, 1973), Richard Bonney, *The King's Debts* (Oxford, 1981), and David Parrott, 'The Administration of the French Army During the Ministry of Cardinal Richelieu', Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1985.

13 Peter Jonathan Berger, 'Military and Financial Government in France, 1648–1661,' Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1979, argues that no real reform occurred before 1659, but that a certain amount of reform was virtually inevitable with the return of peace.

14 Dent, *Crisis in Finance*, p. 232.

illegally high interest and slipped them illicit payments. At least from the time of Cardinal Richelieu, much had been sacrificed to office-holders to gain short-term funds at long-term costs. Before 1661, when things were at their worst, official accounts had to hide where the money was really going rather than render an exact report of transactions.

Certainly Colbert had the power, energy, and talent to put back some sense in French financial practices. Yet even he could not and did not clear up all the confusion in a system that, in his own words, 'the cleverest men in the realm, concerned in it for forty years, had so complicated in order to make themselves needed [since] they alone understood it'.[15] Financial improvements modified the system so that it could function at levels of moderate intensity. But in order to handle wartime crisis, the state had to return to traditional abuses – the sale of offices, short-term bills of credit, alienation of future revenues, etc.

No one could rebuild the foundations of French finance so long as French society operated as a strict social hierarchy with great privileges, including tax exemptions, for those at the top. The tax privileges that so favoured the Church and the nobility insulated much of their wealth from the state. Colbert could not end them; nor could he abolish the purchase of titles of nobility and offices that extended them to greater numbers of the well-to-do.

Louis's style of monarchy may itself have made impossible the creation of a national bank, the kind of institution that rewarded the Dutch and the English with such great advantages. In contrast to the French, the Dutch set up the Bank of Amsterdam in 1609, and the English established the Bank of England in 1694, which buttressed the credit of the state by raising funds with long-term, low-interest loans. The English Parliament that controlled government finances represented the very classes of men made wealthy by land and commerce who financed the state and its wars. Parliament would not go bad on its debts and defraud its own. But French kings were notorious for reneging on their debts; this flowed from political necessity as well as from financial want. State finance under the Bourbon monarchy remained complex and tortured, and Louis found it necessary to delegate the collection of revenues to tax farmers all too often. However, Louis tried to retain what leverage he had over taxation and the budget, and he certainly did not want to place the power of the purse in the hands of a representative assembly; such would have been

15 Colbert in P. G. M. Dickson and John Sperling, 'War Finance, 1689–1714', in *New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. iv (Cambridge, 1970), p. 298.

antithetical to his brand of absolutism. Therefore the absolutist state never effectively mobilized credit through a state bank; the first attempt at a French national bank, under Law in 1716, failed. The French would not really have a national bank until 1800, and it required a revolution to make such an institution possible.

The problems of taxation and credit not only undermined the monarchy, they also cramped the strategic options open to Louis. The expense of maintaining an army in the field made it desirable to support troops by levying demands on the enemy's population, thus the strategic advisability of sending your armies to fight on enemy territory. This, as we shall see, was a major strategic technique for the French.

Financial weakness also forced the delay or elimination of offensives. In 1695, though Louis would have liked to undertake a major attack in Italy, he had to tell his Marshal Nicolas de Catinat 'the only difficulty that presents itself for pursuing offensive war is the considerable sum of money that it requires . . . and after having examined the state of my finances . . . I have, despite myself, been obliged to resolve to pursue only defensive war during the coming year'.[16] In Louis's last war, money problems also crippled strategic options, since 'it was clear that French financial weakness precluded any large-scale offensive after 1709'.[17]

VALUES THAT GUIDED DECISION-MAKING: WAR AND *GLOIRE*

Within the parameters of power set by absolutism, Louis, aided by a handful of top advisers, directed the state. Today, it is common to emphasize institutions and to show how individuals are imprisoned by them. To be sure, in the realm of finance Louis was not omnipotent, but in international affairs and warfare he ruled and imposed his own will on policy.

The personality and values of Louis XIV as an individual did much to guide French strategy; with Louis, it is nearly impossible to separate the monarch from the man. From birth he was groomed to rule France. Louis's well-known dictum, 'I am the state,' is probably apocryphal, but his person and the state were still inseparably linked. For modern readers prone to interpret Louis in twentieth-century terms, it is important to recognize that Louis belonged to the seventeenth century. And as the first gentleman of France, the Sun King's

16 Louis to Catinat, AG, A[1]1326, no. 1.
17 Dickson and Sperling, 'War Finance', p. 305.

value system was fundamentally aristocratic, guided by baroque concepts of war, dynasty, and *gloire*.

While not great in size, the nobility dominated French society. *Circa* 1700, when the French population numbered roughly 19,000,000 souls, the nobility included about 260,000, no more than 1.4 per cent of the population, yet nobles controlled vast wealth and property.[18] Monarchy and a nobility were compatible; to the political philosopher Montesquieu, in fact, monarchy necessarily implied a nobility.

The nobility set the values of society, and formed those of the king. To the degree that he lived an isolated life spent within a court populated by nobles, that court served as a lens through which he viewed and measured his goals and policies. While the interests of Louis as absolute monarch ran counter to the desire of the nobility to become a centre of independent authority and influence, his opinions on other matters of importance coincided with the well-born minority who surrounded him. In the language of modern historiography, he shared the *mentalité* of the nobility.

This is in no case more central than in the king's attitude towards war. For the nobleman, combat tested his manhood, and for the king, warfare tested his reign. His young courtiers were sure to push for vigorous military action, for they needed an arena in which to win fame. When contemporaries remarked about the king, 'He shows the greatest passion for war, and is in despair when he is prevented from going [to the front],' it was to award him highest praise.[19] The thirst for military renown afflicted women as well as men. Noble young ladies were said to give their favours only to soldiers; war, it would seem, was an aphrodisiac.[20] War, 'the most important of all the professions',[21] was to be sought, as a good in itself. Christian virtue fell victim to Roman *virtù* – at least until Louis had proved himself.

War was the true *métier du roi* – the proper business of the king. This required that Louis be trained to become a soldier-king. When a boy he practised the manual of arms with musket and pike and drilled his companions; he learned about fortification in a play fort constructed in the gardens of the Palais Royal. As a youth he visited his armies in the field, where Mazarin reported to Queen Anne that

18 Roger Mettam, 'The French Nobility, 1610–1715', in Hamish Scott, ed., *The European Nobilities*, (2 vols; London, 1995), vol. i, p. 114.

19 Contemporary description in Wolf, *Louis XIV*, p. 78.

20 Primi Visconti, *Mémoires*, p. 146.

21 Paul Hay de Chastenet, *Traité de la guerre* (Paris, 1668), p. 1.

Louis was 'indefatigable; he goes the entire day with the army, and on arriving here he makes a tour of the advance guards' posts . . . he has just returned . . . not worn out by fifteen hours on horseback'.[22] Louis would become renowned for his hearty constitution and his willingness to endure the fatigues of campaign life.

Deep-seated values compelled him to war; they explain why he attended eighteen of the forty-two sieges directed by Vauban. However, he also realized that he must demonstrate his interest and ability in war in order to command the respect of the social and political élite and, thus, govern effectively. Joël Cornette argues convincingly that war was more than just an essential activity; it was a fundamental attribute of Louis's sovereignty.[23] War justified regal authority and defined kingship and the élite's relationship to the monarch, so to be a complete ruler, Louis must represent himself as a warrior-king. In such a political culture, war was an activity with merit quite beyond its utility in international politics.

Such a view of war runs at odds with modern interpretations of it as a struggle over pragmatic economic concerns. Louis cared little for the commercial calculations of merchants, although he would gain trade advantages if they presented themselves. The proper prize of war was territory, land being a supreme good in the aristocratic value system. Even the Dutch War, often ascribed to economic competition, was fundamentally territorial from the Sun King's point of view; Colbert's arguments lost to those of Le Tellier and Louvois.[24]

Louis also shared the aristocratic concern with family, with the noble 'house'. It would be anachronistic to see Louis's vision of Europe as 'national'. He acted for the French state and for the good of his dynasty, the Bourbons. Ruling was a family affair, or at least it was an affair of families. A monarch was both a ruler and a head of a house, and he was expected to use his power in the first role when exercising his responsibilities in the second. Without giving due consideration to his strong dynastic orientation, his policies leading up to and during the War of the Spanish Succession become incomprehensible. He ventured French fortune and lives to secure the Spanish throne for his grandson, knowing full well that the crowns of France and Spain would probably never be united. It was enough that a Bourbon ruled Spain.

22 Mazarin in Wolf, *Louis XIV*, p. 78.

23 Joël Cornette, *Le Roi de guerre: Essai sur la souveraineté dans la France du Grande Siècle* (Paris, 1993).

24 See Sonnino, *Louis XIV and the Origins of the Dutch War.*