

UNIT 3 ■ TOPIC 6

BALANCE OF POWER IN EUROPE: READINGS

■ INTRODUCTION

Europe experienced dramatic political change from the late 17th century into the 18th century. The Peace of Westphalia might have (for the most part) settled religious disputes from the Reformation, but warfare was still a powerful tool, especially as more power and money flowed to monarchs, allowing them to expand their military and colonial power. But these changes also meant that competition among European states was fierce, using more sophisticated diplomatic, military, and economic systems to challenge their rivals. The concept of balance of power became increasingly important in international relations: one state should not gain so much power that it could dominate the others. Both diplomacy and warfare proved crucial in maintaining balance of power, and the relative power of various states shifted

throughout the 17th and into the 18th century as states vied for power.

States essentially made decisions about international relations based on national interests and what we might call *realpolitik*: policies based on practical and circumstantial factors rather than religious/ideological considerations. Europe also increasingly became a multi-polar system in which multiple states were, at various times, more or less evenly matched. In particular, a system of five Great Powers emerged: France, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, Britain, and Russia. To be sure, there would be diplomatic shifts and restructurings throughout this period as states rose and declined.



UNIT 3 ■ TOPIC 6

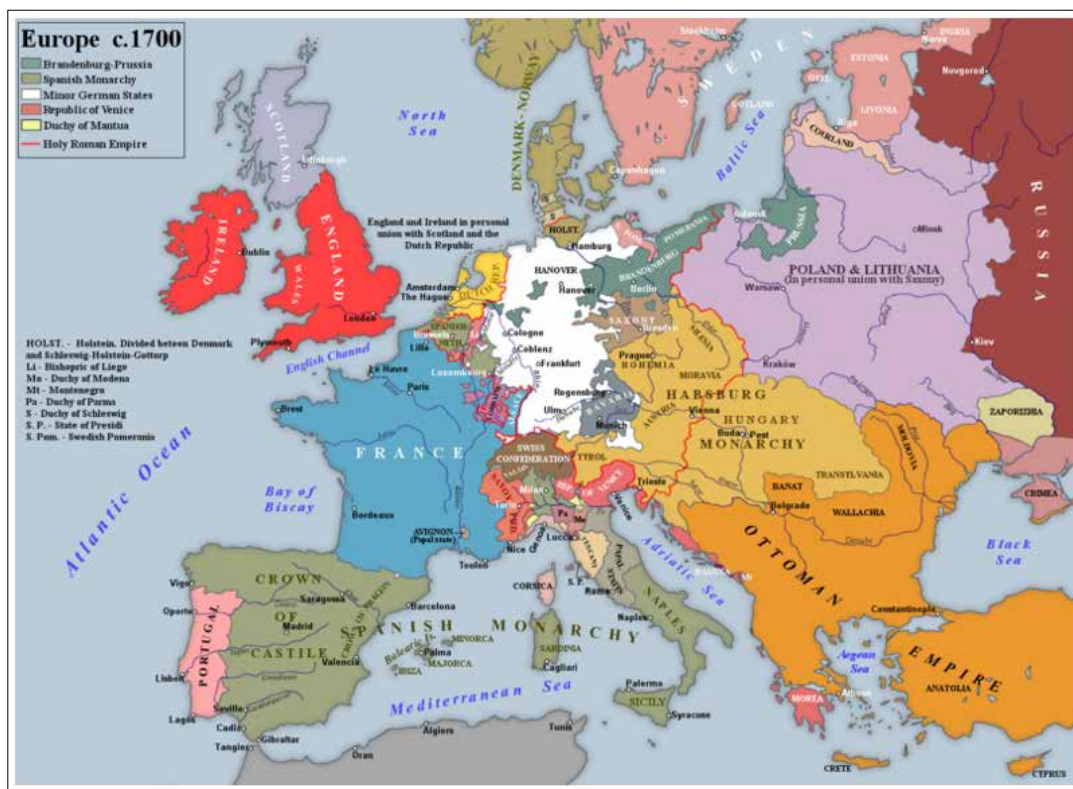
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■ THE DUTCH WARS & NINE YEARS WAR

The Netherlands won independence from Spain in 1648, resulting in the formation of the Dutch Republic. The Dutch emerged as a preeminent naval power, sparking conflict in the age of mercantilist policies and intense maritime competition for control of trade. Both English and French mercantilist policies under Cromwell in England and Colbert in France hurt Dutch shipping at a time when France was eager to expand its borders and England was jealous of Dutch shipping. From 1652 to 1674, the Dutch and the English fought in a series of wars (known as the Anglo-Dutch Wars), a situation on which Louis XIV hoped to capitalize.

territory. When William of Orange became King of England in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, he formed the Grand Alliance (League of Augsburg) of England, the Dutch Republic, Spain, Savoy, and the Habsburg Empire to check the rise of France. At the end of what became known as the Nine Years War (1689-1697), France gained the region of Alsace but lost control of Lorraine, and the French agreed to formally recognize William III (William of Orange) as the rightful King of England. The end of the war also signaled the continuation of the political multi-polarity of Europe.

The growing power of France under Louis XIV (who came to the throne in 1661) alarmed both the English and Dutch after Louis invaded the Spanish Netherlands in 1672. England was initially allied with France but exited the alliance by 1674; and while Louis did not succeed in taking the Spanish Netherlands, France emerged as a dominant power in 1678 and he continued his designs to increase French



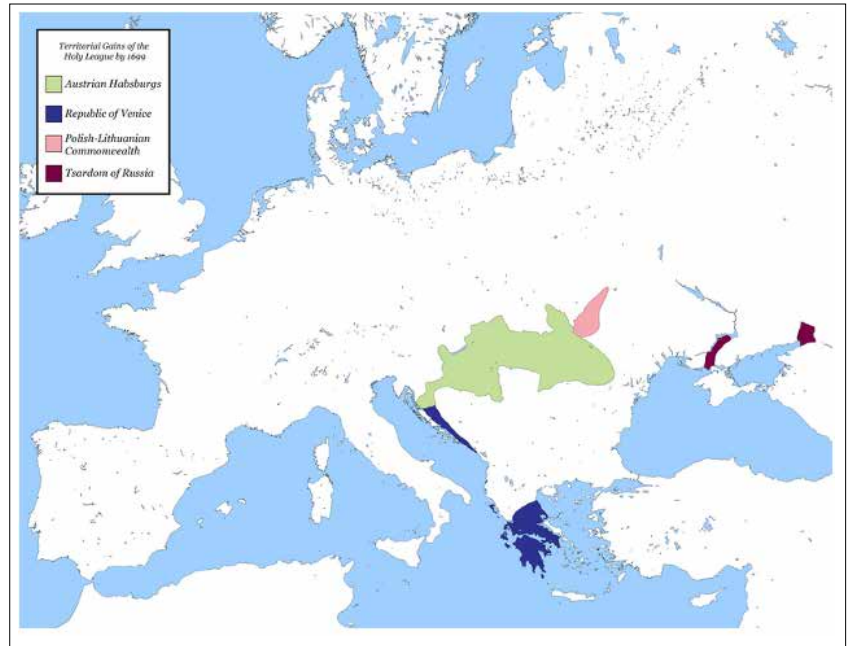
UNIT 3 ■ TOPIC 6

BALANCE OF POWER IN EUROPE: READINGS

■ THE BATTLE OF VIENNA (1683)

While Western European powers were concerned about the growing power and ambitions of France, the Habsburgs grew increasingly troubled by the Ottoman Empire's expansion into Europe. Under Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566), the Ottomans continued their conquests in the Balkans (Southeast Europe), but the conquest of Vienna always eluded Suleiman and his predecessors. Vienna boasted strategic access to the Danube River and to overland trade routes between Germany and the Mediterranean. In the years leading up to the Battle of Vienna (1683), the Ottomans had been supporting Hungarian Protestants who were rebelling against Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I.

Territorial Gains of the Holy Alliance by 1699



Members of the Holy Alliance

In 1682, Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha convinced Sultan Mehmed IV to begin preparations for an all-out assault on Vienna. In the meantime, Leopold sought to solidify the Holy League alliance with the King of Poland, the Venetian Republic, and Russia. Thanks in part to the arrival of reinforcement troops led by Polish King Jan Sobieski, the Holy Alliance managed to lift the siege and force the Ottomans to sign the Treaty of Karlowitz, conceding many territories in Europe and the Mediterranean. The defeat also signaled the end of the Ottoman advance into Europe (but by no means did it spell the end of the Ottoman Empire).



activities

UNIT 3 ■ TOPIC 6

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■ SWEDEN & RUSSIA TAKE THEIR PLACE AS EUROPEAN POWERS

From 1560 to 1660, Sweden had engaged in large-scale territorial expansion in the Baltic region, at the expense of Denmark and Poland. Under King Gustavus Adolphus in particular, Sweden emerged as a major power thanks to his political and military reforms. By 1630, Adolphus commanded one of the best standing armies in the world, utilizing conscription, the adoption of new training and battlefield techniques, and the introduction of mobile artillery. Under Adolphus, Sweden played a significant role in the Thirty Years' War and in maintaining the balance of power in Europe.

But just as Dutch success attracted the ire of other powers, Swedish dominance in the Baltic region provoked resentment. In 1700, Denmark, Poland and Russia—all of whom lost territory to Sweden—jointly declared war against King Charles XII of Sweden. But

Charles managed to defeat the Russian and Polish armies until Russia, under Tsar Peter I, turned the tide of the war, occupying Finland and gaining access to the Baltic Sea by 1714, ending the Great Northern War.

Russia's ascendance, like that of Sweden, was mostly due to the reforms of Tsar Peter the Great. Peter reformed both the military and the bureaucracy along western lines in order to increase his own power at the expense of the nobility and build a large army. Not only did Russia gain access to the Baltic, but it also gained control of much of Ukraine and a slice of Poland after negotiating the Partition of Poland with Prussia and Austria.



The Swedish Empire at its Height (1658)



Expansion of Russia

UNIT 3 ■ TOPIC 6

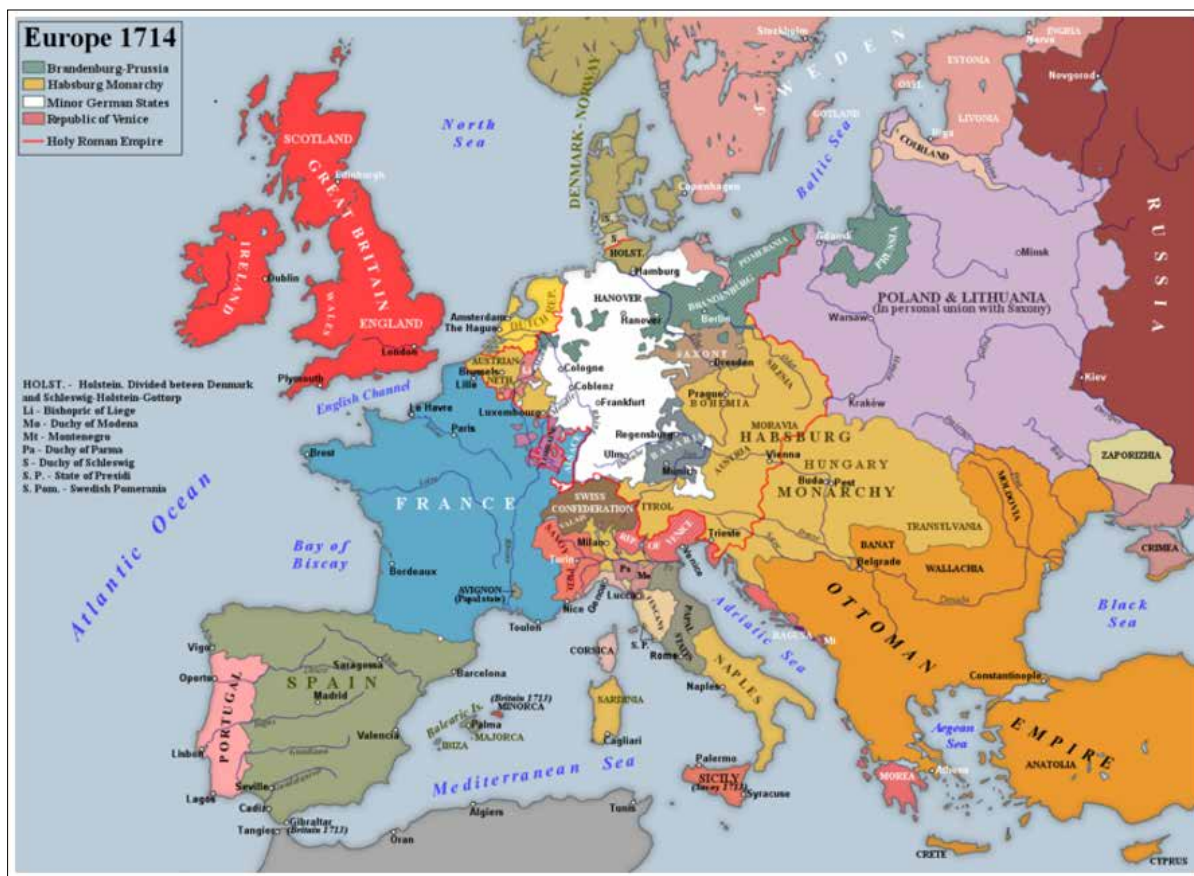
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■ THE WAR OF THE SPANISH SUCCESSION

The end of the Nine Years War was really just a pause in hostilities between the major powers of Europe. In 1700, Charles II of Spain died without an heir, sparking a continental conflict over succession to the Spanish Throne. While Spain was no longer the preeminent power that it once was, it still boasted a large and wealthy empire. Because Charles II was a Habsburg, the Austrian Habsburgs claimed succession; but Charles' will left the empire to Philip of Anjou, the grandson of King Louis XIV of France. Naturally, Louis saw this as an opportunity to fulfill his own ambitions, and the stage was set for a war. The acquisition of the Spanish

Throne by either the Austrian Habsburgs or the French Bourbons could greatly alter the balance of power in Europe. The Grand Alliance of Austria, the Dutch Republic, and Britain opposed the succession of Philip and went to war against France and its pro-Bourbon allies. The war dragged on until

1713 and spilled over into North America, where it was known as Queen Anne's War (named after the English monarch). Under the Treaty of Utrecht, Philip became King of Spain as Philip V, but the Spanish and French thrones could never unite under the same monarch. Austria gained control of the Spanish Netherlands, Naples, Milan, and Sardinia; and the British received Gibraltar and Minorca as well as trade concessions in the Spanish Americas. The war also marked the ascendance of Britain and Prussia and the decline of France and the Dutch Republic. Under Bourbon rule, Spain would also undergo a series of reforms.



Europe After the Treaty of Utrecht