

# 7 – Absolutism and the Balance of Power in West and East, 1640-1740

This chapter covers a wide array of nations and rulers. To assist your comprehension, try employing the framework discussed earlier for each nation: Challenge + Response = Result. In response to the devastation of the religious wars and the general upheaval in the period 1550-1650, rulers increasingly justified their power based on absolutist or divine-right theories of monarchy. As we'll see in this chapter, not all accepted such theoretically expansive powers and worked to limit monarchical authority. Rulers also exploited developments in commerce to enhance their nations' power. The resulting competition led to nearly continuous warfare in this period over colonies, trade, and territory. To prevent the predominance of any one power (usually France), European diplomacy relied on the balance of power. Both of these trends – development of strong centralized monarchies and balance-of-power diplomacy – played out in eastern and western Europe against the backdrop of various political forms and the differing geographic and social imperatives of east and west.

KEY CONCEPT 2.1 Absolute monarchies in western, central and eastern Europe

KEY CONCEPT 2.1 Challenges to absolutism in England and the Dutch Republic

KEY CONCEPT 2.1 and 2.2 Warfare among the great powers over territory and commerce.

KEY CONCEPT 2.2 The theory and practice of mercantilism

KEY CONCEPT 2.3 Artistic movements that glorified the state and that reflected commercial

## Political Theories and the Age of Crisis

To understand the drive for centralized power in European states, it is useful to recall the context of the period 1550-1650. This period is often referred to as the Age of Crisis, owing to the cumulative effect of the following forces:

- Religious warfare
- Climate change involving poor weather
- Resulting shorter growing seasons, crop failures, and famines
- High taxes
- Internal rebellion
- Witchcraft accusations
- Intellectual changes in explaining natural phenomena (the Scientific Revolution)
- Economic changes: Price Revolution, enclosure, increase in poverty/begging
- Increase in violent and property crime

Though we prize our liberties today, this attitude may be a function of our relative political and social stability. In times of chaos and crisis, people often sacrifice rights in the interests of security and order. Such was the case for advocates of absolutism in the early 17th century. To provide for stability, some political theorists developed justifications for the enhanced power of rulers. Not all agreed with absolutist pretensions, and such opponents provided counter theories justifying limits on monarchical power (also see Chapter 6 for Hobbes and Locke). Given the strong religious beliefs of the period, arguments based

on the authority of God carried a natural resonance. Divine-right arguments were new only in the expansive powers with which theorists attempted to imbue them. The most famous advocate of divine-right rule was the French clergyman Bishop Bossuet (1627-1704). Quite simply, kings derive their power from God directly and rule on earth in his behalf. Once this view is understood, the resulting magnificent displays of power by Louis XIV and his imitators become clearer as a ruling strategy, as well as the abhorrence with which rebellion and treason were viewed in this era. Some defied the general trend toward absolutism, such as the Huguenots who endorsed resistance by local officials against what was perceived as a repressive monarchy.

## The Age of Louis XIV in France

### Foundations of French Absolutism: Henry IV and Louis XIII

Absolutism reached its highest expression in France during the reign of **Louis XIV** (r. 1643-1715). The previous two Bourbon monarchs laid the foundation for the sparkling but flawed edifice that was the Age of Louis XIV. **Henry IV** (r. 1589-1610), the first in the Bourbon line, after bringing the religious conflict to an end with the Edict of Nantes (1598), turned his attention to putting France's financial and economic house in order. Under Henry and his primary advisor, the Duc de Sully, the French state balanced its budget and established a firmer basis for taxation. In addition, Henry promoted economic development through the building of roads and canals, draining swamps, and promoting colonization. His strong

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rule allowed France to survive his assassination in 1610 and the regency of his wife, Marie de' Medici, on behalf of their son, Louis XIII. Louis XIII (r. 1610-1643) relied on the advice of his talented and shrewd advisor, Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642), who increased direct (*taille*) and indirect (*gabelle* – government salt monopoly) taxes. Louis and Richelieu concerned themselves with curbing the power of the nobility. To this effect, Richelieu banned dueling (which suggested violence independent of the state), employed spies to monitor the provincial nobility, and appointed *intendants*, or local officials, whose job it was to be the “eyes and ears of the monarchy.” In addition, while allowing Huguenots to maintain their religious practices, Richelieu forced them to relinquish their fortified towns. Though Richelieu was a prince of the Catholic Church, under his guidance France supported the Protestant forces during the Thirty Years' War. Like Machiavelli before him, politics was for Richelieu about *raison d'etat*, or “reason of state,” as he expressed it in his *Political Testament*. According to Richelieu, it was in France's interests to limit the growing power of the surrounding Habsburgs (the political leaders of the Catholic cause), regardless of the religious allegiances of Richelieu, or France more generally.

### Louis XIV and French Absolutism

#### • THEME MUSIC

The SP theme in this period revolves around the theory and practice of absolute monarchy, including those in opposition, such as corporate groups, provinces, and religious minorities. As you consider the material here on the French experience, keep an eye forward to explaining the long-term causes of the French Revolution.

When Louis XIV inherited the throne in 1643, France was once again faced with the prospect of a boy king (Louis was 5). Discontent over high taxes and foreign influence in government led to a series of rebellions in Paris and the countryside known as the *Fronde* (1648-1652). In fact, the young Louis's first memory involved fleeing from his capital in a carriage surrounded by an angry mob. The event convinced him to build his seat of government in the nearby suburb of Versailles and to establish an iron-fisted rule that could overwhelm any potential future opposition. Early in Louis's reign, the real ruler of France was Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661), who continued many of the policies of his predecessor, Richelieu. Upon Mazarin's death in 1661, Louis at the age of 23 took personal control of government and did not relinquish it until his death in 1715. A major concern for Louis was to overcome the provincialism and feudal remnants of the French state. Seventeenth-century France was divided by linguistic dialects, provincial customs and estates, and a variety of political bodies that potentially limited monarchical power. One such was the 15 regional

*parlements*, or courts, controlled by the nobles, and who by tradition had to register the king's decrees to give them effect. To control these bodies, Louis wielded threats of exile and confiscation of property, or involved nobles in court patronage and intrigue at the glittering palace of Versailles.

### The Palace at Versailles

No greater symbol of royal absolutism exists than Louis's palace at Versailles. Originally a hunting lodge, Versailles became under Louis a seat of government as well as a teeming city of patronage-seekers and the backdrop for the drama of Louis's kingship. Looking over the palace itself, the man-made canal, lush gardens, and grandiose outbuildings, one begins to understand the importance of Louis's expression “I am the state.” The palace was constructed over several decades, and though the records were deliberately destroyed, it is estimated that the palace absorbed as much as 60%-80% of the state's revenues during the years of its construction. Versailles was more than a royal residence. Nobles were encouraged to live on the grounds and participate in the pageantry of Louis's rule. Court etiquette and seeking royal favor deliberately occupied the energies of thousands of the French aristocracy, selfeely under Louis's gaze and unable to make trouble in the provinces. All of Louis's activities were infused with religious solemnity; nobles competed to participate in the ceremonies of the king's waking, dining, and retiring to bed (*lever*, *diner*, and *coucher*). French culture and the grandeur of Louis's Versailles became the envy of Europe, as elites across Europe sharpened their French language skills and rulers built their own mini-Versailles.

### Economic Policies

Reflecting a continental trend, France under Louis practiced mercantilism to enhance its economic position. Under Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683), the minister of finance and Louis's primary advisor, France developed a unified internal market and also expanded its commercial presence around the world. Like many nations, France's economy was limited by internal tariffs; though Colbert did not eliminate these, he did create a free-trade zone, known as the Five Great Farms, to facilitate commerce. In addition, Colbert continued to enhance France's infrastructure with roads, a postal system, and the establishment of manufacturing codes. Industries were organized into corporations, which fell under the guidance of the state, a process that helped the nation earn a reputation for high-quality luxury goods. To promote commerce, Colbert established the French East India Company (to rival Britain's and the Netherlands') and built a royal navy. High tariffs (taxes on imports) limited

foreign goods and, along with the high taxes imposed to finance Louis's many wars, had the effect of increasing the burden on the lower classes (especially peasants) by raising prices and taking much of their hard-earned subsistence. Members of the nobility had negotiated exceptions from many direct taxes over the years, creating a regressive and inefficient system that increased discontent as time wore on.

## Religious and Cultural Policies

Louis's commitment to the principle of "one king, one faith, and one law" persuaded him that the Calvinist Huguenots constituted a threat to these theoretical powers. In 1685 Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes by issuing the Edict of Fontainebleau, attempting forcibly to convert French Protestants back to Catholicism. Rather than convert, most simply took refuge, along with their property and skills, in those lands that welcomed them, such as the Dutch Republic and Brandenburg-Prussia.

The grandeur of Louis's France was often associated with its artistic and intellectual achievements. In the 1660s, Louis established the French Academy of Arts and the French Academy of Sciences. The former created paintings, sculpture, architecture, music, and drama under clear aesthetic guidelines—artists should glorify Louis, France, and link its greatness with classical subjects and style. Much of this patronage revolved around Versailles, which featured an opera house/theater for playwrights to express their comic or tragic commentaries on classical themes. Under Louis, France achieved a continental reputation for combining the scale of the Baroque (see below) with the restraint of the neoclassical. In the area of science, Louis hoped to exploit advances in astronomy, medicine, and navigation to enhance France's prestige as well as its economic and military potential.

## The Army

During the 17th century, France replaced Spain as the leading military power on the continent and the nation most often threatening the balance of power. Louis XIV tied his and France's greatness to the army. Under the Marquis de Louvois (1641-1691), Louis's minister of war, France's army became the largest in Europe at 400,000 men. Despite Louvois's skill and the addition of territory on France's eastern border, the wars of Louis XIV (see below) drained the treasury and severely taxed the country's manpower and resources.

### • THEME MUSIC

The most significant driver for the centralization of power (SP) was the military imperative. By 1650, most states had brought warfare under central control; however, the expense of war in the form of troops, munitions, and fortresses came to absorb the bulk of the state's budget, often prompting tax revolts and causing shifts in the fortunes of states.

## A Commercial Republic: the Dutch

For all of France's greatness, its small neighbor to the northeast posed a challenge by being different in almost every possible way. The seven northern provinces of the Netherlands (or United Provinces, officially the Dutch Republic after 1648) became Europe's leading commercial power in the first half of the 17th century. How did this nation of about 1 million people with few natural endowments threaten powerful France? First, the Dutch made efficient use of their resources. Land was recovered from the sea by use of dams and dikes and was then organized into *polders* for purposes of diverting water. After 1580, the Dutch moved into Portuguese markets in the East Indies and South America, establishing colonial outposts and reaping huge profits with their joint-stock companies. Second, the Dutch set themselves up as the "middlemen of Europe" by ignoring the prevailing mercantilist philosophy and using their fleet of maneuverable flyboats (or *fluyts*) to trade with all nations and their colonies. It didn't hurt that the Netherlands lay astride important trade routes in the Baltic and Atlantic. Amsterdam served as an *entrepot* city, where ships were efficiently uploaded and offloaded with goods (much like a modern computer file server), as well as the financial center of Europe, what with its *Bank of Amsterdam* and the Stock Exchange. Merchants played a key role in the Netherlands, and their activities drew investment and trade from all over Europe. Finally, the Netherlands practiced religious toleration, attracting Huguenot refugees from France, Jews, small Protestant denominations, and those fleeing the Inquisition in Spain. These talented minorities lent their business acumen and craftsmanship to the flourishing Dutch economy.

The period 1550-1650 marked the Dutch Golden Age. Its "embarrassment of riches" fueled an outpouring of cultural activity, which, unlike in France, focused on themes of middle-class domestic life, nature, and science. Talented painters, such as *Jan Vermeer* (1632-1675), *Judith Leyster* (1609-1660), *Frans Hals* (1588-1666), and *Rembrandt von Rijn* (1606-1669), reflected the Dutch preoccupation with light and shadow, natural landscapes, still lifes, domestic scenes, and group portraits. *René Descartes* (1596-1650) and *Baruch Spinoza* (1632-1677) found a home for their unorthodox philosophies in the Netherlands when they couldn't elsewhere. Such economic and cultural achievements attracted the envy of the Netherlands' larger neighbors.

Internal strife and external threat posed a problem for the Dutch. Constitutionally, the Netherlands were a loosely connected federation of seven provinces that often

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jealously guarded their liberties, but in times of war relied on leadership from the House of Orange in Holland. Because of continual threats to their security, the other six provinces elected William of Orange (later king of England) in 1673 the hereditary *stadholder* of the Netherlands, though the House of Orange never succeeded in creating a strong centralized monarchy. Given their inherent limitations, it was probably only a matter of time before the Netherlands was surpassed by its rivals. A major turning point proved to be the Anglo-Dutch Naval Wars, fought in three phases between 1652 and 1674 over the English Navigation Acts (1651, 1660), which attempted to restrict Dutch trade with England's colonies. Though the Dutch survived the onslaught, it seriously undercut their commercial power and set the stage for their later conflict with Louis XIV.

### • SKILL SET

Rivalries capture our attention, especially when they involve two strikingly different opponents. This is certainly the case with the conflict between the small, commercial Dutch and the opulent, absolutist juggernaut of France under Louis XIV. As you consider the evidence, keep in mind the contrasts (COMP) between these two rivals.

## Britain: Civil War and Limited Monarchy

### Causes of the Conflict

Like the so-called religious wars, the [English Civil War](#) was both religious and political in nature. The political component involved conflict over sovereignty (ultimate authority) between the new Stuart line of monarchs and the [English Parliament](#). Religiously, *Puritans* wished to purify the state Anglican Church of what they perceived as the residue of Catholic doctrine and worship, which the Stuarts seemed to endorse. Lasting almost a century (from 1603 to 1689), the conflict ultimately laid the foundations for England's unique system of government, which combined elements of monarchy, oligarchy ("rule by a few"), and democracy.

Elizabeth I died without an heir, leaving the throne (in 1603) to the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, James I. As a Scottish outsider, James failed to appreciate the important legislative role played by the English Parliament, whom he continually lectured about his divine-right powers and foolishly laid out in a book, *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598). In addition, James antagonized Puritans with the hierarchical structure he retained for the Anglican Church. To control the clergy and religion in general, James believed such an episcopal ("of bishops") structure was necessary; hence, his saying, "No bishop, no king." The growing number of Puritans in Parliament preferred a loose church configuration that allowed

individual congregations to control local affairs but cooperate through regional governing boards. James's policies fueled anti-Catholic sentiment, which was only heightened in 1605 when radical Catholics failed to blow up the Parliament, an event known as the Gunpowder Plot.

### The English Civil War

These issues came to head during the reign of James's son, *Charles I* (1625-1649). When Charles demanded revenue, Parliament instead issued the Petition of Right (1628), an assertion of its prerogatives regarding taxation and liberties from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. This latter issue had arisen due to the Stuarts use of the *Star Chamber*, a royal court in which standard judicial procedures were ignored in favor of secrecy and arbitrary judgments. Frustrated with Parliament, Charles decided to rule alone from 1629 to 1639, relying on revenues from the royal domain and the use of ship money—in which coastal towns were required to contribute either ships or money for defense. This latter policy had the effect of alienating the growing mercantile elite. Further, Charles's religious policies, guided by Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud (1573-1645), seemed to Puritans little different than Catholicism. Laud attempted to impose uniformity on the realm in 1640 with a new *Book of Common Prayer*, causing the Scots, who favored a decentralized church structure, to rise in rebellion.

Now Charles had to call the Parliament back into session in order defend against a Scottish invasion. Rather than grant Charles his requested taxes, the Parliament once again asserted its liberties and placed two of his top officials on trial for treason. When Charles attempted in 1642 to arrest the parliamentary leaders of the Puritan cause, his action misfired and plunged England into civil war. The war between the forces of the king (Cavaliers) and those of Parliament (Roundheads) resulted in the capture of Charles in 1645. This conflict brought the brilliant and zealous leader of Parliament's New Model Army to the fore – *Oliver Cromwell* (1599-1658). Not only an outstanding military leader who employed many of the new more flexible tactics, Cromwell was a devout Puritan who believed, along with his men, in religious toleration for all Protestant denominations and a democratic church structure.

### Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate

When Parliament refused to take action against the captured king, Cromwell surrounded the Parliament and drove out its more moderate members. This new Rump Parliament placed the king under arrest and executed him for treason in 1649. Soon Cromwell had disposed of even the Rump Parliament and named himself Lord Protector

under the only written constitution in England's history, the Instrument of Government (1653). Eventually Cromwell imposed military rule and pursued vigorous policies aimed at reforming English morals (by banning plays, gambling, and the celebration of Christmas, which smacked of Catholic "idolatry"), promoting English commerce via mercantilism, and violently subduing rebellion in Ireland and Scotland. After Cromwell's death in 1658, the English aristocracy, weary of military rule and Cromwell's Puritanism, agreed to restore the Stuart monarchy.

## The Stuart Restoration and Glorious Revolution

With the Restoration of Charles II (1660-1685) as monarch, the same issues of religion and political control quickly reasserted themselves. Though Charles privately inclined toward Catholicism, he hid his sympathies behind a façade of religious tolerance, while appointing Catholics as justices of the peace (local officials). In 1673, Parliament responded with the Test Act, which required all officeholders to take communion in the Church of England. Further, Charles's pro-French policy ran counter to years of English diplomacy. In fact, Charles had signed in 1670 the secret Treaty of Dover with Louis XIV, in which he gained an annual subsidy from the French king, while agreeing to reintroduce Catholicism in England at the first opportunity. With these funds, Charles was able to rule without Parliament in the last years of his reign.

What caused the end of the Stuart monarchy was the prospect of a Catholic dynasty for the foreseeable future. Charles's brother, James II (1685-88), ascended to the throne in 1685, despite the division in Parliament between those who supported his legitimate succession (Tories) and those who opposed him (Whigs). James was an avowed Catholic, which might have been tolerable, until his wife gave birth to a male heir in 1688. Faced with the prospect of a Catholic dynasty, Whig members of Parliament invited James's daughter Mary, a Protestant, and her husband, William of Orange, *stadholder* of the Netherlands, to invade the nation and claim the throne as co-rulers. The resulting **Glorious Revolution** proved a success, and William III (1689-1702) and Mary II (1688-1694) agreed to parliamentary sovereignty and recognition of English liberties with the *Bill of Rights* (1689). In addition, Parliament passed a Toleration Act (1689), which allowed Protestant dissenters to worship but excluded them from public service, and the Act of Succession (1701), which prohibited the English monarchy from ever being held by a Catholic. Finally, to cement ties formally with Scotland, the English Parliament agreed in 1707 to create the United Kingdom of Great

Britain. The Glorious Revolution and this series of events laid the foundation for Britain's unique but stable government and commercial dominance in the 18th century.

### • SKILL SET

England often seems a genteel and peaceful nation; however, its history involves ongoing conflicts over politics, religion, and ethnicity. Consider this periodization question: Which of the following dates represents the most significant turning point in English politics: 1534, 1603, 1649, 1689? Be prepared to justify your response.

## Art: From Mannerism to Baroque

Due to foreign invasion and economic decline, the Italian Renaissance style of symmetry, order, and classical themes gave way to one based on complex composition, distortion, and elongated human figures. This late 16th-century genre was known as **Mannerism**, meaning those who painted in the manner of the later Michelangelo, such as his *Last Judgment* (completed in 1542). The most famous Mannerist painter, who accomplished his greatest work during the Spanish Golden Age, was El Greco (1541-1614). Known for introducing yellows and grays into the painter's palette, El Greco expressed in works like *Burial of Count Orgaz* and *Landscapes of Toledo* a complex psychology toward a Spain on the verge of decline. To get an impression of the Mannerist style, you might also view Tintoretto's (1518-1594) version of *The Last Supper* and compare it with da Vinci's. Clearly, Catholic Counter-Reformation mysticism had replaced the classical style and one-point perspective of Leonardo's version.

### • THEME MUSIC

You may wish to find images of these artworks using an Internet search or by consulting one of art sites mentioned previously. As always, be prepared to place the art in context (CTX) by explaining the artist's technique and linking its subject matter to the concerns of the period. Baroque is the art of princes and popes, patronage and power. Can you make this conceptual link with a few examples of art?

Mannerism gradually evolved into the **Baroque** style, which dominated art and music from 1600 to about 1730. A major theme of the Baroque was power – reflecting rising absolute monarchs and a reviving Catholic Church, both of whom were the major patrons of Baroque artists. The figure most associated with the rebuilding of Rome in the age of the Counter-Reformation was **Gian Lorenzo Bernini** (1598-1680), an accomplished painter, sculptor, and architect. Bernini designed the magnificent altar in St. Peter's Basilica, the papal throne, and the welcoming arms of St. Peter's Square outside. In addition, Bernini's version of the *David* demonstrates the Baroque style eloquently: unlike Michelangelo's static psychological portrait, Bernini provides the viewer with the action of David flinging his slingshot. Bernini's most famous work – *The Ecstasy of Santa Teresa* – combines sculpture

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and architecture to create a rapturous religious vision. Absolute monarchs like Louis XIV needed artists to assist in conveying their grandeur. Court painters, such as [Velazquez](#) (1599-1660) of Spain, managed to win patronage by not only glorifying monarchy but also creating rich and complex commentaries on their subjects, as with *The Maids of Honor*. Another outstanding painter of the Baroque style who attracted many patrons was [Peter Paul Rubens](#) (1577-1640). Rubens was one of the first studio painters, employing a team of assistants to help him complete his many muscular and energetic compositions of scenes both religious, like *The Raising of the Cross*, and political, such as his *Portraits of Marie de' Medicis* (wife of Henry IV of France). In music, the compositions of [J.S. Bach](#), Antonio Vivaldi, [G.F. Handel](#), and the operas of Monteverdi expressed the Baroque fascination with ornate, complex structure as well as religious and secular themes of power.

## The Wars of Louis XIV

### • EXAMPLE BASE

You may be confused by the wars covered in this section. Focus your attention on the nature of war, the rivalries, the changing role of the state, and their effects on the balance of power. Military history on the AP exam tends to revolve around these issues and lesson on battles and strategy.

To understand European diplomacy, you must grasp the importance of the *balance of power*. Balance-of-power politics developed during the Italian Renaissance but reached its most explicit form during the Age of Louis XIV. Louis's desire to extend France to its "natural frontiers" (the Rhine River) and also accrue glory to himself led him into nearly constant warfare during his reign. As Spain continued its decline under the Habsburgs, France rushed in to exploit the vacuum of power in western Europe. In each of these wars, Louis animated a coalition of powers against him to prevent his threat to the balance of power, or the dominance of one nation over the rest. As you read over the wars below, focus on how the balance of power operates and shifts with each phase of conflict.

The first targets of Louis's ambitions were the Spanish Netherlands and Dutch Republic, the latter whose commercial success he envied. This *Dutch War* earned Louis the strategic province of Franche-Comte (formerly Burgundy), which outflanked Alsace-Lorraine, his next target. Taking advantage of the growing weakness of the Holy Roman Empire, Louis in 1689 then invaded Alsace-Lorraine. The subsequent *Nine Years' War* resulted in an anti-French alliance, also known as the League of Augsburg. Now both the *stadholder* of the Netherlands and king of England, William III (of Orange) pieced together this coalition to prevent Louis's bid for

continental domination. Famines, sieges, and high taxes marked this desultory conflict, which ended in 1697 practically where it started, with Louis gaining only a few towns along his border. Bigger game awaited, as the Spanish monarch, Charles II, continued to decline in health, with no heir to the throne.

European royal houses had waited decades for the death of poor Charles II (1665-1700), the last Habsburg ruler of Spain and sad result of generations of interbreeding between the Spanish and Austrian Habsburg lines. Complicating matters, Louis XIV and the Holy Roman Emperor claimed the throne through family marriages to Charles's sisters. Both contenders signed a treaty in 1700 to partition the Spanish Empire and thus maintain the balance of power. These plans fell to naught when Charles left a will in 1700 after his death granting all possessions to his nephew, Philip V, the Bourbon grandson of Louis XIV. Louis decided to press his claim to the Spanish throne via his grandson. The resulting *War of Spanish Succession* (1702-1713) proved to be the most costly, important, and last of Louis's wars for continental domination. France and Spain faced off against England, the Netherlands, the Holy Roman Emperor, and a few smaller states. Warfare in the 18th century involved deliberate movements designed to outmaneuver opponents or capture strategic fortresses. The war dragged expensively on, as each nation – large and small – exploited the conflict to meet long-held territorial and political goals.

With the Peace of Utrecht in 1714 the conflict finally came to a close. Louis's grandson Philip V (1700-1749) did become the Bourbon ruler of Spain, but it was a truncated empire that could never be united with its northern Bourbon neighbor of France. To recognize the weak position of Spain, the 10 southern provinces of the Netherlands were given to Austria (now the Austrian Netherlands), as were former Spanish territories in Italy. The big winner of the conflict proved to be England, which gained Gibraltar, a fortress at the opening of the Mediterranean, new territory in North America, and the privilege of trading with the Spanish Empire, known as the *asiento*. Britain's Protestant succession was also confirmed, and it was poised, with a stable government and enhanced commercial position, to become the leading maritime power in Europe. As we'll see below, other nations either emerged from the conflict with new found or curtailed power. However, the major consequences of the war and the treaty were to block Louis XIV's last effort to impose French domination on the continent and to confirm the European state system of sovereign nations constantly shifting positions to maintain or create a balance of power. On his deathbed in 1715, Louis told his heir and great-grandson (the future Louis XV) that he feared he "had loved war too much."

## Aging Empires in the East

Three aging states dominated central Europe in the 17th century—the Holy Roman Empire, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire. The weakness of these “soft states” – so-called because of their loose organization allowed for the emergence of a new constellation of powers. Following the Thirty Years’ War (1648), the Holy Roman Empire’s status as a loose confederation of over 300 German states was confirmed. The traditional rulers of the empire, the Austrian Habsburgs, turned east over the next century to enhance their power, particularly at the expense of the declining Ottoman Empire. Though Austria was able to gain significant swaths of land in east-central Europe, these conquests continued to bring more non-German minorities (Slavs, Poles, Italians, Romanians, and Ukrainians) into the empire, which later proved a centrifugal force, as nationalism took hold in the 19th century.

### • SKILL SET

As you may have noticed, some states experienced success and others failure in their attempts to enhance their power and overcome internal divisions and external threats. Be able to place sets of nations side by side (e.g., France and Poland) and explain the reasons for the outcomes (COMP).

Poland was the weakest of the European kingdoms. Ironically, Poland had been in 1500 the largest nation in Europe. Throughout the 16th century, the powerful nobles of Poland – the *szlachta*, who made up almost 10% of the population – succeeded in limiting the power of the Polish kings. Eventually, the Polish monarchy evolved into an elective position, and one that was fought over by rival European powers, who bribed the noble-electors with promises of religious toleration and respect for their “liberties.” After 1587, the nation was ruled by only two native-born monarchs. Further, a single noble could block the actions of the Sejm, Poland’s representative body, by using the *liberum veto*. Poland’s experience ran counter to the larger trend toward absolutism, and unable to establish permanent taxes or a standing army, Poland fell prey to larger rivals. The tragic result of this failure to centralize for the formerly great kingdom was *Poland’s Partition* in 1795. After the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Empire periodically sent shock waves of fear throughout central Europe with an ebb and flow of expansion. In 1529, the Turks had nearly captured Vienna, but eventually fell back into internal turmoil for over a century. Once again, in 1683 the Turks besieged the Habsburg capital, which was rescued triumphantly by a multinational Holy League (led by the last great native Polish king, Jan Sobieski) at the *Battle of Vienna*. Never again would the Turks pose a major threat to central Europe. What had once been Ottoman strengths, now

decayed; the empire simply did not keep up with rest of Europe. First, the Turkish rulers, the Sultans, grew corrupt from court intrigue, assassination plots, and sensuous living. Second, the once-great Janissaries, the elite fighters comprised of former Christians, became a static force opposed to technological and strategic change. Finally, though the Ottoman rulers tolerated religious minorities (more so than most European nations), the resulting tradition of local rule made it difficult to draw effectively on the resources of the empire’s far-flung provinces. Many states, such as France, desired the continued existence of the Ottoman Empire as a counterweight to the Austrian Habsburgs, but only if the Islamic state could be influenced and indirectly controlled from the outside.

## Austria Turns East

Once the Austrian Habsburgs held off the Turkish invasion in 1683, they were able to turn the battle back toward their long-time enemies. Employing the talents of a castoff from the court of Louis XIV, Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736), the Austrians defeated the Turks, gaining back Hungary and adding Transylvania, as well as territory in the Balkan Peninsula, by treaty (1699). Austria needed to end the Turkish conflict so as to turn their attention to the impending War of Spanish Succession (see above): Though the Austrians were unable to reunite the two Habsburg branches (Spanish and Austrian) during the conflict, the Peace of Utrecht (1713-1714) granted them territory in the Netherlands and Italy. The reign of Emperor Charles VI (1711-1740) was dominated by one issue: ensuring the succession of his daughter and heir, Maria Theresa (1740-1780), to the many Habsburg lands. To this effect, Charles negotiated the Pragmatic Sanction with Europe’s rulers, whereby they agreed to respect the Habsburg inheritance to a female ruler. Given the circumstances, Austria adjusted effectively after its losses in the Thirty Years’ War, but as we’ll see in the next chapter, the succession issue would ultimately cost the Habsburgs their dominant position in central Europe.

## The Rise of Prussia and Its Army

The rise of Brandenburg-Prussia (later simply Prussia) in the 17th century was a surprise. A scattered nation with a small population (2 million in 1650) and few natural resources, Prussia relied heavily on three factors for its amazing rise to power: 1) skillful and resolute leadership from the Hohenzollern dynasty, 2) efficient use of resources, and, most importantly, 3) an outstanding military tradition. As was often joked, “Prussia is not a state with an army, but an army with a

## AP Achiever

state.” For no other nation was the military so closely associated with its power and prestige.

Brandenburg stood in the middle of north-central Germany, of importance only as an Elector of the Holy Roman Emperor. However, in 1618 the Hohenzollerns inherited the Duchy of Prussia, so far east that it was surrounded by Poland. During the Thirty Years’ War, Brandenburg experienced widespread devastation, its capital city of Berlin reduced to a village of rubble. Nonetheless, Brandenburg-Prussia gained territory in the west along the Rhine and in Pomerania as a result of the Peace of Westphalia (1648). Frederick William, the Great Elector (1640-1688), resolved that his nation would never again be overrun by invading armies.

Frederick William was the first in a line of great Prussian rulers. To gain the support of the Prussian nobility (the Junkers) Frederick William granted them important positions in the army and allowed them almost complete power over their serfs. In exchange, the aristocracy agreed to accept Hohenzollern leadership and an excise tax to fund the activities of the state. With these funds, Frederick William erected the skeleton of the Prussian state. To collect the taxes, Frederick William created the General War Commissariat, which at first provisioned the army but evolved into a state bureaucracy, famous for its punctuality and efficiency. The Hohenzollern rulers generally lived a Spartan existence, allowing most of the state’s revenues to flow into the army. Though Frederick William enhanced the army to 40,000 men, his goal was not to use it for conquest, but for security and as the glue that held scattered Prussia together. In addition, Frederick William practiced mercantilism by establishing monopolies, raising tariffs on imported goods, and promoting economic development. When Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, the Prussian state welcomed the persecuted Huguenots, eager to cash in on their economic skills.

During the War of Spanish Succession, the Habsburg emperor called on the support of Brandenburg-Prussia to drive out the French from Germany. As a reward for his support, the duke of Brandenburg-Prussia earned himself a new title-king in Prussia. The first great king of Prussia proved to be Frederick William I (1713-1740), not to be confused with Frederick William, the Great Elector. Frederick William’s personality and approach to governing were strict, paternalistic, and austere. The ruler could be seen patrolling the streets of his realm with a walking stick, admonishing government officials or wayward citizens. Efficiency and duty took precedence over all else. State funds were used judiciously to augment the size of the army (up to 83,000) and often at the expense of the royal household budget. Frederick William introduced merit to government service, often promoting the middle

class, though this by no means challenged the primary position of the Junkers or the army. However, Frederick William fought no wars in his reign. This feat he left for the son with whom he never got along, Frederick II.

## Peter and the Westernization of Russia

### • SKILL SET

The skill of CCOT applies especially well to Russian history. Though many rulers have attempted the modernization of Russia, a continual theme has been the difficulty of Russia to establish a functioning democracy able to harness the energies of its people, despite the changes in policies and regimes. The vast expanse and ethnic/linguistic diversity of Russia has often meant a top-down government. How does Peter I connect with this issue?

### Russia’s Unique Position

Much of Russia is *in* Europe, but Russia has not always been *of* Europe. Many of the trends we have addressed thus far – Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution (see Chapter 6) – did not touch the Russian state or its people. For many in the west, Russia was a mystery, more closely tied to the political and religious traditions of Asia. It is not as difficult, however, to identify the thrust of Russia’s experience, as the themes of (1) expansion and (2) relative backwardness define its role in European history.

As we’ve seen, Russia made strides in establishing a larger and more modern state under both Ivan III and Ivan IV in the 16th century. These rulers succeeded in driving the Mongols from much of central Asia, establishing some semblance of an administrative structure and creating a military class (*streltsy*). Unfortunately, Ivan IV killed his heir to the throne in a fit of rage, causing Russia to enter a difficult period of internal instability and foreign invasion known as the Time of Troubles (1604-1613). The situation was not resolved until the feudal estates (Zemsky Sobor) elected Michael Romanov (1613-1645) as the tsar of Russia. Romanov rule would last in Russia until the Russian Revolution in 1917 led to the end of the family line.

Russia now gained stability but continued to lag behind Europe. First, it was during the 17th century that Russia’s oppressive system of *serfdom* was put into legal form. Though other nations in eastern and central Europe practiced serfdom, only in Russia could serfs be bought and sold like chattel. This slave-like existence often provoked massive rebellions, in which discontented serfs often allied with Cossacks (a warrior tribe) in proclaiming the overthrow of landlords and those in authority. Furthermore, Russia’s dominant religion was the tradition-bound Orthodox Church, which tended to oppose social and religious changes. When the Russian



patriarch Nikon (head of the Russian Orthodox Church) undertook reforms in the Bible and worship, a group called the Old Believers opposed the reforms and threatened to break away from the church. These represent only two issues facing Russia during this period, but they demonstrate well the divide between Russia's people and its government, as well as the conflict between tradition and modernization.

## The Reforms of Peter the Great

Peter I, the Great (1682-1725) stands as one of the greatest and most fascinating figures in Russian history. On one hand, Peter was attracted by all that was modern – technology, science, industry; on the other, he could be brutal and ruthless in the pursuit of his goals. By the sheer force of his personality and vision, Peter within a generation brought Russia into the European state system and made his nation a great power. Though Peter did succeed in making the rest of Europe take note of Russia's might, his reforms did not seep down to the common person and often created divisions within Russian society.

As a boy in Moscow, Peter enjoyed the company of westerners who lived in the so-called German suburb of the city. Here he learned about engineering and manufacturing. When Peter took the throne, he decided to embark on a Great Embassy (1697-1698) to the west with hundreds of technical advisors. Peter attempted to travel incognito, but it was hard to miss the nearly 7-foot-tall Russian leader as he visited shipyards, manufactories, and colleges. The trip was cut short as Peter faced a rebellion at home by the *streltsy*, who perceived Peter's reforms as a threat to their power. Upon his return, Peter personally interrogated and executed many of the leaders of the rebellion, hanging their bodies on the city gates as a warning to others. With this storehouse of new technical skill, however, Peter helped build Russia's first navy and a more modern army. During his reign, Peter was nearly continuously at war, generally with the Ottoman Turks and Swedes.

Internally, Peter set out to strengthen the nation as well as reform the habits of his people. Taxes were imposed on a variety of items, including "heads," known as the poll tax. With these funds, Peter pursued mercantilist policies aimed at making Russia a commercial nation, with its own joint-stock companies, merchant fleet, and monopolies. Peter even employed serf labor in mining, metallurgy, and textile manufacture. Russians also needed to look modern, so Peter banned the wearing of long coats, beards, and the veiling of women. To promote loyalty to the state, Peter required all members of the landowning class to engage in state service. This later evolved into a system of merit, known as the Table of Ranks, whereby subjects could rise in status based on

contributions to the state. To make governing the vast Russian expanse more effective, Peter eliminated the feudal organs of self-government and divided the nation into 10 governing units, with a senate of advisers to assist him in day-to-day administration. Finally, to resolve the conflict within the Russian Orthodox Church, Peter simply eliminated the position of patriarch and instead placed the church under the control of the state, a power that was exercised through a Holy Synod of bishops.

## The Great Northern War

The primary goal of these changes was to gain territory at the expense of Russia's neighbors. At first, Peter directed his attention toward the Black Sea, hoping to gain a port city there. His campaigns failed to achieve much, except to demonstrate the backwardness of the Russian military. However, Peter's main rival was Sweden, whose territory and dominant position in the Baltic he wished to replace. After initial defeat in the Great Northern War (1700-1721) with Sweden, Peter learned from his mistakes and changed tactics and technology. Using the traditional Russian tactic of drawing the enemy into the Russian interior to face its brutal winter, Peter eventually gained a victory. By the Treaty of Nystadt (1721), Russia gained significant territory in the Baltic, which allowed Peter to build a new capital city, St. Petersburg, which represented his "window to the west." Never before had Russian influence extended so far into Europe. No doubt, Peter accomplished much in his forced modernization of Russia. Prior to his reign, Russia was a large but backward entity relatively unknown to the rest of Europe. When Peter died in 1725, he left a Russia a great power of Europe, feared for its sheer size and military potential. Many elites in Russia eagerly adopted Peter's reforms, as they saw in them the potential for individual gain and national power. Nonetheless, most of Peter's reforms came at the expense of the masses-serfs, The Orthodox Church, lower classes. While Russia had adopted a veneer of technological and industrial might, its autocratic (rule by one person) system of government was fastened more tightly on the nation than ever before. In the short run, Russia was now a major power and always a threat to expand; in the long run, these perennial issues of backwardness and autocratic rule contributed to the Russian Revolution in the 20th century