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European Warfare 1453–1815

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Problems in Focus

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meaning 'the stutterer'. But he published his 1537 treatise on ballistics anyway, in the hope that it might improve Christian gunnery in a future crusade against the Turk (and in his dedication Tartaglia encouraged king Henry VIII of England to take up that crusade). A 1595 treatise by Francesco Patrizi, the *Paralleli Militari* – published even as Maurice of Nassau was drawing his own parallels in the Netherlands – explicitly connected the essence of the new-style infantry discipline with its virtues in war against the Turk: the book revealed, according to its title page, 'the various customs and the regulations of the Ancients accommodated to our firearms; by the power of this true art of war a few men can defeat the great multitudes of the Turks'.¹⁸ Though preoccupied with the affairs of Europe, Western statesmen and intellectuals could never completely forget the horsehair standards, the crescent flags and the brazen cymbals of the sultan's vast and infidel hosts. It was to fight those hordes that the military revolution was in part proposed; it was in matching those hordes on the field of battle that the military revolution was proved.

2. Warfare in the Age of the Thirty Years War 1598–1648

RONALD G. ASCH

POLITICS AND ARMED CONFLICT: THE ORIGINS OF WAR

The years 1598–1648 were for many parts of Europe a period of almost permanent warfare. After 1618 central Europe was engulfed by the Thirty Years War, which involved not only the Emperor and the principalities of the Holy Roman Empire, but also the Netherlands, Spain, and at later stages of the conflict Denmark, England, Sweden and France. Nor had the years before 1618 been particularly peaceful, although the first decade of the seventeenth century saw a number of prolonged armed conflicts come to an end. The Spanish attempt to intervene in France during the French Wars of Religion had been abandoned in 1598 with the Peace of Vervins. The war between England and Spain – which went back to 1585 – had been ended in 1604, a year after the end of the Nine Years War in Ireland (1594–1603), which had been closely connected with the Anglo-Spanish contest. Even the conflict between Spain and her 'rebellious' provinces in the Low Countries had been interrupted in 1609 by a twelve-year truce, and the long war between the Emperor and the Sultan which had begun in 1593 was ended in 1606 by the treaty of Zsitvatorok. Peace between Turkey and the Austrian Habsburgs remained somewhat uneasy, small-scale warfare continued, and the Prince of Transylvania was to intervene in the Thirty Years War more than once with Turkish support, but a somewhat uneasy cessation of hostilities on any large scale was, nevertheless, achieved in 1606.¹

But smaller conflicts continued to jeopardise the uneasy peace gradually achieved in Europe between 1598 and 1609. As early as

1600 France had occupied by force of arms the provinces ruled by the Duke of Savoy north of the Alps on the western bank of the river Rhône (Bresse, Bugey, Gex), a conquest which Savoy had accepted in the following year. Savoy was involved between 1612 and 1617 in another armed dispute over the inheritance of Duke Francesco Gonzaga of Mantua, who had died without direct male heirs. Charles Emmanuel of Savoy claimed the Montferrat, a part of the Gonzaga inheritance which formed an enclave in Savoy territory. He only abandoned this claim in 1617 under Spanish pressure, when he realised that he could not expect much support from France.

The war over the Gonzaga inheritance was a conflict of limited dimensions, but everything that happened in northern Italy immediately threatened to provoke a major European war, as France had never entirely abandoned her claim, going back to the end of the fifteenth century, to exert some influence in Italy, which had been dominated in the second half of the sixteenth century by Spain. Essentially it was only because France was too weak to embark upon a major war after the death of Henry IV in 1610 that the confrontation in northern Italy did not escalate into a more serious European conflict.²

If Italy was a trouble spot between 1600 and 1618, so was the Lower Rhine, where the death of the last Duke of Cleves in 1609 nearly provoked a major European war. The inheritance was claimed by various German princes who tried to gain the support of either Spain or the Dutch Republic and France. In fact, Henry IV had been about to intervene in the dispute at the head of his army in 1610 when he was murdered by a Catholic fanatic.³ Finally, the Baltic was another area where the tensions between the various powers repeatedly led to war before 1618. In a brief confrontation with Sweden, Denmark had asserted her superiority in 1611–13 for the last time. Poland and Sweden had intermittently been at war from 1600 onwards. Though hostilities died down after 1605 and were in fact settled temporarily by occasional truces, they resumed in earnest in 1617. After another truce, they flared up again in 1620–22, and did not end until 1629. During the same period Russia and Sweden were at war between 1614 and 1617.⁴

Thus the beginning of the Thirty Years War had been preceded by quite a number of minor or not so minor regional conflicts

(only some of the more important ones have mentioned here). Why was peace so difficult to achieve and often so unstable once it had been achieved, as in 1609 in the form of a truce between Spain and the Dutch Republic, or in 1598 between Spain and France? One obvious answer could be that the increased ability of the major European powers to wage war – growing financial resources, and a greater number of soldiers serving in the armed forces, for example – inevitably led to armed conflict, given the absence of any institution capable of settling disputes between rulers with conflicting legal claims, at least outside the Holy Roman Empire. Here, in Germany, the highest law courts did provide a mechanism for this purpose before the constitution of the Empire gradually broke down between the 1590s and 1618. However, for a number of conflicts the opposite answer is far more plausible, that is, that it was not the growing strength but the weakness of existing states and political systems which caused wars, or at least was responsible for the escalation and prolongation of hostilities once war had broken out. This point has recently been made by the German historian Johannes Burckhardt, who interprets warfare essentially as part of a long-term state-building process.⁵

Many of the larger European states were, in fact, composite monarchies, that is, they consisted of a number of individual kingdoms and principalities owing allegiance to the same dynasty but otherwise governed according to their own particular constitutional traditions.⁶ The Spanish empire in Europe and the dominions of the Austrian Habsburgs are the best known examples of such composite monarchies, but in fact the Stuart monarchy, comprising England, Scotland and Ireland, and the Danish monarchy (Denmark, Norway, Schleswig and Holstein), can also be considered composite states. The problem with such political structures was that any attempt to make them more coherent could easily have the opposite effect. The attitude of the individual provinces towards the dynastic centre was often far too ambivalent to guarantee their loyalty if it was put to the test by raising taxes or enforcing religious conformity. Spain had been confronted with the problem in the Netherlands as early as the 1560s. Later, in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, the Emperors Rudolf, Mathias and Ferdinand II were successively to encounter similar forms of provincial resistance against centralising policies in their dominions. It was the revolt in

Bohemia in 1618 which provoked the outbreak of the Thirty Years War. Ferdinand II had too few resources and troops to put the rebellion down himself and had to appeal for outside help from Spain and Bavaria, a decision which immediately transformed the Bohemian war into a struggle in which the entire Holy Roman Empire and – directly or indirectly – the great European powers were involved.⁷ Later still, at the end of the 1630s and in the early 1640s, Charles I faced rebellions first in Scotland and then in Ireland, which in their turn triggered off a civil war in England in 1642.⁸

The Holy Roman Empire can hardly be described as a composite monarchy. Rather, it was a political system *sui generis*, certainly more than a mere federation of states, but clearly less than a state in the sense in which France or England were states during this period, with nationwide administrative and fiscal structures providing an institutionalised link between central and local government. Nevertheless, the relationship between the political centre, the imperial court, and the periphery, the principalities and imperial cities outside the Emperor's immediate control, was a major cause for political friction in Germany as much as in other monarchies. Ultimately, in combination with the Bohemian rebellion, it was the cause of the greatest military conflict of the early seventeenth century, the Thirty Years War. The crucial questions in this respect were, to what extent the Emperor, with or without support from the Imperial Diet, should be entitled to limit the options available to individual princes in matters of confessional policy, and to what extent his interpretation of the Empire's fundamental laws should be binding.⁹

The internal tensions afflicting the Holy Roman Empire and composite monarchies such as the dominions of the Spanish and the Austrian Habsburgs caused wars which are difficult to categorise. Were they civil wars or conflicts between states? In fact civil wars and 'international' war merged into each other during this period – one of the reasons why peace proved so elusive. Whereas the wars of the eighteenth century could in some ways be described as moves in a well-established game in which the European states fought for power and status, the wars of the early seventeenth century were still conflicts in which the very

rules of the game themselves were at stake. Could German princes who were the Emperor's liegemen legitimately enter into an alliance with France or Sweden, or even wage war against the Emperor without committing the crimes of high treason and felony, for example? Questions such as these were to bedevil the peace negotiations in Osnabrück and Münster at the end of our period. The Peace of Westphalia did make a contribution to a clearer definition of the *ius ad bellum*, the right to wage war, although it never quite managed to clarify the status of the German princes once and for all: they gained some of the attributes of sovereignty such as the right to pursue their own foreign policy, without becoming fully sovereign, because they still owed allegiance to the Empire and its ruler.¹⁰

In the years before 1648 it had been quite normal for princes and Estates who were subject to an overlord to appear as independent agents on the stage of European politics. The Estates of Bohemia deposed their King in 1619 (not to mention the older example of the Dutch provinces which had seceded from the empire of the Spanish Habsburgs in 1581), and the French Huguenots tried to defend their privileges by force of arms against Louis XIII in the 1620s, supported in 1627–28 by England. The Estates of Catalonia rose against Philip IV of Spain and received help from France in the 1640s. French noble magnates, including for a long time the Duke of Orléans, Louis XIII's heir-presumptive until 1638, co-operated intermittently with Spain during the 1630s and 1640s, and in particular during and after the *Frondes* of 1648–53, while France was at war with the Habsburgs.¹¹

The inherent instability of many European states and monarchies was an important cause of military conflicts or their escalation, but confessional antagonism certainly also loomed large as a factor exacerbating existing tensions within and between states. In fact it provided a decisive link between domestic conflicts and European politics. Without the conflict between Protestants (in particular Calvinists) and Catholics in the Holy Roman Empire, the Thirty Years War would have been inconceivable. It was the all-pervasive atmosphere of mistrust and hatred between the religious opponents which made a political solution to the constitutional problems of the Empire so difficult. There was certainly no area before 1618, or during the first half of the war, in which

the authority of the Emperor – or indeed the imperial Diet in so far as it took majority decisions – was more hotly contested than in confessional matters.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that outside Germany and even within the Empire, conflicts between princes who subscribed to the same confession were by no means exceptional. France and Spain were, with the possible exception of the years 1610–24, almost always on the brink of war, if not actually at war. Relations between Denmark and Sweden, both Lutheran countries, were hardly much better. Even the Duke (later Elector) of Bavaria and the Austrian Habsburgs, who co-operated very closely during the Thirty Years War, did not really see eye-to-eye on many issues. Maximilian of Bavaria certainly did not want the Emperor to become an absolute ruler in Germany, nor was he prepared to give more than token support to Spanish policy in Central Europe.¹² Within the Protestant camp the Elector of Saxony followed a pro-Habsburg policy. Admittedly, in this case the implacable hatred felt by the leading Saxon theologians (all orthodox Lutherans) for Calvinism in any form did play a role in influencing policy – the Elector Palatine, leader of the radical Protestants in the early 1620s, was a Calvinist.¹³

However, with the possible exception of the period between the Edict of Restitution and the Peace of Prague (1629–35), the war in Germany was never a straightforward religious conflict. Too many Protestant princes remained neutral, or co-operated with the Emperor most of the time. Outside Germany the influence of religion on foreign policy and war was often even less obvious. Although Swedish intervention in Germany in 1630 was interpreted by pro-Swedish pamphlets published in Germany as a crusade for the liberty of true religion, and did in fact assume some of the characteristics of such a crusade, Swedish fears of Habsburg–Polish military and naval co-operation, and the desire to secure Swedish control of all trade in the Baltic, originally loomed at least as large as enthusiasm for the Protestant cause in Gustavus Adolphus's decision to intervene.¹⁴

Another example is the war between Spain and the Dutch Republic. Although the Republic and Spain still appealed in all sincerity to religious ideals to legitimate their policy, economic interests (for example Spain's wish to reopen Antwerp as a port, which was impossible as long as the Dutch blockaded the en-

trance to the river Scheldt), commercial and colonial conflicts outside Europe and questions of prestige and status were, probably in the last resort, more important for refuelling the conflict between Spain and the Dutch, with the result that the truce was not prolonged in 1621.¹⁵ However, in many countries, religious loyalties were the only reliable basis for any sort of popular or even elite support for foreign policy – difficult to dispense with if war had to be financed by taxes granted by parliaments or assemblies of Estates, as in England. It could pose a serious problem if the objectives actually pursued by a government were impossible to justify in confessional terms, as in the case of Richelieu's anti-Spanish policy.

The Franco-Spanish conflict was in many ways a special case. On the one hand its roots lay in a classic dynastic dispute which went back to the sixteenth, if not the late fifteenth, century. The Valois – the predecessors of the Bourbons as Kings of France before 1589 – and the Habsburg dynasties had already confronted each other in the dispute over the Burgundian inheritance after the death of the last independent Duke of Burgundy in 1477, and from the 1490s onwards in Northern Italy. On the other hand, the long-term elements in the confrontation between France and Spain should not be overemphasised. Cardinal Richelieu, who was in charge of French policy between 1624 and 1642, was anxious to avoid a full-scale war with Spain. He felt that France could not match the resources of the Spanish empire and that an open alliance with Protestant powers such as Sweden (as opposed to the mere payment of subsidies), which would be difficult to avoid in an all-out war against the house of Habsburg, would create all sorts of problems for a Catholic country like France, both at home and abroad. He nevertheless went to war with Spain over Mantua in 1629. The last Gonzaga Duke had died and the potential heir with comparatively the best claims was a French nobleman, the Duke of Nevers. The Spanish tried to prevent Nevers from taking possession of the Gonzaga dominions, Mantua and Montferrat. For Richelieu this was an opportunity too good to be missed, given that Spain could be attacked in Italy without appealing to the help of Protestant states, and that it seemed possible to confine hostilities to Italy. The dispute over the Gonzaga inheritance was indeed settled largely in Nevers's and, therefore, France's favour in 1630–31 because the Emperor,

allied with his Spanish cousin, had deserted Madrid at a crucial moment, when confronted with growing opposition among his allies in Germany and facing the threat of Swedish intervention in the Empire.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the war had also demonstrated that the fighting capacity of the French army was very limited. It was therefore by no means a foregone conclusion that Spain and France would go to war again in 1635, and this time openly and on all fronts. Essentially both Richelieu, and the Conde-Duque Olivares acting for Spain, took this decision more because they felt vulnerable – inspired by a sort of worst-case scenario – than out of a feeling of strength. France had pursued a covert war against the Habsburgs in Lorraine and the neighbouring German territories in the early 1630s. Olivares felt that only by converting this undeclared small-scale war at a favourable moment into an all-out military confrontation could he gain the full support of the Emperor who had already demonstrated in 1630–31 that he was an unreliable ally. By attacking French troops on the Moselle in March 1635 and thereby provoking an escalation of the conflict, Olivares hoped to create a situation in which a war between France on the one hand and the Emperor with all the German princes on the other hand became inevitable.

Richelieu for his part could not ignore the Spanish provocation, reluctant though he still was to commit himself to a war à l'outrance because he had staked his entire political fortune on a belligerent anti-Spanish foreign policy since autumn 1628. He had made many enemies in France in the process: devout advocates of a confessional foreign policy, protagonists of financial and administrative reform, and all those who opposed high taxation in the name of the 'soulagement du peuple', relief for the hard-pressed populace. If his policy now turned out to be a failure, Richelieu's opponents would win the day, as the Cardinal could never be entirely sure of Louis XIII's wholehearted support.¹⁷

Domestic issues and problems of foreign policy therefore remained inextricably linked in the early seventeenth century, not just in the French case, and the military conflicts of this period were as much or more a result of the inherent instability and weakness of most European monarchies and states as of their strength.

THE STRUCTURE OF WARFARE: TACTICS, STRATEGY AND NUMBERS

The early seventeenth century is often considered to be a period in which warfare underwent important changes, in fact, a crucial phase in the 'military revolution' of the early modern age.¹⁸ Many years ago Michael Roberts, the biographer of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, argued that this military revolution culminated in the reforms undertaken by the King of Sweden, who managed to perfect the improvements accomplished in the Dutch army during the war against Spain before 1609. The Swedish infantry, the argument runs, was better trained and better disciplined than that of other armies, achieved a higher firing power and was more flexible in battle, because in combat it was deployed in comparatively small units only about six lines deep.¹⁹ The best infantry of the day, the Spanish, originally had a tradition of fighting in massive *tercios*, square formations of up to thirty lines deep, although this pattern of deployment had already been substantially modified by the beginning of the Thirty Years War.²⁰ Furthermore – and Roberts strongly emphasised this point – Gustavus Adolphus revived the cavalry's offensive role on the battlefield. Whereas it had become customary for horsemen to attack infantry units or even hostile cavalry formations by trotting up to them, discharging their pistols, and, more often than not, retreating, Gustavus allegedly had them attack at full gallop with drawn sabre or sword, perhaps after an initial volley of shots.²¹ In ordering this change of tactics he was apparently inspired by the Polish horse regiments which he had encountered on the battlefields of Eastern Europe.

More recent research, however, has shown that the Swedish horse never entirely abandoned the *caracole*, the attack with fire-arms at a comparatively slow trot; in fact, attack at full gallop with the *arme blanche* as the principal or only weapon did not become customary in the Swedish cavalry until the 1680s. Gustavus Adolphus did, however, at times have only the first line of an attacking squadron fire one of their pistols (not both). The second and any further lines used only their swords to attack, although the pistols – still loaded – could be useful in the ensuing *mêlée* with the enemy.²²

On the other hand, the tactical approach of Tilly, Gustavus Adolphus's opponent at Breitenfeld in 1631, was not as outdated as has sometimes been maintained, although he had been trained in the Spanish army. He relied far less on massive, unwieldy infantry squares than the *cliché* of the determined and courageous but old-fashioned and unimaginative Catholic general would suggest.²³ What did give the Swedish army a certain advantage was the combined operation of infantry with artillery, and of cavalry with both musketeers and mobile artillery, but of course even this innovation was soon imitated by others, such as Wallenstein's Imperialists at Lützen in 1632. The superiority of Swedish armies in Germany, demonstrated in battles such as Breitenfeld or Jankov in 1645 but also in a number of minor victories, was probably primarily due to the fact that the entire Swedish state was organised much more consistently for the purposes of warfare than other states of the time. A system of conscription existed which provided the Swedish army with a core of comparatively cheap but reliable regiments, whose soldiers were motivated by religion and national sentiment.²⁴ Admittedly, for most of the time Swedish soldiers were only a small minority of the troops fighting for the northern kingdom; mercenaries, mostly Germans, formed the bulk of the army (in most battles as much as 90 per cent). But at critical moments, such as in 1630–31 at the beginning of the intervention in Germany, and again in the later 1630s after the defeat of Nördlingen in 1634, the Swedish conscripts provided an elite striking force which was not easily demoralised by temporary setbacks, unlike mercenaries, who always had a tendency to desert in such moments. This reserve of highly motivated soldiers allowed Sweden to overcome defeats which would have spelt doom for other powers, such as Denmark, which had to withdraw from the war in 1629, three years after Christian IV's army suffered a crushing defeat at Lutter at the hands of the Catholic League.²⁵

The tactical innovations, on the other hand, first introduced in the Dutch army in the 1590s and later perfected in Sweden, had only a limited impact on the outcome of battles in the Thirty Years War and hardly amounted to a full-scale military revolution. In fact, one could argue, as Geoffrey Parker has done, that ultimately changes in fortification techniques achieved during the sixteenth century were more important than changes in

battlefield tactics as such. According to Parker, the development of a new style of fortress with an elaborate system of bastions and moats initiated in Italy in the first half of the sixteenth century revolutionised warfare much more effectively. Known outside Italy as the *trace Italienne*, this style of fortress was gradually imitated in other parts of Europe, although it did not reach some peripheral regions, for example Ireland, until the second half of the seventeenth century. Such fortresses, whose walls could resist even heavy artillery bombardment, could be taken only after long sieges which, so the argument runs, required a far greater number of professionally trained troops than in the past.²⁶ The impact of battles was very limited, because no number of victories won in battle would overcome the resistance of the enemy's garrison troops in the almost impregnable fortified towns. Thus warfare was largely dominated by long sieges and a strategy of attrition.²⁷ This description certainly fits the war in the Netherlands well enough. In particular, during the second half of the 80-year contest, after the 12 years' truce had expired in 1621, hardly a major battle was fought between the Spanish and Dutch armies. Sieges, positional warfare and other measures calculated to wear down the opponent, including trade embargoes, blockades of rivers and ports, and attacks on trade at sea by privateers prevailed.²⁸ But this was certainly not the sort of war waged in Germany between 1618 and 1648. On the contrary, pitched battles and the rapid movement of armies over long distances, sometimes hundred of miles, remained quite common in the Thirty Years War. Certainly, there were a number of fortresses of strategic importance. The capture of Breisach, for example, by the French in 1638, after a prolonged siege of five months, was crucial for the later success of French operations in southern Germany. Nevertheless, the great battles such as Lutter, Breitenfeld, Lützen, Nördlingen and Jankov on the one hand, and small-scale warfare at the local level, in which villages and small towns were burned down or plundered or forced to pay contributions, or enemy supplies seized by cavalry squadrons on the other, characterised warfare in Germany.

The dense network of fortresses and fortified towns – its effectiveness strengthened by natural obstacles which advancing armies encountered (the sea and the many waterways) – which provided the framework for warfare in the Netherlands, just did

not exist in Germany. Many urban fortifications were out of date and therefore comparatively easy to take by assault or after a short bombardment. And whatever the strategic role of fortified towns, their political and economic weight was certainly much smaller than in the much more urbanised Dutch Republic. Here at least in the most important province, Holland, urban trade and industry produced much more wealth than agriculture, unlike the situation in most other countries. The limited economic and social significance of the towns was another reason why sieges did not dominate warfare in Germany between 1618 and 1648.²⁹

Moreover, in Germany, a victory in battle promised considerable political benefits beyond the destruction of the enemy's field armies. Many princes and free cities in Germany were either neutral during long phases of the war or less than fully committed to one of the two sides. This holds good for Brandenburg and Saxony, both important electorates. Princes such as the Electors of Brandenburg and Saxony quickly changed sides after a seemingly decisive victory. Thus a victory in battle had a considerable psychological impact which went far beyond the immediate military effects. The near-total collapse of Sweden's military position in Germany after the defeat at Nördlingen in 1634 must ultimately be explained in psychological terms, for nearly all of Sweden's pre-1634 allies now joined Saxony in seeking peace with the Emperor. To fight pitched battles therefore remained worthwhile, in spite of the high risk and the heavy casualties. Admittedly, after about 1635, the impact of battles clearly diminished for logistical reasons. Operations now had to concentrate on securing control over regions which were not yet totally devastated so that contributions could be raised there. Under such circumstances it became difficult to follow up a victory in battle with further attacks designed to defeat the enemy once and for all.³⁰

In fact, during the last phase of the war, after 1635, the capacity of almost all armies to mount major offensive operations with enough troops to besiege and take major fortified places – even if their fortifications were not up to date – and to conquer large stretches of enemy territory permanently, diminished considerably.³¹ The number of troops deployed in any battle tended to become markedly smaller. At Breitenfeld, for example, admit-

tedly the largest battle on German soil during the entire war, about 41 000 Swedish and Saxon soldiers had fought 31 000 Imperialists. After 1635, however, the Swedes as well as the Emperor were rarely able to send more than 15 000 and were hardly ever capable of sending more than 20 000 men into battle at any given time. Outside Germany the number of troops participating in individual battles remained greater. At Rocroi (1643), for example, 27 000 Spanish troops fought 23 000 French soldiers, but there the devastation caused by warfare was generally not as extensive as in many regions of Germany, so that supplies could more easily be organised.³²

The small size of the armies actually fighting in any given battle was due to the fact that an increasing number of troops was tied down in garrisons which secured the routes of supply and the areas which provided the armies with money and provisions. In the long drawn-out war of attrition which the military and political contest in Germany had become after 1635, the cavalry became the dominant arm of service outside the garrisons. Mounted units, though needing more supplies, in particular, fodder for the animals, were able to requisition food over a wider area and could move more quickly to regions which were not yet totally devastated. In Germany many armies now had as many horsemen as footsoldiers or even more, whereas in the earlier years of the war the cavalry had normally made up between 15 and 25, or at most 35 per cent of the fighting forces.³³

The overall size of armies during the first half of the seventeenth century is not easy to ascertain. Many soldiers, and sometimes entire companies or regiments existed only on paper. The colonels commanding regiments and the captains in charge of companies had a vested interest in creating the impression that their units had their full complement of men. Only then could they expect to receive the maximum amount of provisions, munitions and wages for their soldiers, and if these soldiers were non-existent they could pocket the surplus themselves. In the French army, where admittedly absenteeism and desertion may have been particularly widespread, the theoretical strength of infantry companies had originally been 120 men. Even in official documents this had to be reduced to as little as 50 in the 1630s and 1640s, and in the period 1645–46 to 40 men. But the real

strength was smaller still, and sometimes not more than 15 or 20. Thus the French infantry, which on paper had a strength of more than 200 000, and in the late 1640s of as many as 270 000 men, could in reality send no more than 170 000 soldiers at most into battle, and when things were going badly, as between 1640 and 1643, fewer than 100 000. Including the cavalry, the French armies in Germany, in northern France, in the South-East and in Catalonia may have reached an overall strength of about 200 000 men in 1639–40 and again in 1645–46, according to André Corvisier. John A. Lynn's more sceptical estimates, however, give the maximum strength for the late 1630s as 125 000 or, at most, 152 000. This was a considerable size, given the fact that at the beginning of the century the peacetime strength of the army was not much more than about 10 000 men. But it could not yet be maintained over a longer period of time.³⁴ Desertion, death and disease reduced the numbers rapidly once a campaign had started, especially if it did not bring any immediate success and the logistical problems could not be solved, as was so often the case.³⁵

The number of around 150 000 (or at most 200 000) soldiers also seems to have been a maximum for the combined Spanish armies in Europe in the 1620s and 1630s.³⁶ Wallenstein apparently had between 100 000 and 150 000 men under his command in the second half of the 1620s.³⁷ The Dutch Republic, which probably managed to finance its troops more efficiently than most other European powers, with the result that official figures are possibly more reliable than in other countries, had a standing army of 55 000 men at its disposal when warfare against Spain was resumed in 1621 (this was about the same size as that of the Dutch army during the last years of war before the truce of 1609). In the 1620s and 1630s this standing army, which excluded the at times very considerable number of mercenaries hired just for one campaign or recruited by military entrepreneurs for the Republic, grew to a maximum of 75 000 men. If mercenaries are included, the fighting strength of the army was 128 700 men in 1629.³⁸ When Gustavus Adolphus intervened in Germany in 1630 he had an army of about 70 000 men at his disposal (though not all of them were in Germany at this time). After the victory of Breitenfeld more mercenaries could be recruited, and the King envisaged an army of 200 000 men, including the troops of his

allies. In fact the Swedish army in Germany had a strength of about 120 000 men in March 1632 (of which only 10 per cent were native Swedish or Finnish soldiers). This army was supported by the Elector of Saxony's troops, comprising another 20 000 men.³⁹

During the second half of the Thirty Years War such enormous armies became increasingly difficult to maintain in Germany. The different imperial armies, for example, numbered only about 70 000 men in 1644, including the troops under Bavarian command and the other allies of the Emperor (but excluding the Elector of Saxony's troops and imperial garrisons in Hungary). They maintained approximately this strength until the end of the war, and the Swedish army was hardly larger at this stage.⁴⁰

FINANCE, WARFARE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE STATE

Whatever the number of troops, warfare was continually hampered by the shortage of funds and provisions. During the first half of the seventeenth century warfare was nearly always underfinanced, probably on an even greater extent than in other periods of history. It is traditionally assumed that the expansion of the state in the early modern period was largely an answer to the challenges of warfare. For our period this is only partly true, for states clearly had ways and means of avoiding major changes in their administrative and fiscal system and waging war on a considerable scale all the same.⁴¹ The easiest solution was to entrust the task of warfare to military entrepreneurs. These were men who recruited and equipped soldiers for a campaign or a series of campaigns. The regiments or companies, which they recruited at their own cost, were in many ways their property. They could expect to be reimbursed for their expenses in some way or other. If it proved impossible to provide them with wages and supplies for their soldiers (including those who only existed on paper, so that they could make a profit), the simplest method was to let them raise contributions and requisition provisions in an area allocated to their regiment or company. Raising contributions often implied looting or holding to ransom towns and

villages occupied during the war. Rewards in the form of confiscated estates which the rulers of the time gave their officers to compensate them for unpaid debts were also a possible source of financial profit.⁴²

This system worked well enough as long as an army operated in enemy territory. In this case the military entrepreneurs, normally noblemen of some wealth, provided the prince who had hired them with funds and credit facilities which he lacked himself. In the end, however, it was the population of occupied provinces which had to foot the bill. On the other hand, if an army recruited by military entrepreneurs should be defeated and destroyed, it was unlikely that the colonels and captains of such an army would be able to insist on the payment of debts owed to them. Matters, however, became more complicated when the army was forced to retreat into friendly provinces or never managed to leave them. In this case, the fiscal costs which the state had avoided in the first place by having the soldiers recruited and equipped by the military entrepreneurs were quickly transformed into social costs in one form or another. Provisions levied in kind, contributions and various services required of the local population were only one of the forms these social costs could take. Another was the legal, political and economic privileges granted to the military entrepreneurs in lieu of cash payments. Rewards of this kind were particularly widespread in Spain, where military administration and warfare itself were gradually privatised during the first half of the seventeenth century. Because the ever increasing financial crisis made it impossible to pay the contractors who supplied the troops with provisions, arms and ammunition and the great noblemen who recruited them, in any other way they received extensive economic monopolies or rights of jurisdiction over formerly royal towns and districts (cf. below pp. 66–7).

Among the military entrepreneurs of the early seventeenth century the commanders who recruited not just individual regiments but entire armies were a special case. Some of the best known examples in Germany were Albrecht von Wallenstein (1583–1634), Count Ernst von Mansfeld (1580–1626) and Bernhard von Weimar (1604–39). Wallenstein had more than a hundred thousand men and perhaps as many as 150 000 under his command at the height of his power in the late 1620s. By

systematically and ruthlessly exploiting the areas his troops controlled, he managed to pay this enormous number of soldiers comparatively effectively, although taxes raised in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia also served to finance Wallenstein's army. However, Wallenstein's system could only work if his troops were kept on the move – to keep such large numbers of troops permanently in one place or one region, even if they were to some extent dispersed, was impossible; a purely defensive strategy was therefore difficult to pursue. This was one of the reasons for Wallenstein's dismissal in 1630, when the Emperor's political priorities had changed. Reappointed commander-in-chief of the imperial armies in December 1631, he failed to fulfil the Emperor's expectations of him and showed a dangerous tendency to pursue his own political objectives. In the end the Emperor had him killed because it seemed too dangerous to dismiss him once more, not least because it would have been extremely difficult to pay off the debts the imperial treasury owed him.⁴³ Bernhard von Weimar, who served France with an army of 18 000 men after 1634, was spared such a fate, but his death from natural causes in June 1639 was certainly not inconvenient for the French crown as he could lay claim to the Landgraviate of Alsace as a reward for his services.⁴⁴

After Wallenstein's and Bernhard von Weimar's death the role of military entrepreneurs was reduced once more, although it survived to a greater or lesser extent at the regimental level. Moreover, the system of contributions on which Wallenstein had relied so largely was also modified. For those parts of the Holy Roman Empire under imperial control or allied with the Emperor, a new legal basis for contributions was devised by the Peace of Prague in 1635. The Council of Electors and the Regensburg Diet of 1640–41 officially granted taxes to finance the Empire's armies, and the assemblies of the various Circles of the Empire, or at least of those Circles which still maintained some coherence and which were willing to co-operate with the Emperor, did the same.⁴⁵ Apparently this system worked quite well until the mid-1640s. Recent research has demonstrated that the Elector of Bavaria was able to finance his army successfully out of the contributions raised in the imperial Circles of Swabia and Bavaria (the Bavarian Circle was considerably larger than the electorate itself), in accordance with the official assessments

by the Diet and the assemblies of the Circles. In fact Maximilian of Bavaria, like other commanders, expected his army to live off the land. Only when his troops were concentrated in order to fight a battle or besiege a town did he spend money out of his own treasury on the troops, because such offensive operations were impossible to undertake without extra funding. His own dominions thus contributed only a limited amount to the upkeep of his army.⁴⁶

Sweden had also tried to put the financial system which formed the basis of her campaign in Germany on to a firmer legal footing by establishing the Heilbronn League, which was joined by most of her German allies in April 1633. However, with the collapse of the League after the battle of Nördlingen, the Swedish commanders had to return to a more primitive system of exploiting the areas occupied by their troops. The results were often less than satisfactory, as demonstrated by the series of mutinies in the Swedish army after 1634 – a reaction to the non-payment of wages. Nevertheless, Sweden managed to pursue the war in Germany until 1648, while investing hardly any revenues raised by domestic taxation at all. During the last years of the war only 4 per cent of the Swedish crown's ordinary budget was spent on the war in Germany.⁴⁷ Admittedly, further funds were provided by French subsidies and by loans from Swedish or foreign financiers, not to mention the fact that the Swedish crown owed huge sums to the army officers and soldiers at the end of the war (unpaid wages, etc.), as well as to the contractors and merchants who had provisioned the army. This fact made the indemnity to be paid by the Empire such an important issue for Sweden during the negotiations in Osnabrück.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the Swedish example shows that by relying on the principle 'the war feeds itself', a comparatively poor country could finance a major war for nearly 20 years without unduly burdening the taxpayer at home.

However, military entrepreneurship and contributions raised in occupied or allied provinces and principalities were not the only way to finance warfare. Some countries did rely on taxation and credit raised at home. This holds good, for example, for the Dutch Republic. The Netherlands were the only major power successfully to draw on domestic taxation as the principal source of war finance without provoking major internal revolts, or

facing the repeated, or indeed permanent, threat of financial collapse. The central provinces, in particular Holland, were particularly urbanised and commercialised; it was one of the economically most advanced areas of Europe. Moreover, the biggest town in Holland, Amsterdam, was not only a focus of international trade, but also the dominant centre of the European money market north of the Alps. The bankers of Amsterdam provided half of Europe with credit, and the Dutch state therefore found it easy to raise loans at fairly low rates of interest. The merchants, rentiers and financiers of Amsterdam were often only too glad to provide the Dutch republic with funds. After all, the finances of the Republic were sound, and domestic creditors had the great advantage of being able to control the budget and policies of their debtor themselves through the Estates of Holland and the Dutch Estates General.⁴⁹

France also tried to finance warfare through taxation, but with less success. Because the crown mistrusted the French nobility which was prone to join provincial revolts led by aristocratic magnates, it avoided a full-blown system of military entrepreneurship, at least after 1635. Although aristocratic patronage was rampant in the army and commands had as a rule to be purchased, the king remained legally in control and regiments did not really become the full property of their colonels. Officers were expected to finance their companies or regiments to a large extent out of their own pocket, without a chance – at least officially – to recoup their losses by raising contributions, and without any guarantee that regiments which they had recruited would not be dissolved or merged with other troops ('reformed') at the first opportunity. The result was that the morale of French officers was not particularly high, absenteeism and corruption were widespread and the fighting capacity of the French army, theoretically under closer royal control than the mercenary armies of other powers, was for a long time inferior to that of its opponents.⁵⁰

Nor was the attempt to finance troops out of taxation entirely successful. Undoubtedly royal income from taxation did rise very considerably. During the 1620s, when royal revenues were already increasing, the central treasury in Paris received about 43 million *livres tournois* each year from revenues of all sorts; in the decade 1630 to 1639 this figure went up to 92 million, and in the

decade 1640 to 1649 to 115 million *livres*.⁵¹ Even if we take into account the fact that the silver content and the purchasing power of the *livre tournois* was falling, the increase was striking. Counted in grain equivalents, in order to assess the real value of these revenues, French taxes, direct and indirect, had brought in about 4.9 million hectolitres in 1620 and 9.2 million hectolitres in 1640. According to one estimate, a French peasant who had to work about 10 to 15 days per annum to pay his taxes before Richelieu became the King's first minister in 1624, had to work about 35 days in 1641 shortly before the Cardinal's death.⁵²

All these figures show that the years of Richelieu's government and the subsequent years of the Thirty Years War until 1648, when the Peace of Westphalia was signed and the outbreak of the *Fronde* put paid to all attempts to increase the level of taxation even further, were a revolutionary period for French crown finances. Within two decades, the income of the French crown doubled in real terms. In terms of monetary units the increase was even steeper. Of all European states participating in the Thirty Years War, France was probably the most deeply transformed by the impact of the war as far as the burden of taxation was concerned.

The French example shows what it meant to finance warfare for long periods of time primarily out of domestic taxation, without the benefit of a vast income from overseas colonies or the ability to transfer most of the costs of warfare to occupied enemy or neutral territories. For France the only way to raise credit seemed to be to sell royal offices and regalian rights, such as the right to retain a certain percentage or even all of the proceeds of newly introduced taxes.⁵³ During the war against the Huguenots, the Mantuan war, and the covert warfare against Spain in 1631 to 1635, the French crown had, in fact, largely relied on this system to finance its policy. Income from the sale of offices and related regalian rights reached an all-time high, amounting to as much as 55 per cent of regular royal income, considerably more than the income from direct taxation. This is not to say that direct taxation did not increase from the late 1620s onwards, but a very considerable share, probably the greater part of the new taxes, went to officeholders and owners of alienated surtaxes, *droits aliénés*.⁵⁴

In 1634, with open war against Spain imminent, however, the crown changed its policy: the surtaxes granted to private parties were now largely resumed. Those who had bought these rights were compensated, but inadequately; that is, in effect the crown declared a partial bankruptcy in 1634. Thus the level of taxation and, more importantly, the actual crown income from taxation could be raised even further. But the new financial policy put considerable pressure on the peasant population, who had to pay the bulk of the taxes, and at the same time antagonised important vested interests, the (former) owners of the *droits aliénés* and hereditary officeholders in general. The result was stiff resistance to the increased taxation, often encouraged by the officeholders and regional elites. The later 1630s also saw a series of provincial rebellions which threatened the foundations of the French monarchy and, of course, reduced the amount of taxes actually collected. One of the most serious of these provincial risings was the revolt of the *Nu-Pieds* in Normandy in 1639, which required 10 000 regular soldiers to put it down.⁵⁵ After 1640, any attempts to increase taxation further foundered on the resistance of the peasantry and the local elites.⁵⁶ Thus French finances were by no means in a healthy state in the 1640s. The expansion of taxation in the preceding years had only been achieved at a high price, that of abandoning most projects for administrative reform. The basic structures of the highly illogical and inefficient French taxation system, with its many exemptions for certain provinces and privileged social groups, had remained largely unchanged.

Essentially, France, like Spain, was just muddling through in the 1640s as far as meeting the ever-increasing financial demands of warfare was concerned. Nevertheless, whereas in France, in spite of all setbacks, the power of the state and its capacity to extract taxes grew during the war, the opposite was true of Spain. Here, in particular in Castile, the heartland of the Spanish monarchy, a deep economic and demographic crisis undermined the crown's ability to raise higher revenues from taxes. The economic crisis was all the more serious as it hit the towns which bore the main burden of taxation in Spain in the form of indirect taxes particularly hard.⁵⁷ Moreover, royal income from silver imports from South America also declined, although the extent of the decline remains controversial.⁵⁸ The stagnation or decline (in real terms) of the crown's revenues also reduced Spain's ability to

raise credit; in the past Spain had never encountered any real problems in finding bankers eager to lend money, in spite of the long series of state bankruptcies from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, because it was widely expected that royal income would increase each year (at least nominally), so that future revenues could be anticipated in the form of loans.⁵⁹

With credit facilities and income from taxation in Castile drying up in the late 1630s, the Spanish crown was forced to fall back on expedients which other participants in the Thirty Years War had already employed earlier. When fighting started along the border between Spain and France after 1635, the frontier provinces were asked to contribute in cash and kind to the upkeep of the troops stationed in these areas. If they refused, the troops would be used to enforce compliance or let loose to plunder villages and towns. Such measures helped to provoke the Catalan revolt of 1640.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, with warfare concentrated on Spanish soil much more after 1640 than before – in addition to the war in Catalonia, Spanish troops were fighting against the Portuguese after 1640 – the system of raising contributions locally in or near the areas where troops were actually operating was maintained. It ensured that Spain could go on fighting (in the case of the war against Portugal, until 1668), despite the collapse of her finances and her credit system. During the course of the war, Spain underwent a gradual regression from a fairly sophisticated system of taxation and raising credit to comparatively more primitive forms of financing warfare – a regression exacerbated by the increasingly widespread devolution of formerly public rights and services, such as the recruiting of soldiers or the provisioning of troops, to noble magnates and private contractors respectively.⁶¹ They were rewarded with extensive legal and economic privileges. Spain, or rather, Castile, could go on fighting only by ‘liquidating’ the crown’s sole remaining capital, its own authority, and by transforming the fiscal costs of war (in the form of taxation) into social costs in the form of the burdens the population had to bear (contributions in kind and in cash, labour services, etc.) and the form of privileges for noble magnates and military contractors, as I. A. A. Thompson has pointed out.⁶²

According to Thompson, this form of warfare was only possible because Spain, on the Iberian peninsula at least, was mostly

fighting a defensive war after 1635, so that the war effort could be organised and financed locally.⁶³ However, this explanation is only partially convincing; in many ways the system of military entrepreneurship prevailing in central Europe tended to privatise war as much as the methods employed in Spain, although the social costs of warfare had to be borne primarily by the population of occupied foreign provinces. What seems at least as significant in explaining the difference between France and Spain is the fact that France had seen almost 40 years of civil war before 1598 and that a relapse seemed quite possible until the late 1650s.⁶⁴ An aristocracy raising private armies or any other form of full-blown military entrepreneurship recalled the trauma of the Wars of Religion, and was therefore unacceptable in France, whereas in Castile, which had seen no serious domestic warfare since the Comuneros Revolt of the 1520s, the great aristocratic families had risen as a service nobility, and therefore seemed to pose a much smaller threat to the coherence of the state.⁶⁵

Sweden, the Dutch Republic, France and Spain present contrasting examples of the interaction between warfare and the development of state and society. Further variants are provided by the German principalities, where the wartime emergency measures and the considerable amount of contributions levied by friendly and hostile armies alike defined the preconditions for political developments after 1648 – a higher level of taxation and a reduced role for the provincial Estates in high politics, though not necessarily in local administration,⁶⁶ and by England, torn apart by a civil war in the 1640s. In England, ‘The tax state was rooted, chronologically, in the 1640s: structurally its roots lay in the localities, in the activities of local officeholders.’⁶⁷ Here it was, in a manner of speaking, their revolt against the crown’s centralising policies which forced local elites to rethink their attitude towards taxation and reorganise the traditional system of raising revenues. Otherwise their fight against the King would have collapsed for lack of resources. Thus it was a revolt against higher taxes imposed from above which laid the foundation for a taxation system which became one of the most efficient in Europe by the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. In this respect, the English case is perhaps best comparable to developments in the Dutch republic but rather unusual in a wider European context.

The effects of warfare on state formation in the early seventeenth century remained ambivalent. In some cases protracted war led to the contracting out or 'privatisation' of formerly public functions and tasks as in Spain, and to a decentralisation of political authority. In other cases it did not affect the constitutional structures and the fiscal system very deeply at all, because the cost of warfare was partly or totally transferred to conquered or occupied provinces. France was perhaps the only country where warfare led directly to political centralisation and some sort of 'absolutism', although even here this process was qualified by the survival or indeed growth of a venal bureaucracy and of innumerable fiscal and legal privileges. These phenomena were as much a result of the financial crisis which the war had brought about as an obstacle to a truly efficient system of financing the war effort, which only one European country managed to create in this period on any considerable scale: the Dutch Republic, seemingly one of the least warlike of the European powers.

3. Warfare in the Old Regime 1648–1789

PETER WILSON

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OLD-REGIME WARFARE

At about 11 a.m. on 11 May 1745 a large column of British and Hanoverian infantry approached a line of French troops near the village of Fontenoy, close to the modern Franco-Belgian border. When the opposing forces were only 30 metres apart, an English officer allegedly stepped forward and cordially invited the French to fire first. This story, though almost certainly apocryphal, nonetheless seems to epitomise warfare in old-regime Europe.

Conflicts in this period are almost universally thought of as more sedate, narrow and limited in comparison with earlier and later wars.¹ Those of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are regarded as particularly ferocious, but also as a source of military innovation, when new tactics and weaponry were developed and standing armies came into being. Similarly, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815) seem the dawn of a new era of mass-citizen armies, grand strategy and military decisiveness. War in both periods involved fundamental issues stirring the passions of the participants; religion and domestic political power in the former era, nationalism and revolutionary ideology in the latter.

These military factors are related to wider social, political and economic aspects characterising these periods generally as distinct phases in European history. Thus, the religious and civil strife of the so-called Confessional Age (1517–1648) was replaced by relative tranquillity under the rule of largely absolutist monarchies. These monopolised violence, depriving their inhabitants of the means to oppose them militarily, and directed their efforts outwards into limited external war fought in their personal dynastic interest. Armies, it is widely believed, became divorced