



At war with the French: Louis XIV and Napoleon

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When I gave my last lecture, on the Hundred Years' War of 1337 to 1453, I focused on a specific war between England and France. However, the long-term context of Anglo-French relations was repeated bouts of warfare from the time of the Conquest in 1066 until the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. The defeat of England in 1453 was not necessarily accepted as final by English kings, and Henry VII and Henry VIII both wished to invade France. Tax rebellions stopped Henry VII's war policy in 1489 and 1497, but Henry VIII was luckier: he was able to spend about one-quarter of his reign in open war against France, although his planned invasion in 1525 was scuppered by yet another taxpayers' revolt. His daughter Elizabeth had a different enemy: Spain. Spain was also the enemy of France, and thus Anglo-French enmity was temporarily dampened. Yet it resumed in the 17th century, and from 1689, as can be seen from the list, France and England, from 1707 Great Britain, were at war for a total of fifty years from 1689 to 1815. Wars and rumours of wars with France dominated British foreign policy.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider some principles of British foreign policy. First of all, and overriding all others, was the need for a balance of power on the Continent. This is a picture of Europe in 1661, the year when Louis XIV, who had become king of France at the age of four in 1643, assumed personal rule at the age of twenty-three. The three greatest of the Great Powers were the Spanish Empire, France, and the Austrian Empire. England was a lesser Great Power, but still one of importance; other countries might be, but were not always, taken into account by the Great Powers. Germany was then 'the Germanies', consisting of some three hundred political entities, although the Kingdom of Bavaria was of a notable size and the Kingdom of Prussia would soon be a major force in Europe; Sweden had been a Great Power, but was now in rapid decline; the Netherlands, called the United Provinces or the United Netherlands or Holland, were now a power of the second rank; and Russia did not yet figure greatly in the calculations of the Powers. Since the early 1500s, Spain and France had been duelling for supremacy, and during this period, England was relatively safe, since she could ally with one or the other. But with the emergence of France under Louis XIV, whose drive was for power and glory, the Continental balance was threatened. This in turn threatened England, with her long history of invasions, threatened invasions, and coastal raids, and thus she allied herself with whichever Powers were countering French assaults, irregardless of their religion or politics.

The second principle of British foreign policy was connected with the first, and this was that the Low Countries must not be held by a strong Power, and certainly not by the strongest. Today's Belgium was then known as the Spanish Netherlands, and Spain's and then France's repeated attempts to control this territory were of acute concern to England; the same was true of the Protestant or Dutch Netherlands, then called the United Provinces, whose deep harbours and prevailing winds made her a natural embarkation point for an attack on England. The Channel could be a highway as well as a barrier.

And this led naturally to a third, and increasingly important, principle: the overriding requirement for a Royal Navy strong enough to protect, to attack, and to control. The navy began to grow in size and improve in quality during the period of the Tudors: Henry VIII saw armed ships as reflecting his status, but at least as important was the annexation by the French king of Brittany and Picardy with their Channel ports, since this brought home to Englishmen their vulnerability to attack and the need for a navy as the first line of defence. A combination of state and private vessels, the navy proved its worth in 1588, when it defeated Spain's 'Enterprise of England' by crippling the Spanish Armada. Seventy-five years later, the Royal Navy was a contender for naval predominance.

One other principle should be mentioned, which was one shared by all the Great - and little - Powers, and this was the so-called doctrine of compensation. If one power made a territorial gain, other Powers expected to be compensated. This was understood by all, and settling the various claims formed a significant proportion of the negotiations amongst the Powers at the end of conflicts.

This is probably the most famous of all portraits of Louis XIV of the House of Bourbon, the Sun King, painted in 1701 when he was sixty-three. However, until his fifties, he saw himself as a warrior king, fighting for glory or glory, accompanying his troops to battle. Louis XIV was king of France for seventy-two years and sole ruler for fifty-four of them - and for nearly fifty of those years, from 1667 to 1714, France was almost continuously at war. There were three major themes of French foreign policy during his reign. One was to increase the glory of Louis XIV, and thereby the glory of France: the seventeenth century made a virtue of great pride, and Louis' pride required him to pursue glory with such concentration that it became a fundamental theme of French foreign policy [John Lynn]. The second theme was to attack Spain. The Spanish empire was in decline by 1760, and - it was thought - was ripe for picking. The third theme was his obsessive need to make impermeable the borders of his lands: this drive to erect strong defensive lines actually led him into two of his wars.

The Habsburg dynasties ruled two empires, or, strictly speaking, three. One was the Austrian Empire, ruled by the Austrian Emperor Leopold I; the second was the Holy Roman Empire, made up largely of the hundreds of German states, and ruled as well by Leopold; and the third was the Spanish Empire. Not only was the latter in decline: the Spanish Habsburg dynasty also seemed to be faltering, and the entire inheritance would, sooner or later, be fought over. Louis' wife, Marie-Thérèse, was the elder daughter of King Philip III of Spain, and Louis and his dynasty, the Bourbons, therefore had a good claim to the throne; this would, in fact, precipitate his final war, the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701. Meanwhile, he attempted to conquer Spanish lands which bordered on France. The centre of his wars was the Spanish Netherlands. Bourbon claims on this territory ran recklessly not only into Spanish opposition, but into that of the Dutch Netherlands and, eventually, that of England.

For the first twenty-five years or so of Louis' personal reign, male Stuarts occupied the English throne. Both were allies of the French. Charles II signed the secret Treaty of Dover in 1670, which gave him a yearly subsidy from the French, in exchange for which Charles promised to declare himself a Catholic when expedient and to join France in war against the Dutch. Parliament would not for long tolerate this, and Charles had to withdraw from the war in 1674. With the abdication of Charles' brother James II in the wake of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, William III and Mary II, daughter of James II, ascended the throne. William of Orange was stadholder and captain-general of the forces of the United Provinces, and his immediate goal in becoming king of England was to carry her into the war against the French which he was currently waging.

It is worth pausing again to consider the nature of war in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It has been called 'war-as-process' [Lynn], because it tended to be long, slow and indecisive. Neither battles nor sieges decided wars: because of the expense of raising and maintaining troops, commanders were loath to risk them, and war, therefore, became more a matter of avoiding battle than of engaging in it. They were wars of manoeuvre. In fairness, it would sometimes have been difficult to know just where one could strike a knock-out blow. Wars were usually fought by coalitions, and this meant that there was more than one front; this could allow one front to supply reserves to another, and this mitigated the effects of a defeat. Furthermore, because elaborate and slow supply arrangements limited mobility, it was difficult to drive an enemy into a corner or to pursue him. These armies fought during fighting seasons, and thus campaigns lasted for only six to seven months a year, giving armies time to recover and recoup. There was often the need to 'make war feed war', which meant conquering a territory for the sole purpose of requisitioning its supplies or of levying a 'tax' on the inhabitants, the proceeds of which would finance further fighting. In short, wars tended to be wars of attrition, and continuing diplomatic negotiations were required to sort things out.

On the death of Philip III of Spain, Louis insisted that his wife should inherit some Spanish territory, and France invaded the Spanish Netherlands in 1667. Seven months later, England, the United Provinces and Sweden formed the Triple Alliance, declaring that Louis could keep what he had already conquered, but that if he continued to take more, the alliance would enter the war on the side of Spain. Unprepared for a long war, Louis reluctantly made peace. However, this lasted for only four years: Louis decided to teach the Dutch a lesson, at the same time clearing them out of the way and thereby giving himself a free hand to do

as he wished in the Spanish Netherlands. He bribed Sweden to withdraw from the alliance with England and the Dutch, bribed Charles II to do the same, and signed a treaty with Emperor Leopold, by which Leopold would be neutral in a Franco-Dutch War. Louis then attacked, sending two armies against the Dutch. The Dutch offered terms, but Louis haughtily refused. The war then expanded, and Spain joined, along with some of the German states. When the war ended in 1678, France had taken Franche-Comté, a number of new towns on his north-east frontier, and Freiburg across the Rhine. Louis was now called Louis le Grand - Louis the Great: he had secured his glory.

But he did not stop there: from 1683 to 1684, he fought another war in order to acquire defensible frontiers, seizing towns, fortresses and land. The rest of Europe saw him as an insatiable conqueror, and Spain, which felt threatened, declared war. The Emperor Leopold, however, was unable to join the coalition, since he was busy repelling the Turks, who were storming the gates of Vienna. The Dutch supplied some troops, but they were not enough to hold back the French, who took Luxembourg. But Louis did not stop, and turned on Italy, a battleground for France since 1494, at the same time forcing French troops on the Duke of Savoy in order to 'help' him forcibly to convert his peaceable Protestant subjects, many of whom ended up being massacred. This was too much for other European states, and opposition began to form. Louis considered that he was acting defensively; the other Powers saw him as acting offensively.

The War of the League of Augsburg or the Nine Years' War, which lasted from 1688 to 1697, was waged between Louis and the coalition called the League of Augsburg. This war grew naturally out of the previous ones, because Louis demanded that the Austrian Habsburgs sanction his gains in Germany. The demand was refused. Louis decided that one more short war would compel the Germans to give him this guarantee. He wanted to close off the Rhine frontier in order to protect Alsace, and he besieged and conquered Philippsburg, the only Rhine fortress outside of his control. His armies then took a number of German towns, and the Germans united against him. Leopold I of Austria as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, which included many of the German states, soon joined, followed by the United Provinces, and, in 1689, England. The other Powers had decided that only force would stop Louis: compromise was impossible.

England did not acquit herself very well during the Nine Years' War. At the outset, William III was busy securing the English crown; a task which Louis hoped would occupy him for some time. William, however, rapidly brought England and the United Provinces into the war. Louis tried to occupy William by intervening on James II's behalf: he sent troops to Ireland, which William was attempting to secure. This could not be prevented by the Royal Navy, which, along with the Dutch fleet, had been defeated not long before by the French navy at the battle of Beachy Head. Fortunately for William, his troops won the critical Battle of the Boyne, and he could then turn his attention to France. The English landed in the Spanish Netherlands, but he was repeatedly defeated by the French. The League of Augsburg, the anti-French coalition, signed a treaty with France in 1697, by which Louis got to keep Strasbourg, and received the guarantee of his borders for which he had gone to war.

Louis' last war, the War of the Spanish Succession, which was fought from 1701 to 1714, was a war too far for France, which left the country weakened and virtually bankrupt. England, however, emerged from the war the pre-eminent naval power and with an enlarged empire. She also vastly improved her military reputation. The whole point of the war was to provide an answer to the question: who was to succeed to the Spanish throne? The dying Spanish King Carlos II was childless, which appeared to mean that Spain, the Spanish Netherlands, and the Spanish Empire were up for grabs. The Great Powers hoped to sort things out amongst themselves by partitioning the lands without resorting to war, but these plans fell through. Carlos wanted above all to keep his domains intact, and on his deathbed he bequeathed them to one of Louis' grandsons. This would certainly mean war with the Emperor, whose son also had a claim, but it need not have meant war against a coalition of the Powers. But this Louis insured by his pride and arrogance. First of all, he immediately occupied the barrier fortresses on Spanish territory on the border between the Spanish Netherlands and the United Provinces, replacing Dutch troops with French, and thereby threatening the United Provinces. He then alienated the English by securing the *asiento*, the right to supply slaves to the Spanish colonies, for French traders, beating out English commercial interests; furthermore, he recognised the son of James II, later the Old Pretender, as the rightful heir to the English crown. In September 1701, William hammered together another grand alliance between England, the United Provinces, and the Habsburg Empire. This was his final act of diplomacy before he died in March 1702, to be succeeded by Queen Anne. He had been a great politician and diplomat, but only a mediocre general, and it was fortunate for both England and the United Provinces that command of the English and Dutch armies passed into the hands of John Churchill, from 1702 the Duke of Marlborough.

The primary theatre of war was again the Spanish Netherlands, first because Louis intended to hold it for his grandson, and secondly because later in the war, as the British under Marlborough pushed the French further and further south, Louis concentrated his forces there to protect his own territory and the road to Paris. However, the first few years of the war went reasonably well for Louis, but the tide turned sharply in 1704. The primary reason was that the coalition armies were led by two outstanding generals, Marlborough for the English and Dutch, and Prince Eugene of Savoy, the greatest of Habsburg generals, for the Holy Roman Empire.

In 1704, French and Bavarian troops were engaged in campaigns along the Danube. Marlborough brought many of his troops from Flanders to the Danube; interestingly, rather than living off the land, Marlborough's troops ate food supplied to them by commissioners at the end of each day's march, a circumstance which must have contributed greatly to their strength and morale. On 13 August 1704, Marlborough and Prince Eugene attacked the Franco-Bavarian forces near the village of Blenheim. The two allied generals attacked the flanks of the opposing army; in due course the French commander weakened his centre by sending reinforcements to his flanks, allowing Marlborough to break through the centre with his cavalry and shatter the French. The loss of the battle of Blenheim stunned the French court: since 1661, Louis had not suffered such a defeat. Two years later, Louis instructed the Marshall commanding the French forces to confront Marlborough head on; as a consequence, the two fought around the village of Ramillies. Marlborough repeated his Blenheim tactics: after battling at the flanks, he again drove through the French centre with his cavalry. This battle won control of much of Flanders.

For the next several years, the war seesawed back and forth, but in 1711 the nature of the war changed: circumstances determined that if the allies won, the Spanish throne would be secured for the new Austrian Emperor: heir to the Habsburg lands, if he also secured the throne of Spain plus the Spanish empire, the result would be a monarchy more dangerous to the balance of power in Europe than if Louis' grandson secured the Spanish throne. The coalition wavered, and in October 1711, the French and British concluded the 'London Preliminaries', by which Louis pledged to recognise Queen Anne and the Protestant succession in Britain, and to ensure that the thrones of France and Spain were never united. The following July, they announced a suspension of arms. The fight continued amongst the other belligerents, until the Treaty of Utrecht in April 1713 ended the conflict amongst all but the Habsburgs, who only ceased fighting in 1714. Louis' grandson was recognised as King Philip V of Spain, although Louis had to guarantee that the Spanish and French thrones would remain separate. Lands were distributed amongst the Powers, with Great Britain receiving Gibraltar, Acadia (Nova Scotia), Hudson Bay and Newfoundland.

The enlargement of the British Empire as a consequence of the Anglo-French conflict was a harbinger of the wars of the eighteenth century. Great Britain was now the supreme naval power, although it must be said that this was due as much to her financial as to her fighting prowess. She had the resources to pour into building and maintaining the Royal Navy, and this navy in turn was the weapon which enabled her to gain colony after colony, frequently at the expense of France. The next three wars between the two powers were fought both in Europe and in and for colonies: Great Britain won them all and, desiring no territory on the Continent, took her spoils elsewhere.

There was, however, a period of peace between the two Powers, which extended from 1713 to 1744. A significant reason for this was the death of Queen Anne and the accession of the Hanoverian George I to the throne. Hanover shared a border with an increasingly militaristic Brandenburg-Prussia, and thus George I had a strong interest in the maintenance of peace in northern Europe. In 1718, France was induced to join Great Britain, the United Provinces and the Austrian Empire in the Quadruple Alliance, established to maintain the peace, and which was essentially directed against Spain. This entente with France enabled British ministers to protect the interests of both Hanover and Great Britain for the following two decades without war. The policy continued under George II, king from 1727 to 1760, since he was also concerned about the safety of his ancestral lands. He had full confidence in Robert Walpole, Prime Minister from 1722 to 1742, who also tried to keep Great Britain out of Continental land wars. There was conflict with Spain, during this period Great Britain's major imperial rival, but until 1744, although there were periods of tension with France, the two countries more or less refrained from the sword.

Then came the so-called 'diplomatic revolution', connected with the War of the Austrian Succession from 1740 to 1748. It is quite depressingly complicated, but it began as a conflict between Maria Theresa, the Habsburg Empress of the Austrian Empire, and Frederick the Great of Prussia, who had seized Silesia. Great Britain and the United Provinces came to her aid, the British promising subsidies and mercenary troops, although Hanoverian and British soldiers were to take part later. The alliance with the Habsburgs put Great Britain in conflict with Prussia's allies, Bavaria and France. In October 1744, France and Spain

formed an alliance and declared war on Great Britain. The following year, the British forces fighting on the Continent were forced to withdraw in order to meet the Jacobite uprising at home. This forced the Austrians to come to terms with Prussia, to the former's disadvantage: the cost to Great Britain was the old alliance with Austria, which had been a pillar of the earlier wars. The support of British public opinion for a continental commitment, such as it was, drained away, and attention became focused on possibilities for the Empire. Indeed, the following two wars began in the colonies, and only then spread to Europe.

The wars which I have already discussed, those beginning in 1689, were typical European wars of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: expensive, bloody, limited and indecisive. They tended to focus on thrones and dynasties, not on great sweeping conquests. They ended in mutual exhaustion and the restoration of a balance of power. The unofficial Anglo-French war of 1754 to 1755 and then the Seven Years' War of 1756 to 1763 were different: they were about the control of territory, not about thrones. They began in the New World, not the Old, and the result was a seismic shift in power, with Great Britain emerging with a tremendous increase in its Empire. I should also note that in 1760 she also gained a new king, George III, who began well but ended up mad.

Anglo-French conflict from 1754 to 1755, the unofficial war, marked the collapse of the strategic balance in eastern North America, between the British and French colonial empires. After the end of the previous war, the French had resumed their advances into the rich Ohio Valley ; at the same time, the British decided that control of this territory was of great importance. The French wanted to link their colonies in Louisiana and Quebec, or New France, both by the Mississippi River and by a belt of forts and missions across the Ohio Valley. For their part, the British were keen on expanding inland westwards beyond the Appalachian Mountains, and it was therefore vital that the French not build a barrier all down the west side of the colonies. Four battles were fought, and French commercial shipping was attacked, in the year before Great Britain declared war on France in May 1756. Even with war raging in Europe, the British decided to make the war in North America the priority, seeking to expand the empire deep into the continent by investing men and money as never before to conquer New France. This also threatened the Indians, many of whom fought on the side of the French for that reason - hence the American name for the conflict, the French and Indian War.

This was primarily a war against France in which Great Britain, Prussia and Hanover with twelve million people faced Russia, Poland, Sweden, Saxony, France and Austria with ninety million. But in fact it was truly a world war, with battles in Europe, America, the West Indies, Africa, India and the Philippines, and this required that British supremacy at sea be fully exploited. William Pitt the Elder, who as Secretary of State managed the war, was convinced that France could be humbled by taking away her colonies, rather than trying - again - to defeat her large army in Europe. Consequently, the focus of the war was now outside the European continent, with a kind of holding operation in Europe by the Prussians and British armies, and especially by the Royal Navy [Peckham]. September 1759 saw the capture of Quebec by British and American soldiers in possibly the most famous battle of the war, that between General James Wolfe and the Marquis de Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham, during which both commanders were wounded and died. An American innovation which had proved its worth - the organisation of rangers, a company of woodsmen to scout, bring in prisoners for information, and generally act as the eyes and ears of the army - was soon adopted by the British. In the end, the French and their Indian allies lost, and all of New France became part of the British Empire. The British had simply overwhelmed the French with the sheer numbers of soldiers and sailors, warships and cannon. The ability to project military power across the Atlantic Ocean reflected British superiority in shipping, finance and organisation. But it was not only territory in North America which the British gained by their success in the Seven Years' War. In 1760 they had decisively defeated the French in southern India, and in 1762 had captured several extremely rich French sugar islands in the West Indies. The end of the war in 1763, in fact, saw Great Britain emerge as the leading world power, rather than European power, a position, however, which would soon be again challenged by France.

France took the opportunity of Great Britain's being embroiled from 1775 to 1783 in conflict with thirteen of her colonies in North America to take revenge. In 1778 she declared war on Great Britain, a course followed in 1779 by Spain and in 1780 by the Netherlands. Military activity in North America quickly became a secondary consideration for Great Britain, as she battled to safeguard both the home islands and her Empire. In the end, she lost her thirteen North American colonies, widely considered the cornerstone of her Empire, and some West Indian islands to France, but she had fended off French demands for territorial concessions in India. And - staggered as she was by the expense incurred - her fundamental financial and economic strength remained, something which could not be said of France.

It is worth pausing again to consider what constituted British power. It was not the size of her population, which was fewer than 10 million, not least because of emigration - between 1695 and 1800 fully one-fifth emigrated. Yet from 1739 to 1815, the army more than doubled, whilst the navy more than trebled. Britons had traditionally feared a standing army, dating from the days of Cromwell and the generals, but these fears were thrown aside by the threat from France and other seaborne enemies. There developed an enormous army of part-time civilian soldiers, the militia, and indeed, proscriptive methods were supplemented by volunteers. The strength of the Royal Navy owed much to the size of the merchant marine, by far the largest in the world: this was because it ensured for the Royal Navy a continuing supply of trained seamen, something no other Power could begin to rival. The mobilisation of males of military age increased from 1 in 16 in the War of the Austrian Succession to 1 in 10 during the Seven Years' War to more than 1 in 5 in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars in 1805. [Stephen Conway] The sophistication of the banking system, from the Bank of England through the country banks to the London firms, enabled the accumulation of funds which the government could borrow; the taxable wealth of the country was also substantial, and Great Britain became by far the most heavily taxed country in Europe, a system which was concentrated more on indirect than on direct taxes. This amazing war effort was supported by a mixture of strong patriotism, fear of French rule, and the desire of the Dissenters and middling classes to play a more prominent role commensurate with their rising social position but denied to them by the traditional élites. It was also supported by a leader of rare authority, William Pitt the Younger, who had become Prime Minister in 1783 at the age of 24.

All of these strengths came into play in the 'Great War with France'. At the beginning there was substantial support in Great Britain for the French Revolution, which, it was hoped, might well result in another constitutional Power, and one which might be usefully distracted from colonial or commercial competition by internal political upheaval. Yet the bloody course of the Revolution snuffed out most support, and was replaced by apprehension as the French looked beyond their borders. The former Spanish Netherlands, from 1757 the Austrian Netherlands, and today Belgium, had since the change of control in 1757 been neutral and free of French influence, but in 1792 the armies of Revolutionary France overran the territory. The following year, it was annexed, and the invasion of the Dutch Netherlands was imminent. Great Britain had already been discussing military plans with the Austrians and Prussians, and the day after the French Assembly annexed what is now Belgium, they declared war on Great Britain and the Netherlands.

In 1792 the Royal Navy was unrivalled, with over six hundred vessels manned by 100,000 men. This enabled her to blockade the Continent, and to sweep the enemy fleets from the seas. The wealth of Great Britain, based on her far-flung trading links, enabled her to supply her allies with enormous subsidies with which they could carry out campaigns on the Continent: by 1812, Great Britain was subsidising in the region of 90% of the allied military effort. Where she was weak was in her army, which was in any case small by Continental standards. Defeat in the American colonies a decade earlier had damaged the army's reputation, and its leadership left much to be desired. She made this up by helping to put together coalitions of Powers to do most of the fighting. Indeed, over the period of the French Revolutionary Wars from 1792 to 1802, and then the Napoleonic Wars, seven coalitions were formed to fight France, a tribute to that country's endurance and élan.

There were now five Great Powers: Great Britain, France, the Austrian Empire, Prussia, and the Russian Empire. They were surrounded by a number of lesser states, most of whom had once been Powers themselves: Sweden, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands, and the Ottoman Empire. Most of western Germany remained fragmented into hundreds of small political entities nestled within the Holy Roman Empire. Italy was also split into a number of kingdoms, some independent and some controlled by Austria. All of the states would, at some point, be part of an anti-French coalition. There were two coalitions during the Revolutionary Wars: the First Coalition from 1792 to 1797, and the Second Coalition from 1798 to 1802, each with its own combination of European powers. The Napoleonic Wars saw another five. I have not the time to discuss these in detail, or in most cases at all, given that my intention is to disentangle the British thread. However, as one example, here are the members of the First Coalition - Austria, the Holy Roman Empire, Prussia, Great Britain, the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, the Papal States, the Venetian Republic, the Kingdom of Sardinia, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. By 1795, the Coalition had begun to crumble, and by 1797, both Belgium and the Netherlands had been occupied, Prussia had left the war, and parts of northern Italy had been occupied and turned into French satellites.

What particularly worried Great Britain, of course, was the fact that France had annexed Belgium and turned the Netherlands into a satellite state, now styled the Batavian Republic. This opened the British Isles to invasion, and for the following ten years she directed military and naval resources away from offensive

operations and into home defence. However, she did use part of the Royal Navy to prey on the French merchant marine and on the vast numbers of French privateers, particularly in the Atlantic, the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. Once the Netherlands was a French satellite, Dutch colonies were fair game, and the British took Cape Colony, and later Ceylon and Guiana.

The collapse of the First Coalition did not affect Anglo-French conflict, which continued to be fought out at sea and in the colonies. France now looked to Egypt, to which the Army of the Orient sailed from Toulon in May 1798. This fleet, made up of four hundred transports and escorted by four frigates and thirteen ships of the line, carried 35,000 men, led by the twenty-eight-year old Napoleon Bonaparte. A force from the Royal Navy was sent to intercept the French fleet. This task was entrusted to Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson who, beginning in May, cruised the Mediterranean with fourteen ships of the line and eight frigates, searching for the French fleet. The French first took Malta and then landed near Marabout. They seized Alexandria, and then advanced on Cairo by land and river. A lack of clear water took its toll, as did attacks by Mamelukes and Turkish infantry - Egypt was loosely part of the Ottoman Empire. On 22 July 1798, the French entered Cairo and had hardly settled in when Nelson arrived in Aboukir Bay on 1 August and discovered the French fleet lying at anchor. Nelson manoeuvred some of his ships to the landward side of the French vessels; the French had expected that any attack would come from seaward. Action began in the late afternoon. About 9 pm, a fire broke out on the French flagship, the L'Orient, which soon spread out of control and ignited the magazine, with the result which you can see from the picture. The British victory in the Battle of the Nile had far-reaching effects. Bonaparte's army was stranded in Egypt without a regular source of supplies or reinforcements from Europe, although it still took until 1801 for the British to drive the French out. The British had begun to re-establish control of the Mediterranean, a task completed with the taking of Malta in 1800. And more importantly in the long run, Nelson's victory brought Russia, who viewed the French occupation of Malta and Egypt as a threat to her naval and commercial interests in the Mediterranean, into the war.

Yet, it was to take another fifteen years to defeat Napoleon, who had made himself Emperor in 1803. Here is a map of Europe in 1807, showing Napoleon, and France, at the height of their power. Napoleon had cowed the three great Continental Powers, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, in three successive campaigns, and now only Great Britain, Sweden and Portugal remained to oppose him. The battle of Trafalgar, fought two years before, had not only saved Great Britain from imminent invasion, it had established her as mistress of the seas. France now had no means of striking back at Great Britain except by severing British trade links with all territories under French control, which Napoleon instituted by decree in 1806 - this became the Continental system, an internal blockade. Britain created a new way of striking back: rather than the Royal Navy blockading the Continent, she tried to regulate its external trade. Ships flying the French flag were fair game; those of neutral countries, such as the United States, could only trade with France under heavy restrictions.

France found it very difficult to make the Continental system watertight, and smuggling was rampant along practically every coast. This drove Napoleon to try to expand his control over the few remaining territories not already under his rule. Neutral Portugal was the last country to defy his plan. Furthermore, control of Portugal's colonial trade, and of Brazil, would be a useful addition to the French Empire. Napoleon's decision to send French troops through his ally Spain to conquer Portugal was the origin of the Peninsular War. Portugal and England had been allies since 1422, and even though Portugal had been neutral during the French wars, she showed a benign neutrality towards Great Britain. In October 1807 France invaded, and by 30 November, French troops entered Lisbon unopposed. The previous day, the Portuguese royal family had taken refuge with a Royal Navy squadron in the harbour. They then departed for their colony Brazil, taking with them the Portuguese fleet and most of the national treasure. However, the response of the Spanish population to the use of their territory was incandescent, and Napoleon's response was to force the Spanish king to abdicate and to place his own brother Joseph on the throne. This was a mistake, since there was an uprising in Madrid on 2 May 1808, which was put down with great brutality. Infuriated by the imposition of a foreigner on the throne, Spaniards across the country rose in revolt.

The French invasion of Spain and Portugal provided an ideal opening on the European mainland into which British military resources could be channelled. First of all, her mastery of the seas meant that she could safely transport troops and supplies to the mainland. Secondly, the Peninsula was accessible from three directions by sea, whilst the French had to transport everything over the Pyrenees. And finally, the British expeditionary force would be fighting on friendly soil, with the advantages that this would facilitate intelligence gathering, supply and communication, and ensure reasonable safety from unofficial forces whilst fighting on land which did not encourage large-scale warfare. The same factors in reverse led to the

defeat of a French army at the hands of Spanish regular forces on 21 July - and eleven days later the British landed in Portugal. They were led by General Sir Arthur Wellesley, later to become the Duke of Wellington.

The Peninsular War lasted from 1808 until 1814. It is an exciting tale, which has been told many times, with battles, sieges, advances and retreats. It was a very important second front, which during its course drained 600,000 French troops from the fight against other adversaries. Wellington much benefited from Napoleon's decision to invade Russia, because the Emperor withdrew French troops from Spain for the new campaign. But his own generalship was superb: with a small army, he could not afford to lose battles, and he thus took few risks, fighting only when the conditions were favourable. Once Napoleon's invasion of Russia made it a two-front war, Wellington went on the offensive. In December 1813, the Spanish king was restored to his throne, and in February 1814, Wellington defeated the French Marshal Nicolas Soult at Orthez. The British pursued Soult into France, where he was finally defeated at Toulouse on 17 April. However, in the meantime, Napoleon on 6 April had abdicated unconditionally. On 30 April the Treaty of Paris between the allies and Louis XVIII, the Bourbon monarch, was signed, and the Napoleonic Wars were over.

Or were they? Napoleon was exiled to the island of Elba, and the victorious allies gathered together in the Congress of Vienna on 1 November 1814 to negotiate restoration, territorial compensation, and international security. The two dominating statesmen were the British Foreign Secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, and his Austrian counterpart, Prince Metternich. They both sought to re-establish a balance of power on the Continent, and they recognised the necessity of a stable and reasonably strong France to act as a counterweight to the growing power of Russia and Prussia. Thus France was to be allowed to retain the territories she held in 1792, including a large part of the Rhineland, which would provide her with what she considered to be her 'natural' frontiers, the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees. But there was bitter conflict amongst the Powers over some of the terms, while many Frenchmen could not accept the return of the Bourbons to the throne. Napoleon determined to take advantage of the conflict and uncertainty, and in late February 1815 he escaped from Elba, landing in France on 1 March. His journey to Paris was in the nature of a triumphal procession, and both veteran soldiers and youths flocked to his standard, enabling him to reconstruct an army within weeks. He arrived in Paris on 20 March, whence the Bourbon monarch had fled, and took over the French government. Thus began the Hundred Days.

Napoleon immediately led his forces into the field, since he knew that his best chance of success was to destroy his enemies piecemeal before they had an opportunity to re-unite against him. On 15 June he marched into Belgium, where he scored a number of minor victories. Four days later he attacked the main body of the British army under the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo. For the greater part of the day, the British held their own against the furious onslaughts of the French. Then towards evening, the tide of battle shifted towards the allies with the arrival of a Prussian army under General Gebhardt von Blücher. The French were completely defeated; Napoleon fled the field, and, after trying to escape to America, surrendered to the British, who refused his request for sanctuary in Great Britain. On 22 June, Napoleon abdicated a second time, unconditionally and, this time, permanently. He was exiled to the tiny Atlantic island of St Helena, a thousand miles off the coast of southern Africa, where he died on 5 May 1821.

The Congress of Vienna re-convened to re-draft the peace terms, and the second Treaty of Paris was signed on 20 November. The French were forced to accept a much harsher peace than had been offered before Napoleon's escape. The borders were now those of 1790, she lost other frontier territory and fortresses, and she had to pay a large indemnity; furthermore, allied occupation troops were to remain until the indemnity was paid. Nevertheless, it was still a peace of moderation, intended to ensure that France would remain a Great Power and that a balance of power in Europe could be maintained.

And so - looking at the trajectory of Anglo-French relations from Louis XIV to Napoleon, what fundamental changes took place? Fundamentally, the two countries exchanged positions in the international system. Under Louis XIV, France was the strongest power in Europe, the one striving for hegemony, the one whom it took a coalition of Powers to defeat. Under Napoleon, France was the strongest Power in Europe, the one striving for hegemony, the one whom it took a coalition of Powers to defeat. But this time, France stayed defeated. She remained a Great Power, and, until her defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to 1871, her army was viewed as the strongest in Europe. But after 1815, France was never again strong enough successfully to go it alone.

As for Great Britain : under William III, Great Britain was an increasingly important financial and naval Power, and a Great Power, if not absolutely one of the Greatest. But over the following century, her power

inexorably grew. Certainly, there were setbacks - the loss of the thirteen American colonies, for example, which at the time was perceived as a body blow. But there was still Canada, as well as other colonies in India, the West Indies, Africa and elsewhere. By 1815, the British Empire was already very large, in ten years it would be the largest in the world, and would soon thereafter grow larger still. To support this, and to safeguard her trade, Great Britain had a navy not only second to none, but quite unrivalled. She controlled the seas. She could afford such a navy because of the strength of her financial system and economy. Her political system, in spite of the occasional alarms, was fundamentally stable - alone of the European Powers, she did not experience a revolution in 1848. In short: in 1815 Great Britain - since 1800 the United Kingdom - was not just a European Great Power - she was the supreme world Power, what one historian has anachronistically called the first superpower. I suppose that, in relation to the time, she was.

I began with a piece written for Louis XIV; I wish to end with a piece written for Great Britain. The music, set to words by James Thomson, was written by Thomas Arne in 1740 for a masque called 'Alfred'. For more than a century, it was something of an alternative national anthem, and it still has the power to stir.

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