

position, of manoeuvre and small gains. As he himself put it: 'to win a battle means to compel your opponent to yield you his position' and so 'to gain many small successes means gradually to heap up a treasure'. During the campaigns of 1761 and 1762, and again during the War of the Bavarian Succession of 1778, he fought no major battle. As we shall see in the next chapter, the French revolutionaries and Napoleon took a great deal from Frederick the Great's military practice and consequently conquered most of Europe; but they fatally failed to imitate his subordination of military means to political ends.

13

The Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon 1787-1815

THE BEGINNING OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WARS

The wars of the French Revolution are usually dated from 20 April 1792, for that was when the National Assembly in Paris declared war on the 'King of Hungary' (which was how the new ruler of the Habsburg Monarchy, Francis, was known until crowned as Holy Roman Emperor in July). In reality, the wars had been underway since 17 August 1787, for it was then that the Turks had imprisoned the Russian ambassador, Count Bulgakov, in the Seven Towers of the Topkapi Palace in Constantinople, which was their ceremonial way of declaring war. As Paul Schroeder has sagely observed, it was a war that began, 'as many wars do, from the decision of a threatened defensive power to halt its decline and regain security by violence'. In the same way that the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 unleashed a chain reaction that eventually engulfed the world, this action by the Turks was to have momentous consequences.

First, it activated the defensive alliance between Catherine the Great and Joseph II concluded in 1781, which required each party to come to the assistance of the other if attacked by a third party. Although Joseph recognized his obligation at once – the *casus foederis* in diplomatic parlance – he did so with a heavy heart. As he lamented to his brother Leopold, 'these damned Turks' had forced him to wage war in regions where plague and famine were endemic and all for the prospect of very little gain. With the Austrians tied down in the Balkans for the foreseeable future, the way was clear for the new King of Prussia, Frederick William II, to make a name for himself. The opportunity was already

waiting, in the shape of the political crisis in the Dutch Republic. This was essentially a re-run of the factional strife that had wracked the country periodically ever since its foundation, between the maritime provinces led by the merchant oligarchs (the 'Regents') and the landed interests led by the current head of the house of Orange, who exercised ill-defined executive authority as 'Stadholder'. For the past decade or so it had been the former who had got the upper hand, progressively stripping the Stadholder William V of his powers. In the course of the 1780s a sharper edge entered the contest by the emergence of a group of 'patriots' looking for more radical and even democratic reforms, including the total abolition of the Stadholderate. At the same time the domestic struggle had taken on an international dimension by the Dutch treaty of alliance with France concluded in 1785 and the accession to the Prussian throne in 1786 of Frederick William II, whose sister was married to William V.

Nothing less than the future of world domination appeared to be at stake in this imbroglio. Now that the French had control of Dutch naval bases at the Cape of Good Hope and in Ceylon to add to their existing possessions in the Indian Ocean of the Île de Bourbon (Réunion) and the Île de France (Mauritius), they were very well placed to do to the British in India what they had just done in America, for their rivals had no naval base between St Helena and India. Certainly the British viewed French domination of the Dutch Republic with great alarm, and some at least of the French ministers viewed it gleefully as an opportunity not to be missed. The death in February 1787 of the French foreign minister, Vergennes, also removed a brake on the hawks, led by the navy minister, the marquis de Castries. The Dutch patriots were now encouraged to take complete control of the regime.

The incident that sparked off the denouement was the arrest on 28 June 1787 of the Princess of Orange by a detachment of Freikorps, the paramilitary wing of the patriots, as she was trying to make her way to The Hague to rally support there for her husband's cause. Although she was soon released, the Prussians were encouraged by the British to take advantage of the episode to solve the Dutch problem by force. After much hesitation, they agreed, by now secure in the knowledge that the Austrians would be diverted by the war in the Balkans. Stubborn to the point of folly, the patriots had refused the satisfaction demanded, confident that their French sponsors would honour earlier

promises of military assistance. As it was, with the new chief minister Loménie de Brienne vetoing any intervention on financial grounds, the French could only stand by in fuming impotence as their Dutch allies were imprisoned or forced to flee. Once the Stadholder had been restored to his previous dominant position, the Dutch Republic was duly steered into a new alliance with Prussia and Great Britain (March and June 1788). For the British, the sense of relief was intense. The Dutch navy was back where it belonged (at the disposal of the Admiralty), the threat of French control of the Channel had dissolved and, above all, sea routes to India were safer than they had ever been. George III spoke for everyone when he told Pitt: 'Perhaps no part of the change in Holland is so material to this country as the gaining of that Republic as an ally in India.'

As the British crowed, the French wailed and gnashed their teeth. To be proved impotent over Poland, the Crimea or even the League of German Princes was one thing, but to be unable to act in one's own backyard to defend a vital national interest was quite another. When Louis XVI supported Brienne and financial prudence against the hawks, de Castries resigned, as did the secretary of state of war, the comte de Ségur. The latter's son was almost certainly correct when he wrote in his memoirs:

Our situation was critical: this was the time when our court should have taken bold action; a vigorous and decisive initiative would probably have thrown our enemies into confusion, reassured the Dutch, checked the Prussians, made the Turks see reason, and so would have diverted abroad that turbulence of opinion which was convulsing France and which urgently required occupation outside the country if it were not to provoke an explosion at home.

Speculation on what might have happened, if only this or that had been done, can sometimes be helpful, especially when the exercise is conducted by contemporaries. The military men among the latter were agreed that a golden opportunity had been lost. Lameth, for example, recorded the 'general opinion' that stopping the Prussians would have been easy, especially as the Dutch opposition party had offered an immediate grant of 12,000,000 *livres*. The political benefits of intervention, he argued, would have far outweighed any cost, for whereas a successful campaign would have restored the loyalty of the army, the actual betrayal of France's allies by the supine ministry had completed

its demoralization. Ségur was not the only contemporary to realize that a watershed had been reached: 'France has collapsed', recorded Joseph II, 'and I doubt whether it will rise again.' It is no exaggeration to say that the Dutch fiasco represented the terminal humiliation of the old regime.

As the French monarchy began to lurch towards the abyss, problems were also intensifying for Joseph II. The Turkish declaration of war on Russia had come too late to allow any serious campaigning in the Balkans that year. It was not until 1788 that the war began in earnest. It did not go well for the allies. Despite increasingly desperate pleas from Joseph, the Russian commander-in-chief, Prince Potemkin, stayed resolutely on the defensive. Nor was there any chance that the Russian fleet might appear in the Mediterranean to inflict another Chesme, for the British declined the necessary assistance to transfer it from the Baltic, and a rumour began to spread that the mercurial Gustavus III of Sweden would take advantage of Russian commitments in the south to launch an invasion through Finland (which indeed he did, in July). During the course of a long hot summer, the Austrian army began to fall prey to their oldest enemies – shortage of food and disease. Its inability to seize the initiative was dramatized in August, when a Turkish force broke into the Bánát of Temesvár, inflicting terrible devastation.

The situation was to get a great deal worse before it got better. Joseph's radical reform programme had alienated a wide swathe of opinion across a wide swathe of his territories. In the Austrian Netherlands in 1787 a revolt had been headed off only by concessions by the governors-general – concessions that Joseph promptly denounced and sought to claw back. Encouraged by the outbreak of revolution in France, a full-blown rebellion erupted in the autumn of 1789. With most of the government forces away fighting on the eastern front, the insurgents found it easy to take control of the province. On 11 January 1790 the combined Estates proclaimed the independence of the 'United States of Belgium'. By this time, Joseph II was on his deathbed, finally succumbing to tuberculosis on 20 February. When his brother and successor Leopold arrived in Vienna the following month, he found his inheritance apparently in a state of dissolution. Belgium was gone and it looked very much as if Hungary was about to go the same way.

These troubled waters naturally attracted the attention of Frederick William II, flushed with the success of his Dutch conquest. Now that

the British were deeply in his debt, the French paralysed by revolution and the Russians preoccupied by a two-front war, the moment seemed to have come to settle accounts with the Habsburg Monarchy once and for all. In August 1789 Frederick William decided to launch an invasion in the spring of the following year to accelerate a dissolution that seemed to be already underway and to pick up the pieces. Among other things, he proposed to create an independent Belgium and an independent Hungary, the latter to be ruled by a Prussian client, the Duke of Saxony-Weimar. Alliances were negotiated with Poland and the Turks and an army of 160,000 was massed in Silesia. As if that were not enough, the Spanish got ready to claim their share of the spoils in Italy.

Yet when the dust settled, in the summer of 1790, nothing had happened. The Prussian hand had never been as strong as it looked. Indeed, the Austrian position began to improve even before the end of 1788, when their Russian allies at last began to get moving. The Swedish invasion of July 1788 had soon come to a halt, when the Finnish officers mutinied and the Danes threatened to open up a second front. Indeed, only the diplomatic intervention of Prussia and Great Britain saved Gustavus III from total disaster. The armistice they mediated in September relieved, if it did not end, pressure on Catherine the Great in the north. Better news still came at the end of 1788 when at long last the Russians captured the great Turkish fortress of Ochakov, which controlled the estuary of the Dnieper and was the key to the Black Sea coast between the Bug and the Dniester. As a result, the campaign of 1789 went very much better for both allies, ending with a series of Austrian victories in Transylvania and Moldavia and climaxing with their capture of Belgrade on 8 October.

It was these victories, won by Joseph's armies, that allowed Leopold to negotiate a settlement with Prussia. In the spring of 1790 war still seemed the most likely outcome of the crisis, but at one minute to midnight, on 27 July 1790, it was resolved by the Convention of Reichenbach, mediated by the British. In return for Prussia's agreement to demobilize and halt the campaign of subversion in Belgium and Hungary, Leopold undertook to conclude his war with the Turks on the basis of the *status quo ante bellum*. Although this involved giving up all the conquered territory, including the great prize of Belgrade, and thus recognizing continued Turkish hegemony in the Balkans, the agreement rescued the

Habsburg Monarchy from what had seemed certain disintegration. An immediate dividend was paid when an Austrian army reconquered Belgium in November 1790.

While continental Europe had been wracked by revolutions, wars or rumours of war, the British had observed events with majestic complacency. In July 1789 Bishop Porteous recorded in his diary the following entry: 'This day Mr Pitt dined with me at Fulham. He had just recd. News of the French Revolution & spoke of it as an event highly favourable to us & indicates a long peace with France. It was a very pleasant day.' Although Pitt did not know it, an episode had already occurred that was to confirm his optimism, at least in the short term. In May 1789 three British merchantmen had been arrested by Spanish warships in Nootka Sound, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. So remote was the location that it took almost a year for news to filter back to Europe. The occasion may have been trivial, but the issues it raised were of great importance to both sides. Essentially, it was a collision between the relentless surge of British commercial expansion and the traditional Spanish claim to a monopoly of trade and settlement on the Pacific coast. Both sides armed and both sides blew hot in the negotiations which dragged on acrimoniously throughout the spring and summer of 1790. If Spain had been given the support she requested and had every right to expect from her French ally, war could not have been avoided. In the event, none was forthcoming and the Spanish had to concede virtually every British demand.

FRANCE JOINS THE WAR

With this revelation that French foreign policy was still in a state of immobility, it is high time to examine the effect of the Revolution. One preliminary point that needs to be made is that nothing could have been further from the thoughts of the other European powers than a concerted effort to come to the rescue of Louis XVI. When his younger brother, the comte d'Artois, asked for assistance from Joseph II (who was, after all, Marie Antoinette's brother), he received the tart reply: 'It is in my interest to be perfectly neutral in all this business, no matter what happens to the King and Queen, and I shall certainly not interfere.' The general reaction in the chanceries of Europe was well summed up by the

Prussian foreign minister Count Hertzberg: 'The French Revolution presents a peculiar spectacle to the rest of Europe, who can regard it, if not with indifference, then at least with tranquillity.' Catherine the Great of Russia engaged in some inflammatory rhetoric against the revolutionary 'barbarians', but she was much more interested in Poland than France.

Inside France, the National Assembly was preoccupied with domestic reconstruction. Only when the Spanish request for assistance over Nootka Sound forced them, did they look outside the country. The debates of May 1790 revealed that their main concern was to take control of foreign policy away from the King, that there was a strong strain of Anglophobia among the deputies, and that they were determined to make a clean break with old regime diplomacy. 'In future, let us recognize as allies only those peoples who are just', proclaimed Jean François Reubell, 'we no longer wish to have anything to do with dynastic pacts or ministerial wars, conducted without the nation's consent but at the cost of the nation's blood and the nation's gold.' So out of this debate came the Revolution's first great programmatic statement on foreign relations. On 22 May 1790 the National Assembly decreed that 'The French nation renounces the undertaking of any war with a view to making conquests and [declares that] it will never use its forces against the liberty of any other people.'

This 'declaration of peace to the world' appeared to be quite unequivocal. Yet within two years a virtual unanimity of the same Assembly declared war. At first sight this looks like an inevitable clash of ideologies, and indeed there were issues of principle at stake. Two stand out. The first concerned the German princes whose jurisdiction and seigneurial dues in Alsace had been abolished by the decrees of 4-5 August 1789. Not unreasonably, they protested that the National Assembly could not abolish unilaterally what was theirs by treaty. In this clash between the principle of national sovereignty and contractual obligations incurred by the old regime, there could be only one winner. When presenting the report of the committee on feudalism, Merlin de Douai was careful to stress that French claims were also based on history and law, but the essence of his case rested on the indivisibility and inviolability of the nation. What he called the 'social contract' concluded by all French citizens in 1789 took precedence over any political contracts concluded by rulers without the consent of their people: 'in short,

it is not the treaties of princes which govern the rights of nations'. With those words, Merlin tore up by their roots the foundations of the European states-system.

At least Alsace had been ceded to France by treaty. It was a different matter in the two enclaves in the south of the country ruled by the Pope – Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin. Supporters of the Revolution there had clamoured from the start for 'reunification' with France. Although there could be no doubt that sooner or later the National Assembly would oblige, the deputies took their time, uncomfortably aware of the furore any recognition of the principle of self-determination would unleash. For that reason, the eventual decree was careful to combine traditional and revolutionary arguments: 'The National Assembly declares that from this moment the territories of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin form an integral part of the French state, by virtue of the rights of France to their possession and in accordance with the wish to be incorporated in France expressed freely and solemnly by the majority of the communities and citizens.' Again, the careful choice of words could not disguise the explosive implications of the principle advanced as a central axiom of the Revolution's foreign policy.

Both of those issues could have been solved by financial compensation. Not one major power was interested in going to war for the small fry of the Holy Roman Empire or the Pope. Indeed, both Prussia and Austria would have liked to emulate the revolutionaries in annexing irritating enclaves. What was pushing France and the German powers towards war was not issues but their sharply differing assessment of their mutual power relationship. The revolutionaries looked at old Europe and thought they saw a moribund political system in its death agony, with all the states at each other's throats: Prussia against Austria, Austria against the Turks, the Turks against Russia, Russia against Sweden, Sweden against Denmark, Spain against Britain, Britain against Russia. They knew only too well that the Dutch patriots had revolted against their Stadholder and that the Belgian patriots had revolted against their Emperor, for Paris was full of Dutch and Belgian refugees, all looking forward to the day when they went home as part of a French army of liberation. They also knew that the Poles wished to throw off the Russian yoke, that the Hungarians wanted to throw off the Austrian yoke, that the Irish wanted to throw off the British yoke, and so on. For their part, the old regime powers drew quite a different lesson from the events after

1787. What they saw was a French state immobilized by bankruptcy and civil unrest – 'the ablest architects of ruin that had hitherto existed in the world', as Edmund Burke put it. As for the 'patriots' elsewhere in Europe, they had shown themselves to be paper tigers. The Spanish had fought for eighty years to conquer the Dutch Republic – in vain; Louis XIV at the height of his power had tried to conquer the Dutch Republic – in vain; yet in 1787 a small Prussian army had done it in just a few weeks. If anything, the Austrian victory over the Belgian insurgents three years later had been even easier. So why should the French revolutionaries be any different?

In the course of 1791 it became ever more likely that this argument would be settled by military means. In the east, the war against the Turks was drawing to a close. A joint initiative in March by the British and the Prussians to restrain Catherine's appetite for Turkish territory by forcing her to give up Ochakov ended in humiliating failure. Then a further surge of Russian victories brought a preliminary peace at Galatz on 11 August, by which the Turks ceded all the territory between the Bug and the Dniester, including Ochakov. A week earlier the Austrians had also finally concluded their own peace with the Turks at Sistova after one of the most protracted and tedious negotiations in the history of European diplomacy. So both of the eastern powers were now free to turn their attention westwards. For Russia it was high time, for the Polish problem now loomed large. Not for the last time, the Poles had taken advantage of Russian preoccupations in the Balkans to reassert their independence. In May 1789 Russian troops had been ejected and a sustained attempt to modernize Poland's political institutions had recently reached a climax on 3 May 1791 when a new constitution was voted. This strengthened central authority by securing hereditary succession to the house of Saxony when the current King Stanislas Augustus died, by abolishing the 'liberum veto' (the individual deputy's right to blackball legislation) and by abolishing the right of confederation, which in effect had made insurrection legal. In future, it was hoped, a constitutional but strong monarch would be able to mobilize the country's enormous but untapped potential against foreign predators. Now that Catherine had her hands free, retribution loomed.

For their part, the Austrians too were looking west, to France. Leopold's sister, Queen Marie Antoinette, had issued her first appeal for international assistance against the Revolution as far back as 12 June

1790. It went unheeded. In March of the following year Leopold was still advising his sister not to attempt to escape from France but to play for time, and was still stressing that he could do nothing to help without the agreement and co-operation of all the other European powers. What changed his mind was the sharply deteriorating situation inside France and the news that the flight of the royal family was imminent. Even then he warned that he could take no action until they had reached safety and Louis XVI had issued a formal appeal for help. That he was not quite such a cold fish as this chilly prudence suggests was shown by his reaction to the (false) news that the great escape had succeeded. In an excited, not to say passionate, letter, he praised his sister as the saviour of the King, of the state, of France – of all monarchies indeed – and concluded: 'Everything that I have is yours: money, troops, in fact everything!'

In reality, of course, he could do nothing until he was sure of at least the benevolent neutrality of Prussia. By the summer of 1791 the Prussians were in a receptive mood. For all their dominant position on the continent since 1787, they still had nothing concrete to show for it. Nor without reason, they blamed their faithless British allies, who had bullied them into accepting a compromise at Reichenbach and then had left them in the lurch over Ochakov. So now they began to think in terms of a military expedition to suppress the French Revolution, for the failure of the 'flight to Varennes' on 20/21 June 1791 had provided clear proof of what everyone had long suspected: that Louis XVI was opposed to the Revolution and was a prisoner in his own country.

Events now moved quickly. On 6 July 1791, Leopold issued the 'Padua Circular', calling on the crowned heads of Europe to combine to restore liberty to the French royal family. On 25 July, a convention was signed between Prussia and Austria which settled outstanding disputes, pledged co-operation over France and paved the way for a formal alliance. On 27 August, Leopold and Frederick William II met in Saxony, at Pillnitz, issuing a joint declaration that the present plight of Louis XVI and his family was a matter of common interest to all the crowned heads of Europe. They called for a concerted effort by their colleagues 'to restore to the King of France complete liberty and to consolidate the bases of monarchical government in accordance with the rights of sovereigns and the welfare of the French nation'. Once this international concert had been formed, they promised, prompt action would be taken

in pursuit of its objective. In the meantime they would issue 'appropriate orders' to their armed forces.

This counter-revolutionary initiative led to a triple misunderstanding which was to result in war. First, the émigrés were greatly encouraged by the Declaration of Pillnitz, redoubled their military preparations and even formed a government-in-exile in preparation for the return to France they believed to be imminent. Secondly, the Austrians and Prussians concluded that the apparent move back towards the political centre in France, which had followed the flight to Varennes, was due to their campaign of intimidation. What they had done once, they concluded, they could do again – should the need ever arise. For the time being, they seemed to have got just what they wanted – a weak but stable constitutional monarchy. Thirdly, the revolutionaries took the Padua Circular, the Declaration of Pillnitz and the antics of the émigrés to represent an international conspiracy against the Revolution which would end in invasion. In fact, nothing could have been further from the truth. The Declaration of Pillnitz had been deliberately nullified by a crucial phrase – '*alors et dans ce cas*' ('then and in that case'). If all the European sovereigns agreed to co-operate, 'then and in that case' Austria and Prussia would agree to take action. With Russia preoccupied with Turkish and Polish affairs, with Spain and Sardinia known to be passive and, above all, with Great Britain anxious to see the disorders in France continue ad infinitum, there was not the remotest prospect of that condition being fulfilled. As Leopold complacently wrote to Kaunitz immediately after the declaration had been issued: '*Alors et dans ce cas* is with me the law and the prophets. If England fails us, the case is non-existent.'

The endgame in the move to war began with the meeting of the new legislature in Paris on 1 October 1791. So much confusion is occasioned by the terminology of the revolutionary assemblies that a word of explanation is necessary. The Estates General proclaimed itself to be the 'National Assembly' on 17 June 1789. As its primary task was to draw up a new constitution, its full title was the National Constituent Assembly (*Assemblée nationale constituante*), so it is sometimes referred to as the 'National Assembly' and sometimes as the 'Constituent Assembly'. When at long last it completed its task in September 1791, one of its last actions was to pass a self-denying ordinance excluding its members from seeking election to its replacement. This was to be called the

'National Legislative Assembly' (*Assemblée nationale législative*), so it is sometimes referred to as the 'National Assembly' and sometimes as the 'Legislative Assembly'. Its brand-new membership included many fewer clergymen, many fewer ex-nobles (noble titles had been abolished in June 1790), was much younger and was also much more radical.

In this new body the initiative was soon seized by a group of radical deputies led by Jacques-Pierre Brissot and known variously as the 'Brissotins' or 'Girondins', the latter title alluding to the fact that many of them came from the *département* of the Gironde in the south-west. Their strategy rested on one key insight: that the approval Louis XVI had given to the new constitution was bogus and that he and his queen were conspiring with the German powers to destroy the Revolution. To expose this treason, they began a campaign for war against Austria. They calculated, quite correctly, that war would radicalize the Revolution, destroy the monarchy, establish a republic and – last but not least – bring themselves to power. Nothing looked less likely in the autumn of 1791, for only 38 of the 745 deputies could be classified as Brissotins. But helped by their superlative oratory – the great speeches of Vergniaud, Isnard, Guadet and Brissot belong in any anthology of political eloquence – by the following spring they had assembled almost a unanimity – only seven intrepid deputies voted against the war on 20 April 1792.

The Brissotins had managed this feat by appealing to both the interests and the prejudices of the deputies. Some of the arguments employed were eminently practical – that war would restore the creditworthiness of the revolutionary paper money, the *assignats*, for example. The same could be said of the prediction that it would put an end to civil strife and restore the revolutionary dream of social and political harmony. Others were more emotional, not to say atavistic, especially the repeated exploitation of the hatred of Austria. Vergniaud's denunciation of the Treaty of Versailles of 1756 – 'We can see that the abrogation of this treaty is a revolution as necessary in foreign affairs, both for Europe and for France, as the destruction of the Bastille has been for our internal regeneration' – brought both the deputies and the public galleries to their feet, cheering and shouting their support. France, it was claimed by speaker after speaker, had been humiliated and exploited by their treacherous 'ally'; now it was time for '*la grande nation*' to stand up again and resume its rightful place as the greatest power in the world. Perhaps most persuasive was the argument that a war would be

quick and easy. As the Dutch and the Belgians had shown, the oppressed peoples of Europe were sighing for liberation and would rise in revolt against their feudal tyrants the moment a French army crossed their frontier. The Austrian mercenaries would desert in droves, the revolutionary freedom fighters would be irresistible.

If the military signals were propitious, the international situation was equally promising. The great European concert, it was predicted, would prove impotent, immobilized by internal decay and irreconcilable differences. Of the powers which mattered, Great Britain would be kept neutral by public opinion, ministerial instability, the enormous National Debt and problems in India; Russia was preoccupied by Poland; Spain was bankrupt in every conceivable sense of the word. Most important of all, it was more likely that Prussia would fight on the side of France than against her. This confidence in Prussia was one of the most striking – and misguided – of the war-party's assumptions. It was based in part, of course, on the Austrophobe rejection of the old regime's diplomatic system. To return to a Prussian alliance would be to return to the golden age of French greatness before the fall from grace in 1756. It was also based on a surprising but patently sincere admiration of Frederick the Great. The 'immortal glory' of this 'philosopher king' and his stable, just and prosperous state were praised repeatedly. Nor was it only his pacific enlightened virtues which appealed. He was also held up to the Assembly as the model on which the Revolution should base its foreign policy, for when he had been confronted by an Austrian-led concert, he had known just what to do: strike first. In short, far from having to fight the rest of Europe, France would only have the feeble Habsburg Monarchy to contend with.

Hatred, pride and confidence were just three of the emotions excited so effectively by the hawks. As the debates of the autumn and winter of 1791 wore on, they began to fuse to form a critical mass. What was needed now was a detonator. It was found in anger and was supplied by the Austrians. In Vienna, Emperor Leopold and his advisers had watched events in the Legislative Assembly in late 1791 with a growing sense of disappointment and alarm. The stability promised by the royal acceptance of the new constitution was not materializing. On the contrary, the leaders of the new legislature seemed determined to provoke conflict at home and abroad. As the entreaties from Marie Antoinette for intervention became more insistent and more reproachful, the

decision was taken to repeat the exercise in intimidation first employed with such apparent success in the previous summer. On 21 December 1791 the chancellor of state, Prince Kaunitz, sent a note to the French ambassador in Vienna couched in deliberately threatening language. If a French army did cross the German frontier to take action against princes harbouring the émigrés, he stated, then Austrian forces in Belgium would intervene at once. Moreover, retribution would also swiftly follow 'from the other sovereigns who have united in a concert for the maintenance of public order and for the security and honour of monarchs'.

Nothing could have served better the cause of the Brissotin war-party in the Legislative Assembly. Just when the wind seemed to have been taken out of their sails by Louis XVI's approval of action against the émigrés, their enemies had come to their rescue. If there was one thing calculated to rouse every deputy, no matter what his position on the left-right spectrum, it was the threat to intervene in French politics, for this conflicted with the essential foundation of the French Revolution: national sovereignty. It also gave credibility to the Brissotin argument that, as the Austrians intended to make war on the Revolution anyway, there was nothing to be lost and everything to be gained from a pre-emptive strike. Not only did Leopold and Kaunitz fail to appreciate the counter-productive effect of their clumsy initiative, they believed that it had had the desired result. They were deluded partly because they were denied reliable intelligence of events in Paris (their ambassador, Count Mercy, having fled to Brussels long ago) and partly because they received from the French foreign minister, Delessart, a feeble and temporizing reply. Apparently unaware that real power was now in the hands of the legislature, they sent an even more provocative note on 17 February 1792. Only the need to force Louis XVI to dismiss his current executive delayed the now certain declaration of war for a couple of months.

No sooner had the war begun than the miscalculations of the Brissotins began to be revealed. The rest of Europe did not rise in revolt; the Austrian soldiers did not mutiny; the revolutionary armies did not prove to be irresistible; Prussia did not join the French – on the contrary it entered the war at once on the Austrian side. However, Brissot did get one thing right, albeit in spite of his confident predictions. It was the invasion of France by the German powers and their imminent arrival in

Paris that brought the fall of the monarchy and the creation of a republic, on 22 September 1792.

REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE CONQUERS WESTERN EUROPE

To follow the twists and turns of the war is rendered impossible by its complexity. The French military historian Arthur Chuquet needed eleven substantial volumes just to cover the first fifteen months. Two essential points need to be made, however. One is the fluctuating nature of military success during the 1790s. Neither side was able to gain a decisive advantage until General Bonaparte invaded Italy in 1796 – and even that success proved short-lived. The other relates to the close interaction between success or failure on the battlefield and events on the home front. After a first invasion of Belgium at the end of April ended in disaster, the war went quiet for three months, as the cumbersome Austro-Prussian war machine was cranked into first gear. When it finally did start to move forward, early in August, at first it carried all before it, as French fortresses fell like ninepins. The feeble resistance offered by the garrisons convinced the Parisian radicals that they were being betrayed by the enemy within. The result was the 'September Massacres', when between 1,100 and 1,400 prisoners were butchered. The great majority were social offenders such as prostitutes or common criminals, innocent of the remotest connection with politics, although one or two aristocrats perished as well. Prominent among the latter group was the princesse de Lamballe, whose severed head was paraded to the Temple, where the imprisoned Marie Antoinette was invited to kiss the dead lips of the woman alleged by the gutter press to have been her lesbian lover.

The advance of the Prussians through Champagne stuttered to a halt at Valmy on 20 September when they ran into, not the demoralized rabble they had been expecting, but a large army of well-disciplined and well-armed soldiers, commanded by men who clearly knew what they were doing. As battles go, it was unspectacular: after a prolonged exchange of artillery fire and one abortive advance, the Duke of Brunswick, the Prussian commander-in-chief, ordered a halt. Under cover of darkness, it was the French who left the field of battle, but not

even the most sanguine Prussian felt anything other than defeated. That night, the greatest poet of the age, Goethe, who was accompanying the invasion with his employer, the Duke of Saxony-Weimar, told his companions: 'From here and today there begins a new epoch in the history of the world, and you can say that you were there.'

By now the French were pressing forwards on all fronts. On the day after Valmy, General Montesquiou invaded, and then occupied almost without resistance, the Duchy of Savoy. General Custine and the Army of the Vosges moved into Germany, taking Speyer on 30 September, Worms on 4 October, Mainz on 21 October and Frankfurt am Main two days later. The most important battle of the campaign, however, came on 6 November at Jemappes in Belgium, where General Dumouriez won a hard-fought but decisive victory over the heavily outnumbered Austrians commanded by the Duke of Saxony-Teschén. Within a week Brussels had fallen, within a month most of Belgium had followed suit. Together with the effortless conquests in the Rhineland and Savoy, this quick and apparently total victory generated a mood of triumphalism in Paris. But it also presented problems, the most obvious being: what was France to do with the territory the armies had won? If a truism, it bears repeating that the Revolution had gone to war without any actual war aims. So it was now high time to invent some. There were plenty of suggestions, it need hardly be said, the most popular – because the most simple – being the doctrine of 'natural frontiers'. After Jemappes, Brissot himself wrote to Dumouriez: 'I can tell you that there is one idea which is spreading here, namely that the French Republic should have no other frontier than the Rhine.' At the end of January 1793, the doctrine was given its classic expression by Danton in the National Convention: 'The frontiers of France have been mapped by nature, and we shall reach them at the four corners of the horizon, on the banks of the Rhine, by the side of the ocean and at the Alps. It is there that we shall reach the limits of our Republic.'

One glance at the map should have been enough to demonstrate that there were problems with the plan to establish natural frontiers other than the linguistic, ethnic and historical diversity of the people affected. Quite simply, the Rhine flows into the sea not in Belgium but in the Dutch Republic, much of which would therefore have to be included in the new 'natural' France. That in turn would guarantee the hostility of the British, who believed that 'Holland might justly be considered as

necessary a part of this country as Kent', as Burke put it to the House of Commons in March 1791. So the French advance through Belgium to the Dutch frontier in the autumn of 1793 turned British neutral observation into active intervention. The National Convention (as the new revolutionary legislature installed in September 1792 was called) had few qualms about adding to a growing list of the republic's enemies because they believed that Britain would be incapacitated by domestic insurrection, especially in Ireland and Scotland. A French secret agent reported from London: 'England offers precisely the same prospect as France did in 1789.' So when the motion was put on 1 February 1793 that war be declared on both Britain and the Dutch Republic, there was not one dissenting voice. The same sort of blithe overconfidence allowed them to add Spain to the list on 7 March.

By that time, the fortunes of war were beginning to spin round once again. An important symbolic moment had come on 2 December 1792 when the Prussians had recaptured Frankfurt am Main. Not only did it show that the German powers were beginning to take the war seriously, it also demonstrated that French confidence in the revolutionary potential of the rest of Europe was entirely misplaced, for the local population had risen in support of the Prussians and had opened the gates to them. Moreover, the great armies that had won Valmy and Jemappes were beginning to melt away. With the Revolution's frontiers secured by the victories of the autumn and with winter approaching, the volunteers began to drift home. They were fully entitled to do so after 1 December 1792, having enlisted only for one campaign. Estimates of the total strength of the armies at this – or any other – stage of the war can only be approximate, but it seems likely that from around 450,000 in the autumn of 1792, numbers fell to 350,000 by the beginning of 1793, of whom only about 220,000 were in any sense 'effectives'. To fill the gaps in personnel that began to yawn, on 24 February 1793 the National Convention introduced conscription. Although the total to be raised was only 300,000, nowhere could the quotas be filled. Across France the average response was about 50 per cent; in the south it dropped to a quarter, while in the west it precipitated civil war in the Vendée.

Thus by the spring of 1793, the Revolution looked as if it were imploding. In the south the Spanish invaded Roussillon; in the east the Prussians went back on the offensive, driving the French out of the Rhineland; in the north the Austrians gained a great victory at

Neerwinden on 18 March, reconquered Belgium and advanced on to French soil; in the north-west a British expeditionary force commanded by the Duke of York besieged Dunkirk; inside France, the 'federalist' insurrectionaries seized control of a large part of the country, including the great port of Toulon, which surrendered to the Royal Navy at the end of August. It was as a response to this critical situation at home and abroad that on 23 August the National Convention finally completed the long transition to revolutionary war begun four years earlier. At long last they heeded the call for every citizen to be a soldier and vice versa and decreed:

From this moment until that in which our enemies shall have been driven from the territory of the Republic, all Frenchmen are permanently requisitioned for service in the armies.

The young men shall fight; the married men shall forge weapons and transport supplies; the women will make tents and clothes and will serve in the hospitals; the children will make up old linen into lint; the old men will have themselves carried into the public squares to rouse the courage of fighting men, to preach the unity of the Republic and hatred of Kings.

The public buildings shall be turned into barracks, the public squares into munitions factories, the earthen floors shall be treated with lye to extract saltpetre [for the manufacture of gunpowder].

All firearms of suitable calibre shall be turned over to the troops: the interior shall be policed with shotguns and with cold steel.

All saddle horses shall be seized for the cavalry; all draft horses not employed in cultivation will draw the artillery and supply-wagons.

This decree is usually referred to as instituting the '*levée en masse*', but it was much more than that. It was also the first declaration of total war. From now on, until total victory was achieved, every man, woman, child, animal and inanimate object was conscripted for the war effort.

The result was the conscription of what was probably the largest army ever seen in Europe. No one knows – least of all the revolutionaries themselves – just how many men were under arms by 1794. If the popular figure of a million is a myth, the best guess of around 800,000 is still a tremendous total. Probably of equal importance was the raw aggression that was brought to the conduct of the war by the new regime that replaced (and guillotined) the Brissotins, who had been unable to

make a success of the war they had started. Deputies of the National Convention were sent to the front as omnipotent commissars, to terrorize the generals out of defeatism and on to the offensive. Arriving at the eastern front on 24 October 1793, Saint-Just at once advertised his intentions by having the luckless veteran General Isambert shot in front of his troops for showing insufficient resolution in the face of the enemy. As Lafayette had deserted to the Austrians in 1792 and Dumouriez in 1793, it was not surprising that the revolutionaries were suspicious of the generals they had inherited from the old regime. A great cull followed.

Uncomfortably aware of the fate of their predecessors, the new men were just what was needed to turn the tide after the disasters of the spring and summer of 1793. And turn it they did. A first success was gained at Hondshoote in August, when the Duke of York was forced to abandon his siege of Dunkirk and start what was to prove a very long retreat. After mixed fortunes on the eastern front in the autumn, the twenty-five-year-old General Hoche had forced the Austrians back across the Rhine by the end of the year. When campaigning began in the following spring, it was Belgium that was the main battleground. Following defeats at Tourcoing on 18 May and at Fleurus on 26 June, the Austrians were forced to retreat back into Germany. By early 1795, the French had conquered not only Belgium but the Dutch Republic and the left bank of the Rhine apart from the fortresses of Luxemburg and Mainz. The west had been won.

Its conquest had been greatly assisted by simultaneous developments in the east. The major beneficiary here was Catherine the Great of Russia, who was delighted to see Prussia and Austria embroiled in an unsuccessful war in the west, leaving her in control – '*der lachende Dritte*', or 'the happy third party', as the Germans say. As soon as she learnt of the French declaration of war, she ordered her armies into Poland 'to restore the traditional constitution'. It is worth repeating that Russia, Prussia and Austria were primarily eastern European powers and more concerned with Poland than France. But their interests were not identical. Prussia viewed the Polish constitution of 3 May 1791 with horror, for, in making the crown hereditary in the house of Wettin, it recreated the nightmare of a Saxon-Polish state. With fear went greed – a desire for more Polish territory, especially the key towns of Danzig and Thorn, plus their surrounding territories.

It is possible that the Prussians were thinking in terms of a second partition even before the Russian invasion; certainly they were putting out feelers immediately after it. That their greedy tentacles would grasp something solid was then made certain by a terrible blunder on the part of the Austrians. Believing that the war against France would be quick and easy, they began to rearrange the map of Europe in advance, in best balance-of-power style. They themselves, they suggested, would seek compensation for the costs of their punitive expedition against the French Revolution by exchanging their Belgian territories for Bavaria, while the Prussians should recoup their outlay by taking a slice of Poland. In the severe but judicious verdict of Paul Schroeder, this was 'an egregious error' – not only had the Austrians walked into a trap, they had helped to lay it and dig it deeper: 'in other words, Austria gave hard cash to a notorious swindler in exchange for his conditional promissory note'. The cash was banked on 23 January 1793 when Prussia and Russia signed a partition treaty, which gave the latter the whole of the eastern half of the country, including the Ukraine, with a population of more than 3,000,000. The Prussian share was three times smaller in terms of population and four times smaller in terms of area, but its value was relatively greater, for it embraced not only the long-coveted prizes of Danzig and Thorn but also all of Great Poland, up to within a few miles of Warsaw and Kraków.

In the west during 1793 the Prussians scored a number of military successes, recapturing Mainz on 23 July and defeating the French at Pirmasens in September and at Kaiserslautern in November, but their strategy was now essentially passive. The Polish rising against the partitioning powers launched by Tadeusz Kościuszko in March 1794 ensured that the Prussian focus would be kept firmly on the east. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the Poles saved the French Revolution from military defeat: by ensuring that both Austria and Prussia, but especially Prussia, went to war with one eye looking behind them and one hand tied behind their backs; by creating dissension between the two German allies; and by keeping Russia out of the war altogether. The Poles also inadvertently pushed the Prussians towards a separate peace with revolutionary France. Excluded from the partition of 1793, the Austrians were determined to have a good share in the next, signing a treaty with Russia on 3 January 1795 which earmarked a huge slice of territory that advanced their frontier almost to Warsaw. Fearing they

would be left out in the cold, the Prussians hurried to conclude peace negotiations with France, which had first been mooted immediately after Valmy and had been pursued in earnest since October 1794. The result was the Peace of Basle of 6 April 1795, by which Prussia abandoned her alliance with Austria, withdrew from the war and agreed that France should occupy the left bank of the Rhine until a final peace was concluded with the Holy Roman Empire. In return, France guaranteed compensation on the right bank for losses on the left, and allowed the Prussians to gather together the states of northern Germany in a neutrality zone, thus greatly enhancing their political influence. Thus strengthened, they were able to join the third – and final – partition of Poland by a treaty with Russia signed on 24 October the same year.

The Prussian desertion of the first coalition encouraged two other powers to do likewise. On 16 May 1795 the Dutch concluded the Treaty of The Hague, purchasing peace at a terrible price: an indemnity of 100,000,000 guilders, a huge loan at a low rate of interest, a commitment to maintain a French army of 25,000 until a general peace was concluded and the cession of Maastricht, Venlo and Dutch Flanders. Returning to Paris in triumph, the French negotiator Sieyès rushed to the session of the Committee of Public Safety and flung a fistful of guilders on the table with the words, 'I have brought you a hundred million of these!' The Spanish took longer to come to terms. The campaign at both ends of the Pyrenees had gone very much the French way in 1794, as both Guipuzcoa and Navarre in the north-west were overrun and Figueras in the north-east was captured. Even so, the Spanish armies were still intact and the French had not penetrated beyond the periphery. So when peace was signed at Basle on 22 July 1795, the Spanish secured the best terms achieved by any enemy of revolutionary France in the 1790s: a return to the *status quo ante bellum* with the exception of the Spanish share of Saint Domingue, a prize of dubious value.

The two great victors of this first phase of the war were the peripheral powers. Without being a combatant against France, although very definitely being a combatant against the Poles, Catherine the Great had won an enormous swathe of territory that propelled the Russian frontier some 300 miles (480 km) to the west. The acquisitions made further gains in the south at the expense of the Turks very much easier. At the other end of Europe, the Revolution had conquered the west. Belgium was formally annexed on 1 October 1795, the Dutch Republic had been

turned into a docile satellite state as 'the Batavian Republic' and the entire left bank of the Rhine was in French hands, only the fortress of Mainz still holding out. On two occasions – in the summer of 1792 and almost exactly one year later – the Revolution had appeared to be on the brink of total collapse; by 1795 it had achieved greater conquests than even Louis XIV in his prime.

That left the British and the Austrians to deal with. It was in the Atlantic that the war against Great Britain would be won or lost. On 1 January 1793, a confident Kersaint had promised the National Convention that their navy could launch an invasion across the Channel without further ado: 'by this expedition we shall bring the war to a close: on the ruins of the Tower of London we shall sign with the English people a treaty to settle the destinies of the nations and to establish the liberty of the world'. This prediction proved to be no more accurate than his Brissotin colleagues' earlier boast about the invincibility of the land forces. When Admiral Morard de Galles sailed out from Brest in March 1793 with three ships of the line and five frigates, the sortie ended in disaster. After multiple collisions and dismastings, the squadron had to return ignominiously to port. Morard's report revealed that some of his officers had failed to carry out orders through ignorance of what was required of them, while many of the terrified 'seamen' had refused to go aloft. Captain Duval of *Le Tourville* was killed by a loose block when trying to secure a sail himself. Nor was the first actual encounter with the Royal Navy encouraging. When Sir Edward Pellew and his frigate the *Nymphe* met the French frigate *Cléopâtre* in the Channel off Prawle Point, it was the latter which was forced to strike her colours after a brisk forty-five-minute exchange of broadsides. A similar encounter between the frigates *Crescent* and *Réunion* outside Cherbourg in October ended in the same way.

Yet it was to take a long time for the Royal Navy to establish its superiority. Although not obvious at the time, its greatest success came as a result of domestic strife in France, for the surrender of Toulon in August 1793 allowed the destruction of its great stock of timber – 'possibly the single most crippling blow suffered by the French navy since Quiberon Bay [in 1759]', in the opinion of Nicholas Rodger. On 1 June 1794 Admiral Lord Howe caught the Brest fleet about 400 miles (650 km) out into the Atlantic and captured or wrecked a dozen French ships of the line without loss. For all the wild celebrations the 'Glorious

First of June' unleashed in Great Britain, however, this was a muddled affair with as many opportunities missed as taken. It also failed in its main objective, which was to seize a massive French convoy. In the Caribbean, the British found it relatively easy to seize the French islands – Tobago, Saint Domingue, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Saint Lucia – but much more difficult to hold these in the face of disease and revolts. The only unequivocal successes were gained at the expense of France's new Dutch allies. As soon as the subjugation of the latter looked certain, the British moved to secure the Cape of Good Hope – 'a feather in the hands of Holland but a sword in the hands of France', as the expedition's Commodore John Blankett put it. They also sent an expedition from Madras to capture the Dutch port of Trincomalee on the eastern coast of Ceylon, another crucial acquisition, for it was the only secure port in the region during the monsoon. With their communications with Europe now secure, the British could embark on the consolidation and expansion of their possessions on the mainland of India.

REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE CONQUERS SOUTHERN EUROPE

Even if the British had got into their naval stride more quickly, they could never have defeated the French Revolution by themselves. That could only be done by a land power, and that meant Austria. Even when deserted by their continental allies, the Austrians continued to demonstrate their marvellous, but usually unsung, resilience. Late in 1795, after months of inactivity, the French had launched a two-pronged attack across the Rhine. The Army of the Sambre-et-Meuse under Jourdan crossed in the north at Düsseldorf and then swung south towards Mainz. The Army of the Rhin-et-Moselle under Pichegru crossed in the south, capturing Mannheim on 20 September. A vigorous Austrian counter-offensive soon had both armies reeling back to the left bank, the year ending with a formal armistice signed on 15 December. For the following campaign, a three-pronged assault on Austria was planned, with the intention of bringing the war to an end. The main thrust was to be through Germany. The Sambre-et-Meuse under Jourdan was to invade from the north and the Rhin-et-Moselle under Moreau

from the south, before uniting for a final assault on Austria culminating in the capture of Vienna. Meanwhile, a revitalized Army of Italy was to be sent through Piedmont and Lombardy, up the Alpine passes and into the Tyrol, to complete an irresistible trident.

At first all went well north of the Alps. During July the Sambre-et-Meuse advanced rapidly south-eastwards through Franconia, reaching Amberg by the middle of August, at which point it was less than 50 miles (80 km) from the Bohemian frontier. Meanwhile the Rhin-et-Moselle had also advanced, through Swabia into Bavaria. But the Austrian commander, the Archduke Charles, succeeded in preventing the two armies combining, while at the same time concentrating his own forces. On 24 August he inflicted a decisive defeat on Jourdan at Amberg, forcing him to begin the long retreat to the Rhine. As soon as he learnt of this reversal, Moreau ordered his own army to withdraw. By October both were back where they started from.

Their bacon was saved by Bonaparte and the Army of Italy, who had started earlier and had moved much faster. He enjoyed the inestimable advantage of moving into territory hitherto unravaged by war, whereas his northern colleagues were trying to subsist on the dregs of a cup that had been drained once too often. The story of the conquest of Italy has been told many times in great detail. If only the bare bones can be presented here, at least a simple narrative reveals just how quickly events could move. Bonaparte arrived at Nice on 27 March 1796; in the course of the next month he defeated the Piedmontese army and imposed a truce on them at Cherasco on 28 April; on 10 May he scored his first virtuoso victory over the Austrians at the bridge of Lodi; on 15 May he entered Milan; by the end of May, all Austrian Italy had been conquered except for the fortress of Mantua. In other words, Bonaparte had completed his part of the great plan before either of the northern armies had even started. He spent the rest of the year imposing extortionate settlements on one hapless ruler after another, extracting huge sums of money and cartloads of works of art. Most important were the settlements imposed on the papacy and the Kingdom of Naples on 5 and 24 June respectively. Together with the occupation on 27 June of the port of Livorno, the centre of British commercial activity in the region, they established French hegemony in Italy. Periodically, his presence was needed in the north, to defeat four separate attempts by the Austrians to descend from the Alps and relieve Mantua. After the last such had ended

with a comprehensive defeat at Rivoli in January 1797, Mantua finally surrendered.

With his southern flank now secure, Bonaparte could turn north for the long-delayed thrust into the Habsburg Monarchy. Sending Joubert to cover any Austrian intrusion from the Tyrol, he headed north-east, across the Brenta and the Piave into Friuli. By 16 March he had reached the Tagliamento and was poised to enter the Habsburg province of Carinthia. By this time, his enemy's will was crumbling. Francis II was still determined to continue the war, but the new commander on the southern front was not. This was none other than the Emperor's brother, the Archduke Charles, the victor of 1796, but now convinced that nothing could stop Bonaparte marching to Vienna. On 29 March Bonaparte reached Klagenfurt, by 7 April he had marched through Carinthia and had reached Judenburg in Styria. Indeed, his advance units reached the Semmering pass, from which, according to one improbable report, they could see the spires of Vienna 75 miles (120 km) away to the north. With the Sambre-et-Meuse and the Rhin-et-Moselle armies about to cross the Rhine yet again, the Austrians agreed to an armistice.

The war was then brought to an end in two stages. First, Bonaparte negotiated a preliminary peace at Leoben on 18 April 1797. He then set about imposing puppet regimes on northern Italy. By the time the definitive treaty was signed at Campo Formio on 17 October, the terms had changed in France's favour. This was essentially a partition treaty: France received Belgium, most of the left bank of the Rhine, Lombardy, the Ionian Islands and Venetian Albania; Austria received Venice, including its territories on the mainland and along the Adriatic coast, and the promise of the archbishopric of Salzburg when peace was concluded between France and the Holy Roman Empire. The Austrians also agreed to recognize formally the Cisalpine Republic and to cede to it Mantua. The Duke of Modena was to be compensated for the loss of his duchy with the Austrian possessions in the Breisgau in southern Germany.

As an exercise in cynical, old-regime-style, balance-of-power politics, this could not be bettered. Indeed, it was even more outrageous than the partitions of Poland, for in Venice there was not even the excuse of a new constitution, or 'Jacobin' agitation, or a rising in the style of Kościuszko to justify its elimination. If proof were needed that 'revolutionary' France was just another great power, this was it. For their part, the Austrians were certainly acting under duress, but their abandonment

of the Holy Roman Empire was an act of self-mutilation if not suicide. For the secret articles of Campo Formio stipulated that the Emperor would use his good offices to secure the left bank of the Rhine for France and also that the dispossessed secular princes would be compensated with ecclesiastical land. The Austrian acquisition of Salzburg was the first stage in this process. In the event, nine years were to pass before Francis II abdicated as Holy Roman Emperor and became Francis I, Emperor of Austria, but with Campo Formio the death-knell of the 1,000-year-old Holy Roman Empire had tolled.

Nine years were needed because the Peace of Campo Formio turned out to be only a truce. The regime in Paris, known as 'the Directory' since 1795, had been rejuvenated by the *coup d'état* of Fructidor (4 September 1797) which had brought a sharp shift back to the left. The French hold on the Italian peninsula was then consolidated in February 1798 by the occupation of the Papal States, the proclamation of the Roman Republic and the deportation of Pius VI to France. Even more important from a military point of view was the corralling of Switzerland by means of the now familiar device of lending the military muscle necessary to allow local collaborators to seize power and set up a satellite republic. The last block was to be eased into place in December 1798, when the King of Sardinia, Charles Emmanuel IV, was forced to abdicate and Piedmont was occupied. For the Directory and its most successful general, Bonaparte, peace was clearly the continuation of warfare by other means.

With western and southern Europe under their control and central Europe about to be remodelled at the Congress of Rastatt, convened to negotiate peace between France and the Holy Roman Empire, the French turned their attention eastwards, to Egypt. Both the foreign minister, Talleyrand, and Bonaparte were enthusiastic about an expedition to conquer it. Egypt would compensate for the loss of the Caribbean islands, pre-empt any attempt by the Austrians to create a Mediterranean empire based on Venice, protect vital French commercial interests in the Levant, provide both a source of raw materials and a market for French manufactured goods, and serve as a base from which to conquer British India. So on 19 May 1798 a huge armada of 280 vessels all told, escorted by 55 warships, including 13 ships of the line and 6 frigates, left Toulon and headed east.

Nemesis swiftly followed. Indeed, there is a good case to be made for

1 August 1798 being the turning point in the history of Revolutionary-Napoleonic France. It was on that day that Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson and a squadron of fifteen ships of the line found Bonaparte's battlefleet at anchor in Aboukir Bay near Alexandria and destroyed it. Of the thirteen French ships only two escaped capture or destruction – and they were hunted down and sunk later. When the smoke cleared, Nelson commented: 'Victory is certainly not a name strong enough for such a scene.' It restored British control of the Mediterranean, it bottled up Bonaparte in Egypt and it may also have marked the end of a French naval challenge to the British hegemon. That was the view of Martine Acerra and Jean Meyer, the authors of the most recent scholarly history of the French navy during the revolutionary period: 'After Aboukir, in reality everything was decided, including the fate of the Empire, Trafalgar being just the inevitable consequence of Aboukir . . . Aboukir changed everything, as the navy lethargically resigned itself to its fate and left it to the army to ensure the survival of the Revolution . . . Aboukir marked the end of France as a naval power.' Bonaparte himself now accepted British naval supremacy. As he reported to the Directory on hearing of the destruction of his fleet, 'On this occasion, as so often in the past, the fates seem to have decided to prove to us that, if they have granted us hegemony on land, they have made our rivals the rulers of the waves.'

WHY THE FRENCH WON ON LAND AND THE BRITISH AT SEA

As we saw in the previous chapter, it was Frederick the Great of Prussia who proved to be the most efficient maximizer of a country's resources. His reward was promotion to the Premiership of the European states-system, missing out a couple of divisions en route. It was as well that he died in 1786, for the Revolutionary Wars that began the following year brutally exposed the inadequacy of his system. The armies of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire outbid every aspect of Frederickian warfare. The differences were identified helpfully by Hans Delbrück in tabular fashion:

Frederick the Great	Napoleon
Army forms a single unit	Army divided into corps and divisions
Commanders of various units have no other function than to pass on orders or to set an example of personal bravery to the troops	Middle-ranking officers are given independent tasks and scope for using their own initiative
Commander marches and attacks according to a preconceived plan	Commander begins battle on all fronts and decides from one moment to the next how to proceed
No or very few reserves	Very strong reserves
Strongest blow first	Strongest blow last
Chance plays a large part	Chance plays a part but is not allowed to disturb superiority in numbers, and leadership is assigned a decisive weight

Napoleon inherited the tools for victory from the old regime. Revolutionary warfare was not revolutionary. Everything commonly regarded as its essence had been invented earlier: 'The French Revolution coincided with a revolution in war that had been under way through the last decades of the monarchy. Soon the two meshed' (Peter Paret). This fusion was made easier by the fact that in old-regime Europe it had been French theorists and practitioners who had formed the vanguard of military change. Partly this was due to the traumatic shock inflicted by defeat at Rossbach. As the Prussians were to do almost exactly fifty years later after Jena and Auerstedt, some far-sighted French military reformers made the best of misfortune to prepare for revenge. They did so in two vital areas. In Jean-Baptiste Vaquette, comte de Gribeauval (1715-89), they found an artilleryman of genius. Seconded to the Austrian army in 1757, he had experienced at first hand just how effectively the Prussians could use field artillery. Recalled by Choiseul (foreign minister after 1758 and secretary of state for war as well after 1761), Gribeauval set about implementing and improving the lessons he had learnt in Germany, most notably standardization, interchangeability of parts, improved accuracy and greater mobility.

At about the same time, Choiseul encouraged his commander in Germany, the *maréchal de Broglie*, to experiment with more flexible

troop formations to allow greater speed and mobility. Broglie broke up his army into more manageable columns or divisions, not exceeding sixteen battalions each, reinforced with their own artillery, covered by their own cavalry and preceded by their own light troops. When one of these rapidly moving columns made contact with the enemy, it was expected to hold on until the others could arrive on either flank and intervene as appropriate. This decentralization gave divisional commanders greater opportunity for initiative and allowed quicker redeployment from column into line of battle.

The Austrians and Prussians went to war with revolutionary France in 1792 confident of a quick and easy victory: 'a promenade to Paris', as one émigré put it. In the event, twenty-two years were to pass before the allies could hold their victory parade down the Champs-Élysées. What had gone wrong? In his treatise *On War against the New Franks*, published in 1795, a bewildered Archduke Charles asked: 'How was it possible that a well equipped, balanced, disciplined army had been defeated by an enemy with raw troops, lacking cavalry, and with inexperienced generals?' His answer at least identified part of the problem: the Austrians had failed, he believed, because they had conducted a defensive war, because they had been too concerned with protecting their lines of communication, and because their use of an extended but thin defensive cordon system had allowed the French to concentrate superior forces at the critical point.

This belief that it was not so much that the French had got it right, rather than the allies had got it wrong, was widespread. It was reassuring but dangerous, because it was an explanation which encouraged a continuing underestimation of revolutionary power and a consequent conviction that tinkering with the old system would be enough to bring eventual victory. The observer who got closest to the truth was rewarded for his insight by repeatedly being passed over for promotion. This was the Hanoverian artillery officer Gerhard Scharnhorst, who also in 1795 published in an obscure military periodical an essay entitled 'A Discussion of the General Reasons for the Success of the French in the Revolutionary Wars'. He singled out for special mention the revolutionaries' intrinsically superior strategic position, which allowed them to operate on interior lines; their superior numbers; their use of light troops; their unified political and military command; their adoption of a coherent, aggressive strategy in the service of national not dynastic interests;

their greater speed and energy; their ruthless acceptance of unlimited casualties; and their nihilistic do-or-die, all-or-nothing approach – ‘the struggle was indeed too unequal: one side had everything to lose, the other little’. Paradoxically, it was the allies who had done most to mobilize French resources: ‘The terrible position the French found themselves in, surrounded by several armies which sought (or so they believed) to enslave them and condemn to eternal misery, inspired the soldier with courage, induced the citizen to make voluntary sacrifices, gathered supplies for the army and attracted the civilian population to the colours.’ Scharnhorst also appreciated how important a part traditional French pride in their allegedly superior civilization fired their indignant rejection of foreign interference: ‘The French nation has always deemed itself to be the only people which is enlightened, intelligent, free and happy, despising all other nations as uncultured, bestial and wretched.’ More radical was his recognition that a free society could generate more strength because it could call on the enthusiasm of the individual citizen-soldier. So, Scharnhorst concluded, the French victories had been no fluke or a temporary aberration: ‘the reasons for the defeat of the allied powers must be deeply enmeshed in their internal conditions and in those of the French nation’.

This is an attractive and popular notion, especially when applied to the pre-nuclear period, but it cannot be accepted as an explanation for the military success of the French Revolution without some qualification. It was certainly the case that many soldiers did see themselves as citizens in uniform, fighting for the Republic and liberty with a fervour born of ideological conviction. Representative of the rhetoric this inspired were the words of twenty-five-year-old Joachim Murat as he set off for war in 1792: ‘Do not weep, my father, if you learn of my death. Without a doubt, the most glorious sacrifice I could make of my life would be to die with my comrades in the defence of the Republic’; or the comment of an anonymous soldier making light of the loss of an arm: ‘It doesn’t matter. I still have one left for the service of the Republic and the extermination of its enemies.’

The belief that it was revolutionary *élan* which brought victory seems problematic when one considers the inconsistent pattern of success. The essential characteristics of the citizen-soldier – his commitment to the Revolution, identification with the nation and willing obedience – were constants and therefore should have had constant results. Yet in fact the

campaigns of 1792, 1793 and 1794 (and those which followed) were anything but constant, being rather a bewildering zigzag of success and failure and close-run things. The revolutionaries won at Valmy in September 1792 but lost at Neerwinden the following March, won at Jemappes in November 1792 but lost at Mainz the following July, won at Fleurus in June 1794 but lost at Kaiserslautern (three times in 1793–4). It would be absurd to suppose that when the citizen-soldiers were defeated they were somehow having an off-day and were not feeling very revolutionary. This may seem facetious, but it does show that arguments based on motivation are both impossible to prove and tautological. On the other hand, examination of the battles fought during the 1790s shows that the Austrians and Prussians too were capable of feats of heroism, both individual and collective, which cannot be explained simply in terms of iron discipline making the soldiers fear their officers more than the enemy. Two awful possibilities loom: either that ideological commitment had little to do with fighting effectiveness or that the values of the old regime were just as powerful motivators as the ideals of the Revolution.

This difficult question will never be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction, if only because it involves motivation. A more concrete, and to my mind more convincing, explanation for the French victory in the west can be found in the numbers of soldiers mobilized by the two sides. The table of major battles during this period, together with the troop strengths of the two sides involved, printed as an appendix to Gunther Rothenberg’s *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon*, reveals that whenever the allies were able to assemble even roughly the same number of troops as the French, they won. It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion of Gilbert Bodinier: ‘All the victories achieved by the republican armies were due to their numbers . . . On every occasion that their numerical superiority was slight . . . or when they were numerically inferior to the enemy, the French were defeated.’

Yet undoubtedly there was also a qualitative element involved. Nothing distinguished the revolutionary army from its predecessor – and all the other armed forces of Europe, for that matter – more than its meritocracy. The declaration of the National Assembly on 28 February 1790 that henceforth ‘every citizen has the right to be admitted to every rank’ began a rapid transformation of the officer corps. Away went the courtiers and the parvenus who had bought their commissions for social

prestige. Away went the die-hard supporters of the old regime. Into the positions they vacated came those whose careers had been blighted in the past by the need to be noble – the ‘officers of fortune’, commoners who had won their commissions by exceptional service but remained anchored to the lowest ranks; those confined by lowly birth or lack of funds to such unfashionable branches as the artillery and the engineers; and, above all, the non-commissioned officers. So the armies which conquered western Europe for the Revolution were commanded by men who had acquired their military training under the old regime but had enjoyed rapid promotion after 1789. The great majority (87.3 per cent) of the generals of 1793–4 came from a professional military background, indeed the majority (67 per cent) had completed thirteen years of service or more by 1789. Brigade and battalion commanders enjoyed similar degrees of experience, 86.9 per cent and 73.1 per cent respectively having been professional soldiers at the outbreak of the Revolution. Yet this was also a young army, with more than a third of its colonels under thirty-five years of age and nearly two-thirds under forty-five.

Doing well was not just a question of showing gratitude to the Revolution. It was a matter of life and death. Following the defections of General Lafayette in 1792 and General Dumouriez in 1793, the regime in Paris was hypersensitive to anything which smacked of treason, including failure. No general had been cashiered before 10 August 1792, but 20 had gone by the end of the year, 275 in 1793 and 77 in 1794. Mere dismissal was often not thought to be enough. No fewer than seventeen generals were guillotined in 1793 and sixty-seven more in the following year, making the execution of Admiral Byng by the British in 1757 seem positively slack by comparison. Nothing illustrated better the violence of the French Revolution than the fact that its generals were more likely to die at the hands of their own government than as a result of enemy action. Not that the latter was a negligible risk, for the regime was insistent that its generals should lead from the front, with the result that eighty were killed in action during the 1790s. When one also takes into account the generals lynched by their own men (such as Dillon in 1792), one must concede that the revolutionary generals earned every last morsel of the fame and fortune lavished on them.

Young, talented and insecure, the commanders of 1793–4 broke the mould of European warfare. The generals of Louis XIV and Louis XV had pottered around for years in the Low Countries without ever achiev-

ing a decisive result. In 1793–4 the names of the fortresses and even of the battlefields were the same, but the attitude was quite different, with the result that the war left ‘the cockpit of Europe’ for more than twenty years, returning only for a brief flurry in 1815. Of all the statistics with which the period bristles, perhaps the most revealing is that which tells us that there were 713 battles between 1792 and 1815, but only 2,659 during the previous *three hundred* years. This was partly due to the remorseless insistence by the Committee of Public Safety that the armies must attack, attack, attack, until the enemy was totally defeated: ‘shock like lightning and strike like a thunderbolt’ was the pithy instruction of 21 August. The ruthlessness bred by this absolute attitude led the National Convention to decree on 26 May 1794 that no British or Hanoverian prisoners should be taken alive. Fortunately, only one French sea-captain ever obeyed this murderous command and, although he was promoted, his example was not followed.

The naval supremacy established by the British in the course of the eighteenth century, and at an ever-accelerating pace after 1793, was to last until the twentieth century. Yet nothing had seemed less likely in 1783, or even 1793, when there were twelve European states with a good claim to be naval powers: four major powers (Great Britain, France, Spain and Russia), five notable powers (Sweden, Denmark, Naples, the United Provinces and Turkey) and three small but not negligible powers (Portugal, the Knights of St John of Malta and Venice). By 1815 there was one superpower (Great Britain) and – a very long way behind – one secondary power (France). All the others had been eliminated. This shift was all the more remarkable in that France had used her land power to capture the navies of four of these (the United Provinces, Spain, the Knights of St John and Venice). Well might a disconsolate General Bonaparte lament in the wake of the defeat at Aboukir Bay that fate seemed to have decided that Britannia should rule the waves.

Two kinds of shortages fatally handicapped the French naval effort. The first was human. When the Revolutionary Wars began, the population was probably about 28,000,000, whereas the total for England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland was less than half that. As we have seen, by means of strenuous overexertion, the revolutionaries were able to mobilize the largest land army ever seen in Europe, yet they could never repeat this feat for the benefit of the navy. There was a deep structural

reason for this, deriving ultimately from the relatively small part played by deep-sea fishing and seaborne commerce in the French economy. This confined the pool of skilled seamen on which a navy might draw in time of war to about 50,000. That was why defeats such as the Glorious First of June (1794) or the Nile (1798) were so serious, for just two such bloody encounters could cost the French navy 10 per cent of its effectives in dead and prisoners of war. By 1802 there were 70,000 French sailors held captive in British prisons or hulks and 80,000 by 1814. A comparison of French and British losses in the period is revealing.

Table 12. French and British naval casualties during the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Wars

Battle	British Losses			French Losses				
	Killed	Wounded	Total	Killed	Wounded	Total	Prisoners	Grand total
1st of June	287	811	1,098	1,500	2,000	3,500	3,500	7,000
St Vincent	73	227	300	430	570	1,000	3,157	4,157
Camperdown	203	622	825	540	620	1,160	3,775	4,935
The Nile	218	677	895	1,400	600	2,000	3,225	5,225
Copenhagen	253	688	941	790	910	1,700	2,000	3,700
Totals	1,034	3,025	4,059	4,660	4,700	9,360	15,657	25,017

Source: Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815* (London, 1960), p. 362

Moreover, with long-range fishing and trade virtually closed down by British command of the high seas, these terrible losses could not be made good. It was a problem exacerbated by a lack of interest and understanding on the part of the Revolution's legislators, very few of whom had ever *seen* the sea: two-thirds of the deputies of the revolutionary assemblies came from rural communities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. This indifference contrasted sharply with attitudes in England, where nothing less than a myth of naval power dated back at least to the wars of Elizabeth I, which had provided a stock of Protestant sea-dog heroes to complement Foxe's Martyrs. Seen as inseparable from national liberty and commercial prosperity, 'it made English sea power the ideal expression of the nation in arms' (Nicholas Rodger).

The other fatal shortage suffered by the French was of materials. The navy ministers of the old regime, notably the marquis de Castries, had not only built an impressive number of warships, they had also stockpiled the huge amounts of timber, cordage and other naval stores necessary to keep a fleet seaworthy. They had done so, however, only with increasing difficulty and only by incurring enormous debts – by 1789 the navy ministry was 400,000,000 *livres* in debt. The final bankruptcy of the old regime and the collapse of discipline in the naval bases (in large measure due to long and lengthening arrears of pay) led to a serious deterioration in the condition of the stockpiled reserves. When war broke out with Great Britain, it became increasingly difficult to replenish them with supplies from the Baltic and the Black Sea. The brief loss of Toulon was particularly serious in this regard, for the British succeeded in burning almost all the great stocks of naval stores in the arsenal before they evacuated. By 1795 the French shipbuilders had exhausted their stocks of wood suitable for ships of the line and had to switch to building frigates. In 1793 the fleet had consisted of eighty-eight ships of the line and seventy-three frigates; by 1799 there were just forty-nine and fifty-four respectively.

British problems over both men and materials were much less acute. With a maritime base both wider and deeper than its enemy's, the Admiralty experienced less difficulty in supplying the navy with skilled seamen. It was helped greatly by the apparently inexhaustible financial resources which allowed attractive bounties to be offered to recruits. Contrary to popular belief, the notorious and dreaded press-gangs were not the only means of filling the ranks. Unlike in France, the Royal Navy had first call on the budget: 'To its immense good fortune the Navy had enjoyed almost a golden age of public and parliamentary support in the decade preceding 1793' (Paul Webb). That continued: Parliament voted the necessary funds for 24,000 seamen in 1793 – and for 120,000 in 1797. The census of 1801 recorded 135,000 sailors in the navy and 144,000 in the merchant marine. Moreover, the British took good care to keep their sailors healthy: 'the great thing in all military service is health', as Nelson observed. A French visitor to a British frigate after the American War was suitably impressed: 'it is kept in such scrupulous cleanliness that we were astonished, I saw nothing like it on a frigate in Toulon. They blame the uncleanness of the French, and say it causes more casualties than the English. They wash the entire ship every day.'

Under the energetic administration of Sir Charles Middleton (comptroller of the navy from 1778 to 1790), the naval dockyards were characterized by greater efficiency in management, economy in the use of resources and professionalism on the part of the officials – at a time when their French equivalents were being ravaged by pilfering and neglect. Command of the routes to and from the Baltic ensured an uninterrupted supply of naval stores, so the gulf between the size of the British and French navies could only grow.

The qualitative gap also widened. While the Royal Navy enjoyed the priceless advantage of being able to train its crews at sea, the French were confined to exercises inside their blockaded ports. After months at anchor, it was no wonder that skills proved rusty when eventually they had to be applied on the high seas, as was demonstrated by the chaos which often attended the sailing of a fleet from Brest. Of the 12,000 men in Admiral Martin's squadron, which fled from the British off the Île de Hyères in July 1795, two-thirds had *never even been to sea before*. There is also some doubt as to whether the much-vaunted superiority of the French vessels was really as great as some pessimistic British experts believed. As Acerra and Meyer have pointed out, much of the criticism of British boatbuilders reflected the traditional contempt felt for civilian landlubbers by aristocratic naval officers and must be taken with a large pinch of salt. The French ships were certainly sleeker and faster, but there was a price to be paid: they were also less durable, more fragile and could carry fewer guns relative to overall tonnage. Some of them were also simply too big. The three-decker 120-gun *Commerce de Marseille*, captured at Toulon, greatly impressed Admiralty experts, but it proved to be of little use at sea and was converted into a prison ship in 1796. When conditions were right, a brand-new French ship could go very fast indeed, but at the cost of high building and maintenance costs and a short working life. These were defects greatly exacerbated by the generations of low investment in dockyards.

The widest and most serious gap between the two navies was in the field of gunnery. Iron discipline and constant training at sea helped the British gunners to deliver broadsides which were more co-ordinated, more accurate and – above all – delivered at a much quicker rate, probably twice as fast. Their firepower was enhanced further by superior gunpowder. The British conquest of Bengal had given them access to the best supplies of saltpetre in the world and it is likely that the muzzle

velocity of their guns was correspondingly higher. As they closed with the enemy, they could put it to good use in the new 'carronade', a fearsome cannon developed by the Carron ironworks in Scotland, which had reduced 'windage' (the gap between bore and ball) by about 50 per cent and made up in weight of metal delivered what it lacked in range. (French guns, on the other hand, were so poorly maintained that the British could not use those they captured.) The cumulative effect of these and other, smaller innovations, such as standardized blocks, flexible ramrods and more sophisticated signalling, was to create a navy which could be confident of winning every time it encountered the enemy.

Confidence bred aggression. That relentless drive forwards which was so characteristic of the revolutionary armies in their heyday was conspicuously absent from the revolutionary navy, but just as conspicuously present in the Royal Navy. It was best summed up by Nelson's instruction before Trafalgar: 'In case signals can neither be seen nor perfectly understood, no captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of the enemy.' At Trafalgar, the battle was over in just five hours, by which time Nelson's fleet had taken seventeen prizes and burnt another. As the French and Spanish fought with tenacious courage, so complete a defeat despite the many advantages they enjoyed can only be explained by 'the crushing superiority of British gunnery tactics' (Nicholas Rodger). By this time, British commanders were crazy for battle because they knew they were going to win, even when outnumbered. As Sir John Jervis stood on the quarterdeck of the *Victory* on 14 February 1797 as the much more numerous Spanish fleet approached off Cape St Vincent, his captain, Sir Robert Calder, called out the numbers of the enemy:

'There are eight sail of the line, Sir John.'

'Very well, Sir.'

'There are twenty sail of the line, Sir John.'

'Very well, Sir.'

'There are twenty-five sail of the line, Sir John.'

'Very well, Sir.'

'There are twenty-seven sail of the line, Sir John.'

'Enough, Sir, no more of that: the die is cast, and if there are fifty sail I will go through them.'

It was on this occasion that one of Jervis's subordinates, Commodore Horatio Nelson of the *Captain*, led in person one of the boarding parties that captured the *San Nicolas* and then moved on to board the *San Josef* as well. Not every British commander shared this taste for the offensive. For every Jervis there was a Bridport and for every Nelson there was a Hotham. Several years had to pass before all the dead wood was sent ashore, but gradually the British naval officer corps was culled to become a body distinguished by professionalism, skill and aggression. Its collective quality allowed commanders such as Jervis, Duncan and Nelson to cut the enemy line, knowing that the individual captains would know what to do and would not shrink from doing it. No such *esprit de corps* could be found on the side of their opponents. There were many instances of skill and determination, even heroism, shown by both commanders and crew on the French side but they remained isolated. The general picture was that painted by Admiral Ganteaume: when ordered to sea from Toulon in 1801, he protested that his fleet was in no fit state to do so, for his sailors had received no pay for fifteen months, they were badly fed, their clothes were ragged and their morale was hopeless. Predictably, he failed in his mission to rescue the French army marooned in Egypt since Nelson's victory at the Nile in 1798.

THE WAR OF THE SECOND COALITION

In the short term, the most serious consequence of Bonaparte's ill-fated Egyptian adventure was the formation of a new coalition. The Tsar of Russia, Paul I, had observed the events of 1796-7 with a mixture of anger and anxiety about what he saw as the 'insatiability' of revolutionary France. Ever since their conquest of the northern coast of the Black Sea, the Russians had been hypersensitive about any threat to their rapidly expanding commercial interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Especially since the annexation of the Crimea in 1783, old ports had been expanded and new ones created, and the value of exports passing through them had more than doubled between 1786 and 1797. Moreover, the Russians were equally anxious about their tenuous hold on the lands they had gained in the second and third partitions of Poland.

Unlike Bonaparte or Talleyrand (or many western historians), they knew just how closely interlinked were Polish and Turkish problems. So when intelligence reports warned of a great fleet of military transports fitting out at Toulon, many Russian ministers nervously concluded that it was directed at them. Some thought it was heading for Albania, from where the troops it carried would march to Bessarabia to link up with Polish rebels; some thought it was heading for Salonika, with the same object in mind; others thought it might sail direct to the Crimea. These economic and political considerations were strengthened by the Tsar's personal involvement in the Knights of St John, the military-cum-religious order which ruled the island of Malta. Bonaparte's seizure of the island in June 1798 en route for Egypt only confirmed Paul's belief in the diabolic nature of the enterprise.

The result was the formation of a grand new coalition, comprising Great Britain, Austria, Russia, Turkey, Portugal and Naples. It was in the course of 1799 that the full folly of Bonaparte's eastern expedition became apparent. He had misjudged the Russians and underestimated the British. It was a supreme irony that he would prove to be the major beneficiary of his own errors, for the failures of the early part of 1798 set up the *coup d'état* of Brumaire which brought him to power. With their most successful general, many of their most talented subordinate commanders and the elite of the French army bottled up by the Royal Navy more than a thousand miles (1,600 km) away, the Directory proved incapable of dealing with the enemy coalition they had done so much to form. The ultimate indictment of their foreign policy was the spectacle of Russians and Turks co-operating during the winter of 1798/9, surely one of the most improbable alliances in the history of the European states-system.

The 'War of the Second Coalition' got off to a false start when the King of Naples jumped the gun in November 1798 and invaded the Roman Republic. Despite initial success, by the end of the year he had taken refuge on Nelson's flagship and his kingdom had been turned into yet another French satellite state as the 'Neapolitan Republic'. When the war proper got going in the spring of 1799, the French suffered one reverse after another in each of the three theatres. In Germany an advance across the Rhine was checked and repulsed by two victories in March scored by the Archduke Charles. In Switzerland too the Austrians occupied Zurich in June and took control of the main Alpine routes. In

Italy it was the elderly but energetic Russian General Count Suvorov who swept the French from the peninsula, with the exception of an enclave around Genoa. In just two months he had conquered Italy more quickly and completely than had Bonaparte in 1796. As in the summer of 1792 and 1793, the last hour of the Revolution seemed to have come.

That the French revolutionaries had found it so difficult to maintain a firm grip on their conquests was due in large measure to the great gulf which had opened up between their rhetoric and their practice. They went to war with the slogan 'war to the châteaux, peace to the cottages', promising to liberate the oppressed peoples of Europe. They were unable to honour this commitment because they could not afford to do so. As the regime was bankrupt and any funds available had to be devoted to the urgent task of feeding the volatile citizens of Paris, the revolutionary armies were obliged to live off the land they liberated. So for the hapless Belgians, Germans, Spanish, Dutch and Italians in their path, they brought not liberation but exploitation in the form of cash levies and the requisition of everything that could be consumed or moved. As the armies were both exceptionally large and exceptionally undisciplined, they also inflicted looting, murder and rape on an unprecedented scale. Although attempts by the locals to resort to armed resistance were ruthlessly crushed, persistent passive resistance ensured that the French could maintain their conquests only by force.

It was a dismal experience for the revolutionaries. They had expected to be welcomed with open arms by a grateful humanity, so when they were rejected, they hardened their hearts and put France first. The rest of Europe, they concluded, had shown that they were still steeped in ignorance and prejudice, unworthy of liberation. Robespierre was not alone in thinking that the French people had outstripped the rest of the human race by two millennia and now constituted what amounted to a different species. This kind of arrogance, which also expressed itself in a rigorously Francophone policy towards the occupied territories, naturally provoked a strong reaction. If nationalism was not an invention of the French Revolution, it was certainly given a powerful impetus by revolutionary cultural and political imperialism.

Widespread anti-French revolts in 1799, the most spectacular of which was the reconquest of the Kingdom of Naples by Cardinal Ruffo's *armata cristiana* (Christian Arm), helped the allies to push the revolutionaries back to their own frontiers. But just when victory seemed to

be within their grasp, the coalition began to fall apart. There had always been a fundamental difference of objective between the Russians and the Austrians, the former looking for a restoration of the old regime in Italy, the latter looking for territorial acquisitions at the expense of the Piedmontese and the Pope. To make matters worse, the British paymasters of both parties were using their financial muscle to insist on dictating strategy from London. Their obsessive mistrust of the Austrians was another self-inflicted handicap. As a result, when yet another coup in Paris injected fresh life into the French war effort, the allies could not make an adequate response. Although the Austrians won another crushing victory in Italy at Novi in August, it was at Zurich that the campaign was decided when General Masséna defeated the Russians under Korsakov. Tsar Paul ordered his armies home. At the same time a joint Anglo-Russian invasion of Holland ended in disaster.

These successes did not come in time to save the regime in Paris. By 1799 the Directory had lost its last shreds of legitimacy by its repeated interventions to overrule the verdict of the electorate. The key figure was now the abbé Sieyès, the veteran operator who had deftly negotiated the whirlpools of revolutionary politics with a pragmatism best summed up by his celebrated response to the enquiry about what he had done during the Terror: 'I survived.' It was he who engineered the *coup d'état* that brought General Bonaparte to power in November 1799. That the General was only one of three Consuls fooled no one – the man on horseback was patently the man in charge.

The military situation confronting him after Brumaire appeared evenly balanced. On the credit side, the counter-revolutionary risings inside France had fizzled out, the Anglo-Russian expeditionary force had gone home with its tail between its legs, and Switzerland had been secured by Masséna's victory at Zurich. On the other hand, an attempt by Lecourbe and the Army of the Rhine to invade Germany had ended in defeat by General von Szatary's Austrians at Sinzheim at the end of November, while in Italy the last fort in French hands apart from Genoa – Coni – fell on 14 December 1799. It was now that Bonaparte took full advantage of the unity of command that his coup had made possible, formulating a plan of campaign, assembling the necessary resources and directing its implementation. The key proved to be his formation of a large reserve army at Dijon, under the command of Berthier, which he could then deploy to capitalize on the central position of Switzerland.

The critical battle was fought at Marengo on 14 June 1800, when Bonaparte won what was arguably the most important battle of his career. If he had lost – and he very nearly did – while militarily he might have lived to fight another day, politically he would have been dead in the water. Even in the few weeks that had passed since he left Paris on 6 May, there had been intensive plotting at home, with ambitious and jealous Jacobin generals such as Bernadotte and Moreau to the fore. Only a decisive victory could have secured the new regime; a decisive defeat might well have destroyed it and plunged France back into the maelstrom of revolutionary politics. In the event, Marengo both screwed down the lid of the French Revolution's coffin and decided the fate of the War of the Second Coalition. Formal peace was still a long way off and many thousands of men would still have to die to secure it, but not much hindsight is needed to appreciate that it was only a matter of time. As Paul Schroeder has written: 'Once again, the only surprise is that Austria stayed in the war another 6 months after Marengo, passing up another chance for a relatively easy escape.' Granting his shattered opponent a badly needed armistice, Bonaparte hurried back to Paris to bang heads together and consolidate his power.

The war did not come to an end until Moreau had defeated the Austrians at Hohenlinden on 3 December 1800. The Peace of Lunéville, concluded on 9 February 1801, confirmed and extended the gains France had made at Campo Formio. It also began the destruction of the Holy Roman Empire, as Bonaparte presided over a great simplification of the map of Germany. Almost exactly two years later, on 23 February 1803, the Imperial Diet approved a settlement which wiped from the map scores, hundreds, of territories. The great beneficiaries were the larger secular princes, notably Prussia, Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden; the losers were the ecclesiastical states, the Free Imperial Cities and the Imperial Knights. It was Bonaparte's intention that the survivors would be large enough to be useful to France as providers of men, money and materials, but not large enough to pose a threat to French security. In the short and medium term, this worked very well, but the more farsighted could see that the soft centre of Europe had just got appreciably harder – and might well get harder still.

After Lunéville, only Britain remained at war. Her failure to prevent French hegemony on the continent was dramatized when the Spanish invaded Portugal in April 1801 at Bonaparte's behest and forced it into

the French orbit. On the other hand, Britannia continued to rule the waves, as Nelson's spectacular victory at Copenhagen in the same month demonstrated. So this particular phase of the Second Hundred Years War had ended in a draw, although in terms of territorial gain the French had come off by far the best. When peace was finally concluded, after many months of wearisome negotiations, all the British had to show for nine years of naval victories was Spanish Trinidad and Dutch Ceylon. Everything else had to be handed back, even the Cape of Good Hope. Lord Grenville, who had been foreign secretary from 1791 until his resignation in February 1801, expressed a very popular sentiment when he told the House of Lords that 'this disgraceful and ruinous treaty . . . [is] the most disgraceful and ruinous measure that could have been adopted'.

THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

General Napoleon Bonaparte did not become the Emperor Napoleon I until 1804, but there is a real sense in which the Revolutionary Wars came to an end in 1802. This has been argued with special cogency by Paul Schroeder. As he shows, the wars that began in 1787 with the Turkish declaration of war on Russia represented a breakdown in the eighteenth-century balance-of-power system. Beginning as a conflict about the future of central and eastern Europe, they expanded after 1792 to include the question of the role of a revived France in the European states-system. When they came to an end, they confirmed British domination of the world overseas, French domination of western and southern Europe and Russian domination of the east. As both Prussia and Austria accepted the settlement, it could have had a long life, but only if the three dominant powers accepted their assigned sphere of influence and their separation either by geographical barriers such as the English Channel or by intermediary zones, the most important of which was the rump of the Holy Roman Empire, including Prussia and Austria.

These conditions could not be realized. As he had shown after the Treaty of Campo Formio, Bonaparte believed that peace was the continuation of warfare by other means. Not only did he refuse the negotiation of a free-trade commercial treaty with the British, he excluded

their manufactured goods from every country under his control. The extortion of Louisiana and the attempted extortion of Florida from the Spanish, the re-establishment of slavery and the despatch of an expedition to the Caribbean island of Saint Domingue proclaimed his intention to rebuild a French colonial empire. Contrary to the terms of the 1802 Peace of Amiens with Great Britain, he did not evacuate French troops from the Batavian Republic, annexed Piedmont and Elba to France and occupied Parma. In February 1803 he intervened in Switzerland to impose a new constitution and a new alliance, and to take control of the Alpine passes. The Cisalpine Republic was retitled the 'Italian Republic', with Bonaparte as its president and his stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, as his viceroy. The reconstruction of the Holy Roman Empire under his aegis ensured that his influence would be predominant there too. In January 1803 a French general who had recently visited Egypt was quoted in the government newspaper as saying that 6,000 men would suffice for a reconquest. Against this background of continuous provocation, it is perhaps not surprising that the British refused to evacuate Malta, as required under the terms of Amiens, and declared war on 18 May 1803.

With the rest of the continent still at peace, albeit uneasily so, the next two years were dominated by Bonaparte's attempt to organize an invasion force at Boulogne. 'Let us be masters of the Straits but for six hours, and we shall be masters of the world', he declared. A colossal amount of time, effort and money was expended, with the result that, by the spring of 1805, 2,240 barges had been assembled, ready to transport an army of 165,000 men and 23,000 horses. Admirers of Bonaparte – or rather Napoleon as he should be known following his self-coronation as 'Emperor of the French' on 2 December 1804 – would do well to examine closely this preposterous enterprise. As Nicholas Rodger has demonstrated, 'his idea of the time and conditions necessary for the operation was completely divorced from reality'. Simply to embark this great armada would have required a week of good weather, and two days more of perfectly calm conditions would be needed to cross the Channel. And even that scenario assumes that the Royal Navy would be completely inactive. Well might the navy minister, Decrès, despair over Napoleon's 'bizarre, shifting and contradictory projects'.

They did, however, have one side-benefit: they allowed the *La Grande Armée*, as Napoleon called his invasion force, to be trained up to peak

efficiency. This was just as well, for during the course of 1804 a third coalition was in the process of formation. Napoleon's reconstruction of Germany, the kidnapping and judicial murder of the Bourbon duc d'Enghien in March 1804 and the assumption of the imperial title all helped to propel the Austrians and Russians into a secret agreement at the end of the year. Napoleon's creation of the Kingdom of Italy in May 1805, with himself as king it need hardly be added, and annexation of Genoa to France the following month, completed the process. From August 1805 most of the continent was at war again, only Prussia remaining at peace. It was now that Napoleon enjoyed his finest hour. If the Boulogne episode had shown him at his most bone-headed, his conduct of the campaign in Germany showed just why so many contemporaries believed him to be a military genius. That he surely was, although it must also be allowed that his opponents provided the dull background against which his star could shine all the more brightly. Assuming that Italy would be the main theatre, the Austrians assigned only 60,000 troops to Germany. Their commander, General Karl Mack, believed that Napoleon could muster only 70,000 and would take eighty days to reach the Danube. In the event, the Grand Army was 190,000-strong and marched 300 miles (480 km) in *thirteen* days, achieving complete surprise and forcing Mack to capitulate at Ulm on 20 October. For once, the official army bulletin was not exaggerating when it recorded: '30,000 men, among them 2,000 cavalry, together with sixty guns and forty standards have fallen into our hands . . . Since the beginning of the war, the total number of prisoners taken can be assessed at 60,000 . . . Never have victories been so complete and less costly.'

Much more costly, but much more complete in terms of results, was the victory Napoleon scored six weeks later over a combined Austro-Russian army at Austerlitz in Moravia. Every account of this, the greatest of his victories, agrees that Napoleon showed again and again on the battlefield that '*coup d'œil*' so prized by Clausewitz – 'a sense of unity and a power of judgement raised to a marvellous pitch of vision'. The grim post-battle statistics reveal the extent of his victory: on the allied side 15,000 dead or wounded and 12,000 taken prisoner; on the French side, 8,000 dead or wounded and 573 taken prisoner. Napoleon wrote home to the Empress Josephine: 'I have beaten the Austro-Russian army commanded by the two Emperors. I am a little weary. I have camped in the open for eight days and as many freezing nights. Tomorrow I shall

be able to rest in the castle of Prince Kaunitz, and I should be able to snatch two or three hours sleep there. The Russian army is not only beaten but destroyed. I embrace you.' The Russians withdrew eastwards, to fight another day. The Austrians hastened to make peace, signed at Pressburg on 26 December. They gave up Venice, Venetia, Istria and Dalmatia to the Kingdom of Italy; Trentino, the Tyrol and Vorarlberg to Bavaria; and the Breisgau to Baden and Württemberg.

By the end of 1805 Napoleon was on top of Europe, but he was not on top of the world. On the day after his triumph at Ulm, disaster struck at Trafalgar. In just five hours of fighting, Nelson's fleet of twenty-seven captured or destroyed more than half the Franco-Spanish fleet of thirty-three, suffering no losses in the process. In a devastating demonstration of the superiority of their gunnery, the British inflicted ten times as many casualties on their enemy. The consequences proved to be of immense importance. Although Napoleon spent enormous sums in an attempt to reconstruct the battlefleet he had 'thrown away' (Rodger), British maritime supremacy was now absolute. They were safe from invasion and could continue to expand their already immense colonial and commercial empire. The wealth thus generated enabled them to keep on subsidizing their continental allies. As we shall see later, their invulnerability led Napoleon to pursue a blockading policy which eventually brought the fatal campaign against Russia in 1812. Most could now see that the British could not lose the war, but few realized that they must win.

Back on the continent, Napoleon's focus swivelled to the north. Prussia had been neutral since 1795, but in the autumn of 1805 had moved closer to the third coalition. Austerlitz put a stop to that. Napoleon now applied both the carrot and the stick, allowing a Prussian occupation of Hanover but also extracting commitments to provide troops for the next campaign against Russia and to close Prussian ports to British shipping. Prussia's half-hearted co-operation with Austria during the first Revolutionary War and their inactivity during the previous decade have won the Prussians a bad press from historians enjoying the benefit of hindsight. Yet more territory was added to Prussia during the reign of Frederick William II (1786-97), usually depicted as a gross voluptuary who squandered his inheritance, than during the reign of Frederick the Great. It is also worth remembering that, however inglorious, over the years neutrality had paid handsome political,

economic and cultural dividends. Indeed, the years 1795-1806 were something of a golden age. Some sympathy might also be felt for the Prussians' dilemma, situated as they were between the French frying-pan and the Russian fire.

Nevertheless, there was undoubtedly much confusion and indecision to be found in Berlin, where there were two foreign ministers - Haugwitz and Hardenberg - pursuing different policies. By the summer of 1806, those advocating a showdown with the insatiable Napoleon were gaining the upper hand. The formation of the 'Confederation of the Rhine' in July revealed Napoleon's intention to turn the German states into satellites. The last straw proved to be the news that he was planning to buy peace with the British at Prussia's expense by handing back Hanover. Early in October Frederick William III in effect declared war by issuing an ultimatum he knew would be rejected. The war was over in a week: at the twin battles of Jena and Auerstedt the Prussian armies were routed. So sudden and total was the collapse that the decision to fight alone has seemed incomprehensible to most non-Prussian historians. Typical was Felix Markham's dismissive comment, 'having ruined the Third Coalition in 1805 by her selfish neutrality, Prussia proceeded in 1806 to commit suicide by taking on Napoleon single-handed'. That was not how it seemed at the time: the Prussians believed that their very large army could achieve sufficient military success to force Napoleon to treat them as equals not as satraps. However misplaced their optimism may have been, they did not go to war expecting to lose. No less a figure than General Blücher proclaimed that 'the French will find their grave on this side of the Rhine and those that make it back home will take with them news of disaster, just like after Rossbach!'

Perhaps even more depressing than the battles themselves was the way in which the Prussian state imploded. Not always noted is the fact that the French had not even reached the frontier, for Jena and Auerstedt are in Saxony. Yet one Prussian fortress after another surrendered with little or no resistance. The commander of Küstrin hurried across the River Oder to greet the advancing enemy, so anxious was he to capitulate. This might have been *finis Borussiae*, if Frederick William III had agreed to the armistice Napoleon now offered. The crucial council took place on 21 November 1806, with the reform party led by Baron vom Stein successfully arguing for continued resistance. In the view of Ranke this was one of the great turning points in the history of the Prussian

monarchy. It meant that Prussia's fate was now yoked to that of Russia (which had entered the conflict in 1805) and it also led Napoleon into making a fateful error. By advancing further east he allowed himself to be drawn into the labyrinth of eastern European politics. Although it took some time for the consequences to work themselves out, he was never to escape.

In the short term Napoleon advanced into Poland, acquiring a mistress in the attractive shape of Countess Marie Walewski and encouraging her fellow countrymen to shake off the Russian yoke. From there he moved north into East Prussia, where on 8 February 1807 at Eylau he fought one of the bloodiest battles of his career, gaining a technical victory but losing perhaps as many as 25,000 men in the process. '*Quelle massacre! Et sans résultat*', exclaimed Marshal Ney as he rode over the battlefield afterwards. The battle also marked an important step towards the rehabilitation of the Prussian army, for a corps under General Leszocq had performed effectively. Eylau proved to be only a brief setback on Napoleon's triumphant progress towards the total domination of the continent, however, for on 14 June in the same year he defeated the Russians decisively at Friedland, south-east of Königsberg, and forced them to make peace at Tilsit on the River Niemen on 9 July. As Napoleon was anxious to get back west to complete the reorganization of Italy and Germany, the settlement was surprisingly favourable to Russia. All that had to be ceded were the Ionian Islands, indeed a good slice of Prussian Poland was gained. In effect, the two powers agreed to an alliance which divided Europe into two, with France dominating the west, centre and south-west and Russia the east and south-east, with the prospect of further expansion in the Balkans at the expense of the Turks and in central and southern Asia at the expense of the British. Tsar Alexander I positively welcomed the requirement to join the continental blockade and to make war on Britain. The real victim was Prussia, which lost more than a third of its territory and half of its population, had its army reduced to 42,000, and was required to pay an enormous financial indemnity and to maintain a large French army of occupation. To make matters worse, the old nightmare of Saxony-Poland was revived, for the King of Saxony (as the Elector was now called) was to be hereditary ruler of the new Grand Duchy of Warsaw, comprising what had been Prussia's share of the second and third partitions.

THE NAPOLEONIC EMPIRE UNRAVELS

When these two hectic years of warfare were over, the map of Europe had been redrawn and recoloured. In the process a great new dynasty had been created. The Netherlands had been changed into a kingdom, ruled by Napoleon's brother Louis. The Bourbons had been ejected from the Kingdom of Naples, in favour of another Bonaparte brother, Joseph. Among the beneficiaries of the destruction of the Holy Roman Empire (finally laid to rest in 1806) was yet another Bonaparte brother, Jerome, who became the ruler of the newly created Kingdom of Westphalia. Another new creation, the Grand Duchy of Berg, was given to Joachim Murat, married to Napoleon's sister Caroline. Napoleon reserved northern Italy for himself, creating the 'Kingdom of Italy' there and installing his stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, as his viceroy. The Duchy of Guastalla he gave to his favourite sister, Pauline, and her husband Prince Camillo Borghese, although they sold it to Parma for 6,000,000 francs. Another sister, Elisa, and her husband, Prince Bacciochi, were given Tuscany in 1808. In the same year Napoleon promoted his brother Joseph to be King of Spain, transferring Murat to the vacancy thus created at Naples.

This parody of old regime dynastic politics brought disaster. The imposition of Joseph Bonaparte on Spain led to risings across the country, fuelled by a variety of resentments, as much internecine as directed against the new regime. After a French army around 20,000-strong capitulated at Bailén in July 1808, the following month a British expeditionary force under the command of Sir Arthur Wellesley landed in Portugal. Thus began the 'Spanish ulcer', which over the next five years was to prove a serious drain on Napoleon's resources. Time and again – most notably when Napoleon went to Spain himself to take command – it looked as though the insurgency might be overcome, and just as often it revived. Wellesley (or Wellington as he should be known following his elevation to the peerage in 1809) retreated from Spain back to Portugal twice in 1809, held on by the skin of his teeth in the lines of Torres Vedras outside Lisbon in 1810–11, retreated from Spain again after another invasion in the autumn of 1812, but in 1813 did

finally begin an inexorable advance that took him over the French frontier in October of that year. What ultimately gave him the decisive advantage was naval support. As he himself wrote, 'if anyone wishes to know the history of this war, I will tell him it is our maritime superiority gives me the power of maintaining my army while the enemy are unable to do so'.

During this roller-coaster road to victory, Wellington was given powerful if often incoherent assistance from the guerrilla movements that ravaged the peninsula. A French officer complained that the guerrillas 'attempted to destroy us in detail, falling upon small detachments, massacring sick and isolated men, destroying convoys and kidnapping messengers'. If they ran into a superior force, they melted away into the countryside, hiding their weapons and pretending to be peasants. On average they killed about a hundred French soldiers a day, not enough to achieve victory by themselves but a very useful auxiliary. If social tension and simple criminality played obtrusive parts in mobilizing them, so did religion. The old Spanish sense of being in the front-line of Christendom against the Moors in the Mediterranean, the heretics in the north and the pagans in the New World was still strong. The association of the French Revolution with a new and peculiarly dangerous threat to the True Faith – atheism – gave both the war of 1793–5 and the more intense conflict of 1808–14 a traditional crusading flavour. The transfer of old fervour to a fresh target was neatly symbolized by a ceremony in Cadiz on 25 July 1808, the feast day of St James. The procession to a specially venerated statue of the saint was conducted as usual, with one important difference – the Moorish captives depicted lying prostrate at his feet had been re clothed in the uniforms of French soldiers. This association between national identity and religion was as widespread as the fighting itself. Just a few days earlier, on 16 July, a Spanish force had cut the French line of retreat at the ford of the Menjíbar, in the manoeuvres which were to lead to the French disaster at Bailén three days later. The commander reminded his men that it was the anniversary of the battle of Las Navas, the day on which, six centuries before, Alfonso of Castile had defeated the Moors, saving Christianity and founding national independence. The junta of Seville proclaimed:

We are going to fight in defence of the Fatherland and of Religion and our actions must show that we are true Spaniards and Christians. This junta therefore urges

the armies, the towns and persons of all classes to improve their habits, to be modest and to endeavour to appease the righteous wrath of God through . . . virtue and by means of ceaseless prayer.

A similar combination of national and religious fervour caused problems for Napoleon in many other parts of Europe, not least in Russia. Indeed, it provided the one chink of light to radiate from an otherwise gloomy episode in 1809 when the Austrians tried yet another fall with their old enemy. Rightly concluding that no permanent peace with Napoleon was possible but wrongly assuming that he had been immobilized by the Spanish imbroglio, they declared war in April 1809. After victory at Aspern near Vienna in May they once again paraded their fabled ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by losing at Wagram on 6 July. Yet if their hopes of a German rising in their support had been frustrated by the speed with which Napoleon moved against them, events in the Tyrol revealed the military potential of anti-French insurrections. Annexed to Bavaria by the Peace of Pressburg in 1805, the Tyroleans rose in revolt for 'God, Emperor and Fatherland', as their peasant leader Andreas Hofer proclaimed. After every victory the insurgents conducted services, processions and pilgrimages to give thanks for divine assistance and to supplicate for further marks of favour in their struggle with their anti-clerical tyrant. At the battle of Bergisel on 13 August 1809, when 15,000 Tyrolean peasants defeated 20,000 French and Bavarian regulars, it was a Capuchin – Father Joachim Haspinger – who commanded the left wing. Once the main Austrian army had been defeated, of course, it was only a matter of time before the Tyroleans were brought to heel. Finally defeated in November 1809, Hofer was taken to Mantua and executed.

The Austrians had learnt their lesson. After yet another humiliating peace had been signed at Schönbrunn on 14 October 1809, by which they lost two-thirds of their Polish territory to the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and the other third to Russia, their remaining Adriatic possessions to the Kingdom of Italy, a slice of Bohemia to Saxony and Salzburg to Bavaria, they abandoned resistance and tried conciliation. This was a change of tack with momentous long-term consequences. In Prussia the defeats at Jena and Auerstedt had brought the reformers to power, so that when success eventually came, it was reform that was franked. In Austria the defeat at Wagram led to the dismissal of the

reformers and the appointment of Metternich as chancellor, so when success eventually did come, it was his way of thinking that was franked – and he remained in office until the revolutions of 1848. In the short term, Metternich adopted a traditional Habsburg precept – ‘*Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube!*’ (Let other countries wage war, may you fortunate Austria marry!) – and arranged a match between Napoleon and the Emperor Francis I’s eldest daughter Marie Louise. The knot was tied between the happy couple (and they were a surprisingly happy couple) on 11 March 1810.

Once again, the Habsburg sense of timing was seriously awry, for by now the Napoleonic Empire was beginning to unravel. With Britain invulnerable to direct attack after Trafalgar, Napoleon proposed ‘to conquer the sea by the land’, as he told his brother Louis. The prohibition of any kind of trade with Britain imposed by the Berlin Decrees of November 1806 was designed to destroy her economy. This was less visionary than it looked. For a year or so after the Peace of Tilsit, Napoleon really was able to impose an effective boycott, prompting the British prime minister Lord Grenville to exclaim, ‘I am more alarmed than I can say.’ Then the opening up of the Iberian peninsula allowed British exports to flow once more. All the while Napoleon himself was undermining his own policy by authorizing the issue of special licences to allow the import of vital goods and simply to raise revenue. A deep depression in the whole European economy, beginning in 1810, then brought a new crisis for the hard-pressed British and it is a good question as to what might have happened if Napoleon had been able to sustain the pressure.

He could not, because, of all the European powers, it was the British who coped best with the blockade. Their insular position, continuing trade with the rest of the world (which took about two-thirds of British exports) and superior credit institutions allowed them to sit out the economic storm with relative equanimity. As Paul Schroeder put it: ‘with all his power, Napoleon not only could not bring the British down, he could not even gain their full attention’. But there was one power whose increasingly hostile attention Napoleon certainly did grasp, and that was Russia. Of all the treaties that Napoleon concluded, it was Tilsit that most clearly revealed his insatiability. No sooner was the ink dry than he was seeking to expand his power into the Russian zone of interest. He gave the Turks covert assistance in their war with Russia, underway since 1806, and also sought to extend his influence over

Persia. Closer to home, he expanded his empire by annexing to France the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Hanover, the Grand Duchy of Berg, Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck and also occupied the Duchy of Oldenburg. That last action was a particularly provocative breach of the Treaty of Tilsit, for the current duke was Tsar Alexander I’s brother-in-law. The choice by the Swedes of Marshal Bernadotte as heir and regent to their childless king in 1811 was interpreted by the Russians as a further French incursion into the Baltic, although in fact Napoleon deeply – and correctly – mistrusted the new Crown Prince.

More fundamental was the running sore that was the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, whose status as a French satellite was underlined when it was allocated the lion’s share of Austrian Poland by the Treaty of Schönbrunn in 1809. Perhaps more fundamental still was the economic issue: Russia simply could not survive without British markets and British shipping. Between 1802 and 1806 Russia had sent to Britain 91 per cent of its flax exports, 77 per cent of tallow, 73 per cent of hemp, 42 per cent of linen and even 71 per cent of iron. During those years more than half of all ships docking at St Petersburg were British. When they stopped coming, goods piled up on the quayside and prices collapsed. The main victims were the Russian magnates, whose estates relied on exporting cash crops. Alexander I was of course uncomfortably aware that it was from just this class that the assassins of both his father and his grandfather had come. By the end of 1810 the blockade had been abandoned. Within a year, the number of ships arriving at Kronstadt had doubled.

From the summer of 1811 Napoleon was actively planning the war that was certain to come. Within the course of the next twelve months he assembled a gigantic army in East Prussia, well over 600,000-strong, of whom about 300,000 were French, 190,000 German, 90,000 Polish and 30,000 Italian. Another 50,000 second-line forces and reinforcements followed later. This grandest of grand armies was accompanied by 200,000 animals and 25,000 vehicles when it crossed the River Niemen on 22 June 1812. The most elaborate plans had been laid to feed this horde, but they went awry almost at once. It was not ‘General Winter’ that defeated Napoleon, as he later maintained, it was sheer distance. When he formally opened the campaign at Erfurt, he was closer to Galway on the west coast of Ireland than he was to Moscow. With every mile his army marched and with every day that passed, the more

certain became his eventual defeat (as Charles XII could have told him, or as he himself could have told Hitler). His only hope was to bring the Russians to battle quickly and to defeat them so decisively that they sued for peace. They declined to oblige, not least because they soon discovered that they were heavily outnumbered – they had only just over 200,000 serving in their front-line armies when the war began.

Just how calculated was the Russian refusal to fight the sort of war Napoleon wanted, choosing instead to retreat and retreat, remains an open question. Its effectiveness is undoubted. By the time the Russians did make a stand, at Borodino on 7 September, the Grand Army had already dwindled alarmingly. The Bavarian corps, for example, had lost half its strength through illness before it even made contact with the enemy. Borodino cost Napoleon 30,000 killed and wounded. It was undeniably a victory, for the Russians lost even more and the Grand Army was able to resume its advance to Moscow, which it took a week later, but the Russian general Kutuzov had been able to withdraw the bulk of his army in good order and could look forward to being reinforced continuously – unlike his enemy. Just a month later the Russians enjoyed a numerical superiority. So the retreat from Moscow which began on 20 October was soon degenerating into disaster. Captain Roeder noted in his diary: 'It did not take long for hunger to attack the French army, the regiments began to dissolve and collapse, horses perished in their thousands . . . All the common people in the provinces of Moscow and Kaluga were under arms to avenge the atrocities they had suffered.' That last remark points to an important force accelerating the disintegration of the Grand Army, namely the unofficial action of tens of thousands of partisans, both organized and freelance. The scale of the disaster was stupendous. Of the 655,000 troops that had crossed the Vistula only 93,000 remained. Some 370,000 had died as a result of enemy action or disease, or had simply frozen to death; around 200,000, including 48 generals and 3,000 other officers, had been taken prisoner. From the point of view of Napoleon's long-term military prospects, just as serious as this human carnage was the loss of virtually his entire stock of horses, as many as 200,000.

It says a great deal for the accumulated stock of credibility that Napoleon had built up during the palmy days that it took more than a year before his empire finally fell. Whatever one thinks of his prolongation of Europe's agony, it is difficult not to be impressed by the resilience he

and his army displayed as the shadows lengthened. The first of his unwilling allies to jump ship was Prussia, neutralized by the unilateral action of General von Yorck in signing the Convention of Tauroggen with Russia on 30 December 1812, and confirmed officially by the Treaty of Kalisch on 28 February 1813. The Austrians were more hesitant, for Metternich had no desire to see French hegemony replaced by a Russian version. It was only when it became clear that Wellington had achieved total victory in Spain, followed by the revelation of Napoleon's total intransigence in an interview with Metternich at Dresden in June, that Austria moved from cautious neutrality to belligerence. By the Treaty of Teplitz of 9 September 1813, the three great continental powers pledged to provide armies of 150,000 each and not to make peace until Napoleon had been defeated.

This was the first time since the Revolutionary Wars had begun that Russia, Austria and Prussia had acted in concert. The effects were soon felt. In the course of a terrible four-day battle at Leipzig between 16 and 19 October, Napoleon's hold on Germany was shattered. At two crucial moments during the battle, the troops of his German puppet princes turned against him: on the very first day, the refusal of General Normann and the Württemberg cavalry to charge saved the Prussian infantry from being routed by Marshal Marmont; on the third day the defection of the Saxon units proved to be 'the decisive event' (Jean Tulard). According to Major Odeleben, who was situated close to Napoleon, it was this that visibly demoralized him. On the following day, he ordered the retreat. What was already a disaster was made worse by the premature destruction of a bridge across the Elster which trapped the rearguard. In all, the French lost 38,000 during the battle and at least another 30,000 as prisoners. A huge amount of ordnance fell into allied hands, including 325 pieces of artillery. Napoleon went straight back to Paris, leaving the remnants of his army to trudge back through the debris of his empire. By the end of 1813 the Prussian army under Blücher had crossed the Rhine into France.

In the course of his interview with Napoleon at Dresden on 26 June 1813, Metternich told him that a favourable peace could be secured with the allies today, but perhaps not tomorrow. Napoleon's reply was uncompromising: he would not dishonour himself; he would rather die than give up an inch of territory; the old regime sovereigns could lose as many battles as they liked and still keep their thrones, whereas he, as

a 'parvenu soldier', could not afford even one defeat; his rule would not last a day longer if his force failed and he was no longer feared. Metternich then gave him a piece of his mind (by his own account), telling him that everything Napoleon had said demonstrated that Europe could never secure a durable settlement with him; that his peace treaties had only been truces; that both defeats and victories impelled him to war; that the final struggle between him and Europe was about to begin – and that it was not Europe that was going to lose. Napoleon was in fact quite wrong about the impossibility of accepting peace. On that occasion and repeatedly afterwards, even after the defeat at Leipzig, he could have obtained a settlement which kept him as ruler of a France with natural frontiers, for Metternich's desire to maintain a balance between France and Russia never did weaken. Napoleon would have none of it. Although he demonstrated great skill during the campaigns of early 1814, he was inexorably forced back by the overwhelming numerical superiority of the allies. Deserted by his marshals, Napoleon abdicated on 6 April and went into exile on the island of Elba.

WHY THE FRENCH LOST (EVENTUALLY)

As in 1914, both sides went to war in 1792 expecting to be home before Christmas. 'In the face of our brave patriots, the allied armies will fade away like the shades of night in the face of the rays of the sun', predicted Gaston to a cheering National Assembly, while on the other side a senior Prussian official, Bischoffwerder, told a group of officers: 'Do not buy too many horses, gentlemen, the comedy will not last long. The army of lawyers will soon be crushed and we shall be back home by the autumn.' In the event, neither side could achieve a decisive victory, with the result that peaces proved to be only truces. In view of the roll-call of great French victories – Valmy, Jemappes, Fleurus, Marengo, Hohenlinden, Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena, Auerstedt, Friedland, Wagram, just to mention the more spectacular – that might seem very odd. Yet the obvious question is not often posed: if each of these was so overwhelming a victory, why did there have to be so many of them? The answer lies, of course, in the simple fact that the decisive quality of any battle is more

a subjective than an objective concept. The decision-makers of the old regime just refused to believe that all was lost, even after the most catastrophic of defeats. They had good reason for their obstinacy, which only a close reading of the military history of the period will reveal. The Austrians, in particular, kept coming back for more, rather like those infuriating lead-weighted toys which always right themselves after being knocked over, with the same fatuous grin painted on their faces. Napoleon observed contemptuously that the Habsburgs were always one idea and one army behind the rest of Europe, but – as Albert Sorel remarked – they always had an army and they always had an idea. It was Napoleon who ran out of both.

Even in its Napoleonic version, revolutionary France was never able to convince old regime Europe that it had come to stay. Its successes, however dazzling, were thought to be ephemeral – just one more push, its enemies thought, and down it would come. In the event, many more pushes were needed, but in the end they were right. Although the operation took twenty-three years longer than had been hoped or expected, the allies did eventually achieve their war aims. This is not always appreciated, because the counter-revolutionary nature of the war of 1792 is so often exaggerated. The Prussians and Austrians did not go to war in 1792 to restore the old regime, they went to war to induce the revolutionaries to maintain a constitutional settlement which would keep France monarchical but weak (a kind of western version of Poland) and also, of course, to gain territory. That was exactly what they got in 1815.

By that time both sides were poorer but wiser. They had had to learn the error of their ways in a school where discipline was brutal and there were no vacations. Napoleon never learnt, so his empire fell as fast as it had risen. Before he had time to finish the Arc de Triomphe, it was the allies who were holding a victory parade on the Champs-Élysées. He himself liked to think that he had been the victim of bad luck (the early onset of the Russian winter in 1812, for example) and treachery (the desertion of his marshals in 1814), but with the advantage of hindsight we can see that his problems were more structural in nature. Perhaps the most intractable was demographic imbalance. Although the population of France had increased by about 30 per cent in the course of the eighteenth century, this was a rate of growth eclipsed by the other countries of Europe. This relative decline was due less to any deficiency

in virility or fecundity than to the simple fact that, by contemporary standards, France had been a densely populated country when the century began, so the population was soon banging its head against the demographic ceiling imposed by inelastic food supplies. By the time the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Wars began, the demographic dominance which had made Louis XIV so formidable was a thing of the past.

To conquer Europe from a base that was too narrow and shallow involved overexertion. The French were obliged to exert so much pressure on both their own population and that of occupied Europe that the law of diminishing returns soon began to operate. In the short term, the problem was dealt with by the establishment of the satellite state, an inspired invention which was to have a future as long as it was dishonourable. Wherever the French went in Europe, they found dissidents prepared to collaborate with the invaders to obtain support in dealing with their political enemies. If peace had ever been restored long enough to allow these new regimes to strike roots, this might have proved a permanent solution. In the event, the need to extract ever-increasing amounts of men, materials and money to feed the French war machine made them reliant on force for their survival. As soon as the prop of the French army was removed, they collapsed in a heap. The same process of alienation occurred in Napoleon's satellite kingdoms. Even those German princes who were given royal titles and vast amounts of land began to wonder whether the game was worth the candle as the price escalated and their subjects became increasingly restive. The number of troops required by Napoleon from his German satraps rose from 63,000 in 1806 to 119,000 in 1809, finally reaching 190,000 with the invasion of Russia in 1812.

For the plain people of Europe, Napoleon's rule had promised much, delivered little and ended in disillusionment. When sending to his brother Jerome a constitution for the Kingdom of Westphalia, Napoleon stated: 'What people will wish to return to the arbitrary rule of Prussia when it has once tasted the benefits of a wise and liberal administration? The peoples of Germany, France, Italy and Spain demand civil equality and liberal ideas.' Some benefits they undoubtedly did receive, in the shape of civil equality, careers open to talent, legal reform and the metric system. But against that had to be set an increased and constantly growing burden of taxation, conscription and a government much more tyrannical than anything they had experienced under the old regime.

The longer the Napoleonic regime lasted, the more unpopular it became.

By 1813 the empire was crumbling from within, as confidence and support were eroded further by failure in Spain after 1808, growing resistance to conscription, and a severe economic crisis which had begun in 1810. What was worse, Napoleon's enemies were beginning to put their own house in order. They had been prevented from mobilizing their full weight by three main failings: their preoccupation with eastern Europe, their mutual antipathies and their reluctance to fight fire with fire. It was Napoleon's personal achievement to bring the western and eastern theatres of the war together, first in 1798 and then terminally after 1806. He also dealt with the second handicap under which his enemies laboured – their mutual distrust. By treating them all so brutally during his glory years of 1805–7, he drummed into their thick skulls the message that they must sink their differences and unite against him. The lesson took some time to penetrate, for in 1809 the Austrians once again had to take the field alone, but eventually it was learnt.

It was also Napoleon who forced the old regime powers to adopt revolutionary methods to combat revolutionary force. It was not so much that they could not grasp what to do, rather that they could not face the terrible side-effects. Certainly the French revolutionaries had constructed a state of colossal power but they appeared to have done so at the cost of killing their king and queen, expropriating their Church, abolishing their nobility, instituting a reign of terror, plunging the country into civil war, unleashing galloping inflation, and so on and so forth. By 1808, however, Napoleon was busy rearranging the thrones of Europe. If he could depose the Bourbons in Spain and Naples, why not the Hohenzollerns and Habsburgs? Indeed, it was well known that he had toyed with just such an idea in 1807 and 1809 respectively. As it now seemed to be all or nothing, even radical reforms had to be risked in the search for survival. By 1812–13 it was the allies who were arming their peasants and mobilizing mass armies.

More fundamentally still, Napoleon was bound to fail because his appetite for *gloire* was insatiable. Like the French Revolution from whose culture he sprang, he never had any war aims beyond victory. This was grasped at an early stage with special insight by the Prussian officer Carl von Clausewitz, the greatest military theorist of the age (or of any age for that matter). His celebrated dictum – 'war is nothing but the continuation of policy by other means' – is often misunderstood as

an advocacy of militarism, whereas in reality it is a normative statement and better formulated as: 'war *should* be nothing but the continuation of policy by other means'. Napoleon, on the other hand, always made war first and determined his policy according to the degree and nature of his success. So even after the Prussian defeats at Jena and Auerstedt, and his own experiences as a French prisoner of war, Clausewitz remained convinced that Napoleon would eventually be defeated and that his destruction would be certain if he invaded Russia.

THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA

After Napoleon's departure to Elba, more than eighteen months were to pass before the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Wars were finally brought to an end by the Second Treaty of Paris of 20 November 1815. Such a major reconstruction of Europe would necessarily have taken a long time, but further delay was occasioned by Napoleon's return from Elba on 1 March 1815 for a last, desperate attempt to regain his empire. This episode has received excessive attention because of the dramatic way it ended at Waterloo on 18 June after the 'Hundred Days', but it was really nothing more than a coda marked '*diminuendo*'. Although the actual battle may have been 'a damn close-run thing', as the Duke of Wellington put it, the numerical superiority of the allies was such that the outcome of the campaign was certain before it ever began.

Twenty-three years of fighting had probably killed around 5,000,000 Europeans, or proportionally at least as many as the First World War. The two great victors were the peripheral powers. Great Britain had achieved all its war aims: French hegemony on the continent had been destroyed; the Low Countries were reorganized as a single 'Kingdom of the Netherlands' under the house of Orange; the sea-routes to India were secured by the acquisition of Ceylon, Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope; and continuing British influence in the Mediterranean was secured by the retention of Malta. In terms of territory, Russia had done even better, acquiring Finland from Sweden in 1809, Bessarabia from the Turks in 1812 and most of Poland in the Vienna settlement. Although not so obvious at the time, the Prussians had also done very well. Quantitatively they were a long way down the list, but qualitatively they were at the top, for their acquisitions included at least four regions with

great economic potential: northern Saxony, the Aachen-Cologne-Krefeld triangle, the Saarland and the Ruhr. The peace-makers gave them most of the left bank of the Rhine and Westphalia to create a buffer against French expansion, but in doing so they also made Prussia much more of a German power than it had been in the past.

It took a long time for the implications of these Prussian gains to be worked out. In the short and medium term, it appeared that the Austrians had done best. If they had to abandon their Belgian territories (lost since 1794) and the bits and pieces in the south-west, they regained everything they had lost between 1797 and 1809, including Salzburg, the Tyrol and Galicia. As the Emperor of Austria was to be president of the new 'German Confederation' of thirty-nine states, he was much better placed to dominate central Europe than the Holy Roman Emperor had ever been. Austria was also now indisputably the hegemonial power in Italy, ruling Lombardy, Venetia and the Dalmatian coast directly and Tuscany, Modena, Parma, Piacenza and Guastalla as 'secundogenitures' of the Habsburg family. Yet not much foresight was needed to see the problems that were to become so acute a generation or so later. As Austria was now much more of an Italian power than it had ever been in the past, the hostility of France was inevitable. Savoy-Piedmont-Sardinia, restored and strengthened by the addition of Genoa, was intended to be a buffer against France but potentially was a French ally, as indeed events were to prove in 1859. As Austria was now much more of a Balkan power than it had been in the past, the hostility of Russia was inevitable. That was also to become clear in 1859 when Tsar Alexander II gave Napoleon III of France the all-clear to expel the Austrians from Italy, thus preparing the way for Prussia to expel them from Germany.

All too immediate were the losses inflicted on the two Iberian powers, albeit indirectly. Both retained or regained their territorial integrity, but both emerged from the wars so drained of resources as to be unable to sustain their great overseas empires. With the advantage of hindsight, we can see that Spain had been the chief loser at Trafalgar. The seizure of Caracas in 1810 by a group of patriots including Simon Bolivar ('The Liberator') marked the beginning of a rapid collapse of metropolitan authority. By 1830 almost all of South America had achieved independence. Moreover, the acute polarization of opinion inside Spain after 1793 bedevilled the country's politics throughout the nineteenth century. In particular, the impoverishment of the Church and consequent

reduction of its social role encouraged the development of the radical anti-clericalism that was to play such a disruptive role deep into the twentieth century. Spain had benefited from its French connection during the eighteenth century but the Revolution brought only disaster.

The fate of France is less easy to assess. On the face of it, she was treated with extraordinary generosity by the allies, being allowed to go back to the frontiers of 1790 (or in other words to retain the papal enclaves of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin), and even to regain most of the Caribbean islands. Yet during the twenty-three years of the war, French power had been dealt a series of terrible blows, most of them self-inflicted. The 1,400,000 Frenchmen lost as a result of the wars (some estimates go much higher) left the country with a low male/female ratio (down from 0.992 in 1790 to 0.857 in 1815) and a falling share of Europe's population. The Revolution's agrarian settlement, confirmed and reinforced by Napoleon, both accentuated this demographic weakness and put the whole French economy in lead boots. The collapse of French maritime power allowed the British to establish an unassailable colonial, commercial and industrial advantage. It was Britain not France that became 'the workshop of the world'. As the French economic historian François Crouzet concluded: 'France was not disastrously behind [in the 1780s], and the Industrial Revolution might have taken off there with only a few years' delay in relation to England. But the "national catastrophe" which the French Revolution and the twenty years war meant to the French economy would intensify the discrepancy and make it irremediable.' In short, France no longer had the financial, economic and demographic resources that had made Louis XIV's hegemony possible. But the world had become a much more dangerous place as a result of the destruction of the Holy Roman Empire.

For a generation or so, this structural vulnerability was masked by a long period of peace. There was to be no major war in Europe until the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854. As Paul Schroeder has argued persuasively, the selfish brutality of Napoleon eventually persuaded the other great powers that they had to change their attitude fundamentally:

He finally convinced the statesmen of Europe, hard persons to teach, that what was at risk was not merely certain goods in international politics (peace, security, territorial integrity) but the very life principle of European politics which made these goods and others possible, the independence of European states, the exist-

ence of a European states system. He made them see that the kind of politics they had hitherto practised themselves had made his rise to power and his colonial rule possible; that to preserve the international system on which they depended from being wholly destroyed and replaced by colonial rule, they would have not only to defeat or curb him but also to abandon their own old politics, and discover or invent something else.

Most important was the conversion of the two powers of the periphery, Russia and Great Britain, increasingly invulnerable by dint of size and insularity respectively and so the natural hegemons of post-Napoleonic Europe and the only true world-powers. The three master-builders of the Vienna settlement – Castlereagh for Britain, Alexander I for Russia and Metternich for Austria – came to see that 'the chief cause of a generation of war and disaster had not simply been revolution or Napoleonic imperialism, but the arbitrary, lawless use of power in general, and that this had to be stopped'. So they did three crucial things: they established a reciprocal guarantee of territories, security and status, supported by recognized norms of behaviour; they fenced off Europe from colonial, commercial and maritime conflicts; and they created a network of 'intermediary bodies'. The last-named were not just buffer-states, but served also as links between one great power and another. Thus the Kingdom of the united Netherlands not only blocked any further French attempt to control the Low Countries but also formed a bridge between the German powers and Great Britain. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same sort of role was played by Scandinavia, Switzerland, Italy, Turkey and the German Confederation. The last-named was the most important, for although it did not bring unity – 'an impossible and undesirable goal' in Schroeder's view – it did create concord without unity, making Germany secure at home and safe for Europe. In other words, Europe after 1815 was rather like a catamaran, with the two outriggers (Great Britain and Russia) holding a vulnerable centre above the waves. There is a great deal to be said for this argument, although it might be added that the longevity of the Vienna settlement also stemmed from the decisive nature of the war that preceded it. After Napoleon had been defeated and Paris had been conquered not once, but twice, even the most nationalist Frenchman had to appreciate that the war had been lost.

One final paradox of great importance needs to be stressed. The war

which the French revolutionaries unleashed in April 1792 was intended to be the most universal war there had ever been, a war for the liberation of all humanity. Their jaunty confidence was soon frustrated by what Hegel called 'the cunning of reason'. By the spring of 1793 the war had ceased to be universal and had become national: as Danton told the National Convention on 13 April, 'above all things we need to look to the preservation of our own body politic and to lay the foundations of *French* greatness'. The next stage in this ideological contraction took much longer because it had so much further to go: by 1808 the war was being fought for the benefit of one family, the Bonapartes. Yet even that was not the limit of the contraction, for by 1810 Napoleon was concluding that his siblings were not sufficiently obedient and was clawing back what little independence they enjoyed. His brother Louis, for example, was obliged to abdicate as King of the Netherlands. The war had become a war for one man.

Meanwhile, the Revolution's enemies had been moving in the opposite direction. Their aims in 1792 had been as limited and precise as the means they sought to employ. They did not even suppose they were embarking on a full-blown war in the spring of 1792; rather they thought they were organizing an armed demonstration which would send the revolutionary rabble skulking back into submission. In fits and starts, prodded and pushed by the revolutionary challenge outside and their more far-sighted advisers at home, the 'cunning of reason' took them from the particular to the universal. As Napoleonic France slipped into military dictatorship, it was the old regime states that introduced programmes of modernization, mobilized citizen militias, declared total war and used the rhetoric of liberation. Alas, after 1815 only the British were able to sustain the relationship, as the continental powers moved back towards reaction, but that is a story for the next volume in this series.

Conclusion

The most beneficial legacy this period bequeathed to the nineteenth century was the awful warning of what could happen when state power was divorced from traditional restraints and placed at the disposal of one man. So rapacious and brutal was the treatment meted out by Napoleon to the powers he vanquished that even the dimmest of them had to recognize that a new basis for international relations had to be found. It was not enough to defeat Napoleon militarily, for he was only the most malignant symptom of a disease that stretched back deep into the previous century. The competition and conflict engendered by a preoccupation with the balance of power had to make way for a system based on concert and political equilibrium. The result was that during the ninety-nine years that separated Waterloo from the outbreak of the First World War the only major wars were the short, sharp conflicts leading to Italian and German unification. Relative to population, *seven times* fewer men died in battle in the nineteenth century than in the eighteenth.

On the domestic front, the signs were much less clear and much less easy to read. The horrors of the French Revolution were still too fresh in most people's minds to allow a dispassionate assessment of its positive contributions. It was not only the French Bourbons who had forgotten nothing and learnt nothing. If they were unique in having to go on their travels again (in 1830), all the European monarchies had to learn the hard way that after 1789 no regime could be regarded as legitimate if it did not find some way of assimilating the principle of popular sovereignty. Even the British old regime began to look shaky before refreshing its mandate with the Great Reform Act of 1832. The Russians never did learn. Even more difficult to read was the relationship between liberal constitutionalism and nationalism. Although highly intelligent,

Metternich showed a fatal lack of judgement when he treated them as if they were independent. It was to be left to Bismarck to demonstrate that the one could be exploited to emasculate the other.

The future of this and other phenomena can safely be left to the next volume in the series. Reviewing what had happened since 1648, two opposing kinds of narrative might be constructed. The first could be labelled 'progressive' and 'optimistic' and might be presented as follows: in 1648 the belief that the earth was the centre of the universe was almost universal; by 1815 it had been discredited even in the most conservative circles (Pope Benedict XIV lifted the ban on heliocentric works in 1757). In 1648 prayers were said and church bells were rung to ward off electrical storms; by 1815 lightning conductors were being installed. In 1648 heretics and witches were being burnt across Europe; by 1815 it was their accusers who found themselves in the dock. The dominant leitmotiv was expansion, for this was a period when population, literacy, towns, ease of communication, voluntary associations, economic activity, overseas empires – just to mention a few of the tastier items from a much longer menu of possibilities – all grew. It was also a period when humankind made the decisive breakthrough from the feudal world of the society of orders, the domination of landed wealth and authoritarian government to classes, capitalism and democracy, for it witnessed both the American and French Revolutions and the beginning of the industrial revolution.

But there is also more than enough material to support quite a different kind of exercise, which might be labelled 'conservative' and 'pessimistic'. This would draw attention to the superficial nature of much of the apparent change and the illusory quality of much of the apparent achievement. At the end of the period, the land-owning elites were still firmly in charge of even the most advanced countries, the overwhelming majority of Europeans were still illiterate peasants, superstition was still rife and a major religious revival was underway. The French Revolution turned out to be all sound and fury, if anything making France more conservative than it had been under the old regime. France after 1815 was run by the same sort of mixed elite of noble and commoner *notables* as had ruled before 1789. As for the 'agricultural revolution', 'commercial revolution' and 'industrial revolution', they were not revolutions at all, just labels attached retrospectively to an evolutionary process. The changes that had occurred had been for the worse: states were more

intrusive, more demanding and more despotic; armies were bigger and more destructive; for the poor, work in the 'dark satanic mills' and life in the mushrooming shanty towns was even nastier and more brutish than in the past. The emancipation offered by the Enlightenment had turned out to be a chimera, being merely the exchange of one kind of tyranny for another and opening the gates that led to the totalitarianism and genocide of the twentieth century. Women, ethnic minorities and those considered to be sexual deviants were still the victims of discrimination and persecution. The fine houses and fancy clothes of the few were financed by the involuntary sacrifices of the many, not least by serfs and slaves. Moreover, the period had ended in the twenty-three years of a world war that in terms of loss of life and suffering put every previous European conflict in the shade.

As this book has tried to show, neither of these narratives is valid in isolation. There is no obligation to accept one or the other in its entirety: a selection can be mixed and matched according to individual taste. While no attempt has been made to disguise the author's own preferences, it is hoped that sufficient illustration, evidence and stimulation has been provided to induce the reader to make a critical choice and, above all, to engage actively with the period and its problems. Here it is appropriate to return to the lines from Goethe's *Faust* with which the Introduction concluded. Faust's alienation led him to make a wager with Mephistopheles that he could never achieve satisfaction sufficient to make him say: 'beautiful moment, do not pass away'. If that were to happen, he agreed, then Mephistopheles could take him. In old age, after many adventures, Faust does at last find contentment in organizing a land reclamation project. But he is redeemed because of his active engagement in the world and his constant striving to understand nature, human nature and his own nature. And that provides a suitably constructive note on which to end.