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# The Military Revolution and Political Change

ORIGINS OF DEMOCRACY AND  
AUTOCRACY IN EARLY  
MODERN EUROPE

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## CHAPTER THREE

## The Military Revolution

MEDIEVAL constitutionalism had as its main defensive carapace a decentralized form of military organization that composed one source of constitutionalism. But conflicts within the crystallizing European state system engendered competition, technological and tactical innovation, and changes in military organization, and these had important effects on the political order. The means of destruction changed from relatively small feudal levies and militias to large mercenary and standing armies, which required a new superstructural apparatus to guarantee inputs of capital and labor. A more centralized and coercive state was needed to extract these inputs from an unwilling population. The expense of military modernization conflicted with medieval constitutionalism. Kings found estates no longer willing or able to provide the revenues for modern warfare. In many parts of the continent, constitutional government became as obsolete as the heavily armored knight.

## FEUDAL MILITARY ORGANIZATION IN DECLINE, 1300–1500

The era of the armored knight originated with the system of military benefices built by Charles Martel to deal with the Saracen threat. The system was more fully developed throughout Europe by Charlemagne, Otto the Great, and William the Conqueror. Otto's successors in the Holy Roman Empire spread feudal military organization across the Elbe, into Poland, Austria, and Hungary. Feudal militaries were decentralized, scattered across the land on hundreds of benefices. Coordination at the regional or territorial level was slight: there were no annual maneuvers or training programs, only occasional musters to demonstrate the serviceability of armor and weaponry. Medieval warfare was not a national or territorial matter so much as it was the temporary coalescence of individuals trained, for the most part by themselves, in the art of war. Warfare did not mobilize national resources or integrate warriors into organized formations; it relied on a levy of knights whose character, breeding, and outlook placed a premium on individual merit and personal valor.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War within the Framework of Political History*, Volume 3: *The Middle Ages* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 289–90. As we shall see, this individualism was a critical flaw in feudal military organization.

The low level of central organization and small size of armies made medieval warfare relatively inexpensive, at least from the point of view of central authority. Charlemagne's hosts conquered much of Europe west of the Elbe, but probably never numbered more than five thousand. At the height of the Crusades, at the Battle of Ascalon (1099), all Christendom assembled fewer than ten thousand soldiers, and even that figure diminished during lulls.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the timely sack of a city, infidel or Christian, defrayed the expenses of the noble crusaders. Armor, which became heavier in the course of the Middle Ages, was quite costly, having roughly the same value as forty head of cattle. Specially bred war horses, of which each knight required two or three, were also of considerable value. But these were expenses incurred by vassals themselves and not by their overlord. The state did not yet shoulder the costs of war.<sup>3</sup>

Castles were originally of the old motte and bailey variety, constructed out of earthen mounds surrounding a wooden bastion, but, in the second half of the eleventh century, the towering stone castles with which we are more familiar began to replace them. These castles, such as the line of castellar fortifications built by Plantagenets in their French holdings, were often financed and built with the king's demesnes revenues. Like their architectural contemporaries, the cathedrals, they were constructed over the course of many years, and required no extraordinary fiscal measures.<sup>4</sup>

Everywhere in Europe, even in the most heavily feudalized parts of northern France, the knight was supported by infantry levies, essential though secondary parts of feudal military organization. In France, the Holy Roman Empire, and England, able-bodied men were levied and organized into militias (*ban*, *arrière ban*, *Heerfolge*, and *fyrd*).<sup>5</sup> Aside from these levies, infantry for most medieval battles came from three

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, Michael Jones, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 59–64; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> R. Allen Brown, "The Status of the Norman Knight," in John Gillingham and J. C. Holt, eds., *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1984), pp. 18–32.

<sup>4</sup> On castles, see *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 6, pp. 776–81; John Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe, 730–1200* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 25–28, 98–100; and Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 110–13.

<sup>5</sup> Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe*, pp. 40–41; André Corvisier, *Armies and Societies in Europe, 1494–1789*, Abigail T. Siddall, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 25–27; János M. Bak, "Politics, Society and Defense in Medieval and Early Modern Hungary," in János M. Bak and Béla K. Király, eds., *War and Society in Eastern Central Europe, Volume 3: From Hunyadi to Rákóczi, War and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Hungary* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982), pp. 1–22; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, pp. 104–7.



sources: the town militias (part of the exchange between crown and burgher guaranteeing town autonomy); the knights' retinue of sergeants and lance-holders; and those members of the old Merovingian and Saxon warrior elite who, for various reasons, had not become beneficed knights.<sup>6</sup>

In mountainous or hilly areas, or in regions otherwise inhospitable to heavy cavalry and manorial agriculture, infantry predominated or even became the exclusive form of military organization. Such was the case in Switzerland, Scandinavia, and the unconquered Celtic parts of Britain. English forays into Wales and Scotland met with such fierce resistance (and often outright defeat) that the Angevins adopted Celtic infantry formations and weapons, especially the longbow.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, the heavy cavalry retained supremacy in the social hierarchy and preeminence on the field of battle, where it was the knights' charge, not the bow, sword, or pike, that won or lost the day.<sup>8</sup>

One myth that haunts military history contends that mercenaries did not appear until the epoch of the warring city-states of Renaissance Italy or the confessional wars of the sixteenth century. In fact, mercenary troops were to be found everywhere in medieval Europe, and even earlier. The armies with which Justinian retook Italy and North Africa in the fifth century were largely mercenary. William the Conqueror's army had a large mercenary contingent; indeed, the English military continued to use mercenaries, before and after their specific proscription in Magna Carta.<sup>9</sup> On the Iberian peninsula, both the Spanish and the Moors used hired lances during the Reconquista, the legendary Cid being the best known of them. In France Philip Augustus built an army of mercenaries to conquer contumacious vassals and to expand his kingdom. Charles VII

<sup>6</sup> Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe*, pp. 40–51; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 84–85; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, pp. 266–67, 293–94.

<sup>7</sup> Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe*, p. 100; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 152–53; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, pp. 385–92. These footsoldiers were decisive in the English victories over French chivalry during the Hundred Years' War.

<sup>8</sup> The charge was actually more of a trot, since the weight of the armor made rapid motion hazardous. The charge, as we commonly imagine it, did not emerge until Gustavus Adolphus's innovations during the Thirty Years' War, well after light cavalry had been adopted. See Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, p. 99; Michael Roberts, "Gustav Adolf and the Art of War," in Roberts, ed., *Essays in Swedish History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967). The tactical predominance of the knight, at least in the later Middle Ages, was probably as much the effect of his social superiority as it was the cause. As early as the battles of Civitate (1053) and Legnano (1176), the knight's vulnerability to infantry had been clearly demonstrated. Yet, as we shall see, adaptive tactical innovations did not quickly follow.

<sup>9</sup> Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe*, p. 42; Sally Harvey, "The Knight and the Knight's Fee in England," in R. H. Hilton, ed., *Peasants, Knights and Heretics: Studies in Medieval English Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 159–60; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, pp. 166–67, 189, 313–21.

continued this practice until their unreliability was made evident during the Hundred Years' War.<sup>10</sup>

Feudal military organization suffered from inherent problems, centuries before the introduction of the pike and gunpowder. Among these were the unreliability of feudal loyalty, a decline in competence, and a lack of discipline. The loyalty of the vassal was far from the picture of fealty presented by those who have sentimentalized this period, in which self-interest and treachery were commonplaces. Without loyalty, the efficacy of feudal armies suffered. Knights often refused to respond to their suzerain's call. They bickered over the numbers required, duration of service, regions in which they were required to serve (generally, service on foreign soil was not part of the feudal obligation), and commutation of service into scutage.<sup>11</sup> Even the more autocratic Russian service cavalry was not immune to discipline problems: "While Russian troops were investing [Smolensk] the Tatars attacked from the south. Servitors with land in the region hurried home to the region to repair the damage."<sup>12</sup>

Many things contributed to the decline of the competence of the feudal warrior class, even among those willing to heed their overlord's summons. Holders of benefices had long since thought of their estates as de facto personal property, and had begun to concern themselves more with managing the manor, to the benefit of the medieval economy but at the expense of the military.<sup>13</sup> Inflation often meant that many knights could no longer afford the expense of equipping themselves for longer and longer campaigns.<sup>14</sup> Problems plagued all Europe: "It was happening ev-

<sup>10</sup> Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe*, pp. 40–42; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, p. 153; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, p. 508.

<sup>11</sup> Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 80–85; *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 6, pp. 216–18; Karol Górski, "La Ligue des Etats et les origines du régime représentatif Prusse," *Studies Presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions* 23 (1960): 177–85; Felix Gilbert, "Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 12ff; Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 47; Michael Prestwich, "Cavalry Service in Early Fourteenth Century England," in Gillingham and Holt, *War and Government*, pp. 147–58; Derek Hirst, *Authority and Conflict: England, 1603–1658* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 186–87; Davis Bitton, *The French Nobility in Crisis, 1560–1640* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 27–41.

<sup>12</sup> John L. H. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia 1462–1874* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 19–20.

<sup>13</sup> Corvisier, *Armies and Society*, pp. 37–38; Knud J. V. Jespersen, "Social Change and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe: Some Danish Evidence," *Historical Journal* 26 (1983): 1–3; Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

<sup>14</sup> Fritz Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser and His Workforce: A Study in Eu-*



everywhere: in England knights who could not ride, in Spain *hidalgos* who could not shoot, in Milan and Naples *conti* whose sword-hands stank of trade."<sup>15</sup> The reliability of that part of medieval society that neither prayed nor labored was clearly in decline.

The most serious problem of the feudal military system was the lack of discipline. Though highly disciplined as individuals, the knights, when assembled into the hosts, lacked the coordination and regimentation we now associate with armies. There was no routine training and so battles lacked orderly tactical movements and disciplined behavior.<sup>16</sup> Knights often refused orders, especially when not given directly by the king: they had sworn allegiance to the king himself, not a placeholder. Discipline further eroded as roturiers, lower nobles, and commoners took positions of command. Knights were wont to break off combat before victory was assured in order to have first crack at plundering nearby towns, villages, and even the slain.<sup>17</sup> Discipline was better in the military orders, such as the Teutonic Knights, the Knights Templar, and the Brethren of the Sword. Such orders had a greater level of central organization: the grandmasters, their system of commanderies, and a strong religious ethos binding them together and to the hierarchy.<sup>18</sup> But they were hardly the norm, and the orders collapsed in the early sixteenth century. What Oman says of the French feudal military may be said of that of much of Europe: "The strength of the armies of Philip and John of Valois was composed of a fiery and undisciplined *noblesse*, which imagined itself to

ropean Economic and Social History, Volume 1 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1964), pp. 6–8.

<sup>15</sup> J. R. Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 1450–1620* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe*, pp. 250–51. Weber observed: "The berserk with maniac seizures of frenzy and the feudal knight who measures swords with an equal adversary in order to gain personal honor are equally alien to discipline." See "The Meaning of Discipline," in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 254.

<sup>17</sup> Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937), pp. 654–751; Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War c. 1300–c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 43–44. Discipline problems plagued Ottoman forces as well. The beneficed *timariot* bickered over terms of feudal service, refused orders, and even mutinied. This led to increased reliance on the professional infantry, the janissaries. See Oman, *Art of War in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 758–70. Nor were problems alien to naval warfare: as late as the English victory over the Armada (1588), Drake broke off pursuit of the main body in order to seize the highly prized *Rosario*. See Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Ashfield Press, 1987), p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, pp. 243–45. On discipline in the Teutonic Knights' *Ordenstaat*, see Michael Burleigh, *Prussian Society and the German Order: An Aristocratic Order in Crisis, c. 1410–1466* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 55–67.

be the most efficient military force in the world, but was in reality little removed from an armed mob."<sup>19</sup> Many of the same problems were found in infantry militias. They were poorly trained, refused to serve abroad or for extended periods, and were badly armed. Furthermore, as rural opposition to royal centralization or increased labor requirements grew, peasants were likely to use their skills and weapons against internal, seigneurial enemies, and not against their lord's external ones. As the threat of peasant rebellion loomed larger, peasant militias were disbanded or fell into disuse. Thereafter, peasant contribution to defense would be confined to paying taxes and serving as forced conscripts.<sup>20</sup>

Inherent problems of the feudal military were exacerbated by the development of disciplined infantry (with pike or firearms) and intermittent forays by large Turkish armies. Though not themselves part of the military revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these changes further undermined feudal military organization and introduced innovations that destabilized medieval Europe's conception of war, and led to the portentous revolution that transformed European military and political organization. The challenge to the aristocratic social order posed by the urban bourgeoisie was predated, by several centuries, by one posed by impertinent peasants and townsmen who, banded together into disciplined phalanxes of pikemen, proved invulnerable to the charges of heavy cavalry. The superiority of these formations only slowly became apparent to warrior elites blinded by narcissism and defensive of their military-based privileges.

The rise of the infantry began in four regions. First, in northern Italy, footsoldiers successfully turned back Frederick Barbarossa's efforts to prevent the urban centers from becoming independent city-states. At Legnano (1176), infantry repelled heavy Hohenstauffen cavalry, ensuring secession from the empire.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in Flemish towns to the north, footsoldiers inflicted a serious defeat on French chivalry at Courtrai (1302). The secession of the Swiss cantons and towns from the empire initiated a number of attempts by the Burgundians and Habsburgs to restore imperial authority in that mountainous region. Repeatedly, at Morgarten (1315), Laupen (1339), Sempach (1386), and Näfels (1388), cantonal and urban footsoldiers brandished their pikes expertly, decimated haughty aristocratic intruders, and sent them fleeing for their lives

<sup>19</sup> Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War: The Middle Ages from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1898), p. 592.

<sup>20</sup> Corvisier, *Armies and Society*, pp. 29–39.

<sup>21</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, pp. 342–43; *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 6, p. 794. At this point infantry was not yet used offensively; the pikemen only repelled the cavalry charge.



from that alpine fortress.<sup>22</sup> By the late fifteenth century, Swiss infantry was renowned throughout Europe. Swiss pikemen became mercenaries in French and Spanish employ, and served as prototypes for developing modern national infantries elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

In England, as we have noted, repeated Celtic raids and stubborn resistance to English punitive expeditions led to increased use of infantry, principally bowmen. Infantry and the superb tactical use of them were decisive in all but the latter phases of the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). English battle plans called for the cavalry to hold the middle, while bowmen on the flanks mowed down their adversaries. At Crecy (1346), the English knights dismounted and stood in the ranks with foot-soldiers to repel the French heavy cavalry, a melding of two military organizations and social classes. At Agincourt (1415), infantry were deployed on the offensive for the first time and annihilated a much larger French force. Only after repeated costly defeats did the French decline to engage the English on the field, a decision that transformed the conflict into a war of sieges.<sup>24</sup> These stunning defeats led ultimately to Charles VII's liquidation of the French feudal military system and adoption of infantry phalanxes and artillery.

Economic and geographic factors were also at play in the rise of the infantry. The defeats of Hohenstauffen and Capetian chivalry came at the hands of militias from autonomous towns of northern Italy and Flanders. Here, the absence of traditional feudalization, and hostility toward surrounding feudatories, directed military structures away from the prevailing pattern. In Switzerland and the Celtic frontiers of England, rough terrain made the armored knight even more vulnerable than he was on level ground. Accordingly, the infantry of the cantons and clans had remained dominant since antiquity. This feudal military organization was under attack from the rural communes and the emerging towns, from Europe's past as well as its future.

The superiority of infantry was unmistakable by 1400. The battles of Courtai, Bannockburn, and Crecy spelled the doom of heavy cavalry; yet

<sup>22</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, pp. 551–90; W. D. McCracken, *The Rise of the Swiss Republic: A History* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), pp. 158–82. The discipline of the Swiss footsoldier, it is often observed, stemmed from the cohesion found in the canton valleys and towns. But it also came from a less romantic source: breaches of discipline were punished by death.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4: *The Modern Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 13–19.

<sup>24</sup> Desmond Seward, *The Hundred Years War: The English in France, 1337–1453* (New York: Atheneum, 1982); John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1988), pp. 78–116; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 3, pp. 455–68, 508–16; *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 7, pp. 347–87; Volume 8, pp. 646–49.

heavy cavalry endured well into the sixteenth century. This persistence can be accounted for, at least in part, by the inability of monarchs to afford anything but the relatively inexpensive feudal levies bolstered by the odd mercenary regiment. We must also take into consideration the ability of the feudal military elite—as well as the monarch, who was not far removed from the aristocracy, especially on the ideological plane—to ignore the lessons taught so well by footsoldiers. Oman's remarks on the French knight are insightful, but perhaps overly mordant:

The French knight believed that, since he was infinitely superior to any peasant in the social scale, he must consequently excel him to the same extent in military value. He was therefore prone not only to despise all descriptions of infantry, but to regard the appearance on the field against him as a species of insult to his class-pride. A few years before, the self-confidence of the French nobility had been shaken for a moment by the result of the battle of Courtray (1302). But they had soon learned to think of that startling and perplexing event as a mere accident. . . . Comforting themselves with the reflection that it was the morass and not the Flemish infantry which won the battle, they were confirmed in their views by the event of the two bloody fights of Mons-en-Preville (1304) and Cassel (1328). The fate which on those days had befallen the gallant but ill-trained burghers of Flanders was believed to be only typical of that which awaited any foot-soldier who dared to match himself against the chivalry of the most warlike aristocracy in Christendom. Pride goes before a fall, and the French nobles were about to meet [in the Hundred Years' War] infantry of a quality such as they had never supposed to exist.<sup>25</sup>

On a less caustic note, it might be added that doing away with heavy cavalry was not a relatively simple, coldly analytic decision like that of replacing superannuated aircraft with more modern ones. Liquidating the feudal military entailed nothing short of breaking with one's entire upbringing, culture, and social system.

Gunpowder delivered a second blow to the feudal military, but not the mortal one often supposed: pike-wielding infantry did that.<sup>26</sup> Firearms

<sup>25</sup> Oman, *The Middle Ages*, pp. 592–93. Thompson echoes this view: "In Italy and the Netherlands revolt against feudal lords was accompanied by the development of infantry forces and of a professional soldiery. . . . The amour propre of the feudal knight, however, was slow to encourage a practice which confounded him with his inferiors, and its systematic employment was long delayed." A. Hamilton Thompson, "The Art of War to 1400," in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 6, p. 794.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Bean exaggerates the early role of gunpowder technology in the military revolution and in state building. See "War and the Birth of the Nation State," *Journal of Economic History* 33 (1973): 203–21; and Charles Tilly's criticism, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 177–



were first introduced in northern Italy circa 1300 but did not become standard equipment in European armies for almost two centuries. Diffusion was delayed by the poor quality of powder, slow rates of fire, and the expense of these artisanal products.<sup>27</sup> Owing to their notorious inaccuracy and slow rates of fire, cannon did not become important until the mid-fifteenth century. Once they were developed, however, castles were swiftly made obsolete, and new forms of fortification using thick, low walls had to be developed. An advantage was obtained by troops whose mobility and discipline shortened exposure to the increasingly deadly cannonade.<sup>28</sup>

Infantry and gunpowder delivered two blows; the Turks delivered a third. By the late fifteenth century, they had vanquished the Byzantine Empire and were pressing into Christendom, by land and sea. They pressed westward into the Mediterranean, taking Rhodes and Venetian territory along the Dalmatian coast. In the lower Danube, the Turks fielded an army of perhaps a hundred thousand—an enormous force for the time. Their numerical superiority as well as their mobile, light cavalry surged up the Balkans into Hungary, defeating the Hungarians and Austrians at virtually every turn. The forces of Christendom had to augment their own numbers and replace their traditional forces with light cavalry (hussars) and modern infantry.<sup>29</sup>

In short, feudal militaries had inherent problems that the introduction of infantry, gunpowder, and large armies badly aggravated. By 1500 feudal military organization was moribund: “Ce qui trouvait sa raison d’être à l’époque de la ‘Chanson de Roland’ devint une farce pathétique au siècle de don Quichotte.”<sup>30</sup>

#### THE MILITARY REVOLUTION, 1500–1650

Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut of a battle-ready knight, the devil, and death stalking the countryside conveys an essential truth of early modern Eu-

80. On the importance of infantry over gunpowder in undermining the feudal military, see Roberts, “Gustav Adolf and the Art of War.”

<sup>27</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 28–40; *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 8, pp. 650ff.

<sup>28</sup> Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 147–49, 198–200.

<sup>29</sup> *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume 8, pp. 647–48. See also Samuel E. Finer, “State- and Nation-Building in Europe: The Role of the Military,” in Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of the National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 84–163.

<sup>30</sup> “What had found its raison d’être in the epoch of the ‘Song of Roland’ became a pathetic farce in the century of Don Quixote.” C. Gaier, “La Cavalerie Lourde en Europe Occidentale du XIIe au XVe Siècle,” *Revue Internationale d’Histoire Militaire* 31 (1971): 385–96.

rope. Warfare and its attendant evils were commonplaces. The continent was at war more than it was at peace. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, warfare broke out continuously, bringing developments in infantry, gunpowder, and large armies, as well as new characteristics and greater durations, to wars.

Dynasts tried to consolidate or expand their territorial sovereignty at the expense of the indigenous aristocracy or independent duchies. The latter’s resistance often won the support of adjacent states fearful of the growing power of rivals, just as Habsburg attempts at dominating the Italian peninsula led to war with France.<sup>31</sup> Duchies relying on feudal levies or only small modern forces were easy victims for countries with modern infantries and cannon, as were regions whose administrations were paralyzed by an interregnum or a childless marriage.

A second cause of warfare in early modern Europe lay in the agrarian transformations. From England to East Elbia, peasants fought against enclosure, enclosures of commons, or seigneurial attempts at recovering rights and privileges reluctantly extended after the Black Death. Third, religious strife was breaking out everywhere as the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation swept Europe. Religion was almost always mixed with local resistance to centralization, as in the Huguenot wars in France; with breaking from an imperial system, as in the Hussite Wars and the Dutch Revolt; or with social antagonisms, as in the *Bauernkrieg*. The oft-quoted principle set forth at the Peace of Augsburg (1555), *cuius regio, eius religio*, says at least as much about power relations between emperor and prince as it does about religion. Fourth, conflicts over international trade erupted into war, though this was hardly the cause of as many wars as Marxist historians might suggest. As the three Anglo-Dutch wars of the seventeenth century and numerous Anglo-Spanish conflicts show, war became economics by other means. Finally, Turkish pressure in Hungary and in the Mediterranean persisted, even after the Spanish victory at Lepanto (1572).<sup>32</sup>

A consequence of new wars was the diffusion of new technology and a fundamental transformation of military structures. Armies became much larger, adopted new techniques and weaponry, and expanded central organization. Warfare became an extremely onerous and politically sensitive fiscal burden. Like the Industrial Revolution, this great transformation did not occur simultaneously in all countries. Spain, largely unencumbered by constitutional government, was the first to build a modern army for its wars against the Ottomans; Austria, facing Turkish

<sup>31</sup> See Ludwig Dehio, *The Precarious Balance: Four Centuries of the European Power Struggle* (New York: Vintage, 1962); and Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *War, Diplomacy, and Imperialism, 1618–1763* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

<sup>32</sup> See the essays in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, eds., *The Origins and Prevention of Major Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).



pressure and trying to hold the Empire together, built a large mercenary army; France and Sweden responded in kind to Habsburg armies during the Thirty Years' War; and Prussia underwent the transformations shortly thereafter. Insular England relied primarily on local militias for a much longer period.

The technology and composition of warfare were changing in three principal ways: the preeminence of firearms, functional specialization, and new forms of fortification. Granulated powder, improvements in the casting of cannon, and the production of calibrated iron projectiles to replace ill-fitting iron and stone ones led to more reliable and faster-firing guns. Mobile cannon were introduced during the Thirty Years' War by the Swedes, who for the first time attached them to individual regiments.<sup>33</sup> The use of arquebuses and muskets increased steadily, and their number reached parity with that of pikes by 1600, outstripping them two-to-one twenty years later. By the end of the seventeenth century, the invention of the bayonet enabled the infantry to double as musketeers and pikemen, dooming the venerable pike, just as it had doomed heavy cavalry.<sup>34</sup> Pistols replaced the lance as the main weapon of the cavalry by the sixteenth century.

Armies became more and more specialized and complex. By 1550 armies had roughly equal proportions of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, each branch evolving dramatically.<sup>35</sup> Heavily armored cavalry was replaced by light horsemen modeled primarily after the Albanian *stradioti* of Venetian armies, the Hungarian hussars, and later the German mercenary *Schwarzreitern*. Their principal battlefield tactic was the caracole, a quick thrust toward the enemy lines followed by firing of their pistols, before retiring to the rear for another go.<sup>36</sup> The helter-skelter of the feu-

<sup>33</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 16–20; Michael Roberts, "Gustav Adolf and the Art of War" and "The Military Revolution," in Roberts, *Essays in Swedish History*. For an account of military modernization in eastern Europe, see Béla K. Király, "Society and War from Mounted Knights to the Standing Armies of Absolute Kings: Hungary and the West," in Bak and Király, *War and Society in Eastern Central Europe*, Volume 3, pp. 23–55.

<sup>34</sup> Roberts, "Gustav Adolf and the Art of War," pp. 56–59; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 4, pp. 220–21. The pikemen were essential to defend the arquebusiers and musketeers from cavalry charges after they had discharged their weapons. On this and other military changes, see Michael Howard's essay, *War in European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> Oman, *War in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 561–68; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 148–50.

<sup>36</sup> The new light cavalry made its first appearance outside Italy and eastern Europe during the Schmalkaldic War of the early sixteenth century, mostly on the imperial side against the league of South German towns. See Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 119–25.

dal cavalry became a carefully drilled maneuver. Dragoons, cavalry reconnaissance, and skirmishers were developed, further complicating military organization. Even the footsoldier became some sort of specialist: light infantry, fusilier, grenadier, or sapper.<sup>37</sup>

Armies were broken down into smaller tactical units, from the 3,000-man Spanish *tercios*, to Maurice of Orange's 550-man units, to Gustavus Adolphus's somewhat smaller units.<sup>38</sup> This increased mobility and firepower, but also required more training, as individual valor and discipline—attributes of the knight—were replaced by submergence of the individual into the phalanx, squadron, or battery, guided by the steady beat of the drum and the captain's shouts. Owing in part to the expense of training, armies gradually moved away from being seasonal forces, disbanded at the outset of winter; they became increasingly permanent.

Developments in gunpowder and field pieces obviously made old castellar fortifications nothing more than large, vulnerable targets easily reduced to rubble. Fixed fortifications had to evolve: advances in one set of weaponry or techniques, whether offensive or defensive, quickly led to corresponding evolution in the other. The high walls made from brittle stone were gone, but towns surrounded themselves with low walls of earth and brick, modeled after the town fortifications of Renaissance Italy, and hence called the *trace italienne*. Town enclosures were architectural wonders, drawing from the state of the art in scientific knowledge to maximize resilience, minimize exposure to fire, and allow the most outgoing firepower.<sup>39</sup>

Like the innovations of the late medieval period, changes in methods and technology spread throughout the continent, at least in the regions most affected by war, from central Germany to Italy, from Hungary to the Atlantic. Diffusion was accelerated by mercenary forces who moved from employer to employer, from kingdom to kingdom, teaching or learning new techniques of destruction.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 2, pp. 498–500. On continued specialization into the eighteenth century, see David Chandler, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Marlborough* (New York: Hippocrene, 1976).

<sup>38</sup> Roberts, "Gustav Adolf and the Art of War," pp. 60–61; Geoffrey Parker, "The 'Military Revolution,' 1560–1660—a Myth?" *Journal of Modern History* 48 (1976): 195–97, and *The Military Revolution*, pp. 6–44; and John A. Lynn, "Tactical Evolution in the French Army," *French Historical Studies* 14 (1985): 176–91.

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders*, pp. 8–10; John U. Nef, *War and Human Progress: An Essay on the Rise of Industrial Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 51–53; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 2, pp. 220–21; Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 212–25. The technology of fortifications remained largely similar from the late sixteenth century to the Napoleonic Wars.

<sup>40</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 2, pp. 41–43. Gunpowder technology,



Rapid growth in size constituted a second fundamental change in armies of the early modern period. This stemmed from the rise in population, the flourishing wealth of the period, new methods, and the proletarianization of the soldier. Quantity became more important than quality: "The eclipse of cavalry by infantry meant that victory in war after the 1470s came to depend not on the quality of the combatants nor on the excellence of their armaments, but on their numbers. A government bent on war had now to mobilize and equip every man who could be found."<sup>41</sup> A reciprocal relationship existed between increased size and the specialization of troops. Augmentation of one called for or greatly facilitated the other. Furthermore, the defensive prowess of the modern infantry led to compensation by weight of numbers. The seeming invulnerability of the phalanx could be overcome by attacking it from several directions.<sup>42</sup>

At the outset of the Thirty Years' War, imperial forces numbered some 20,000 men, Mansfeld's Protestant opposition approximately 12,000. A decade and a half later, Wallenstein commanded over 150,000, his Swedish enemy an even larger number.<sup>43</sup> Parker has saved us many hours of research by compiling various troop strength data, which are reproduced in Table 1.

An important source of manpower was the military contractor and his mercenary recruits. Swiss pikemen left their poor forest cantons to serve in many armies, though mainly with the French. German *Landsknechte* and *Schwarzreitern* were more numerous than the Swiss, but were not their equals on the battlefield. Scots, Irish, Albanians, and Italians also served in the ranks of these motley forces. Conscription, too, provided soldiers, either to supplement mercenary troops or to serve as the principal means of manpower. This was especially the case in lands where mercenary troops had proved unreliable or where contractors' defalcations had been extreme.<sup>44</sup>

Numerous factors conspired to make warfare of the early modern period much longer than most of the conflicts of medieval Europe. The defensive superiority of disciplined infantry often made a single decisive battle a thing of the past. Conflicts became lengthy wars of maneuver or

however, met with stubborn resistance owing to its considerable expense and relatively slow rate of fire. See Parker, *The Military Revolution*, pp. 16–20.

<sup>41</sup> Parker, *The Army of Flanders*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts, "The Military Revolution"; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 117–53.

<sup>43</sup> *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 4, pp. 322–31. These huge forces were never assembled at any single battle. Many troops were utilized for guarding communication routes and garrisons, others campaigned elsewhere.

<sup>44</sup> See Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser*, Volumes 1 and 2; and Howard, *War in European History*, pp. 20–74.

TABLE 1  
Increase in Military Manpower, 1470–1710

Date	Spain	Holland	France	England	Sweden	Russia
1470s	20,000	—	40,000	25,000	—	—
1550s	150,000	—	50,000	20,000	—	—
1590s	200,000	20,000	80,000	30,000	15,000	—
1630s	300,000	50,000	150,000	—	45,000	35,000
1650s	100,000	—	100,000	70,000	70,000	—
1670s	70,000	110,000	120,000	—	63,000	130,000
1700s	50,000	100,000	400,000	87,000	100,000	170,000

Source: Parker, "The 'Military Revolution,'" p. 206, with permission of the publisher.

Note: In a later chapter I shall disagree with Parker's figure for Swedish military strength in the 1630s, which probably excludes the large number of German mercenaries. His figures nonetheless show the unmistakable trend to larger armies.

sieges of walled cities.<sup>45</sup> With the decline in the significance of feudal levies, the restraints on the length of war imposed by the feudal contract regarding length and place of service were gone. Inasmuch as monarchs were no longer restrained by the need to meet the expenses of war from the demesnes, they could prosecute wars much longer than previously. As long as they could obtain revenues from the estates or from constitutional gray areas, wars could go on. But that means of finance could only support small modernized forces; larger forces meant constitutional conflict.

Organization was needed to train the pikemen in synchronized thrusts and parries, arquebusiers and artillerymen in operating and maintaining their weaponry, light cavalry in the caracole and later the sabre charge, and all of them in coordinated, almost choreographed, tactical deployment in battle.<sup>46</sup> In the armies of the Spanish Habsburgs, training organizations and procedures were developed that sent new troops to garrison duty in Italy and North Africa before rotating them to one of the several fronts on which Spanish forces fought.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, organizational sections were needed to administer justice, garner intelligence,

<sup>45</sup> Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 11–16; Oman, *War in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 674–76; Parker, *The Military Revolution*, pp. 6–16.

<sup>46</sup> Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 1–6; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 2, p. 488; Roberts, "The Military Revolution," pp. 196–98.

<sup>47</sup> Parker, "The 'Military Revolution,'" pp. 199–200.



care for the wounded and later for the invalid, and provide other indirect means of maximizing destructive power. Science was mobilized as new principles of mechanics and geometry were studied and applied to the art of war.<sup>48</sup> Rear echelons formed, and war became probably the first part of Europe to be bureaucratized.

One of the most important of these administrative superstructures was the adoption of supply and logistical systems, though this development did not come until the seventeenth century, and even then initially only in Spain and France. Charles XII and Napoleon operated effectively without elaborate logistical support in the eighteenth century, as did the Duke of Marlborough in at least one critical campaign of the War of the Spanish Succession. But Charles and Napoleon ultimately met with catastrophe, in large part due to the absence of reliable supply systems. A lengthy campaign without rational logistics was risky if not foolhardy, and almost all armies developed them. By the seventeenth century, armies without rational supply systems faced critical problems. First of all, soldiers, especially mercenaries, mutinied when not well supplied, thereby paralyzing armies, sometimes at pivotal junctures. Allowing soldiers to forage for themselves often led to widespread desertion. Regular logistical commands enabled armies to exert greater control over their troops by making them more reliant on army organization for food and clothing.<sup>49</sup>

Second, the defensive superiority of infantry and the *trace italienne*, as well as the costs of rebuilding an army after a large battle, also lengthened wars. Each commander hoped that the other's food and money would run out, precipitating mutiny and dissolution, giving him an easy, almost costless victory.<sup>50</sup> A third problem associated with the absence of a rational logistical structure was the effect on the prosecution of the war itself. If an army had to rely on plundering the local economy for sup-

<sup>48</sup> See Henry Guerlac, "Vauban: The Impact of Science on War," in Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, pp. 64–90. Of course, many of these applications, such as the use of geometry to determine with "scientific" precision the range of an army, stemmed from an overzealous faith in science—something one senses has persisted in militaries.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Bonney, *Political Change in France under Richelieu and Mazarin 1624–1661* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 261–63; *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 6, pp. 741–833; D. W. Jones, *War and Economy in the Age of William III and Marlborough* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), especially pp. 28–65; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 64, 160; Walter L. Dorn, *Competition for Empire, 1740–1763* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 80–83.

<sup>50</sup> Hale, *War and Society*, p. 64; R. R. Palmer, "Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bülow: From Dynastic to National War," in Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, pp. 94–95; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 108–9; Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 7–8.

plies, its movements and strength became dependent on that means of supply, and strategy had to be subordinated to supply concerns. A decisive thrust into a region might make eminent sense from a purely military perspective, but if that region lacked resources, because of nature or another army's recent plunder, logistical considerations prevailed over strategy. So it was that, during the last stages of the Thirty Years' War,

Ragged bands were scattered across Germany, caring nothing for the cause, knowing nothing of any planned strategy, their chief care to scratch nourishment out of the soil and to avoid serious fighting. They fought only their competitors for food, of whatever party. This phenomenon created the confused campaigns of the last decade of the war. Fighting was uncoordinated and spasmodic, the headquarters staff being unable to move the mass of the troops easily or with purpose.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, an army without sound logistics is highly vulnerable to a cautious, patient enemy, especially one willing to trade territory for time. Charles XII learned this lesson too late at Poltava in southern Russia, Napoleon, during his campaign in northern Russia.<sup>52</sup>

Two systems of supply emerged during the Thirty Years' War. The first, developed by the Swedes, might seem little removed from plunder but, in that it relied upon a large supply staff, it actually constituted a break from the practices of the period. Gustavus's quartermasters deployed throughout Germany, took inventory of the area's economic resources, and extracted them for the army's needs, without the pillaging, rapine, and massacre normally associated with living off the land. Inasmuch as the extractions were usually spent in the same region, the effects on the economy were not as deleterious as one might initially suspect. Indeed, this long-run concern for the sources of supply was one of the key differences between Swedish and imperial methods.<sup>53</sup> Although this method reduced the likelihood of mutinies and the problems of a war of maneuver, strategy was still subordinated to supply.

By the later stages of the Thirty Years' War, many parts of Germany had approached exhaustion. When France entered the war after years of watching from the sidelines and subsidizing the Habsburgs' enemies, it

<sup>51</sup> C. V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1961), p. 420. See also J.F.C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World*, Volume 2: *From the Defeat of the Spanish Armada to the Battle of Waterloo* (New York: Da Capo, 1987), p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 129–30; van Creveld, *Supplying War*, pp. 8–14.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Roberts, *The Swedish Imperial Experience, 1560–1718* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 53–54; F. Redlich, "Contributions in the Thirty Years' War," *Economic History Review* 12 (1959): pp. 247–54; Myron P. Gutmann, *War and Rural Life in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 41–53.



constructed a supply system consisting of magazines (*étapes*) and private contractors in the local regions, bringing in food and fodder from various distances—a blend of state organization and private enterprise that effectively victualled its armies abroad.<sup>54</sup> The Habsburgs built road systems to supply and reinforce their far-flung armies. One road stretched from Vienna to the lower Rhine, the other principal one from Habsburg possessions in northern Italy to the mouth of the Rhine.<sup>55</sup>

Naval development in this period has thus far been neglected. This is not because, as Hintze argued long ago, navies could not be used for internal repression or against the estates—an argument based on resource mobilization must still deal with the costs of navies—but because most naval modernization took place after that of the land forces, and after most of the political consequences of the military revolution on land had played themselves out. Colbert's naval construction came almost fifty years after the army modernization of Richelieu and Mazarin. Prussia, later Germany, was almost exclusively a land power, until Tirpitz's naval program at the close of the nineteenth century. Instead, Prussia relied on the naval resources of allies, the Netherlands and England. Prior to the mid-seventeenth century, most navies were relatively small and inexpensive. Most were based on small galleys (mainly in the Mediterranean) or on privateers, that is, on privately owned naval mercenaries whose pay came from booty, not state treasuries. State expenses were also reduced by the wartime conversion of merchantmen to fighting ships.

By the late seventeenth century, technological competition, brought on by the Anglo-Dutch wars, made privateers and converted merchantmen obsolete. They were replaced by true navies: state-owned ships of the line, built exclusively for war, with sixty or more guns. The impact of this naval revolution was less important for constitutional history than one might expect. First, the construction of navies took place after the military revolution had already placed Brandenburg-Prussia and France firmly on an absolutist track; the effects, then, were only to strengthen state extractive mechanisms. Second, the expense of maintaining a modern navy was still far less than that of an army of over a hundred thousand. Third, and related to the first point regarding timing, in England, Sweden, and the Netherlands, naval modernization took place after those countries had found constitutionally benign methods of financing land

<sup>54</sup> David Parker, *The Making of French Absolutism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 62, 124; van Creveld, *Supplying War*, pp. 17–22. Ever one to find profit in the midst of war, Wallenstein constructed his own expansive supply system, which if not for his assassination, would have been the basis of a formidable central European state. See Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser*, Volume 1, pp. 325–27.

<sup>55</sup> Parker, *Army of Flanders*, pp. 50–53, 96–99.

forces. Those methods, as shall be seen, were applied to funding a navy without endangering political institutions. Naval modernization played an important role in the development of military strategy and in the economic history of the world, but its relevance to constitutional history was limited by its timing and relative expense.

War had changed enormously since the days of Charles Martel, Otto the Great, and the knights of the Crusades. It became more technologically advanced, and more complicated organizationally. It required far greater numbers than even those boastfully and dishonestly entered into the pages of medieval chronicles. My argument about the military revolution is not a pseudo-Weberian one lamenting that individual valor and leadership counted for nothing or very little, or that numbers and cold technique decided who won the day. Only those whose hearts are truly hardened or whose humanism exists only at the level of unengaged abstraction will not be struck by accounts of the courage of the Spanish footsoldier at Rocroi. The Swedish army took on opponents twice its number, without blinking, usually without losing. And somewhere men were found to serve in an exposed formation known as the forlorn hope. The seventeenth century probably produced more great military leaders than any other, including our own. In future histories the names of Maurice of Nassau and Gustavus Adolphus will, I suspect, more than hold their own against those of Guderian and Giap. Nor was everything subordinated to scientific principle and rational method. Wallenstein consulted astrologers prior to campaigns, most of which were successful. Promotions were based on favoritism and intrigue far more than on professional competence.<sup>56</sup> Changes in military organization led to new challenges of command and motivation, and so to the epoch of the great captain. The military revolution was a qualitative and quantitative change in military organization, but not one that obviated the roles of individual valor and leadership.

The impact of such a radical transformation could hardly be confined to the military. The dynamics of the various parts of the military revolution reverberated throughout Europe and fundamentally transformed state, society, and constitution in most countries. Students of military history might point out that there was nothing new in disciplined infantry forces numbering over a hundred thousand, that huge infantry armies had existed in the Roman Empire, albeit without the technological accoutrements. One scholar has estimated the size of the Roman legions at

<sup>56</sup> On the painstakingly slow professionalization of European officer corps, a process that did not really begin until the nineteenth century, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 24–58.



three hundred thousand.<sup>57</sup> The military revolution, then, was in some respect the reemergence of large infantry armies. But the Roman state had access to the resources of the entire Mediterranean world, even beyond; and, owing to Caesar's crossing the Rubicon, emperors and legion commanders could mobilize them without the bothersome intermediary of the Senate.

#### THE MILITARY REVOLUTION AND CONSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT

Sophisticated armaments, growing echelons of support and administration, and the trend toward large standing armies and longer campaigns meant enormous rises in the costs of war. A single cannon cost as much as feeding 800 soldiers for a month; the lowly pikeman's corselet cost as much as feeding him for over two years.<sup>58</sup> Standardization of weapons brought down unit costs, but the transition entailed considerable expense. The movement away from heavily armored cavalry meant that the equipment of each cavalryman was less expensive, but cavalry were now more numerous and centrally equipped. Insofar as mercenaries were often paid in booty rather than solely by salary, they were less expensive in some respects; but there was much speculation to be considered.

The cost of modern armies was no longer spread across hundreds of feudal benefices; it shifted squarely onto the shoulders of king and parliament. It had been centuries since the revenue derived from the royal demesnes covered chancery and military expenses. Parliaments had been originally convoked in the thirteenth century to obtain revenue from the country, more often than not during times of war. Spoliated ecclesiastical property provided a temporary solution to this problem, but as soon as the last tracts were sold, the need for money returned. As the military revolution unfolded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the rising expenses of armies led to conflict with the estates. Parliaments were loath to allocate monies for new armies during an era before we may properly speak of nationalism and before there was widespread understanding of international politics, even among elites. Individual members of the estates might privately favor large revenues, yet oppose them for fear of losing support from constituents in the counties. Exacerbating problems of provincialism and tight purse strings were numerous divisions in the estates and in society as a whole. Religious passions, regionalism, and class antagonisms were prevalent in the postmedieval world, and were not easily put aside once a parliament convened. Indeed, a meeting of the estates seemed the perfect time to bring such issues to

<sup>57</sup> Michael Grant, *History of Rome* (New York: Scribner's, 1978), p. 247.

<sup>58</sup> Parker, *Army of Flanders*, p. 49.

the fore. Estates seemed disposed to plodding deliberations, conducted by a cumbersome group of several hundred rustics whose ability to grasp the larger, international issues was hindered by particularist and regional concerns. There were no party organizations to bring order to the process. A final exacerbation stemmed from the fact that many countries faced increased military costs amidst the Thirty Years' War, a conflict that devastated economies across Europe.

Kings sought to resolve this conflict by packing the estates with those sympathetic to the royal pleas, eliding parliamentary practice through illegal taxes or ones of at least questionable constitutionality, selling royal property, selling office, or borrowing money against future revenue; but these expedients could not suffice in a major war against a modern power. Pressures arose to dissolve the estates and collect taxes without their approval. The Spanish minister, Olivares, vented his exasperation shortly before trying to overpower one provincial estates: "We always have to look and see if a constitution says this or that. . . . We have to discover what the customary usage is even when it is a question of the supreme law, of the actual preservation and defense of the province. . . . The Catalans ought to see more of the world than Catalonia."<sup>59</sup> The estates, though important parts of the medieval political process, were not well integrated with the monarchy. They did not meet regularly and routine procedures between crown and estates were lacking. In a dangerous international environment, where nothing less than territorial sovereignty was at stake, a more streamlined decision-making body with its own financial resources was necessary. If these innovations violated traditional rights and procedures called for by constitutional practice, then reason of state, what Olivares called "the supreme law," could be invoked to justify rising above them. Estates were suspicious of standing armies, whose loyalty might be closer to the monarch than to constitutional government, and they were all the warier after foreign monarchs had used standing armies as the engine of autocracy. Schwartzberg, prime minister of the Elector of Brandenburg, understood well the potential of a standing army shortly after the estates had refused taxes for one: "They would have been great fools if they had tolerated it; indeed, if the prince elector came to Prussia so strong, they would have had to fear that he would make laws for them and do whatever he wished."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in John Lynch, *Spain and the Habsburgs*, Volume 2: *Spain and America 1598–1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 103–4. See also J. H. Elliot, "England and Europe: A Common Malady?" in Conrad Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 246–57; and Conrad S. R. Russell, "Monarchies, Wars, and Estates in England, France, and Spain, c. 1580–c. 1640," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 7 (1982): 205–20.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, p. 244. The Elector, as we



Perhaps the domestic battle lines in the estates have been drawn too neatly. Within the nobility, gentry, and burghers were numerous adherents to the "national security" position, whose support came from a sober assessment of international realities: survival was indeed imperiled without military and constitutional change. Second, the growth of the state's judicial, administrative, and economic roles prior to the seventeenth century incorporated many members of the nobility and middle classes into the service of the crown. Court nobles, middle-class administrators, and placemen in the royal ministries developed rather dissimilar outlooks from those of their relations and colleagues in the country and towns. And defenders of constitutional government could be mollified or won over by grants of new office. Furthermore, clerics and independent bishops of Catholic regions gave support to expansionist kings of the Counter-Reformation. Although there were fissures preventing consensus on immense war subsidies, many of the same fissures prevented a consensus against the king's arrogated power.<sup>61</sup>

Conflict with the estates, however, was only the first phase of building military-bureaucratic absolutism. An increasingly powerful state coordinated the new, complex matters of finance, recruitment, and administration: "The transformation in the scale of war led inevitably to an increase in the authority of the state. The days when war partook of the nature of a feud were now for ever gone. . . . Only the state, now, could supply the administrative, technical and financial resources required for large-scale hostilities."<sup>62</sup> These changes further conflicted with constitutionalism and provided the basis of absolutism:

The entire socio-political situation of Europe was transformed with the new military organization. The standing army was the point of contention in the struggle between the princes and their Estates of the Realm, the factor that raised kings to absolute rulers on the whole continent and in England brought first the minister Strafford and then King Charles I himself to the scaffold. . . . As a prerequisite, or perhaps we should say a side effect, of the great change in the army, there developed a new administration of the state, a bureaucracy

shall see, eventually got his army and followed Schwartzberg's scenario quite closely. On conflict over standing armies elsewhere in Germany, see Peter-Christoph Storm, "*Militia Imperialis—militia circularis*: Reich und Kreis in der Wehrverfassung des deutschen Südwestens (1648–1715)," in James A. Vann and Steven W. Rowan, eds., *The Old Reich: Essays on German Political Institutions, 1495–1806* (Brussels: Les Editions de la Librarie Encyclopédique, 1974); and Gerhard Buchda, "Reichsstände und Landstände in Deutschland im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," *Gouvernés et Gouvernants* 4 (1984): 193–226.

<sup>61</sup> See F. L. Carsten, "The Causes of the Decline of the German Estates," *Studies Presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions* 24 (1961): 287–96.

<sup>62</sup> Roberts, "The Military Revolution," pp. 204–5.

whose mission it was to collect the taxes required to maintain the army and, by careful handling of the economic conditions and finally of the entire welfare and agriculture, to make the country as productive as possible.<sup>63</sup>

Among the developments referred to by Roberts and Delbrück was the construction of central organs in localities, charged with extracting resources and conscripting men for military service. These organs came into conflict with existing forms of local government, and typically replaced them. Elders, aldermen, and even local notables were pushed aside or transformed into royal officials; local police became agents of the crown; and election was replaced by royal appointment. Magnate councils lost their significance as the chancery assumed the role of the king's advisory council and executive.

The rule of law deteriorated with each additional power arrogated by the state and with each invocation of the principle of reason of state. Such situations called for wide discretionary power in the hands of the crown to meet the challenges of a treacherous state system, in which alliances came and went with little notice and wars erupted continuously, in which internal enemies had to be sought out and squelched, and in which loss of sovereignty might be the price of respecting what seemed the quaint privileges and niceties of a bygone era. In many cases involving reason of state, proceduralism and respect for precedent disappeared; legal institutions often became means of implementing state policy and removing obstacles to it.

Personal and property rights also suffered. Villagers and town dwellers had to quarter soldiers, whose discipline in battle was hardly matched while among the civilian populace. Though manpower needs were often met by tapping the seemingly inexhaustible supply of mercenaries and desperate poor, peasants were conscripted, without benefit of the concomitant endowment with rights and immunities of earlier (and later) forms of military organization. Besides conscription, there were threats of forced impressment as well as the devices employed by the recruiters to trick the unsuspecting lad away from his village and cast him into the maelstrom of a distant war, from which, as likely as not, he would never return. (On the Russian peasant commune, a conscripted peasant was given a ceremonial farewell, ritualistically similar to a funeral rite.) Short of that, he was effectively tied, not to the soil, as was the case with the second serfdom sweeping eastern Europe, but to his province or *Kanton*, where he was required to report regularly, instructed in military matters and duties, and subjected to a welter of intrusions.<sup>64</sup>

In that the ability to wage war depended heavily on the economic re-

<sup>63</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, Volume 4, pp. 223–24.

<sup>64</sup> Parker, *The Military Revolution*, pp. 46–61.



sources at its disposal, the state also assumed the role of manager of the economy. Towns, burghers, and other aspects of commerce were regulated and otherwise controlled. State managerialism led to investing state money in new enterprises and further control of economic life and subjects' personal lives. Accordingly, there developed not a healthy and perhaps salutary antagonism between middle classes and state, but rather a *modus vivendi* that left the state politically dominant.

The relationship between modern warfare and the rise of a military-bureaucratic form of absolutism is not a direct one. Not every country followed the course of Brandenburg-Prussia. Even intense, protracted warfare and a modern army need not lead to the mobilization of domestic resources and autocracy. Human and economic resources are needed—there is no escaping that—but historical conditions offered the means of engaging in protracted periods of war without the mobilization of substantial, politically destabilizing levels of domestic resources. Four factors may intervene to break the nexus between war on the one hand and the destruction of constitutionalism and the rise of absolutism on the other:

*Foreign Resource Mobilization.* War may be conducted exclusively or primarily outside a country's territory. This can enable an army to mobilize, through rude plunder or systematic exploitation, the resources of a host country and recruit large numbers of mercenary forces. War revenues from home are light and may be negotiated from the estates without constitutional crisis. State building in the homeland is much weaker than in lands using domestic resources. Following this pattern, Sweden fought most of its wars of the early modern period on the European mainland, availing itself of foreign (mainly German) resources.

*Alliances.* Military alliances enable allies to reduce the amounts of domestic resources to be mobilized. Foreign troops and subsidies take the place of domestic resources, by mutual agreement rather than by plunder. In the long wars with Spain, the Netherlands allied with England, France, and other powers, and avoided a one-on-one war with the powerful Habsburgs, a conflict that, even with intensive domestic resource mobilization, the Dutch might not have won. Formal alliance is not necessary for a country to benefit from the military capacity of another country; the Dutch also benefited from Turkish attacks in the Mediterranean and revolts in Spain, which diverted Habsburg soldiers from northern fronts.

*Advanced Economy and Commercial Wealth.* Foreign sources of revenue (exclusive of subsidies from allies), such as those obtained from colonies or lucrative commercial transactions, may provide a country with far greater levels of wealth than those of its enemies. Accordingly, the

proportion of domestic resources mobilized may remain small and may be provided by the estates, without too much difficulty and without constitutional crisis. Venice used the wealth from Mediterranean trade to build powerful fleets and armies to counter the might of Spain and the Turks. It is essential that control of this wealth-generating commerce be in the hands of merchants and not the crown. Where the crown is in control, it has a spectacular source of revenue that can be used to build an army, wage war, and build a state devoid of parliamentary practice. This situation gave the Spanish Habsburgs the revenue to build a war-making state without having to deal with provincial estates. The domestic economies of most European states, though generally expanding, were not as yet sufficiently well developed to provide adequate amounts of wealth to preclude coercive resource mobilization. The historical evidence suggests that, at least until the eighteenth century, sufficient levels of wealth could only come from lucrative international commerce and to a much lesser extent from colonial exploitation.

*Geography and Natural Topographical Features.* Island nations and ones bound by rivers, mountains, marshlands, and the like have natural barriers to invading armies that enable a relatively small or antiquated military system to fight a larger, modern one to a standoff. In this situation, it is impossible to win an offensive victory, but a stalemate can nonetheless secure national sovereignty. The Swiss relied on mountains and forests to thwart invasions, the Dutch on the Scheldt and its marshy littoral.

It is important to note that these four buffers between military modernization and military-bureaucratic absolutism are by no means choices available to states facing modern war. Three of them are, at least at the critical moments when military modernization is confronted, givens that cannot in short order be created, built, or negotiated. A monarch could not decide to double or treble his country's economic output on short notice any more than he could create easily defended borders. Foreign resource mobilization is predicated on the availability of a lucrative, defenseless border area that can be invaded by a small force, plundered, and used as a staging ground for building a large army, without triggering a sudden and catastrophic counterstroke from a powerful nearby state. During the Thirty Years' War, the weak principalities of Germany were exactly this sort of vulnerable area; but, in time, these small states were annexed by larger ones, thereby diminishing this possibility for war finance.

However, many alliances are in fact made by states, and often on short notice, as shifting tides of war make new coalitions intelligible. Still, specific historical situations, even specific phases of a war, can force a coun-



try to face a powerful foe, and rapid military modernization, without benefit of foreign assistance. Indeed, this was precisely the situation confronted by France and Brandenburg when these countries moved in the direction of military-bureaucratic absolutism. Geography, national wealth, and the availability of foreign plunder are givens at specific moments in history, and alliances, although to some degree made by states, can disappear as quickly as they appeared, leaving a country with no resources but its own. No metahistorical claim regarding human agency, free will, or determinism is being made here. My argument is only that at specific historical junctures—France in 1634, Brandenburg in 1655—states found themselves without any of the conditions that reduce the need to mobilize domestic resources, and had to mobilize their own or face loss of sovereignty.

A fifth intervening variable, the availability of foreign loans, might come to mind. After all, this was an important and often central method of war finance upon which Spain, England, and other countries relied. Loans by themselves were only intermediate sources of money; they had to be guaranteed in some way. Even the most powerful sovereign had to demonstrate access to future resources to repay them. Then as now, bankers were irritatingly intransigent on this point. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, monarchs secured war loans from bankers by pledging revenue derived from the royal demesne, but soon found themselves so deeply in debt that subsidies from the estates were needed—a situation leading to the exchange of subsidies for expansion of parliamentary power.<sup>65</sup> With the growing expense of war even in the late Middle Ages, the royal demesne could never again suffice as security for loans; the estates alone could secure enough resources. Tudors and early Stuarts obtained Parliamentary guarantees based on future taxes, a process that continued constitutional practice of policy by king and Parliament. In contrast, the Spanish Habsburgs assured creditors with bullion-laden ships from the New World, a process that circumvented the estates and provided a pillar of absolutism in Castile. Wary bankers hesitated to make loans that would certainly lead to a civil war whose outcome could not be reliably calculated; and if the war's outcome could not be guaranteed, then neither could repayment. Also, by the early modern period merchant and banking networks were such that the process of negotiating these loans could not have been kept secret from burghers in the estates, and any word of such impending loans would have triggered a constitutional showdown, and possibly civil war, prior to the crown's having raised an army with the foreign money.

<sup>65</sup> Richard W. Kaeuper, *War, Justice and Public Order: England and France in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 32–62.

War and the need for resources to wage it were not the only sources of conflict between the monarchy and constitutional government. Conflicts developed almost everywhere over the shift of judicial functions into the hands of the monarch. Religion was a serious point of contention in England, where Puritanism opposed the apparent Arminian bent of the monarchy, and in the Low Countries, where the Inquisition was deployed. But everywhere war was the decisive factor that brought conflict—after all, a normal part of any constitutional government, and perhaps even a healthy sign—to the level of constitutional crisis. And everywhere in Europe it was war, not the judiciary, religion, or personal animosities, that required the circumvention or destruction of the estates, and the creation of centralized organizational systems that developed into military-bureaucratic absolutism.<sup>66</sup>

Despite some similarities, this phenomenon differs from the military coups and states of siege of modern authoritarianism. There was no state paralysis, domestic turmoil, or parliamentary stalemate that fostered the rise of absolutism. There was only the recognition on the part of the crown and segments of the nobility and middle classes that a more decisive, independent state was needed to deal with a dangerous, external threat. Furthermore, the process described here must be differentiated from the condottieres' seizure of power in Renaissance Italy. This was simply a case of a military contractor using his troops to oust civilian government and assume control himself. Such was the means by which Sforza and his mercenaries overthrew the government of his employers, and installed himself as Duke of Milan.

Finally, let us not succumb to the temptation to see monarchs, even those who founded military-bureaucratic absolutisms, as despots who, placing ambition and lust for power ahead of respect for constitutional practice, destroyed the estates and built powerful states in their image.<sup>67</sup> It is all too easy to adopt this perspective when studying the origins of

<sup>66</sup> On constitutional conflict during this period, see Gerald Strauss, *Law, Resistance, and the State: The Opposition to Roman Law in Reformation Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Mary Fulbrook, *Piety and Politics: Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg and Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 45–75; Trevor Aston, ed., *Crisis in Europe, 1560–1660* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith, eds., *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); Valentin Urfus, "Die Steuergewalt des böhmischen Landtags und der Absolutismus," *Studies Presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions* 31 (1964): 179–87; and F. L. Carsten, *Princes and Parliaments in Germany: From the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

<sup>67</sup> Useful correctives to this view are Russell, "Monarchies, Wars, and Estates," and works cited therein; and Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965).



democracy, which we rightfully respect, and dictatorship, which we equally rightfully disdain. If we look at monarchs entangled in the net of time and circumstance, we might still be unable to follow Sir Herbert Butterfield's counsel and take pity on them, but perhaps we can understand that kings acted to defend their realms and subjects, and, after the military revolution, found cooperation with the estates and retention of other parts of the constitution incompatible with that duty. We might observe that a country's trajectory was an unfortunate one, one we might not choose to live in, and perhaps even one that bears a contingent relationship to a horrible end in the twentieth century, but let us not vilify kings or confuse their intentions. There are doubtless numerous villains to be found in the history of Prussia, France, and most other countries for that matter, but Friedrich Wilhelm and Louis XIII are not, in my view, among them. And if one should feel tempted to idealize the king of Sweden for sparing his country the rigors of domestic resource mobilization, remember that Gustavus Adolphus was not above hanging simple German peasants for hiding a few cattle from his quartermasters. Sweden's constitutionalism was a predatory one that preserved itself by mulcting foreign lands—a virtuous end occasioned by vicious means. This should instruct us that the unfolding of democracy is not always an edifying narrative.

The possibility of being militarily vanquished was a very real one, as the histories, or lack thereof, of Livonia, Novgorod, and Burgundy attest. It is significant that Friedrich Wilhelm is known in history as the Great Elector, not as Friedrich the Terrible or Friedrich the Unready. Without a modern military constructed and led by a powerful state, sovereign territories were typically devoured. Such was the case of Poland, where the gentry thwarted attempts to build a strong state. No one sings the praises of the gentry's myopic dedication to constitutionalism, and it shall not be done here; a threnody for their irresponsibility is more in order. The Great Elector prevented his country from sharing that fate, and to judge his actions by pointing to the catastrophic trajectory German history ultimately took is dubious casuistry; to argue that he embarked upon that trajectory out of ambition or hatred for the estates is sheer fiction.

. . .

Feudal military organization suffered from inherent flaws that had revealed themselves by the late medieval period. The military revolution made the knight obsolete and put pressures on countries to build powerful state organizations in order to extract resources for warfare. Where advantages of foreign resources, alliances, commercial wealth, or geography were not available, military requirements conflicted with and de-

stroyed or at least seriously undermined constitutional government. In its stead, there arose a military-bureaucratic state whose overwhelming power vis-à-vis the social classes, the economy, and the whole of civil society decisively patterned the contours of its national history. The principles presented in these chapters shall now be considered within the framework of the military and constitutional histories of Brandenburg-Prussia, France, Poland, England, Sweden, and the Netherlands.