

The Military Revolution

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Lecture goals

- Explain what the Military Revolution was
- Identify the technologies that helped drive the Military Revolution
- Understand the Military Revolution's importance
- Discuss different scholarly interpretations of the Military Revolution.

The Military Revolution in a nutshell

- A series of changes in military tactics and strategy that, in turn, gave rise to important changes in government and state organization.
- Unlike the gunpowder revolution, not the result of a specific technological innovation
 - But still influenced by technologies
- Not a specific historical event
 - Unlike e.g., the French Revolution or the American Revolution

When did the Military Revolution start?

Good question.

General scholarly consensus traces the Military Revolution's beginnings to the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) or the decades immediately preceding it.

Thirty Years' War

Major war involving most states in Europe. Nominally fought over religion (but arguably, not really).

War becomes long and drawn out due partly to the inability of any side to win a major victory. Why?

- Lack of finances.
- Unreliability of armies: Armies melt away every winter and have to be raised again in the spring.
- Many troops are mercenaries, who switch sides at will.
- Troops lack supplies needed to fight.
 - Because they are supposed to supply them on their own.

Solution: A military revolution



Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden

Adopted linear tactics as the basis for military strategy, circa 1630.

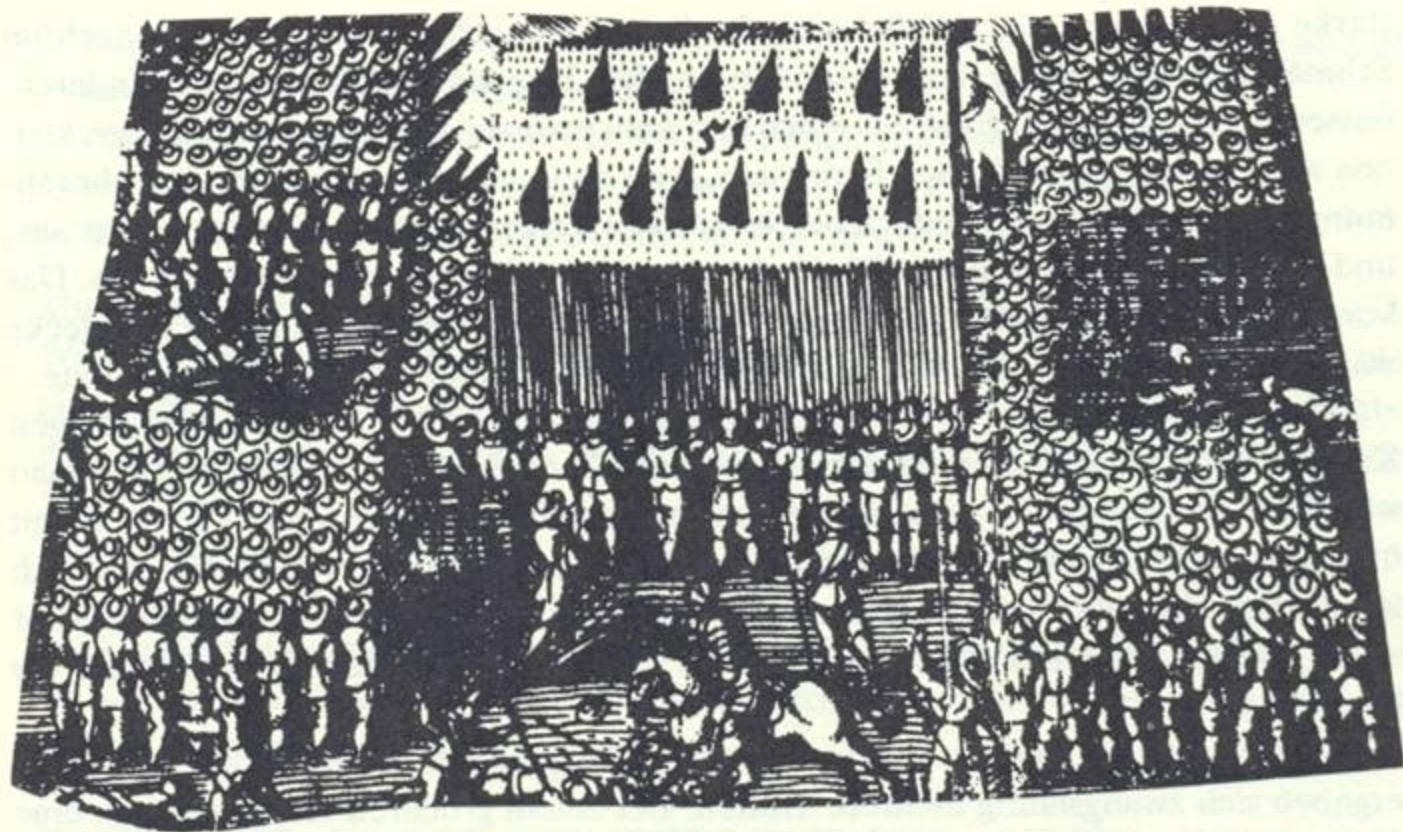
What are linear tactics? Why do they matter

Linear tactics: Arranging troops on the battlefield in long, thin line formations

- As opposed to huge squares (*tercios*)

Why? Because line formations are better for gunpowder-equipped armies

- Guns are more effective in line formations
- Lines are less susceptible to artillery fire





Why linear formations made a big difference

Line troops require more training and discipline, which:

- Increases the value of experienced soldiers.
- Requires more planning to raise an army.
- Encourages the creation of permanent armies.

As a result of new line tactics, the nature of armies changes.

So do the logistical and institutional systems that support them.

What it takes to raise a (good) permanent army

- Money, money, money
- Organization
- State-led recruitment
 - As opposed to officer-led recruitment
- State oversight of forces
 - To make sure commanders do what they promise
- State supply of forces
 - So that armies have the food, clothing and ammunition they need.
 - Eventually, the state supplies housing for troops in the form of barracks.

This leads to...

Stronger, more powerful governments

- States create new bureaucratic structures to collect taxes and oversee troops (e.g., *intendants* in France)
- Kings are less reliant on nobility to organize and command armies
- Military Revolution encourages absolute monarchies

For civilians, warfare becomes less destructive

- Because soldiers are mostly supplied and paid by governments, and are better disciplined, so marauding is less frequent

In short, “War made the state,
and the state made war.” -
Charles Tilly

Larger armies

In late 1500s, the most powerful state in Europe (Spain) has roughly 40,000 men under arms.

By late 1600s, the then-most powerful state (France) has 400,000.

(This trend arguably continued into the mid-twentieth century, and has only recently been reversed.)

More troops = more power for the state.

Military Revolution debate

Scholars argue about:

- When and where the Military Revolution actually began
 - Some say Renaissance Italy
- What caused it
 - Some say newer, better fortifications (rather than firearms and linear tactics) necessitated much larger armies
 - Some argue that state bureaucratic power increased first, then army size and organization (not vice versa)
- Whether it really happened at all
 - Easy for historians to overstate the size of armies (because most sources show theoretical strengths, not actual strengths)
 - *Tercios* sometimes defeated line troops

Pause to appreciate what the
Military Revolution means for
your life.

Midterm study tips

Midterm will consist of two sections:

1. Identifications, or IDs

- a. Write two to four sentences
- b. Include as much *specific* information as possible.

2. Essays

- a. No strict word count, but be sure to answer the question completely
- b. Include introductions and conclusions: Organization and writing quality matter
- c. Reference as many course readings and as much lecture material as possible
- d. But also demonstrate your own original thinking ability by forming novel arguments

See study guide on LMS!