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## ■ PREFACE ■

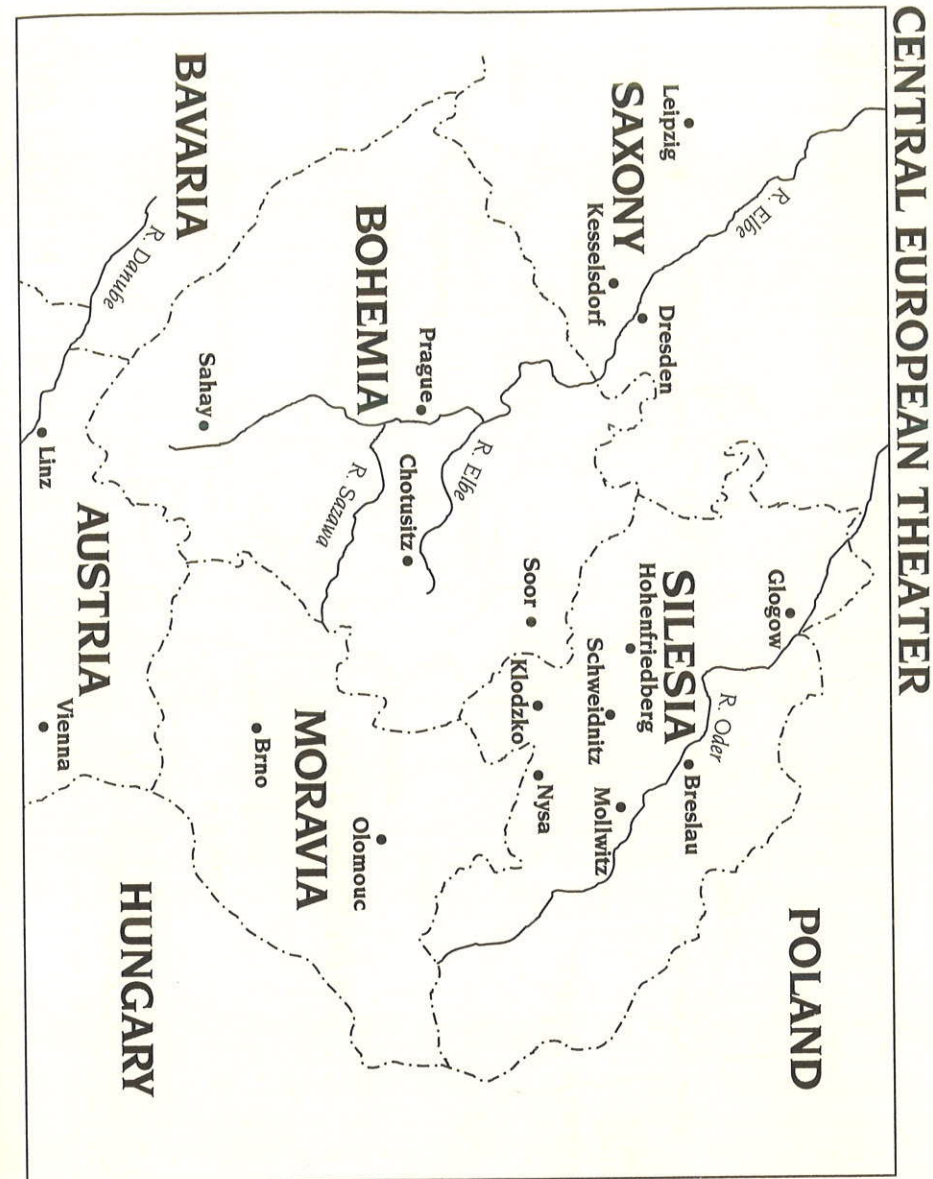
I want to take a moment before beginning my narrative to offer three points of advice about how this book should be dealt with. First, I urge the reader to be attentive to names. There will be a plethora of them before the tale is told, and unfortunately many of the individuals whose careers we will be examining were named Charles. The reader must be prepared to keep Charles Albert and Charles Emmanuel separate, to realize that one Charles VII ruled as Holy Roman Emperor while another reigned as King of the Two Sicilies, and to distinguish Prince Charles (of the House of Lorraine) from Bonnie Prince Charlie (of the House of Stuart). Second, I urge an attentiveness to place. Twentieth-century readers cannot be expected to have maps of eighteenth-century Europe impressed upon their brains, and so to avoid the fog of directionlessness the reader will probably need to consult the charts at the back of this book whenever geographical references become obscure. Third, I urge the reader to keep in mind the fact that this war, more than most we are accustomed to speaking of, was marked by frequent shifts in fortune. National prospects waxed and waned, belligerent armies advanced and retreated, and no ruler or minister was spared the agony of seeing hopes dissolve into dread. It was a war in which overextension was invariably punished, in which hubris regularly suffered its appointed fate. The reader should therefore expect that the tale will be burdened by the irritation of apparent inconclusiveness.

A few other cautions are necessary. Throughout the work I shall use the Gregorian calendar. It had not yet been adopted in Britain and Russia in the 1740s, and so some of the dates I give may seem oddly errant to those conversant with the internal histories of those lands. The reader also may be struck by the suspiciously rounded character of the numbers used in the citing of battle statistics. During the eighteenth century there was no reliable means of counting either combatants or casualties—even commanders were usually quite uncertain of the numbers they commanded—and so the relative sizes of fighting forces and the balances of carnage that ensued from combat are very uncertain. Finally, the reader may be puzzled by some of the European place-names. The general principle I have followed is to employ the names used by the governments that exercised sovereignty over the sites at the beginning of 1992. This principle has implications for all border regions, and most dramatically it means that I will use Czech and Polish names when mentioning towns in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, even

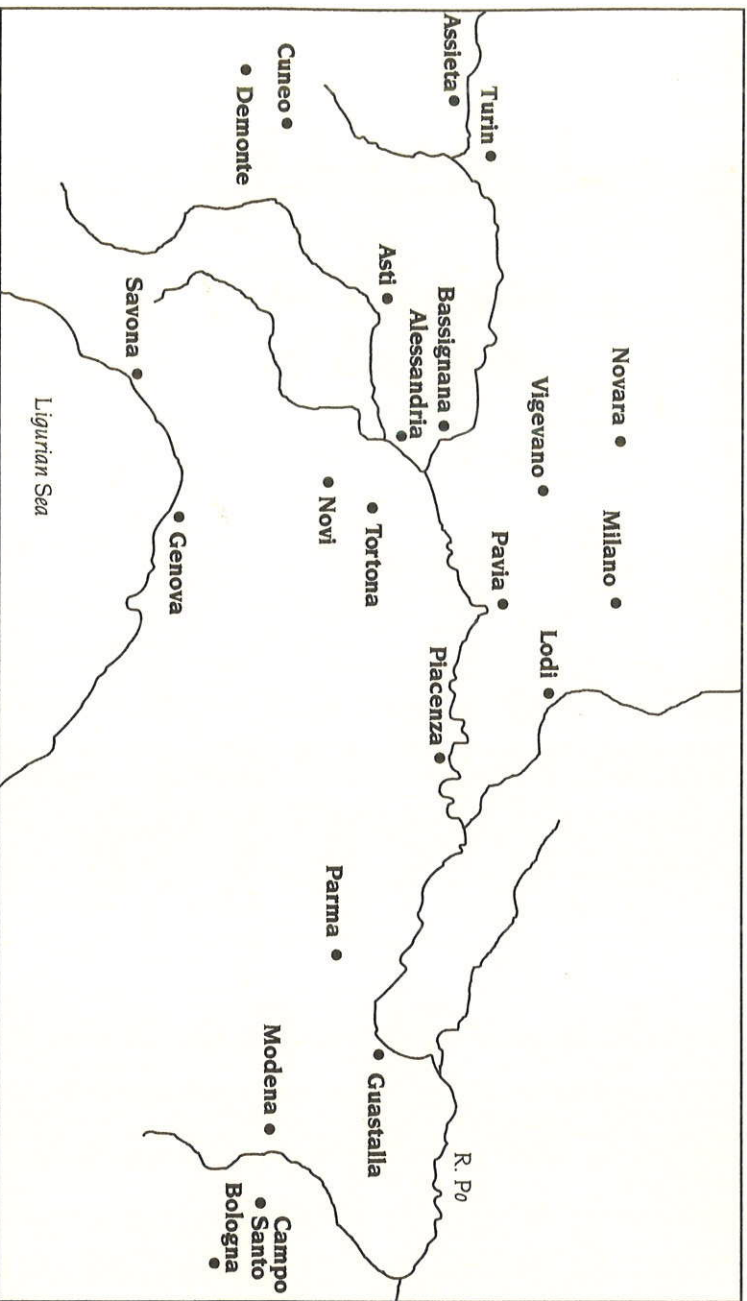
though these towns were typically designated by German names in the documents of the eighteenth century. Only in cases where history has fixed the names of events or the conventions of the English language control the consciousness of readers will I violate the rule: Hohenfriedberg will thus remain Hohenfriedberg, Prague will remain Prague, and Aix-la-Chapelle will not yield to Aachen.

As a final caution I should note that the name conventionally given to the war that wracked Europe and its dependencies between 1740 and 1748—and consequently the name of this book—is not much more than a century and a half old. In fact, for many years the belligerence lacked a generally accepted title. It was not one single war but several that happened to coincide: the war of Bohemia, the two wars of Silesia, the war of the Alps, the war of Italy, the Forty-Five. And even if contemporaries realized that the various military actions occurring in scattered theaters around the world were parts of an organic whole, they were likelier to denominate the struggle the War of the Pragmatic Sanction or even the War of 1741 than to call it a succession struggle. There were, of course, those who from the very beginning seized upon the analogy to earlier wars over dynastic claims. Prussian ministers, for example, and even Frederick II himself, were ascribing the war to the “Austrian succession” as early as 1741. But it was not until the nineteenth century that the usage of our day became current, and even in our own century it has not won universal assent. We may draw an important conclusion from this nomenclatural uncertainty: the conflict we are about to trace is neither well understood nor well charted.

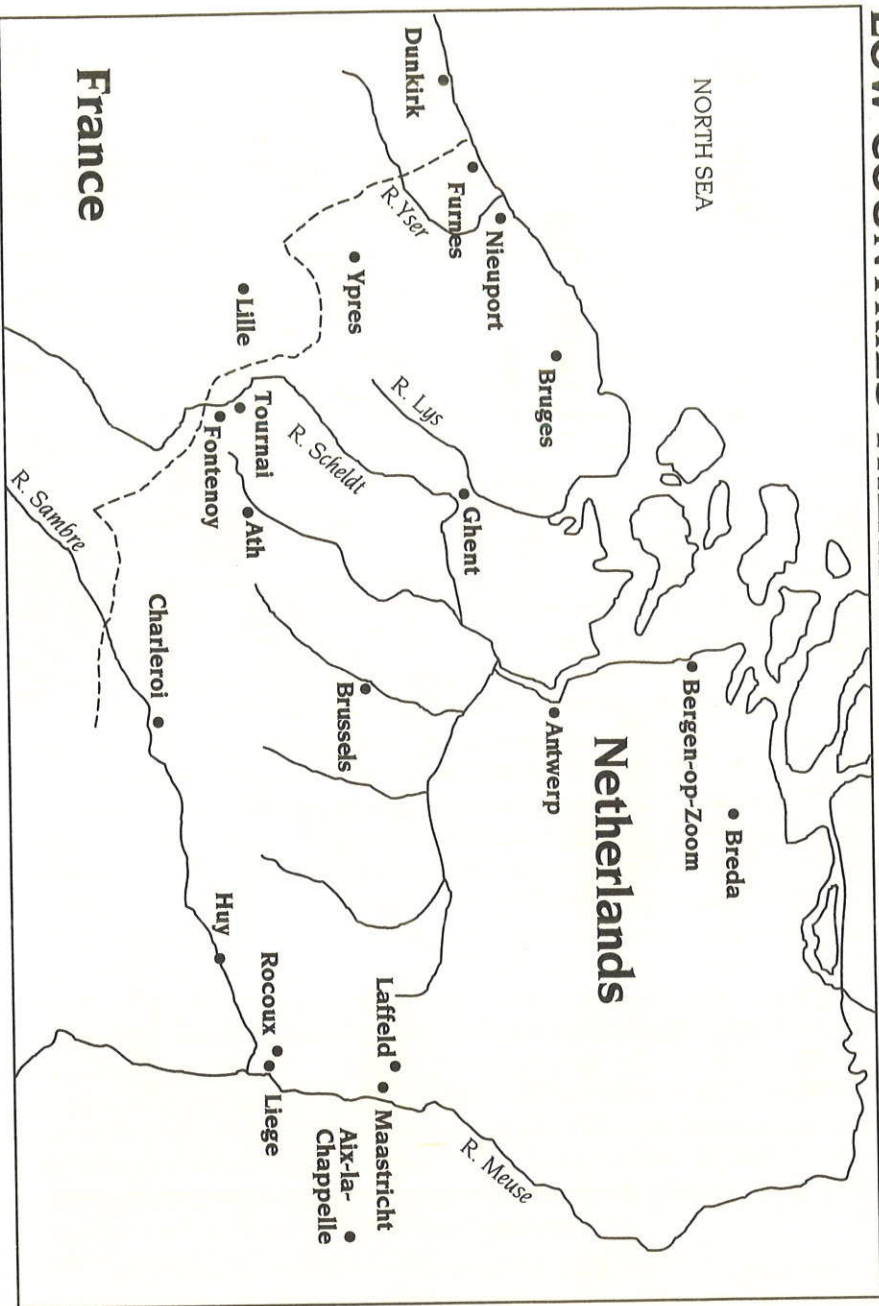
Finally, I wish to thank some friends and colleagues. Will Scott, a colleague on the Kenyon College Department of History, provided seminal advice early on. Jeremy Black, Grete Klingenstein, Karl Roeder, and Don Smith—distinguished historians all—provided timely encouragement. Two members of the fine staff of the Olin and Chalmers Libraries at Kenyon were especially helpful: Nadine George assisted in researching place-names, and Carol Marshall supplied me with an abundance of interlibrary loans. The manuscript was prepared chiefly by Roberta McPhail and Mary Hopper. The charts were drafted in part by Kimberley Highfield. Support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and from Kenyon College enabled me to visit major libraries in Europe. I am grateful to all these people and institutions for their faith and help. Finally I am grateful to my wife, Susan. She has been living with the War of the Austrian Succession for more years than the war itself lasted. She has been wonderful.



# NORTHERN ITALIAN THEATER



# LOW COUNTRIES THEATER



P·R·O·L·O·G·U·E

*The Designs  
of Europe*

## The Framework of War

### THE ORDER OF ARMS

To understand the War of the Austrian Succession we need to understand the military thinking of the age. The chief constituent of any eighteenth-century army was the infantry. At the time of the War of the Austrian Succession, it provided three-fourths of the troops in an ordinary army. Life for the infantryman was hard. His feet were his chief mode of transportation. Though actual engagements were rare—on the average in the mid-eighteenth century, significant battles among belligerent states occurred less than once a month—the soldier spent his days in camping, marching, and perhaps training. When encamped, he subsisted on meager rations; when on the move, on scantier ones still. On his back he bore over sixty pounds of equipment. As he trudged along, his thighs lashed against each other, often drawing blood. He was not without diversions. An encamped army was joined by wives and whores, and improvised recreations, especially dancing, were commonplace. But the rigors of military life were never far off. There was, for example, the weather. Steamy summers exhausted armies on campaign. And when the cold season appeared and campaigning ended, armies conventionally settled into winter quarters to begin their hibernal struggle to keep warm and safe amid campfires, tents, and generally hostile civilian populations. Disease was another rigor. In an age of primitive medicine and hygienic ignorance, infections of the digestive tract and lungs were frequent. Veterans built up immunities to the more ravaging diseases, but young recruits were invariably vulnerable. About one-fourth of all deaths due to disease were among soldiers in their first year in uniform. Illness, in fact, exacted a higher toll of soldiers than combat.

By far the greatest part of the remaining portion of an eighteenth-century army was the cavalry. These were the soldiers who, in the tradition of medieval knights, went into battle on horseback. The generic term cavalry embraced several different modes of combat. In western Europe there were

usually two types of cavalry, called horse and dragoons respectively. The horse fought only on horseback and therefore rode large animals capable of delivering a forceful charge. The dragoons might engage either in the saddle or on foot, and so they rode smaller steeds. They also received training with firearms. In the east—and most prominently in the Habsburg realm, where the rulers could draw upon warriors accustomed to the military ways of Hungary and the Balkans—there were regularly three kinds of cavalry. The cuirassiers, or heavy cavalry, corresponded to the horse in the west, and the dragoons, or medium cavalry, corresponded to their namesakes in the west. The hussars, or light cavalry, were one of the sensations of the war, so successful at harassing enemy flanks that several countries that entered the war without such troops tried to create them as the hostilities continued. A frightened French soldier dubbed them “vermin.”<sup>1</sup> As a nondisciplined, irregular element in an otherwise ordered army, they provided commanders a wider degree of flexibility in their operations.

The artillery constituted a third section of the army, minuscule in size but important in many situations. Several figures suggest the exiguity of artillery forces. In 1740 Prussia had only one battalion—perhaps 600 men—of field artillery. For the purposes of the war, it was found sufficient to do no more than double that number. Britain in 1741 had 593 men in service. Its wartime expansion was virtually identical to Prussia’s, for at the end of the struggle artillery personnel totaled 1,025. Considering the importance of their function, it is almost certain that these men who were charged with tending and deploying cannon were the most productive in uniform. Their work was hard and dangerous. The cannons themselves were heavy, impediments to swift troop movements. Transporting them as part of an army on campaign required patience and sweat and, when in the vicinity of hostile forces, exposed the men to enemy fire. During combat all artillerymen faced the threat of the unexpected explosions caused when powder encountered residual sparks in the barrel. Since the artillery was a service of recent origin, it lacked the prestige associated with the far older and more conventional infantry and cavalry. Its appeal was different from theirs, and rarer too. Men of mathematical or mechanical curiosity might prefer it. Most, however, thought its rewards dubious. By yoking enhanced danger to low dignity, the artillery kept itself a service of comparative eccentrics.<sup>2</sup>

The warfare of the mid-eighteenth century was dominated by two smooth-bore weapons—the flintlock musket and the cannon. The flintlock, a muzzle-loading firearm, was the weapon of the infantry and most of the cavalry. By modern standards this musket was primitive, requiring a four-step reloading procedure after each discharge. Though capable of killing at 300 yards, its

accuracy disappeared at half that distance. But if rudimentary in our view, the flintlock was nevertheless an improvement on its seventeenth-century predecessor, the matchlock, since in the hands of a skilled infantryman it could be discharged as often as three times a minute, a rate that allowed a trained fighting force to increase its firings by 50 percent. Cannon at midcentury came in a variety of calibers, ranging (in the terminology of the day) from the mobile three-pounders to the cumbersome twenty-four-pounders. (The figures refer not to the weapons themselves but the weight of the iron balls propelled by the cannon.) The lighter pieces were assigned to infantry battalions, for which they provided close fire support in combat. Because for short periods they could be fired as often as four times a minute, shredding an enemy with clusters of iron bits, their usage has been likened to the employment of machine guns in more recent times. Larger pieces were employed as massed batteries. When directed against the heart of the enemy formation, they could quickly disrupt the developing scheme of the opposing commander. The largest cannon were siege weapons, designed to pummel walls and fortifications with crushing blows and incendiary threats. Though in principle cannon project their missiles farthest when raised 45 degrees from the horizontal, eighteenth-century mountings limited the angle of inclination to 15 degrees. The point of this limitation was to encourage gunners to send their cannonballs *bouncing* through the enemy lines. The three-pounders had a range of perhaps 2,500 yards; the twenty-four pounder increased that range to little more than 3,300 yards. In general, in the War of the Austrian Succession the flintlock musket was the controlling weapon in central Europe and Italy while cannon played a similar role in the Low Countries.

The outcome of wars is in large measure a consequence of the outcome of battles. Thus it is important to recall that in the eighteenth century, except in instances of surprise, battles were fought only when both commanders wanted them. This important truth is a consequence of the fact that positioning an army for battle took more time than withdrawing an army from a proposed field of combat. Thus a force that chose to avoid combat could always impose its will on the moment, though usually at the cost of ground. It therefore follows that battles occurred only when each commander saw nothing to be gained by delay or withdrawal. This was not often the case, for if the two rival armies differed significantly in size, the smaller would have little inducement to hazard a battle; even if they were approximately the same size, both commanders would have to conclude independently that the promise of victory was great enough to warrant running the risk of defeat. And risk it was, for one almost certain consequence of a battle was to widen the margin of



superiority that one army enjoyed over the other. Thus, in the aftermath of most major battles, the winners took over the artillery and baggage of their enemy, while the losers, nursing their wounds, yielded the area and withdrew to recover, regroup, and reconsider. Of the major commanders of the War of the Austrian Succession, only Frederick II of Prussia actively sought battle. More characteristic of the age was the view of Maurice of Saxony, who, commanding the often inexperienced French army, preferred to triumph by maneuver rather than battle. As he told Louis XV, "the issue [of a battle] is always doubtful when one cannot rely on the discipline of one's troops."<sup>3</sup>

Although armies marched to battlefields in columns, they engaged from line formations. This term means that, when confronting the enemy prior to battle, the infantry presented itself as a long line of soldiers facing the enemy and standing shoulder to shoulder. This formation was preferred to all alternatives because it allowed an army to deliver the greatest volume of fire. The line might extend for several miles and was composed of three or four ranks, separated from each other by a distance of several yards. The precise procedures for firing varied from army to army, but the general principle was everywhere identical: the rank in front would fire a volley and then step back behind the other ranks, reload, and move back to the front as the other ranks followed in sequence. By firing in this manner it was possible for a line of infantrymen to maintain a rate of four to six volleys a minute. Commanders rarely committed all their infantry to the front line. They preferred, even at the initial sacrifice of firing power, to withhold some troops at a distance of 150 to 450 yards behind the front line, ready to advance and reinforce that line if it showed signs of cracking at any point. Flanking the infantry in a regular battle formation was the cavalry. Their task was to deal with the cavalry of the enemy, to protect the flanks of their own infantry line, to capture hostile artillery emplacements, and, if possible, to harass the infantry of the foe. It is important to understand what cavalry could and could not do. They were ineffective when charging unaided against the front of a hostile line of infantry, for as they drew near they were exposed to enemy fire that they could not hope to match in force or accuracy. But they were far more effective when assaulting the flank of an enemy line of infantry, for their enemy was not positioned to fend them off and their horses' speed allowed them to move in quickly and devastatingly. A good cavalry could not compensate for a poor infantry, but a commander who could rely on his cavalry had at hand a flexible tool that widened his options both offensively and defensively.

A good commander also paid attention to topography, weather, and the time of day, for all might aid him in implementing schemes of deception. The covers of disguise were numerous. Once the sun had set, a commander had

the hours of darkness to move his troops about. But even when the sun illuminated the battlefield, an able commander had several tricks he could resort to. Hills and woods provided screens behind which troops could be moved. Even gently rolling terrain offered depressions through which battalions could be filtered unseen. For want of any natural feature, a commander could create an artificial screen by sending his cavalry into a position between the enemy and the troops he was shifting. The point of this effort at deception was to secure a local advantage that could be exploited before the enemy could either reinforce its outnumbered sector or discover where the attacker had weakened himself in order to create the local advantage. Speed was thus important, and an army bedeviled with difficult terrain that retarded troop movements was at a clear disadvantage. Because a company ensconced in the buildings of a village enjoyed a high measure of protection, such settlements often became the fulcrums of battles. It was not uncommon for a commander to infuse men into a village secretly, in the hope that the incautious enemy would either send an outmatched detachment to take it or, believing it innocuous, choose to ignore it entirely.

In addition to the battle, there was one other type of major engagement to which eighteenth-century troops might be committed: the siege. The besieging of fortified towns had become the most formalized part of warfare by the middle of the eighteenth century. Among its practitioners were not only commanders schooled by experience but engineers trained in principles of construction and demolition. Eighteenth-century Europe was studded with walled fortifications, some small, some mammoth. Because an attacker rarely dared simply to bypass such a fortification (since he would thereby expose his rear to the foe), he had no choice but to try to oust the enemy. The effort to oust was called siege warfare, and it was the most toilsome and dangerous part of soldiering. In fact, if the besieging commander did not have an advantage of at least five to one in troops—and ten to one was preferred—he would often decline the operation. Each fortress was architecturally and positionally unique, but they all had several common features. The most prominent was the wall, which formed a continuous ring around the precinct that it protected. Because it was backed with piled and packed earth, it could resist pummelings by the enemy artillery. Because a ditch lay just outside its circumference, creating a height of perhaps ten yards for potential attackers to scale, it could resist assaults by the enemy infantry. Behind earthen ramparts on the wall sat artillery emplacements, able to reply blow for blow to the attacker. And through the cunning placement of bastions, which were triangular structures projecting outward from the wall, it was possible for protected marksmen to bring any spot along its base under fire. If a garrison was

amply endowed with supplies and ammunition, it might be able to hold out against a besieging army for several months.

The men who served in eighteenth-century armies were usually drawn from the poorer sectors of society. In Prussia and Austria the peasantry constituted the backbone of the national fighting force. In France and Britain it was city folk who preponderated. The pay these men were offered is usually called miserable, but in most instances, though low, it sufficed to keep voluntary enlistments coming and peacetime armies at adequate levels of manning. Troop levels also were maintained by the incorporation of foreigners, who constituted an important element in all the major continental armies. When war broke out, however, the manning methods of peacetime failed and all European countries resorted to some variation of conscription. Prussia's method, which involved obliging geographical areas called cantons to keep the regiments assigned to them at full strength, was easily the most effective. All wartime armies suffered from high rates of desertion, especially among the young. In fact, for fear of offering opportunities for desertion, commanders tended to avoid such exercises as night marches, encampments near wooded areas, and the sending out of small detachments to gather supplies. The other sources of wartime attrition in manpower were illness and injury. About the former little could be done; its toll, as noted, was invariably higher than that attributable to combat. But wounds offered a different prospect to eighteenth-century physicians, and it is a notable commentary on the uneven diffusion of medical knowledge at the time that in Prussian camps the mortality rate among wounded might rise to 80 percent while in British camps the duke of Cumberland operated by the rule of thumb that two-thirds of those wounded would fight again.<sup>4</sup>

Keeping an army supplied with food was a staggering task. Commanders tended to agree that the best way to avoid being constrained by a shortage of victuals was to live off the land. As long as an eighteenth-century army kept on the move and did not retrace its steps, it could hope to secure adequate food and fodder from the countryside, and the pressing need for grass for grazing animals—"the most important restraint of all," in the words of a French officer—was quite expeditiously met in this manner.<sup>5</sup> It was only during siege operations that armies preferred the sedentary to the mobile life, and in such circumstances they quickly discovered that they needed magazines, ovens, and cumbersome supply trains.<sup>6</sup> These considerations correctly imply that eighteenth-century warfare, despite its reputation for relative benignity, in fact bore exceedingly heavily on the civilian populations of Europe. Armies cut swaths through the agricultural countryside, leaving desolation in their train. Understandably, therefore, rulers preferred their armies to campaign, even to winter, in foreign lands.

## THE WORLD OF THE FLEET

The conflict of the 1740s spread to the seas. Its maritime aspect will not detain us for long, because engagements on the vastness of the deep were rare. But a paucity of combat does not imply an irrelevance of theater. Control of the seas conferred enormous advantages on the country that could secure it: safety for one's own trade, a stifling of enemy trade, the ability to move troops by sea, and the opportunity to threaten the coastal cities of the enemy. Precisely because naval supremacy imparted such leverage, the states that bordered the Atlantic had recently been pushing their naval programs. But despite improvements in the navies of Spain and France, Britain remained the dominant maritime power. Its traditions infused its commanders with boldness. Its financial resources gave it the capacity to sustain combat for long periods of time. Its pool of experienced seamen assured it of trained crews. It is true that they were not always contented crews: in time of war Britain supplemented voluntary enlistments with the activities of the press-gang. But despite the problems posed by manning ships through coercion—despite too the surprising but acknowledged fact that French ships and French naval technology were superior—Britain was the recognized mistress of the sea. France's navy was not inconsequential: though shackled to the jejune notions of a *guerre de course*, it still played an important role in the struggle. But the fleet that His Britannic Majesty could put to sea could overawe the naval power of any other nation. For that reason the opponents of Britain usually sought maritime allies. Alone, they had little chance.

The ships of eighteenth-century navies came in many sizes, but even though corvettes and frigates had their uses, the strength of a fleet was measured basically by the number of ships of the line it contained. This term designated all three-masted ships with sixty or more guns; the largest such ship boasted over one hundred. These cannons were eighteen- to thirty-two-pounders, placed within the confines of the hull on one of the two or three decks of a ship. Smaller vessels posed no challenge to these behemoths, for in an engagement between mismatched ships the larger could simply sit outside the range of the smaller and, though pitching atop the restless ocean, hurl enough cannon fire at it to assure its eventual destruction. Remarkably self-sufficient, a ship of the line, if it avoided combat and heavy storms, could shelter 700 men at sea for as long as five months before fouled hulls, the thirst for fresh water, and disrepair aloft necessitated a visit to port. Advances in the skills of rigging and handling sails permitted eighteenth-century ships to keep their sails full even when plowing to within 70 degrees of the wind. But sailing with the wind at one's back was far easier and swifter. And the worst fate of all, in an era in which wind supplied the power of motion, was to become becalmed.

When war came, the navy was expected to perform two duties—to protect commerce and to render the enemy fleet ineffectual. Since the commercial vessels of a belligerent state were the lawful prey of their foe, a nation that valued its trade would act to defend its merchant marine against the warships and privateers of the enemy. Thus merchant ships were encouraged to sail in convoys, to which warships would be attached as protectors. This device saved ships and goods, but the men of commerce disliked having to adjust their sailings to the schedule of the convoys. And since any merchant who broke from a convoy in mid-passage to race ahead—and who managed to evade the enemy—stood to gain large profits by beating his rivals to the transoceanic market, it was difficult to keep convoys intact for the duration of a journey. The still more important function of the navy in time of war was to keep the enemy at bay. In many instances this goal could be accomplished by establishing a blockade—more accurately, a “close watch”—off an enemy port, stationing a squadron within view of the port and thereby preventing the enemy from bringing its fleet out. But if the enemy fleet was already at sea, then battle was the best expedient for rendering an enemy ineffectual. The loose tactical principles that explain battle at sea in the eighteenth century were quite independent of the tactical principles applicable to battle on land.<sup>7</sup> Since the sea afforded no screens, commanders had no opportunity to engage in the hidden maneuvering that characterized land engagements. Since the number of ships on one side rarely exceeded twenty-five and since victory usually went to the side with the numerical advantage, however small, there was no incentive for holding part of a force back in reserve. Since there was no maritime equivalent to the distinction between infantry and cavalry, there was no imperative to establish two sets of rules for deployment. Since communications within the fleet were usually limited to flag signals, only the simplest of maneuvers were practicable. Finally, since the slowest vessels of a retreating force would invariably be overtaken by the swiftest vessels of the pursuing force, flight in the face of an approaching enemy left stragglers to the certain threat of capture or destruction and was therefore inadvisable. In fact, the logic of engagement at sea was precisely the reverse of the logic of engagement on land. When armies met, they fought only if both commanders sought to do so; when navies met, they withdrew only if both chose to do so.

Fleets (and their subdivisions, squadrons and detachments) generally prepared for engagements by falling into lines behind their lead vessels. This formation was called line of battle ahead. When moving into position to engage each other, the fleets maneuvered until they had aligned themselves in a roughly parallel formation (though the lines might still be several miles

apart), whereupon individual ships began to fire broadsides on the vessels holding analogous spots in the enemy's line. Because the largest ships, including the flag ship, sailed near the center of the line, this procedure assured that size would be pitted against size. But a commander had the option of beginning an action before the two forces were completely aligned. If he saw that he could secure a temporary local advantage by doing so, he might start the affray even when some of his ships were without obvious targets. If one force had a greater number of ships, it would be able at some point along the line of engagement to commit two ships against one of the enemy. The exchanges of cannon fire that marked the opening stage of a battle might occasionally shatter the hull of a ship unlucky enough to be hit in a vulnerable spot, but they were likelier to damage the upperworks and rigging. A dismasting could quickly immobilize a vessel and make it a choice candidate for capture as a prize. As a battle continued, its linear structure became increasingly disordered and coordination gave way to melees.

In light of the logic of engagement, the reader might well wonder why naval battles were rare events. In fact, enemy sightings were exceedingly uncommon. In an age innocent of high-speed communications, fleets at sea wandered in a void, directed by instructions months out of date and following up on information that had been stale weeks earlier. Commanders might yearn for action, but unless fortune flung an enemy before them, they could expect months, even years, of watchful but fruitless sweeps across seemingly limitless seas. A British commander expressed his frustration to the first lord of the admiralty: “’Tis all chance to which we must submit, and content ourselves with the merit of deserving success by our diligence whether we meet with it or not.”<sup>8</sup> Still, it is true that the British were likelier to meet with it than the French, not merely because they had ampler resources but also because their strategic thinking placed a far greater emphasis on finding and destroying the enemy. The French held to a conservative strategic theory that posited the priority of defending trade. It was a strategy of folly: it kept the battle fleet below full strength, and when that enfeebled fleet finally met its predictable defeat, it left the convoys exposed to attack as well. Bolder by experience as well as instructions, the British commanders probed and hunted with ever mounting diligence as the war proceeded, and when negotiators finally sat down to try to end the carnage of the War of the Austrian Succession, command of the seas gave Britain its best card.

## The Constellation of States

### THE MAP OF WAR

To understand the War of the Austrian Succession, we must understand the topography of Europe. When nations went to war in the early modern period, they regularly found themselves operating in the same few regions. We may therefore speak of a military geography of Europe. Certain topographical features—mountain ranges, for example, and wide stretches of water—divided the arena into theaters, each of which was relatively cut off from the other theater. Other features—river valleys and mountain passes—funneled military activity into narrow areas. It is true that national ambitions, as embodied in strategic planning, might tempt a commander to test the constraints that geography imposed on his army. And sometimes he even succeeded in vaulting these constraints. But the more general practice was to treat the constraints with respect. In an age of cumbersome and slow armies, of forbidding support problems and imperfect discipline, of communications no faster than the fleetest horse, it would have been foolhardy for leaders to ignore the implacable commands of nature.

The War of the Austrian Succession fell into three theaters. To the west the Low Countries hosted, as they so often had, a set of avaricious armies that sat heavy on the land, occasionally engaging in battles, more often undertaking sieges, but most frequently simply lurking, waiting, and preying. To the east, in the region centered on Bohemia and including Saxony, Silesia, Moravia, Upper Austria, and Bavaria, a war of greater movement occurred, as armies ebbed and flowed across the land while Prague, situated at the heart of the theater, endured three sieges and two occupations. To the south the expanse of northern Italy provided campaign grounds for the armies of no fewer than six nations and even an occasional opportunity for demonstrations of the impact a vigorous navy could have upon military operations. This distribution of military activity into three cockpits was no accident. Rather, it followed very neatly from the existence of the two dominating geo-

graphical divides of the era: the awkward block posed by the Rhine River and the still more forbidding partition created by the Alps.

The first cockpit, the region called the Low Countries, was the stretch of land in northwestern Europe through which the Scheldt, much of the Meuse, and the lowest reaches of the Rhine coursed their ways to the sea. A reticulation of virtually innumerable tributaries across generally flat countryside made transportation easy and cultivation profitable. Villages abounded—over 7,000 in the Austrian Netherlands alone—and Flanders was so thick with people that the Spanish described the entire county as “but one city.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the region also boasted the most productive agricultural sector in Europe. In extent the Low Countries included the seven provinces of the Dutch republic, the various districts of the Austrian Netherlands (with the embedded but independent bishopric of Liege), and parts of northern France. Traditionally, therefore, Europe’s largest battles occurred within its precincts. But the region also offered ample opportunity for siege operations. The Low Countries had often served as a route for French attacks on the Dutch. Consequently there stretched across the middle of the region, from Furnes by the English Channel to Maastricht on the Meuse, a chain of fortifications that had been built within the previous half century to serve as a Barrier—and that is what they were collectively called—against future French probes. When these probes came in the 1740s, the French were faced with the need of taking each of the fortresses one by one. Finally, these fortifications lay within territory that was, by virtue of the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, under Austrian control. But by the terms of the Barrier Treaty of 1715, many of the fortifications were manned by Dutch, not Austrian, troops. This unusual arrangement was by itself sufficient to assure that the Austrian Netherlands would have a peculiar international status.

Four hundred miles to the west lay Bohemia, the center of the second cockpit. Unlike many political entities in this part of Europe, the old kingdom possessed geographically intelligible frontiers. Rimmed by hills and mountains, Bohemia had the topography of a bowl. These rugged borderlands impeded a military entrance into the central plain, but they by no means prohibited one. Because most of the troops that saw action in Bohemia in the 1740s came from beyond its borders, the lands adjacent to the kingdom also must be seen as part of the cockpit, each playing a distinctive role in the military activities of the decade. In two instances that role was secondary. Since Moravia was mountainous and possessed of two fine fortresses, it posed tactical problems that potential invaders preferred to avoid. Since Saxony was so flat that an army could sweep across it in a matter of days, it was not the scene of lengthy campaigning. The roles of Bavaria

and Silesia, however, were primary. The electorate of Bavaria was divided into three geographical bands. In the north and the south it was mountainous. But across its middle, like a great belt, stretched the Danube valley, fed by the Isar and the Inn—a route of easy access for armies moving either westward or eastward. Where the Rhine was a barrier, the Danube was a highway. As for the duchy of Silesia, though it was a dependency of the crown of Bohemia, it lay beyond the Sudetes and is better viewed as a part of the southern tier of the north German plain than as a land placed amid the central German mountains. The Oder River flowed northward right down its middle, draining its lands into the Baltic Sea. It is of the greatest moment to the present story that this Habsburg land of Silesia, rich and prosperous, buffered by Moravia and Bohemia from its distant overlord in Vienna, thrust itself almost like a pointing finger into the regions dominated by the Hohenzollerns of Brandenburg.

Almost 500 miles to the south from both the Low Countries and Bohemia lay the third cockpit—the valley of the Po River. Stretching across northern Italy from its source in the mountains west of Turin until it flowed into the Adriatic south of Venice, the Po and its many tributaries provided a fertile band of land that lay cut off from Gallic and Teutonic Europe by a sleeve of mountains. All along its northern stretch it faced the Alps. At its narrow western end it still met the Alps. And along its southern limit, though now not far from the waters of the Mediterranean, it still fronted onto mountains—the Maritime Alps and the Apennines. These mountains provided remarkable protection for northern Italy, and especially for Piedmont, the principality that occupied the westernmost recess of the valley. In 1713 Piedmont had secured the western Alps from France and thus, although the principality lay adjacent to France, its rulers felt no compelling need to be unduly submissive to the monarchs at Versailles. Only a few passes wound their tortuous ways over and through the lofty and inhospitable mountains, and these passes the Piedmontese zealously guarded. Thus moving troops from France into Italy was no small task. The mountain passes might be stormed, but even when such assaults achieved success they often entailed the incapacitation of an entire army. The narrow coastal path might be hazarded, but it exposed a strung-out army to withering fire from ships offshore. A seaborne invasion might be chanced, carrying troops from Toulon to Spezia or Orbetello, but unless the attacker was assured of command of the Mediterranean—and only Britain (and its allies) could be reasonably confident of such command—such a plan threatened to abort in a maritime disaster. Because nature had so munificently shielded the Po valley, this cockpit was easily the most independent and isolated of the three.

## THE CATALOG OF ASPIRATIONS

The paramount power in Europe as 1740 opened was France. The Bourbon kingdom had been guided to preeminence in the seventeenth century by the decisions of two shrewd ecclesiastics, cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, and by the determination of the renowned Sun King, Louis XIV. This preeminence rested on several considerations: a centralization of sovereign authority that, though loose by modern standards, was second only to Britain's among European states; a population of 23 million that exceeded by a factor of three that of its island enemy; an economy that, by the standards of the Old Regime, was diversified; a geographical compactness that left it without exposed territorial salients; and a large and successful army. France was the only European nation whose geographical situation allowed it to contemplate acquiring dominion either on land or on sea. We must not be surprised to learn, therefore, that France was the only nation in which the notion of preserving a European balance of power was challenged: a cant prescription almost everywhere else because it promised the maintenance of European peace through the creation of countervailing forces, the idea of an international equilibrium aroused little enthusiasm among those French policymakers who preferred to ground their hopes for European peace in the establishment of a France capable of overawing all other states. These men nourished, in short, the old dream of a universal monarchy. They were not the only section of foreign policy thinkers in France; they were not even, in 1740, the section in command. But only in France was such a view conceivable.

The French goal in 1740 may be succinctly expressed: to maintain French dominance in Europe. In general, and especially after the acquisition of the expectation to Lorraine, dominance did not imply territorial expansion. France sought not to bludgeon its neighbors but rather—by a judicious combination of coaxing, prodding, and bullying—to persuade the states of Europe to pursue policies acceptable to Versailles. Equipped with the most skillful corps of diplomats in Europe, the French government had a pool of capable agents through whom it could explain and try to effect its purpose of dominance. These agents could then employ the various instrumentalities that legitimized the exercise of French influence. Subsidy treaties with a number of second-level states, especially Sweden and Bavaria, gave it opportunities to affect decisions in the heart of Scandinavia and Germany. The Bourbon family tie, which extended to the kingdom of Naples, meant that the wishes of France could not be ignored in southern Italy. Centrally important—and therefore resolutely defended—was France's role as guarantor of the treaties of Westphalia of 1648. This role allowed France to act as defender of the rights of the numerous body of German princes in the

empire. It was a marvelously serviceable policy for France, for while assuring the friendship of at least some of Germany's rulers, it simultaneously inhibited Austria's efforts to tighten imperial control for Vienna's benefit. The goal of dominance required the deliberate pursuit of divisions among potential rivals. Operating from its base of power, France had of late known nothing but success.

The man who had directed French affairs during the triumphant decade of the 1730s was Cardinal Fleury. Though in his eighties and beginning to make concessions to age, he stood as the preeminent figure in European politics. Even more remarkably, he managed to combine a reputation as a cunning wartime minister with celebrity as a lover of peace. His gifts were those of the manager: repressed ambition, unbounded patience, a keen sense of the limits of the possible. He had recently decided, as the War of the Polish Succession wound down, that rather than smiting Austria, France would be better served by protecting the coherence of its old rival. In 1738, therefore, through the long-sought peace treaty, Fleury finally secured an alliance with the Habsburg state. Then in 1739, at the pinnacle of his influence, Fleury directed French policy to three dramatic triumphs: French mediation of a Swedish-Turkish defense alliance, French service as honest broker in the treaties of Belgrade that ended Austria's humiliating war with Turkey, and the conclusion of a treaty with Prussia that, while reaffirming French influence in Germany, also initiated a decade of Franco-Prussian cooperation. With Britain isolated and Austria subdued, "the Nestor of politics" had earned, he believed, the right to rest. He expected to end his days as the faithful servant of Louis XV, guiding the affairs of France and, through France, of Europe along the fabled paths of peace.

The state most manifestly in need of peace as 1740 began was Austria. Geography and recent history had conspired to illuminate the weaknesses of the Habsburg realm. In fact, only by the loosest of usages could these domains even be considered a state. Flung out across the political map of Europe from the English Channel to the Carpathians and from north of the Oder to south of the Po, the European power that we conventionally call Austria was actually an archipelago of historically diverse regions that over centuries had been combined, through matrimony and conquest, into the Habsburg realm. But this combination was not a fusion. Indeed, in its governmental, cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity this realm of more than 16 million people was an administrative nightmare. The task of integrating this vast patrimony had been beyond the capacity of even the ablest of recent Habsburg ministers. The dislocations of war only complicated the task, and thus to the extent that the directors of Austrian policy believed

Austria's salvation to lie in constitutional and economic centralization, they would be proponents of peace.

They had another reason as well for wishing to forgo war: Austrian arms had of late been distinguished only by their feebleness. It had not always been so. In the protracted struggle against Louis XIV and the Turkish empire that had opened the century, Austrian forces had triumphed magnificently. But in these wars Austria had overextended itself. Money, bureaucratic discipline, and, finally, vision were all deficient for the perpetuation of the ramshackle state created by war. Prince Eugene himself, the hero of the era of expansion, faltered, his grip relaxing as his mind dimmed. Bloating and vulnerable, Austria stumbled from humiliation to humiliation in the 1720s and 1730s. Unsuccessful in defending commercial interests in the Netherlands and recently acquired territory in Italy and the Balkans, Austria within a generation receded from its position as the continent's most impressive state to the status of victim. It is no wonder that Austrian leaders sought protection in a tie with Bourbon France. Immediate war held scant prospect of gain.

Throughout the previous two decades of embarrassment, one thread of consistency had marked Austrian foreign policy. Whatever else was changing, Austrian diplomats had worked steadily and, by Vienna's lights, successfully to secure European guarantees of a document called the Pragmatic Sanction. Latter-day observers have been inclined to adjudge this campaign a monumental misallocation of energy. Its purpose was to assure that on the death of Emperor Charles VI the Habsburg inheritance would pass intact to his daughter, Maria Theresa. In issuing the Pragmatic Sanction, Charles VI violated his own sworn promise to support the terms of a family compact promulgated by his older brother, Joseph I. But Charles VI was not concerned with such matters: he had fixed his mind upon assuring that his daughter would succeed him. The Pragmatic Sanction thus became the talisman of his reign, the putative salvation of Habsburg hopes, and the obsession of Austrian diplomats. By purchasing promises of support from Spain, Russia, Prussia, Britain, the United Provinces, and France, Charles VI thought that he was purchasing his daughter's unchallenged succession. Rarely has the foreign policy of a major power been more persistently fatuous.

There was a separate yet related problem. For centuries—in fact, since 1438—the elective office of Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation had been held by Habsburgs. But imperial law forbade a woman from becoming emperor, and so the failure of Charles to sire a male heir meant that, with his demise, the most distinguished secular title in Europe would pass to a non-Habsburg. The imperial office was not inherently a powerful one. The peace of Westphalia had set the radical decentral-

ization of the empire in stone: since each member state had the right to maintain an army and follow its own foreign policy, an emperor was almost powerless to compel demurring princes to obey his direction. What Charles VI worried about, therefore, was not the loss of power that his death would bring to the family but the loss of dignity. There was no shortage of German rulers who might seek the office for themselves. The best solution to Charles VI's awkward dilemma would have been to get Maria Theresa's husband, Francis Stephen, Duke of Lorraine, chosen as King of the Romans—the official title of an elected heir presumptive in the empire. But even though Charles VI courted the idea of securing Francis's election, the fact that the duke was hostile to France (which had, after all, forced him to give up Lorraine for Tuscany) and his own undistinguished military record against the Turks induced the emperor to lay that plan aside until a more propitious hour. So those who presided over affairs in Vienna as 1740 began could expect that the death of the emperor, whenever it came, would create challenges against both the integrity of the Habsburg realm and Austrian prestige in Germany.

In 1740 the direction of Austrian foreign policy lay chiefly in the unlikely hands of Johann Christoph Bartenstein. His had been a triumph of intellect and industry over birth. The group that made foreign policy decisions for Austria was called the Conference, and technically Bartenstein was not even a member of that august body. But as its registrar he was in a position to give verbal expression to its deliberations. And as the passing years gave him experience, his opinions were more and more heeded by the distrustful but superannuated members of that body. Bartenstein was notorious abroad for stubbornness and for the acerbic tone he could give to his lengthy and detailed papers. But most foreign observers saw only part of the man. Though proud, he was not inflexible. A British diplomat well acquainted with him noted that it was "the nature of the fellow to stick out as long as he can, but that nobody runs faster into a thing when once it is necessary and ripe."<sup>2</sup> Unlike his imperial master, Bartenstein did not turn a blind eye on the complexities and uncertainties of international affairs. He thought that Austria would be ill advised to entrust its fate simply to one powerful friend, and so, though he was determined to be faithful to the French tie as long as it was beneficial, he secured a treaty with St. Petersburg in 1739. Bartenstein's fault lay not in an absence of vision. It lay rather in his tendency to become immersed in detail and thereby to get his priorities wrong.

It is perhaps needless to add that the international situation of Austria in 1740 was thoroughly unhappy. The state's coffers were empty after decades of mismanagement, the state's leading military commanders languished in

prison as punishment for their ignominious collapse before the Turks, the state's army was but half its authorized size and so widely scattered as to make it a sieve. A French diplomat lamented "the disorder which reigns in the finances of the Emperor." A Dutch envoy despaired of the "dissensions, confusions, disagreements, protraction, indecisiveness, mistrust, jealousies, intrigues, cabals" that tore the court of Vienna apart. A British agent dismissed the Habsburg domains as "a mere state of anarchy." And a leading Austrian nobleman, Frederick, Count Harrach, could only hope that he might predecease the dying realm.<sup>3</sup> In retreat on its frontiers and in disarray at its center, Austria seemed to owe its continued existence to nothing more substantial than inertia.

It is a common error of historians to undervalue the importance of Spain in the affairs of eighteenth-century Europe. Scholars have too readily seen Bourbon Spain merely as a satellite of Bourbon France. But in the late 1730s and for much of the 1740s, Madrid was almost as influential as Versailles in the Bourbon alliance. This influence resulted not from any margin of Spanish superiority in power—Spain's population was only 8.5 million, and it lacked France's administrative coordination—but from an odd combination of familial, psychological, and strategic factors that in the years around 1740 provided the leaders of the Spanish kingdom with impressive leverage at Versailles. Louis XV's eagerness to be helpful to his uncle Philip V, the complementary intransigence of the Spanish queen, and the temporary centrality of Italian concerns within a larger European context combined to assure that Spain's clear voice was heard within the Bourbon alliance.

Spain's first preoccupation was Italy. For decades Philip V and his Italian wife, Elizabeth Farnese, had devoted their full efforts to securing the establishment of their sons, Don Charles and Don Philip, as important Italian rulers. The War of the Polish Succession had been the vehicle for getting Don Charles planted in southern Italy, as Charles VII of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies. But the price had been embarrassing, for Spain had been required to relinquish to Austria the duchy of Parma and Piacenza, a territory rich with Farnesian associations. Having succeeded with the elder son, the royal couple was now working to establish Don Philip in the peninsula, and the duchy so recently handed over to Vienna gleamed as an appropriate core for the younger son's presumptive principality. Elizabeth Farnese was a driving force behind the campaign. Her ambitions for her sons were a staple of the diplomatic banter of the day. She was the personification of maternal blindness, so formidable, the Prussian king once declared, because she blended Spartan pride, English obstinacy, Italian finesse, and French vanity.<sup>4</sup> But Elizabeth Farnese's resolve to see her offspring placed in the land of her

ancestors is not an adequate, still less a complete, explanation for Spain's interest in Italy. The Spanish had ruled in parts of Italy for much of the preceding two centuries. Strong pro-Spanish factions prospered in Sardinia, Corsica, Tuscany, Genoa, and even Milan. Many Spanish nobles owned land in Naples and Sicily, while many Italians resided in Spain. All these considerations bore in upon the king's consciousness, persuading him that Spain should reassert itself where once it had ruled. The envoy from the court of Turin understood the king's commitment: "the intention of this sovereign has always been to restore to his crown, or at least to place in his sons' hands, all those states that were subject to his throne when he ascended it."<sup>5</sup>

Spain's other preoccupation was America, and though Italy loomed potentially larger in the old-fashioned minds of the royal couple, it was in the New World that affairs had become urgent as 1740 opened. The basic cause of the problem was not complex. Spain wished to control its American empire with the same absolutist and xenophobic spirit that it exercised at home. But in 1713 the Iberian kingdom had reluctantly yielded to British demands that British traders be given at least minimal access to Spanish markets in the Caribbean basin. The appetite of Spanish America for slaves, when conjoined to Spain's reluctance to engage directly in the transatlantic traffic in human beings, provided the foundation for such access, and the British were awarded the *Asiento*, the contract to supply 5,000 slaves annually for thirty years to New Spain. An additional Spanish concession allowed the British to send a single commercial vessel each year—the so-called Annual Ship—to Porto Bello. To the Spanish authorities in Madrid such a concession to British commercialism, extorted under duress, seemed already excessive; to the British it was risibly meager. And so British merchants began to resort to smuggling. The blocking of such illicit trade posed immense problems for Spain. The protection afforded smugglers by nighttime darkness, the high-handedness of Spanish commanders charged with distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate British voyages in the international arena of the West Indies, and the Spanish settlers' own eagerness to purchase goods that only Britain could supply conspired to subvert Spain's efforts to guard its empire without provoking the British. Several ancillary quarrels—Britain's refusal to give Gibraltar back, disagreements over the location of the boundary between Florida and Georgia, the dispute over logwood, and the counterclaims advanced by the Spanish government and Britain's South Sea Company about losses incurred during recent wars—also poisoned Anglo-Spanish relations.

For most of the decade of the 1730s, patient diplomacy had served as a firebreak against inflammatory proposals, but in the fall of 1739 the will to



peace succumbed to the intransigence of grasping British merchants and proud Spanish bureaucrats. The British government declared war on Spain and began to fit out its fleet for attacks on Spanish holdings in the West Indies. The directors of Spanish policy in Madrid realized that in a maritime struggle the advantage lay with Britain: London's treasury was ampler, its fleet three times as large. To neutralize these British advantages, the Spanish decided to take steps designed to make Britain wary of shifting the preponderance of its naval might westward across the Atlantic. The Spanish assembled an army opposite Gibraltar, poised for an assault on the strategic rock so recently lost. They gathered troops in Catalonia, from where they might strike at Minorca, the former Spanish island the British had secured in 1713. And they created a minatory force in Galicia, hinting that they were considering the still bolder plan of invading Scotland or Ireland. Behind these troop dispositions Spain nourished a more basic hope: that France might come to its aid. For the truth of Spain's situation—a truth that Spanish leaders ruefully but correctly discerned—was that Spain needed the help of its Bourbon ally but its hopes, presently for America and in the future for Italy, were to be realized.

To observers in London the international situation in 1740 was no occasion for joy: with its 7.5 million people, Britain stood awkwardly isolated. The isolation had two sources. In part it was self-inflicted, for in 1733 Britain had declined to honor a treaty obligation to come to the aid of Austria, thereby saving British lives but also poisoning its relationship with the court of Vienna, traditionally its most important continental ally. In significant measure, however, Britain's isolation was a consequence of Cardinal Fleury's brilliant diplomatic initiatives during the 1730s. Because they controlled the world's largest fleet and could tap financial resources unparalleled in any other land, isolation did not terrify the British. They had over 120 ships of the line in their fleet, while France had but 50 and Spain, 40. But if not panic-struck, they were uneasy. Virtually friendless in the face of Bourbon restlessness, the British were often reduced to imagining a world subject to Bourbon hegemony. Should events come to such a pass, Britain would have to acknowledge that it had been thwarted in its effort to realize its two primary diplomatic goals: the maintenance of an equilibrium of power on the continent and the establishment of a world receptive to British traders.

The desire to keep a balance of power operative on the European continent constituted the oldest and most persistent theme in British foreign policy. In the 1720s and 1730s Britain had pursued this goal by adopting policies that paralleled France's, whether in opposition to Madrid's scheme to overturn the Utrecht settlement or to Vienna's hope to plant a commercial empire in the Austrian Netherlands. The British inclination to remain

friendly with France culminated in Britain's neutrality in 1733. This policy of entente was the product of the cautious mind of Whig leader Sir Robert Walpole, who had become first lord of the treasury in 1721. Thereafter, as chief minister, he had steadily widened his authority in the British government. Walpole believed that peace promoted prosperity. He was determined therefore to keep Britain out of war, and he thought that cooperation with France was the policy likeliest to achieve that end. He failed to realize that by elevating peace to the rank of first priority in diplomacy, he might be compromising Britain's self-defined role as equilibrator of Europe by depriving the nation of its weapon of last resort. When historians call Walpole "the Fleury of England," they have in mind his love of peace.<sup>6</sup> The comparison is apt. But it should not be pressed beyond its core meaning. Walpole was not Fleury's peer as a diplomatic strategist, and as the 1730s progressed, international advantages accrued disproportionately to France. This uneven allocation of rewards could not pass unnoticed, and by late in the decade British critics of Walpole's policy were becoming increasingly vocal. Moreover, the initial French reason for supporting Anglo-French cooperation—the fear of violent disputes over the French succession should Louis XV die without heir—had disappeared with the birth of the dauphin. Whether Britain would continue to equate the pursuit of an equilibrium with amity toward France was thus open to question by the end of the 1730s.

The other chief goal of British policy was the promotion of commerce. And in the eighteenth century trade was booming. Exports exceeded imports by a healthy margin, both mounted throughout the century, and with the striking exception of France, almost all areas of Europe accessible by sea experienced buoyant trade with Britain. Because most Britons who gave thought to the matter believed that British prosperity was inextricably linked to British trading success, the government paid the closest attention to commercial voices when elaborating the kingdom's foreign policy. But these voices did not speak in unison. Traders represented diverse and often conflicting interests. They fell into quarreling parties on almost every discrete issue of the day. The war with Spain that Britain initiated in 1739 is a case in point. When the British government declared war on Madrid, it was bowing to the demands of those merchants who believed a fortune was to be made by trading with Spain's American empire and rejecting the advice of that separate, more prosperous group of merchants who already traded with Old Spain and who foresaw that the outbreak of war would steal their markets from them. What the verdict of time has rather oddly called the War of Jenkins' Ear—oddly, because Captain Jenkins had been separated from his ear back in 1731—was essentially a commercial conflict, but not all men of

commerce endorsed it. Indeed, Sir Robert Walpole resisted the calls for belligerence to the end. His defeat on the issue signaled not only a decline in his political power but also the acceptance by a significant proportion of Britons of the rightness of using war to realize commercial goals.

A final complication must enter our analysis of Britain: the kingdom's close ties with the United Provinces and Hanover left the trajectory of its policy ever vulnerable to deflection. The alliance with the Dutch republic had been forged in the wars against Louis XIV. So close had the cooperation between the two commercial and liberal states become that Europeans spoke of them jointly as the Maritime Powers, even after they ceased to share princes. Britain had always been the stronger of the two, and in the years after 1713 British power had waxed while Dutch had waned. But the memory of cooperation endured, and since both shared a keen determination to prevent France from gaining control of more of the Low Countries, leaders in both states worked consciously to keep their policies generally coordinate.

The tie with Hanover had arisen in 1714, when the Elector of Hanover succeeded to the throne of Britain. In 1740 George II, like his father before him, was prince in both lands. Hanover was geographically vulnerable. "It would only be a breakfast," a Prussian warned the British envoy to Berlin in 1738.<sup>7</sup> Most Britons would therefore gladly have ended the tie: they believed that Hanover held Britain in thrall. But George II loved what he called "his country-seat."<sup>8</sup> Since it could not be cast off, it had to be included in diplomatic calculations.

The distinctive fact about Prussia was the size of its army. Like all nations, Prussia had objectives it hoped to realize in the world. But with a standing army numbering 80,000—constituting almost 4 percent of the entire realm of only 2.2 million—it had access to a club of disproportionate magnitude wherewith it might pummel all but the largest of the states that stood in its way. In Prussia the army was the chief business of the nation. Fortunately for Europe the king of Prussia, Frederick William I, valued his army too much to risk it in war. Political geography defined his objectives. Like the Habsburg domains, the lands of the Hohenzollerns were discontinuous. Far to the east, beyond the Holy Roman Empire, lay the kingdom of Prussia, or East Prussia, as contemporaries often called it. Far to the west, on the Rhine and the Weser rivers, were several outlying clumps of territory. Between these flanking outposts to east and west, but contiguous with neither, were the homeland of the Hohenzollerns, the Mark Brandenburg, and other adjacent territories. To the north lay the Baltic Sea; to the south, Saxony. And for a short stretch of about forty miles, where the Oder divided Brandenburg from Silesia, the Hohenzollern domains fronted onto the holdings of the Habsburgs.

A long-term goal of Prussia was to acquire the intervening territories in Germany. Pomerania, which separated the core holdings from East Prussia, was a part of Poland and therefore relatively immune from Hohenzollern grasping, for any effort to seize it would trigger Russian and Austrian assaults upon Prussian territory. Hanover separated the core holdings from the smaller territories lying farther west. Any effort to wrest this electorate from its ruler would certainly bring British and Austrian forces into the field. Consequently Prussian leaders in the 1730s were contemplating less controversial possibilities. The immediate issue as the decade drew to a close was the reversion to Jülich and Berg, two Rhenish territories that, if joined to existing possessions, would make Prussia a significant force on the middle Rhine. But the Prussian claim was not uncontested, and so the foreign policy of Frederick William I had been directed toward securing international support for Prussia's reversionary right to Berg, even at the cost of renouncing Jülich. In diplomatic as in military affairs, Frederick William was a cautious man.

To the south, in the northwest corner of Italy, sat the strategically important state of Piedmont-Sardinia. The three chief components of this state of 2.3 million inhabitants were the island of Sardinia, economically unimportant but the source of Charles Emmanuel III's royal title; the duchy of Savoy, the mountainous province from which Charles Emmanuel's family had earlier sprung; and the principality of Piedmont (with contiguous territories), the core of the realm and seat of its capital at Turin. Following the course laid out by his father, Victor Amadeus II, Charles Emmanuel bent his own energies to securing more land for his realm. His hopes lay in the east, for to have envisioned plucking territory from France would have been insane and to have chosen an Alpine struggle against Switzerland would have been stupid. The region to be looted—peeled like an artichoke, leaf by leaf, as the expression ran—was therefore Lombardy. Spain had held it until the War of the Spanish Succession; Austria had ruled it thereafter. Neither of these major states was prepared to yield its ambitions for the regions, and thus both were regarded as the enemies of Turin. The key tactical problem facing the diplomats of Piedmont-Sardinia was to discover how, in a world of powerful enemies, a smaller state could expand.

Since coming to the throne in 1730, Charles Emmanuel had played his enemies against each other dexterously. He dangled hopes of his support or at least of his neutrality before one and all. He was determined to keep Britain as an ally and thereby, whatever else might happen, to maintain a route (through Nice) to the outside world. He so maneuvered his state that he never faced the combined armed might of Austria and Spain. He called

bluffs opportunely, he made threats credibly. He was—though the world did not fully acknowledge the fact in 1740—the master diplomat among the princes of his day. Since it was Austria that held the land that Charles Emmanuel desired, it was Austria that would be required to yield it up. But to the king, it was a matter of indifference whether Austria transferred the land as an indemnity to a victorious enemy or as a reward to a useful friend. Piedmont-Sardinia was prepared to serve in either capacity in order “to play,” as the Austrian envoy had said in 1727, its “two-sided role.”<sup>9</sup>

Finally there was Russia. Peter the Great had made western Europe aware of the citadel of Orthodoxy. Then the penetration of 12,000 Russian troops to the Rhine in 1735 had forced western Europe to stop relegating the land of the czars to the periphery of its consciousness. If nothing else, Russia boasted an army that was composed, in the words of a French observer, “of very fine troops, perfectly disciplined, accustomed to hard work and deprivation.”<sup>10</sup> But western understanding of this vast and alien empire of 14 million souls was a jumble of hope, fear, and misinformation. Though the empress Anna, who had reigned since 1730, was German by background and in her interests, she was also indolent, and thus the main lines of Russian foreign policy remained unaltered from the direction given it by Peter the Great. By this definition Russia had two goals: moving southward at the expense of Turkey and moving northwestward at the expense of Sweden. Because France supported both these nations, Russian leaders were not notably tender-hearted toward Versailles. Because Austria followed an anti-Turkish policy parallel to Russia’s, there were opportunities for cooperation between Vienna and St. Petersburg, and treaties concluded in 1726 and 1739 identified the character of that cooperation. But essentially, Russia was an international loner, protected by distance. It was free to choose to ignore Europe. If complications in the notoriously vicious politics of St. Petersburg should further distract the attention of Russian leaders from the affairs of the west, it would become a monumental task to dislodge Russia from its inactivity.

#### THE NETWORK OF CONFLICTS

National leaders in the eighteenth century were confident that the fundamental conditions of the international order were enduring. Above all, they believed that antipathies between states were more determinative than friendships—in fact, that persisting international rivalries provided the fixed points upon which any sound understanding of the world of international relations had to be based. They were right, and the earlier discussion of national aspirations directs our gaze immediately to the four contentions that

seemed paramount to the statesmen of 1740. The first pitted France against Austria in a struggle for influence in Germany. The second found Austria and Spain as rivals in a conflict over territory in Italy. The third involved Britain and Spain in the competition for trade in America. The fourth cast Britain and France as adversaries in a contest for nothing less than dominance in Europe. None of these contentions was of recent origin; all, in fact, may be traced at least to the seventeenth century. They thus satisfied the eighteenth-century presumption that the foundations of the international order should be persistent. And foundations they were, for in the mind of almost every person who gave thought to the reality of international relations these four great conflicts constituted the starting point of policy formulation.

It is easy, but also misleading, to see the contention between France and Austria as a contest between rival ruling houses. Whatever it may once have been, the struggle had by the middle of the eighteenth century become one in which national motives transcended dynastic motives. France sought to make Germany responsive to its wishes so that Paris need feel no threat from beyond the Rhine. Austria sought to make Germany compliant to its will so that the integrity of the Austrian state would not be challenged. Thus, though nominally allies in the odd twilight years of the late 1730s, France and Austria were in fact wary antagonists for power in Germany. And even though recent trends—the gaining of the reversion to Lorraine and the tightening of the alliance with Bavaria—had worked to the advantage of France, two further considerations posed severe constraints to the potential further widening of French influence. First, the Germans did not much care for the French. Whether because they remembered the brutalities of Louis XIV’s troops or because they had been exposed to the prevailing French contempt for things Teutonic, the inhabitants of the Holy Roman Empire nursed a keen distrust of their Gallic neighbors. Second, Austria had a friend in Russia. To policymakers in Paris this ominous connection might be translated into military support that would allow Austria to send its armies sweeping across Germany with impunity. Fleury was therefore quite sincere when he assured Charles VI that Louis XV would “observe with the most exact and inviolable fidelity the obligations he has taken.”<sup>11</sup> Both from personal inclination and from his reading of the international situation, Fleury had concluded that France’s chances for success in the struggle for influence in Germany were best if the contest remained diplomatic in nature.

A second great conflict focused on Italy. Here Austria and Spain were the contenders, and their duel revolved less on influence than upon the sheer acquisition of territory. Unlike the contests between Austria and France for influence in Germany, the struggle between Austria and Spain for land in

Italy was essentially dynastic. Spain had long been the dominant foreign power in Italy, ruling in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in both Naples and Milan. But this had been the Spain of the Habsburgs. Thus, when the Bourbons replaced the Habsburgs in Madrid—and especially after the War of the Spanish Succession was fought precisely over this issue—it became possible for both the new Bourbons, now ensconced in Spain, and the dispossessed Habsburgs, driven back to their Austrian redoubt, to advance pretensions to the old Spanish Habsburg holdings in Italy and thereby to claim valuable real estate at both ends of the peninsula. Charles VI styled the council that ran Italian affairs from Vienna the Consejo de España, and he hoped to use his son-in-law's new duchy of Tuscany as a *point d'appui* for an Austrian recovery of southern Italy. But the Spanish rulers were equally determined. Having won Naples for Don Carlos, they now eyed Milan for Don Philip. There were those in Vienna and Madrid who could justify the struggle for Italian territory by reference to presumptive economic or strategic advantage. But at root the struggle was familial, fueled by dynastic pride and fought for dynastic pretensions.

The third great conflict, however, was anything but dynastic. When Britain challenged Spain's command of the Caribbean by declaring war in October of 1739, the government was responding to the demands of a frustrated British public and an ambitious commercial sector. It was to be a war for trade, and Britain believed it would prevail by interdicting the lines of trade that bound the Caribbean to Spain and thereby isolating the scattered New World settlements of the Iberian kingdom. The organization of Spanish Caribbean trade suggested that the plan would not be difficult to effect. On the mainland that rimmed the sea Spain had three secondary ports—Vera Cruz, Porto Bello, and Cartagena—each of which fed its trade into Havana, on the island of Cuba. From Havana the cargoes crossed the Atlantic, most of them going to Cadiz. In theory, therefore, Spain presented several vulnerable Caribbean targets. In practice, however, there were several problems for the British. They had only eight ships of the line and eleven smaller vessels in the region. Even though that number could be augmented by squadrons from Europe, such a transfer would mean the weakening of either the Mediterranean or the Channel defenses of Britain and perhaps invite a Spanish attack in European waters. Moreover, their Caribbean ships could not remain at sea indefinitely, and Britain lacked the Caribbean dockyard facilities for building new vessels that Spain possessed at Havana. And so, despite boasting a fleet that numbered over one hundred seaworthy ships when the war began, the British were uneasy. No one knew better than they that naval warfare was riddled with vagaries.

Britain won an early victory when, in December of 1739, Admiral Vernon captured Porto Bello with six ships. At home the British people were jubilant: Vernon was memorialized in dozens of medals for beginning the war so auspiciously. But in truth the achievement was nugatory. The defenders had offered no resistance, and after the British left, the Spanish resumed their use of the port. British ministers soon began to realize that maritime activities alone would be insufficient to make Spain yield to British demands. What was needed, they came to believe, was the capture of an important Spanish port in the Caribbean. Havana and Cartagena were the two choicest targets, but a divided ministry could not choose between them. So in December of 1739 it decided to dispatch a joint military-naval expedition to Jamaica with the orders that a Council of War, convoked in Jamaica, should make the final determination of target. But while Britain pondered strategies and tactics, Spain acted with alacrity to relieve its distressed forces in the Caribbean. Philip V sent a squadron under Admiral Torres to the West Indies. Meanwhile, with a series of feints on land and sea, Spanish commanders in Europe kept Britain's naval directors thoroughly confused about Spanish plans for the eastern rim of the Atlantic. Above all, Spain sought and received pledges of French assistance. By October of 1740 Vernon was digesting the thoroughly unpalatable news that two French squadrons, one under the Marquis d'Antin and the other led by Admiral Laroche-Alart, had escaped British detection in European waters and were cruising near Martinique.

The mention of French commanders indicates that this third great conflict of the era was impinged upon by the fourth. And the fourth was the greatest of all. For if Britain and Spain were contenders for trading advantages in America, Britain and France were contenders for dominance in Europe and the world beyond. By one criterion that the eighteenth century respected, Britain and France stood apart from all other states as the only two great powers: France had the military might to command the land of western Europe, but Britain had the naval might to control the sea and the financial resilience to purchase allies almost indefinitely. What these two powers sought was not so much territory as influence. They deployed their foreign policies with an eye to assuring the continuance of a world order suitably malleable to their wills. The problem lay in the unhappy fact that their wills did not coincide. The rivalry touched North America and the West Indies, India and West Africa, but it focused on Europe, where both France and Britain purchased friends and influence. Sweden lay in France's orbit, Denmark and the United Provinces in Britain's. Britain enjoyed better relations with Russia than France did, and in 1740, prompted by Hanoverian misgivings and its own fear that war in the Caribbean might leap the

Atlantic, Britain campaigned to secure closer ties with Prussia. France in turn had its Bourbon nexus to rely on, its important German friends, and its capacity to stir the Turks to action. As if in fear of contamination, the two capacity to stir the Turks to action. As if in fear of contamination, the two rivals eschewed trade with each other. But elsewhere their merchants struggled incessantly for the upper hand. The Baltic was Britain's sea, the Mediterranean (though more narrowly) France's. The war in the Caribbean now threatened to ignite this tinder-box of cross-purposes, for even a generation of superficial Anglo-French amity had not reduced, still less expunged, these multiple tensions. Cardinal Fleury viewed the dispatch of d'Antin's squadron as decisive; in August he declared that "one can not reasonably doubt that the English will declare war in due form."<sup>12</sup>

A consideration of these four great conflicts suggests that Europe fell into two rival camps. In one sat France and Spain, each with its particular quarrels against both Britain and Austria. In the other sat Britain and Austria, each with a particular quarrel with the respective Bourbon kingdoms. France's recent policy of pampering Britain and patronizing Austria had confused the picture somewhat, but no one believed that if general war came to Europe either London or Vienna would side with Versailles. It is true that relations between Britain and Austria had soured since the halcyon days of the Duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene. In 1725 the two states had joined rival alliances, and in 1733, two years after the earlier rupture had been repaired, Britain had refused to honor commitments to come to Austria's aid in the War of the Polish Succession. But if the two states had not in recent years been notably friendly, they continued to find in their common suspicion of France a basis for cooperation. And since the Austrian decision to abandon its Ostend dreams had eliminated the last serious point of contention between London and Vienna—and since London was seeking allies in the face of its West Indian problems—all the elements were in place that would conduce to more amicable ties between Britain and Austria and perhaps to joint international actions. Bourbon relations also had known their rocky moments. In 1719 France had joined an international effort to compel Spain to accede to a revised territorial settlement; in 1724 France had broken off the engagement of the Spanish infanta to the French dauphin; in 1727 France had forced Spain to abandon its military effort against Gibraltar. But unlike the London-Vienna axis, the Paris-Madrid tie was grounded in commercial relations that both sides valued. So a political rapprochement was central to Fleury's thinking. In 1731 the two states had agreed to an alliance, the first sign of the Family Compact that would promote the coordination of Bourbon policies off and on for three decades. And in the war that followed over the Polish succession, the two had cooperated with stunning success.

That war was now the great object lesson for Europe. For if Lorraine and Naples constituted proof of the value of Bourbon solidarity, they were equally proof of the fatuity of Austro-British bickering.

Of the unengaged states of Europe, Russia was the least involved with any of the foregoing disputes. It had growing trade ties with Britain and France, though the relations with the latter were complicated by France's support of the three countries—Sweden, Poland, and Turkey—that comprised the so-called eastern barrier against Russia. It had virtually no relations with Spain, for these two seats of empire—guardians of pieties as dissimilar as the nativistic Orthodoxy of the czarist state and the baroque Catholicism of the Iberian peninsula—viewed each other with suspicious incomprehension. Only with Austria, its nearest neighbor among states already considered, did Russia have considerable intercourse. The two were, as noted, allies. But their friendship was strained. A half century of lukewarm cooperation against the Turks had led each to realize that the other coveted land and allies in the Christian regions taken from Islamic control. The issue was not sharp in 1740. But it cast a shadow on Austro-Russian ties. And one recent event also bedeviled those ties. In the just concluded war with Turkey, Austria had been so desperate for peace that it had, with considerable French prompting, accepted a separate treaty of peace, leaving its ally Russia isolated. All these considerations united to reinforce the impression that geography gave: Russia had no adequate reason to become immersed in the disputes of western and central Europe.

A second unengaged state was Piedmont-Sardinia. Unlike Russia, it had powerful reasons for choosing to enter a European war, should one break out. Alone, the armies of Charles Emmanuel III could not hope to wrest Lombardy from Austrian control. But in a time of general war, when Austria would need troops to defend Brussels and Prague as well as Milan, the possibilities for success would multiply. Nevertheless, Charles Emmanuel faced a vexing dilemma: how could Piedmont-Sardinia acquire land from the Habsburgs without simultaneously weakening the Habsburg capacity to check Bourbon ambitions in Italy? There were several alternative approaches from which the king, always inventive in stratagems, might choose. But one thing he needed to take into account, whatever course he chose, was the feebleness of support for Piedmont in the lands he coveted. The inhabitants of Lombardy had no desire to become part of Turin's growing northern Italian empire. Nourished in the municipal traditions of ancient Lombardy, many of the middle-class inhabitants of the Milanese viewed Piedmont-Sardinia as a land of pernicious centralization, unrelieved monarchism, and stultifying agrarianism. The sum of these considerations was clear to observers across

Europe: Charles Emmanuel could be expected to take advantage of any emerging opportunity to secure unwilling subjects, but the means he would choose could not be predicted. Waiting upon events had become the hallmark of Piedmont-Sardinian foreign policy.

There were parallels between the conditions of Piedmont-Sardinia and of Prussia, the last of the important unengaged states. Rulers in both had embarked upon deliberate programs of centralization, encountering in the process resistance from their nobilities. Rulers in both had formulated reasonably clear plans for territorial expansion at the expense of adjacent states and were looking for opportunities to implement these plans. Two important dissimilarities, however, defined their essentially divergent situations. First, Piedmont-Sardinia had natural and defensible frontiers; Prussia did not. In one sense this dissimilarity gave an important advantage to the leaders in Turin. But the second dissimilarity flowed in part from the first and more than compensated for it. Prussia had the army of a major power; Piedmont-Sardinia did not. The difference is most graphically suggested by figures. Piedmont-Sardinia, no laggard in this matter, had the equivalent of one out of every 77 subjects in the army; France, for comparison, had one out of every 157. But Prussia, through draconian discipline and an unyielding commitment to military might, had managed to put the equivalent of one out of every 28 Prussians in arms. It is no wonder, then, that European courts eyed the Hohenzollern succession uneasily. Prussia yoked the appetite of Piedmont-Sardinia to the military potential of France. Frederick William was a prudent man, a practitioner of peace. But it has always been the chancier of foreign policies to hazard all on the life of a single individual.

In May of 1740 the King of Prussia died. Of his successor, Frederick II, much has been written. Twenty-eight when he ascended the throne, he later became known as "the Great," a sobriquet he would earn in the war he was soon to unleash. Frederick was an unpleasant person. He bullied his associates, saddled them with blame for his own failures, and lied with abandon. His conception of himself was exalted, and as early as 1731, when not quite twenty, he likened himself to Alexander, seeking new worlds to conquer. To some degree these unattractive traits can be imputed to the loveless childhood and frightened adolescence that the new king had endured. But to some degree they reflect deliberate choice—the calculated behavior of a ruler who, despite a publicized critique of Machiavellianism, operated on the assumption that private virtue was inconsistent with princely function. Frederick was also a man of high intellect and wide reading, unafraid to make bold decisions. He valued accurate information and browbeat his representatives abroad to learn all they could about the courts and countries to

which they were posted. He lived, by royal standards, austerely; he worked, by royal standards, arduously. Throughout his long life he knew only rarely the joy of friendship. He meant to be feared, not liked.

Nine years before acceding to the throne, Frederick had set forth his ideas on Prussia's foreign policy. The government, he had declared, should seek to enlarge the territory under its control and thereby link up the separated territorial blocks that comprised the state. He identified three targets for incorporation—Polish Prussia (West Prussia), Swedish Pomerania, and Jülich and Berg—and he inaugurated his reign by declaring his unwillingness to accept his father's renunciation of Jülich. But even as he was bending his energies to realizing the old Hohenzollern dreams for more Rhenish territory, he also had his eye upon Vienna. In 1737 he had written: "The present situation of the House of Austria is very critical. If the emperor should die today or tomorrow, what kind of upheaval would the world then not experience. Everyone would want to share in his inheritance, and we would see as many factions arise as there are rulers." In the year of his accession he was blunter: "The emperor is the old spectre of an idol who formerly had power. . . . but who at present is nothing."<sup>13</sup> Some commentators have seen in these remarks only the ruminations of the intellectual in politics, somewhat dramatically couched but essentially analytic rather than programmatic. Perhaps the commentators are right. But in light of what followed we should not lightly dismiss the possibility that the new king began his rule with aspirations that far transcended the acquisition of a Rhenish principality. Frederick was himself later to say of the opening of his reign: "Ambition, the opportunity for gain, the desire to establish my reputation—these were decisive, and thus war became certain."<sup>14</sup> In any event, as his words suggested and his actions showed, the young man who had come to the throne of Prussia, unlike his fellow sovereign in Turin, was one of those rare rulers who would not be content to wait upon events but would choose instead to shape them.