

The Grand Strategy of the Habsburg Empire 1700-1866
A Study in Interstitial Time-Management

A Dissertation

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Table of Contents

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
Prologue: Why the Habsburgs?.....	4
I. Introduction: Defending the ‘Lands Between’.....	10
II. Empire of the Danube: The Geography of Habsburg Power.....	38
III. <i>Damnosa Hereditas</i> : Habsburg People and State.....	78
IV. <i>Si Vis Pacem</i> : Habsburg War and Strategy.....	118
V. Harvest of Briars: Turks, Russians and the Southeastern Frontier.....	161
VI. ‘The Monster’: Prussia and the Northwestern Frontier.....	205
VII. <i>Teufelfranzosen</i> : France and the Western Frontier.....	248
VIII. Barricades of Time: Metternich and the Zenith of the Habsburg System.....	290
IX. Between Hammer and Anvil: Eclipse of the Habsburg Monarchy.....	325
X. Conclusion: Interstitial Empires, Then and Now.....	371
Bibliography.....	390

Prologue.

Why the Habsburgs?

The starting point of this dissertation is the question: How does a Great Power with limited resources manage the strains of military competition with multiple rivals simultaneously? All states face constraints on the ability to project power; most face an array of potential threats that exceeds the resources available for security. But for certain types of Great Power, the mismatch in resources and threats is especially large. By definition, states that occupy interstitial geography—that is, which exist in *lands between* other major regions—face a greater number of external threats. Such powers must manage multiple security frontiers. Their exposure to the effects of warfare is greater, their reprieves from the pressure of geopolitics fewer, and the tradeoffs they must make in the quest for a sustainable and affordable safety sharper than is the case for states which enjoy favorable geography.

One such power is today's United States. America is an interstitial power on a global scale, flanked by major regions to the East and West that possess the industrial and demographic attributes necessary for supporting major military rivals. Despite the insulating effects of two oceans, North American geography exposes the United States to multi-sided geopolitical dynamics that are growing more intense over time. The threats emanating from America's 21st Century frontiers vary greatly in form, from classic Great-Power competitors like China and Russia to mid-sized regional aspirants like Iran and a shifting assortment of non-state terrorist groups such as *Al Qaeda* and ISIS. While the U.S. military remains the most powerful force in history, the end of the 'unipolar' moment and advent of a more equal distribution of power in the international system has made America more susceptible to the pressures of *tous azimuts* competition than was the case during the Cold War or immediate post-Cold War eras.

Advances in technology have only partially mitigated the effects of interstitial geography. Even with nuclear weapons and long-distance airpower, the United States cannot achieve military dominance over enemies in all three of the world's major security regions simultaneously. Nuclear proliferation and cyber warfare sharpen the interstitial problem by enabling enemies to

strike from more directions, more quickly and more devastatingly than ever before. Resource constraints and strides in new weaponry by large rivals promise to make the United States even less capable of consistent control of escalation dominance than it was in prior decades. Already, these changes are forcing Washington to relinquish the longstanding goal of being able to fight and win two-front wars involving major rivals in Europe and Asia, simultaneously, and to undertake rebalances in its diplomatic and military resources between regions.¹ As America's military advantages erode and it faces a more level playing field against rivals, the search for viable formulas to manage these tradeoffs can be expected to intensify.

What options does the United States have for managing interstitial competition in the absence of military dominance? Answering this question in a way that produces viable strategic alternatives for policy is difficult, given the speed of technological catch-up by rivals and the unpredictable U.S. budgetary landscape of the next few decades. America's recent national-security experiences, and those of the immediate post-Cold War period, furnish mixed insights at best, given emerging power symmetries and rapidly changing face of military-technological competition. Attempting to conduct offensive wars on the mold of the late 1990s and early 2000s could generate confrontations with newly-capable rivals and quickly escalate into Great-Power war. Nor can the United States expect indefinitely to oversee an international security order through emphasis on democratic values and institutions in an environment in which major rivals may see such structures as tilted against their national interests.

One source of insights for thinking about strategic options is history. The experiences of past states provide an analytical basis for reflection upon the problems of the present and future. Drawing upon history, scholars such as Paul Kennedy (*Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*) and Robert Gilpin (*War and Change in World Politics*) offered frameworks for studying the geopolitical questions that confronted the Western alliance during the Cold War. More recently, much benefit has been rendered through the expanding field of grand strategy. Beginning with Edward Luttwak's landmark analysis of the Roman Empire in 1976, a growing stream of

¹ *Quadrilateral Defense Review 2014* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2014), p. 1.

studies have appeared on the grand strategies of Great Powers and empires.² Understood as the process by which states make “calculated relationships between means and large ends” in order to “act beyond the demands of the present,” grand strategy provides a useful prism for thinking about how national-security leaders employ scarce resources to address seemingly infinite security threats.³ Using grand strategy as a framework, an analyst can move beyond assessments of individual battles and treaties to take account of the various, combined dimensions of a state’s power—military, economic and diplomatic—across a long time span, catching patterns in behavior that would otherwise be missed.

There is not an abundance of viable historical cases for a grand-strategic study of the interstitial dilemmas facing the 21st Century United States. Precisely because of the difficulties inherent in managing contested geography, interstitial powers have often had short lives. The classical empires that occupied the space between the Mediterranean and Persian seas rose and fell with an astonishing rapidity—Akkadians surpassed by Babylonians, who in turn were succeeded by Assyrians and Persians. The Archaemenid Empire enjoyed true dominance for a little more than a century before its overthrow by Alexander. Later European history shows similar examples. The 17th Century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is only one in a long procession of states that foundered in the 1,000-mile stretch of land between the Baltic and Black Seas. The interwar nation-states of this region—what Germans of the period called

² For a sample, see: Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (London: Redwood, 2000); John P. LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650–1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Paul A. Rahe, *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta: The Persian Challenge* (Yale: Yale Library of Military History, 2016); and John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³ Many competing definitions of grand strategy exist. This study will employ the definitions used by John Lewis Gaddis, who describes grand strategy as the “calculated relationships between means and large ends,” and Williamson Murray, who largely agrees with this definition but adds the dimension of states “acting beyond the demands of the present” to “think about the future in terms of the goals of the political entity.” See John Lewis Gaddis, ‘What is Grand Strategy?’ *American Grand Strategy After War* (Triangle Institute for Security Studies and Duke University Program on American Grand Strategy, unpublished, 2009), p. 7 and Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, James Lacey et al., eds., *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 2 and 5. For a review of the various definitions and debates on grand strategy from the early 20th Century to the present day, see Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

saisonstaats—lasted 20 years. And even the powerful German Empire of Bismarck and Moltke, anchored in the better geography of Middle Europe and buoyed by offensive warfighting strategies *par excellence*, endured for barely three generations.

A notable exception to this trend is the Habsburg Empire. Few powers in history better exemplify the pressures of interstitial geography than the realm of the Habsburgs. From its emergence as a primarily Eastern European power center in the late 17th Century until its collapse after the First World War, the Habsburg state was engaged in sustained military and political competition across a security space that extended from the Adriatic to the Black Sea and from the Balkans to the Alps. It faced dangers on every side: in the north, from Poland, Sweden and the military kingdom of Brandenburg-Prussia; in the south, from its historic enemy, the Ottoman Empire; in the west, from dynastic rival Bourbon France and Spain; and in the east, from the colossus of Tsarist Russia. Its enemies varied widely in warfighting techniques, from semi-barbaric Ottoman hordes and Tatar raiders of the Eurarian steppe to the modern armies of contemporary Western European states.

And yet, despite the immense challenges arrayed against it, the Habsburg Empire achieved a remarkable degree of success. It outmaneuvered and outlasted countless competitors that were militarily stronger than itself. It survived Ottoman sieges, Bourbon quests for continental hegemony, efforts at dismemberment by Frederick the Great and numerous invasions by Napoleon. Despite losing most of its battles, it won most of its wars and continued to add territorial holdings well into the modern era. At times it even came to dominate European diplomacy, exercising a degree of influence over its external environment out of all proportion to its actual resources. Altogether, it endured for half a millennium, with its Austrian branch existing as a Great Power for two centuries. By virtually any standard measure – longevity, wars won, alliances maintained, influence exerted – it must be judged a geopolitical success.

How did the Habsburg Monarchy survive for so long in such a difficult geographic position? How did it address the perennial danger of multi-front war? How did its diplomats avert conflicts against multiple enemies simultaneously? How did its military men manage multi-front

wars once they broke out? How did its rulers balance threats and avoid succumbing to financial and military pressures beyond the state's ability to bear in both peace- and wartime?

This dissertation argues that the Habsburg Empire managed the dilemmas of interstitial geography, not through offensive military prowess, but by developing the ability to influence the element of time in strategic competition. Unable to concentrate power in one place for very long and too weak to afford perpetual war, the Habsburgs used the tools at their disposal to manipulate the two critical components of Time in geopolitics: Sequencing (which wars they fought when) and duration (how long they fought). Unable to fight all enemies at once, they learned to set priorities among foes and bring all components of imperial power to bear against the main threat without exposing themselves to unmanageable risks on de-prioritized frontiers in the process. They used bribery, marriage and appeasement to 'deactivate' secondary problems and concentrate scarce military force. They built buffer zones on every side that co-opted weaker states into shouldering defense burdens and stopping enemies before they could reach the Austrian home area. They used superior military technology to crush weaker enemies and defensive terrain to delay, harass and outlast stronger opponents. Rarely holding a grudge after war, they played the "long game" in geopolitics, roping friends and foes alike into voluntarily maintaining their position and building Europe's first collective security system.

Austria's behavior as a geopolitical actor does not conform to the popular image of a successful military state on the model of Clausewitz's Prussia, with its emphasis on offensive war and conquest. Indeed, by modern standards, Habsburg methods for managing time in strategic competition with rivals were often dilatory and cautious to the point of timidity. Perhaps for this reason, the Habsburg Monarchy has not received extensive attention by national-security analysts. However, while less bold militarily than other European powers, Austrian grand strategy was at least if not more successful at staving off defeat and achieving the ultimate goal for any state in geopolitics: survival. In the words of Metternich, Habsburg strategy "was not heroic, but it saved an empire." With meager resources and an infinity of threats, the Austrians managed to erect a sustainable and ultimately affordable safety for the lands of the Danube that would only be replicated in the expansion of NATO and the European

Union (EU) into Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th Century.

A grand strategic account of the Habsburgs is therefore long overdue. This dissertation is offered in the hope of filling this gap and contributing to the knowledge base for preserving a stable international order in the turbulent century ahead.

Washington, DC

January 2017

Chapter I.
Introduction:
Defending the ‘Lands Between’

“Take care, Sire... Your Monarchy is a little straggling: it connects itself with the North, the South, and the East. It is also in the center of Europe. Your Majesty must give them law...” – Prince Eugene of Savoy

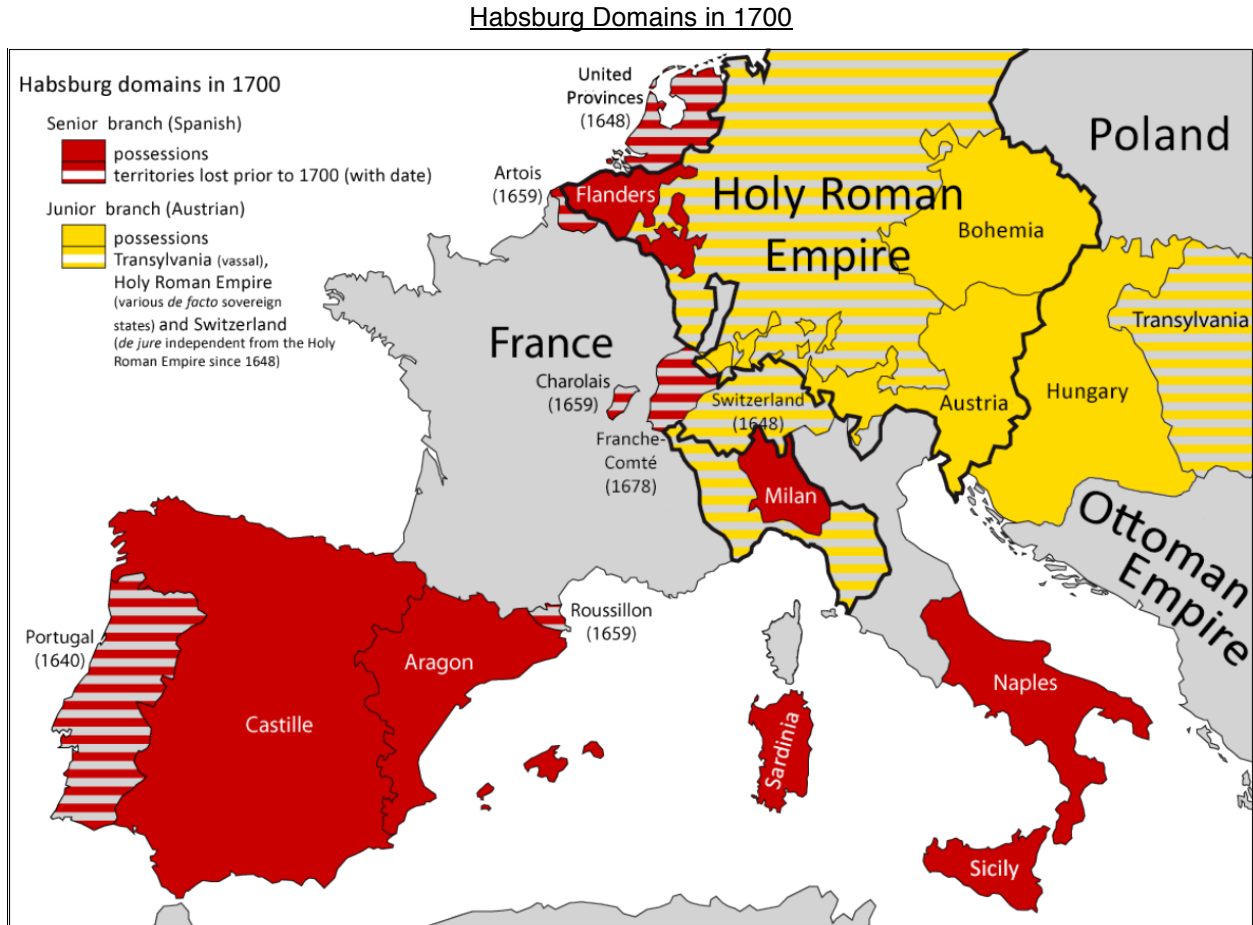
“[My allies] know how divided my military power is, scattered about every corner of Europe... how I stand in Hungary and Transylvania, how difficult it would be for me to raise a force to protect myself should a threat suddenly emerge from Sweden, which still must be reckoned with, how weak I am... in the Reich where as head I should certainly be the strongest.” – Emperor Joseph I

On November 1, 1700, Charles the “Bewitched,” great-grandson of Phillip II and last Habsburg king of Spain, died, childless. With his death, a dynasty that had ruled over a fifth of the known world, from Peru to Prague, was shorn of its wealthiest possessions and pushed to the back corner of its empire. The new cockpit of the Habsburg realm was a ragged cluster of duchies and kingdoms 1,000 miles to the east, in the violent borderlands between Christendom and the Empire of the Turk. Its capital was Vienna, seat of the Habsburg archdukes who formed the dynasty’s junior branch and who for a half millennium had ruled over Central Europe, first as march lords and now as Emperors of the German *Reich* and kings of Bohemia and Hungary.

The eastern imperium of the Austrian Habsburgs was very different, not only from the dynasty’s western holdings but from the other European Great Powers forming around it. Amassed over several centuries by marriage, war, diplomacy and luck, it was an *omnium gatherum* of tribes and languages—German, Magyar, Slav, Jew and Romanian—bound together by geographic happenstance, legal entailment and the person of the emperor who ruled them. The lands they inhabited were a place of war. Formed around the banks of the Danube and its adjacent tributaries and plateaus, the Habsburg Monarchy sat in the interstitial geopolitical zone formed by the isthmus between the Baltic and Black Seas. An invasion route for millennia, it represented both a civilizational and military frontier—the collision point of the Christian, Orthodox and Muslim worlds that converged at Europe’s southeastern corner.

In every direction, the empire of the Danube faced enemies. To the south lay the ancient menace of the Ottoman Empire. For centuries, Austria—the *Marca Orientalis*, eastern mark or Österreich; in Latin, “Austria”—had manned the outer ramparts of the Christian world against the banners of Islam, bearing a burden of frontier defense bequeathed by the Byzantines and the medieval kingdoms of Serbia and Hungary that had fallen in succession to the advancing Ottoman hordes. To the east sat the Hungarian Plain and Transylvania, whose inhabitants were Habsburg vassals since the 16th Century but whose vast expanses had only been reconquered from the Turk and whose truculent princes still resisted rule from Vienna. Further east was the colossus of Tsarist Russia, now beginning the westward expansion that would eventually bring its armies to the shores of the Baltic and Black seas. To the north was the Baltic empire of Sweden, the precocious military kingdom of Brandenburg-Prussia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a decaying giant that attracted predation from stronger neighbors. To the west sprawled the wealthy but fragmented statelets of the German *Reich*, nominal subjects to the emperor but sources of interminable political schism and strife. Beyond them sat the military super-state of Bourbon France, dynastic *Erbfeind* to the Habsburgs and centuries-long competitor for mastery over northern Italy and southern Germany.

As long as Spain had remained in the hands of the senior branch of the dynasty, the pressures bearing down on the eastern half of the empire had been manageable. Although not administered as a unified whole, the Habsburg domains had helped one another. At least until Spanish power waned in the mid-17th Century, Austria could count on Spain to divert French attention and thus avert the arch danger of *double guerre* – two-front war. But with Charles’ death and the accession of a Bourbon prince to the Spanish throne, Austria’s western line of support vanished. Nor could the eastern Habsburgs expect to fend off all of their foes through military strength. In its earlier, continent-wide form, the Habsburg empire had been capable of fielding powerful offensive armies, reaching the cusp of European military hegemony under Charles V and, later, the imperial Catholic armies of Tilly and Wallenstein. By contrast, the eastern Habsburgs were a relatively impoverished line, hampered in the quest for a large standing army by the continual fiscal and constitutional constraints of their motley realm.



Source: Habsburg Territorial Maps.

Just how severe a predicament this combination of multi-horizon threats and resource scarcity could create for Austria was made painfully clear by the war that now broke out over the fate of the Spanish inheritance following Charles' death. The Bourbon bid for the throne pitted the military machine of the French king Louis XIV against the Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold I, whose Austrian armies were a tenth the size of his opponent's. Stripped of its accustomed Spanish support base, the Danubian Monarchy quickly became enmeshed in a multi-front war. In Italy, it faced the combined armies of France and Spain, which now sought to regain the wealthy territories lost by the Bourbon kings a century and a half earlier. In Germany, Austria was confronted with a joint French and Bavarian assault on its position of primacy in the the German *Reich*. In Hungary, the renegade prince Francis II Rakoczi led the Magyars in armed revolt to wrest Transylvania from Habsburg dominion. In the north, the powerful armies of

Sweden's Charles XII threatened to invade Bohemia. And in the south, border tensions flared with the Turks, who longed to re-gain lands only recently lost to Austria.

As a rite of passage, the Spanish war presaged in vivid and violent form the difficulties that Austria would face as a standalone polity in the turbulent world of 18th Century European geopolitics. Prince Eugene of Savoy, the Monarchy's most successful commander in the conflict summarized the Habsburgs' desperate situation in a letter to the emperor in 1703:

Your army, Sire, is your monarchy; without that it will revert to the Turks, to the French or perhaps, one day or other, to the Hungarians. Your capital is a frontier town; your Majesty has no fortress on any side."⁴

By the war's climax, the Austrian heartland was threatened by invading armies from both west and east, as French forces marched down the Danube and Hungarian *kuruc* hussars raided the outskirts of Vienna. By its end, Austria was militarily exhausted and on the brink of bankruptcy. Yet the Monarchy survived. Summoning resources far beyond their own, the Habsburgs stopped the French invasion at Blenheim, evicted the Bourbons from Lombardy, deterred the threats from Sweden and Turkey, and not only re-secured the rebel territories of Hungary but, to a large extent, the loyalties of its princes. In the concluding peace, the Habsburgs gained control of virtually all of northern Italy and acquired new lands as far away as the Netherlands.

Austria's experience in the Spanish succession war would be repeated in the centuries that followed. Again and again, military threats would erupt across its numerous, vulnerable frontiers. Within two years, Austria was back at war with the Turks, and within a decade and a half it was juggling a new multi-region contest with France. In the 18th century, its army would see multi-year combat in every decade but one. In 1741, Austria was invaded on three sides and brought to the brink of extinction. In the three decades that followed it faced repeated

⁴ Prince Eugene of Savoy, *Memoirs of Prince Eugene of Savoy* in Alexander Innes Shand, *Eugene of Savoy: Marlborough's Great Military Partner*, Transl. by William Mudford (London: Leonaur, 2014), p. 43.

invasion by the military juggernaut of Prussia's Frederick the Great. After a brief pause Austria was thrown into a more than two decade running war with Revolutionary France and then Napoleon that would see its capital occupied, its territories reduced to a rump and its ancient dynasty denigrated to supplicants to the French Empire.

Invasions and Forts of the Habsburg Monarchy 1700-1866

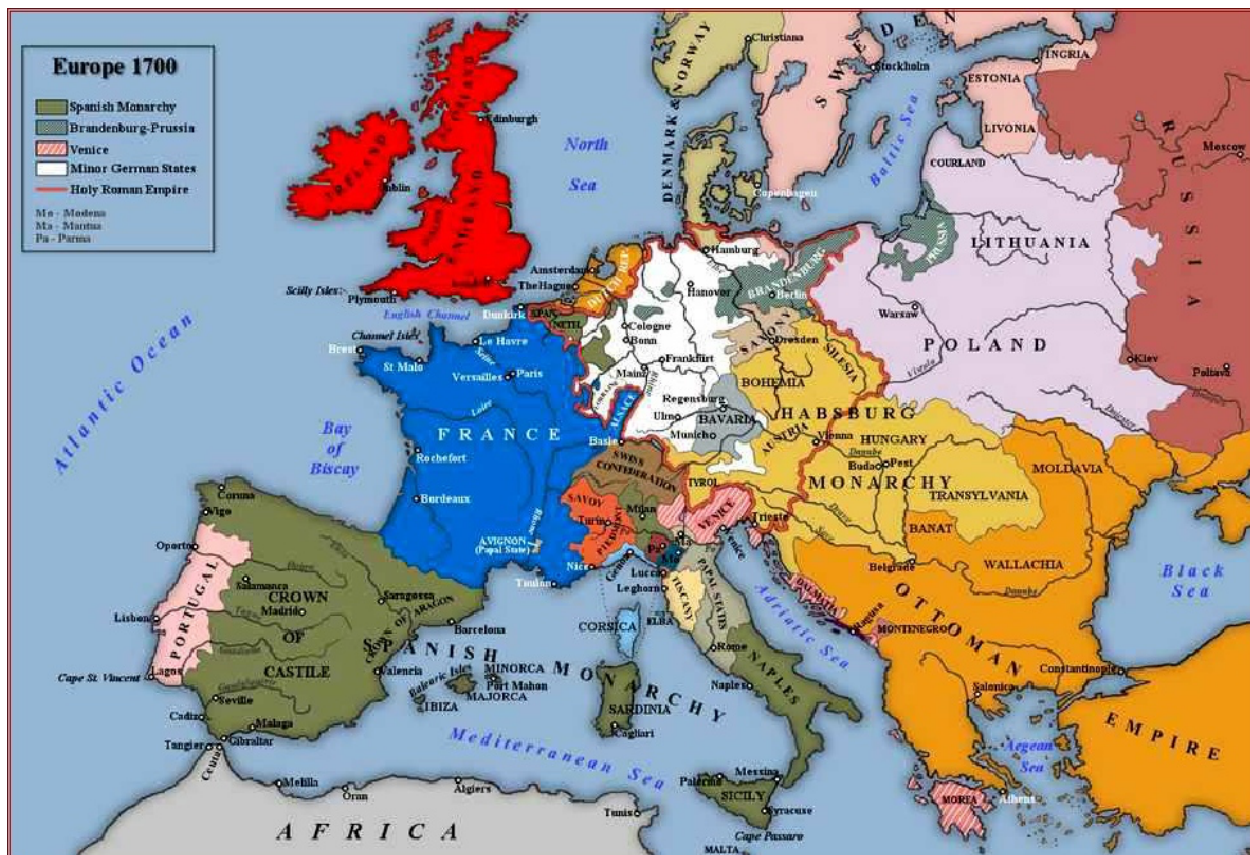


Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

Rarely in these contests did Austria possess a strong hand militarily. It entered most of its wars with a weak army and shaky finances, and ended most of them bankrupt. It faced enemies often more advanced or numerous than itself, led by the great captains of history. At all times the threat of multi-front war loomed. Rarely were the available resources sufficient to deal with the dangers at hand. And yet, each time, Austria survived. It outlasted Ottoman sieges,

Bourbon invasions, repeated Prussian attempts at dismemberment and no fewer than six failed attempts to defeat Napoleon. Each time, it endured the threat at hand and, more often than not, ended on the winning side. Despite losing most of its battles, it won most of its wars and continued to add territorial holdings long after it was considered a spent force. At times it even came to dominate European diplomacy, exercising a degree of influence over its external environment out of all proportion to its actual resources. Indeed, by virtually any standard measure – longevity, wars won, alliances maintained, influence exerted – the Habsburg Empire must be judged a geopolitical success.

Map of Europe, 1700



Source: Habsburg Territorial Maps.

The Habsburg Puzzle

How do we explain this success? How did an externally encircled, internally fractious and financially weak empire survive and even thrive for so long in Europe's most dangerous neighborhood? Had the Habsburgs possessed the attributes normally associated with successful empires, there would be little to explain. But they did not; indeed, if anything, they were conspicuously lacking in many of these traits.

Certainly, Austria did not find the degree of security in its geography that many Great Powers are able to attain. Although it possessed abundant frontier mountain ranges, which as we will see proved crucial to mounting an effective defense, these were not adequate in themselves to provide safety against all of the empire's enemies. Unlike Britain and Russia, Austria had no ocean moats or vast steppes to shelter it from the effects of geopolitical competition; unlike other continental states France and Prussia, it lacked even one secure, seaward flank to aid in the task of military concentration. Where these other states might have to manage one or two enemies in wartime, Austria possessed four active military frontiers. At 4,000 miles, its security perimeter included theaters of operation as diverse as arid Balkans highlands, snowbound Alpine passes, and malarial floodplains of the Danube Delta. Together, these regions presented a 360-degree threat horizon from which danger could appear with little warning to overwhelm Austria's relatively small geopolitical core.

Habsburg military power alone could not master this forbidding threat environment. While more effective than many modern critics have alleged, the Habsburg Army was, in itself, an inadequate tool with which to overmaster or even consistently deter the empire's numerous rivals. These ranged widely in character, technology and fighting techniques, from conventional European armies armed with the latest Western military technology to the mounted semi-Asiatic armies of the Ottoman Empire. Where the Habsburg empire of the 16th and 17th centuries had been able to project offensive power in several theaters simultaneously and almost attain the goal of creating a universal, Catholic empire, this was never an option for

the Danubian Habsburg state. Even at its height under Maria Theresa, Austria would possess a fraction of the pan-European military resources available to Charles V or Phillip II.

At no point did the Habsburg Monarchy possess adequate economic and military power characteristics with which to fully cope with, much less dominate, its forbidding environment. To be sure, the empire was large—around 260,000 square miles at its height, or about the size of Texas. It maintained a human population roughly comparable in size to those of its main Western rivals. But throughout its history, Austria was hindered from realizing the full latent potential suggested by these figures. The Habsburg Monarchy, to put it mildly, was not a “normal” state.⁵ Where most European powers were already well on their way by the 18th Century to creating an efficient centralized government that would lay the foundation for the modern nation-state, Austria was a composite polity that struggled to achieve control over its constituent parts and retained essentially Medieval characteristics of government well into the modern era. In later decades, the Monarchy would attain levels of economic growth and dynamism comparable to its Western rivals.⁶ However, the combination of administrative complexity and uneven levels of development between its eastern and western lands would hinder the mobilization of resources for war and stunt the development of a secure economic foundation that has been the prerequisite to geopolitical power projection for most of history.

In all of these areas—military, economic and geographic—Austria faced severe constraints to the pursuit of security. The outside environment placed the empire in a position of continual danger while the political and economic structure of the empire narrowed the range of viable options for responding effectively to these attacks and putting the monarchy on a secure long-term footing. Austria’s prospects as a Great Power would fluctuate over the centuries, with occasional, if brief, moments of relative strength and stability. But throughout its history, from

⁵ For a description of the structural complexities of the Habsburg Monarchy in comparison to contemporary European states, see Oscar Jaszi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 31-33 and Michael Hochedlinger, *Austria’s Wars of Emergence*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 7-30.

⁶ The empire’s economic picture was improving greatly by the late 19th century and stronger than previously held. See: David F. Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750-1914* (Berkeley: University of California: 1984).

the Spanish succession war until the final effort of 1914-18, the Danube empire would face a wide and persistent gap between the scale of external threats arrayed against it and the internal capabilities available for security.

Given the extent of challenges stacked against Austria, it would be easy to conclude that its eventual collapse was a foregone conclusion.⁷ The longstanding answer to the puzzle of the Monarchy's geopolitical success and longevity has been that it was a "necessity"—a construction whose continued existence was so valuable to the rest of Europe that its neighbors dared not demolish it. On this view, Austria's fellow Great Powers made a calculation, not just once but repeatedly over several centuries, to prop it up, lest its collapse generate problems beyond their ability to solve. As we will see, there was occasional truth to this claim.

But this explanation alone is insufficient to explain the Habsburgs' success. On more than one occasion in its history, Austria was invaded by aggressive neighbors who viewed it not as a "necessity" but as a hindrance to their own aggrandizement and a prize to be carved up. At the outbreak of the War of Austrian Succession in 1740, to take one notable example, the Monarchy appeared to be on the brink of dissolution, prompting exultation from enemies (the French Cardinal Fleury triumphantly proclaimed that "the House of Austria has ceased to exist!") and passivity from allies ("The preservation of the balance of power and liberties of Europe does not...depend," Lord Newcastle told the House of Lords, "upon preserving entire the dominions of the House of Austria.")⁸ On this and other occasions, Austria would face

⁷ Historians taking this position are numerous. See for example: A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1809-1918: A History of the Austrian Empire and Austria-Hungary* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1948); C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790-1918* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010); and Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Other historians argue against the inevitability of Habsburg decline. See for example Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) Alan Sked, *Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁸ Fleury quoted in Oskar Criste, *Kriege unter Kaiser Josef II* (Vienna: Verlag von L. W. Seidel & Sohn, 1904); Newcastle quoted in Reed Browning, *The War of the Austrian Succession* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 64.

existential crises in which its status as a “necessity” did not automatically save it. Indeed, rarely can the security environment in which it existed be described as permissive for its development as a state. From start to finish, the Habsburg story would be a bitter and unrelenting struggle for survival.

The Necessity of Strategy

The argument of this study is that the Habsburg Monarchy survived as long as it did, not because of the strength of its armies or the charity of its neighbors but because its leaders developed successful strategies that allowed it, more often than not, to avoid tests of strength beyond its ability to bear. All states need strategies to survive. Great Powers in particular, if they wish to endure in the turbulent world of competition with other large states, must develop grand strategies—that is, they must that make calculations about how to match the means at their disposal—military, diplomatic, intelligence and economic—to the political ends of security, expansion and, above all, survival.⁹ The need for making these calculations frequently and accurately increases in proportion to the demands of the competitive environment in which the state finds itself.

In Austria’s case, the demand for matching means to ends was especially great, since the means themselves were constricted and the potential ends to which they could be put was virtually infinite. The emperor Joseph II captured the problem in a lengthy memo in 1767:

We require peace, so we must prepare for war. Yet how far are we from being prepared... The time when this important question was first raised I now see as like a vision that God presents to sinners, but from which they do not profit at all, remaining ever more incapable of conversion. Your majesty spent 17,500,000 francs on the army, excluding the Low Countries and Italy, and yet we are not at all in a state to defend against our attacks by our neighbors. What a prospect for a man who adores his Monarch and treasures his country... To this state of affairs, whose badness has been quite demonstrated, I can propose no other remedies except to surrender ourselves to Providence, or to forecast with certainty that there will be no more war ever again, or to address the situation’s challenges through feasible and

⁹ See footnotes 2 and 3 above.

necessary actions. All that this comes down to is the conviction of the necessity of these changes and a firm resolve to bring them about.¹⁰

So wide was the gulf between Austria's real capabilities as a Great Power, even at its height, and the scale of outside threats, that it could rarely bear the full burden of self-preservation unaided for very long. The Monarchy's geopolitical and internal predicaments called for strategy in the purest sense, as a set stratagems and artifices to compensate for voids in the competency of the state. If any Great Power in history *needed* strategy, it was Austria.

At the same time that they made the development of strategy more necessary, constraints on Habsburg power shaped the kinds strategy that would and would not work. Most obviously, they proscribed the pursuit of an offensive grand strategy of the kind that large land empires have used throughout history. Rome under the Julio-Claudian emperors, 3rd Century Han China and early 18th Century imperial Russia are all classic examples of continental powers that have used expansion to enlarge their material resource base and incorporate the territories of weaker neighbors into their own.¹¹ No such course was possible for the Austrian Habsburgs. With the exception of a brief period of expansion into Hungary and the subsequent Turkish campaigns of Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736), Austria would never be able to use offensive power to achieve sustained military expansion. Indeed, unlike for most large land empires in history, absorption of new territory was for Austria usually a net negative, since it tended to incorporate new lands and peoples that only intensified the internal complexity of the state. "Imperial overstretch," in other words, was written into the DNA of the empire. This effectively ruled out grandiose schemes for remaking surrounding environment in Austria's image. On the rare occasions when its rulers contemplated such schemes—most notably, in Joseph II's flirtation with large-scale Balkan expansion in the late 18th Century—geopolitical realities quickly reined them in.

¹⁰ "Si vis pacem para bellum," Mem. 2/20, KA, Wien.

¹¹ See Luttwak, *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, pp. 7-50 and LeDonne, *Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire*, pp. 85-123.

Austria was constrained for most of its history from projecting offensive military for anything more than short bursts. The vision of even some small states employing such methods to subdue even the harshest threat environments has been reinforced in the post-Clausewitz era, with its emphasis on speed and firepower to secure the political objectives of the state. Sparta Prussia and modern-day Israel are examples of small states that have used mobile armies to knock out adjacent nominally stronger rivals before they could mount an effective response.¹² Such a strategic course was not possible for Austria; even setting aside the question of territorial acquisition, internal financial limitations placed restrictions on the size of the army and how it could be used. With more than a dozen ethnicities and languages at its height, Austria simply lacked the national unity and cohesion necessary for becoming a cohesive, militant garrison state along the lines of Prussia.

Habsburg Strategy: Defense, Delay, Self-Preservation

The difference between the Habsburg Monarchy and these other powers lay in its relationship to risk. Austria's internal and external constraints heavily penalized rash or aggressive behavior, both as a drain on scarce power resources and as presenting an opportunity, once an offensive was underway, for rivals to attack the empire from another direction. These realities meant that, as a Great Power, Austria had to be fundamentally concerned, not with seizing and exploiting opportunities, but with avoiding or managing risk. However, this does not imply that the Habsburg Monarchy could safely pursue a grand-strategic course of isolation or calculated passivity. While penalizing attempts at expansion, Austria's surroundings also deprived it of the luxury of strategic drift, even for short periods. The ability that England's island geography gave her statesmen of managing problems remotely through a combination of finance and naval supremacy while occasionally neglecting active diplomacy and military preparation closer to home was never an option for Austria. Lord Salisbury's famous characterization of British strategy as "float[ing] lazily downstream, occasionally putting out a

¹² See Paul A. Rahe's excellent account in *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, pp. 1-76 and the comparison of Israel and Prussia in Colin S. Gray, "Geography and Grand Strategy," *Comparative Strategy* 10 (4): 311-329, p. 319.

diplomatic boat-hook to avoid collisions” could never have been even joked about by a Habsburg statesman. Collisions, in Austria’s case, tended to seek out the boat.

Rather than attempting to dominate or hide from its environment, Austria survived for most of its history by pursuing defensive and inherently conservative strategies that husbanded strength and avoided contests beyond its capacity to sustain or win. While the political object shifted over time, the overarching aim, corresponding to the gravest danger facing the state, was to not become involved in wars against more than one major rival at a time. If this became impossible, as in those instances when the Monarchy was invaded unexpectedly, an ancillary goal asserted itself: to narrow the number of enemies by ‘turning off’ as many fronts as possible to concentrate against the main threat. Whether proactive or reactive, both tasks involved strategy, in the sense that survival ultimately depended on calculations being made, whether wisely or unwisely, on how to match limited means to a plethora of potential ends.

As for any state, there were spatial, temporal and instrumental components of the strategies that the empire pursued—or a “when,” “how” and “where” of Habsburg strategy

1. ‘When’: The Time Factor

By generating recurrent crises, the empire’s multiple frontiers had a natural tendency to pull strategic attention to the local level and crowd out empire-wide conceptualizations of strategy. However, the presence of a 360-degree threat horizon penalized too much focus on any one frontier for too long and thus forced thinking about the empire’s defenses as an interconnected whole, on a grand-strategic plane. Habsburg rulers had no choice but to maintain an awareness of the combined resources at their disposal and how those resources were being deployed in space at any one moment.¹³ Above all, this was a question of time. Since Austria

¹³ As Charles Ingrao argues, “although the monarchy’s geopolitical concerns were essentially quadrilateral in nature throughout the [18th] century, it would be erroneous to suggest that its statesmen consciously conceived of a comprehensive and well-coordinated program for dealing with this challenge. At best they made only occasional references to the monarchy’s exposed position in the heart of the continent, and invariably concentrated on responding to individual crises as they arose in a particular theater. Nevertheless throughout the century the course of Austrian foreign policy was generally dictated by these new geopolitical realities, even to the point of

could not be strong everywhere at once, the art of strategy, or the matching of means to ends, came down to choosing where to be strong at a particular moment and thus setting priorities among the competing political ends available to the state. By definition, this also meant making choices about where to be weak and, by extension, how to manage the opportunity costs of strategic concentration (that is, what to do about the areas of weakness).

As a result of these pressures, Habsburg strategy developed a high consciousness of the element of time in geopolitical competition. Time in strategy comes down to two main things: Sequencing (whom to fight when) and at duration (how long to remain focused on one problem at a time). Sequencing could be proactive or reactive in nature—that is, either trying to prioritize and prepare for a significant threat before it emerged and thus preemptively defuse others, or trying to rank combined threats once a war had begun and deal with them in turn. Over and over again in the first half of the 18th Century—in 1701-1714, 1733-1738, 1741-1748—Habsburg monarchs found themselves shuttling scarce military resources between far-flung fronts, and using reactive diplomacy to turn off lesser theaters and focus on major ones. Through these experiences the Monarchy's leaders became more attuned to the multi-front problem and the need to stagger contests in advance. In 1757-1763 and 1800-1815, the Monarchy would achieve diplomatic concentration ahead of major conflicts.

The duration of conflict was also a major concern for the Habsburgs. While all states prefer short wars, the Habsburgs had an existential need to control the time limits of warfare, both to alleviate the financial pressures on their usually-depleted treasury and to limit escalation spirals, which created opportunities for predators to attack other, exposed flanks. Even the lead-up to a crisis could be expensive. As Maria Theresa wrote to her son Joseph II in 1772:

withstanding and overriding the individual prejudices of its rulers." See Charles W. Ingrao, "Habsburg Strategy and Geopolitics during the Eighteenth Century," in Gunther E. Rothenberg, Bela K. Kiraly and Peter F. Sugar, Eds., *East Central European Society and War in the Pre-Revolutionary Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 50.

...our critical situation weighs too heavily on me, not to present it again in full clarity, and to try to find if not the best then at least the least bad remedies. Above all, it is important for us to bring about peace quickly as possible; by its postponement, our situation will always worsen.¹⁴

The need to avoid the burdens of war on the state led Austria to often seek to avoid war altogether. On other occasions—1716-1718, 1735-39, 1788-91, 1848-9—it would seek (though not always obtain) swift victories in order to quickly turn attention back to the main threat. However, when confronted by invasion by militarily stronger opponents—as in 1741-1748, 1757-1763 and 1800-1815—Austria frequently sought to prolong the contest, interspersing periods of fighting and recuperation to allow it time to develop the Monarchy's deeper power capabilities.

Both sequencing and duration ultimately revolved around the same objective: avoiding contests beyond Austria's ability to bear, whether financially or militarily. It is in the juggling of the time dimensions of geopolitical competition that Habsburg strategy reached its highest form. Ultimately, it would culminate in a Europe-wide diplomatic system that allowed the Monarchy, for a season, to adjudicate the crises around its borders without paying the full opportunity costs of managing multiple frontiers. For most of its history, however, attention to time in strategy was not the result of any inherent wisdom on the part of individual rulers (often quite the contrary) but rather because failing to do so, even for a short period, could be fatal.

2. 'How': Tools of Habsburg Strategy

As a relatively weak and encircled Great Power, Austria did not possess the necessary power attributes to attempt military primacy over even a portion of its extensive periphery for very long. Over time, however, its rulers and generals learned to exploit a number of tools, some

¹⁴ Maria Theresia an Josef, 25. Jänner 1772 and Maria Theresia an Josef. 29. Mai 1778 in Karl Schneider, *Aus Österreichs Vergangenheit, Nr. 11, Aus dem Briefwechsel Maria Theresias mit Joseph II* (Wien, Leipzig, Prag: Schulwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1917), pp. 22-23. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>.

natural and others manmade, that, when used effectively in combination, helped to mitigate the burdens of frontier security and help in strategic time-management.

Terrain. Although vulnerable by virtue of its overall location, the Habsburg Monarchy possessed was flanked on almost every side by formidable mountain ranges. Internally, the Habsburg heartland was well-watered and interspersed with numerous, navigable river networks. Together, these features made the empire a natural geopolitical space, aiding in the tasks of defense and politico-economic integration. The Alps, Carpathians and their various cadet ranges formed natural defensive barriers that delayed and funneled attacking armies into predictable invasion routes. Properly leveraged, they assisted in efforts at sequencing by allowing the Monarchy time to rally and reposition its forces from scattered frontiers. The Danube and its tributaries equipped the empire with abundant lines of communication that allowed for a more rapid movement of troops and supplies between fronts and provided internal barriers to slow the progress of invading armies in a defensive war. Together, these attributes gave the Monarchy the military advantage of the central position, encouraging the development of a defensive mindset that, while couched in vulnerability, saw order and safety as attainable conditions for the state.

Technology: The Habsburgs amplified the natural defensive characteristics of terrain with military technology. Over time, Austria would excel in the development of fixed fortifications. Constructing advanced defenses at key points along the perimeter helped the Monarchy achieve much-needed economy of force and offset the costs of preparedness across a 360-degree security perimeter. In wilder sections of the frontier, the empire developed integrated, cost-effective defensive networks that drew on local warfighting techniques to intercept frontier raids and provide an early-warning system for major attacks. Internally, the Habsburgs maintained forts as visible symbols of their power, placing them at chokepoints within the territory occupied by the empire's most truculent ethnicities to deter and suppress uprisings.

Behind these extensive fortifications lay the Habsburg Army. Despite its shortcomings as an offensive instrument, the Austrian military was a political instrument well-matched to the needs

of the Monarchy.¹⁵ Over time, it would elevate the study and application of terrain-based defensive warfare to one of its highest levels in modern military history. Against weaker rivals, it was often able to achieve escalation dominance through a combination of Western weapons platforms and fighting tactics. At its height, the Army proved capable of incorporating localized fighting styles matched to the needs of individual frontiers and, in a few cases such as the *klein krieg* or “little war” guerilla tactics, adapting them for using against other foes. Used alongside terrain and forts, the Army was capable of a surprising degree of resilience, using limited objectives, delay and harassment to exhaust and outlast stronger opponents. Most importantly, it was a source of political loyalty to the dynasty, providing an Army-in-Being whose primary strategic value, like Washington’s Continental Army or Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, lay not so much in victory itself as in the ability to act as a guarantor of the continued existence of the state.

Treaties: The acme of Habsburg power lay not in armies but diplomacy. Unable to defeat all of its foes, Austria used subtle statecraft to deceive foes, avoid ill-timed wars and extend its power in neighboring regions at an affordable cost to itself. With Europe’s large states, the Monarchy formed defensive alliances—first with the Maritime Powers England and Holland against France, later with France and Russia against Prussia, then with Prussia against France. Trading on the Monarchy’s status as a power strong enough to resist hegemonies but never strong enough to be one itself, Austria positioned itself at the heart of virtually every major anti-hegemonic coalition from the time of Louis XIV to Napoleon. Time and again it brokered military arrangements that brought relief armies onto Austrian soil, often just in the nick of time. It enmeshed stronger rivals in alliances of restraint to jointly manage intractable problems and excelled in the art of appeasement, using well-timed compromises, clemency

¹⁵ For an evaluation of the Habsburg Army as a defensive fighting force, see example Gunther E. Rothenberg’s *Army of Francis Joseph* (Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999) and the more recent treatment by Richard Bassett, *For God and Kaiser: The Imperial Austrian Army, 1619-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). For a discussion on its comparative operational strengths and weaknesses, see Rothenberg’s “The Shield and the Dynasty: Reflections on the Habsburg Army” in *Austrian History Yearbook*, Vol. 32, Jan. 2001, and Lawrence Sondhaus, “The Strategic Culture of the Habsburg Army” in *Austrian History Yearbook* Vol. 32, Jan. 2001: pp. 225–234. For sobering critiques of the Army’s deficiencies as an *offensive* force, particularly in the empire’s later phases, see Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War: Austria’s War with Prussia and Italy in 1866* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

and bribery to quiet one foe, concentrate against another, and return to deal with the original problem from a position of military strength. After wars, it used treaties to compensate for losses on the battlefield and strengthen the Monarchy's hand for future conflicts.

As important as Austria's big-power alliances were the relations that it maintained with the weak states in neighboring regions. Over time the Monarchy developed extensive buffer zones in all four of the security theaters around the empire's borders. They used fear, bribery and moral authority to co-opt local elites into supporting and even subsidizing Austrian interests in exchange for protection against more threatening powers. Tributary states provided client armies that acted as a significant force multiplier to the Habsburg Army and maintained an array of tutelary fortresses beyond the frontier that could be garrisoned by Austrian forces. In wartime, these buffers were the linchpin to Habsburg defense, providing an exoskeleton of territory that absorbed and slowed attacking armies and bought time for the Habsburgs to shift their own forces to the threatened sector from scattered posts around the empire.

3. 'Where': The Pull of Frontiers

The Habsburgs used these sets of tools—terrain, technology and treaties—in flexible combinations “sized” to the local circumstances of the places where they encountered rivals most frequently: the frontier. For all Great Powers, frontiers form the site of greatest vulnerability, both because they are the main site of military invasion for enemy armies and because they represent the outer limit of the defender's power projection capabilities. In Austria's case, frontiers played an especially important role in shaping strategy. The Habsburg security perimeter was long and varied, encompassing four geographic regions:

- The southeastern frontier, from the Adriatic to the Black Sea Delta and encompassing the better part of the Balkan peninsula to the Polish border and Dnieper River.
- The northeastern frontier, from the Transylvanian Alps to the Oder River and centering on the pivot point of the Silesian Plain.

- The southwestern frontier, from the Gulf of Venice to the spine of the Alps, encompassing the Lombardy Plain and Italian peninsula above the Apennines.
- The northwestern frontier, from the northern face of the Bavarian Alps to the rivers Elbe and Oder and encompassing all of Germany to the Rhine and frontiers of France.

Each of these frontiers formed a separate security theater with own mix of terrain considerations, client states, threat types and strategic interests. Strategies that worked on one frontier might not work on another. Specialized methods for countering Ottoman cavalry had little utility in defending outcroppings of rock in the Alps; forms of bribery and intrigue that were effective in the Sultan's palace might not work with *Reich* princes or a Bourbon court.

Local realities demanded local adaptations to strategy. Habsburg frontiers evolved regionally-specific formats comprised of tools matched to indigenous circumstances. In the west, Austria used confederated buffers, riverine forts and forward field armies to engage in what would today be called "preclusive defensive" aimed at stopping high-intensity French threats before they reached Habsburg soil. In the southeast, it used militarized borders and soldier-settlers to absorb low-intensity raids, offensive armies to seek and destroy Turkish incursions, and alliances of restraint to curtail Russian influence. In the north, where the Monarchy lacked abundant buffers, it used a version of "defense-in-depth" to trade space for time, fall back on fortified lines and harass stronger Prussian armies with guerilla tactics of delay and attrition.

The approach of this dissertation will be to treat each Habsburg frontier as a distinctive "case" in strategic time-management. The focus will be on assessing how the Austrians adopted tools in response to local threats and opportunities without exhausting the capabilities of the empire as a whole or subjecting it to undue vulnerabilities on other frontiers. Each set of regional techniques will be assessed as a separate strategic "system" of frontier management, the components of which worked in tandem to reinforce the effects of the whole. For each frontier, the dissertation will look at how the tools used helped to mitigate interstitial geography by

defeating, offsetting or avoiding burdens that would have surpassed Austria's financial and military capabilities. While evaluating each frontier as a system in its own right, the dissertation will place particular emphasis on how the tools used locally alleviated the burdens of its overall position, not only by managing the risk of multi-front war but by lowering the peacetime costs of *tous azimuts* defense preparation beyond the empire's ability to sustain.

Trial and Error

Habsburg grand strategy did not form overnight but rather evolved over the course of several decades. As a formative experience, the Spanish succession war (1701-1714) illustrated the dangers of extended multi-front crises. The lesson was muted by the offensive warfighting abilities of Eugene of Savoy and the recent, successful expansion into Hungary (1683-1699). With Eugene's death, the Monarchy was subjected to repeated defeats, culminating in the Prussian invasion and renewed multi-front war of 1741-1748. These experiences forced the Austria to embrace a defensive mindset better suited to the empire's military and fiscal abilities. The result was a conservative and largely risk-averse grand strategy that reached its apogee under the Austrian empress Maria Theresa (1717-1780) and continued, perforce, under her son Joseph II (1741-1790) and grandson Francis I/II (1768-1835).

Austrian success in this period, measured in both survival and systemic wars won, stemmed from adherence to the defensive and eschewal of unsustainable opportunities that would have brought defeat or overstretch capable of overwhelming the Monarchy's limited resources. At moments when Austria deviated from this defensive strategy and attempted to pursue offensive objectives, as occurred under Joseph II in 1778-1779 and 1788-1791, it suffered setbacks and was forced to change tack. Course correction was possible in this period because of the flexibility of Habsburg diplomacy and the relatively static state of military technology, which enabled Austria to retain influence over time in its conflicts.

The Habsburg Monarchy's demise as a Great Power in the mid-19th Century can be attributed in large part to the abandonment of this conservative grand strategy. After decades of reliance

on subtle, if not always martially glorious, security policies, the Monarchy's leaders embraced military-intensive approach to security that over-relied on the Army to stabilize neighboring regions. Under the emperor Franz Joseph (1830-1916) Austria neglected core advantages in terrain, fell behind in critical technologies and pursued an isolated course in European diplomacy. Coming at a moment of technological change that made offered rivals the ability to conquer space more quickly and definitively, the Monarchy was unable to use its accustomed methods to influence the sequencing and duration of war. Battlefield defeat could no longer be mitigated by diplomacy, as nationalism superseded treaty rights as a determinant of legitimacy. As a result, the Monarchy permanently lost its buffer states and was unable to influence the time factor in its contests. This exposed it to the full burdens of defending its vulnerable position for the first time, imposing fiscal and military costs beyond its ability to bear.

The Evidence

Habsburg strategy did not form according to single, unifying memo or script. Rather, it was a set of learned responses, shaped by experience in war, dictated by the constraints of geography and money, and reflected in patterns of behavior over the centuries. Like national-security leaders today, the Habsburgs often reacted to crises as they arose, grasping among the available tools to fashion a response. But it would be a mistake to conclude from this fact that the Habsburgs did not engage in higher level strategy, both in terms of deliberately seeking to match available means to end and in thinking about how to manage gaps between their capabilities and threats in the future tense.

While there was no overarching document from which Habsburg strategic thinking derived, Austrian rulers, generals and statesmen left behind written evidence of their thinking about strategy and war.¹⁶ The ultimate bureaucratic empire, the Habsburg Monarchy was the forerunner of the modern state in producing paper trails of even the most mundane aspects of

¹⁶ This study draws upon a combination of original documents from the Austrian state archives, the extensive collections of primary sources published in intervening decades by the *Kriegsarchiv* and the numerous secondary source research that has been conducted in both German and English.

power. Habsburg monarchs conducted correspondence with their diplomats and field commanders, often airing opinions about the merits of various courses of strategic action available to the state. Ministerial councils left minutes of meetings in which strategy was debated. The Army actively studied the past, conducting analytical studies of previous wars and forming commissions after major conflicts to absorb lessons from enemy tactics and technology. Austria did not produce formal war theorizing on the scale of Prussia or France.¹⁷ But a small professional military literature evolved that shows a clear lineage of thought emphasizing terrain-based defensive warfare, ranging from the proto-theoretical work of Archduke Charles to lesser-known officers producing essays on geometric warfighting and treatises on Polybius, Vegetius and the Byzantine Emperor Leo the Strategist.¹⁸

The Habsburgs also developed administrative bodies for managing both the conceptual and material dimensions of war.¹⁹ A *Hofkriegsrat* (court war council) existed from the mid-16th century with specialized roles for civilian and military officials to plan for war on a standing basis. From the time of Eugene, a general staff existed, embryonically at first and then, from the time of Frederick the Great's wars, formally.²⁰ Much like in Washington today, influence over strategic decision-making tended to be fluid in nature, shifting between various bureaucratic bodies and individual ministers from one emperor to the next. But to perhaps an even greater extent than in modern democracies, the person of the emperor and his immediate circle of formed a central locus that provided a means of continuity in basic perspective, if not necessarily policy priorities, from one generation to the next. Over time contemplation of

17 Manfred Rauchensteiner describes a trickle of abstract Austrian military-theoretical writings in "The Development of War Theories in Austria at the End of the Eighteen Century" in Gunther E. Rothenberg, Bela K. Kiraly and Peter F. Sugar, Eds., *East Central European Society and War in the pre-Revolutionary Eighteenth Century*, pp. 75-82.

18 For a detailed compendium that includes minor and less-studied Austrian military writers from the late-18th through mid-19th centuries, see Günter Brüning, *Militär-Strategie Österreichs in der Zeit Kaiser Franz II (I)* (doctoral dissertation, unpublished, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster, 1983).

19 The Austrians compare favorably in this regard to the Roman and Byzantine empires, both of which possessed little in the way of either formal structures or written records and yet developed coherent grand strategies. See the discussion in James Lacey, "The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire" in Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich et. al., Eds., *Successful Strategies: Triumphant in War and Peace from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 38-41; and Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, pp.1-49.

20 See the detailed study conducted by Hubert Zeinar, *Geschichte des Österreichischen Generalstabes* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), pp. 29-33.

strategic questions more formal, and by the late 18th Century, Joseph II was holding elaborate conferences in which generals examined scenarios for future wars and presented white papers containing what today would be known as contingency planning.

Austrian statesmen and generals also developed a spatial conception of their realm. Habsburg rulers were early and avid patrons of cartography, commissioning extensive and highly detailed topographical surveys. Drawn at scales as close as 1:11,520, Austrian maps were among the most accurate of the time and treated as classified material, requiring the equivalent of a modern-day top-secret security clearance to view.²¹ By the late 18th Century the Austrian soldiers and statesmen could accurately “picture” not only the empire’s individual frontiers but the realm as a whole, enabling them to both conceptualize defense and attend to the operational details of campaigns and troop movements at a level of detail that would have been unimaginable for the empires of antiquity, with their mainly orally-based strategies.

The fact of Austrian strategy can also be seen in the physical structures that the Monarchy left behind. Perhaps its greatest material testament are the extensive fortifications that the Habsburgs built over the centuries across their realm. At its apogee in the mid-19th century, there were more than twenty major fortresses ring-fencing the empire’s security perimeter and countless scores of smaller forts, towers and blockhouses strewn throughout its mountain passes, plains and coastlines. In Northern Italy alone the Quadrilateral fortress network comprised more than 80 defensive structures across a 1,000-km square area. An equivalent, in terms of expenditure and effort to construct, of today’s aircraft carriers, Austria’s forts were both sophisticated weapons platforms and symbols of imperial power. By their physical location and evolution, first on the Balkan frontier, then the Rhine, then Bohemia, then Italy and finally Poland, we can see what the Habsburgs were most worried about, when and where.

²¹ Madalina Valeria Veres, *Constructing Imperial Spaces: Habsburg Cartography in the Age of Enlightenment* (dissertation, unpublished, University of Pittsburgh: 2015), pp. 18-19.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to conduct a study of the Habsburg grand strategy. Such a study would fill several niches. First, in the academic literature, it would contribute an important case to the expanding literature on grand strategy. In recent years, scholars have produced grand-strategic accounts of states as varied as the British Empire, classical Sparta and Rome. The Habsburg Monarchy is a natural addition to this field. The premise of grand strategic studies is that states develop habits, or patterns, in their approach to war and diplomacy reflecting the demands of their environment. Few geopolitical landscapes have been as harsh as the East-Central European crossroads inhabited by the House of Austria. To perhaps a greater extent than most states, the Habsburg Empire *needed* strategy to exist at all. The prevalence of military pressures bearing down on the state created powerful prompts for thinking about how to match higher-level ends and means. The development of a bureaucratic administrative complex left behind a richer documentary trail than in many lost empires of what Austria's rulers and diplomats thought and did about these challenges. It is therefore surprising that a grand strategy of the Habsburg Monarchy has never been attempted. This project will fill that gap.

Second, next to nothing has been written about the element of time in strategy. Most of the focus in contemporary political science and strategic studies is on the material as opposed to temporal element of competition between states. Classical realist scholars such as Robert Gilpin, Hans Morgenthau and Paul Kennedy devote attention overwhelmingly to the physical power capabilities of states—the size of armies and fleets, the underlying industrial strengths that make these forces possible, and how these factors shift over time. Liberal internationalist and postmodern accounts place greater emphasis on ideational factors such as institutions and norms, but devote are deficient in their treatment of the physical realities and constraints of space and time. Within military studies, the element of time has received similarly scant attention. There is a small literature on how states' capabilities are affected by the "power

gradient”—that is, how military power is degraded by space, a form of time.²² Particularly in the United States, there is a widespread fixation on Clausewitzian warfare, with its inherent emphasis, derived from Prussia’s sandwiched geography, on the ability to conduct speedy offensive strikes. But the literature from this field is preoccupied primarily with the tactical and technical nature of time—how to achieve victory quickly—and largely neglect wider strategic questions of how a state combines military and non-military forms of power to manage multiple competitors and the costs associated with multi-front contests.

The focus on Clausewitz reflects what might be called a bias against weakness. That is to say, the cases that tend to receive the greatest attention in political science fields—comparative politics, political science, strategic studies, etc.—are those states that were strong and, indeed, achieved a position of power dominance over other states. Very little attention has been devoted to cases that involved states which were deficient in offensive military power or that failed to achieve hegemony. While understandable, this bias has resulted in a relative paucity in understanding how weak or encircled players have coped with, and survived in spite of, the pressures of tough environments. A central claim of this dissertation is that such experiences hold great value for the present-day; indeed, that the internally constrained and externally contested circumstances of an empire like the Habsburgs are in many ways more comparable to those of 21st Century powers than the military nation-state of Prussia.

In devoting attention to the neglected case of Habsburg strategy, this dissertation does not attempt to conduct an exercise in history or historiography, but rather an assessment of the foreign and security policy behavior of the Habsburg Monarchy through the lens of modern-day strategic analysis. A large number of historical accounts exist of the Habsburg Monarchy in both English and German.²³ Many provide valuable details about military or diplomatic

²² For a synopsis, see the discussion in Colin S. Gray, *The Geopolitics of Super Power* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), pp. 50-1.

²³ Among the best general accounts of the post-1700 Habsburg Empire in English are the works by Macartney, Kann and Judson cited above, as well as Jean Bérenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1700-1918* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Habsburgs: Embodying Empire* (New York: Penguin, 1995). Michael Hochedlinger provides an extensive review of German- and English-language secondary literature on the 18th Century Monarchy in *Austria’s Wars of Emergence*. For a more dated review of historiographical debates see Sked, *Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire*.

behavior but were not written with strategy primarily in mind.²⁴ Instead of trying to replicate these approaches, this study seeks to examine the Habsburg state as a security actor, in much the same way that one would examine the drivers and actions of a modern nation. It is offered as a contribution to the growing literature on grand strategy and, as such, seeks to highlight patterns and analyze them rather than merely chronicle and describe.

By contrast, the aim here is not to contribute to knowledge of history *per se* but rather explore the application of history to the present. As such the purpose of the dissertation is explicitly didactic in nature: to gain a better understanding of how a now-dead Great Power succeeded and failed in navigating security challenges and thus render insights for modern statecraft and, in particular, for national-security policymakers in the United States. It does not pretend that the Habsburgs were consistently wise or that historical analogies work in every instance. But nor does it view history as an impenetrable mass of facts or deny that the challenges confronted by states of the past are similar to those of the present. Indeed, in Austria's case, the parallels with our own time are numerous and compelling.

Like the Habsburgs, the United States faces a two-fold strategic problem of external encirclement and internal constraints. It must manage a multi-sided strategic position with threats on every side that range from unconventional actors to rising Great Powers determined to undermine the existing international political order. It must maintain numerous, smaller client states that help to guard its frontiers but are drawn to the orbits of nearby rivals. To a greater

²⁴ A number of modern historians have dealt with the military and diplomatic histories of the Habsburg Monarchy. In German, the works of Oskar Regele, Kurt Peball, Manfred Rauchensteiner and Michael Hochedlinger are especially valuable (the latter two have also published extensively in English—see Bibliography). Among British and American authors see Charles W. Ingrao Charles W. Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1618-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and “Habsburg Strategy and Geopolitics during the Eighteenth Century,” in Gunther E. Rothenberg, Bela K. Kiraly and Peter F. Sugar, Eds., *East Central European Society and War in the Pre-Revolutionary Eighteenth Century*. The 18th Century Austrian military is covered in detail by Christopher Duffy—see for example *The Army of Maria Theresa: The Armed Forces of Imperial Austria 1740-1780* (New York: Hippocrene, 1977). For the 19th Century Habsburg Army see the numerous works of Gunther Rothenberg, especially *The Army of Francis Joseph* and Wawro's *The Austro-Prussian War*. For 19th Century Habsburg diplomacy see, for example: F.R. Bridge, *The Habsburg Monarchy Among the Great Powers 1815-1918* (Oxford: Berg, 1990) and Paul Schroeder's numerous books and articles—especially *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) and the various essays on Metternich-era Austrian diplomacy in David Wetzel, Robert Jervis, and Jack S. Levy. Eds., *Systems, Stability, and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

extent than in previous bipolar or unipolar eras, America can not rely entirely on military predominance to solve these problems.

Perhaps most importantly, as for the Habsburgs, the United States increasingly finds that the security problems it faces cannot be defeated or solved outright; rather, they must be managed as pressures that are likely to endure for the foreseeable future. This is not a task for which the American strategic mindset is well-suited, requiring both an acceptance of the absence of military preponderance and a weary resolve in worldview that were the stamps of Habsburg statecraft. Like the leaders of Great Powers throughout history, Americans often conceit themselves in the uniqueness and imperishability of their power. The Habsburgs are a caution against this hubris. Ultimately, for all of its past zeal as a revolutionary force, the United States is today an essentially status quo player tasked with holding together a peaceful security system anchored in alliances and stability. For such a state, there is much to learn from a similarly-situated predecessor who, though far weaker in relative terms, succeeded in maintaining a difficult position to its own and the wider system's benefit for several centuries.

Organization

This study consists of three main sections. The first (chapters 2-4) examines the external and internal constraints on Habsburg power. Chapter 2 describes the physical location and topographical features of the Monarchy, how the Habsburgs themselves thought about space, and the vulnerabilities and advantages that geography created in competition with other major powers. Chapter 3 looks at the unusual and constitutional makeup of the Habsburg state and the inherent limitations that these characteristics placed on its mobilization of economic and thus military power. Chapter 4 examines the effects that external and internal constraints had in shaping Austria's view of military force and political power more broadly, as well as how its leaders approached the tasks of strategy.

The second section (chapters 5-7) examines Habsburg strategies for managing individual frontiers. It is roughly chronological in order, unfolding according to the major threats that the

Monarchy faced. Chapter 5 looks at the competition with the Ottoman Empire and Russia on the southeastern frontier, progressing from the time of the re-conquest of Hungary in 1699 to Joseph II's final Turkish war in 1788-91. Chapter 6 examines the struggle with Prussia on the empire's northwestern frontier, beginning with the supreme emergency that followed Frederick the Great's first invasion of Silesia in 1741 and continuing to the stalemate of the War of Bavarian Succession in 1778-9. Chapter 7 traces the wars of the southwestern and western frontier with France, providing background on the early 18th Century dynastic struggles the Bourbons over Italy and the German *Reich* but primarily dealing with the bitter struggle with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France that run more or less unbroken from 1800 to 1815.

The third section (chapters 8-10) continues with this chronological progression but backs away from the individual frontiers to provide a panoramic view of strategy in the Habsburg Monarchy of the Metternichian and Franz Joseph eras. Chapter 8 examines Austria at its post-Napoleonic peak, assessing the Congress system of European diplomacy and the low-budget, forts-based military system of the early Radetzky period as an integrated, diplomacy-intensive security system. Chapter 9 looks at the mid-19th century crisis of Habsburg power, beginning with the break-down of the Metternichian system following the revolution of 1848 and Crimea War and culminating in the catastrophic military defeats of 1859 and 1866. Chapter 10 concludes with a net assessment of the chapters and set of observations for modern-day U.S. power.

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Chapter II.

Empire of the Danube:

The Geography of Habsburg Power

“No other part of Europe faces as many enemies.” – Raimondo Montecucoli

“Austria should, by the dictates of reason, possess all of the Danube region, from the river’s source to the Black Sea.” – Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow

Summary

Like all states, the Habsburg Monarchy depended for its survival upon the ability to exercise undisputed control over a clearly-defined territorial space.²⁵ This in turn involved two tasks: building a sound political and economic base and providing security against internal or external attack.²⁶ In the first task, the Habsburgs enjoyed the advantage of a compact, riparian heartland bounded on most sides by mountains. The second task was made difficult in the extreme by the empire’s wider East-Central European security environment. This combination of defensible local terrain and geopolitical vulnerability influenced how Habsburg leaders thought about and conducted strategy by: (1) encouraging the development of strategic forms of knowledge to conceptualize space for defensive purposes and (2) pulling attention outward, to the frontiers, while (3) demanding the maintenance of a ‘big picture’ capable of taking in the security position of the empire as a whole.

The Habsburg Heartland

The geographic space over which the Austrian Habsburgs presided from the early 18th Century to the 20th was a wild expanse of territories on Europe’s eastern edge, the effective defense of which required mastery of enormous distances and an array of climates and terrains. While the political boundaries of the Monarchy would change over time, the epicenter of the Habsburg

²⁵ John Nicholas Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), p. 42.

²⁶ Emphasis on these two requirements in both Spykman (navigable rivers and mountains) and Luttwak (“providing adequate security and a sound material base”). See Spykman, *Ibid.*, and Luttwak, *Roman Empire*, p. 1.

state corresponded roughly to Danubian-Pontic zone of European geography, consisting of the Danube Basin and its outlying plateaus.²⁷ Geologically, this region is the meeting point of three of the world's great geographic formations: the Eurasian steppe, extending westward from Mongolia to the Hungarian Plain; the dense river network of Middle Europe; and the spine of mountains that run from the Pyrenees to Asia Minor.²⁸

The contours of this space are recognizable on a physical map of Europe as the hermit crab-shaped recess between the Balkan Peninsula and North Central European Plain. Its heartland is the drainage basin of the Danube and its three sub-regions: the mainly mountainous zone of Alpine Austria; the semi-enclosed highlands of the Bohemian Massif; and the Hungarian Plain, or *Nagy Alföld* a vast tableland marking the westernmost extension of the Eurasian steppe. Together, these plateaus form a distinctive sub-region of continental Europe that is bounded on every side by mountains and rivers: in the west, the Alps; in the east, the Carpathians; in the north the Sudetens and Tatra; and in the south, the Sava River to its junction with the Danube at the Iron Gates.²⁹

Viewed geostrategically, as a space to be unified, governed and defended from attack, the first significant feature of the Danubian Basin is its interstitial quality, forming the “lands between” two seas (the Baltic and Black) and major geographic zones (the Western Europe peninsula and the Eurasia plains).³⁰ A second is its sheer size. At its height, the Habsburg state covered more than 260,000 square miles—ten degrees of latitude and eighteen degrees of longitude—making it the largest continental European power and second only to the Russian Empire in total landmass. The empire's west-east length, from Italy to eastern Transylvania, was about 860 miles, and its north-south length, from Bohemia to Croatia, was about 500 miles

²⁷ Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), p. 2.

²⁸ William H. McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 2.

²⁹ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars 1918-1941* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1962), p. 3.

³⁰ In the words of McNeill, the place “where the transcontinental gallop intersected the interregional river boat.” McNeill, p. 2.

(excluding Dalmatia).³¹ Measured end-on-end, its frontiers were more than 4,000 miles by the end of the 18th Century—about the width of the Atlantic Ocean.³²



Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

The Habsburg Power Gradient

Large distances impeded strategic mobility between the Habsburg heartland and periphery. In fair weather and on good roads, an infantry regiment could expect to march for more than three weeks to get from the imperial capital to the Turkish frontier, nearly two weeks marching to reach outposts in Moravia, almost a month to the Italian frontier, and about as long to reach the German frontier (See figure).³³

³¹ William O. Blake and Thomas H. Prescott, *The Volume of the World: Embracing the Geography, History and Statistics* (Columbus: J. & H. Miller, 1855), p. 584.

³² Some estimates put the length in the range of 3,900, but this excludes several important sections of border; see Veres.

³³ Figures calculated using U.S. Army's *Field Manual Number 21-18: Foot Marches*. Travel time could increase dramatically with inclement weather, bad roads, etc.

March Times in the Habsburg Empire*

Vienna to:	Belgrade	619km / 32 Days
	Drobeta	756km / 40 Days
	Essegg	478km / 25 Days
	Gradiiska	535km / 28 Days
	Karlsburg	752km / 39 Days
	Olmütz	201km / 11 Days
	Theresienstadt	360km / 19 Days
	Unghvar	645km / 34 Days
	Verona	809km / 58 Days

*Transit for Austrian infantry regiment in ca. 1800

Source: Base calculations taken from *U.S. Army Field Manual 21-18*, modified to reflect Austrian equipment, roads and terrain gradients, cross-referenced with contemporary accounts.

Distances between Major Points in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1815.



Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

A further complication was the topographical variety of the empire's lands. Straddling the geological transition zone between Western Europe and both Eurasia and Asia Minor, the Habsburg state encompassed several topographically dissimilar sub-regions. Where most Western armies could expect to fight their wars in the rich agricultural lands of Middle Europe, with its established seasons of campaigning, foraging and wintering, Habsburg armies had to be prepared for operations in theaters as diverse as the flooded plains of Walachia, the rugged hills of the Balkans, where summertime conditions approximated those of the American southwest; and the snow-bound passes of the Alps and Carpathians. This represented a wider range of terrain and climate conditions than anything confronting other European powers. Only the global empires of Britain, Russia and the United States had to contend with a greater variety of physical geography in their possessions.

The size and complexity of the empire's physical geography presented the Habsburgs with a power gradient problem familiar to all large empires. Space and terrain consume power as it is projected, with the result that "effective power declines in proportion to distance."³⁴ Large distances from the empire's center to its periphery complicated the task of asserting political dominance over a contiguous space that is a prerequisite to collecting revenue and building a sound economic base. Militarily, distance and the abundance of rough terrain slowed the movement of armies to confront internal and external enemies.

Austria was similar to other large land powers in both regards. However, in confronting this challenge, the Habsburg Empire enjoyed two significant geographic advantages that would aid the task of empire-building in both its political and military dimensions. One was the abundant rivers that knit together their territories and sped the projection of political influence, culture and military force; a second was extensive mountain ranges, concentrated primarily at the empire's frontiers, which separated the empire from its neighbors and gave it breathing space to focus on creating an integrated polity.

³⁴ For a discussion of the power gradient problem as it relates to land vs. sea empires, see for example Gray, *Geopolitics of Super Power*, pp. 50-1.

The Danube: 'Spinal Column' of Empire

The unifying physical feature of the Habsburg Monarchy was the Danube River. In geopolitics, rivers play two main roles, not unlike seas: They act as barriers and as highways. Historically, the Danube has performed both functions, being, in the words of Hugh Seton-Watson, “a line of invasion, a commercial thoroughfare and a frontier line.”³⁵ Pliny the Elder traveled the river and counted 60 tributaries, half of which were already navigable in his time.³⁶ The Roman Empire used the Danube as a fortified boundary, part of the extensive, eastward-facing defensive lines known as the *Limes Germanicus* that blocked the path of advancing Germanic and Hunnic tribes. The medieval kingdoms of Central Europe used it as a commercial thoroughfare, centered on the bend in the river at Visegrad, as well as a frontier separating Catholic Hungary and Orthodox Serbia. With the eruption of Ottoman military expansion in southeastern Europe in the 16th Century, most of the Middle and all of the Lower Danube fell under Turkish rule while the Upper Danube formed the main dividing line between Christendom and Islam.

With the expulsion of Ottoman power from Hungary in 1699, the Danube reverted to its historic role as an artery tying together neighboring riparian lands. From this point forward, the Danube would form both the central axis of Habsburg political power and the basis for a common Central European civilization, centered on Vienna. The Danube’s predominant role in the life of the empire is comparable to those of other river-based empire, such as the Nile, Euphrates or Indus. As for these empires, the footprint of Habsburg power in both a political and cultural sense traced the contours of the river at its core. As one 18th Century German writer observed about the Danube:

A river valley forms a whole. The water course offers transportation facilities and thus unites both halves of the valley — the inhabitants of both sides having the same interests. The great river is like a spinal column, and its tributary waters to the right and left are like the two sides of the human body. It is,

³⁵ Seton-Watson, p. 9.

³⁶ Brian Campbell, *Rivers and the Power of Ancient Rome* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

therefore, natural that such a riverine domain should either form a state apart or the integral part of a state.³⁷

The distinctiveness of the Danube as a “spinal column” for Habsburg power lay mainly in the direction of its current. Where other German rivers such as the Elbe or Rhine flow toward the Baltic and North Sea, the Danube’s easterly watershed helped to demarcate a separate and distinctively East-Central European geopolitical space.³⁸

Conquering Distance

The Habsburg Monarchy’s central river systems helped it mitigate the effects of the power gradient, in several ways. Historically, the reach of a state’s power has been defined by the surface area across which its center can collect revenue. The further and more complicated the distances to outlying lands, the harsher the effects of the power gradient, the weaker the levels of political control and the smaller the revenue base and the weaker the empire. Hence, the ability to overcome distance (that is, to shorten travel times), whether by natural or man-made means, is a vital prerequisite for the success of empires. This is challenge for both sea and land empires.³⁹ Overcoming distance requires capital-intensive effort—for sea powers, the construction of expensive merchant and naval fleets; for land powers, the construction of roads, infrastructure and armies.

Habsburg rivers to address this problem by providing a ready-made communication network that facilitated efforts to extend political control over a large expanse of territory. Possessing abundant natural arteries at the center of the Habsburg holdings was a major advantage in the era before railroads. Like the empires that formed on the basins of the Indus, Tigris and Nile, the Danube provided a connective tissue for a common political civilization. Wide, long and in

37 Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow, *The Spirit of the Modern System of War* (London: Whitehall, 1806) reproduced in C. Malorti de Martemont, Ed. and Transl., Cambridge Library Collection (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 283.

38 Robert Strausz-Hupe, *Geopolitics: The Struggle for Space and Power* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1942), p. 16.

39 A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History: 1660-1783* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.), p. 21.

many places navigable, the region's rivers cut the travel time to some parts of the empire by more than half. Its 817,000 square-kilometer drainage basin is the largest of any European river, with 300 tributaries stretching into every corner of southeastern Europe, linking both of the region's major plateaus, the Bohemian and the Transylvanian, to the Basin's central plain.

In every direction around the Habsburg core, rivers provided highways for collecting taxes, promulgating laws, spreading culture, and imposing military rule. The Danube glued together the Habsburg heartland territories of Austria, Bohemia and Royal Hungary; the Elbe, Vltava, Morava and Iser linked the Czech lands; the Po unified the territories of Northern Italy; the Drava, Sava and Tisza tied in Hungary and portions of the Balkan peripheries.

The same communication networks that sped the movement of armies and tax collectors also facilitated commercial exchange. The numerous navigable arms of the Danube allowed for cheaper movement of goods, services and labor. Combined with the Habsburg heartland's mild winters and mid-latitude temperate climate, the presence of a large fresh water drainage basin created an arable landmass capable of supporting a large population. Well-watered plains generated rich soils capable of supporting extensive agriculture.⁴⁰ Nearby mountain ranges provided timber, minerals, and ore for metallurgy and early industry. These attributes gave the Danubian lands a degree of internal economic complementarity (metals from Bohemia, grain from Hungary, timber from Transylvania) that made them a natural economic space and strong material base upon which to build an empire.

Rivers aided in the integration of an otherwise mostly landlocked economic space with wider European and global markets. Europe's second-longest river, the Danube runs almost 2,000 miles from its source in the Black Forest to its exit into the Black Sea. Its long length and easterly flow supported the movement of commerce and technology from the Western European interior to the Eastern European periphery that would otherwise have required passage through the Alps. With headwaters and tributaries located near the Rhine and Oder,

⁴⁰ Blake and Prescott, p. 587.

which connected to the Atlantic and Baltic respectively, the Danube could with overland portage (and later, canals) link up with European and international trade routes. Without the river, the empire would have been primarily reliant on its handful of ports on the Adriatic for this function. The fact that the Danube's exit occurs at a point well beyond the empire's natural borders meant that it lacked assured access to the sea, depriving it of the full strategic and economic benefits of a river connecting Western Europe with the Black Sea. This reality would become a significant factor in Habsburg geopolitical history.

Together, the Danube's political and economic roles not only aided but made altogether possible the knitting-together of the Habsburg territories as a coherent polity and its vocation as a European Great Power. The Danube's drainage basin furnished a geopolitical heartland sufficiently large, well-resourced and interconnected to provide the foundation for a large state with a material base transferrable into military power. The orientation of this resource base to the larger European landmass provided the benefits of Western cultural and economic exchange while setting it apart sufficiently from other Western European power centers to form a politically coherent and militarily defensible space. Although the empire's peripheries would shift over the centuries, at moments encompassing points as far-flung as the Netherlands and Sicily, its heartland would remain centered on the lands lining the banks of the Danube and tracing that river's major tributaries. However Habsburg sharply fortunes might rise or fall elsewhere, as long as its position here was secure, it remained a Great Power.

The Monarchy's rivers did present some challenges. The Danube was not amenable to navigation until its confluence with other rivers at Ulm. In its middle course, it contained navigation hazards from Pest to Baja in Serbia and was blocked by cataracts at the Iron Gates. On the Hungarian Plain the river was flanked in spring by swamps, which in flood season impeded access to the river and produced silt that formed into sandbanks, and the river's swift current made movement downriver easier than upriver.⁴¹ Overcoming these obstacles would be a major focus of Austrian infrastructure development over the centuries.⁴² However, even

⁴¹ Henry Hajnal, *The Danube: Its Historical, Political, and Economic Importance* (The Hague, 1920).

⁴² Ibid.

with these important exceptions, the wider river systems of the Danubian Basin were an unmistakable advantage compared to the exertions that would have been needed to conquer distance in a comparably sized land mass lacking rivers. As a frame of reference, the large land empires of Rome, the Incas and Persia all required the construction of vast networks of manmade roads, undertaken at vast public expense, as a precondition to the imperial center being able to exert tax-collection across the periphery. The difficulties encountered by the Austrians in the dredging and canalization of rivers were by comparison relatively modest. For all of the other obstacles the Habsburgs may have faced, rivers represented a major leg-up in the game of empire-building.

Rivers and Time

Habsburg leaders were aware of the geopolitical importance of the Danube and viewed it as the key to building and maintaining an empire. Central to its role in this regard was the river's ability to aid in the management of time. It did this, first, by providing a central axis around which to rally Habsburg strength. In warfare, mastery of time begins with the ability to concentrate force—the collection of force in denser forms in a specific space. The Danube helped in this task by forming an internal network around which to assemble military forces. As Count Radetzky, one of Austria's leading generals of the 19th Century, described it:

The great artery of the Monarchy and the basis, not only of its combined military system but also its political system, is the Danube. Our forces must be assembled along the Danube at all times, and the necessary resources be prepared at once there... The maneuverability and security of our forces hinges upon the number and strength of our defensive works along the Danube.⁴³

Concentration along the Danube allowed for the swift movement of armies not only by water itself but along the natural highways of river valleys, both within the Habsburg core and to threatened points on the periphery. A defender occupying the stretch of Danube from the

⁴³ Johann Joseph Wenzel Radetzky Von Radetz, "Militärische Betrachtung der Lage Österreichs," 1828, in *Denkschriften Militärisch-Politischen Inhalts Aus Dem Handschriftlichen Nachlass Des K.K. Österreichischen Feldmarschalls Grafen Radetzky* (Stuttgart und Augsburg: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1858), p. 423.

Bavarian frontier to Budapest could maximize the empire's main strategic advantage, its central location, and move across internal lines of communication without bearing the full logistical and time costs to defend such a large space. In the southeast, the Danube's current allowed for the transfer of large armies and supplies to project power beyond the Carpathians into the Wallachian Plain. In the West, the Danube valley's extrusion into Germany allowed for offensive operations, via land, up the Rhine and into France and the Austrian Netherlands – a route that Habsburg armies would use repeatedly in wars against the French.

These same routes also allowed outside invaders to bypass mountain defenses and attack the empire's heartland. Indeed, successive generations of Habsburg leaders would view the inability to control the entirety of the river, from the headwaters at Donaueschingen to the river's estuary at the Black Sea, as an organizing strategic problem. In the words of Radetzky, "as long as we do not control the entirety of the river, we stand at risk of embarrassing ourselves at one place or another."⁴⁴ The gap that the Danube cuts between the Bohemia and the Alps was once such place; another was the Danube's exit between the Carpathians and Balkan Mountains. Nevertheless, the known existence of these points made them predictable as invasion routes, thereby allowing Habsburg military planners to concentrate force. This too saved time, in obviating the need to spread forces across an entire frontier and only converge on a threat once it materialized.

Should an attacker penetrate the frontier, the Danube and other rivers performed another, time-related strategic role: forming obstacles that can be used as secondary lines of defense. Clausewitz noted, rivers favor a defender by requiring an invader to break a preferred front:

River defense can often gain considerable time—and time, after all, is what the defender is likely to need. It takes time to assemble the means of crossing. If several attempts at crossing fail, even more time will have been gained. If the enemy changes his direction because of the river, still other benefits will no doubt fall to the defense. ⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 423.

⁴⁵ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 437.

Abundant internal rivers, many of which lay just inside and parallel to the Monarchy's frontiers, allowed Habsburg armies to form defensive positions reinforcing the first, natural line formed by mountains. As Austria's Archduke Charles, the foremost Habsburg commander and war theorizer of the Napoleonic era, wrote:

In the defense of rivers, as nature indicates the places where crossings are possible, it follows that entrenchments can have, in this case usefulness for covering from the fire of the enemy the cannon of the batteries that it is necessary to rest, to flank the crossing area. These areas are those where the bank on which one finds oneself dominates the bank of the enemy, or the bank is concave upon the side of the enemy.⁴⁶

Numerous sites of this kind existed along the banks of the empire's major rivers. In the north, the Elbe and Iser formed an inverted "U" behind which Habsburg armies could entrench (and later fortify) defensive lines facing both of the main Prussian invasion routes into Bohemia. In Italy, the Mincio and Po rivers and numerous left-bank tributaries formed a defensive glacis against eastward thrusts toward the Alpine passes entering Upper and Lower Austria via the Tyrol and Carinthia. In both cases, rivers bought time for Habsburg forces in the interior to mobilize. Deeper inside the empire's territory, rivers provided opportunities for its armies to rally against a successful invader. At its moments of greatest emergency, the empire's rivers repeatedly afforded its forces opportunities to conduct strategies of Fabian delay and harassment against militarily stronger opponents.

The Alps: Ramparts of Empire

The second dominant feature of Habsburg geography was mountains. On almost every side, the Danubian heartland is fenced by mountain ranges. The most formidable of these were the Alps, which extend for 1,200 km across south-central Europe and reach heights of 13,000 feet, splitting into dependent branches across Habsburg territory. In the West, the Alps run in three

⁴⁶ Archduke Charles, *Principles of War*, Daniel I. Radakovich, Trans. (Ann Arbor: Nimble Books, 2009), p. 37.

chains from Piedmont to the outskirts of Vienna, blocking, at least partially, westward approaches. In the north, the Ore, Sudeten and Tatra Mountains separate the Bohemian highlands from the surrounding Thuringian and Silesian plains. In the east, the Carpathians form a vast, scimitar-shaped 8,000-foot high barrier from the Vistula River in Poland to the Dobruzha, coming within 200 miles of the Black Sea. In the southeast, the Transylvanian Alps extend to the Iron Gates, where the Danube cuts a canyon on its way to the sea. In the south, a continuous curtain of mountains extending from the Serbian Mountains across the northern face of the Balkans and into the Dinaric Alps, which hug the coastline the full length of the Adriatic Sea and merge with the Julian Alps in the north, completing the circle.

End-on-end, there were more than 3,000 miles of mountains in Habsburg territory. Their prevalence would exercise a dominating influence on the empire's military options and strategic culture. In geopolitics, mountains divide rather than unite territories. Where rivers facilitate contact and communication, mountains delay them. Second only to oceans in their ability to impede movement, their primary political value lies in the clarity with which they demarcate a state's territory from those of a neighbor. For this reason, the benefit of mountains value generally increases in proportion to how close they sit to a state's frontiers. States without mountains or other obstacles on their borders are susceptible to invasion; those with extensive mountainous interiors, such as classical Persia or modern-day Mexico, face severe challenges in achieving political and economic integration. It is for this reason that the Balkans region to the south of Habsburg territory became the antithesis of a unified geopolitical space, defying efforts at integration and remaining politically fragmented to the present day.

In the Habsburg Empire's case, the possession of frontier mountain ranges was arguably a precondition to any meaningful degree of political integration occurring within the Danube Basin at all. The fact that they were concentrated primarily at the edge rather than interior of the realm gave the Monarchy terrain that combined the best features of the two neighboring Eastern European sub-regions: the integrative qualities of the well-watered North Central European Plain and the defensive qualities of the Balkans to the south. Without mountainous frontiers, the region's rivers, rather than unifying a coherent economic space, could just as

easily have been extensions of Northern or Southern Europe. As a mid-19th century geographer noted, of the two empire's two main mountain ranges, the Alps and Carpathians:

The first divides the region of the German ocean and Baltic from those of the Black Sea and Mediterranean. The second mountain range, which has much more elevated summits, and covers a larger tract of country, divides the region of the Mediterranean from that of the Black Sea.⁴⁷

An absence of mountains in the north would have rendered the empire's territories a southern extension of the Polish plain, an indefensible and therefore politically chaotic invasion route subject to incorporation in whatever stronger entity existed around it. In the East, where the Carpathians mark the only significant obstacle between the Danube and the Urals, an absence of mountains would have made the Hungarian Plain a de facto extension of the Volhynian-Podolian Plateau and thus subject to domination by whatever force was strong enough to possess Ukraine and Russia. Instead, the presence of extensive mountains on all sides made the Danubian Basin an eddy in the turbulent currents of East-Central European geopolitics: a sustainable Middle Zone where an independent civilization of some kind could form and resist the tug of both the European Rimland and the Eurasian Heartland, to use the classic geopolitical phraseology.

Mountains and Time

As with rivers, the principal contribution of mountains to Habsburg empire-building stemmed from their role in conquering space and time. Where rivers speed up movement, mountains slow it down. Even when undefended, they impede the transit of armies, complicating travel across even short distances and entailing significantly greater logistical difficulties than flat land, much less water. In the Habsburg Monarchy's case, the time advantages provided by mountains were significant, given the high proportion of defensive perimeter that could be considered "unpassable" in the pre-airpower age. Seeing mountain ranges like the Alps on paper gives an imperfect impression of their actual formidability; as an early chronicler wrote,

⁴⁷ Blake and Prescott, p. 587.

“it is difficult to compass the Alps and all the mountains on a map, for one gets false ideas of the distances that are reduced to scale.”⁴⁸ Movement through the Alps is funneled to a handful of dependable passes, most of which are narrow, long and winding; all but a few are blocked by snow in winter and can become block during warm months with mud or debris.

For armies that choose to pass through the mountains, these factors impose a significant time cost and restrict logistics as well as tactical options when entering, transiting and exiting the passes. In the 18th Century the French Army calculated that it could move about 4,800 men per day through some of the defiles of the Western Alps; the numbers for longer or more complicated passes were lower.⁴⁹

Armies that try to pass through mountains are forced to split their forces and, once transited, run the risk of leaving a major obstacle in their rear. As Clausewitz noted:

Where a province is protected by a mountain range, no matter how lightly the range is defended, the defense will at any rate suffice to prevent enemy raids and other plundering expeditions.... No...attacker likes to march across a mountain massif like the Alps and to leave it in his rear... The higher and less accessible the mountains, the more the forces may be split: indeed, the more they *must be split*, because the smaller the area that can be secured by the combinations based on movement, the more its security must be taken care of by direct coverage.⁵⁰

Trying to go around mountains also cost time, since the attacker was forced to take a more circuitous and thus longer route to its target.

In addition to time costs, mountains increase attrition on invading armies. Passing through mountains exacts a toll in lives and amount of supplies used; perforce, an army crossing a mountain range will be weaker when it exits than when it entered—as Hannibal found out.

⁴⁸ French military officer quoted in Reed Browning, *The War of the Austrian Succession* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 97.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵⁰ Clausewitz, pp. 424, 428, 432.

Austria's Archduke Charles noted this effect in his military writings; in "rugged and rocky mountain chains," he wrote:

...there is no means of replenishing supplies... One must either use the few and arduous connections and passages which nature provides or has to make one's own path with much a lot of troublesome effort effort and time loss (*Zeitverlust*). Marches and supplies can only be performed by long, constricted, and thus slow columns. In any case the course of operations is slow and jerky...and supremacy over physical elements rather than man becomes the primary obstacle to victory.⁵¹

From the defender's standpoint, mountains provide advantages proportional to the disadvantages inflicted on attackers. By slowing the offensive army, mountainous terrain gives the defender time to organize a defense; time and again in Habsburg military history, mountains would provide a first line of defense behind which Vienna could muster its forces and transfer troops from quieter frontiers more quickly than its opponent could achieve deep penetration of imperial territory. By magnifying the defensive fighting power of even small numbers of troops troops, they allowed the Habsburgs to achieve a greater economy of force than would have been possible in open terrain. Because they funnel attackers to predictable invasion routes, they helped make Austria less susceptible to surprise. This in turn aided in the task of sequencing between fronts, allowing a defender to hold down one attacker with minimum force and concentrate elsewhere without inordinate fear of losing on the weaker front.

Together, Austria's possession of mountainous frontiers and extensive internal rivers helped to mitigate its power gradient problem, aiding in the task of holding together a large geopolitical space. What the Danube and its tributaries integrated by easing movement and cutting internal travel time, the Alps and Carpathians protected by impeding external attacks. Such a combination is rare in geopolitical history. Most mountainous states are small and embedded within a single mountain chain, like Switzerland, Andora or Tibet. Most large powers possessing a mountainous border do so on one or two sides, like France or Germany, or have

⁵¹ Erzherzog Karl, "Von dem Einfluss der Kultur auf die Kriegskust" in Freiherr von Waldstätten, *Erzherzog Karl: Ausgewählte Militärische Schriften* (Berlin: Richard Wilhelmi, 1882), pp. 117-8.

mountain ranges embedded well within the political frontiers of the state in ways that separate the state from itself, like the Rockies in the United States or the Urals in Russia. Only classical Persia, with its large central (albeit arid) plain and surrounding mountain chains, approximates the favorable position that the Habsburg Monarchy enjoyed with its four-sided ramparts and large central plains.

Equal parts fort and common market, the Danubian Basin's economic rationality and military defensibility gave the Habsburg Monarchy a degree of natural resiliency that represented a significant competitive advantage in geopolitical competition. When the ethnic complexities of the Habsburg state (discussed in the next chapter) are added into the equation, the criticality of these natural features in lessening the pressures of geopolitics and aiding in the formation of an otherwise unnatural entity is obvious. While not insulating the Monarchy from the effects of its neighborhood altogether, these features gave it a wider margin of error in its military and diplomatic behavior than an interstitial power of similar size and location in a less naturally protected space, as the short and violent histories of polities on the Polish Plain to the north demonstrate.

Habsburg Periphery

The Habsburg Monarchy would need these geographic advantages to cope with the dangers of its East-Central European security environment. From antiquity, the 1,000 -mile stretch of territory between the Baltic and Black Seas has formed a funnel for migration and invasion from the Eurasian heartland to the rimlands of the European peninsula and the eastward expansion of Western military empires. In southeastern Europe, there was the added pressure of the states and empires of the eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor expanding northward into Europe. Together, these forces created what the early 20th Century British geopolitical writer James Fargrieve called a "Crush Zone" – a contested space in political geography in

which empires collide and all but the toughest polities find it hard to endure for long periods of time.⁵²

The Danubian Basin sits in the epicenter of this Crush Zone, astride both the main East-West and North-South axes of the European continent. This interstitial position gave the Habsburg state vital strategic and economic interests in multiple regions while exposing it to enemies more than one primary security theater. From the time of its emergence as a primarily Danubian state, the empire was flanked by aggressive rivals along the entire length of its security perimeter except the Adriatic Sea. In each direction, the empire faced a combination of an established or expanding power center separated from its frontiers by a belt of weaker ethnicities or states. These comprised four distinct security frontiers, each representing a separate security complex with its own geographic constraints, opportunities and threat vectors.

The Southeastern Frontier: Adriatic to Black Sea Delta

The southeastern frontier of the Habsburg Empire extended from the Dalmatian coastline of the Adriatic along the Sava River to the Transylvanian Alps. As a security space, it encompassed the better part of the Balkan Peninsula, from Croatia through the southern portion of the Hungary and the Wallachian Plain to the Dniester River. A combination of arid uplands and flooded plains transitioning to rugged hills in the south, the geography of this region was un hospitable to prolonged military operations for much of the year. Defensive keys included possession of strongpoints along the Middle and Lower Danube, control of strategic passes in the Carpathians, control or denial of the economically-important Danube Delta, and defining a line of sustainable expansion in the unhindered but largely featureless southern approaches to Hungary.

⁵² James Fairgrieve, *Geography and World Power* (London: University of London Press, 1915), pp. 329-330.

From antiquity the southeastern corner of Europe has been a collision point of empires. By the early modern period, the eastern portion of this region was dominated by the Republic of Venice, which entered into a period of decline roughly coinciding with the ascendancy of the Austrian Habsburgs but represented a source of residual commercial and political competition in Dalmatia and portions of Northern Italy. The primary strategic rival on this frontier for much of Habsburg history was the Ottoman Empire, a large, aggressive, and militarily and religiously expansionist power with a geopolitical heartland in Anatolia and outlying lands in Egypt and Persia. Expanding on a northerly axis, the Ottomans exerted unceasing pressure on the Habsburg frontier from the 16th to the mid-18th Century. For much of this period, they would represent perhaps the greatest strategic threat to the empire, invading the Austrian heartland and besieging Vienna in 1529 and 1683.

The military contest for this region initially revolved around Turkish-occupied Hungary. With the ejection of Ottoman influence in the late 17th Century, the locus of conflict shifted to the Habsburg acquisition and consolidation of a substantial hinterland centered on the Tisza and Danube Rivers and extending through Transylvania to the Carpathians. Thereafter, Austria and Turkey would engage in a protracted struggle across the rugged and under-developed lands between between the Habsburg and Ottoman heartlands, first Hungary itself and later the territories of Banat, and Bosnia, and in the east, the Turkish-dominated Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia and the territory of Bukovina. This intermediary zone was populated by the ethnic fragments of previous Christian states that had followed to the Turks: Hungarians, Romanians, Orthodox Serbs, Croats, and various smaller groups. Throughout the 18th Century Austria squared off across the Balkans with a steadily declining Ottoman state in Croatia, the Lower Danube (where both empires maintained lines of fortresses), and the Black Sea littoral.

From the mid-18th Century a third empire, Russia, would become an active and eventually domineering presence across much of the Wallachian and Balkan marchlands. Its expansion on a southerly axis from the Dniester and Bug Rivers in the quest to build a Black Sea littoral extension of the Russian Eurasian Empire would collide repeatedly with remaining Ottoman

footholds in Europe while presenting challenges for the defense of Habsburg interests in the wider Balkans. Russia's ejection of Ottoman influence from the north shore of the Black Sea and Crimea would precipitate a 200-year running contest in which Russian influence would eventually expand through Dobruzha, then into the Balkans proper and to the Bosphorus itself. By the mid-19th Century the combination of accelerating Ottoman decrepitude and Russian ascendancy would threaten to place many of the strategic keys to the geography of this frontier under the sway or control of a stronger rival power. To this mix would be added from the mid-19th Century, with backing from the Western powers Britain and France, the coalescence of the Danubian Principalities into an embryonic Romanian independent state.

The Northeastern Frontier: Carpathians to Oder

The northeastern frontier of the Habsburg Empire historically traced the full length of the Carpathian Mountains extending from their intersection with the Oder River to their 90-degree westward turn near the Oituz Pass. The region beyond this line of mountains formed a large downward facing Triangle anchored on the hinge between the Sudeten and Tatra Mountains in the south, the Pomeranian coastline in the northwest and Kaliningrad in the northeast. A flat, featureless tableland punctuated only by rivers and bordered by marshes, this region was a natural expansion zone for land warfare. Defensive keys in this theater included control of the numerous passes through the Carpathians, possession of the populated and mineral-rich Silesian Plateau, and securing the largely defenseless forward slopes of the Carpathians south of the Vistula and Dniester Rivers.

The pivot point of this frontier, the line of the Vistula River, formed a natural confluence point for the westward advance of Eurasian power, the southward expansion of Baltic empire and the eastward jut of German expansion and colonization. To the west lay the northern states of the German *Reich*, Saxony and the small but formidable military kingdom of Prussia Brandenburg-Prussia; to the north the cold-water maritime empire of Sweden, and to the east the ancient kingdom of Poland and trackless borderlands of Tsarist Russia. By the 18th Century, the main military threat facing Austria on this frontier was Prussia, which seized the

Habsburg province of Silesia and waged a two-decade running war against the Monarchy. To this pressure would be added the growing attention and activities of Russia which following its eviction of Sweden from the east Baltic littoral would press forward on a vast strategic periphery stretching across the Ponto-Baltic isthmus from Kaliningrad to Crimea.

Strategic competition in this region revolved primarily around the fate of Poland, which for more than two centuries formed a large intermediary body between the stronger neighboring empires around its flanks. Feuds within the Polish elite generated power vacuums and a resulting degree of instability that, by the late 17th Century, offered abundant opportunities for foreign intervention. Nominal Saxon kingship gave way to Great Power jostling, with major European states advancing the claims of various powerful Polish families for the hereditary throne. With the gradual decline of the Polish state, Austria faced the threat of losing this buffer state altogether, either through chaos inviting invasion or foreign-backed state capture. A series of partitions in the late 18th Century ended Polish independence and brought large portions of territory into Habsburg possession north of the defensive Carpathian line, centered on the lower Vistula around Krakow. From this point until the early 20th Century, the empire would face the challenge of managing a vast frontier directly abutting the territories of powerful rival empires Prussia (later Germany) and Russia.

The Southwestern: Adriatic to Alps

The southwestern frontier of the Habsburg Empire ran in a line from the northern end of the Adriatic near Trieste up the Isonzo River valley to the spine of the Alps. As a wider strategic theater, it included most of the Italian Peninsula above the Appenines, extending across the Lombardy plain from the Julian Alps to the Western Alps and border with France. A region of fertile valleys shielded by mountains to the north, this theater was capable of supporting large-scale agriculture and population, and therefore of sustaining lengthy high-intensity military campaigning. It presented a combination of rivers which were difficult to ford, cities that were costly to besiege; and passes for rapid retreat and resupply. Defensive keys included securing

the Alpine passes that proliferate east of Lake Garda and denying the Piave River valley as a point d'appui for enemy armies seeking to debouch onto Carinthia and the Austrian heartland.

Strategic competition on this frontier centered on the Po River Valley and Lombardy (initially more a geographic rather than political term denoting the space between the and the Po and Alps). The region's economic resources made it attractive to the major powers of the Mediterranean: first Spain and later France, which used it as a military corridor for attacking Austria under the Bourbon kings of the 18th Century, Napoleon I and Napoleon III. Throughout the 18th Century, the region's primary strategic value was primarily linked to the modalities of dynastic warfare, while in the nineteenth century its value became more economic, as a resource-base and supplier of tax revenues. A key barrier against French designs, in tandem with the Danubian Valley, Lombardy allowed the possibility of forestalling marches on Vienna from a reasonable distance and as military glacis for forward fortifications.

As on other Habsburg frontiers, the geography immediately abutting its southwestern periphery was populated by weak polities. From the Middle Ages through the mid-19th Century, this region was filled with a kaleidoscope of small Italian duchies and kingdoms, none possessing sufficient strength to dominate the others. As in Poland, the primary geopolitical threat facing the empire was the potential for a hostile power to occupy or control what amounted to a geopolitical fracture zone which, in this case, directly bordered the imperial heartland. Habsburg possessions in this space from the early 18th Century included the Duchies of Milan and Mantua; traditional allies included Venice, Piedmont-Sardinia, which guarded the strategic passes from France into Lombardy, and Tuscany; while Genoa and Parma/Piacenza were typically in Bourbon hands, and so often allied to the French or Spanish. From 1815, Habsburg possession of an enlarged Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia would bring the empire into direct competition with growing forces of Italian nationalism, fostered by Piedmont with French backing.

The Northwestern: Inn to Oder

The northwestern frontier of the Habsburg Empire stretched from the northern face of the Bavarian Alps along the line of the River Inn through the Bavarian and Bohemian Forests and along the western escarpment of Bohemia to its apex between the rivers Elbe and Oder. As a strategic area of operations, this theater encompassed the whole of the Rhine and Elbe watersheds, from the headwaters of the Danube up the Rhine Valley to Alsace. Fat, flat and fertile, the German plains were capable of supporting large armies through long campaigning seasons. The central military axis of this region was the Danube River Valley, which narrows between the Bavarian Forest and Alps to enter Habsburg lands unimpeded. Defensive keys on this frontier included possession or denial of the entry points to the Upper Danube and Inn River valleys as invasion routes, including possession or control of the area around the Black Forest, and ability to project power up the Rhine Valley to the frontiers of France.

The primary focus of military competition on this frontier was southern Germany, which for centuries was a cockpit of competition among the large power centers of Western Europe. For centuries the German lands were organized under the auspices of a succession of increasingly loose imperial configurations—first the Holy Roman Empire, or German *Reich*, and later the German Confederation. Austria's historic rivals for hegemony in Germany from the late Middle Ages were the dynasties of France, which by the early 18th Century constituted a large and centralized military super-state capable of challenging Habsburg primacy in both Italy and Germany. Periodic French bids for European hegemony, first under the Bourbon kings and later under Napoleon were typically accompanied by military advances on southern Germany and an attempted invasion of the Danubian lands. From the mid-18th Century the empire found itself under growing pressure from Prussia, a Sparta-like military kingdom whose century-long rise and quest for leadership of Germany would gradually eclipse France and the Ottoman Empire as the main military and political threat facing the Habsburg Empire.

As in Poland and Italy, the political geography of Germany was made up of numerous small and mid-sized states and, as in those other regions, the primary strategic contest revolved

around the geopolitical orientation of states occupying the territory between the empire and its rivals. As the elective leaders of the Holy Roman Empire and later German Confederation, the Habsburg dynasty held nominal sway but in practice competed with rival powers for influence, allies and, on rare occasions, the seat of emperor itself. The main threat in this theater was twofold: militarily, the ease of rapid movement for enemy armies down the region's large river valleys both into and out of Habsburg territory; and politically, the potential for a rival power to organize these states into an anti-Habsburg constellation, either from within (Prussia), or from without (France). The most industrially advanced of Austria's frontiers, Germany would from the 18th Century to the empire's end represent the source of its greatest military challenges.

Effects of Geography on Strategy

In sum, the Habsburg Monarchy's frontiers embroiled it in four separate, continually evolving security competitions across a space that stretched from the Rhine to the Black Sea and from the Vistula to the Adriatic. No other continental European power faced such a set of challenges except perhaps Russia, which was insulated by larger spaces and was usually able to count on at least one or more secure flanks. The possession of a mountain-enclosed riverine heartland helped to mitigate these pressures emanating from the Habsburg periphery. While not insulating the Monarchy from the effects of its neighborhood altogether, the empire's defensive terrain gave it a narrower margin of error in geopolitics than an interstitial power of its size and location would have possessed in the absence of abundant mountains, as the short and violent histories of states on the featureless Polish Plain to Austria's immediate north demonstrate.

The combination of vulnerability and defensibility in Habsburg geography influenced how the Monarchy's leaders approached strategy. For all states, grand strategy is a byproduct of geographic conditioning.⁵³ The physical location of a state, its size, orientation to land and sea, and position in relation to other powers are all important factors in the behavior and

⁵³ See Colin S. Gray, "Seapower and Landpower," in Roger W. Barnett and Colin S. Gray, eds., *Seapower and Strategy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989) and Gray, "Geography and Grand Strategy," pp. 311-29.

performance of a state in security competition. While geography does not determine policy, it does limit choices. It also determines the kinds of tools that a state will need to cope with their surrounding environment and reveals gaps in national power capabilities that will need to be filled through some other means. By rewarding some behaviors and penalizing others, it builds up a knowledge base over time about what will and will not work in the quest for survival.

Habsburg geography made it an almost exclusively continental power, largely insulated from the direct effects of competition at sea. At the same time, the presence of multi-directional threats placed more severe limitations on Habsburg strategic options than many classic continental empires have faced. As we will see in chapter 4, these limitations would be reflected in how the Habsburg thought about and conducted war, contributing to the development of largely defensive and risk-averse military culture that placed a greater emphasis on terrain than perhaps any major army in European history. More broadly, the effects of geography on Habsburg strategy can be seen in how it conditioned the Monarchy's leaders to think about physical space, in several ways: (1) by encouraging the development of strategic forms of knowledge, including maps and other tools, to visualize and conceptualize space for defensive purposes; (2) by pulling attention outward, to the frontiers; and (3) by demanding the maintenance of a 'big picture' capable of taking in the security position of the empire as a whole.

1. Conceptualizing Space

Austria's difficult location necessitated attention to the spatial dimensions of power both topographically, for the defense of the empire's main territories, and geopolitically, for the management of its security position in the wider European balance of power. While this is true in a general sense for all empires, the ability to conceptualize space is more important for some than others. In the case of Russia, to use one notable example, the possession of wide expanses of largely featureless terrain meant that accurate maps, while desirable, were less essential to the conduct of effective military operations or diplomacy. In this regard, Russia and other large steppe empires such as those found in Central Asia and Mesopotamia were

perhaps more comparable to sea powers in their relationship to space, with plains that resembled oceans in their unbroken vastnesses and armies that need to navigate like fleets.

By comparison, Habsburg rulers had compelling military and strategic reasons to accurately map and thus visualize the shape and extent of their realm. Historically, states have made maps for many reasons —to legitimize claims to territory, to measure and assess, and thus tax, the lands under their rule, to create visual symbols of their power. Prior to the 18th Century, the Habsburgs had occasionally produced maps for all of these reasons. The composite nature of the Monarchy, involving historically distinct kingdoms and provinces tied together by dynastic claim made maps important for establishing claims to individual territories. Habsburg maps of this period reflect this emphasis, usually depicting stand-alone possessions with little topographical accuracy, military value or effort at depicting the Danubian empire as a whole.⁵⁴

But the geopolitical turbulence of the 18th Century gave the Austria another, very different reason to make and use maps: as aids to the defense and security of the realm. An early example of this transition can be seen as early as 1705 when, at the high point of the War of Spanish Succession, Prince Eugene of Savoy, Austria's most successful commander, commissioned a detailed map of the main theater of war in Northern Italy. Titled *Le Grand Theatre de la Guerre en Italie*, the map marked a significant departure from Habsburg maps of the previous century.⁵⁵ Produced on four sheets of two feet by a foot and a half each, the map was explicitly intended as a tool to assist in military campaign and battle. Illustrations in the corner of the map, typical for the period, show Eugene's armies carrying the double-headed standard of the emperor through the Alps, with mechanical hoists lifting cannons over the mountains. The message—mastery of the Monarchy's geography using the scientific means of the day—is reinforced by the details of the map itself. Where previous maps had often been

54 For a sample of studies on Habsburg cartography, see: Oskar Regele, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der staatlichen Landesaufnahme und Kartographie in Österreich bis zum Jahre 1918* (Vienna: Verlag des Notringes der wissenschaftlichen Verbände Österreichs, 1955); Johannes Dörflinger, *Die Österreichische Kartographie*, vol. I (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984); David Buisseret, *Monarchs, Ministers and Maps: The Emergence of Cartography as a Tool of Government in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and the superb and exhaustively researched work of Madalina Valeria Veres, cited above.

55 This map can be viewed in the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.

artistic in nature, emphasizing towns and scenery and not drawn to scale, Eugene's map used the latest cartographical tools to depict topographical and man-made features with a high degree of accuracy. Roads, rivers, forts and other military sites are shown in great detail.

Subsequent wars would prompt ever more elaborate attempts at mapping the Habsburg Monarchy. Conflict with the Ottomans spurred bouts of periodic surveying in the south, while border disputes in Italy and the Netherlands required accurate maps to establish the Monarchy's claims in the west. However, it would ultimately be the wars with Prussia that do the most to catalyze Habsburg seriousness about cartography. Between 1740, when Frederick the Great launched his first invasion of Austrian Silesia, and 1790, Habsburg leaders would undertake map-making on a vast scale, laying the foundations for what would become the most advanced strategic cartographical culture in Europe. In 1747, the newly created Habsburg corps of engineers created *The General Map of all Imperial and Hereditary Lands*—the first attempt at depicting the empire as a geographic whole. Illustrations in the margin of *The General Map* underscore its geopolitical rather than artistic purpose, with the Empress Maria Theresa shown, amidst various map-making instruments and cannon balls, pointing her scepter at France (*Galiae pars*), Austria's historic rival.⁵⁶

The decades that followed brought an explosion of Habsburg map-making. Building on *The General Map*, in 1764 Vienna launched what would become the first in a series of highly detailed, comprehensive military surveys of the Habsburg Empire. Known as *The Great Military Map*, or *Josephinische Aufnahme* (Josephine Survey), they produced the most advanced cartographical instrument of its time, requiring an astonishing 22 separate surveys and showing more than 220,000 square miles of territory in 3,500 sheets.⁵⁷ This effort was accompanied by scores of smaller projects focused on specific regions and objects: *The Great Military Map of Transylvania*, the so-called *Ferraris Map of Belgium* (named after its creator), maps of Lombardy and other provinces, and extensive surveys of outside territories directly abutting the borders of Monarchy and countless small maps of individual strategic sites, such

⁵⁶ Veres, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

as fortresses, mountain passes and individual frontiers—altogether amounting to more than 16,000 maps.⁵⁸

Habsburg maps were made with a strategic, as opposed to merely commercial or artistic purpose. Several characteristics of Habsburg cartography demonstrate this point. One is that the efforts to produce them was driven from the top, with an overtly military goal in mind. The principal drivers were Empress Maria Theresa and her co-regent and successor Emperor Joseph II, as well as their senior advisors, the foreign minister Prince Kaunitz and by Franz Moritz Lacy, the Quartermaster General and creator of the Habsburg general staff. Motivated by the long and bitter wars with Frederick, these and other Austrian leaders sought to harness the conceptual and scientific tools of the Enlightenment to reform the state at all levels—in Maria Theresa’s words, to “organize and put [it] on a firm footing.”⁵⁹

The aim of these efforts was to make the empire a unified polity and thereby leverage its combined means in natural and human resources toward the political end of victory over revisionist Prussia. Maps were an important tool for achieving this goal, since they helped the empire’s leaders picture, and this calculate, the range of resources at their disposal, as well as fight battles more effectively and reach more favorable territorial deals in post-war negotiations. To this end, Habsburg leaders of the late 18th Century devoted large-scale resources in money and intellectual power to the creation not only of maps but the institutional and scientific infrastructure needed to support an advanced, modern cartography. The aim was not momentary but long-term: to cultivate spatial knowledge as a competitive advantage for the Monarchy in competitions with rivals.

The fact that strategy was the motivating force behind these efforts can also be seen in the content of Habsburg maps. The level of detail in Habsburg maps of this period far exceeds the maps of the Monarchy’s major adversaries. When *The Great Military Map* was commissioned,

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁹ C. A. Macartney, Ed., *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Walker, 1970), p. 126.

the most accurate map in Europe was the Cassini Map of France, which was drawn at 1:86,400 scale. By contrast, Austria's military surveys were conducted at 1:28,800 scale, with 275 of 3,500 sheets produced at an astonishing 1:11,520 scale—or more than seven times more detailed than the maps of their rivals.⁶⁰ This is roughly the distance between looking at the earth from the window of a low-flying aircraft and looking at the earth from a high-altitude jet liner.

As notable as the level of detail are the objects of emphasis in Habsburg maps—that is, what their makers chose to depict. Comprehensive in nature, they took into account both topographic and man-made features. Elevation was shaded in gradients, with even small degrees of change indicated. Various kind of forests and fields were clearly demarcated, while mountain passes received particular attention, with narrow defiles and defensible points highlighted. Rivers were marked to show width, curves, islands, fords and direction of current, as well as the locations of flood plains and marshy areas. Existing structures, particularly those with potential military value, were illustrated carefully and precisely. Towns and farms were sketched to show their exact layout, with everything from mills and forges to orchards shown true to form. Roads were shown in exact detail, from major highways and boulevards to the smallest and most remote footpaths. Fortifications were shown down to the layout of individual ramparts and battlements, and the locations of arsenals were marked in every province. On the frontiers, even the smallest military posts and blockhouses are included, to the point that on the southern borders individual frontier watch-towers, each roughly the size of a large deer blind, are depicted and clearly labeled at intervals every few thousand yards.

Further indication of the strategic purpose of Habsburg maps is the manner in which they were handled. Where most other European powers made their maps available to the public for commercial and other use, the Habsburg Monarchy treated them as sensitive state material, restricting the means by which they were produced, viewed and and circulated. This tradition of secrecy had a long history in Austria, beginning with the strict intelligence controls introduced by Raimund Montecuccoli, *Hofkriegsrat* president, in the 1670s.¹²⁶ As

⁶⁰ Veres, pp. 18-19.

cartographical efforts expanded in the late 18th Century, these controls intensified. Habsburg maps were treated as what would today be called “top secret” classified information. Each section of map produced for the military survey was made in triplicate form, with copies going respectively to the Emperor and the president of the *Hofkriegsrat*.⁶¹ Outside a small senior military and diplomatic circle, anyone wishing to view a map had to receive explicit, written permission from the Monarch⁶². Cartographers, many of whom were inevitably drawn from outside the empire, were vetted for reliability. Kaunitz offered payment for a large mapping project in Italy on the condition that the maker not be recruited by a foreign power, and Maria Theresa delayed a similar effort on the grounds that it needed to be conducted “without needing to hire foreigners.”⁶³ So strict were the classifications on Habsburg maps that, when an imperial officer possessing classified cartographical information or tools died, the state moved swiftly to seize these materials before they could fall into foreign hands, even if he was killed in a combat zone.⁶⁴

The lengths to which the Austrians went to control their maps, together with the amount of state resources that went into their construction and the high degree of military relevance of their contents, demonstrate that the Habsburg Monarchy’s leaders saw them as a form of strategic knowledge to be consciously cultivated and protected in order to gain a competitive advantage in geopolitics. Under Maria Theresa and Joseph II, Austria created the institutional infrastructure for generating this intelligence on a systematic, rather than *ad hoc* basis. Vienna devoted large shares of the defense budget not only to maps but to the development of the scientific support structures needed to sustain map-making on a long-term basis, including observatories, collections of the most modern astronomical and geodetic tools, a professional military corps of engineers, map archives and detailed protocols for mapping practices, surveys and border demarcation.⁶⁵

61 Buisseret, p. 163.

62 Veres, p. 30 and Buisseret, p. 164.

63 Veres, 53 and 426.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 439. See also John Brian Harley, “Silences and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe,” *Imago Mundi: The International Journal for the History of Cartography* 40 (1) (1988): 57-76.

65 Veres, p. 7.

In today's terms, Habsburg cartography represented what would be called "geospatial intelligence"—the systematic development of visual aids, used in combination with other intelligence-gathering tools, for the explicit purpose of aiding the state in war and diplomacy. Indeed, there was a symbiotic relationship between intelligence and maps in the Habsburg Monarchy. During military campaigns, engineers accompanied the troops and made extensive maps of the local terrain. Likewise, teams of military officers accompanied surveying teams and took careful notes on the defensive features of anything of potential military value, marking the exact location of everything from morasses to orchards and cemeteries. These notes were attached to the corresponding section of map with a legend, thus providing detailed intelligence guide that could be readily referenced by senior commanders and the *Hofkriegsrat* in wartime. The emphasis in these notes is on assessing the Monarchy's lands a potential future battlespace, as one example shows:

The town is a solidly built affair, with a large military barracks and stables on the edge. Principal buildings are the town hall, a convent, a church, and a large parish house. Outlying buildings are well constructed, especially those near the mill on the banks of the Crems river. That river joins the Danube just below the town, and at that point the Danube makes the area something of an island. The terrain is generally flat but dominated by the hill rising behind the town.⁶⁶

2. *The Pull of Frontiers*

In addition to encouraging conceptualizations of space generally, the Habsburg Monarchy's geography and geopolitical position focused the attention of its leaders to specific points in space that were tied to its security and survival as a state. As for states in today's world, this was first and foremost about those places where problems were most likely to emerge: the frontier. It was here, at the outer reaches of Habsburg power, that Austria's interests were bound to come into conflict with those of a neighboring state, where the Monarchy would first encounter an attack, and where it would either expand or concede space after war.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Buisseret, p. 165.

The presence of numerous outside dangers around Austria's borders exerted what the historian Owen Lattimore, in his work on the Ch'in Empire, called the "pull" of frontiers—a continual demand for attention and resources that draws the imperial center's focus outward, toward the point of contact with the enemy.⁶⁷ In Austria's case, this "pull" was especially strong, due to the number of active military fronts and the overall length of frontiers, across more than 4,000 miles. Pressure from the frontier—pressure to react, but also to plan, prepare and act proactively—would be a constant throughout Habsburg history, often transcending the dynastic preoccupations and predilections or rivalries of individual emperors.

Habsburg maps reflect this strategic emphasis on frontiers. Its roots lie in military competition with the Turks. At the Peace of Karlowitz in 1699, Vienna ordered its commissioners to conduct a survey in order to move beyond interminable debates over "ancient" or "natural" frontiers and establish the exact location of the Sava-Maros line that would form the new frontier between the two empires.⁶⁸ An expedition by the Austrian Military Engineer Johann Christoph Müller would establish cartographical parameters to support what would eventually become the famous Military Border (see chapter 5).⁶⁹ In subsequent wars, the first act after acquiring new territory would be to order a comprehensive survey and census.⁷⁰

This focus on frontiers formed a pattern that would persist into the late 18th Century. Frontiers routinely received the closest attention in military-topographical surveys. Sections of *The Great Military Map* dealing with frontline territories were often produced at 1:11,520 and 1:17,200 scale rather than the usual 1:28,800.⁷¹ *The Great Military Map of Transylvania* produced follow-on maps of the neighboring non-Habsburg frontier territories of Moldavia and Wallachia, which as we will see figured prominently in Austrian military strategy in the southeast.⁷² Similarly, Austrian maps of the Netherlands, Lombardy gave special emphasis to identifying defensive features of the borderlands.

67 Owen Lattimore, *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers 1928-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 110-111.

68 Black, p. 23.

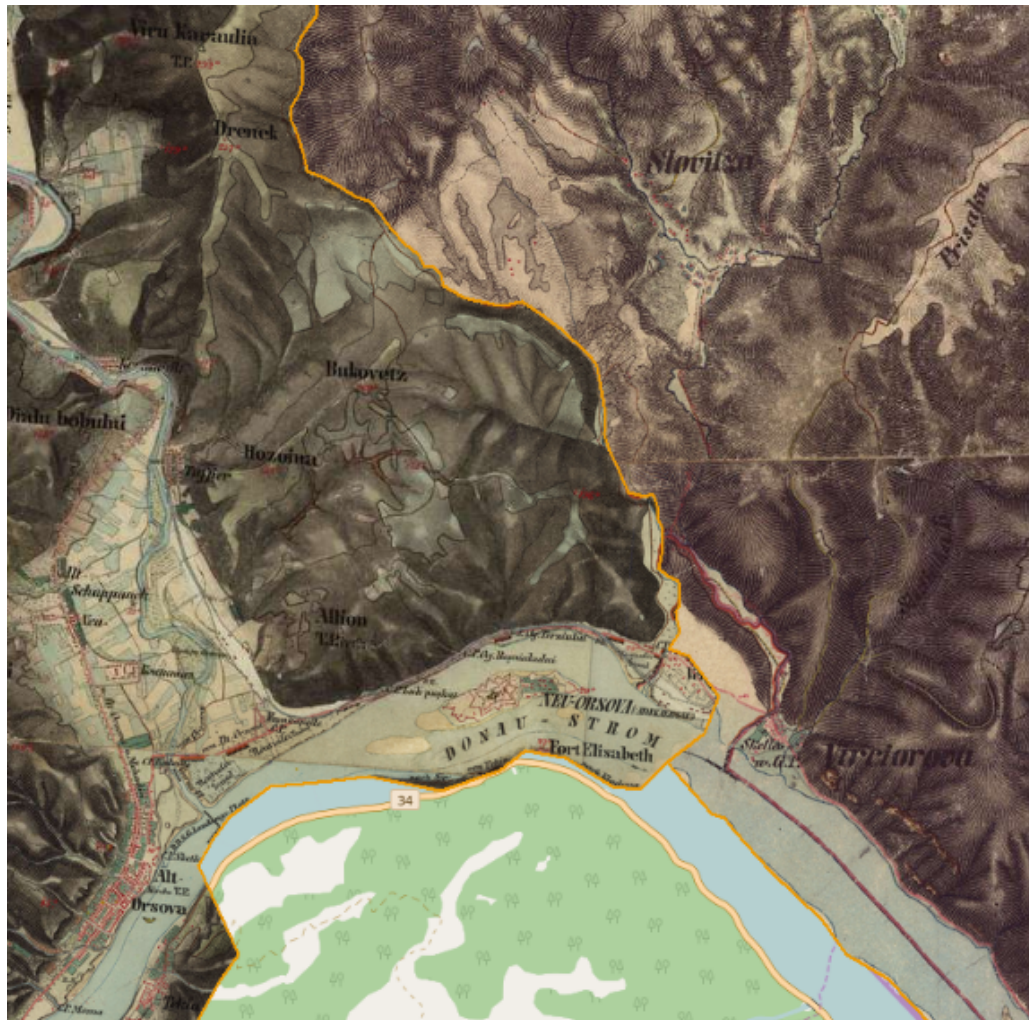
69 Hochedlinger, p. 125.

70 Ibid., pp. 125, 308.

71 Buisseret, p. 166.

72 Veres, p. 151.

Section Detail, Southern Frontier, Second Military Survey



Mappire, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, 2016.

The degree to which Habsburg strategic attention was centered on frontiers can also be seen in numbers: according to calculations by the Romanian researcher Madalina Valeria Veres, by the late 18th Century, around 79 percent of the Monarchy's maps devoted to its own territories depicted frontier provinces; of the 252 maps covering outside powers, 227 were of states sharing a frontier with the Monarchy.⁷³

Over time, these mapping efforts formed a repository that was actively used by Austrian rulers,

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 104-7.

statesmen and generals to support the conduct of Habsburg strategy. Detailed knowledge of frontiers helped Austria address the ubiquitous border disputes afflicting a state of its central location, for example after the 1737-39 Turkish War, to resolve a 1743 disagreement with Venice, and to delimit the frontiers of the Austrian Netherlands and the river boundary of Lombardy. Maria Theresa and Kaunitz spent hours pouring over maps of the western frontiers in the lead-up to the War of Bavarian Succession, the diplomatic resolution of which revolved around the ability to ascertain small but important physical characteristics (salt mines, population count, locations of rivers) reflected in the empire's maps.⁷⁴ The ensuing negotiations of the Polish partition hinged on similar details, though on a larger scale, while Metternich's famous diplomacy at the Vienna Congress involved cartographical and assessments of the strategic value of frontier regions in Poland and Saxony in which successful diplomacy depended on the ability to accurately tally "a certain measure of territory, count of population, and stock of resources."⁷⁵

Extensive frontier maps also had military application. Possession of such a database allowed Austrian commanders of the late 18th and early 19th Century avoid Eugene's improvisations and instead rely on an established database of knowledge, both for pre-war defense planning and conducting military campaigns. Austrian expeditions into the Balkans in the 1716-1718 and 1727-39 wars benefited from access to the work of Müller and other earlier border surveying missions. When Joseph II's legions marched south in 1787, its officers from the general staff down to the level of individual regimental commanders would be carrying some 150 engraved copies of sections from *The Great Military Map* and the *The Great Hungarian Map (Hungarischen Grossen Charte)* for Croatia, Slavonia, Banat of Temesvár, Transylvania and Galicia.⁷⁶ By the late phases of the Prussian wars, Habsburg field commanders had access to vastly improved maps compared to what had been available in the first disastrous encounters in Silesia. As we will see in chapter 6, Joseph II and his generals would use these maps to plan fortifications, painstakingly cited in Bohemian topography, during the 1760s and 1770s. And when the Monarchy went to war with Revolutionary France, the

⁷⁴ See Maria Theresa's correspondence with Joseph II during the 1778 Bavarian succession crisis in Maria Theresia an Josef. 29. Mai 1778 in Schneider. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Larry Wolfe, 'Kennst du das Land?' *The Uncertainty of Galicia in the Age of Metternich and Fredo* (*Slavic Review* 67, no. 2, Summer 2008), p. 277.

⁷⁶ Veres, pp. 107-108.

Hofkriegsrat would possess a cartographical library sufficiently well-evolved to support a 20-year struggle in the west and extensive, subsequent rounds of frontier fortification construction.

The Big Picture

The pull of frontiers exercised a prevailing influence on Habsburg strategic thinking. As we will see in chapter 4, the pressures that frontiers exerted would decisively shape the empire's military planning and diplomatic concepts well into the 19th Century. Because dynamics at the frontier, particularly for a relatively weak power, tend to be driven by an external source (the rival), they generate problems that require crisis management, which in turn implies a high degree of reaction on the part of the defender. This would appear to be particularly true for a power like Austria, which was enclosed on four sides by frontiers and would seem to be a victim of *perpetual* reaction to external engines of crisis beyond its ability to anticipate, much less control.⁷⁷

But precisely because it had so many frontiers, Habsburg leaders could not afford to be purely reactive; they needed the ability to get ahead of escalatory dynamics and picture their realm as a defensive whole, for at least two reasons. First, the empire's geography penalized concentration on any one frontier at the expense of others for very long. "Take care," as Eugene of Savoy warned the emperor, "Your Monarchy is a little straggling: it connects itself with the North, the South, and the East; It is also in the center of Europe."⁷⁸ Such a state could not afford to prioritize a threat *du jour* to such an extent that it neglected preparations for attack from other directions. Being prepared required its leaders to be able to visualize the juxtaposition of frontiers, study the distances and times between them and conceptualize the means of balancing among their threats. Second, Austria's central position and frequent military weakness meant there was a good chance its armies would be involved in fighting in the interior of the empire itself. By the second half of the 18th Century, this had already

⁷⁷ As Charles Ingrao wrote, Habsburg monarchs "...invariably concentrated on responding to individual crises as they arose in a particular theater." See Ingrao, "Habsburg Strategy and Geopolitics," in Rothenberg, et. al., p. 50.

⁷⁸ Eugene, p. 96.

happened in three wars—1701-1714, 1740-1748 and 1757-1763. In such cases, the ability to conceptualize defensive measures integrating Monarchy’s heartland and periphery was crucial for survival.

The Second Military Survey in Assembled Form



Mappire, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, 2016.

Habsburg maps reflected both realities. The explicit purpose of large-scale mapping efforts in the second half of the 18th Century had been to create tools for allowing Habsburg monarchs and their advisors to make strategic appraisals about the realm as a unified whole. As Joseph II’s wrote to the Austrian ambassador to France in 1781, “we must what we can to acquire the necessary notions about the general situation of the monarchy.”⁷⁹ Both *The General Map of all Imperial and Hereditary Lands* and *The Great Military Map* were attempts to achieve

⁷⁹ “...acquérir les notions nécessaires au régime général de tous les Etats de la monarchie.” Joseph II a Mercy, Vienne, 20 Mai 1781 in Alfred von Arneth, *Correspondance secrète du comte de Mercy Argenteau avec l'empereur Joseph II et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1889), pp. 34-35.

precisely that—a picture of the empire as a whole. The first achieved this goal inaccurately; the second failed, not for effort but for technical reasons, because the surveys were begun before the astronomical measurements had been made, creating misalignments between the individual map sheets that prevented them from being assembled as a whole.⁵ In subsequent decades, the goal would be realized.

The ability to piece together a big picture was important for defensive reasons. The fact that Austria's leaders devoted so much time and resources to developing an ability to visualize their *own* spaces suggests that they anticipated often having to fight future wars on Habsburg rather than foreign soil. Altogether, sixty-five percent of the maps in the *Hofkriegsrat* archives are focused on Habsburg territory, with much of the remaining 35 percent being focused on directly adjacent lands.⁸⁰ The point is further reinforced by the degree of attention given to depicting the kinds of man-made sites and terrain features that would be used to fight a defensive war, with militarily-relevant points noted well into the empire's interior and travel times marked between key points—ostensibly to aid in postal deliveries but with obviously military application.

Taken together, these characteristics of Austrian maps show that Habsburg Monarchs both wished to be able to form a big picture of their state and that they developed the means to do so. While their frontiers may have been a source of constant friction and attention, they were conscious of the need to avoid a perpetual state of reaction to the problems generated there. They sought to equip themselves with spatial tools to support the matching of means (defense resources) to ends (countering multiple threats) and to do so on a forward-looking basis—that is, for the purposes of strategy.

Conclusion

Where a state sits shapes what it cares about. This is often reflected in how it pictures itself—that is,

⁸⁰ Veres, p. 105.

in whether it develops maps and what those maps reveal about its fears and priorities. Soviet maps during the Cold War, as Zbigniew Brzezinski noted, were centered on Moscow, while the United States had long used North American-centric maps and assumed that other powers looked at the world in the same way.⁸¹ Soviet maps suggested preoccupation with the maintenance of long land borders; American maps the need to manage two great oceans and their coastal rimlands.

Similarly, Habsburg cartography tells a great deal, both about how its rulers viewed the vulnerabilities of their geography and how they thought about managing those vulnerabilities. Above all they show a preoccupation with frontiers and the numerous threats that lined the empire's lengthy security perimeter. Frontiers represented a continual source of danger that drew Austrian attention outward, at the same time that the empire's large distances imposed power gradients on its ability to effectively manage all four frontiers simultaneously. Together, these represented severe constraints on Habsburg power that were more severe than what many other large continental empires in history have faced. Where Russia was afflicted steeper power gradients across its much larger territories, it was able to find security in these vast spaces. Austria, by contrast, had the logistical difficulties of managing large space while possessing a smaller margin of error because of a larger number of physically closer foes.

Austrian geography also offered some advantages to offset the difficulties its geopolitical position. Chief of these were the internal lines of a central position. The unusual length and integrating properties of the Danube river system helped to soften the power gradient for Austria, aiding in both defense and the construction a secure resource base. The presence of defensive boundaries, in the form of enclosing mountain ranges, provided a degree of separation and protection favorable to the tasks of empire-building. The contrast to the lands north of Austria is striking in this regard; where the North Central European Plain was naked to attack, the Danubian Basin's encircling mountains created a cradle capable of sustaining a riparian heartland. In the the words of Claudio Margris, this provided the ingredients for a

⁸¹ See the discussion in Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Game Plan: A Geostrategic Framework for the Conduct of the U.S.-Soviet Contest* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986).

“great civilization of defensiveness, of barriers thrown up to protect oneself from outside attack...a fortress which offers excellent shelter against the threat of the world.”⁸²

This combination of vulnerability and defensibility lies at the heart of Habsburg strategy. Austria’s geopolitical environment made the development of strategies for coping with perennial danger necessary; its immediate geography and topography made the implementation of strategy possible. This distinguishes the Habsburg Monarchy from other interstitial states. Vulnerability without defensibility would have produced a larger, southern version of 18th Century Poland: a state that was physically indefensible and showed the traits of that indefensibility in a strategic culture of offensive-minded resignation to fate. Conversely, defensibility without vulnerability would have made Austria a larger version of Switzerland, a state for which security is near-total and a corresponding strategic outlook that is retiring, insularist and able to assume that problems are distant and will dissipate with time.

It is in the Austrians’ quest to manage their obvious vulnerabilities by leveraging their empire’s advantages, however modest, that we see the stirrings of strategy in the Habsburg Monarchy. Austrian maps and attempts at constructing geospatial intelligence show that the Habsburgs studied their physical setting, noted its vulnerabilities and sought to systematically address them with the tools available. One need only look at a map to grasp the scale of threats arrayed against the Monarchy. But one need only look at the Alps or Carpathians, standing on the ground, to grasp the immense defensive potential that such features imprinted upon the minds of their owners. Surveying the empire’s mountains and rivers, Austrian rulers, soldiers and diplomats could imagine not just survival but the prospect of bringing a durable order to the cluster of territories under their dominion. As we will see in chapter 4, this helped to produce a conservative and defensive strategic mindset, motivated by danger but anchored in the rational quest for an attainable security. In this way, Habsburg geography helped to create a sense of strategic viability, a perception that, however numerous the threats arrayed against it, the empire could with the application of reason, outside help and God’s grace, endure.

⁸² Claudio Magris, *Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea*, Transl. by Patrick Creagh (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1989), p. 155.

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Chapter III.
Damnosa Hereditas:
Habsburg People and State

“The Austrian monarchy is composed of five or six...different constitutions. What a variety, in culture, in population and in credit! The title of emperor does not bring with it a single man nor a Kreutzer. He must even negotiate with his empire.” – Prince Eugene of Savoy

“If things continue on this path, no imaginable order can be maintained.” – Empress Maria Theresa

Summary

In contrast to its physical geography, the political geography of the Danubian Basin greatly complicated the task of Habsburg empire-building. Accumulated in an ad-hoc fashion over several centuries, the territorial holdings of the Austrian Habsburgs formed a composite state made up of multiple, historically separate polities, each with its own separate constitutional arrangement with the ruling dynasty. The resulting human population consisted of more than a dozen ethnic groups, none of which was strong enough to dominate the others. This internal makeup impeded the Monarchy’s evolution as a modern state in two ways: (1) by hindering the development of a centralized, efficient state administration and (2) by implanting sources of domestic conflict into the social fabric of the state. Both factors shaped Austria’s behavior as a strategic actor in ways that placed it at a disadvantage in competition with more centralized and unified Great Power rivals. Ultimately, they prevented the Monarchy from mobilizing its full power potential, effectively removed territorial expansion as an option for increasing state security and presented internal vulnerabilities for enemies to exploit in wartime.

Habsburg Political Geography

The Habsburg Monarchy was a layer-cake of lands that consisted, by the 18th Century, of seventeen historically separate polities and more than a dozen ethnic groups. The empire’s political geography was the byproduct of a series of territorial acquisitions that occurred in a sedimentary fashion over more than five centuries, but which had its roots in the much older

human history of the Danubian Basin. The Ponto-Baltic isthmus on which the Basin sits is an ancient highway of migration—the point at which the Eurasian landmass narrows into the western European peninsula. Within this funnel, the Basin acted as a sieve, collecting and retaining fragments of passing tribes. The same abundant rivers and protective mountains that made the Basin so amenable to later empire-building had, at a much earlier point in its history, attracted waves of human settlement. Eastern tribes entered through the Carpathian passes; horse people of the steppe came through the Panonian Plain and Roman settlers ventured beyond the *Limes Germanicus* in search of farmland.

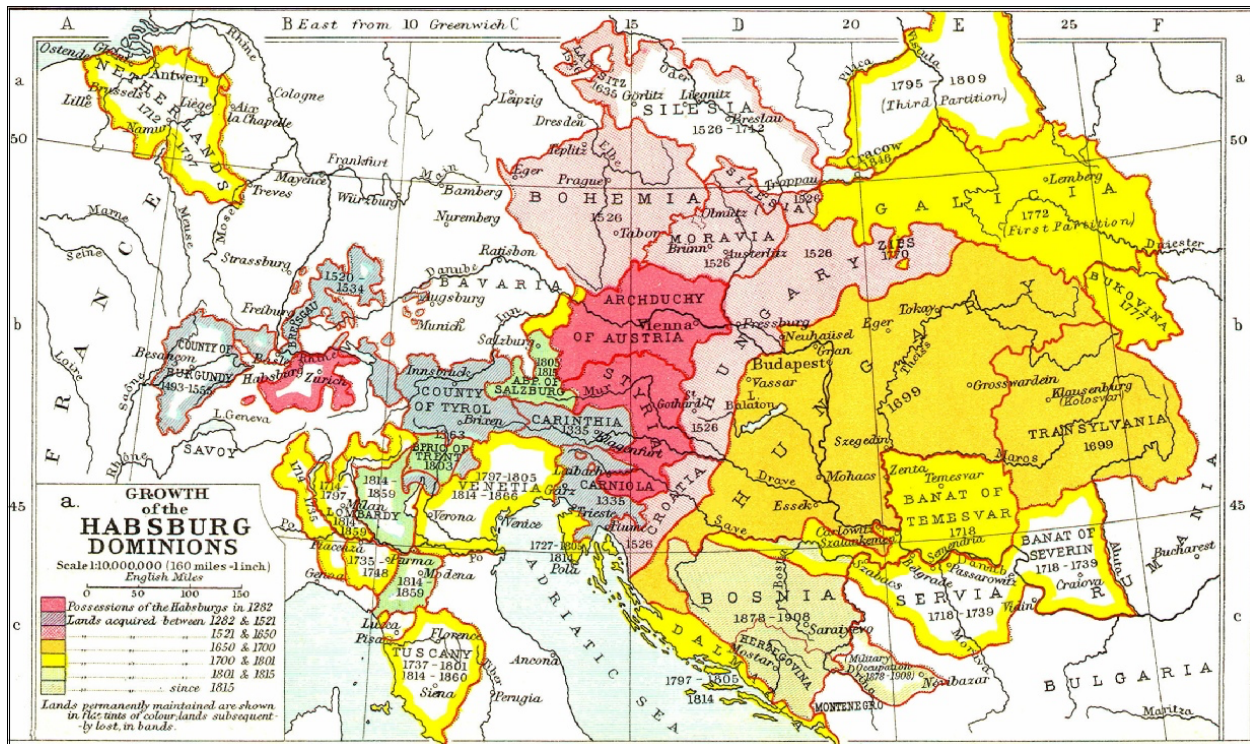
By the 10th Century, three main ethnic groups had established themselves as the Basin's most numerous and entrenched residents: the Slavs, the Magyars and the Vlachs, ancestors of modern Romanians.⁸³ Over the centuries each group built kingdoms and statelets of varying sizes and duration, some of which would grow into substantial holdings by the Middle Ages.

The subsequent political dynamics of the Habsburg Monarchy were an outworking of the centuries-long collision of these pre-existing, mainly Slavic and Turkic settlement patterns with the eastward march of Medieval German empire. This process began in earnest in the 8th Century, with efforts to extend Frankish rule into the chaotic Eastern marchlands of Charlemagne's empire. By the late 8th Century, the German *Reich* had incorporated a strip of eastern territory from the Elbe through modern-day Austria to the Istrian Peninsula and across the northern half of Italy. Frankish influence would reach its furthest extent in the southeast, extending from the Bavarian Alps as far as the midway points of the Sava and Drava rivers. A major factor behind this eastward jut of German influence, and subsequent Habsburg expansion, was the Danube itself, which propelled German political and commercial activity along the spine of the Alps on an easterly axis, from the Black Forest toward the Black Sea. By the mid-10th Century, this movement had crystalized into a series of German-administered

⁸³ Anonymus, *Notary of King Béla: The Deeds of the Hungarians*, Ed. and Transl. by Martyn Rady and László Veszprémy, in János M. Bak, Urszula Borkowska, Giles Constable, Gábor Klaniczay, Eds., *Central European Medieval Texts Series, Vol. V* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), p. 27; and C. A. Macartney, *The Medieval Hungarian Historians: A Critical and Analytical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 70-80.

borderlands – the Eastern, Styrian, Carinthian and Carniolan “Marches” – that would form the nucleus of Austria. Beyond these territories, the Danube watershed set the path for subsequent expansion.⁸⁴

Growth of the Habsburg Empire in Central Europe



Source: Habsburg Territorial Maps.

It was in the context of the quest by the German *Reich* to stabilize and govern its eastern frontier that the Habsburgs emerged into Central European politics in the mid-13th Century from their family strongholds of Switzerland and Swabia. Under Rudolph I, the family acquired a series of titles and territories that would form the font of their legitimacy in subsequent centuries, beginning with election to the seat of Holy Roman Empire after the death of the last Hohenstaufen emperor in 1254 and acquisition of the duchies of Styria and Austria after the defeat of the Premyslid king Ottokar of Bohemia at the Battle of Marchfeld in 1282. In the centuries that followed, the Habsburgs enlarged their Central European holdings by marriage,

⁸⁴ Strausz-Hupe, p. 16.

war and diplomacy. In the 14th Century, they consolidated their core Austrian lands with the acquisition of Tyrol, Carinthia, and Carnolia. The 16th Century brought a burst of expansion to the east with the incorporation of Bohemia, Moravia, Upper and Lower Silesia and Royal Hungary into the Habsburg domains by inheritance following the death of King Louis II of Hungary at battle at Mohacs against the Turks.

This period also saw the growth of Habsburg influence in Western Europe, with Burgundy and Spain coming into the family's possession. By the mid-16th Century Habsburg power had reached its apogee in Europe, encompassing a sprawling array of lands from the Netherlands and Spain, through Italy and the lands of the German *Reich* to the Danube and including outlying territories as far away as South America.

From this point, Habsburg holdings would evolve into what would become their eventual Danube-focused form by a series of events at the end of the 17th Century. The first was the end of the Thirty Years War at the Peace of Westphalia in 1683 which, by splitting the formerly monolithically Catholic German *Reich* into Protestant and Catholic states, weakened Austrian influence in Germany and pushed the dynasty to look eastward, to the Danube valley, for compensation.⁸⁵ The second was the prosecution of a successful war of expansion following the repulsion of the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, by which the Monarchy absorbed a wide tract of territory in Hungary, formerly a contested borderland between itself and the Ottoman Empire. The third event, the death of the final Spanish Habsburg King Charles II in 1700, would bring the western branch of the Habsburgs to extinction, making its eastern, junior line the locus of all subsequent dynastic growth.

This rapid sequence of changes would give the Habsburg realm the character of a principally East-Central European geopolitical enterprise that it would retain until its demise after the First World War. Essential to this strategic reorientation was the enclosure of Greater Hungary, with its broad expanses, alongside the Danubian principalities of Bohemia, Moravia and the

⁸⁵ Seton-Watson, p. 30.

Austrias to form a territorially contiguous mass capable of furnishing the Habsburg state with the resource base and strategic depth necessary to become a Great Power. While the dynasty retained the title of Holy Roman Emperor and would continue to command military resources and political influence in Germany for another century and a half, this function would become increasingly symbolic with growing autonomy of the German states and the consolidation of Habsburg east of the Alps. And although the Monarchy would acquire extensive extra-Danubian appendages over time, eventually amassing territories as far afield as the Netherlands and Sicily, its geopolitical heartland would remain centered on the three sets of territories clustered around the Danube: the Austrian Hereditary Lands, or *Erblande*; the Lands of the Bohemian Crown; and the Kingdom of Hungary.

The Erblande: Cockpit of Empire

At the heart of the Habsburg possessions lay the *Erblande*. Held since the Middle Ages, these included the Archduchies of Upper and Lower Austria with the capital of Vienna, Inner Austria (the duchies of Styria, Carinthia, Carniola), the Adriatic Principalities (Gorizia, Istria, Trieste), the Tyrol, and the Vorlande (Anterior Austria, Swabian Austria and the Voralberg). Geographically, these lands form a backwards 'L' extending eastward along the Danube and Mur rivers from Switzerland to the Hungarian Plain, and northward along the eastern face of the Alps to the Bohemian Plateau. The human composition of the *Erblande* was primarily German but with large enclaves of Croats, Hungarians, Slovenes and Italians in the south and east. By the mid-18th Century, Habsburg rulers would often refer to Bohemia and Moravia as being part of the *Erblande* but for the sake of clarity the term here will be used to describe the Austrian lands alone.

As the dynasty's original territorial possessions, the *Erblande* were the taproot of Habsburg political legitimacy in Central Europe, the seat of its capital, and a major contributor of war resources to the dynasty. Together with the neighboring Czech lands, they comprised the most populous and economically productive provinces of the Monarchy. Styria, Upper Austria and Carinthia were major sites of mining metallurgy and later industry, producing 75 percent of the

empire's pig iron by the late 18th Century (and more than all of Britain in Styria alone).⁸⁶ Vienna and the Voralberg were the site of a significant textile industry, with paper, glass and agriculture dominating elsewhere. In 1790, Lower Austria alone accounted for 50 percent of the empire's manufacturing firms.⁸⁷ Commercially, Outer Austria acted as a bridge to the nearby Swabian and Alsatian economies and wider Western European markets. The proximity of Upper and Lower Austria to the Danube and its tributaries made these provinces naturally integrated with the Bohemian and Hungarian trade networks at the empire's center, while Inner Austria's connected it to Northern Italy and the ports of Trieste and Fiume provided access to Mediterranean trade routes.⁸⁸

As a launch pad for empire-building, the *Erblande* possessed certain advantages: being partly mountainous, they were naturally defensible; being compact and ethnically homogenous, they were a usually reliable source of political support to the dynasty. But viewed as a cockpit from which to manage a large and complex empire, the *Erblande* had some limitations. Most notably, they were small – perhaps a fifth of the empire's overall landmass. While the local terrain was advantageous, the overall location of the *Erblande* subjected it to the pressures of East-Central European geopolitics. They were within easy striking distance of enemies in the south, where the Turks could reach Vienna with little warning, and in the north, where Prussia had a fast route through Bohemia to Vienna. This combination—a microcosm of the wider empire's mixture of defensive terrain and geopolitical vulnerability—made the possession of adequate buffer zones a prerequisite for Habsburg security.

Lands of the Bohemian Crown: Habsburg Coffers

To the north of the *Erblande* lay the Bohemian Crown Lands, a grouping of Medieval provinces acquired by the Habsburgs through marriage amid the political vacuum created by the defeat of the indigenous kingdoms at the hands of the Turks in the first quarter of the 16th Century.

⁸⁶ Good, pp. 20-1.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁸⁸ Ingraio, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, pp. 7-9.

These lands were centered on the Kingdom of Bohemia, ancient stronghold of the Czech kings, and included its historic appendages: the Margraviate of Moravia; the Duchy of Silesia; and for a period the Margravates of Upper and Lower Lusatia. Together, these territories formed a bell-shaped outcropping of highlands above Upper and Lower Austria along the parallel axis of the Vltava and Morava rivers, flanked by thick forests to the west and mountains to the north and east. Most of these lands were contained within the Bohemian Massif. An important outlier was Silesia, which lay beyond the Ore Mountains in the exposed Silesian Plain.

In geopolitical terms, the Bohemian Crown Lands can be viewed as an extension of the Habsburg heartland, and indeed they were commonly treated as such politically throughout the 18th Century.⁸⁹ They were the most thickly-peopled territories of the Monarchy, containing twice the population of the *Erblande*.⁹⁰ By Habsburg standards, they were relatively homogenous; all but Silesia were dominated by ethnic Czechs and Slovaks, with large concentrations of ethnic Germans in the towns and mountains. This pattern was reinforced by the waves of foreign (mainly German) nobility who took up the major estates following the eradication of the native Czech nobility at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. Unlike in the Austrian *Erblande*, confessional conflict had been a political leitmotif of history in the Czech provinces, though by the 18th Century the vigorous Counter-Reformation had rendered separatism (for the time being) a spent force and the territories well-integrated into the Habsburg polity. The territories were thenceforth a major source, both of manpower for the Army and of dynastically-loyal officials for service in Habsburg government.

Economically, the Bohemian Crown Lands were the strongest sources of export and revenue for the Habsburg Empire. Rich in minerals (iron, silver and tin), they were natural sites for the development of industry – textiles, glass in Bohemia, wool in Moravia, textiles around Prague and Brünn.⁹¹ The reign of Maria Theresa brought a boom in mills and manufacturing that

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

⁹⁰ Hochedlinger, p. 19.

⁹¹ Ingraio, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, pp. 11-12.

would result in about a third of all Habsburg manufacturing firms being located in the region.⁹² Eventually, cotton textiles and iron emerged as the principal industries. The contribution of tax revenue from the Czech lands exceeded that of other parts of the Monarchy by a considerable margin.⁹³ Silesia alone accounted for a quarter of Habsburg tax revenue – some 3.5 million florins per year by the early 1740s, making it, in the words of statesman and diplomat Baron von Bartenstein, “the true jewel of the house of Austria.”⁹⁴ Even after the definitive loss of Silesia to Prussia in 1745, the remainder of the Bohemian Crown Lands were providing many times the revenue of the *Erblande* (6 million florins by the 1750s compared to 1 million florins each for Inner Austria and the Archduchies respectively and no revenue at all from Tyrol and Outer Austria).⁹⁵

Strategically, the Czech lands performed several important functions for the Habsburg Empire. At 30,000 square miles and a fifth of the Monarchy’s overall population, they acted as a much-needed makeweight to the otherwise small Austrian *Erblande* and a politically-reliable counterweight to the territorially large and often obstreperous Hungarian Lands. In military terms the possession of extensive northern territories rich in defensive rivers provided much-needed strategic depth vis-à-vis Prussia. Economically, the merging of the Czech and Austrian lands into a developed industrial region, when combined with the territorially large but economically backward agricultural hinterland of Hungary, provided a high degree of economic complementarity.⁹⁶

Other features of the Czech lands presented challenges. Strategically, the loss of Silesia would deprive the northwestern Habsburg frontier of a substantial buffer, presenting Prussia with easy access to Vienna via invasion routes that led through the empire’s richest territories.⁹⁷ Economically, the close proximity of Czech rivers to the Elbe facilitated commercial exchanges

⁹² Good, p. 23.

⁹³ Ingraio, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, p. 161.

⁹⁴ Browning, pp. 42 and 108.

⁹⁵ Ingraio, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, pp. 132 and 164.

⁹⁶ Good, p. 25.

⁹⁷ Ingraio, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, p. 160.

with the German territories, luring the region's trade toward the markets of Western Europe.⁹⁸ Demographically, despite the relative degree of integration in the early modern period, the presence of a large ethnic non-German population with a history of political independence would become a source of tension in the 19th century.

Kingdom of Hungary: Breadbasket of Empire

To the east of the *Erblande* lay the vast Kingdom of Hungary, comprising both the rump of territory north of the Danube that had avoided incorporation into the Ottoman Empire in the 17th Century (so-called 'Royal Hungary') and the large tablelands of the Hungarian Plain and Transylvania that stretched beyond it to the Carpathian Mountains. Remnants of a Medieval Kingdom that had once encompassed most of the Danubian Basin outside of Alpine Austria, Hungary included a number of distinct territories, including modern-day Croatia, Slovakia, and a large portion of Romania. Together, these lands marked the transition point between the forested landscape of Central Europe and the grasslands of the Eurasian steppe. They extended along the north-south column of the parallel Danube and Tisza rivers, bordered by the Czech highlands in the north, the Sava and Lower Danube in the south and the elongated elbow of Transylvanian Alps in the east.

Geopolitically, Hungary played two roles in the Habsburg Monarchy. Its northern and central territories were a *de facto* extension of the Habsburg heartland, being well-watered, populous and the center of Hungarian industry. Its eastern approaches formed a large hinterland that had been useful as a buffer zone between Austria and the Turks in previous centuries and would continue to be treated as a kind of internalized buffer long after it had been formally incorporated into the Monarchy.

The Hungarian economy was primarily agrarian. Despite comprising almost 38 percent of the Monarchy's total population by the late 18th Century, the Hungarian lands were economically

⁹⁸ Good, p. 32.

backward, both as a result of long wars with the Turks and archaic social structures. Industry was under-developed. Although Budapest, with its large population of urban Germans and Jews, was a significant source of commerce, Hungary made up a much smaller proportion of Habsburg industry than the smaller Austrian or Czech lands. Northern portions of Hungary in modern-day Slovakia were an important center of mining and the ports of the Croatian coast held some commercial significance through long exposure to the trade of the Mediterranean. But as a whole, Hungary's main economic contribution to the Habsburg economy was agricultural, in providing large volumes of grain, livestock and other commodities from Inner Hungary.

Politically, the Hungarian lands were late and reluctant participants in Habsburg empire-building. A long history of Magyar independence had created a reactionary and economically entrenched political class with a strong emotional attachment to the accumulated privileges of the past. These inherited privileges derived from the so-called *Tripartitum*, a 1514 legal arrangement whereby the Hungarian nobility was largely exempted from taxation. As a result of this arrangement, an unusual amount of wealth was concentrated in a narrow slice of the nobility, with around a hundred families controlling about a third of Hungary's land. Renegotiation of the terms of this exemption and other vestigial Magyar rights would be a source of perennial friction. The resulting feuds had a significant impact in impeding the economic development of Hungary, slowing the removal of internal trade barriers and stunting investment and public works on the scale needed to improve river transport in Hungary's central region.⁹⁹ Attempts at removing these privileges tended to be triggers for conflict.

The strength of the Habsburg heartland in geopolitical terms was the relatively compact and complementary nature of its core territories. The proximity of a small but wealthy and populous Austria and Bohemia to a large and resource-rich Hungary, all tied together by riverine networks, created the natural conditions for a common market. What one historian called a "marriage of textiles and wheat" when referring to the internal economic exchange of the

⁹⁹ McNeill, p. 216.

Austrian and Hungarian lands at a later date in the empire's history was in reality a marriage of Austrian (and Czech) textiles, Hungarian wheat and Bohemian coin.¹⁰⁰

Size and Contribution of Major Habsburg Territories, c. 1780s

Habsburg Region	Proportion of population	Proportion of landmass	Contribution to Army
<i>Erblande</i>	18.9% (4.3 million)	17.8% (43,110 sq mi)	Approx. 70.2% (153,864 men)
Bohemian Crownlands	19.3% (4.4 million)	12.7% (30,533 sq mi)	
Hungary	37.4% (8.5 million)	51.8% (125,402 sq mi)	Approx. 20.5% (44,936 men)

Source: Hochedlinger and Dickson Vol. II.
Army calculations are author's own.

The Price of Complexity

The ability of the Habsburg state to realize the full potential of these core territories would be a major determinant of its performance as a Great Power. Historically, the success of states in strategic competition has been a byproduct of the extent to which they can achieve mastery over the internal resources at their disposal.¹⁰¹ This in turn has depended on two things: the

¹⁰⁰ Good, p. 228.

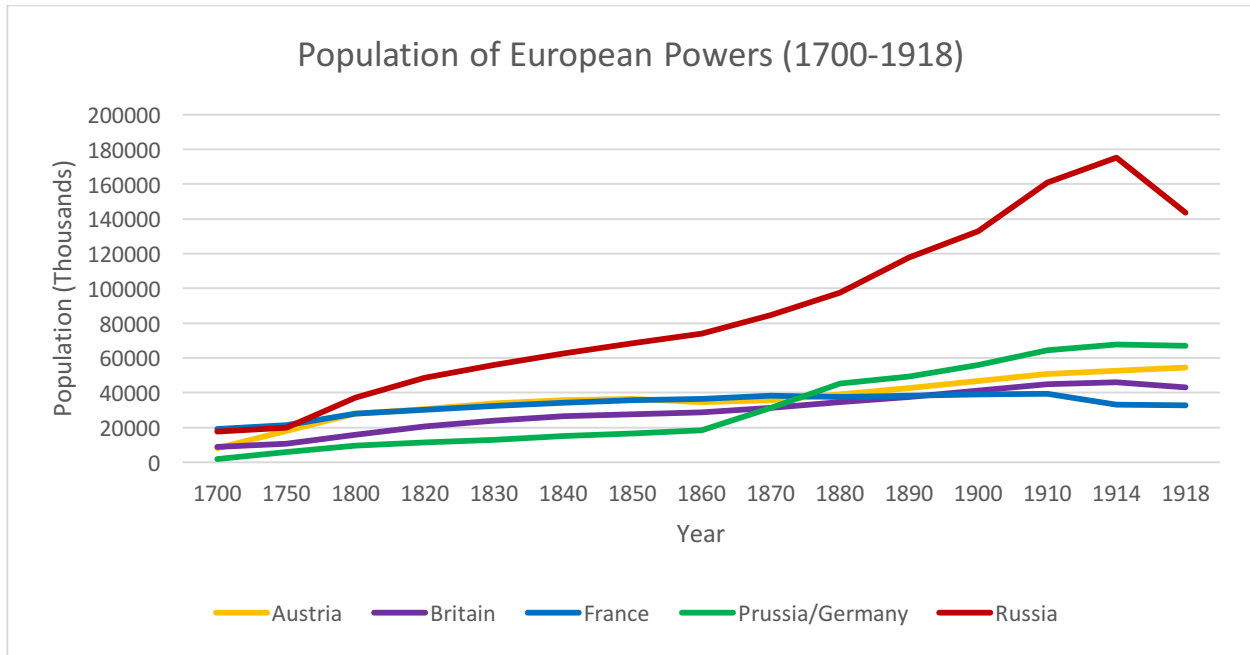
¹⁰¹ In the words of Charles Tilly, "war made the state, and the state made war." Charles Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 42.

ability of a state's central government to dominate its constituent parts and efficiently organize their capacity for war; and the ability of a state's population to provide a sufficient degree of unity to support the state's political aims. Beginning in the 18th Century, major European states had begun to develop both features, placing them on a track to become the centralized nation-states that formed the basis for the large Great Powers of the 19th Century.

On paper, the Habsburg Monarchy possessed many of the traits necessary to become a modern Great Power. Its combined land mass was larger than any European power except Russia. Its population, while smaller than France's, was on par with other large powers. Its physical resources, stemming from fertile soils, metal-rich mountains and abundant rivers, gave it one of the greatest potential power bases of any state in the European states system. And the configuration of the Habsburg lands, combining a developed industrial core with a agricultural hinterland made the Monarchy a good candidate for the mercantilist policies that most European powers would use to achieve aggressive centralization as modern military states in the 18th Century.¹⁰²

But in reality, the empire was never able to realize this full potential. The Monarchy's unique political geography made it different from emerging nation-states in two important ways: (1) by imposing residually feudal forms of government that impeded the quest for administrative efficiency and (2) by imparting a degree of ethnic complexity that hindered internal unity. These factors obstructed the mobilization of the Monarchy's nominally large power base, while complicating its use of those resources that it did mobilize. Together, they made it harder for Austria to adapt to match the strength and efficiency of its rivals, thus placing it at a disadvantage in geopolitical competition.

¹⁰² Good, p. 25.



Source: Correlates of War Database.

1. Administrative Inefficiency

Although geographically contiguous, the territories that made up the Monarchy's geopolitical base were for much of Habsburg history semi-independent polities with little in the way of a common constitutional character.¹⁰³ Until the mid-18th Century, the core Danubian territories, including not only the Czech and Hungarian lands but even the original possessions in Austria itself, maintained distinctive political and contractual arrangements with the Monarchy, all entailing different obligations on the part of the territories and corresponding responsibilities and limitations on the part of the ruler.¹⁰⁴ This setup was a product of the late Middle Ages, when the dynasty in its relative penury sought funds from the landed elite to support the running expenses of a court and army. The result was perennial horse-trading between Dynast and Estates, which eventually settled into an annual process whereby the provincial assemblies, or diets, would vote to sustain a certain level of support for the imperial center

¹⁰³ Ingraio, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, pp. 7-10.

¹⁰⁴ The following section draws extensively on the recent, extensive work of Michael Hochedlinger, who has done much to elucidate the military history of Austria in the 17th and 18th centuries in his excellent and highly-detailed *Austria's Wars of Emergence*, (New York: Routledge, 2013).

through taxes. As part of this dynamic, an annual allotment, or *Kontribution*, was raised to fund the Army. In exchange, the Habsburgs made certain political concessions to each Estate which became the basis for a governing consensus with the various local nobilities of the Monarchy.¹⁰⁵ In these arrangements, the Estates held the power of the purse and operated most of the machinery for collecting taxes—a portion of which they withheld for themselves. As Prince Eugene bemoaned, “the title of emperor does not bring with it a single man nor Kreutzer. He must even negotiate with his empire.”¹⁰⁶

These constraints gave Habsburg power a “mediated” character, in which the ruler negotiated with his subjects to obtain the implements of state power.¹⁰⁷ This was true to varying degrees of most European states of the early modern period. However, where other states gradually and purposefully shed these vestiges of feudalism—breaking the corporate privileges of the nobility, Church and other bodies to centralize the power of the state for war—the Habsburgs retained many of these features well into the 18th Century. In addition to influencing the extent and character of Austria’s performance in its wars of emergence, this slower pace in the Monarchy’s political evolution stunted its development as a geopolitical actor at a critical moment when continental powers like France and Prussia were achieving greater efficiency in matters of state and war. Other states of this period that failed to evolve these functions at a brisk pace—most notably, 18th Century Poland—quickly fell behind in military competition and ceased to exist as independent polities. A similar fate for Austria would perhaps have occurred were it not for the more protective geography and sheer size of the state.

While spared Poland’s fate, the persistence of residual feudalism in Habsburg governance nevertheless decisively affected Austrian strategic capabilities, ensuring that its potential power routinely outstripped its strength in actual power attributes. The most important constraint in this regard was financial, in the extent of available monetary resources with which to field armies. The Habsburg state found it harder than its western rivals to predictably fund

¹⁰⁵ Hochedlinger, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Eugene, p. 77.

¹⁰⁷ In the words of Hochedlinger, “the Austrian Habsburgs did not so much rule through the Estates but rather jointly with them.” See Hodechlinger, p. 268.

military endeavors. Even when the Estates-centric funding system operated smoothly, revenues routinely fell short of what was needed to sustain Habsburg forces through the crises that frequently beset the Monarchy. Amounts raised by the *Kontribution* were almost always wildly exceeded by military needs, generally amounting to between a third and half of what was actually required in the late 17th and 18th Century.¹⁰⁸ In the War of Spanish Succession, the Monarchy was only able to raise about a quarter of the funds it needed, fielding an army and budget about one-tenth the size of France's.¹⁰⁹ At the outset of the wars with Frederick II a few decades later, the Austrian state was on the verge of bankruptcy, with an army of barely 30,000 men; Prussia, by contrast went into the war with a budget surplus and an army nearly triple that of Austria's, despite possessing only a fraction of the Habsburg Monarchy's size and an eighth its population.¹¹⁰ In the Seven Years War, the *Kontribution* provided less than a third (114.3 million) of the 391.8 million florins ultimately needed for the war effort, with most of the balance coming from loans and taxes.¹¹¹

So severe were the financial constraints on the Habsburg state that Count Haugwitz, Supreme Chancellor and a driver of attempts at reform under Maria Theresa, called its convoluted revenue system an "internal enemy fully as dangerous to the Crown as the more obvious enemies without."¹¹² Tackling this "enemy" would motivate Habsburg reform efforts from the early 18th to the 20th Century. The impetus to do so, as with the development of more accurate cartography, was geopolitical in nature, arising from the pressure of the French and later Prussian military threats.¹¹³ Beginning in doses under Joseph I and gaining force from 1748 onward under Maria Theresa, the Monarchy implemented measures to strengthen the central power of the state and keep pace with an ever-evolving competitive landscape populated by strong foes. By the final quarter of the 18th Century these efforts had broken the power of the Estates and would continue to bear considerable fruit into the 19th Century in rationalizing

108 Ibid., p. 37

109 Charles W. Ingrao, *In Quest and Crisis: Emperor Joseph I and the Habsburg Monarchy* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1979), p. 28 and Hochedlinger, p. 37.

110 Bassett, pp. 85-6.

111 Hochedlinger, p. 285.

112 Quoted in P. G. M. Dickson, *Finance and Government under Maria Theresa 1740-1780*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 223.

113 Hochedlinger, p. 29.

imperial administration, increasing state revenues from domestic sources and fielding ever-larger armies.

Even with these reforms, the Habsburg Monarchy would only rarely realize its full military potential—and then, only for short stretches usually coinciding with times of great crisis.¹¹⁴ The root of the problem was a set of essentially Medieval political institutions, the corporate rights of which even the most determined monarchs often had difficulty curtailing.¹¹⁵ While Maria Theresa would be successful in breaking down duplicative government structures and provincial particularism, and subordinating the Austrian and Bohemian Estates to central rule, the Monarchy would struggle for decades, unsuccessfully, to find a way of realizing the financial and military potential of its largest and most populous province, Hungary. After a brief period of abrogation under Leopold I following Hungary's re-conquest from the Turks, the Magyars managed with only occasional interruptions to protect their historic tax exemptions until the mid-19th Century. As a result, for most of the Monarchy's history, a large portion of what would have been a fundamental pillar of state power and resources base was at best only partially contributing directly to the state's revenue stream.

Nowhere is this absence more visible than in the composition of the Habsburg Army. Over-reliance on recruitment from Austria and Bohemia, a byproduct of Hungarian constitutional exceptionalism, persisted for much of the Monarchy's history. Between 1706 and 1742, Hungarians (including ethnic Magyars and subject ethnicities of the Hungarian Crown) consistently made up between 2 and 6 percent of the Army, while from 1743 to 1794, their numbers hover between 15 and 20 percent—startling percentages, considering that Hungary accounted for around a half of the empire's total land mass and more than a third of its population. These proportions changed little in the 19th Century; in 1865, ethnic Magyars still made up around 6 percent of the Army, compared to 26 percent for ethnic Germans (slightly

¹¹⁴ Even in the mid-19th Century, at the high-point of Habsburg military spending, one historian notes, "Austrian forces were always 20 to 25 percent smaller than was generally admitted." See Gordon A. Craig, *The Battle of Königgrätz: Prussia's Victory Over Austria, 1866*, p. 29.

¹¹⁵ Ingraio, *In Quest*, pp. 3-4.

more than their population strength) and percentages for smaller ethnicities often well in excess of their population.¹¹⁶

While the degree of special treatment accorded to Hungary was unique, vestigial arrangements of this kind—for the Estates, the Church segments of the nobility, and later, other so-called ‘master’ nationalities—would constrain the power of the Monarchy throughout its lifetime. Where the dynasty had begged the Estates for money in the first half of the 18th Century, later in the 19th Century it would face a less formally constrained but still unpredictable and conflict-prone process of negotiating an annual military budget in two separate parliaments. These dynamics made Habsburg war funding a hand-to-mouth exercise at a time when the Monarchy’s rivals were regularizing their defense budgets on a fixed basis. While frequently fielding large armies in times of war, Austria nevertheless consistently ranked near the bottom the bottom of Europe’s Great Powers in military spending and manpower. (See Figures).

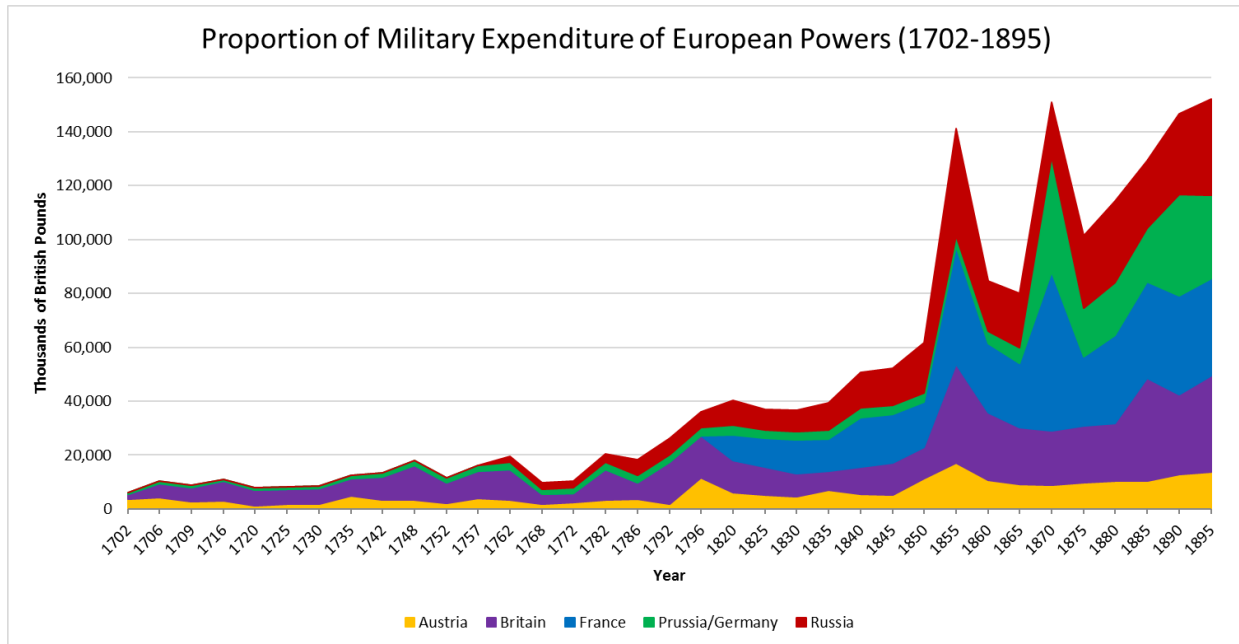
Revenue and Finance

Difficulty organizing resources for war led the state to look for other means to support its foreign policy and military goals. In peacetime, gaps between revenue and spending could usually be covered from special taxes or other measures. In wartime, however, spending mushroomed, pressuring the Monarchy to find money from other sources. The main recourse was to loans, both from domestic and foreign sources. Throughout its lifetime the Monarchy engaged in borrowing on a fairly large scale. At the end of the French and Ottoman wars of the 1680s the Habsburg debt stood at around 10 million florins—a figure that had grown to 25 million by 1700 and by 1740 was 100 million—a 900 percent increase in little over fifty years.¹¹⁷ Even with the introduction of reforms to streamline administration and expand

¹¹⁶ For 18th Century, see Hochedlinger, p. 281; Dickson, Volume II, Appendix A, pp. 344-352; and Sondhaus, pp. 225-34. For 19th Century, the figures above were calculated using Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, p. 61: “128,286 Germans, 96,300 Czechs and Slovaks, 52,700 Italians, 22,700 Slovenes, 20,700 Romanians, 19,000 Serbs, 50,100 Ruthenes, 37,700 Poles, 32,500 Magyars, 27,600 Croats, and 5,100 other nationalities.”

¹¹⁷ Hochedlinger, pp. 37-9.

revenue, the stock of Habsburg debt continued to increase, reaching 542 million florins by the end of the century.¹¹⁸



Source: Correlates of War Database.

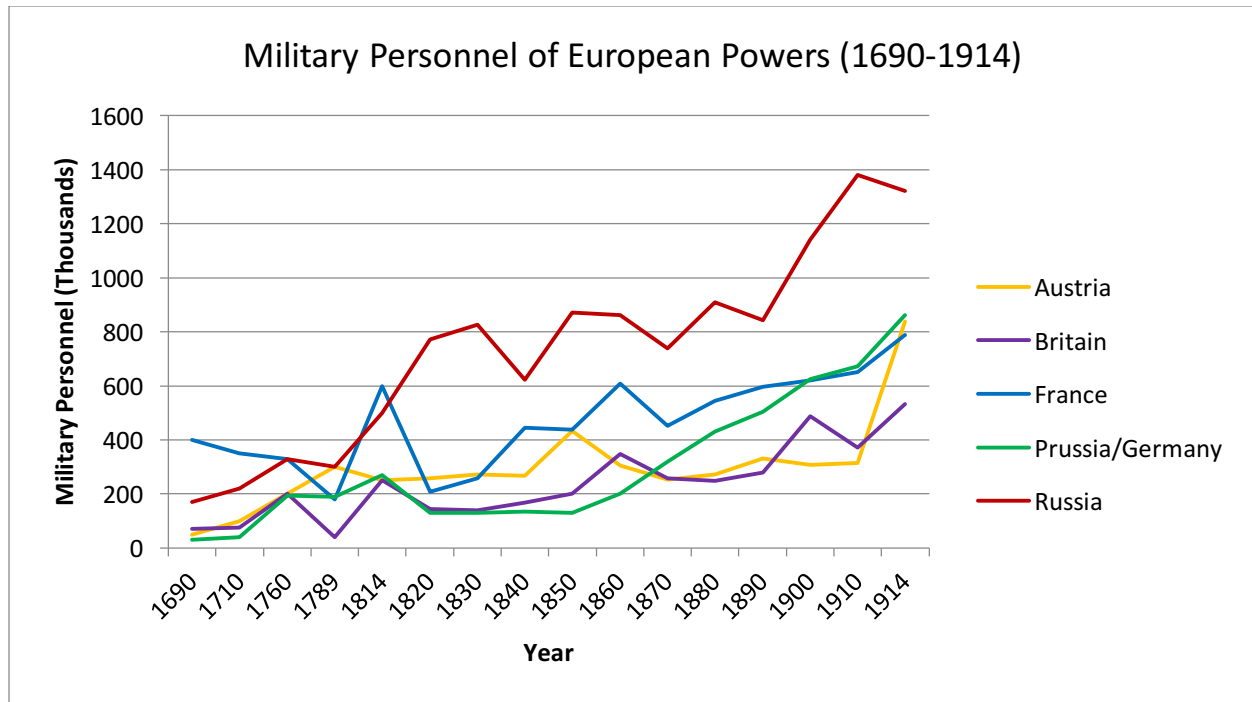
A large amount of this borrowing—about three-quarters in the first half of the Century—was from internal sources. The Habsburgs generally preferred domestic credit in peacetime but would aggressively tap foreign sources when hostilities broke out.¹¹⁹ The creation of the Vienna City Bank in 1706 allowed for the retirement of a portion of the state’s 17th Century debt, as well as a widening of the empire’s domestic and foreign base of private lenders. Additional borrowing took place among the Estates, with Vienna occasionally resorting to mortgaging Estate-based revenues to secure financing. The balance shifted gradually toward overseas borrowing from the mid-18th Century onward, first in Amsterdam and London and then to the growing capital markets in Brussels, Genoa and Milan.¹²⁰ In wartime, the Monarchy was usually kept afloat by financial aid from allies, which often took the form of

118. See Michael Pammer, “Public Finance in Austria-Hungary, 1820-1913” in Jose Luis Cardoso and Pedro Lains, Eds., *Paying for the Liberal State: The Rise of Public Finance in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010), p. 156 and Hochedlinger, pp. 78-9.

119 Dickson, p. 47.

120 Scott, p. 51.

guarantees for borrowing on foreign money markets.¹²¹ So decisive was British monetary help in the War of Spanish Succession that Prince Eugene wrote to the emperor, somewhat sarcastically, that war for Austria was “impossible without the money of England” and Frederick II would complain that Britain was “the mainspring of the Austrian machine.”¹²²



Source: Correlates of War Database.

The basic contours of Habsburg military funding continued into the 19th Century, albeit with more predictable revenue streams and expenditure patterns, and a large legacy deficit.¹²³ In the immediate post-Napoleonic, or *Vormärz*, period, indirect taxation came to comprise a large portion of revenue (especially customs and excise, plus salt and tobacco monopolies). From the mid-19th Century, the burden would tilt toward direct taxation (especially on land) and by 1854, a third of all revenue was going toward the servicing of the public debt.¹²⁴ With the

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

¹²² Eugene, p. 43; and Frederick II quoted in Browning, p. 102.

¹²³ For detailed accounts of Habsburg war financing in this period, see Thomas Charles Banfield, *The Austrian Empire: Her Population and Resources* in *The British and Foreign Review of European Quarterly Journal*, No. XXVII (London: R. and J.E. Taylor, 1842), pp. 218-287; and Pammer, cited above.

¹²⁴ Pammer, pp. 144-46 and Blake and Prescott, p. 587.

resumption of military crises in this period, Vienna's fiscal position deteriorated and the 1850s saw an explosion of military expenditure, state debt and the issuance of bank paper, with a corresponding increase in tax revenues (achieved in the large part by ending Hungary's tax privileges in 1849 and introducing wider systems of direct taxation). Eventually, the Monarchy had to resort to transferring responsibility for outstanding paper currency to the National Bank, alongside mortgaging the proceeds from salt mines, state monopolies and entire classes of tax revenue.¹²⁵

Habsburg Debt

War is expensive. For the Habsburgs, the costs of warfare grew steadily over the Monarchy's lifetime. The 1716-1718 Turkish war cost 43 million florins—almost double the military budget for that period.¹²⁶ The War of Polish Succession cost 73 million florins, only 14 million of which could be afforded out of pocket. The Turkish War of 1735-1739 cost 146 million florins; the War of Austrian Succession about 185.85 million florins; and the Seven Years War 392 million.¹²⁷ The five-year war of the first coalition against Napoleon cost about 500 million florins.¹²⁸ Even wars against a nominally weaker rival could rapidly deplete the resources of the state. The three campaigns of the 1788-91 Turkish war, to cite one example, cost more than 70 million florins apiece (214-223 million total), at a time when annual revenue was about 80 million florins.¹²⁹

The costs of war represent a burden to any state. The Habsburg Empire's rivals also spent vigorously on the military and frequently went into debt to fund their wars. Britain borrowed on a prodigious scale throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, but maintained a debt-servicing capacity that was among the highest of Europe's Great Powers. France also borrowed

¹²⁵ Karl Marx, "Austrian Bankruptcy," *New York Daily Tribune*, March 22, 1854.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1854-03-22/ed-1/seq-4/> (accessed May 19, 2016).

¹²⁶ Wilson, Peter H. *German Armies: War and German Politics, 1648-1806* (London: UCL Press, 1998), pp. 112 and 235.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235 and P. G. M. Dickson, (1987, vol. 2), Table 4.1, p. 119 and (1987, vol. 2), Table 4.4, p. 388.

¹²⁸ Hochedlinger, p. 425

¹²⁹ Leopold Kolowrat, Nota, 29 Dec. 1789, Kabinettsarchiv, Nachlässe der Kabinettskanzlei, 17 (Nr. 1097-1174), LK 1146, HNSA Wien. See also Dickson (2007), Table 6, p. 52-53.

frequently, while Prussia was known for an efficient tax system (though also often dependent on subsidies) and Russia possessed an underdeveloped financial system backed by prodigious if inefficiently organized internal resources.¹³⁰

What set Austria apart in its geopolitical relationship with money was its combination of a weak economic base and exposure to four-sided security competition. Habsburg geography subjected the Monarchy to greater military challenges than its limited resource-mobilization capabilities could support. This created more numerous triggers for debt growth than most states face and ensured that, once incurred, debt would form recurrent overhangs to burden the economy in peacetime. By contrast, Austria's rivals could usually find some form of alleviation from these pressures. Prussia, for example, shared Austria's multi-sided security position but possessed a stronger economic base that helped to ameliorate debt burdens. Russia, though possessing a relatively weak economic base, occupied a more insulated geopolitical position facing less security pressure.

Once at war, or even in the prelude to war, the money crunch began to be felt very quickly, limiting the Monarchy's geopolitical options. An indication of how sharply these pressures could be felt can be seen in the correspondence of Habsburg monarchs and ministers. As Maria Theresa wrote to Joseph II about mounting costs in the early phase of the War of Bavarian Succession:

You are going to feel the consequences [of spending] later. The monthly accounts are arriving in complete disorder. I fear chaos; such financial sums can have dire consequences. Eventually, one surrenders and simply goes for a cut-off... Over the past four months we spent at least six million in excess of the monthly sum set by yourself, while in July there was already an advance of 1.8 million florins for the coming year, only to be followed by another demand for 600,000 florins in August. If things continue on this path, no imaginable order/system can be maintained. Time is needed. Our losses worsen available credit rates abroad, and the depredations of the private sectors those at home...

I only dive into these details in response to your remarks calling for the mobilization of all [national] strength in the

¹³⁰ Lieven, p. 140.

war. I cannot see how that would be possible. We ought to be weaker by 30 to 40,000 men, whereas it will be impossible to maintain an army stronger than this year. We should be happy if we are able to sustain our current force level.¹³¹

The longer a war lasted, the greater the likelihood that the costs incurred would outstrip the limited resources of the state. While this rule generally applies for any state, it was a particular concern for the Habsburgs, partly because the empire's baseline financial position was usually one of indebtedness and partly its vulnerable geography penalized lengthy distractions. The advent of war against one rival could set in motion potentially exponential borrowing, at the same time that the Monarchy needed to remain on guard against other rivals and be prepared to see even small and initially limited conflicts spiral into broader (and therefore longer and more expensive) crises.

The methods used to cover the gaps between the state's resource base and military needs also brought disadvantages that grew more acute the longer a war lasted. Subsidies came with expectations among Austria's allies that they could, on some level, influence its foreign policy and even military objectives on the battlefield. As a conflict dragged on and new fronts required attention, this could become a source of intra-alliance friction, as Habsburg efforts to address threatened fronts not aligning with the ally's interests opened up divergences in war strategy, as occurred in both the War of Spanish Succession and Austrian Succession. Eugene's complaint that allies "are often very inconvenient and become a sort of tutors" is echoed in Maria Theresa's advice to Kaunitz on the eve of negotiations at the end of the Austrian succession struggle in 1748 to find ways of relying on Austria's own cunning "rather than to beg for foreign money and thereby remain in subordination."¹³² For obvious reasons, borrowing could sour relations with allies after a war. In the 1820s, inability to pay debts from the 1790s (with interest, around 20 million pounds) strained links between Vienna and London

¹³¹ Maria Theresa an Josef, September 5, 1778 in Schneider, pp. 88-90. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>.

¹³² Eugene, p. 99 and Browning, p. 351.

at a pivotal moment in the Eastern Question, arguably contributing to the eventual collapse of the Metternich's Congress system.¹³³

Large-scale external borrowing created debt overhangs that could constrain strategic options and require military retrenchment in the post-war period. During the 18th Century, debt servicing typically accounted for a volume of state expenditure (about 30 percent) second only to the Army.¹³⁴ By comparison, debt servicing for the United States usually stands at about six percent of annual spending. The years following the Seven Years War, Napoleonic Wars and the 1850s-60s are all prime examples of the strictures that could result from periods of substantial borrowing.

And while internal borrowing was more reliable as a source of funding than loans from external sources, extraordinary domestic collections could also be problematic. Money-printing money ran the risk of triggering runaway inflation, which only added to economic instability at moments when the Monarchy could ill afford it (even if high inflation in practice was one way to liquidate debts). This dynamic could also be encouraged by foreign powers, as France did by attempting to flood Austria with forged currency during the Napoleonic Wars.¹³⁵ At moments of great crisis, complete shortages of money could lead the state to extreme measures, including redenomination, write-downs of paper currency and even rounding up bullion and silver plate.¹³⁶ Emergency levies or increased taxation could have ripples within the Monarchy's unusual domestic fabric and strain Vienna's relationship with key constituencies, especially the Magyar nobility.

¹³³ Alan Palmer, *Metternich* (London: The History Book Club, 1972), p. 208.

¹³⁴ Hochedlinger, p. 84.

¹³⁵ Gunther E. Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary: Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army 1792-1814* (Jackson: De Capo Press, 1995), p. 221.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Money and Time

All of this translated into pressure for short wars. Habsburg rulers and their ministers were keenly aware of the fiscal burdens brought by war and frequently advocated military restraint or even avoiding war altogether in order to offset these risks. Maria Theresa's letters to Joseph II in the War of Bavarian Succession, itself more a game of maneuvers than a shooting war, abound with warnings about the state of the Monarchy's finances and the need to be a "cheap-minded" (*billig denkende*) ruler and avoid a prolonged crisis.¹³⁷ In the aftermath of Joseph II's Turkish war, the Monarchy's supreme chancellor, Count Leopold Kolowrat used grim reports outlining the inexorable growth in military spending to counsel against a new war.¹³⁸ In a similar vein, Habsburg Finance Minister Count Michael Wallis warned amidst the wars with Napoleon that the "no war could be undertaken by Austria for at least ten, perhaps another thirty years."¹³⁹ These constraints carried over into the early 19th Century, sometimes limiting Austria's options for handling even small crises. An 1821 uprising in northern Italy could only be undertaken with a loan from the Rothschilds, prompting the Finance Minister to ask Metternich "for the love of God, how is this to be paid for?" and to joke that the empire was "armed for perpetual peace."¹⁴⁰ In 1827, Emperor Francis was constrained from his preferred response to aggressive Russian moves in the Balkans of sending an observation corps of 100,000 into Hungary by economic concerns, and again in 1831 financial problems curtailed Austrian options for handling crises in Italy.¹⁴¹ Even at the height of the 1848 Revolution, a moment of existential peril for the Monarchy, Treasury officials arguing for a diplomatic rather than military solution to the problems in Italy on the grounds that "ever-continuing" reinforcements would have disastrous ripple effects for Austria's credit and financial solvency from.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ See for example Maria Theresa an Josef. 2. August 1778 in Schneider, pp. 75-78. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>.

¹³⁸ Leopold Kolowrat, Summarischer Ausweis, Kabinettsarchiv, Nachlässe der Kabinettskanzlei, 17 (Nr. 1097-1174), LK 1168, HHSA, Wien and Kolowrat, Nota, 29 Dec. 1789, Ibid.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Alan Sked, *Radetzky: Imperial Victor and Military Genius* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris and Co., 2011), p. 30.

¹⁴⁰ Palmer, p. 200 and Bridge, p. 33

¹⁴¹ Palmer, pp. 241 and 249.

¹⁴² Quoted in Sked, *Radetzky*, pp. 126-127.

Fiscal constraints were also felt by Austrian military commanders once the Monarchy was at war. The field correspondence of Prince Eugene is filled with lamentations about the inability to carry out war “without troops or money,” with the eventually Prince threatening to resign more than once in protest over the inability to pay his regiments.¹⁴³ Lack of funding gutted the Habsburg Army in the lead-up to the First Silesian War, leading to northern fortresses so weak that one only contained a single, leather cannon dating from the previous century. Even after years of fighting in the Napoleonic Wars, Archduke Charles would nervously ask, on the eve of the 1805 campaign, “What would be the financial consequences of war? While such would ordinarily be purview of the Fiscal Administration, anyone who would wish to make pronouncements on the possibilities in military operations must make some account of the money necessary.”¹⁴⁴ And General Radetzky, Austria’s foremost commander of the post-Napoleonic period, would repeatedly find the size of his armies and range of logistical options curtailed by the, in his words, “immense financial pressures” facing the Monarchy, prompting him to write lengthy memoranda filled with ideas on how to maintain operational efficiency amidst conditions of budget austerity, with titles like “How To Maintain Good and Large Armies at Little Cost.”¹⁴⁵

In addition to placing limits on the empire’s own range of options, the Monarchy’s usually impecunious state presented an opportunity for its rivals to pursue what today be called “cost-imposition” strategies—the practice of using sustained military expenditures or the development of new technologies to force a rival into a scale of exertions beyond its ability to sustain. The combination of internal weakness and encirclement made Austria unusually susceptible to such strategies, allowing opponents on one frontier to undertake local military build-ups in the knowledge that matching these moves while maintaining other frontiers would

¹⁴³ See for example Eugene, p. 135.

¹⁴⁴ Erzherzog Karl an Kaiser Franz, Wien, am 3. März 1804 in Alfred Kraus, k.u.k. Generalmajor, *Beilagen zu 1805: Der Feldzug von Ulm* (Wien: Verlag von L. W. Seidel und Sohn, K. u. K. Hofbuchhändler, 1912), p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Radetzky, “Wie Kann Man Gute und Grosse Herre mit Wenig Kosten Erhalten,” December 1834, in *Denkschriften*, pp. 534-552.

place financial and military strains on Austria. This in turn allowed rivals to attempt to force diplomatic concessions that would have been harder to extract from a stronger opponent.

2. Ethnic Complexity

The second feature of Habsburg political geography that distinguished the Monarchy from its rivals was its ethnic composition. For any state, building a strong material base requires a foundation of internal unity. Historically, most have derived this unity from shared ethnic or religious commonalities among the population. Even multi-ethnic empires have been preceded by and built around an earlier, successful attempt at forging a homogenous group that provides a sufficiently numerous and loyal core from which to exert political rule the heterogenous periphery. For the Habsburg Monarchy, the ingredients for state-building on this traditional template were lacking. Where Austria's western rivals possessed the building-blocks to become large nation-states and its eastern rivals were able to forge empires led by a single dominant nationality, Austria was characterized by a bewildering degree of ethnic complexity over which the imperial center was never able to achieve more than partial dominance. This reality would place limitations on Austria's performance, both in the task of empire-building and in how it competed geopolitically with major rivals.

Ethnicities and Empire-Building

Mile-for-mile, the Danubian Basin is home to one of the densest concentrations of ethnic diversity of any comparably-sized space in the world. Major groups populating the Habsburg lands included Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, Ukrainians, Slovenes and Romanians, with smaller numbers of Jews, Gypsies, Greeks, Bosnians, Szeklers and Ruthenians. Altogether at its highpoint in the 19th Century, the Monarchy was home to no fewer than 14 ethnic groups speaking 17 languages and practicing 9 religions—all in a physical space 260,000 square miles in size. By comparison, the Ottoman Empire of the same period contained a similar number of ethnicities spread across a landmass of about 700,000 square miles—more than double that of the Habsburg Monarchy.

From a geopolitical perspective, the crucial aspect of the empire's ethnic makeup was not its diversity *per se*; other European empires, most notably Russia but also to a certain extent Prussia, were also made up of more than one ethnic group. Indeed, throughout the 18th Century and well into the pre-nationalist era, ethnic homogeneity was neither a prerequisite to effective state-building nor particularly prevalent among the major powers of Europe.

Distribution of Major Ethnicities in the Habsburg Monarchy, ca. 1900

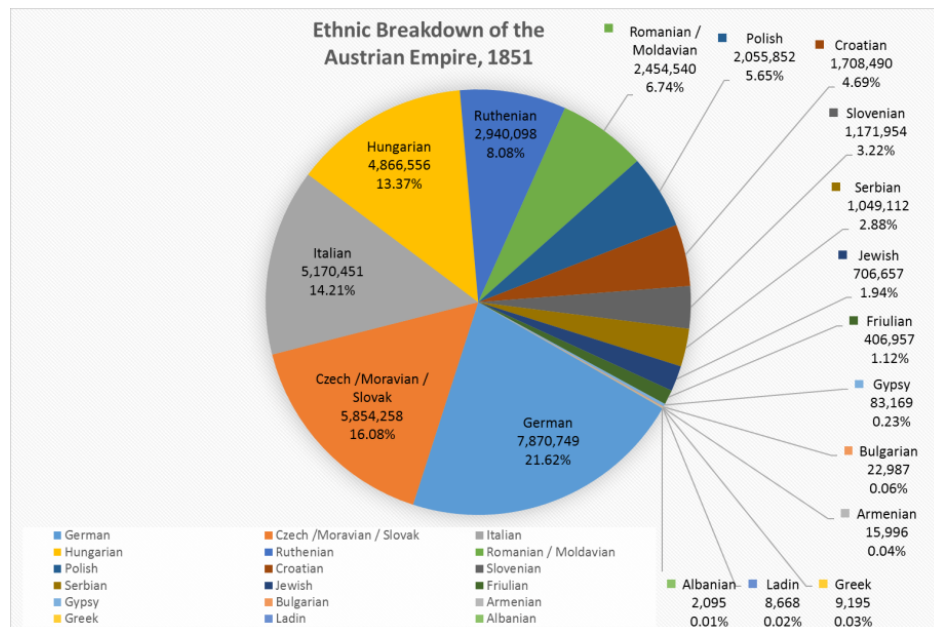


Source: Habsburg Territorial Maps.

What made the Habsburg Monarchy different was the absence of a dominant ethnic group sufficiently numerous to subjugate under a unified language and culture. Statistically, ethnic Germans made up about a quarter of the population, Magyars another quarter, and Slavs of various types a little less than half.¹⁴⁶ In the Russian Empire, by comparison, ethnic

¹⁴⁶ G.E. Mitton, *Austria Hungary* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1914), p. 7.

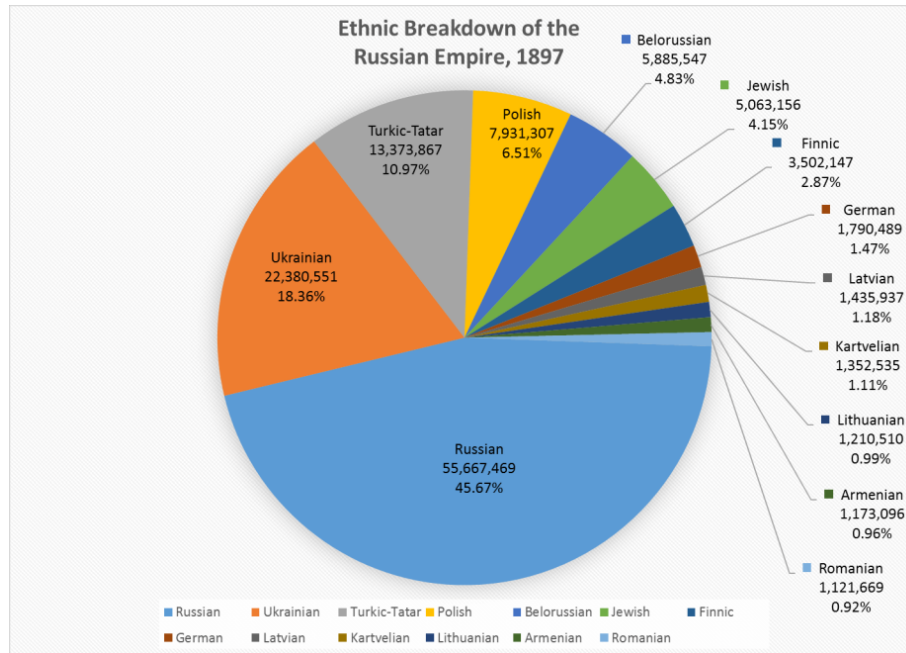
Russians made up just under half of the population (44 percent)—a proportion that was considerably higher at earlier stages of the state-formation process, before the Tsar’s armies had acquired new territories. If culturally similar groups such as Ukrainians and the Baltic Germans who maintained a symbiotic relationship with the ethnic Russian elite are added to the equation, the percentage is even higher—around 67 percent. In Prussia, ethnic Germans made up an even higher proportion: more than 80 percent, out of a mixed population that included Poles, Lithuanians, Czechs and other minorities. (See figure). In both Prussia and Russia, the presence of a numerous and dominant ethnic provided a basis for unifying political elites and to a large extent also the population behind a common foreign policy.



Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

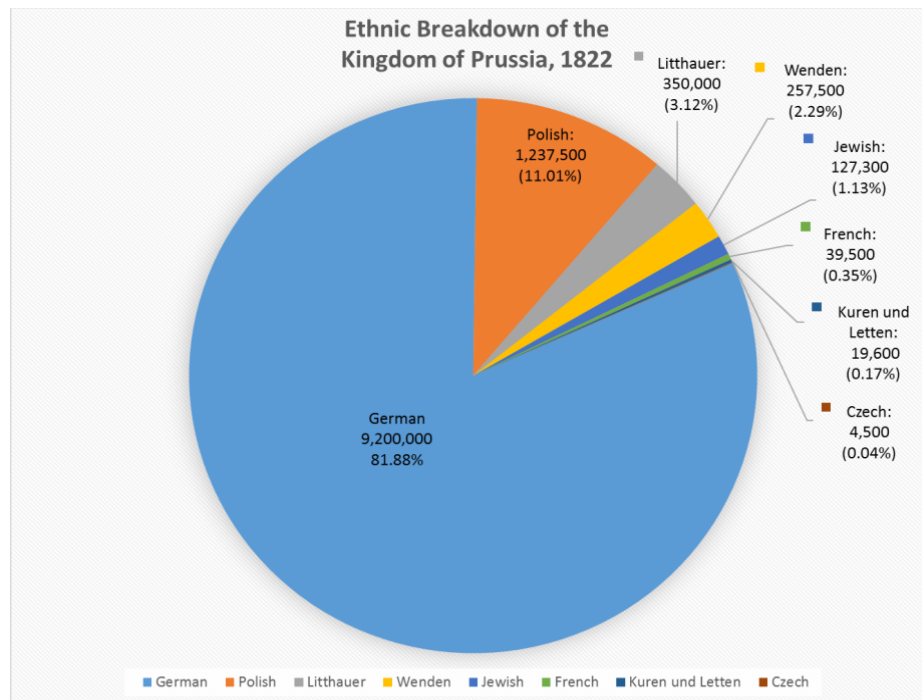
By contrast, the 25 percent of ethnic Germans in the Austrian Empire, while holding a preponderance in Habsburg political and military institutions, were too weak to overawe, let alone assimilate, the other nationalities along ethnic or cultural lines. Among the Habsburg Monarchy’s non-German ethnic groups, the most populous were the Magyars and Czechs, both of which had histories of proto-national development stretching into the early Middle Ages and therefore had prior claims to primacy over large portions of the Danubian Basin. The Czech lands had formed an indigenous Slavic empire in the 9th century that later became the

nucleus for a Bohemian-Moravian state under the Premysl kings well into the 15th Century. The annihilation of the Bohemian nobility at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620 stripped the Czechs of an autochthonous political elite, creating a vacuum that Habsburg monarchs filled by extending land grants and patents of nobility to loyal soldiers and nobles from across Europe.



Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

The Magyars were different. After centuries of mounted raiding in Europe's steppe borderlands, they had formed a large kingdom under the Arpads in the 10th century that would endure under various dynasties and act as the principal eastern bastion of Christendom until military defeat at the hands of the Turks at Mohacs in 1526. At its zenith in the 15th Century, Hungary would stretch from the Adriatic to the foothills of the Carpathians, including most of modern-day Croatia, Bosnia and Slovakia as well as Transylvania and a large portion of Serbia south of the Danube. The kingdom offered military resistance to both the northward expansion of Islam and to the eastward expansion of the Habsburg-led Counter-Reformation. Unlike the Czechs, the Magyars retained an unusually large and politically active nobility keenly aware, both of their kingdom's past geopolitical role and of the overlordship that their families had enjoyed over neighboring lands.



Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

More than any other Habsburg minority, the Magyars possessed the requisite traits—a landed patrician class, culture of political independence and recent history of regional paramountcy—to become sources of resistance to Habsburg rule. This was especially true in the traditionally recalcitrant territories of Transylvania, where Protestant princes had long formed alliances with the Ottoman Turks to check Habsburg advances. The presence of a group with these characteristics in such large numbers, both inside the Habsburg heartland and along the strategically important southern frontier, represented a strategic disadvantage for the Habsburgs in their quest to build a unified Great Power. The search for a formula to both contain the often-truculent Magyar nobility and offer adequate incentives to recruit their help in empire-building would become a recurrent pattern of Habsburg history from the early 18th Century until the Monarchy's final days.

Ethnicities and Space

An important factor in how the Habsburgs managed these dynamics was the spatial arrangement of the empire's major ethnic groups. The wave-like arrival of groups in the Danubian Basin created laminous rather than linear settlement patterns, with the densest population clusters appearing near rivers and other major arteries. The Slavs congregated around the Vlatava and Vistula in the north and Sava and Drava in the south; the Magyars between the two, along the double axis of the Tisza and Middle Danube; Vlachs between the Lower Danube and Prut; and Germans primarily along the River Inn and Upper Danube. The crucial point is that none of these groups were settled in entirely contiguous geographic spaces, but rather interspersed among one another. While concentrated primarily in the *Erblande*, ethnic Germans were found in pockets across the Czech and Hungarian lands; Croats, Serbs and Romanians were found in significant numbers across Hungary, both in the border areas and the interior; Hungarians, Italians and Croats could be found in southern portions of the *Erblande*; and so on.

The Danubian Basin's helter-skelter demographic footprint influenced how the Habsburgs approached the task of empire-building. On one hand, the Monarchy's dispersed tribal layout aided in the task of multi-national statecraft. No single minority, especially the Hungarians, were so concentrated in one place to amass the characteristics of a geographically compact and ethnically homogenous internal "state" within the empire's borders. The fact that numerous smaller nationalities, each with a history of subjugation under the Magyars, existed in pell-mell pockets within and around both of the major Magyar footprints—the Middle Danube and Transylvania—presented abundant opportunities for containing the Hungarian problem. In a classic pattern of geopolitics, weak groups often seek patronage from a stronger but still distant source to counterbalance a historic rival. For the empire's weaker minorities, this just-strong-enough force was the Habsburg dynasty. Being small made them the chief beneficiaries of its regional primacy, since they would lose out disproportionately in any scheme to reorganize the Basin along ethnic (and therefore likely Magyar-dominant) lines. These fears

gave the Habsburgs a ready source of strategically-located, highly motivated allies to assist in the task of containing their chief internal rivals.

Various Habsburg monarchs reinforced this pattern by settling Catholic Germans and other *kaisertreu* ethnicities in Transylvania and elsewhere in the empire's eastern lands. These efforts represented a systematic program to address the issue of Hungarian truculence on a long-term basis by altering the empire's internal population and settlement characteristics to geopolitical ends. As William McNeil notes:

This program was supplemented by efforts to recruit settlers from German lands outside Austrian borders. Transportation, land, initial capital, and tax exemption for a period of years were offered such immigrants. These inducements were such that between 1762 and 1772, when the program was in full operation, a total of about 11,000 German families were settled in the Banat under official, government aegis. Others came from Lorraine, Belgium, Italy and elsewhere, but the German immigration far outweighed all the other strands and sufficed to establish a fairly numerous 'Swabian' population along the Danube from its junction with the Sava as far as the Iron Gates.¹⁴⁷

Such practices continued until the end of Maria Theresa's reign and achieved a small but measurable impact in reaching the economic development ceiling of some portions of the underdeveloped Hungarian periphery, as well as in strengthening the politically-reliable "ballast" of the human population of the region.¹⁴⁸ Nor was this an isolated incident; as we will see in chapter 5, the Habsburgs undertook a longer-lasting and more ambitious attempt at geopolitical engineering in the creation of the famous Military Border along the southern border, where Vienna would systematically relocate thousands of Serb, Croatian and later Romanian soldier-settlers in a series of semi-autonomous, centrally-administered administrative districts running from the Adriatic to the Carpathians from the late 17th to mid-19th Century.

¹⁴⁷ McNeil, p. 213.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 215.

Despite the relative success of these efforts, the political geography of the Danubian Basin remained by and large an obstacle to be overcome rather than an advantage to be harnessed in the process of empire-building. The physical distribution of Habsburg ethnicities posed significant and recurrent challenges of frontier statecraft. One dimension of the problem was that only a handful of the region's indigenous ethnicities existed entirely within the confines of the Danubian Basin. Of these, the largest (the Magyars) were never fully reconciled to Habsburg dynastic supremacy. Hungarian history and social structure inhibited the degree of outside engagement and economic development that would have been required for full incorporation into the Monarchy. As late as the end of the 18th Century, after more than a century under Habsburg rule, large swaths of Hungary remained largely insulated, Medieval in social organization and economically under-developed.¹⁴⁹ The outlook of the Hungarian elite tended to alternate between seasons of support for the Monarchy as a vehicle of conservative political continuity and protection of historic land and tax rights, and resistance to bureaucratic rule from Vienna in search of a quixotic and often overly romanticized independence.

Equivocal Loyalties

Magyar mood swings were typical of what the historian Owen Lattimore called “equivocal loyalty” — the tension often found in frontier peoples of supporting the state as a source of stability while continuing to seek cultural and political autonomy. The 19th Century would see similar outlooks develop in other Habsburg nationalities. Among non-Magyar groups, the problem would be exacerbated by the fact that all but a few were parts of larger ethnic footprints that overlapped the territories of neighboring states. On almost every frontier, Habsburg local communities directly abutted ethnic kin across the border: In Alpine Austria, the south German states; in Trieste, the fellow Latins of northern Italy; in Transylvania, Rumanians living in nearby Wallachia/Moldova; in the Balkans, Serbs and Croats under Ottoman and later national rule; in Poland, ethnic Poles and Ruthenes living under Prussian and Russian rule.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 217.

This made the Habsburg Empire a frontier state in truest sense—an interstitial polity astride separate civilizational spaces. As Lattimore wrote of such empires:

[There is an] ‘axiom of frontier administration that a tribe or group of tribes situated between two comparatively powerful States must be under the influence of one or other of these’ – for where the sense of kinship does not operate, other forces – such as military power, class interest, or the opportunity for an individual career act all the more strongly.¹⁵⁰

A large portion of the Habsburg population fell under Lattimore’s axiom. More than half of its ethnic groups were geopolitical “straddlers,” inhabiting the space between larger or more homogenous entities. The presence of such a large number of frontier groups, with divergent histories and separate languages could, under the right conditions, undermine sense of shared identity that for most states has provided the foundation of political order. The largest of these groups, the Hungarians, would mount persistent attempts to enhance political autonomy at the expense of the larger polity – a pattern that would intensify among other ethnicities with the advent of modern nationalism in the mid-19th Century. These dynamics would absorb and distract the attention of the state in the quest for new templates of compromise and multi-national governance from the Treaty of Szatmar in 1711 to the Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich* of 1867.

2. Ethnicities and Geopolitical Competition

In addition to shaping how the Habsburgs conducted empire-building, the Monarchy’s ethnic composition affected how it behaved at a geostrategic level, in military competition with major rivals. Its effects can be seen both in the constraints that it placed on Austria’s strategic options and in the opportunities it created for competitors.

First, at a fundamental level, internal complexity exacerbated the difficulties of mobilizing Habsburg power. For most Great Powers in history the path to survival and security has been

¹⁵⁰ Lattimore, pp. 167-168.

through “internal balancing”—that is, through increasing the capabilities at the state’s disposal, either by maximizing the efficiency of the resources that it already possesses or by growing the overall size of the resource base through physical expansion. The Habsburg Monarchy’s human make-up complicated both options. The presence of numerous groups with different forms of social and political organization across sub-regions with often widely differing levels of economic advancement contributed to uneven development patterns. While this could be a spur to growth, it also required that a considerable amount of energy be spent in aiding the “catching up” process of backward regions. As a result, the Monarchy did not possess the degree of economic strength or overall advancement that a European state of similar size and population would likely have possessed with a more ethnically and economically homogenous human base. Together with the empire’s administrative inefficiency, this uneven composition would prove to be an obstacle—perhaps not insuperable, but real and persistent—to realizing the Monarchy’s full power potential.

Nor could the Monarchy escape its problems through the second traditional form of internal balancing: territorial growth. Historically, land powers have been able to enhance their security by expanding the surface area over which the state can collect revenue and raise armies. For the Habsburgs, this was a tricky proposition; the Monarchy’s complex internal ethnic balances, together with its layered and contested mechanisms of governance, meant that additions of space were likely to increase the commitments of the state without necessarily increasing its actual power. New lands brought new problems. Whether acquired through war or diplomacy, they brought new groups that would have to be incorporated alongside other, pre-existing ethnicities. They also brought new security liabilities and exposure to new sources of friction on the frontiers, stretching the responsibilities of the military and increasing the demands on state finances. Even in the era before modern nationalism, such acquisitions brought inevitable geopolitical complications with Austria’s neighbors demanding ‘compensation,’ potentially in more places more valuable to Austria than the spaces acquired. More dangerously, with expansion would come questions about the constitutional status of new territories, bringing population shifts that could upset the empire’s increasingly delicate ethnic balances. As a

result, unlike in many other empires in history, expansion usually brought less security for Austria, not more.

Second, Habsburg ethnic complexity created opportunities for the Monarchy's rivals. Austria's opponents were aware of the Monarchy's fissures and frequently sought to exploit them as a source of strategic advantage in wartime. While the full force of equivocal loyalty would not be felt until late in Habsburg history, after the emergence of nationalism as a major political force, its effects were felt in geopolitics long before then. The Magyars in particular represented a sufficiently large and determined source of opposition—a Habsburg "*Fronde*," in the words of one historian—to attract the political and military courtship of foreign powers.¹⁵¹ The Bourbon kings of France provided arms and encouragement to successive Rakoczi uprisings; the Swedes threatened to link up with Hungarian Protestants during the War of Spanish Succession; Russia promoted defection and emigration among the Orthodox Slav inhabitants of the Military Border in the mid-1700s; Prussia incited unrest among the Poles of Austrian Galicia at inopportune moments; Napoleon III stoked the embers of Kossuth's insurrections; and Bismarck tried to stir up problems in Hungary, Serbia and Romania during the war of 1866—to name just a few instances.

The value of such tactics to rivals was two-fold: creating an internal distraction that siphoned off Habsburg military resources, and leveraging Hungarian political grievances to such a degree that they might lead to a splintering of the empire's territories after war. The former was especially valuable to rivals attacking a frontier in the west, in creating conditions for a multi-front war. To this manipulation by Great Powers would be added, in the nationalist era, the efforts by newly-emerged abutting nation-states (Italy, Romania, Serbia) and eventually also allied governments to incite separatism among ethnic groups living in Austrian territory. While other Great Powers occasionally dealt with problems of rivals enflaming internal "fifth columns" in wartime—France's courtship of Britain's Scots and Irish is one such example—none faced this challenge on the scale that Austria did. Although rarely successful, the potential for

¹⁵¹ Palmer, p. 249.

enemies to attempt such tactics always had to be factored into Habsburg military strategy. As we will see in later chapters, this sharpened the time pressures on Austria in wartime, essentially creating an additional, internal front that required troops and attention to manage.

Finally and relatedly, it is worth noting the effects that equivocal loyalty had on the Habsburg concepts of power. The continual encounter with ethnic complexity and the constraints that it placed upon Austrian economic and geopolitical options profoundly shaped the possibilities of Habsburg governance across the empire's lifetime. Claudio Magris' characterization, while perhaps more appropriate for a later phase of the empire's history, bears some truth for the empire's history in general, that ethnic complexity forced Vienna away from true bureaucratic centralism whenever it was tried and required instead a reliance on "flexible prudence, on wary carelessness...not the levelling, centralist despotism of Louis XIV, Frederick the Great or Napoleon, but... more to administer the resistance which universalism and medieval particularism put up in opposition to the modern state."

Constrained by what would increasingly become a constitutional and financial straightjacket, Habsburg rulers developed an approach to power that, more often than not, did not try to "overcome contradictions, but [instead] cover[ed] and compos[ed] them in an ever-provisional equilibrium, allowing them substantially to go on as they are and, if anything, playing them off against one another".¹⁵² This preference for *fortzuwursteln* (muddling through), as with so many other features of Habsburg behavior closer to the geopolitical traits of maritime than a classic land power, evolved not from principled restraint but necessity, as the only sustainable method of governance for such a complicate realm. Surprisingly resilient and durable, it nevertheless can be seen as a concession to complexity and constraint that tacitly acknowledged a permanent inability to realize the full potential of the Monarchy as a geopolitical actor.

¹⁵² Magris, pp. 243-4.

Conclusion

The Habsburg Monarchy was not, and could never become, a modern Great Power. Its internal machinery of government was more complicated, its processes of tax and administration subject to greater interruption and constraint, and its human population less unified than contemporary nation-states. As a result, while capable of surprising feats of resilience in mobilization of resources, as for example in the Seven Years War and 1809 campaign against Napoleon, for most of its existence the Monarchy struggled unsuccessfully to express its full potential as a Great Power.

The large nominal surface area and population base that its territories represented on paper were misleading; in real terms, on any sustainable basis involving economic or military power, the Monarchy was a fettered giant. Some historians have suggested that it was the nominal and latent rather than actual and expressed potential of the Monarchy that often guided the behavior of its statesmen; that having a self-image that inflated the state's capabilities beyond what it was capable of achieving occasionally led the empire into crises it could not handle. Perhaps. What is certain is that the Monarchy's complicated constitutional order and the contested nature that it gave to Habsburg domestic power placed constraints on the empire's range of strategic maneuver—constraints that tended to express themselves as a “ticking clock” of time pressure in the Monarchy's geopolitical contests. The historical record leaves no doubt that Habsburg leaders, even at relative apogees in Austrian strength such as the late 18th Century or immediate post-Napoleonic period, felt these constraints acutely when attempting to wield diplomatic or military power.

Important corollaries followed from these constraints for Austria's behavior as a player in European geopolitics. The most obvious was that the Habsburg Empire could not “grow” its way out of its security problems. Where most Western states have or at least perceive themselves to have the option of mastering strategic challenges over time through the enhancement (quantitative or qualitative) of internal strengths, this was at best a partial option for the Habsburg Monarchy. On a short term basis, it could not spend sufficiently to overmaster

its security competitors on all four frontiers; financial limitations simply did not allow this. On a long-term basis, attempts to create a centralized bureaucratic state capable of maximizing tax yields to support the growth of the military-industrial base in support of a sustained technological edge to mitigate geographic vulnerability were virtually guaranteed to run afoul of the web of complex constitutional bargains that supported the empire's fragile internal order. Attempts to develop the economic potential of the territories possessed by the Monarchy were also problematic. Realizing the full transport potential of the Danube, to take one prominent example, would have required a degree of mobilization of the Hungarian tax base that the Magyar nobility would not have allowed without a protracted political fight. Without such resource mobilization, the expense of such large-scale projects for economic development that the Monarchy needed to realize its potential as a Great Power was constrained by the sheer scale of expenditures on the military in the imperial budget.

In addition to complicating the quest for security outright, Austria's internal complexities brought another, less tangible geopolitical disadvantage: the time and opportunity costs of dealing with them. Attempts at tackling the empire's administrative and ethnic challenges, irrespective of how successful they were in outcomes, were intensely difficult and draining. They required a certain amount of effort, attention and resources to be directed inward rather than outward.

To some extent this is true for any state, particularly in the era of the 18th Century when most European powers turned their thoughts to mastering the residua of feudalism to produce a more efficient military machine. In Austria's case, however, this process was open-ended, playing out throughout the empire's lifetime and never being fully resolved. Even in a static environment, without determined competitors looking for ways to exploit the empire's competitive disadvantages, the formidable internal challenges would have represented a drain on the activity and attention of the state. But Austria's geographic position meant that it never had the luxury of such an environment; rivals were aware of its complexities and willing to use them as a tool against it. Foreign and domestic policy were, in this sense, always linked for the Habsburg Monarchy. The distraction effect of dealing with recurrent attempts to modernize the

state, tame the Estates, tweak the constitutional and later ethnic formulas and most of all renegotiate compromises with the Hungarian nobility represented a kind of invisible “tax” on Habsburg power that impeded even the most enlightened efforts at leveraging the Monarchy’s nominal resources—a tax that tended to rise in proportion to the instability of outside geopolitics.

In sum, Austria was a Great Power, but a constrained one. The quests for external security and a stable and productive internal political order and resource base that together comprise the central tasks for any state were to some extent mutually contradictory for the Habsburg Monarchy. Pursuing one tended to complicate the other. Achieving greater security through the means normally used in geopolitical history—centralization, larger territory, economic development—were not as readily available for Austria, at least without bringing significant internal repercussions that would have to be dealt with to the detriment of strategic competitiveness. Nowhere were the effects of these constraints more keenly reflected than in the effort to mobilize and conceptualize military power, the subject of the next chapter.

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Chapter IV.
Si Vis Pacem:
Habsburg War and Strategy

“Better a mediocre peace than a successful war.” – Empress Maria Theresa

“Time is often times more valuable than even intrinsically precious human blood.” – Archduke Charles

Summary

The Habsburg Monarchy’s physical and political geography shaped how its leaders thought about war. Austria’s position at the heart of Europe dictated that it would be a continental power and thus need large land armies to achieve security. But encirclement by powerful rivals meant that Austria could not defend all of its frontiers simultaneously using military force alone. Internal complexities placed further limitations on the size and capabilities of Habsburg armies, curtailing their utility as offensive instruments. Together, these constraints influenced Habsburg strategic behavior by: (1) encouraging the development of defensive conceptions of force that sought to avoid risk when possible; (2) highlighting gaps that would need to be filled to augment the Monarchy’s weak military capabilities; and (3) prompting the systematic development of strategy as a tool for coping with Austria’s difficult environment, with a particular emphasis on managing the time parameters of competition and thus avoiding the full impact of the virtually limitless threats facing the Monarchy.

The Limits of Habsburg Force

A state’s physical and political geography influence how it behaves and performs in war.¹⁵³ At the most basic level, where a state sits determines what it fears, and what tools it will need to protect itself. Historically, most Great Powers have tilted toward either a primarily continental or maritime orientation in their strategic outlook. Thus Russia, surrounded by plains, developed large land armies while Britain, surrounded by oceans, concentrated on building naval fleets.

¹⁵³ Gray, “Geography and Grand Strategy,” pp. 311-29.

Habsburg geography dictated that it would be a continental power. The Monarchy's position as a mostly landlocked state in East-Central Europe largely insulated it from the effects of competition at sea. Such exposure as Austria faced to maritime pressure was mitigated by the presence of large mountains (the Dinaric Alps) and the fact that the adjacent sea—the Adriatic—was a sideshow to the world's main theaters of oceanic competition in the Atlantic and, to a secondary extent, the Mediterranean. As a result, for most of its history Austria would have, at best, a second-rate fleet whose operations had little bearing on its success or failure in war.

By contrast, the Monarchy's four landward frontiers exposed it to the primary areas of military competition on the European continent. This location called for the development of large land army while requiring that it be trained and equipped for several different types of warfare. Austria's threat environment demanded that its armies develop the means to fight not only the conventional armies of Western Europe but the semi-Asiatic hordes of the Ottoman Empire, and if necessary the vast, regular-irregular armies of Russia. In addition, they would need to be able to counter low-intensity threats and border raids along the empire's southern border and conduct *gendarmerie* functions among unruly territories of the Monarchy itself if called upon.

While defining Austria's military needs, Habsburg physical and political geography also placed constraints on its ability to meet those needs. The number of potential enemies facing the Monarchy meant that it could never hope to produce an army large enough to subdue all four frontiers simultaneously through military means alone; the task was simply too great. Even if Vienna had wanted to take on this task, the financial weakness of the Habsburg state placed effective limits on the size of armies that it could field. Prince Kaunitz, Austria's foremost statesmen of the late 18th Century, summed up neatly the problem that this combination of outside threats and internal constraints presented to the state:

Nobody can have any reasonable doubt about the necessity of a large, powerful and well prepared army. Still, there are two principles that should never be forgotten:

- 1 - That no [Austrian] army, however strong in numbers, can stand against all possible foes [at once].
- 2 - That, at least in peacetime, any army's strength needs be in proportion to that of the state.¹⁵⁴

This basic problem-set would persist in various forms from the early 1700s to the end of the empire in 1918. While capable of impressive feats of mobilization in emergency, Austria's defense establishment was always hampered by internal constraints and therefore usually smaller than the armies of its major rivals.

Such armies as the Monarchy turned out were also affected by the state's bewildering ethnic composition. While the Habsburg Army developed a high degree of cohesion and resiliency as a fighting force, its heterogeneous make-up inevitably had an adverse impact on its combat performance. Despite the prowess of many elite Habsburg formations—which tended, notably, to be ethnically homogenous, such as the Hungarian light cavalry, Bohemian artillery and Austrian mountain troops—the infantry that made up the bulk of Habsburg military strength took longer to train, had greater difficulty mastering new technology and were less adept at conducting complex maneuvers than their counterparts in other western armies.

In both size and quality, Habsburg military force therefore fell short of the array of tasks that it would need to accomplish to provide safety for the state. These limitations set Austria apart from most other large land empires. While the development of land armies would have first call on the Monarchy's military priorities, Austria could not produce standing armies on the scale of Bourbon France without encountering significant financial strains. Unlike Prussia, Austria could not expect to fashion even a subset of its forces into a tool of national excellence through focused military spending and bonds of ethnic homogeneity. Nor could it expect to employ its armies in large-scale offensive operations like Russia which, while ethnically polyglot like Austria, enjoyed far larger manpower reserves and fewer peer competitors around its borders.

¹⁵⁴ Kaunitz to Maria Theresa, in Alfred Ritter von Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresias*, Band 7 (Wien: k.k. Hof- und Universitätsbuchhändler, 1877), p. 530.

For Austria, the military instrument was inherently weaker than in these other continental powers while the military dangers facing the state were more numerous. This gap in capabilities and threats, or means and ends, shaped how Habsburg leaders pursued the goal of security, on several levels. (1) The relative scarcity of military capabilities in proportion to threats required that force be husbanded and used sparingly, primarily as a defensive tool that could not be subjected to undue risk. (2) The inadequacies of Habsburg military power highlighted which additional tools the Monarchy would need to possess to bridge performance gaps. And (3) the extent of the gulf between limited military means and virtually limitless ends encouraged the development of strategy as a tool to offset burdens and set priorities about which threats should receive the greatest attention, when. Together, these factors helped to shape a conservative approach to war and strategy that was distinctive to Austria and corresponded to the needs of managing its severe environment.

1. Conserving Force

A foundational strategic principle for the Habsburg Monarchy was the need to conserve military strength. While most Great Powers need to avoid exertions that could exhaust their military capabilities, the danger of doing so was a graver concern for Austria. By definition, war has the potential to be more destructive for an encircled power than for more insulated states. Even initially limited conflicts run the risk of spreading into multi-front crises that can overwhelm the state's military resources. And for an internally weak power, virtually any war, for any length of time, brings dangerous economic strains.

The Habsburgs had an additional, political reason to preserve the Army. Their Monarchy needed it to exist at all. If France lost the bulk of its army in a crushing defeat and succumbed to enemies in war, it might lose territory or even its ruling dynasty, but France itself would continue to exist as a state. To varying degrees, the same could be said of Prussia and Russia. In all three cases, the existence of the state was rooted in something permanent—the existence of an ethnically and territorially linked polity, which would eventually become the modern nation-state. The Habsburgs were different. A transplanted dynasty ruling over

multiple polities not tied together by blood or language, they depended on the Army to underwrite their rule, and thus the existence of the state. As long as there a force existed in the field under Habsburg command, the dynasty had a chance of outliving even the worst defeats; the moment this was gone, they could easily be replaced, either by some other dynasty or (later) multiple nation-states.

These realities gave warfare unusually high stakes for the Habsburg Monarchy and made its occurrence a greater danger than for most states. Where conflict could, under the right circumstances, be an opportunity to some powers—e.g., to expand territory or neutralize a foe and thus contribute to the safety of the state—for Austria war was almost always a net negative. Even if successful, it would entail great costs, add lands difficult to manage and, at best, perhaps deal momentarily with only one among the wide cast of foes facing the state. If unsuccessful, it was potentially catastrophic, capable not just of taking resources and territory but of killing the state itself.

War for Austria was a form of chaos that, once unleashed, could not be controlled. It was an “evil” not just in the practical or economic sense as a calamity to befall a state but morally, as eruption of disorder capable of threatening the form of civilization embodied by the state. “Among all the physical and moral evils that penetrate the true good of life,” wrote the Prussian-born Habsburg staff officer Karl Friedrich von Lindenau, “war stands out as the one greatest disaster, and a bad war the greatest calamity that could befall a state.”¹⁵⁵ Similarly, the opening paragraph of Archduke Charles’ *Principles of War* states that “war is the greatest evil that can happen to a state or nation.”¹⁵⁶

This ethical dimension, rooted in the Catholic-Christian just war tradition, permeates Habsburg thinking on war. It can be seen in the terminology that the Habsburgs often used to describe their greatest foes: Maria Theresa, for example, referred to Frederick II as “the monster” and Archduke Charles said of Napoleon: that he “was everything except a human being...

¹⁵⁵ Lindenau quoted in Brüning, p. 141.

¹⁵⁶ Charles, *Principles*, p. 1.

Bonaparte was to his contemporaries what our ancestors would have called the devil, and all peoples consider the basis of evil: the extraordinary confluence of power, spirit and wickedness.”¹⁵⁷

Avoiding War

Two things followed from this view of war. First and most fundamentally, it should be avoided if at all possible. A state that sees war as evil, both practically and morally, does not seek it out as a source of potential gain and therefore does not gravitate toward offensive war as a strategic method for advancing its security. Instead, it takes up a defensive position, buttressed by its own legitimacy and the civilizing order that it brings to its subjects, and tries when possible to avert disruptions to that order.

One byproduct of this mindset was that the Habsburgs often placed value in being able to avoid war when possible. This inherently conservative approach to warfare had its roots in the military texts of the classical era. From the mid-18th Century forward, numerous translations and studies appeared in Vienna examining the work of ancient writers such as Polybius and Vegetius, both of which emphasized self-restraint and war-avoidance as paths to victory.¹⁵⁸ In 1777 a Habsburg cavalry officer, J. W. von Bourscheid wrote a 390-page translation of the writings of the Leo VI (‘the Strategist’)—a 10th Century Byzantine Emperor noted for his intellectual mastery of war rather than offensive spirit.¹⁵⁹ A similar appeal drew the Habsburgs to earlier Italian writers and, in particular, the work of Niccolò Machiavelli, whose first-hand observation of the feuds of the Italian city-states had bred a sensitivity to the costs of war. Machiavelli counselled states to “temporize with [a threat] rather than to strike at it” and to only enter into war when other options have been exhausted.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Maria Theresia an Josef. 29. Mai 1778 in Schneider, pp. 48-9. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>; and Charles quoted in Brüning, p. 125.

¹⁵⁸ Brüning, pp. 39-41.

¹⁵⁹ J. W. Bourscheid, *Kaisers Leo des Philosophen: Strategie und Taktik* (Wien: Joh. Thomas Ehlen v. Trattenern, k.k. Hofbuchdruckern und Buchhandlern, 1777).

¹⁶⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, Transl. by Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Book I, Chapter 33, pp. 71-72.

The self-restraint and proportion in this and other Renaissance thinkers exerted a strong influence on Habsburg views of war. “In reading Machiavelli’s treatises on warfare,” Archduke Charles wrote, “one is impressed by the importance and depth of the Florentine’s thinking. His propositions on how to view, prepare, and prosecute wars are timeless. They will further remain relevant, for they are derived from the calculations of composition and balance of forces and relations, meaning from the subject matter in and of itself.”¹⁶¹ Fascination with such texts, whether ancient or recent, stemmed from the restraint that they embodied, both in avoiding conflict until the odds were favorable and in defending a civilized order against an approaching chaos.

Preserving the Army

A corollary to the Habsburg view of war was that, if it could not be avoided, it should be fought in a way that avoids exhaustion and maintains a degree of control over the material and spiritual factors of the contest. An important foundation for this approach was the work of Count Raimondo de Montecuccoli, a Neopolitan nobleman who served the Monarchy as a field commander and president of the *Hofkriegsrat*. Montecuccoli’s view of war was formed amidst the excesses of the Thirty Years War. His *Sulle Battaglie* (“Concerning Battle”) outlines a cautious approach to war in which commanders eschew the temptation to fight offensively and instead use self-control and judicious planning to outwit the enemy, prevent him from fighting on his preferred terms and thus deprive him of victory.¹⁶²

Sulle Battaglie would exercise considerable influence over subsequent Habsburg military thinking and warfighting. At its heart was a sense of proportion and moderation, or *metodizmus*, in which commanders seek not to win wars so much as not lose them, keeping

¹⁶¹ Charles quoted in Brüning, p. 132. For a discussion of the influences on Archduke Charles’ military thought, see Lee W. Eysturlid, *The Formative Influences, Theories and Campaigns of the Archduke Carl* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), p. 23.

¹⁶² Raimondo Montecuccoli, *Sulle Battaglie*. Transl. by Thomas M. Barker, *The Military Intellectual and Battle: Raimondo Montecuccoli and the Thirty Years War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

their armies alive and holding onto whatever modest gains they can acquire to gain an advantage at the concluding peace treaty. In this kind of warfare, the job of the commander is not to seize opportunities but to manage risk in order to limit the amount of evil that the war produces. Archduke Charles would later capture the essence of this mindset when he wrote that “the object of all war must be an advantageous peace, because only an advantageous peace lasts, and it is only a lasting peace that can, by making nations happy, accomplish the ends of governments.”¹⁶³

The restraint inherent in this approach to war was a byproduct of the positional and maneuver-based warfare of the 17th and 18th centuries, in which human conflict came to be viewed as a mathematical science, and victory went to those most skilled in the habits of reasoned observation, exact measurement and defense of key geographic positions. While such concepts were present in most European armies of the period, they found a particular resonance in the Habsburg Monarchy, as offering the means to limit the destructive effects of war. From this mindset stemmed certain principles about how military force should be used in the field. Foremost of these was preservation of the Army itself. Since the very existence of the state rested on its shoulders, it was imperative that the main army remain intact at war’s end.

The goal of ensuring this outcome is a constant theme in Habsburg military history. Montecuccoli’s maxim “Never risk the main army” is echoed in Prince Eugene’s warning to Joseph I during the Spanish succession war, “Your army, Sire, is your monarchy,” Archduke Charles’ comment a century later, “if the army is defeated there is no salvation” and Gillparzer’s famous accolade to General Radetzky amid the tumult of the 1848 revolution, “in thy camp is Austria.”¹⁶⁴

Preserving the Army meant not exposing it to undue risk. The goal is not to annihilate the enemy but to deprive him of victory, which means not fighting on his terms. As Johann Burcell, a Habsburg officer and veteran of the Prussian wars wrote:

¹⁶³ Charles, *Principles*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁴ Eugene, p. 43 and Rothenberg, “The Shield of the Dynasty,” p. 182.

War arranges things in such a fashion that anything that benefits us, proves necessarily detrimental to the enemy, and anything that benefits him we should resent... [We must] pursue solely that which benefits ourselves... It is preferable to defeat the enemy through hunger, cunning and perpetual harassment than in open battle, where luck often ends up playing a greater role than valor... One ought to never dare, unless the potential advantages of victory far outweighed the horrible consequences one would have to suffer in defeat.” 165

On this calculus, Austrian commanders were to avoid bold strokes, gambles and, above all, committing a disproportionately large portion of the Army to one big decisive battle which, if lost, would deprive it of the means for sustaining the wider conflict.

Inherent in “never daring” is the proposition that victory can be attained by not offering or accepting battle until highly favorable conditions are present. The idea of avoiding battle as a means of gaining an advantage over an enemy shows up repeatedly in Austrian military thought and practice. At the tactical level, it involved the deceptive use of terrain and securing flanks and lines of communication. One early 19th Century military pamphlet provided a compilation of ways to avoid battle, gleaned from ancient warfare and provided, rather hopefully, in paperback form for easy reference in the field.¹⁶⁶ At the strategic level, Austrian generals devoted as much attention to avoiding decisive combat as offensive generals devote to seeking it out. Maria Theresa’s ablest field marshals—Otto von Abensperg und Traun and his protégé, Leopold von Daun—elevated combat-avoidance to an art form, waging campaigns of attrition against Frederick the Great that were modeled on the methods used by the Roman general Quintus *Fabius Maximus* against Hannibal. Daun summed up his approach in layman’s terms to the Empress:

People talk about exterminating all and sundry, about attacking and fighting every day, about being everywhere at once and anticipating the enemy. Nobody desires this more than I do...God knows that I

165 Quoted in Brüning, pp. 35 and 37.

166 Ibid., pp. 39-41.

am no coward, but I will never set my hand to anything which I judge impossible, or to the disadvantage of Your Majesty's service."¹⁶⁷

In the same vein, years later Maria Theresa warned her son Joseph II to avoid coming to blows with Frederick II because "a battle is not advisable for you as it is for him in the same degree."¹⁶⁸ Best, if possible to deny the enemy a fight altogether since:

We have quite only to lose and nothing to gain [through battle]. Our whole force is concentrated in one point; if we meet with misfortune, it's all over and we are left with no support. It would be a disaster if this happened... So I...must see if you can not find the means to prevent all of this great evil that occurs once the sword is drawn... The well-being of thousands and thousands, the existence of the monarchy and the preservation of our house depend on it.¹⁶⁹

For similar reasons, Habsburg military thought emphasized the importance of not getting too caught up in pursuit of victory. Commanders were to prioritize the safety of their own forces above speed or initiative. If a battle was lost, the Army had to have access to carefully prepared avenues of retreat to allow it to live and fight another day. If a battle was won, pursuit of the enemy must not be undertaken if it exposes the Army to risks. "Let us not get carried away by zeal or lust for vengeance [*Rachelusf*]," as Maria Theresa wrote, "but rather seek to retain our Army for our realm."¹⁷⁰

The point of all of this restraint was to shelter the Army from strains beyond its—and the Monarchy's—ability to bear. The potential uses for the Army almost always exceeded its available strength, while the risks of catastrophe if it over-committed itself and lost, were greater than the benefits of even the most spectacular success. Thus, whatever other political ends might present themselves as a potential object of war, they were secondary to preserving

¹⁶⁷ Daun quoted in Christopher Duffy, "The Seven Year's War as a Limited War" in Gunther E. Rothenberg, Béla K. Király, and Peter F. Sugar, eds., pp. 73-4.

¹⁶⁸ Maria Theresia an Josef, 14. März 1778, and Maria Theresia an Josef. 26. September 1778 in Schneider, pp. 95-6. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>.

¹⁶⁹ Maria Theresia an Josef, 14. März 1778, and Maria Theresia an Josef. 26. September 1778 in Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁷⁰ Maria Theresia an Josef. 26. September 1778 in Ibid., pp. 95-6.

the Army, which meant preserving the dynasty and state. This supreme political imperative transcended all other strategic and tactical considerations.

Emphasis on preserving the Army distinguished the Habsburg approach to war from its continental rivals. Where most European armies evolved over time along the lines of the Napoleonic and Prussian models of warfare, in which military force is used to seek out and annihilate the enemy army, the Habsburg Army retained an attachment to positional warfare and produced commanders who tended to be risk-averse on the battlefield. The Prussian military writer Carl von Clausewitz would later criticize these conservative methods, viewing Montecuccoli as excessively cautious about pushing war to its fullest extent. Reflecting on one of Archduke Charles's campaigns, Clausewitz puzzled over why someone would fight "for no other reason than to facilitate his own retreat," concluding, that he "never entirely understood the reasoning of the famous general and writer."¹⁷¹

The reason, to answer Clausewitz's question, is that unlike in Prussia, the loss of the Army in Austria could result in the extinction of the state itself. The development of more restrained and defensive forms of warfare in the Habsburg lands has to be understood in the context both of the inherent limitations of Austria's military instrument and the unusual political needs of the Habsburg state.¹⁷² Far from being an instrument to achieve gains for the state through the pursuit and destruction of enemy forces on the Prussian mold, war for Austria was "not a grand strategic option under all but the most desperate circumstances."¹⁷³ In many ways this made the Habsburg land army more comparable to what in naval terms is called a "Fleet-in-Being"—a force that achieves its purpose by existing rather than fighting. Understood in this way, the Habsburg Army bears comparison to Washington's Continental Army or to Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in its later phases, in that it was a force to be conserved, and when used, used in moderation.¹⁷⁴ A conservative institution with a conservative role, its first job was to preserve the political order of which it was a creature, by preserving itself in the field.

¹⁷¹ Clausewitz, p. 246.

¹⁷² For an elaboration on this point, see Rothenberg, "The Shield of the Dynasty," pp. 169-206.

¹⁷³ Sondhaus, p. 228.

¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, the campaigns and writings of Charles were studied closely by the general staff of the

2. Filling Capability Gaps

As a result of these limitations, Austria possessed an army that, while politically loyal and capable of resilience in emergencies, could not be solely entrusted with the task of ensuring the Monarchy's existence. To survive, Habsburg leaders would therefore have to find ways to bridge the gap between these limited military capabilities and the enormous demands of its security environment.

This is true for every state. Geography constrains choices, highlighting what tools a Great Powers need most to respond to the threats and opportunities around them. Such choices inevitably come at the expense of other kinds of capabilities that the state could have chosen and thus point to gaps that it will need to fill in wartime, either from internal or external sources.¹⁷⁵ Thus Britain's naval concentration implied the need for land allies to contain and defeat continental rivals. France and later Germany, as states invested primarily in land power, would in a war with Britain either need to divert some of their resources to building fleets or recruit (or capture) the fleets of other seapowers to move their land armies across the English Channel.

In a similar way, Austria's exposed geography and internal weakness cast light on the power assets it would need to complement its field Army. Primarily landlocked, it did not need the help of a seapower, at least for purposes of projecting power against an enemy. Rather, what it needed was to find ways of enhancing its ability to compete effectively at land. As for other states, finding these tools was important for augmenting and completing its own power capabilities. But for Austria, such tools were also needed to shelter the Army from the risks of attempting to manage its exposed position unaided.

Confederacy. See: Major D. Jonathan White, *Confederate Strategy in 1863: Was a Strategic Concentration Possible?* (Fort Leavenworth: Penny Hill Press, 2000).

¹⁷⁵ Gray, "Geography and Grand Strategy," pp. 311-29.

Like other states, the Habsburg Monarchy sought to fill the gaps in its power capabilities through a combination of internal and external means. The tools that it used for this task can be grouped into three categories: (1) Terrain (2) Technology and (3) Treaties-allies.

Terrain

The most natural asset at Austria's disposal for enhancing its power capabilities was the physical form of the empire itself. The Monarchy possessed a plenitude of defensive topographical features—most notably, mountainous frontiers and extensive internal rivers. Such resources were readily available and did not require reliance on outside help. The very existence of these terrain attributes in such abundance encouraged defensive thinking. As discussed in chapter 2, one byproduct was the development, from the mid-18th Century onward, of extensive cartographical capabilities. Another, which went hand-in-hand with maps, was a heavy emphasis on the use of defensive terrain in Habsburg tactical and strategic thinking.

Over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Habsburg Army developed perhaps the greatest concentration on terrain of any army in European history. Terrain helped to fill the gaps in Austria's power portfolio in several ways. At the most basic level, it aided in the effort to avoid or delay battle. As discussed in chapter 2, mountains buy time. At the start of a war, they give a defender breathing space to rally armies and shift forces from one frontier to another. Together with rivers, they aid in stalling attackers until the defending power is ready to fight on its terms.

Montecuccoli laid the foundation for Austrian thinking about how to use terrain in this fashion in *Sulle Battaglie*, where he encouraged commanders to look for defensive sites “favored by a river, forest mountain, lake or city, by the sea, swamps, precipices or something of like nature.”¹⁷⁶ The writings of 18th Century Austrian officers abound with similar references.

¹⁷⁶ Barker, p. 117.

Henry Lloyd, a Welshman who served as adjutant to Field Marshall Lacy in Seven Years War and whose writing was popular in Austria, wrote in 1783:

Smart generals will rather base themselves on the study of terrain, than stake everything on the uncertain outcome of a battle. Those who master this discipline will be able to...prosecute [wars] perpetually without ever being obliged to battle.¹⁷⁷

Another military writer who expounded the benefits of terrain was Johann Georg Julius Venturini. An engineer officer from Braunschweig, Venturini who died at 30 and dedicated portions of his writing to Archduke Charles, Venturini wrote extensively on the use of terrain at both the tactical and strategic levels in warfare. In his chief work, *The Teaching of Applied Tactics or Real Military Science: Adapted from the Foremost Authorities and with Examples Using Real Terrain*, Venturini advances the thesis that proper employment of terrain can, in and of itself, bring success in war. Building on Burcell's maxim that "anything that benefits us, proves necessarily detrimental to the enemy, and anything that benefits him we should resent," Venturini writes that "a given piece of terrain has military advantages if, when occupied it increases the security and effectiveness of our troops' combat style while weakening the combat style of the enemy and making him insecure."¹⁷⁸

The view of terrain as the key variable in war was deeply ingrained in the Habsburg military. "The terrain advantage," Venturini wrote, "varies with the general abilities of humans and horses, in accordance to the combat style of the three arms (infantry, cavalry and artillery)".¹⁷⁹ The curriculum at Vienna's Neustadt Military Academy devoted extensive attention to how to use topography to maximize the effectiveness of each of these unit types. Joseph Auracher von Aurach, a Neustadt professor, expanded on many of Venturini's concepts, writing that "the application of armaments appropriate to the type of terrain aids in the defense or capture of that terrain. Thus the science of war consists in the advantageous allocation of various arms

¹⁷⁷ General von Lloyd, *Abhandlung über die allgemeinen Grundsätze der Kriegskunst* (Frankfurt und Leipzig: Philipp Heinrich Perrenon, 1783), p. xxvii.

¹⁷⁸ G. Venturini, *Mathematisches System der Angewandten Taktik oder Eigentlichen Kriegswissenschaft* (Schleswig: J. Rohtz, 1800), p. 12.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

on different types of terrain in the pursuit of military objectives.”¹⁸⁰

Venturini devoted substantial effort to replicating the effects of terrain, designing a wargame to simulate its effects on war. The game used 3,600 colored terrain squares marked to show changes in elevation and to differentiate between mountains, rivers and other features, with playing turns that represented 3 months. Venturini’s goal was to use terrain simulations to support scenario-planning and help “the future warrior” be able to “capture at a single glance the relationship between cause and effect in the great events of war and through experience on a small scale deduce the possible consequences from first causes on the world’s big scene.”¹⁸¹ By doing so, he hoped to use “mental games...and the study of history, in combination with geography” to help players grasp “the master plan of a war and the connection of all its components.”

The grand scale of Venturini’s game is a reflection of the value that he and other contemporary writers attached not just tactically but at the strategic level as well, as an object in itself that informs the aim and definition of war. “The main and all subordinate purposes of war,” Auracher wrote, “is either to hold a certain terrain against the enemy, or to evict him from an area and occupy it for oneself. Terrain is thus the decisive factor of battle.”¹⁸² “Terrain is everything,” he wrote elsewhere—a conviction echoed in Archduke Charles’ writing many decades later, in 1826: “War is terrain...and the constitution of the surface has supreme impact on the effectiveness of the forces.”¹⁸³

This outlook produced a belief that the very fact of controlling certain pieces of terrain will lead to success in war. While emphasis on retaining important nodes—magazines, fortified passes and other critical infrastructure—was prevalent in the 18th Century, this emphasis would reach

180 Jos. Auracher von Aurach, *Vorlesungen über die angewandte Taktik, oder Eigentliche Kriegswissenschaft für die k.k. österreichische Armee bearbeitet nach dem systematischen Lehrbuche des G. Venturini* (Wien: Anton Strauss, 1812), Vol. 1, Part. 1, p. 6.

181 G. Venturini, *Beschreibung und Regeln eines neuen Krieges-Spiels, zum Nutzen und Vergnügen, besonders aber zum Gebrauch in Militär-Schulen* (Schleswig: bey J. G. Röhß, 1797), p. xvi.

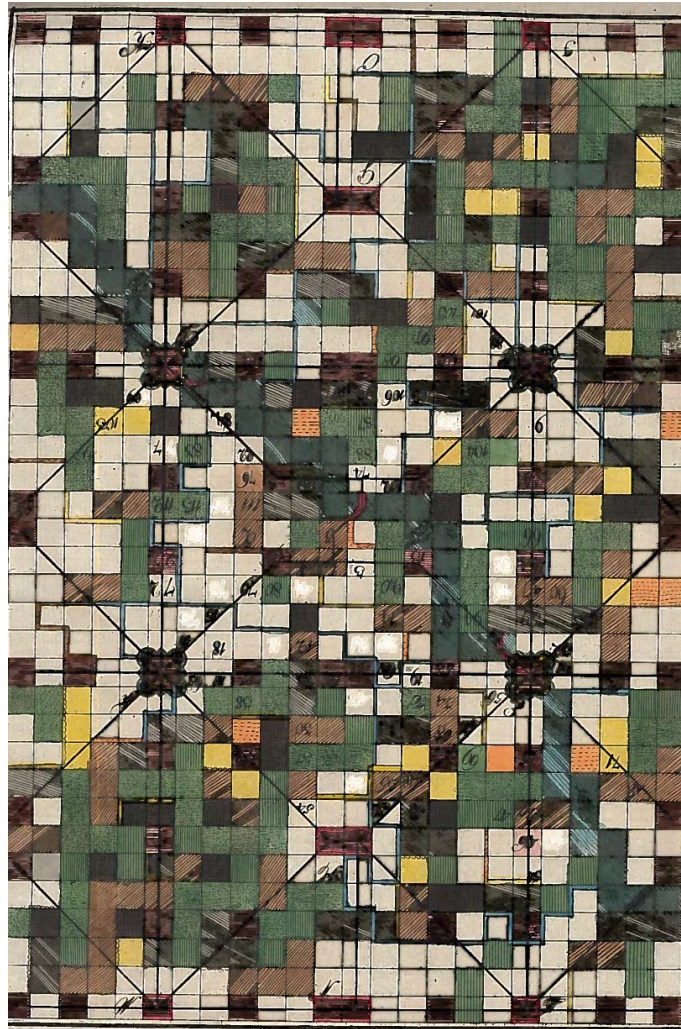
182 Auracher, *Vorlesungen*, Vol. 1, Part. 1, p. 6.

183 Quoted in Brüning, p. 270.

its apogee in the Habsburg military. Auracher writes:

The entire internal defensive structure, which was built by artisans on natural foundations and upon which the outer protective shell rests, has strong and also weak sides to it, both when it comes to breaches as well as exploiting internal lines that connect the whole structure. The latter spots [are] key to the entire defensive structure [and can] bring about the fall of the entire defensive position.”¹⁸⁴

Venturini's Wargame.



Source: G. Venturini, *Beschreibung und Regeln eines neuen Krieges-Spiels, zum Nutzen und Vergnügen, besonders aber zum Gebrauch in Militär-Schulen* (Schleswig: bey J. G. Röhß, 1797). Forsvarets Bibliotek.

¹⁸⁴ Auracher, pp. 105-107.

Archduke Charles later expanded on this concept, writing that:

...in a given theater, there are certain points, the possession of which exercises a predominant influence over outcomes, either by facilitating one's own or efforts or paralyzing those of the enemy. This is called the decisive point. For a point to be decisive, its possession must endow the side that holds it to dominate the space around it in such an overwhelming manner as to deny the enemy the ability to control the either by gaining ground here unpunished or by being able or by bypassing it.¹⁸⁵

Given the importance of such points, strategy became, by definition, an exercise in defending or capturing them. "If one applies the rules of pure tactics," Venturini wrote, "the art of protecting land, as well as that of reaching the goals of the war itself, strategy – or science of generalship – comes about."¹⁸⁶ Elsewhere he writes: "Strategy is the situational application of position, maneuver and battle in war for land."¹⁸⁷

Study of terrain would be the primary focus of the Austrian military until the mid-19th Century. Mastery of basic cartographical skills was a required competence for Austrian staff officers. As with maps generally, this requirement was driven by experience in war. Where no more than a handful of senior Austrian officers had been familiar with basic map-making skills at the start of the Seven Years War, by 1766, more than half of staff officers had training in basic cartography, and by 1786, 100 percent of them did.¹⁸⁸ The extent of focus on topography as a strategic domain can be seen by the fact that the General Quartermaster Staff, the cerebrum of Austrian military planning, would evolve over time into the department responsible for surveying terrain with the explicit aim of identifying advantages and disadvantages in operations and battle.

Preoccupation with terrain on this scale—as not just a tool of war but war's very purpose—was distinctive to Austria.¹⁸⁹ While all armies historically have paid close attention to terrain, the

¹⁸⁵ Erzherzog Karl, "Geist des Kriegswesens überhaupt," in Charles Waldstätten, p. 90.

¹⁸⁶ Venturini, *Mathematisches System* p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁸⁸ Veres, p. 145.

¹⁸⁹ Brüning, p. 66.

Austrians brought its study as a capability-enhancer to a level that would not have been needed in a state with weaker terrain properties, such as Poland, or that possessed extensive offensive warfighting abilities, such as Russia. At the tactical level, terrain helped to fill gaps in capabilities by increasing the fighting effectiveness of Austria's often numerically or qualitatively limited armies. The parallel at the strategic level was that it came to be seen as offering the means of closing the gaps in the empire's lengthy frontiers and securing the realm as a whole.

Technology

Austria also used man-made technology to bridge gaps in military capabilities and responsibilities. Recourse to technology, whether through internal or external means, is a frequent means of compensating for a state's limitations. Thus Rome deliberately sought out allies possessing skilled archers, slingers and light cavalry to make up for its over-concentration on heavy infantry, and Germany developed U-boats in both world wars to make up for its weakness at sea.

Similarly, Austria needed to extend its military capabilities on land. The Monarchy's economically advanced western territories (the Austrias and Bohemia) enabled it to keep pace with the military technology of western rivals for most of its history. As we will see in chapter 5, such technologies often allowed Austrian armies to achieve escalation dominance against less advanced enemies. However, the empire's physical and political geography placed constraints on the ability to field technology offensively on the scale that would have been required to subdue the surrounding environment.

The primary technological means by which Austria sought to address its military gaps was fortresses. Historically, most major land powers have employed fixed defenses to augment their field armies. But forts held an unusually strong attraction for the Habsburgs, for two reasons. First, the sheer extent of the imperial security perimeter lent value to structures that allowed forces to safely remain in-theater. Second, the Monarchy's terrain, as we have seen

above, invited technological augmentation. As discussed above, the ready availability of mountains encouraged thinking about how to improve upon its defensive properties through, in Auracher's words, "the application of armaments appropriate to the type of terrain."

Over the course of the 18th and early 19th centuries, the Habsburg Monarchy invested significant energy and resources to the development of forts around its frontiers. In modern U.S. military thinking, the term "fort" conjures images of primitive structures manned by a handful of soldiers against poorly-armed aboriginal attackers. But the Vauban fortresses of the 18th Century were large, expensive and technologically-sophisticated structures requiring many years of effort and advanced engineering tools to construct. As weapons platforms, they were the rough equivalent in capital investment of the dreadnought in the early 20th Century or today's aircraft carriers.

At its zenith, the Habsburg Empire would possess more than twenty such major fortresses and hundreds of smaller installations. As with maps, the skills and techniques required for making fortresses was treated as sensitive state information. As early as the 1670s, Montecuccoli, as *Hofkriegsrat* president, had placed the Army engineers working on forts under the war council's direct authority and subjected their blueprints to "top-secret" controls, requiring that two copies of each be made and placed, respectively, in the hands of the *Hofkriegsrat* and the local commanding general.¹⁹⁰ The similarity in treatment accorded to maps and fortification blueprints is evidence that they formed a symbiotic relationship in Habsburg strategic thinking; "the main purpose of studying military plans and maps," as one 18th Century Austrian text on fortifications stated, "is the considered thought on the placement of fortifications."¹⁹¹

Not surprisingly given this linkage, the rise in importance of forts for Austria occurred in tandem with the growth of professional cartography, which as we have seen in the previous chapter was driven by warfare. In the early 18th Century, the Austrian Habsburgs possessed few

¹⁹⁰ Heinrich Blasek, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der K. U. K. Genie-waffe: Nach den vom K. U. K. Obersten des Genie*, I. Theil, 2. Abschnitt (Wien: L. W. Seidel & Sohn, 1898), p. 737.

¹⁹¹ Franz Kinsky, *Über Emplacement der Festungen: Erster Nachtrag zu den Elementar Begriffen* (W. Neustadt: Adam und Kompagnie, 1790), p. 3.

fortresses, prompting Eugene's doleful observation to the emperor, "Your capital is a frontier town; your Majesty has no fortress on any side."¹⁹² The Turkish wars and expansion into Hungary brought Austria into possession of numerous riverine fortresses that had developed over the course of preceding centuries by the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary. The wars with Bourbon France led the Habsburgs to extensively use the forts of the German *Reich* along the Rhine and to eventually beef up its own defenses in the west. But as with maps and military strategy more generally, it was the wars of the late 18th Century, first against Prussia and then against France that would inaugurate the greatest expansion in Habsburg fortification technology.

Fortifications performed several functions for the Habsburgs. A 1790 manual on fortifications published by Franz Kinsky at the Wiener Neustadt military academy titled *Über Emplacement der Festungen* ("On the Emplacement of Fortresses") spelled out two broad purposes: "the defense of an area against enemy intrusion," and "providing support for one's own operations against the enemy," while noting that the best forts are those that "fulfill both offensive and defensive purposes at once."¹⁹³ It went on to outline four criteria that terrain should meet to support such a dual-use fort:

1. That it controls land;
2. That it hinders, or at least impedes, enemy operations;
3. That it facilitates one's own operations against the enemy; and
4. To make it difficult to be besieged or blockaded through the use of terrain and situations, as well as to force the enemy into a disadvantageous fighting position.¹⁹⁴

These functions pointed to a foundational role for Habsburg forts: deterrence. A major objective of the Habsburg Army, as noted earlier, was often to avoid conflict. A powerful fortress helped to accomplish this goal by forcing an offensive-minded enemy to pause and count the costs of assaulting an obstacle that would be hard to overcome and was capable of

¹⁹² Eugene, p. 43.

¹⁹³ Kinsky, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

launching raids into his own heartland. As Archduke Charles wrote:

In every state that has a war system it should be principle of the state, to set such points in defense alert and preserve them even during profound peace, to be able to maintain them for a long time with little effort and to discourage every enemy from war by the belief in the difficulty of its conquest.”¹⁹⁵

Similarly, Radetzky wrote that that forts were meant, if possible, to “avert entirely the danger posed by the opponent.”¹⁹⁶ Such deterrents were especially useful in the west, against militarily powerful European states. Complaining about the lack of even an “entrenched camp” here, Prince Eugene implored the economy-minded Charles VI to build fortresses “...not so much to make war, as to form a barrier against France, which might deter her from attacking us.”¹⁹⁷ Later Austrian fortification networks in Bohemia and Italy would be constructed with precisely this goal in mind.

Once war started, forts bought time for the defender by delaying the attacker and forcing him to split his forces. “If a defensive fort’s purpose,” the fortification manual noted, “is to block the entrances to the lands behind it [then]:”

...it follows that an enemy should not be able to just pass it by. Even if a fort does not directly cut the enemy’s supply lines, it impedes him by forcing him off the main routes and developed roads, onto side paths... [If he gets] far enough from his depots and magazines... the fort would effectively cut off his supply line. He would either have to station a corps [of observation], thus dividing his forces, or start running armed convoys, a difficult enterprise in war.¹⁹⁸

In short, Kinsky concluded, forts are “physical obstacles that hold up the attacker, that make him waste time.”¹⁹⁹ In a similar vein, Charles would write:

The task of the defensive is to gain time; that consideration must never be lost sight of in the choice of

¹⁹⁵ Erzherzog Karl, “Grundsätze der Strategie” in Waldstätten, p. 61.

¹⁹⁶ Radetzky, “Gedanken über Festungen,” 1827, in *Denkschriften*, p. 423.

¹⁹⁷ Eugene, pp. 95 and 99.

¹⁹⁸ Kinsky, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

emplacing fortresses to defend a country. They will thus be placed in such a manner that the enemy cannot easily leave them behind him without risking all for his communications and his convoys, and that by this he is obliged to leave in his rear a considerable force to observe them, blockade them, or besiege them, which will weaken his army and make it incapable of an ulterior offensive.²⁰⁰

Because of their delaying abilities, forts also helped the Habsburgs achieve economy of force. In the era before railways and telegraph, there was significant strategic value to having troops *in situ* near the likely site of conflict. This was especially true for large land empires, for which distance imposed steep power gradients. Forts helped address this by facilitating concentration and allowing the defender to, in Kinsky's words, ensure that the "few to can hold out against many"; or as Radetzky would later write, "make defense of the few against an attack by the many possible."²⁰¹

In all of these roles—defense, deterrence and economy-of-force—the forts that were most valuable to Austria were the ones located near the frontier. "Fortresses situated upon the frontiers," Charles wrote, "change all conditions of war." They strengthen deterrence by putting military hardware where the enemy can see it; they strengthen defense by promising to stop an enemy at the furthest point from the capital. Montecuccoli had advocated their placement on the frontier when he wrote:

Frontier posts, especially those where hostilities may be expected first, are provided with victuals, munitions, and full garrisons in order that the men will not be intimidated by the sight of the victorious enemy. The majority of the infantry can be thrown into these places in order to absorb the initial impact of the attacking forces. The reason for doing this is that a fortress which resists for a certain length of time and detains the foe affords great relief to the defeated party.²⁰²

Habsburg military men from Eugene onward regarded the absence of frontier fortresses as contributing factor to Austria's difficulties in the wars of the early 1700s. "Due to a lack of these [forward fortifications]," Joseph II lamented in 1766, "we rely upon the establishment of

²⁰⁰ Charles, *Principles*, p. 10-11.

²⁰¹ Radetzky, "Gedanken über Festungen" in *Denkschriften*, pp. 401-4.

²⁰² Montecuccoli quoted in Barker, p. 172.

rearward strongholds and magazines, which make the transport of supplies difficult, costly and burdensome for the country while precluding any swift forward movement and ensuring that the army remains split into small groups which must move to defend the strongholds at every sign of danger.”²⁰³

The question of where exactly to place fortifications among on frontiers was a major preoccupation for Austrian military writers. Venturini, Auracher, Charles and Radetzky all devoted substantial portions of text to debating the finer points of how they should be incorporated into local terrain. Kinsky’s manual lists nine factors that should be taken into account, ranging from “unimpeded field of vision” to “avoiding indentations,” and “wide and secure lines of communication.” As a general rule, it was agreed that frontier fortresses should be placed in locations that made use of the defensive aspects of the rivers and mountains. “A fort positioned near a river,” Kinsky wrote:

...will have all the more advantages if it is located near the confluence of two or more waterways, thus cutting off even more land and valleys. A fort on a river fork, especially when in control of floodgates, will leave only one side from which to be attacked, allowing the defenders to reinforce the fort’s natural defenses by placing obstacles and mines.²⁰⁴

As we will see, a large number of forts can be found in such positions on every Habsburg major frontier. Regarding mountains, Kinsky advised that forts be placed:

...at the foot of a mountain range, reachable only via cumbersome terrain or roads and passages. There they are more useful than in the mountain itself, even though forts may be useful to cover mountain passes. These so-called *Bicoques* cannot be cleared without heavy artillery, and thus enemy operations will be significantly impeded, to the point where overcoming them together may prove more difficult than the main fort itself. These positions are very useful to scare and annoy the enemy periphery and create diversions against an enemy.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ “Si vis pacem para bellum,” Mem. 2/20, KA, Wien.

²⁰⁴ Kinsky, pp. 12-14.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

Also debated was the question of how to arrange series of forts across a broad area. Venturini devoted particularly close attention to the attributes of Austria's Italian and German frontiers and the optimal fortification systems for guarding each. In looking for where to put forts in relation to one another, he developed postulates such as "the lateral boundaries of the terrain have to perpendicularly meet the war frontier" and "if this is not the case, the tapering state suffers from the disadvantage."²⁰⁶

Venturini's Frontier Sketches



Venturini advocated against cordons of posts "unconnected by a formal defensive structure, and located on the forward front" of the frontier since they "do not cause a sufficiently large gap in the advancing hostile force." Instead, he argued for what would today be called defense-in-depth, writing that to "avoid the disadvantages of forward fronts," Army should develop "mutual operation plans" in which buffer states absorbed the first blow of an attack while Austria "pull[ed] the defense force back" to form a "formal, fortified, double-fronted defensive structure" along the Main-Lech-Danube-Adda-Po, line.²⁰⁷ As we will see in subsequent chapters, such questions and the debates they fueled would take on great significance in Habsburg strategy.

Treaties

A third way that Austria sought to bridge the capabilities-threats gap was through the recruitment of treaty-allies with which to share the burdens of defense. Historically, a state's geography influences not only how badly it need allies but *what kind* of allies it needs. Britain's ocean moats allowed it to forego extensive formal alliances while dictating that it would need

²⁰⁶ G. Venturini, *Kritische Übersicht des letzten und merkwürdigsten Feldzugs im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Johann Conrad Hinrichs, 1802), p. 1.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

security ties with smaller continental states to complement the maritime capabilities of the Royal Navy's against major foes. While Russia's steppe environment gave it a similar freedom of maneuver, the need to govern vast spaces let it to prefer a combination of direct rule over neighboring territories and client-state relationships with potential rivals beyond the western periphery.

By contrast, Austria needed allies to exist at all. Of particular value were alliances with large powers capable of harassing the rearward frontiers of an enemy and drawing offensive military attention away from the *Erblande* or providing financial or military support to supplement Austria's land army. The powers that Austria courted for these purposes shifted over time, from the Maritime Powers (England and Holland) against Louis XIV to France against Prussia, Prussia against Napoleonic France and, perhaps most consistently, Russia to free up attention from the eastern frontier.

A second focal point of Habsburg diplomacy were the smaller states around its borders. As the British historian A. J. P. Taylor has pointed out, maritime powers have tended historically to prefer buffer zones as solutions to frontiers while large continental powers have tended to favor partition, on the calculation that outright ingestion of neighboring spaces is better than seeing them fragment and be recruited into the orbit of a rival.

As discussed in chapter 3, expansion of this latter variety was problematic for Austria, which was too weak to extend formal empire over neighbors. Instead, for most of its history the Monarchy sought to promote the existence of buffer zones composed of numerous smaller polities in the spaces around its borders. The bond linking these states as clients to Vienna was one of indirect patronage rather than direct rule: protection from Austria in exchange for fealty and mutual defense against stronger and more dangerous outside foes.

The benefit of buffers to Austria was partly spatial: By helping to avoid direct border-on-border contact with powerful neighbors, they lessened the sources of friction for war. Thus Prince Kaunitz, the leading Habsburg statesman of the 18th Century, in tutoring the future Leopold II

on geopolitics, wrote in a memo of 1789 that it was the presence of buffer spaces in the east that provided a basis for stability and friendship in relations with Russia, which “possesses all the characteristic traits of a natural ally” because “its is not directly adjacent” (*unmittelbar nicht benachbart*) and thus capable of undertaking territorial enlargements” without necessarily threatening Austria.²⁰⁸

Should a war break out, buffer states helped buy time for Austria to organize its own often defenses, while providing financial aid, client armies to assist Austria in the field, and tutelary fortresses to extend its reach beyond the frontier. Eugene ranked the support provided by “a kind of subscription by all the petty Italian princes” as second in strategic importance only to the subsidies of England and Holland.²⁰⁹ Venturini extolled the importance of using the states of Germany and Italy as “a means for weakening the hostile force” and making [the states of] Germany unconquerable” by a policy of encouraging each one to “cover itself as a separate state.”²¹⁰

3. Prompting Strategy

Terrain, forts and allies were all tools that the Habsburg Monarchy cultivated over its lifetime to extend the often slender military resources at the its disposal and shield the Habsburg Army from the full brunt of geopolitical competition. In addition, Austria’s harsh environment prompted its leaders to develop conceptual tools—strategy—for bridging the gaps between its power capabilities and security demands.

States develop strategies to aid in the quest for survival. Great Powers in particular, if they wish to endure competition with other large states, must develop grand strategies. Defined as “calculated relationships between means and large ends,” grand strategy requires a state’s

²⁰⁸ Kaunitz, *Memoire über die Rätlichkeit, Nützlichkeit und Nothwendigkeit, das zwischen uns und Russland nun zu Ende gehende Allianzsystem nicht nur unverzüglich zu erneueun, sonder auch auf alle mögliche Art fortan bestens zu cultivieren*, 10. Mai 1789, Staatskanzlei Vorträge Kart. 146, 1789, HNSA Wien.

²⁰⁹ Eugene, p 26.

²¹⁰ Venturini, *Kritische Übersicht*, pp. 8 and 10.

leaders to consciously plot out how they will use the finite resources to meet the variety of challenges facing the state. The need for making these calculations increases in proportion to the demands of the competitive environment in which the state finds itself. In Austria's case, the incentive was especially great, since the means were unusually limited and the potential ends to which they could be put were virtually limitless.

Strategy occurs on two levels.²¹¹ One is rationality—the attempt to arrange means to meet ends that a state's leaders anticipate will exist tomorrow. The other is interaction—the attempt by a state to pursue its chosen ends in the face of a purposeful and determined enemy. The first is proactive and anticipatory of future events that have not occurred. The second is fluid and often reactive, involving crisis management and continual rearrangements of the state's means to confront shifting threats. The Habsburg Monarchy's environment required its leaders to develop both.

The Pain of Interaction

The doorway through which Austria entered the path to grand strategy was managing interaction dynamics—or crisis-management. This level of strategy involves matching ends and means after a military contest has already begun, amidst the counter-actions of adversaries. If the central question of strategic rationality is “can we achieve the political objective with the tools available?” the question that interaction poses is, “can we do so despite the enemy's reaction?”²¹² The problem of interaction is the inherent difficulty that unexpected enemy moves create for attempts at rationality. They do this, either by triggering unforeseen consequences that exceed the defender's ability to manage, or by raising the overall costs of war to a point that “ceases to be commensurate with ends,” thus creating economic or domestic problems that force the weaker side to de-escalate. “The very nature of interaction is

²¹¹ Bradford A. Lee, “Strategic Interaction: Theory and History for Practitioners,” in Thomas G. Mahnken, *Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century: Theory, History, and Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 28.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

bound to make it unpredictable,” in the words of Clausewitz, “the effect that any measure will have on the enemy is the most singular factor among all the particulars of action.”²¹³

Strategy at the level of managing interaction comes more naturally to states than futuristic planning, for the obvious reason that it requires little prior effort and is about adjusting day-to-day plans to account for the latest battlefield or diplomatic developments. But it is also the most dangerous, since by the time competition reaches the point of war the stakes are high and can involve the survival of the state itself. It is especially dangerous for an interstitial power, with rivals on every side. Even initially limited conflicts can unexpectedly widen as rivals move cooperatively or opportunistically to take advantage of the defender’s plight. Once ignited, multi-front wars generate a high degree of complexity, spawning interaction dynamics that have to be managed in numerous places simultaneously. This is particularly difficult when the defender is militarily weak, since the burdens on the state can quickly grow beyond its ability to bear, requiring emergency fixes that bring knock-on affects internally.

Austria learned the hard way just how painful these interaction dynamics could be in the first war of the 18th Century. It entered the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) without much in the way of prior preparation or a preconceived strategy other than the desire to wrest wealthy possessions, particularly in Italy, from Bourbon control. Prince Eugene sarcastically describes a chaotic meeting of senior Habsburg officials to decide the opening moves in the war:

War being upon the point of breaking out, on account of the Spanish succession, a grand council of conference was held. My advice was, that the archduke should be sent into Spain immediately, to lead an army into Lombardy; but it was rejected by the wise counsellors of Leopold. They were offended at it. Prince Louis was appointed commander in the Empire and I in Italy.²¹⁴

Austria entered the war with few frontier forts, few forward magazines, few useful maps, little in

²¹³ Clausewitz, p. 139.

²¹⁴ Eugene, p. 36.

the way of preparatory diplomacy and disordered finances.²¹⁵ Its one asset was a veteran army with experience from recent combat with the Turks and a commander, Eugene, skilled in audacious battle tactics.

With this tool, Vienna sought to manage the crisis at hand. The ensuing thirteen-year struggle was an extended introduction to the severity of interaction dynamics for an interstitial empire. At its high point, Austria was beset by Spanish and French armies advancing across Italy, French and Bavarian armies marching down the Danube, rebel *kurucs* raiding from Hungary, a Swedish army menacing Bohemia and the danger of border disputes erupting with the Turks.

The Monarchy survived, but it was a close-run thing. These experience showed that success for Austria in an interactive setting would come down to how well it could juggle between frontiers *during the heat of battle*. This meant confronting opportunity costs: being strong in one place implied being weak somewhere else.²¹⁶ If Vienna chose to place its troops in Italy, it had to find something to take up the slack in Germany; if it wanted to deter a threat from Sweden it would have to draw down forces somewhere else and be prepared for the repercussions.

The Spanish war showed that by the time a war broke out, problems had already escalated to a point in numerical and spatial terms that were almost beyond handling. This produced an awareness that the threats of the Monarchy's environment outstripped its capabilities. But this knowledge did not take deep root, primarily because of the availability of Eugene's talents on the battlefield. For not the last time, victory lulled a Great Power into not absorbing the lessons of a conflict. As a result, 26 years later—about the same amount of time that elapsed between the First and Second World Wars—Austria was dragged into another multi-front war, except this time it almost resulted in its extinction as a state. Without Eugene's military talents and just

²¹⁵ *Denkschrift über die Reichsbefestigung der ehemalige Österreichisch-Ungarische Monarchie*, undated, KA, Wien, p. 38,

²¹⁶ For an excellent summary of the trade-offs facing Habsburg strategy in the War of Spanish Succession, see Lothar Höbelt, "The Impact of the Rakoczi Rebellion on Habsburg Strategy: Incentives and Opportunity Costs," in *War in History* 2006 13 (1) 2-15, pp. 3-15. For a longer treatment, see Charles Ingrao's masterful *In Quest and Crisis: Emperor Joseph I and the Habsburg Monarchy* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1979).

as unprepared as it had been a generation earlier, the Monarchy barely navigated the War of Austrian Succession, fending off invasions from the north, west and southwest.

Together, Austria's experiences in the Spanish and Austrian succession wars drove home a point that its leaders could no longer ignore: multi-front dynamics were too lethal to handle on a purely reactive basis. Crisis-management alone was not enough. If it wanted to endure, Austria would need to find ways of getting ahead of its conflicts in both a material and conceptual sense.

Strategic Rationality

The pain of interaction dynamics necessitated that Austria be more conscientious about squaring its limited means with the abundant threats around it. This required attempts at strategic rationality, or systematically preparing the state for future conflicts. Where the effort at rationality in strategy is for most states usually intruded upon by the chaos of war, in Austria's case it was impeded long before the point of war, in peacetime, as a result of the fabric of the state itself.

Rationality in strategy involves leaders asking the question whether the tools that they have can be used, in isolation or combination, in such a way to achieve security. It asks, "can we do it?"²¹⁷ If the answer is "yes," then they must count, in Clausewitz's words, "the sacrifices to be made in *magnitude* and also in *duration*"; if the answer is "no," then leaders must determine how they will augment their tools hand to counter the threats they face. ²¹⁸

Austria's experiences in the Spanish and Austrian succession wars strongly suggested that the answer, for it, was "no": the tools that it possessed alone were insufficient for the task of achieving security on anything like a predictable basis. After the second such war, Habsburg leaders therefore began to search for rational strategies to ensure that the empire would not

²¹⁷ Lee, pp. 28-9.

²¹⁸ Clausewitz, p. 92.

remain in a state of perpetual reaction in future crises. This search took several forms— institutional, material and conceptual.

Strategic Institutions

Even before the early 18th Century, Austria had already developed institutions for war. Chief among these was the *Hofkriegsrat*, or court war council. Created by Emperor Ferdinand I in 1556, the *Hofkriegsrat* combined the roles of Army administrator, military staff and chancery to the Emperor and direction of armies in the field while also overseeing the southern military frontier and fortresses.²¹⁹ Above the *Hofkriegsrat* sat a mosaic of other entities with roles in strategy: the Conference (known after 1760 as the *Staatsrat*), an inner group of top advisors to the Emperor, as well as the *Directorium* and *Hofkammer*, which together oversaw the *Hofkriegsrat* and a *Zentralbehörde* that shared some of the former's logistical duties.²²⁰

As with the development of maps and forts, the evolution of these and other Austrian war-making institutions was driven by the pressures of war. Already after the Spanish war, Joseph I had strengthened the *Hofkriegsrat's* status among many competing horizontal and vertical institutions, giving it nominal authority over the military affairs of the entire Monarchy.²²¹ After the Austrian succession war, Maria Theresa expanded on these reforms, eliminating duplicative provincial bodies, clarifying the *Hofkriegsrat's* duties and bolstering its position as one of the Monarchy's independent *Hofstellen* (government departments).

Warfare also prompted the development of a General Staff. Eugene had begun this process by creating a group of general officers charged with Quarter Master and Chief-of-Staff duties.²²² Experience in the Prussian wars led to the development of more formal structures, with the creation of a separate staff in 1757-58 and clear hierarchy and chain of command instituted

²¹⁹ Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, p. 4.

²²⁰ Zeinar, p. 144.

²²¹ Hochedlinger, p. 120.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 77

in 1769.²²³ The resulting body, one of the first modern general staffs in Europe, brought improvements in Austrian operational planning sufficiently notable to attract the praise of Austria's adversary, Frederick the Great.²²⁴

As is true in the modern world, the actual influence of Austria's various strategic institutions shifted over time and according to the strength of personalities at their helms. Also like modern governments, they were often overlapping and inefficient. In today's terms the *Hofkriegsrat* would be something like combining the functions of the U.S. National Security Council, Defense Policy Board and Pentagon's office of Acquisition and Logistics—a mixture that inevitably led to bureaucratic jumbles. "The bad composition of the whole machine," Joseph II complained, "overwhelm[s] [officials] with muddles, and reduce[s] them to the point when they don't know what's to be done."²²⁵

Nevertheless, however bad the machine's performance may have sometimes been, its existence and the evolutions it underwent through war represented a quest to attain achieve rationality in the preparation for war in both its material and conceptual forms.

Material Planning

Both the War of Spanish Succession and War of Austrian Succession had found the Monarchy lacking in adequate manpower, war provisions and forts and other installations. A major lesson from both wars had been that such materiel was difficult to organize once a war was underway, with enemy armies occupying provinces and depriving the state of their resources. To survive, Austria needed to take better stock of the "means" at its disposal and place them on a war footing before conflicts broke out. Early on, Eugene had seen the need to take these precautions. In 1724 he wrote:

²²³ Ibid., pp. 107 and 154-170.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 136.

²²⁵ Quoted in Derek Beales *Joseph II*, vol. 1, *In the Shadow of Maria Theresa, 1741-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 184.

I applied myself greatly to the concerns of the [empire]....I said to our generals, Could we not...raise regiments...Have large garrisons at Vienna, Presbourg, Olmutz, Gratz, Lintz, Brussels, Luxembourg and Milan? Make an entrenched camp upon each frontier, since fortresses cost too much? Establish and keep up studs, that money may not go out of the kingdom? &c.226

Again, shortly before his death, he warned about the consequences of unpreparedness:

If I were still to interfere with affairs, I should say to the Emperor, 'Take every precaution for your succession: it will be devilishly embroiled. Two or three different powers will support their pretensions. Prevent it while you are alive.... The army and the artillery are falling into decay. They will not be in a state to resist if they do not arrange together to prevent all that will happen; and if, on the death of Charles VI, they do not refuse to go to war with the Turks. I wish great good fortune to the house of Austria...and I hope that she will extricate herself.227

Failure to heed these warnings had contributed to the Monarchy plight in 1740-48. Afterwards, as we will see in chapter 6, Maria Theresa undertook large-scale efforts to reorganize the empire's military resources, enlarging and reforming the Army and forming military commissions to ensure that the empire would be able to more quickly mobilize resources at the start of the next war.

When the Seven Years War ended, Joseph II expanded on this process. "Recent experience," he wrote, "has proved quite clearly the necessity of preparing sounds arrangements for the future."228 To create a basis for such arrangements, he asked the *Hofkriegsrat* to provide a detailed ("mit vollster Genauigkeit") appraisal of the military resources available to the Monarchy.229 After reviewing their findings, he wrote a long memorandum entitled *Si Vis Pacem Para Bellum* ("If you want peace, prepare for war") arguing that Austria needed to make material preparations *well ahead of* the next war and outlining what steps specifically it should take. The emphasis in the memorandum is on the future tense. Its first axiom states:

226 Eugene, p. 95.

227 Ibid., p. 112.

228 "Si vis pacem para bellum," Mem. 2/20, KA, Wien.

229 Quoted in Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresias*, Band 7, pp. 222-3.

It is probable that the Monarchy will, before the end of time, once again be at war and that, in consequence, we are obliged to make arrangements so that we – even our great-grandchildren – can defend ourselves with dignity. To this end we must choose now the most appropriate sites for fortresses, prepare men to replace the dead, increase the number of service-horses... acquire firearms, and finally be assured of having bread for our men and oats for our horses.²³⁰

Inherent in the preparations suggested in *Si Vis Pacem* is the goal of breaking out of the reactive mode that had plagued Austria in earlier wars. The second axiom states:

...it is possible to forecast, that the next war will be incredibly bloody and vigorous... What we are unable to defend and hold...during the first two campaigns we will neither recover nor take even if we were to fight ten [campaigns], because outlays of money and men made in the initial moments will not necessarily support us for the duration [*on finit par l'inaction*]. It follows that if one will be attacked then one *must already be in a state of defense* [emphasis added]... that we must not wait until they start to prepare ourselves, when it will be too late, but rather we should have our resources ready during peacetime, so as to be able to act at the first signal.

Joseph's emphasis on material preparation shows the influence of earlier writers like Montecuccoli and Machiavelli, the latter of whom had stressed preparation of depots before a conflict: "Whoever has not taken proper care to furnish himself with a sufficient stock of provisions and ammunition bids fair to be vanquished without striking a stroke."²³¹ It also echoes Eugene's earlier, practical emphasis on the need for reliable sources of manpower, money for fortresses and systematic horse-breeding.

In other memoranda, Joseph would elaborate on the provisions that Austria should institute to be war-ready on a standing basis. These included a permanently enlarged land army, transitioning to a canton system, developing magazines and depots and creating defense infrastructure on the northern frontier. Not all of these would prove practicable, due to the financial constraints facing the Monarchy.²³² But many would be implemented, shifting Austria

²³⁰ "Si vis pacem para bellum," Mem. 2/20, KA, Wien.

²³¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Art of War* (London: CRW Publishing, 2004), p. 416.

²³² Joseph's recommendations prompted a debate with Kaunitz, who favored systems of alliance to secure Austria rather than a larger army. See the discussion on Joseph's memorandum 'The General Picture of the

to both a numerically larger army and eventually leading to the construction of a chain of forts in Bohemia. These changes and the culture of planning they instituted ensured that Austria would never again find itself as militarily unprepared as it had at the start of the wars of the first half of the 18th Century.

Conceptual Planning

The material preparations prompted by the wars with Frederick went hand-in-hand with increased attention to the conceptual dimensions of strategy. As we have seen above, this was reflected in the work of late 18th Century Austrian military writers such as Venturini and Auracher. But it was also apparent at the official level, in the formal war plans developed by the Habsburg General Staff.

One early example can be seen in the planning that was set in motion by Joseph's *Si Vis Pacem* memorandum, which was circulated among senior generals and members of the *Hofkriegsrat* and used as the basis for a conference to debate its contents.²³³ At the end of the meetings, which ran for three days, three of the generals present were tasked with drafting a White Paper. The resulting document, titled "Organization of a Reliable Defensive Strategy" presented the findings from the conference and outlined recommendations for future policy.²³⁴

In today's terms, the contents of "Organization of a Reliable Defensive Strategy" reads like a combination of the U.S. Quadriateral Defense Review and U.S. National Security Strategy. It analyzes military threats facing Austria, ranks them in level of priority and proposes solutions for addressing them that are within the means of the state. "For some time now," it begins, there has been discussion about the necessity to create reliable defensive systems to be

Affairs of the Monarchy' (*Tableau Général*), in Beales vol. 1, pp. 182-191.

²³³ Rauchensteiner, "The Development of War Theories," in Rothenberg et al., p 78.

²³⁴ "Festsetzung eines zuverlässigen Defensions-Systeme," *Protocollum Conferentiae de Die 7a 10ma et 14da Martie 1767*.

better prepared for a breach of the peace.” It then conducts what today would be called an exercise in contingency planning:

How many enemies could we afford to counter under current circumstances and...must we focus on one or multiple armies? ...An eruption by the King of Prussia alone would seem the most likely, whereas an attack from the Turkish side would not be as easy, at least while the current mood at the Porte prevails. The Austrian provinces...would be covered to the point that, if a crisis were to break out somewhere else, troops could be shifted from them according to need. At the same time, considering conditions may always change, it would be smart to prepare with whatever resources the monarchy has available for the case of a war on two fronts.²³⁵

Surveying the threats facing the state, the paper analyzes which is the gravest:

We know from experience, as well as from the state of its lands, that the Porte is in no position to mount any surprise attacks. In any case, we would have several months to contain the situation and prepare ourselves. Prussia however, in its bellicose constitution, is capable of rapidly assembling its forces to realize its hostile intentions at a moment's notice. Consequently, we must focus our attention and consider putting our defenses on an equal footing to theirs.

On the basis of this threat assessment, the White Paper asks: “What assistance could be expected from our allies?”; “What armies [could] the various enemy powers field against us?”; and “How do our forces measure up against these requirements?” In counting necessary resources, the paper takes account of the interaction dynamics that the Army had learned could arise in war, including “the possibility of a two-front war,” of allies reneging on promises and on the “contingency of an ever costly insurrection in Hungary.” The paper concludes with recommendations that include construction of forts in Bohemia, with cost estimates provided, and where to move Army units when war breaks out.

The findings in “Organization of a Reliable Defense Strategy” would directly shape subsequent policy, laying the foundation for what would become Joseph II’s northern fortification system and the plans that would be used, with some modifications, in both the subsequent War of

²³⁵ Ibid.

Bavarian Succession (1778-79) and Austro-Turkish War of 1788-1791. It is notable as an exercise in grand strategy— “calculating relationships between means and large ends,” and “acting beyond the demands of the present.” As we will see in subsequent chapters, other similar planning exercises occurred in the years following the 1767 White Paper, including preparations for an offensive war against the Turks; defensive operations in Bohemia; detailed war plans for competition with Napoleonic France and the development of complex war contingencies in the era of Radetzky.²³⁶ Rather than a one-off occurrence, the formalization of war planning initiated under Maria Theresa and Joseph II would thus become a permanent fixture of both the processes and culture of the Austrian military into the 19th Century.

Time and ‘Systems’

In grappling with strategy, Habsburg leaders were forced, to a greater extent than in most states, to come to grips with the factor of time. Time in strategy is mainly about two things: duration (how long a contest lasts) and sequencing (which contests occur when). Clausewitz places duration at the heart of the problem of interaction, posing it as the central impediment to strategic rationality in pursuit of a political object.²³⁷ For Austria, duration mattered enormously, since the longer a war lasted the more likely it was to create dynamics beyond the Army’s ability to manage. Conversely, when facing a militarily stronger foe, Austria might need to be able to draw out the contest until alliances could come into play. Above all, the Spanish and Austrian succession wars showed that Vienna needed to be able to sequence its wars—to have some means of prioritizing which rival to face when, *well before* war ever began.

Time figures prominently in Habsburg strategic behavior. Charles’ *Principles of War* identifies it as the central concern facing Austrian commanders, writing that “the principal tasks of defensive [war] are to gain time,” that “time is often times more valuable than even intrinsically

²³⁶ See for example Mem. 1/7, 1/8, 1/9, KA, Wien; “Kurz zusammengezogener Defensionsplan für das Königreich Böhmen,” in Oskar Criste, *Kriege unter Kaiser Josef II* (Vienna: Verlag von L. W. Seidel & Sohn, 1904), pp. 260-2; Erzherzog Karl an Kaier Franz Wien, am 3. Marz 1804, Beilage 1, pp. 1-17 and Beilage 3, “Operationsplan,” pp. 1-6 in Alfred Kraus, k.u.k. Generalmajor, *Beilagen zu 1805: Der Feldzug von Ulm* (Venna: Verlag von L. W. Seidel und Sohn, K. u. K. Hofbuchhändler, 1912).

²³⁷ Clausewitz, p. 139.

precious human blood,” and “the principal need of a sovereign or a general-in-chief will be to...employ [forces] in such a way that the war lasts as shortly as possible.” The problem of time is frequently discussed in imperial memoranda and letters. “Time itself is against us,” wrote Maria Theresa when Austria was diplomatically isolated, “the longer war drags on the more new enemies we have to fight...[we] have to seek to gain time.”²³⁸ When facing a stronger foe, she pines for “types of warfare that grant time to recover” and the ability to “gain time and not rush.”²³⁹ Joseph II’s memoranda worry about a “double guerre” producing enemies beyond Austria’s ability to sequence, and the 1767 White Paper centers on the need to “buy us enough time in case of a sudden breach of peace.”

It is in wrestling with issues of time that Habsburg strategy takes on its defining quality. In both a military and diplomatic sense, the heart of the strategic problem facing Austria had to do with how power is arranged in space. As Metternich said, “power distributed is no longer power.” For true power to exist at all for any state, it must be concentrated in a specific location. This implies the need for concentration, which is about space and therefore time. For an encircled and weak state, concentration is hard to achieve because the commodity of power is, in the natural state of things, diffuse. It is stretched geographically, by the “pull” of frontiers and need to guard against threats on every side; politically, by the drain of constitutional constraints and ethnic quarrels; financially, by the scarcity of resources for *tous azimuts* security readiness. The moves of rivals only complicate concentration further.

The need to deal with the time factor pointed Austria’s leaders towards the creative and integrated use of the tools that it possessed to ensure survival. Anything that they came up with strategically would have to compensate for the inadequacies of military power to cope with the state’s 360-degree threat environment. One byproduct was a search for “systems” to provide security without overstretching resources. In strategy, the term “systems” usually refers to the employment of tools in an interdependent fashion to achieve sustainable security. As Luttwak used the term in the context of the Roman Empire, it refers to: “integrated diplomacy,

²³⁸ Maria Theresa an Josef, 14. März 1778 in Schneider, pp. 45-48. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>.
²³⁹ Ibid.

military forces, road networks, and fortifications to serve a single objective [in which] the design of each element reflected the logic of the whole.”²⁴⁰

The idea of systems in strategy, as expressed in systems theory, is a tricky one, involving as it does the implicit proposition that statesmen are capable of imposing instrumental rationality in complex form, on the basis of some agreed plan, over a long period of time. Nevertheless, a systems construct does provide a useful way to think about how the Habsburgs approached the task of security, for a couple of reasons. First, a systematic approach to war and strategy were logical outworkings of Austrian strategic and political culture. The historical foundations of Habsburg military science, with its Catholic emphasis on striving for a just order and late-Renaissance and Enlightenment preoccupation with using reason and mathematics to master human passions and physical environments, lent itself to such an approach. The central concept of *metodizmus* from Montecuccoli is built around the view of war as a type of chaos (Charles’ “evil” of war) that can be managed with rational systems of thought and behavior. For the Habsburg field marshal, “strategy and perspective are those of the Cabinet room...his art of war consists in... measured geometric order, carefully weighed-up knowledge of circumstances and rules, a tranquil ‘thinking things over’; without [which] there is little use in being acquainted with that ‘infinity of situations’ in which a soldier finds himself.”²⁴¹

Second, this is how the Austrians themselves *talked about* strategy. The search for an optimal “Vertheidigungssystem” or “Defensions-system” is pervasive in Habsburg military writing from the reign of Maria Theresa to Franz Joseph. Such terminology was in widespread use by the time of Joseph’s post-war planning exercises. The 1767 White Paper seeks to “create reliable defensive systems” combining troops, forts, terrain and allies. Venturini, with his Enlightenment belief that geometry can guarantee success advocates “general defense systems” and a “mutual operation plan” integrating terrain, buffer states and fortresses. Auracher thinks in terms of systems as well, stressing the interaction of field armies and forts to secure key nodes in the terrain, while Bourscheid writes about how the Byzantine Emperor Leo used superior

²⁴⁰ Luttwak, *Roman Empire*, pp. 6-7.

²⁴¹ Magris, pp. 138-39.

“tactical systems” mixing cunning with logistical adaptation to technological change to win wars. Archduke Charles writes about both general “*Kriegssysteme*” and “*Verteidigungssysteme*” for ring-fencing Austria in forts at key points.²⁴² Even Radetzky, who tended not to think in systems but rather in terms of seeking and destroying enemy armies, writes about the need for a “defense system,” composed of “internal and external” strongholds to secure multiple war theaters at an affordable cost.²⁴³

Use of systems language was often vague, appearing to mean something like a methodology of war.²⁴⁴ But more often it was a shorthand for some combination of tools—usually, a mixture of defensive terrain, perimeter forts (whether in rows or cordon), allies (whether large or buffer-states) to extend the abilities of the Army. Perhaps the term’s meaning can best be described by what it was not: pure crisis-management. The lesson from Austria’s early 18th Century wars had been that relying on improvised reaction to events was not a viable option for a state in Austria’s position. The unpredictable and escalatory nature of interaction dynamics for an interstitial state penalized this unpreparedness financially, logistically and militarily. Thus Joseph worried, “we at present have made no arrangements or preparations; neither to be able to act immediately, nor to create a system that will allow us to operate...in a coming war.” As Archduke Charles wrote, the state needs “a system which directs the proceedings into prepared structures, and that unburdens the mind of having to make decisions under pressure and to constantly adjust and modify them. [One that brings consistency to the art of war], which is as incompatible with constant excitement as it is with strict principles.”²⁴⁵

“Systems,” in other words, were an attempt to free decision-makers from the straightjacket of constant reaction. In this sense, the search for them was a function of dealing with the time problem. Since the Army could not, in Daun’s words, “be “everywhere at once,” Austria needed things that could be in these places on its behalf. As we will see, the various permutations of

242 Erzherzog Karl, *Militärische Werke*, (Vienna: k.k. Hof-und-Straatsdruckerei, 1862), vol. 1.

243 Radetzky, “Militärische Betrachtung der Lage Österreichs,” 1828, in *Denkschriften*, p. 427.

244 Brüning, p. 69.

245 Erzherzog Karl, “Von dem Einfluss der Kultur auf die Kriegskunst” in *Waldstätten*, p. 125.

Kaunitz's "Allianz-system" were about enabling Austria's military to safely de-prioritize some of frontiers and focus on others. Similarly, the forts in Charles' defensive systems were aimed at enabling concentration (prioritization) against a main threat by putting objects in place elsewhere so that the Army would not have to "occupy all the other frontiers of the state save with the absolutely necessary number of troops."²⁴⁶

Systems thinking was inherently defensive, representing a search for means to cope with the reality of an army that was weak relative to the challenges it faced, and whose retention was necessary for the survival of the state. The offensive armies of 18th Century France or Prussia would not have needed such systems, since their essence of was to seek out opportunities on foreign soil. It is for this reason that the handful of instinctively offensive Austrian sources—Burcell, Laudon, Radetzky—did not gravitate towards systems thinking and, as we will see, why it was relinquished amidst the move toward more offensive warfighting concepts in the Habsburg Army of Franz Joseph. At the same time, systems thinking was a reflection of Habsburg geography. It is hard to imagine generals in 18th or 19th Century Russia wrestling with pseudo-mathematical systems of warfare in their use of deep strikes to conquer the endless spaces of the Eurasian heartland. For Austria, systems made sense as an attempt at amplifying the defensive traits of abundant mountains and internal lines. In this sense, the method of thought that they reflected was inherently optimistic—an expression of the quest for order and an attainable security that was encouraged by Danubian topography.

Conclusion

Habsburg physical and political geography significantly influenced Austria's behavior as a strategic actor. Surrounding threats required a large land army while placing effective limitations on what that army could accomplish. Domestic complexity amplified these constraints. The composite nature of the state made such military power as existed precious, for reasons that went beyond the normal security responsibilities held by most armies and had

²⁴⁶ Charles, *Principles*, p. 6.

to do with the survival of the dynasty—and thus the state itself.

Habsburg strategy can be understood as the search for expedients to husband this weak but valuable tool, and thus the state, against the chaos of geopolitics and war. Terrain, technology and treaties were the foremost ways for doing so. Used in combination, they offered an affordable means of offsetting strategic burdens and avoiding a coalescence of unmanageable threats. The search for these combinations fueled the development of Habsburg strategy. Strategy as a conscious exercise thus arose for Austria as an expedient, the need for which was driven home by the painful consequences of trying to survive without it, through *ad hoc* reactions to invasion. These experiences created incentives to try to transcend pure crisis management and be deliberate about matching means to ends—to prepare materially ahead of conflicts and to think conceptually about threats before they emerged. Coming at a moment when the Enlightenment seemed to offer rational processes to tackle even the most vexing state challenges, the pressures on Austria encouraged attempts at creating methodical systems to fend off the chaos intruding from its strategic environment.

The result was a defensive grand strategy, the essence of which was to use an Army-in-Being, frontier forts, buffer states and a flexible system of alliances to mitigate and deflect the strains of external encirclement and internal weakness. Like the development of accurate maps and attempts at reforming state administration and finance, Austrian attempts to formulate grand strategy were spurred by war and geopolitical necessity. Periods of reflection, planning and fortress construction tended to occur in the wake of conflicts, which in Austria's case were an almost permanent occurrence.

These wars took place at the frontier—first in against the Turks, then the French, then the Prussians. As we will see in the next three chapters, it was here, at the outer reaches of imperial power, that Habsburg grand strategy would be prompted, shaped and tested most.

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Chapter V.
Harvest of Briars:
Turks, Russians and the Southeastern Frontier

"I do not find that Your Majesty would be well-served by the possession of these faraway places." – Prince Eugene

"Russia is almost useless as a friend, but could cause us considerable damage as an enemy." – Kaunitz

Summary

On its southern and eastern frontiers, the Habsburg Monarchy contended with two large land empires: a decaying Ottoman Empire, and a rising Russia determined to extend its influence in the Black Sea littorals and Balkans peninsula. In balancing these forces, Austria faced two interrelated dangers: the possibility of Russia filling Ottoman power vacuums that Austria itself could not fill, and the potential for crises here, if improperly managed, to fetter its options for handling graver threats in the West. In dealing with these challenges, Austria deployed a range of tools over the course of the 18th Century. In the first phase (1690s-1730s), it deployed mobile field armies to alleviate Turkish pressure on the Habsburg heartland before the arrival of significant Russian influence. In the second phase (1740s-1770s), Austria used appeasement and militarized borders to ensure quiet in the south while focusing on the life-or-death struggles with Frederick the Great. In the third phase (1770s-1790s), it used alliances of restraint to check and keep pace with Russian expansion and recruit its help in co-managing problems to the north. Together, these techniques provided for a slow but largely effective recession, in which the House of Austria used cost-effective methods to manage Turkish decline and avoid collisions that would have complicated its more important western struggles.

Southern Frontiers of the Habsburg Monarchy



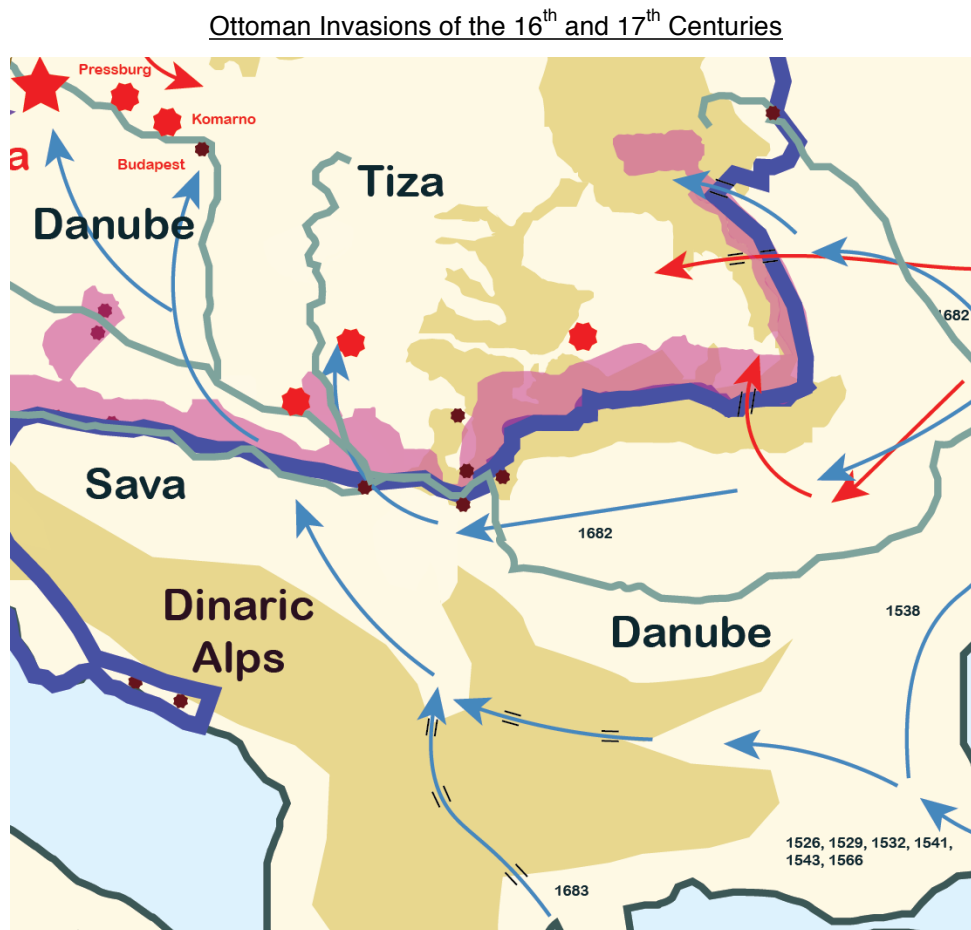
Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

Eastern Dilemmas

The end of the Great Turkish War in 1699 brought the Habsburg Monarchy into possession of a vast span of territories to the south and east of their historic heartland in Upper and Lower Austria. Under the terms of the Treaty of Karlowitz, the Monarchy gained nearly 60,000 square miles of land, effectively doubling the size of their empire. The new territories stretched to the Sava River in the south and to the Carpathians in the east, bringing Slavonia, Croatia and most of Hungary, including Transylvania but without the Banat, under Habsburg rule.

Acquisition of these new lands greatly alleviated the ancient security problem in the south, where since the 16th Century an expansionist Ottoman Empire had placed unrelenting pressure on the Habsburg core, rendering Royal Hungary and Styria as buffer territories. With the Ottoman frontier so far north, Turkish armies had been able to maraud the borderlands and invade the *Erblande* itself with little warning. Twice in previous centuries—once in 1529, again in 1683—large Ottoman siege trains had moved through the gap in the Šar Mountains up the

Maritsa, Morava and Sava river valleys to invest Vienna itself.²⁴⁷ Only with great effort and the help of allied armies from across Europe had these attacks been repelled. By placing a generous layer of territory under Habsburg control, Karlowitz effectively removed this problem of surprise invasions while furnishing the Monarchy with the nominal size and strategic depth of a first-rank power. However, expansion in the southeast created two sets of problems for the Habsburg state—one administrative in nature, the other geopolitical.



Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

²⁴⁷ Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993. p. 63

The Eastern Power Gradient

First, Austria faced the question in the Balkans, encountered by most land empires at their height, of where to draw the line of conquest. As noted in chapter 2, the power of an empire can be assessed according to the surface area over which it can exercise control and collect taxes. The frontier historian Lattimore Owen has surmised that, historically, land empires eventually hit an “outer limit of desirable expansion,” at which the ability to bring new territories under civil administration is undercut by the costs of projecting military power. Beyond this point, the power gradient, or rate at which military power is eroded by distance, becomes too steep, and the empire faces a “zone of diminishing returns,” where additional gains, rather than strengthening the empire, weaken it. Not expanding to this point deprives an empire of resources and safety, as was case for Austria in the period before Karlowitz. But going beyond it leads to overstretch and increases the vulnerability of the state. The ability to accurately identify the point of maximal expansion is therefore an important objective for successful empires. Only by doing so can they establish the parameters of an *orbis terrarum* – what the Chinese called *t’ien hsia* – that can be sustainably administered through the construction of a defensive perimeter.²⁴⁸

Finding the point of maximal expansion is easier when geographical features demarcate the space in question. Herein lay much of the problem for Austria in the southeast. The Balkans were the only Habsburg frontier to possess relatively weak natural borders. Major mountain ranges lie several hundred miles south of the rivers Sava, Drava, which allowed substantial fluctuation of formal borders according to military realities. To the east, the map would seem to indicate the possibility for expansion to the Black Sea, but the interposition of the Carpathians some 270 miles before the river delta, and malarial flood zones on the Wallachian Plain placed obstacles to such enlargement.

The nature of terrain in the southeast also worsened the effects of the power gradient. At

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

almost 800 miles in length, this was the Monarchy's largest frontier. Unless properly managed it could easily require large forces to hold down far-flung sectors often separated by rugged terrain with few roads. Units deployed to the south were harder to reposition than in other frontiers. Travel distances from the Balkans to the Monarchy's other frontiers was further and more complicated than movement to the other three. Once deployed, troops were more likely to get bogged down: in the Serbian sector, by seasonal rains; in Wallachia, by floodplains and fever. The longer a war lasted here, the more troops it was likely to suck in troops and embroil the Monarchy in protracted fighting. These factors impacted military range, not only by making the radius of effective operations shorter than in more congenial territories of Western Europe, but also by creating logistical incentives for Habsburg commanders to tether forces here to predictable supply depots and avenues of retreat.

Growth of Habsburg Power on the Southeastern Frontier



Source: attwiw.com.

A further complication was the human makeup of the southeastern territories. The territories that Austria acquired at Karlowitz possessed social, political and economic traits very different from the rest of the Monarchy. Such formal economy as existed bore the stamp of a century and a half of Ottoman rule—artisanal and agricultural, kept local by the underdeveloped infrastructure and not easily incorporated into the western Habsburg lands.²⁴⁹ As in neighboring frontier spaces under Ottoman and Russian rule, social organization in Hungary was archaic and rustically agrarian, with only five towns with populations greater than 20,000.²⁵⁰ Further south, frontier cultures of tribalism and raiding did not readily lend themselves to assimilation by bureaucratic empire. In the eyes of much of the Orthodox population, the Habsburg soldiers and administrators that arrived after Karlowitz brought a liberating but new and alien form of rule; to the Magyar nobility, they had the appearance of foreign interlopers.

In both territorial and human terms, Austrian expansion in the southeast, while necessary for keeping neighboring empires at bay, tended to not significantly add to the Monarchy's economic resource base. Indeed, expansion here brought problems. On the border itself, the longstanding *Ghazi* tradition of incessant raiding brought low-intensity attacks on a more or less permanent basis, creating a "constant state of emergency" that made "official boundary marks worthless."²⁵¹ The presence of a large and churlish Magyar nobility in the historically secessionist territory of Transylvania near the Ottoman border created a continual danger of revolt. These factors amplified the geopolitical "pull" on the Monarchy's southeastern flank, requiring frequent military intervention and ensuring that the army's attention here would be directed inward as much as outward.

Together, this mixture of large distances, internal difficulties and low returns on investment made the south a nettlesome place for the exercise of Habsburg power. Despite their formal

²⁴⁹ McNeill, pp. 215-216.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

²⁵¹ Hochedlinger, p. 24. Under the Treaty of Karlowitz, the Ottomans committed themselves for the first time to a political-linear border that technically required eschewal of continued raiding. See Rifaat A. Abou-El-Haj, "The Formal Closure of the Ottoman Frontier in Europe: 1699-1703," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (July-September 1969), pp. 467-475.

incorporation into the Monarchy from the early 18th Century onward, it is more accurate to think of these lands as a kind of internalized buffer zone, militarily valuable as a shock absorber but not a net contribution to Habsburg power in anything other than status terms. As Prince Eugene mused to the Emperor in the midst of one of his Balkan campaigns, “I do not believe that Your Majesty would be well served by these wretched, distant places, many of which, without lines of communication to the others or revenue, are expensive to maintain and more trouble than they are worth. Potential liabilities, Your Majesty need not insist on their retention.”²⁵²

Balancing Turks and Russians

A second problem for Austria in the southeast was geopolitical in nature—the need to manage relations with two large, neighboring empires, the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Each posed a distinct challenge to the Habsburgs.

In spite of their recent defeat, the Turks remained a potent military force committed to projecting power in, if not pursuing outright mastery of, their northern frontiers. With a heartland in Anatolia and outlying provinces in Persia, the Balkans and Northern Africa, the Ottoman Empire enjoyed a significant degree of insulation in the era before modern air and naval power. While they would eventually lag behind the west technologically, the Ottomans at this stage still possessed military capabilities roughly equivalent to their Habsburg and Russian neighbors, with large stores of gunpowder, small arms and field and siege artillery.²⁵³ The decentralized Ottoman military system, or *seyfiye*, consisted of local forces supplied by fiefdoms backed by a professional army centered on the famous Janissary corps. Rich in cavalry, their armies employed a combination of conventional and irregular battle techniques reflecting their partly Asiatic composition. Through centuries of Balkan warfare they had amassed numerous fortresses along the Lower Danube and Black Sea. Slow to mobilize in

²⁵² Eugen an Karl, 20 Juni 1718 in *Feldzüge des Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen*, Kriegsgeschichtlichen Abteilung des k. und k. Kriegs-Archivs, XVII Band, Anhang, p. 238.

²⁵³ Jonathan A. Grant, “Rethinking the Ottoman ‘Decline’: Military Technology Diffusion in the Ottoman Empire, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Journal of World History*, Volume 10, Number 1, Spring 1999, pp. 179-201.

wartime, the Ottomans suffered from inefficient administration and were already showing signs of the political instability and court intrigue that would later paralyze the empire and trigger outside intervention. At the time of Karlowitz, however, they remained a resilient and aggressive power capable of fielding large armies and inflicting defeats on Western opponents.

As the Turks began their long decline, Russia was emerging as a regional military power. The late 17th Century saw Russia begin the multi-directional expansion from the Muscovy heartland that would eventually make it one of the largest land empires in history. As Russian settlers and soldiers pushed east and south into the steppe, they also moved west toward the Baltic-Carpathian-Pontic line.²⁵⁴ At the time of Karlowitz, Russian attention was primarily focused on competition with Sweden over the Baltic and decaying Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. But the Russians looked south as well. Just three years earlier, the Tsar's armies had expelled the Turks from the fortress of Azov, signaling Russia's appearance as a serious military presence on the north shore of the Black Sea. In the years that followed the Russian Tsar, Peter I, systematically reformed the Russian state, establishing a modern fleet and professional army on the Western model. Coinciding with a period of population growth and territorial expansion, Peter's reforms set Russia on the path to deep offensive strikes that would become defining features of Russian military strategy well into the 19th Century.²⁵⁵

The combination of Ottoman decline and Russian expansion represented both an opportunity and a challenge for Austria. On one hand, the diminishing strength of the Turk relieved much of the the traditional source of security pressure that had existed here prior to 1699. It also created room for Habsburg territorial enlargement which Russia, a fellow Christian power, could help exploit. At the same time, this process also created vacuums that Russia itself might eventually be able to fill.

At the heart of this problem was the growing physical reality of Russian military strength in the region. After defeating Charles XII of Sweden and consolidating its position in the north, Peter I

²⁵⁴ LeDonne, pp. 1-37.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.85-93

diverted the bulk of the army to a southerly axis. Following an unsuccessful campaign in 1710-11, Russian forces launched a series of offensive wars that expelled the Turks from their fortresses on the northern rim of the Black Sea, seized Crimea and began pressing down the sea's western coastline to Ottoman on the Danube. Already by the early 18th Century, these exploits showed Russia's potential to conduct large, well-organized expeditions using Western military technology well beyond its traditional periphery and eventually become an ordering presence in Austria's backyard.

The fact of Russian strength constrained Habsburg strategic options for managing the southeast. The Monarchy's own military limitations and the diminishing returns of Balkan conquest meant that Austria was unlikely to be able to fill emerging Turkish vacuums to such an extent as to bar Russia's expansion, much less to win in a sustained contest against Russia. At the same time, Austria could not simply let regional voids be filled by Russia alone. The speed of Russian conquests, if unchecked, could conceivably create a mammoth competitor bordering Austria from Poland to Serbia blocking future Austrian expansion to the mouth of the Danube. Sustained Russian proximity to the culturally and religiously similar Slavic population of Austria's Balkan territories was likely to present a greater challenge to Habsburg authority than the common enemy of Islam.²⁵⁶ Should these factors lead to a diminution or ejection of Habsburg strength in the East, it could negatively affect the Monarchy's prestige and strategic depth for dealing with problems in the West.

Eastern Strategies

Habsburg rulers recognized this dilemma. A meeting of the Privy Conference in 1711 concluded that, "if the tsar is victorious he could throw himself into Turkish territory as far as the Danube and possibly force his way to Constantinople, an outcome much more menacing in its long-term consequences for Austria than even the most far-reaching Turkish victory."²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Harvey L. Dyck, "New Serbia and the Origins of the Eastern Question, 1751-55: A Habsburg Perspective." *The Russian Review* 40, (1981): 1-19. p. 2

²⁵⁷ Conference Protocol, 23 February 1711 quoted in Karl A. Roider, Jr., *Austria's Eastern Question 1700-1790* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p.33

From the early 18th Century onward, the Habsburgs would debate three broad options for how to deal with this problem: (1) unilateral extension of Habsburg power; (2) cooperation with Russia to eject and supplant the Turks and co-manage the remnants of their rule; and (3) support for the status quo and resistance to Russian encroachments.²⁵⁸ Over the century that followed, all three alternatives would be attempted in different forms and combinations. The viability of each option at given moments in time would be a function, both of Austria's power position relative to that of its two eastern neighbors and how they judged developments on this frontier to rank alongside priorities on the Monarchy's frontiers in the west and north.

1. The Era of Mobile Field Armies: 1690s-1730s

In the opening decades of the 18th Century, local conditions favored the first option, of seeking to militarily shape the southeastern security environment to Austria's advantage. At this early stage, Ottoman weakness, as demonstrated by the scale of Habsburg territorial gains in the previous war and recent Turkish defeats at the hands of the Russians, presented an opportunity to consolidate the Monarchy's enlarged position in the southeast. The prospects of gain seemed to outweigh the risks, either from the Ottoman military itself or from Russian interference, which was foreseen but still on the horizon, and mainly restricted to the Sea of Azov and Dniester.

The strategy that evolved in response to this environment was shaped primarily by the desire to exploit areas of military advantage that Austria possessed as a result of the previous Turkish war and its recent contests with Spain and France. Experiences in combat had revealed a considerable Habsburg tactical-technological edge over Turkish forces, rooted in the development of modern Austrian armies using Western equipment and fighting methods. As recently as 1697, Prince Eugene had demonstrated the decisive results that such forces could have against traditionally deployed Ottoman armies by inflicting a crushing defeat on the Turks at the Battle of Zenta that resulted in more than 30,000 Ottoman casualties.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

The early decades of the 18th Century offered opportunities to repeat this victory. Ottoman forces of this period were equipped in similar fashion to European rivals; indeed, Ottoman muskets and artillery were in some cases qualitatively superior to those found on the Habsburg side.²⁵⁹ The Habsburg edge lay in the quantity of such weapons and in how they were employed tactically.

The first was a byproduct of advantages in the Austrian system for procuring military technology. Traditionally, the Ottoman Empire had financed its wars through plunder, a system which required continual conquest to support the growth of the military establishment. While possessing the core of a standing army, the system supporting it was unstable and contingent upon victory. The development of munitions in the Ottoman Empire was tightly controlled by government and depended upon a combination of arsenals and networks of skilled artisans, the latter of which were organized by guild and dominated by the the Janissary corps, an elite but conservative military body which frequently opposed innovation.²⁶⁰

In Austria, by contrast, procurement was tied more heavily to military contractors, who had at their disposal a larger reservoir of artisanal talent and access to the techniques and resources not only of the *Erblande* but of neighboring Bohemia and Italy. To this must be added the advantage of greater resources for war in Habsburg lands which, while deficient alongside many western rivals, compared favorably with the Turks. Efforts at bureaucratic centralization and, from 1714 onward, by the Monarchy's acquisition of the Italian and Dutch lands, enabled a larger tax base and more powerful standing army. By the early 1700s Habsburg revenue was already at least double that of the Ottoman Empire, where an astonishing 80 percent of revenues collected failed to ever reach the Treasury as a result of corruption and rent-seeking.²⁶¹ Of those Ottoman funds raised for defense, a large portion had to go to the navy,

²⁵⁹ Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500-1700* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1999). See also; Grant, pp. 179-201 and Gabor Agoston, "Firearms and Military Adaptation: The Ottomans and the European Military Revolution, 1450-1800" in *Journal of World History*, Volume 25, Number 1, March 2014, pp. 102, 108.

²⁶⁰ McNeill, p. 131.

²⁶¹ Lieven, p. 140.

while in Austria virtually all could be concentrated on the upgrading and upkeep of the army.

One result of these financial disparities was that, while the quality of Turkish weapons may have been comparable or occasionally superior, Habsburg forces tended to go to war with both more numerous and higher quality weapons. By the time of the Turkish wars of the early 18th Century, Habsburg units had transitioned to the flintlock musket (*Flinte*), which fired faster and more reliably than previous match- and wheel-lock pieces. The newer muskets also allowed for the widespread use of bayonets, the latter of which would not be widely used in Turkish armies for many decades.²⁶² By contrast, Ottoman armies were equipped with a mixture of European and traditional weapons. The total proportion of their armies equipped with modern firearms—the Janissaries, artillery and *sefylie* volunteer forces—typically made up only a third.²⁶³ Although reforms would raise these proportions, for most of this period Habsburg forces were proportionally stronger in regular troops, with Janissaries still making up less than a third of the Ottoman Army at Peterwardein in 1716. Those Turkish units that did carry muskets were equipped with an array of different types. “Their weapons,” an Austrian military memo noted, “lack a uniform caliber, causing balls to often get stuck in the breach; as a result, their supply is slow and their fire never lively.”²⁶⁴

Another Austrian advantage was tactical, in how their weapons were used on the battlefield. Individually, Ottoman troops tended to be formidable fighters. As Archduke Charles wrote, “the Turk has a strongly constituted body: he is courageous and bold, and possesses a particular ability in the handling of his own arms. The horses of the Turkish cavalry are good; they possess a particular agility and rapidity.”²⁶⁵ Numerically, they tended to field larger armies than the Habsburgs, composed of different troop types from across the Ottoman Empire and including everything from stock Anatolians to Persians, Egyptians and Tatars. Their favored

262 Erich Gabriel, *Die Hand- und Faustfeuerwaffen der habsburgischen Heere* (Wien: Oesterreichischer Bundesverlag, 1990), pp. 23-29

263 Muhammed Fatih Calisir, *A Long March: The Ottoman Campaign in Hungary* (Budapest: CEU Central European University, 2009).

264 “Janitscharen,” 1787, in Oskar Criste, *Kriege unter Kaiser Josef II* (Vienna: Verlag von L. W. Seidel & Sohn, 1904), p. 272.

265 Charles, *Principles*, p. 59.

method of war was offensive, forming dense masses that charged headlong with Islamic banners waving and screaming, as Eugene put it, “their cursed yells of Allah! Allah! Allah!”²⁶⁶ Austrian eyewitnesses frequently commented on the unnerving effects that such chants, coming from tens of thousands of advancing Ottoman soldiers, could have on their opponents.²⁶⁷

Despite such ferocity, Turkish armies suffered from a lack of discipline, which in turn undermined tactical handling and fire control. Ottoman attacks, though large, tended to be pell-mell and poorly coordinated. As Eugene said of the chaos in Turkish formations, “the second line [is] in the intervals of the first, and others in the third line [are] in the intervals of the second, and then, also, reserves [are thrown in] and their saphis on the wings.”⁷⁸ A later Austrian source described these assaults as proceeding “without rule or order” (“*ohne Regel, ohne Ordnung*”), comparing them to the “pigs-head” (“*Schweinskopf*”) formations described in antiquity, in which the bravest fighters inevitably push to the forefront while the mass lingered behind them.²⁶⁸ In a similar vein, Archduke Charles wrote that the Turks “attack in mixed groups of all types of troops, and each isolated man abandons himself to the sentiment of his force.”²⁶⁹

By contrast, by the early 18th Century, Habsburg armies were drilled to fight on the Western European model, in synchronized fashion by unit. From long experience on European battlefields, the infantry was trained to deliver controlled volleys on command. The resulting discipline translated into a tactical advantage that allowed Austrian armies, if well-handled, to sustain rates of fire capable of repelling or even massacring massed charges of the kind favored by the Turks. “As the effort of several Turks acts neither to the same end, nor in the same manner,” Charles wrote, “they always fall against an enemy who opposes against them

²⁶⁶ Eugene, p. 78.

²⁶⁷ “Janitscharen,” 1787, in Criste, p. 273.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Charles, *Principles*, p. 60.

a unified mass acting cohesively. They rout with the same disorder and the same rapidity as they came up.”²⁷⁰

The question of how to maximize these advantages against the Turks was intensely studied by Habsburg military men. In *Sulle Battaglie* Montecuccoli advised Austrian commanders to abandon the defensive methods used on western battlefields and adopt an aggressive, tactically offensive mindset.²⁷¹ “If one had to do battle with the Turk,” he wrote:

1. Pike battalions have to be extended frontally, more than has ever been the case before, so that the enemy cannot easily enclose them with his half-moon order.
2. Cavalry is intermingled with the infantry behind and opposite the intervals so that the foe...would be exposed on both sides to the salvos of the musketry.
3. One should advance directly against the Turk with one’s line of battle, and one should not expect him to attack because, not being well-furnished with short-range, defensive weapons, he does not readily involve himself in a melee or willingly collide with his adversary... Using the wings of his half-moon formation, it is also easy for him to approach and retire laterally...
4. Squadrons are constituted more massively than is ordinarily the case.
5. One stations a certain number of battalions and squadrons along the flanks of the battle line in order to guarantee security.²⁷²

Prince Eugene would adopt and expand upon this template in later years, systematizing fire control, introducing uniform regimental drill, placing greater emphasis on speed of deployment for plains warfare, and adopting defensive formations to allow small units greater flexibility in movement across broken terrain.²⁷³

The overarching goal of Austrian tactics in the south was to bring their greater firepower to bear while making provisions for the safety of flanks, which Turkish cavalry were expert at attacking. To account for Ottoman speed, Austrian commanders were to form their units in square formations not unlike those later used by colonial European forces against indigenous

²⁷⁰ Charles, *Principles*, p. 59.

²⁷¹ Barker, p. 61.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²⁷³ McNeill, p. 160.

armies in Africa. As Charles wrote:

The suppleness and rapidity of their horses permit their cavalry to profit from all openings in front or in flank and penetrate there. To give them no chance of doing it, one should thus form the infantry in square...and not to put into lines anything save the cavalry which is equally rapid as their cavalry... [Commanders should] form several squares, each one of two or three battalions strength at most. These squares constitute lines of battle as much in march as in position. One forms in the end some of these squares in checkerboard fashion, and from it one derives the great benefit of being able to mutually defend and support each other.²⁷⁴

So great was the risk of Turkish cavalry penetrating the flanks of these squares that Austrian units were to “camp and march always in squares” and when possible to protect these formations with *chevaux-de-frises* or so-called ‘Spanish Riders’—lances several yards long fitted with boar spears—to provide a thick hedge and keep irregular cavalry at bay while reloading.²⁷⁵ As a further precaution, Austrian forces in the south were typically given a higher compliment of cavalry (at times approaching 50 percent of field armies).

Eugene’s Offensives

It was with these techniques that Habsburg forces took the field against the Turks in 1716. Leading them was the 52-year-old Prince Eugene of Savoy. Born in Paris and raised amongst the court and nobility of Louis XIV, Eugene had been rejected from the French army and forced to leave France after a scandal involving his mother and the King. Small in stature, he was a tenacious, creative and offensive-minded general whose motto in war was “seize who can.”²⁷⁶ A veteran of the Turkish wars, Eugene’s first combat experience had been as a 20-year-old volunteer pursuing the Turks alongside the Polish hussars as the siege of Vienna in 1683, for which Leopold I had awarded him a regiment of dragoons. By the time of the 1716 war, Eugene was a seasoned senior field commander who had successfully led the armies of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire in three wars and more than a dozen major battles. He

²⁷⁴ Charles, *Principles*, pp. 60-61.

²⁷⁵ Hochedlinger, pp. 126-127 and 140.

²⁷⁶ Eugene, p. 41.

was ready for war.

Eugene's war aims, as outlined by the Privy Conference, were two-fold. First, he was to secure Habsburg control of the Danube down to Vidin, thus closing the Banat salient and restricting the Turks to a second line of fortresses at Giugiu-Babadag-Ismail; and (2) by doing so, to impose a diplomatic settlement making Wallachia and Moldavia *de facto* buffer states. As the Emperor communicated to him, it was critical to establish these provinces as client states ("*uns tributaer erhalten*").²⁷⁷

While tactically offensive, Eugene's overarching strategic objective was therefore defensive: to round off, and buy breathing space for, the territories acquired in the previous war. In the ensuing campaign, Eugene accomplished these goals while inflicting crushing defeats on the Turks. Going into the war less than two years after the conclusion of the Spanish succession struggle, he was able to draw upon a large reservoir of seasoned veterans from campaigns in Italy and Germany. Using the Danube as a supply artery, he bypassed Belgrade, a major Ottoman fortress holding the key to southeastern lines of communication, and chose instead to seek out and destroy the main Ottoman army. This he intercepted in late summer at Peterwardein under the personal command of the Grand Vizier and, despite possessing numerically inferior forces, inflicted a decisive defeat from which barely a third of the Turkish army escaped.²⁷⁸ In the months that followed, he consolidated this victory by taking Ottoman fortresses at Timisoara, in the Banat and, most notably, Belgrade.

The Role of Diplomacy

Eugene military victories would not have been possible without prior Habsburg diplomacy. The key to his victories in the field was the ability to concentrate Austria's limited military forces, which had only occurred because Austria did not have to worry about maintaining large troop concentrations on other frontiers while fighting in the south. This was made possible by

²⁷⁷ Der Kaiser Karl an den Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen, Wien, 25. Sept. 1717, in *Feldzüge des Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen*, pp. 438-9.

²⁷⁸ Roeder, p. 50.

preparatory diplomacy, which had begun years before the war, when Habsburg diplomats worked to ensure that a war in this theater would not occur until the timing was militarily favorable to the Monarchy.

The foundation to this diplomacy had been efforts to prevent the breakout of conflict too early—most notably, at the highpoint of the Spanish succession war, when tensions with The Porte had repeatedly threatened to open a Turkish front in the contest. The first of these came in 1707, when several Ottoman merchants were killed in a border incident at Kecskemet. Faced with the prospect of a Turkish declaration of war at a moment when Habsburg forces were pinned down on the Po and Rhine, Joseph I used a combination of bribery at the Sultan's court and compensation for Turkish damages, to buy peace.²⁷⁹ Again in 1709, the passage of Sweden's Charles XII into Ottoman protection following his defeat by the Russians threatened to bring the Turks into the war. This time Austria responded by rallying its western allies against the Swedes, issuing a war threat to Turkey and creating a new northern corps under Eugene to deter attack.²⁸⁰ In both instances, the Habsburgs were able to avoid war with the Ottomans at an inconvenient moment for their broader strategic interests.

A similar mixture of accommodation and force had been used to ensure that Eugene would not have to worry during his campaigns about problems from the Hungarians. From 1703 to 1711, Magyar *kurucs* under the rebel prince Rákóczi had waged a relentless irregular war against Austrian positions in Hungary, momentarily even threatening the Habsburg capital. In order to concentrate force in the western theater, Austrian diplomats in 1706 brokered a temporary armistice that allowed Eugene to focus attention to his operations in Italy, without granting the scale of constitutional concessions sought by the rebels.²⁸¹ After achieving victory in the west, the Habsburgs were able to use a "surge" of cavalry into Hungary to defeat the rebels and force a favorable peace. The resulting Treaty of Szatmar (1711) was a showpiece of Habsburg diplomacy, mixing threats (as Joseph I said when threatened by a resumption of *kuruc* raids, "tell them bluntly that we 'could do even worse.'") and magnanimity, with pardons for rebel

²⁷⁹ For an extended description of the crisis see Roider, pp. 29-30.

²⁸⁰ Ingrao, *In Quest*, pp. 153-55.

²⁸¹ Höbelt, pp. 3-15.

leaders and a guarantee of Hungary's historic liberties.²⁸² This peace proved durable. As a result, by the time Eugene began preparing for military operations four years later, he was not troubled by the prospect of Hungarian uprisings along his lines of communication, and was even able to employ former *kuruc* rebels in his army.

These earlier preparations helped make possible a sharp, successful war. The Emperor had explicitly requested that the campaign be short, instructing Eugene to achieve a "quick and glorious peace" – partly to avoid creating an opening for crises ("*grosse Unruhen*") on other frontiers and partly to ensure that any lands won could be secured rapidly and without foreign interference ("*ohne Mediation*").²⁸³

In achieving these objectives, Eugene achieved maximum for Austria at a minimum financial burden to the state. In the concluding Peace of Passarowitz, the Monarchy kept, by terms of *uti possidetis*, what Eugene's armies held, adding some 30,000 square miles of new territory. The speed of this victory allowed Austria to quickly turn its military attention to problems arising in Italy. "Our hands are now free," Charles VI wrote to Eugene, "to deal with those who want to chew on us."²⁸⁴

The war's gains bolstered Habsburg security in the southeast. Following Eugene's advice to "expand following the lay of the land" Austria absorbed the Banat, closing the gap between its defenses in Croatia-Slavonia and Transylvania. The war also enhanced the size and status of the Monarchy's regional buffers, placing northern Serbia and Little Wallachia under Habsburg rule, while designating Wallachia, Moldavia and Poland, under Article I, as intermediary bodies: "Distinguished and separated as anciently by the Mountains, in such manner that the Limits of the ancient Confines may be unchangeably observed on all sides."²⁸⁵

²⁸² Quoted in Höbelt, p. 11.

²⁸³ Der Kaiser Karl an Eugen, Wien, 25. Sept. 1717, in *Feldzüge des Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen*, pp. 438-9.

²⁸⁴ Der Kaiser Karl an Eugen, 28. Juli 1718 in *Ibid.*, p. 385.

²⁸⁵ Samuel Whatley, *A General Collection of Treatys of Peace and Commerce, Manifestos, Declarations of War, and Other Publick Papers* Vol. IV. (London: J.J. and P. Knapton, 1732), p. 402

2. The Era of Appeasement: 1740s-1770s

Passarowitz marked a high-water mark for Habsburg power in the Balkans. But it would not last. In the years that followed, Austria's ability to shape the southern frontier through unilateral military action evaporated, as a result of two changes—one military in nature, the other geopolitical.

First, Eugene died. The extent to which Austria's spectacular battlefield victories had been the result of the prince's talents became dramatically apparent in the Austro-Turkish war of 1737-39. As before, Habsburg diplomats successfully labored to create the conditions for an exclusive focus on this frontier before going to war.²⁸⁶ As before, Habsburg forces set out to win a short war using mobile field armies. And as before, the goal was to consolidate holdings along the central Danube axis and deepen the client-state status of Wallachia and Moldavia.²⁸⁷ But this time, Austria suffered catastrophic defeat and, in the ensuing Treaty of Belgrade, was forced to disgorge most of its gains from Passarowitz. While using many of the same tactics as in the previous war, Habsburg generalship was weaker, the army had lost its fighting edge, and the Ottomans themselves had incorporated lessons from past wars, adopting improved technology, with the help of foreign military advisors, in both small arms and artillery.

The second, far larger, change to conditions in the southeast, however, came as a result of geopolitical developments elsewhere. In the year after the war ended, Austria was invaded from the north by the armies of Frederick II of Prussia, setting off what would become an almost 40-year life-or-death struggle for the Habsburg Monarchy.

With virtually all of its military resources pulled northward, Austria would not be able to devote the attention to the Balkans that it had in prior decades. But this did not mean that it had no strategic needs in the southeast or could ignore this frontier. Border raiding continued and the

²⁸⁶ Roeder, p. 68.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

possibility of a Turkish renewal of hostilities to expand on their recent victories had to be taken into account. Russia, too, continued its expansion down the Black Sea coastline. However bad things might get in the north, these dynamics would have to be monitored—and managed. Above all, Austria needed to avoid a Turkish invasion from the south while their armies were detained in Bohemia. And if possible, it needed to recruit Russia's active help against Prussia.

For these purposes, the Habsburg Monarchy developed a strategy very different, but no less effective, than the one it had used to expand offensively under Eugene. Instead of mobile field armies, it would rely on appeasement to engage and placate eastern enemies, undergirded by frontier defenses to deter conflict and keep the Balkan frontier quiet without sacrificing ground in its longer-term regional position.

Turkish Intrigues

As we will see in chapter 6, Austria's fight with Prussia in the years between 1740 and 1779 was a bitter contest that would at one point threaten the very life of the Monarchy. The severity and length of these wars not only demanded that Austria deprioritize its southern flank, but that it be able to redirect as many resources as possible from this sector without compromising security there. To support these goals, throughout the middle years of the 18th Century Vienna pursued policies of proactive engagement with its rivals in this theater. Collectively, these efforts would amount to an almost 40-year strategy of *détente* in the Balkans, the key pillars of which were appeasement with the Turks, accommodation with the Hungarians and a defensive alliance with Russia.

The first of these was especially important. The end to hostilities in the 1739 Turkish war, coming barely a year before Frederick II's invasion of Silesia, left open the possibility of renewed hostilities with The Porte. Given the recent poor performance of Austrian forces and the lingering tension in many sectors of the border, it was not inconceivable that the Turks, emboldened by their recent recapture of Belgrade, would use Austria's plight in the north as an

opening to seize territory—a prospect that Austria’s enemies, particularly France, actively encouraged through aggressive diplomacy inciting the Turks to attack.

The Habsburg response to this threat was a diplomatic offensive as determined and creative in its use of the arts of persuasion as Eugene’s campaigns had been in the art of force. At the official level, Austrian diplomats worked to remove sources of friction, taking less than two years—an astonishingly short period by Balkan standards—to resolve disputes leftover from the previous war. Much as Austrian diplomats had massaged Turkish court politics to keep the Ottomans from entering the Spanish succession war, their successors now used similar techniques on a larger scale to deactivate tensions over a period that would stretch from the first clashes of the Austrian War of Succession in 1740 to the end of the Seven Years War in 1763.

The architects of these successes were now-forgotten Austrian diplomats stationed in Constantinople. One was Heinrich Christoph Penkler, who assiduously manipulated court dynamics to avoid war. Acting on Vienna’s admonition that a war with the Turks “would be the worst thing that could happen to our court and therefore we must do all we can to turn aside this misfortune,” Penkler outmaneuvered his French and Prussian counterparts, using intrigue, bribery and propaganda to discourage Ottoman alignments with Austria’s enemies. One example of his techniques was the well-timed leaking of the details of the latest Austro-Russian treaty to defuse the threat of Turkey turning its attention north after putting down a rebellion in its Persian provinces.²⁸⁸ Through these efforts, Penkler was able to not only project a greater image of Austrian strength than actually existed but to successfully solicit an Ottoman condemnation of Frederick II’s invasion and extension of the conditions of peace under the Treaty of Belgrade.²⁸⁹ In a subsequent contest with Prussian diplomats from 1756 to 1762, Penkler’s successor, Josef Peter von Schwachheim, used similar methods to forestall a concerted Prussian attempt at enticing the Turks into a formal alliance.

²⁸⁸ Quoted in Roider, p. 106.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Austria's success in Ottoman internal diplomacy was the result of centuries of experience navigating the complex politics of the Sultan's court. Key to this mastery was the cultivation, through bribery and favors, of local intelligence through which to not only divine the Sultan's intentions but to assess and manipulate the factions among his chief ministers. Using these knowledge networks, Austria was able to construct a kind of "early warning system" that told them when rival diplomats' efforts at agitation were succeeding, and, just as importantly, when the Ottomans were more concerned with problems on their other frontiers. The ultimate testimony to the success of this diplomatic came from Austria's arch-enemy, Frederick, who commented that "the Viennese court knows the Turks better" than their adversaries.²⁹⁰

Hungarian Accommodation

A renewal of Ottoman hostilities was only one of the ways that Austria's southeastern frontier could complicate its focus on the north in the wars with Prussia; another was an eruption of problems in Hungary. The destructive impact that Magyar uprisings could have on wider Habsburg interests at times of emergency had been shown in the Spanish succession war, when raids by Rakoczi's *kurucs* had forced the Austrians to construct fortified lines and entrenchments on the outskirts of Vienna and siphon off troops from other fronts to protect the *Erblande*.²⁹¹

Conditions were ripe for a repeat of such disturbances at the outset of the War of Austrian Succession, as Austria faced attacks from Prussia, France and Bavaria. Her susceptibility to Hungarian trouble on this occasion was arguably even greater than in the Spanish war, since Britain's initial refusal to provide subsidies and Russia's distraction with a Swedish war deprived Austria of the extent of allied help that it had enjoyed before.²⁹² The war also came at a sensitive political moment with Maria Theresa's accession to the throne, which would require ratification and coronation by the Hungarian Diet. Such moments of transition were

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 107.

²⁹¹ For a description of these defenses, see Manfred Rauchensteiner, *Vom Limes zum 'Ostwall'* (Wien: Militärhistorische Schriftenreihe), Heft 21, pp. 19-23.

²⁹² Browning, pp. 65-67.

typically used by the Magyar nobility to register new demands upon, and extract fresh concessions from, a new Monarch. These dynamics gave Hungarians the upper hand, at the same time that the external situation created a greater strategic need, not only for the Habsburgs to ensure tranquil conditions in Hungary, but to find military resources here to contribute to aid in the overall struggle.

Maria Theresa's approach to dealing with this dynamic replicated the tactics of earlier Habsburg monarchs in their use of accommodation to dampen the embers of separatism and motivate voluntary Hungarian support. While her armies waged war in Bohemia and her diplomats sought to appease the Turks, Maria Theresa engaged in a personal charm offensive with the Hungarian Diet. In exchange for affirming Hungary's historic rights, consenting to new tax breaks and re-confirming Hungary's separate administrative status, the Empress was able to not only secure Hungarian support for succession but extract promises of more than 100,000 Hungarian troops under the *generalis insurrectio*, or general levee.

Like her forebears Leopold I and Joseph I, Maria Theresa was careful in these barterings not to give away too much constitutional ground, restricting her concessions to provisions that could be rescinded to Hungary's disadvantage if future circumstances dictated. Through these efforts, she was able to 'flip' Hungary from a source of potential military concern to an active contributor to the Monarchy's defense. While a portion of the Diet's troop pledges were never fulfilled, the far more important gain from her efforts, from an Austrian strategic perspective, was the successful avoidance of what could have become an *additional*, internal military front at a time when all of the Monarchy's resources needed to be focused on a supreme crisis elsewhere.

Restraining Russia

While appeasing Turkey and accommodating the Hungarians, Austria needed to find a way to deal with its other potential problem in the East: Russia. Here, it had something to build on. As with the Hungarians and Turks, Austria had worked to lay a foundation for future detentes with

Russia in earlier years, forming a bilateral anti-Turkish alliance in 1697 and toying with the idea again in 1710 on the suggestion of Eugene as an expedient for forestalling Swedish-Hungarian flirtations. A new pact was formed in 1726, which had led to Habsburg participation in the Austro-Turkish War of 1737-39.

As Austria struggled against Prussia, it now needed such an alliance not to check the Swedes or widen gains against the Turks but to prevent Russia from stirring up conflicts in the south that would derail Austria's overall strategy. More than that, it needed to mobilize Russia as an *active* military partner against Prussia. This goal was forestalled at the start of the Austrian succession war by conflicts in the Baltic with Sweden that prevented Russia from providing meaningful aid to its ally at the height of crisis.

As we will see, the effort to ensure greater Russian involvement against Prussia would become a driving force for Habsburg diplomacy under Kaunitz, second in importance only to recruiting France out of Frederick's orbit. The centerpiece of these efforts was a defensive alliance, constructed by Kaunitz, committing the two empires to mutual aid against attacks by Prussia or Turkey, with a secret clause to repatriate Silesia and territorially emasculate Prussia. In the ensuing Seven Years War, Russia acted as a reliable Habsburg ally, sending a relief army to link up with Habsburg forces at Kunersdorf in a battle that would set a precedent for later, numerous Russian military interventions on Austria's behalf, including most notably in 1805 and 1849.

Frontier Defenses

As impressive as Habsburg diplomacy was at appeasing eastern rivals, the Monarchy still needed to be able to show military strength on its southeastern frontier. Internecine border raids, an ancient feature of the Balkans, continued even amidst the wars of the north. More importantly, the placatory diplomacy that Austria used with neighboring rivals depended for its effectiveness on the assumption that the distracted Monarchy was still a military factor in the region. To succeed in its overall strategy of de-prioritizing the Balkan frontier, Austria therefore

needed to be able to maintain baseline security here and, if diplomacy failed, have the means to deter or defeat attacks.

In both tasks, the Habsburgs were aided by the presence of extensive and well-planned defenses along their empire's southern and eastern approaches. Their backbone was the *Militärgrenze*, or Military Frontier, an integrated defensive system that would eventually stretch across the full length of the frontier, from the Adriatic to the Carpathians. The Military Border had its roots in the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary, which from the 14th Century had organized the Croatian-Slavonian frontier (the *Vojna Krajina*) into a series of interdependent forts, supported by a *militia portalis* under the control of the Ban of Croatia, a Hungarian client.²⁹³ As the Ottomans penetrated northward, nearby Austrian lands became co-managers of these defenses, supplying money and troops to ensure their maintenance as Hungary gradually collapsed.

By the late 16th Century, with most of Hungary in Turkish hands, the remnants of the Military Frontier formed a ragged frontier bulwark protecting the southern approaches to the *Erblande* and city of Vienna. "Th[is] system of fortresses," a military appraisal in 1577 told the Emperor, "is the only means by which your Majesty will be able to contain the power and the advance of the enemy, and behind which Your countries and peoples will be secure."²⁹⁴ Keeping these defenses in good working order was therefore a high priority for the Habsburg state, and the origins of the *Hofkriegsrat* lay in the need to create an institution capable of ensuring their proper supply and administration.

293 Geza David and Pal Fodor, "Ottomans, Hungarians and Habsburgs in Central Europe: The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest" in Suraiya Faroqhi and Halil Inalzik, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage*, Vol. 20, 2000, pp. 8-9

294 Quoted in Geza Pallfy, "The Origins of the Border Defense System Against the Ottoman Empire in Hungary (Up to the Eighteenth Century) in David and Pal Fodor, *Ottomans, Hungarians and Habsburgs in Central Europe: The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest* (Boston: Brill, 2000), p. 3.

Map of the Habsburg Military Border, ca. 1780



Source: Wikipedia

To man the Military Border, the Habsburgs continued the practice, begun by the Hungarians, of recruiting soldier-settlers from the displaced Christian populations of nearby Ottoman territories.²⁹⁵ To attract these colonists, the Habsburg Monarchy offered incentives that included land, arms, tax exemptions and religious tolerance in exchange for military service and loyalty to the Emperor. Using these allurements, the Austrians were able to attract large numbers of Orthodox Serbs, Croats, Szeklers and Wallachs to permanently re-settle their families into fortified villages, known as *zadruga*, on the frontier. Administered directly from the Hofkriegsrat, the *zadruga* were encouraged to maintain high birthrates and operated according to a strict frontier legal. Self-selecting, motivated and militant, colonists provided a cheap and abundant source of manpower well-versed in the irregular “small war” (*Kleinkrieg*) techniques of the Balkans. “The *Grenzer* [are] a warlike people,” one Austrian military observer wrote, “so proud of [their] military status that the men retain their muskets and side arms even when they are attending Holy Mass.”²⁹⁶

Following the acquisition of new lands in 1699, the Habsburgs expanded the Military Border southward to the new frontier on the Sava, Danube, Tisza and Maros rivers. They reorganized

²⁹⁵ Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Military Border in Croatia, 1740-1881* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 1-40.

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Rothenberg, *Ibid.*, p. 112.

it into two main geographic clusters: one along the Slavonian Border and centered on the fortresses at Brod and Esseg, and a second along the boundary with Serbia, first centered on fortresses at Szeged and Arad on the Tisza-Maros line. In later years, the Border would be pushed further eastward into Transylvania following the acquisition of the Banat.²⁹⁷ It would eventually form one of the densest concentrations of military manpower in Europe, with one in ten males under arms by the late 17th Century and one in three by the later 18th Century.²⁹⁸

The enlarged Military Border had three main components (See figure).

Fortresses. At the outer edge stood a line of large fortresses, with a second row some 150-200 miles behind them in the interior. The forward fortresses included both updated Medieval forts and newer structures and were usually located at strategic sites in the terrain, such as bends in the river, known invasion routes or commanding heights above the frontier. They were equipped with heavy artillery capable of dominating the nearby countryside and manned not by *Grenzers* but German regulars.

Watchtowers. Between the forward row of fortresses stood a network of watchtowers, placed at intervals of about a mile and a half. Known as *Tschardaks*—also called *čardaks*, *ardaci*, *eadaci* or *Chartaques*—these were wooden huts two-stories high, usually accompanied by a small trench or palisade to obstruct access to its base. Towers of this kind had a long history as frontier posts going back to antiquity and were not unlike the wooden structures placed at intervals along the Roman *Limes*.²⁹⁹ The Habsburgs had used these for centuries, not only in the south but occasionally in the west.³⁰⁰ The *Tshardaks* of the Military Border were manned at all hours by *Grenzer* detachments which rotated every few days. A 19th English traveler described one such post and its guards as follows:

297 Hochedlinger, p.241

298 Bassett, p. 60 and Hochedlinger, p. 323.

299 See Rauchensteiner, *Vom Limes*, pp. 19-23.

300 For a full discussion of these structures, see Josip Kljajić, "Vojnokrajiški Čardaci u Slavonsko-srijemskom Posavlju u 18. i 19. Stoljeću," p. 35 and Fritz Posch, *Flammende Grenze: Die Steiermark in den Kuruzzenstürmen* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1968).

The sentry-house or *Tshardak* stood on the height immediately overlooking the sands. It had two divisions, one for the watch-fire, and the other for the soldiers to sleep in. Before this little shed, under the projecting roof, the men had piled their arms. There were six or seven soldiers at the *Tshardak*, and their dress like their political constitution was half military and half peasant-like. Over the usual peasant's frock they wore knapsacks, fastened to a leathern strap. Their legs were wrapped in linen or woollen cloths, and their feet covered with those sandals...common to most Eastern Slavonian nations... No soldiers remain more than seven days together at a sentry post; they are then relieved by six or seven others, who likewise remain a week. Every soldier spends ninety days of the year on guard at these places.³⁰¹

The spacing of the *Tshardaks*, never more than a 30 or 45-minute walk apart, meant that, if assaulted, a post could depend on rapid support from nearby towers.³⁰² This spacing also allowed for visual communication, mainly through use of signal fires, which when lit in succession down the length of the frontier could be used to rapidly alert nearby fortresses to an approaching attack.

Infrastructure. The Military Border was sustained by a carefully-planned support network. Connecting the *Tschardaks* and fortresses were communication roads that ran adjacent to the river and into the interior. Behind the frontier, at intervals of 5 or 10 miles, were strategically-located depots and magazines as well as the various *zadrugas*, sited in easy reach of the border to respond to a crisis. Maintenance of this infrastructure was a high priority well into the 19th Century. "It is a no less agreeable surprise to the traveler coming from Hungary, or still more from Turkey," the English traveler wrote, "to observe the good state of the roads and bridges in the Military Frontier."³⁰³

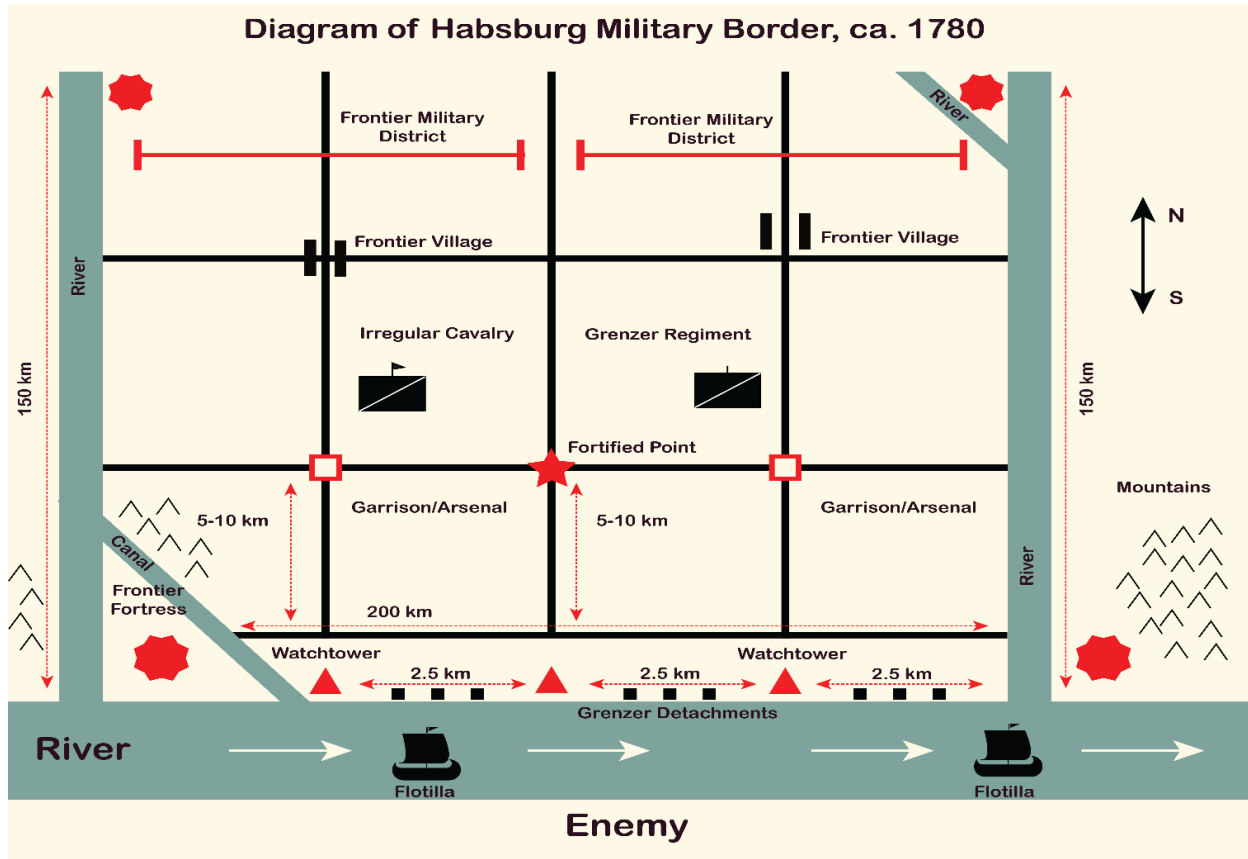
All three components—forts, watchtowers and infrastructure—were organized into separate districts, each corresponding to a *Grenzer* regiment, which in turn was split between piquet troops assigned to *Tschardaks*, and a reserve *Land-Miliz* of infantry and irregular cavalry

301 J.G. Kohl, *Austria: Vienna, Prague, Hungary, Bohemia, and the Danube; Galicia, Styria, Moravia, Bukovina, and the Military Frontier* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), p. 267.

302 Estimates of exact spacing distances vary but generally agree on 30-minute walk times. The figure used here is based on an eye-witness account from the 19th Century and spacing observed between *Chartaques* marked on the First and Second Military Surveys using the Time = Distance / Speed formula.

303 Kohl, p. 270.

assembled into mobile frontier armies. These were augmented by flotillas of *Grenzer*-manned gunboats that patrolled the river between the fortresses.



Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

Deterrence and Defense

The Military Border supported Austria's goal of safely de-prioritizing the southern frontier during the Prussian wars, in several ways. First, it dealt effectively with raiding. A permanent feature of Balkan life, border raids varied in scale and usually involved nighttime attacks across the river to steal livestock, other valuables and women. These raids were more than just an irritant. Unchecked, they could pull in Army units desperately needed in the north. As both the War of Spanish Succession and War of Polish Succession had shown, border incidents could escalate to major crises that threatened to inflame Austro-Turkish relations. By stationing local

troops familiar with raiding techniques directly at the frontier, the Military Border provided an effective, inexpensive means of repelling these low-intensity attacks and launching counter-raids. Indeed, as late as 1764, the *Hofkriegsrat* considered 7,000 of such troops to be more than adequate for dealing with was concerned about “Tatar adventurism” at a moment when it was preparing to deploy 130,000 against Prussia.³⁰⁴

Second, the network of large fortresses around which the Border was built helped to deter larger attacks by the main Ottoman army. To be sure, for much of the period of Austria’s wars with Frederick II, the Turks were uninterested in launching an invasion, being detained by internal crises in other parts of their far-flung empire. Habsburg diplomats like Penkler were able to monitor these developments through their intelligence networks. At the same time, attempts by rival diplomats to incite the Turks to open a second front were determined and ongoing. While well-informed, Habsburg diplomats could never be sure of the extent to which these efforts were succeeding. The ability to point to Austria’s well-planned and provisioned southern fortresses provided a valuable makeweight to their counter-bribes and blandishments.

Relatedly, the Military Border helped to discourage mischief by the Hungarians. Already in 1672 and 1678, the *Grenzers* had shown their value in suppressing *kuruc* revolts.³⁰⁵ In reorganizing the Border after Karlowitz, the Emperor Leopold had sought to strengthen this function, barring the Magyars from oversight of or participation in Border units.³⁰⁶ In the Spanish succession war, the *Grenzer* had helped to deal with Hungarian insurrections—a role they would play again in 1848-49.³⁰⁷ The presence of loyal troops *in situ* at the frontier demonstrated that the Monarchy had options, even amidst the wars in the north, for dealing

304 “Festsetzung eines zuverlässigen Defensions-Systeme.”

305 Anton Lesic, *Das Entstehen der Militärgrenze und die Geschichte der Stadt und Festung Brod A./S.*, KA, Vienna (Zagreb: Königliche Landesdruckerei, 1914), p. 15 See also: Gunther E. Rothenberg, “The Origins of the Austrian Military Frontier in Croatia and the Alleged Treaty of 22 December 1522” in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Maney Publishing, (June 1960) 38 (91): 493–498, p. 99.

306 David and Fodor, p.62

307 See Imre Berki, *A magyar határvédelem története* (History of Border Protection in Hungary), Múlt-Kor Történelmi Portál, 29 September 2010; available at: http://mult-kor.hu/20100929_a_magyar_hatarvedelem_tortenete.

with local uprisings, thus placing a stick alongside the carrots that Maria Theresa used to entice the Magyar nobility into helping against Prussia.

The third and perhaps greatest contribution of the Border in this era was the aid that it provided to the Habsburg war effort in the north. While holding down the frontier with minimal force, the *Grenzers* were able to feed large numbers of men into the battles raging in Bohemia and Moravia for a fraction of the cost that would have been required to field this number of regular units.³⁰⁸ As we will see in chapter 6, the *Kleinkrieg* raiding techniques of *Grenzer* troops would prove a crucial component in Austrian military strategy against the Prussians.

3. The Era of Alliances of Restraint: 1770s-1800s

Austria's policies of appeasement and accommodation, backed by the defenses of the Military Border, allowed it to manage the southeastern frontier at minimal cost and stay focused on northern crises from the time of Frederick's first invasion in 1740 until the last standoff with his armies in 1778-9. This approach succeeded in both its principal aims, avoiding the opening of a second front and roping Russia into efforts against Prussia.

However, during this period, geopolitical dynamics in the south had evolved in other ways that were not favorable to Habsburg interests. Most importantly, Russia continued to grow in strength as a Balkan power. As Austria dealt with Prussia, Russian armies continued their encroachments onto Ottoman positions along the coasts of the Black Sea. In 1768, a new Tsarina, Catherine II, launched Russia's most ambitious southeastern gambit to date, sending offensive armies across the Dniester that crushed the primary Ottoman fortress at Kotyn and clawed their way down the Moldavian Plain. Within a few months they had captured the capitals of both Moldavia (Jassy) and Wallachia (Bucharest). From here, they then penetrated even deeper into Ottoman territory, eventually reaching positions that were 600 km from their starting points.

³⁰⁸ Hochedlinger, pp. 243 and 323.

The scale of Russian successes showed the extent of the Ottoman Empire's decline as well as Russia's ability to devour large swaths of Balkan territory without Habsburg help. At the war's end, Austria faced a radically altered situation on its southeastern flank. In place of the old landscape of rickety Ottoman outposts with diminishing military potential and decentralized local rule, there now stood a well-armed and acquisitive Russia, backed by a large military force on the River Bug and fleets at Azov and Crimea, capable of projecting power throughout the Black Sea region. Where Russia had previously been constrained mainly to the northern coastlines of this sea, its offensives down the coastline placed it near the mouth of the Danube and thus astride the main axis of Austria's traditional path of eastern expansion.

This new reality posed two serious problems for Austria. First, Russian advances threatened the continued existence of regional buffer zones. From the beginning of the century, the maintenance of these intermediary bodies—in the north, Poland; in the south, Wallachia and Moldova, or the so-called “Danubian Principalities”—had been a central objective for Habsburg strategy. Ensuring the independent status of the latter two provinces had been an explicit goal of both Eugene's 1716 campaign and the unsuccessful 1737 war. The treaties that followed both wars had dealt with the question of their status in their opening paragraphs, with the Karlowitz text stipulating that Wallachia, Moldavia and nearby Podolia be preserved intact “by observing the ancient boundaries of both sides, [which] shall not be extended on either side.³⁰⁹

The existence of these buffer territories produced significant strategic advantages for Austria. By ensuring, as Kaunitz later wrote, that Habsburg territories were “not directly adjacent” (*“unmittelbar nicht benachbart”*) to the territories of large military rivals, they helped to avoid disagreements that could escalate into war. This in turn relieved part of the burden of frontier defense, obviating the need for large, standing security presence along long stretches of the eastern periphery. As a result, the Monarchy could safely concentrate its scarce military

³⁰⁹ Whatley, pp. 291-292,

resources elsewhere, which as recent events with Prussia had shown was a vital necessity in wartime.

Austria's Eastern Buffers: Wallachia and Moldavia



Source: Wikipedia.

By endangering these spaces, Russian expansion therefore undermined a keystone of Austria's entire southeastern strategy. While the 1768 war had left the Danubian Principalities nominally intact under Turkish rule, the terms of the concluding treaty (Küçük Kaynarca) granted Russia the ability in the future to intervene here and elsewhere as "protector" to all Christians living in Ottoman territories. Concurrently, Russian inroads in Poland, now in a state of growing internal chaos, were growing.

Second, Russia's aggressive moves in the East complicated Habsburg strategy at the European level. Austria needed to maintain viable buffers, which meant resisting Russian moves. But it also needed Russia to participate as an active ally against Austria's arch-enemy Prussia in the west. The two goals were incompatible. If it chose the latter—the natural choice given the degree of threat posed by Prussia—it would come at the expense of the buffers, which over time could create sources of tension in Austro-Russian relations that could either lead to the loss of Russia as an ally against Prussia or war with Russia itself over the East.

Courting Turkey

Austria's initial approach to handling this dilemma was to try to check Russian expansion by balancing against it using the Ottomans. The fact that Habsburg diplomats would contemplate such a move with the Monarchy's historic Muslim enemy shows the degree to which they were concerned about Russia's growing strength. "To save our archenemy," Kaunitz wrote, "is rather extraordinary, and such decisions can be justified only in truly critical situations, such as self-preservation."³¹⁰ Shuffling troops from Italy and the Netherlands, Austria composed a deterrent force in Transylvania, across the border from Russian forces in Wallachia, and promised the Sultan to resist further Russian aggression in exchange for monetary and territorial remuneration.

To some extent, the move worked: The Russians backed down and dropped their claim on the Danubian Principalities. But now, they turned their attention north, to Poland, entering into negotiations with Prussia for what would become the first of a series of partition of the Polish state. While it was in Austria's long-term interest to keep Poland intact as a buffer state, the Monarchy now faced the possibility of seeing two large rivals claim portions of the Polish state without its participation. Vienna joined in the partition, acquiring almost 32,000 square miles, primarily in Galicia, including the capital of Krakow and the economically valuable salt mines at Bochnia and Wieliczka. It also negotiated the acquisition of a portion of the Bukovina—a small

³¹⁰ Roeder, p. 120.

but strategically valuable piece of northwestern Wallachia that provided a link between Galicia and Transylvania and a promontory from which to monitor future Russian moves on Moldova.

Restraining Russia

The Polish Partition demonstrated the growing dilemma facing Austria in the East. It could not consent to what was increasingly clear would be a continued process of Russian expansion in the Balkans. But nor could it resist Russia outright and expect to succeed. Instead, Austria chose a third option: to restrain its rival by drawing closer to it. The approach that it pursued for the remainder of the century under the new Emperor Joseph II and his chief diplomat Kaunitz combined elements of previous Habsburg strategy from both the mid-century and wars of Eugene. Its centerpiece was an expanded strategic partnership with Russia through a renewed alliance of 1781.

Austrian aims in pursuing this approach were three-fold. First, Vienna wanted to create a mechanism for monitoring and if possible slowing Russian ambition in the East. Historically, Great Powers have formed alliances of restraint to keep pace with a rival that it cannot effectively counter using military force. The goal is not primarily to increase capabilities against a third power, but rather to observe and delay the main partner in the alliance. Austria's earlier 1726 alliance had to a large extent been pursued with this in mind. In the war that followed, Habsburg commanders had used the alliance mainly to push the main burden of fighting to the Russians and to learn more about their ally's military capabilities. The 1781 alliance deepened this cooperation, committing the states to mutual military support within three months of any conflict initiated by the Ottomans.³¹¹ Implicit in Austria's approach was the belief that the greatest benefit of having the alliance was avoiding the dangers of *not* having it. As Kaunitz later wrote:

³¹¹ Matthew Z. Mayer, "The Price for Austria's Security: Part I. Joseph II, the Russian Alliance, and the Ottoman War, 1787-1789," in *The International History Review* Vol. 26, No. 2 (Jun., 2004): 257-299, p. 262.

Every system of alliance, and also ours with Russia, is made advisable, useful, and necessary, based on two major considerations—one being the real benefits, which can be extracted from its existence and the other being the drawbacks that one would have to about if the alliance did not exist... If the real [benefit] that we derive from the [the alliance with Russia] seems accidental, then the real harm that would arise from the alliance not existing is inevitable, imminent and highly worrying.³¹²

Relatedly, the Austrians wanted the alliance to not be left out of whatever territorial gains Russia achieved in its regional military moves. Sitting out of the 1768-74 war had almost resulted in Austria being left empty-handed in the peace, an outcome averted through last-minute maneuvers over Poland. Keeping pace with Russia, Kaunitz wrote, “has enabled significant benefits for us and can do so in the future.” While Austria’s preference would have been to maintain a weak Ottoman presence, supported by smaller buffer states, it could not afford to see Russia grow steadily larger and thus more powerful against it without attempting to gain commensurately.

A final, substantial aim of the new alliance was to keep Russia onside in the continuing contest with Prussia. Experience in the Polish Partition had shown that when Austria sat still or resisted Russia in the East, it tended to result in closer Russo-Prussian ties. This was existentially dangerous for Austria. In the brief War of Bavarian Succession (1778-79) the absence of a close link between Austria and Russia had threatened to bring it into the war on Prussia’s side. By shoring up their eastern alliance, the Austrians sought to prevent opportunities for Prussia of this kind from recurring. As Kaunitz wrote:

If we refuse the renewal of the alliance today, the Russian empress will be welcomed with open arms by Prussia and England immediately. The certain consequence would be the creation of an alignment against us by Russia, Prussia, and [other powers]. In doing so, we would become completely isolated...In this isolated position, to the excess of all misfortune, we would not even be able to make peace with the Ottomans... [It is therefore] beyond a shadow of doubt, that the renewal and continuous cultivation of our

³¹² Kaunitz, *Memoire über die Rätlichkeit, Nützlichkeit und Nothwendigkeit...Russland,* 10. Mai 1789, Staatskanzlei Vorträge Kart. 146, Vorträge 1789, HHSA, Wien.

system of alliance with Russia is all the more advisable, useful and necessary, the more its destruction is at least desired and sought by our most dangerous enemy, the court in Berlin.³¹³

Put differently, Austria could not afford to *not* ally with Russia. Even if it wanted to preserve buffers like Poland, the policies of resistance or non-action that this would have required carried far higher costs. Flanked in the east by a Russia bent on offensive war against the Turks and in the north by a bellicose Prussia determined to expand at Austria's expense, the one course not available to the Habsburg Monarchy was fence-sitting. While Austria had aligned with Russia intermittently for decades, Habsburg strategy from this point forward would place the goal of alliance with its large Eastern power at the heart of its entire security policy. This would continue to be the case through the Napoleonic Wars and into the time of Metternich and fall apart only under Franz Joseph, with disastrous consequences for the Monarchy.

Austria's Final Turkish War

The first major test of Austria's deepened alliance with Russia came almost immediately after it was signed. Beginning in 1781, a series of uprisings against Turkish rule in the Crimea seemed likely to provoke a new Russo-Turkish war. The danger for Austria was that these tensions would boil over into the Balkans and Danubian Principalities. Mobilizing its forces and using the improved channels provided by the alliance, Austria was able to contain the crisis to the Black Sea coast and avert a wider conflagration.

However, this only delayed the inevitable confrontation between a now-emboldened Russia and the faltering Ottoman state. Under a grandiose plan presented to Joseph II years earlier, Catherine II proposed to extend Russian power to dismember the Ottoman Empire altogether and replace it with a resurrected Byzantine Empire which, *inter alia*, would replace Wallachia and Moldova with a new "Kingdom of Dacia" under Russian tutelage. For Austria, such an

³¹³ Ibid.

outcome was highly undesirable. As Maria Theresa had written before her death, in words that echo Eugene's concerns about over-extension in the Balkans decades earlier:

The partition of the empire of the Turks is of all enterprises most hazardous and most dangerous, the consequences of which we have the most to fear. What do we gain from conquests, even all the way to the gates of Constantinople? The territories are unhealthy, without culture, depopulated or inhabited by treacherous and ill-intentioned Greeks ("des Grecs perfidies"); they are not capable of strengthening the Monarchy but may rather weaken us. Moreover, the esteem that my house has always been eager to preserve [of not being a partitioning power] would be lost forever and this would be irreparable...even worse than our partition of Poland....I hope that our descendants will never see [the Ottomans] expelled from Europe.³¹⁴

The threat of a Russian invasion and partition of Turkey would persist well into the 19th Century. The scale of Russian ambitions ensured that, when war finally came in 1787, Austria could not sit on the sidelines. Doing so in the previous crisis had allowed Russia to annex Crimea while Austria gained nothing and bore the expense of mobilization.

In going to war Joseph II enjoyed a better range of strategic tools for managing the terms of the conflict than his predecessors had possessed. As a result of its wars against Prussia, Austria had a quarter of a million men under arms. Its armies were battle-tested, with a large cavalry compliment and the latest artillery. They were backed by extensive fortresses and, due to recent territorial gains in Bukovina and Galicia, could bring pressure to bear more quickly in the main military theaters.

Like earlier Habsburg rulers, Joseph was concerned by the time factor of a war in the south. As in the past, Austria could only safely concentrate forces here if it did not face pressing threats on other frontiers. Prussia represented a greater problem in this regard than France had been in Eugene's 1716 war, possessing as it did a large army in striking range of the Habsburg border. The danger was that it would use the war as an opportunity to attack in Bohemia or take some portion of Poland. There was also the possibility that France, despite its

³¹⁴ Marie-Therese an Mercy, 31 Juillet 1777, in Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresias*, Band 3, pp. 99-100.

recent alliance with Austria, could be tempted into an opportunistic grab at the Austrian Netherlands, then in a state of unrest, or even join with Prussia for an attack on the *Erblande* as it had done in 1741.

To counter these eventualities, Kaunitz renewed the Austro-French alliance of 1756, thereby enabling Austria to shift forces from its western frontier and create a deterrent force in Bohemia and Moravia totaling 58 infantry battalions and 35 cavalry.³¹⁵ In addition, unlike in previous wars, it now possessed a line of northern fortresses that could be used to deter Prussian moves while its main armies were preoccupied in the south. As in 1716 and 1737, the aim was to achieve a short war, partly to avoid prolonged stress on the Monarchy's finances, partly to deny an opening for Prussian mischief and partly to keep domestic difficulties in the Monarchy, including especially in Belgium and Hungary, from getting out of hand.³¹⁶

These preparations allowed for a higher degree of Habsburg force to be concentrated in the south than would otherwise have been possible. Austria's generals were also able to draw upon detailed plans for a war in the south that had been created much earlier, anticipating the contingencies that they now faced. In a series of memos in 1769, senior Austrian commanders had gamed out how such a war should be fought.³¹⁷ Taking account of the latest intelligence, the memos assessed the organization, weapons and tactics of Turkish armies. Their conclusions were similar to those drawn by Austrian commanders of earlier campaigns. While capable of rapid and violent attacks in which "many people are lost...the conventional methods of coordinated [tactical] movements remain unknown the Turks, who are attached to their peculiar fighting methods, in keeping with their forebears, whether from nature or some other motivation."³¹⁸

Given the stasis in Turkish fighting styles, the generals assumed that a short and decisive war would be achievable. They recommended that the Army use the discipline and firepower

³¹⁵ Mayer, Part I, p. 290.

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 270.

³¹⁷ Mem. 1/7, 1/8 and 1/9, KA, Wien.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

honed against Western opponents while making tactical adaptations to the topographical conditions of the Balkans less extensive than those observed in the past. Drawing on lessons from Eugene's campaigns, they advocated what would today be called seek-and-destroy missions combining small-unit flexibility and security of flanks through square formations and fortified camps.³¹⁹

Balkan Attrition

Despite this extensive planning, several factors worked against the goal of a short war. Unlike in 1716, Austria's 1787 positions included territories that had now been settled for several decades and were therefore more vulnerable to economic devastation at the hands of the enemy. The need to guard these far-flung possessions led Joseph II to spread out his forces across a wide area and thus lose focused punching power that Eugene had been able to achieve at the start of his campaign.³²⁰ The longer Austrian units remained in their positions, the more subject they were to the attritional factors of Balkan warfare. From their fortress at Orsova, the Ottomans could strike either in the direction of the Banat and Transylvania, or into Serbia, forcing the Austrian to further split their forces. Through past experience, the Turks also understood the Austrian habit of seeking short wars against them and had learned to continue fighting unless either the main army was beaten or an enemy managed to threaten their capital—an unlikely scenario as long as they retained their second line of Romanian fortresses.³²¹

The Russian alliance also tended to prolong the war. Where Austria's interstitial position demanded that it avoid prolonged Balkan entanglements to be able to focus on other frontiers, Russia faced no such constraint. Indeed, since its goal was to gain territory and if possible break the Turk, it had an incentive to draw out the conflict as long as necessary, in the knowledge that it was stronger than its enemy. Austria by contrast was unlikely to gain

³¹⁹ Mayer, Part I, p. 293.

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 280.

³²¹ Ibid., p. 299.

significantly from such acquisitions. This created a paradox, inherent in the structure of the Austro-Russian alliance, whereby the very edifice that the Monarchy needed to ensure its overall security—a close relationship with Russia—had the potential to drag it into long conflicts that undercut that very security.

The chief beneficiary of the time pressures facing Austria was Prussia. Repeating French tactics from the Spanish succession war, Berlin fomented unrest in Galicia and Hungary, offering to back a Magyar declaration independence. While the scheme miscarried, Prussia's machinations served to complicate the Habsburg domestic position.³²² As the war progressed, Hungary became more reluctant to provide troops and supplies, and opposition in the Netherlands to bearing the tax burdens of the war stiffened. This required Austria to divert a growing trickle of forces away from the warzone, eventually siphoning off 117,000, compared to 194,000 in the south.³²³

Fear of Prussia opening a new front in the north led Austria to exit the conflict earlier than Russia. At the war's end, Habsburg forces occupied a greater extent of territory than Eugene had in 1718. They had accomplished their main war aims, ejecting the Turks from the Banat and most of Wallachia, bringing a large portion of Serbia under Austrian control, and reaching as far south as Bucharest.

Under the concluding Treaty of Sistova, Austria relinquished many of these territories, not least because it could not afford to administer them. It retained the fortress at Orsova, closing off the invasion route into the Banat, the vulnerability of which had been a major reason for going to war. Building on the traditions of Karlowitz and Passarowitz, Habsburg diplomats used the post-war negotiations to try to gain long-term advantages, reinforcing Austrian navigation rights on the Danube and strengthening the independence of the buffers of Wallachia and Moldova.

³²²R. J. W. Evans, "The Habsburgs and the Hungarian Problem, 1790-1848" in *Transactions of the RHS*, (1989): 41-62.

³²³ Matthew Z. Mayer, "The Price for Austria's Security: Part II. Leopold II, the Prussian Threat, and the Peace of Sistova, 1790-1791," *The International History Review* (Sep., 2004): 473-514, p 490.

While the outcomes of Austria's final Turkish war were mixed, the Russian alliance that formed the heart of Joseph's foreign policy had served its purpose. Austro-Russian cooperation deterred Prussia had forced the Turks to divide their forces and thereby reduced the overall military pressure on Austria. Habsburg participation in the war was costly but foiled the grander Russian schemes of an Ottoman partition, as Austria's blocking moves in Wallachia forcing Russia to concentrate on new acquisitions east of the Dniester and abandon the idea of a Russian-dominated Kingdom of Dacia.³²⁴ It would take another sixty years later to bring about the permanent loss of Wallachia and Moldova as Habsburg buffers in a crisis that would have very different outcomes for Austria.

Conclusion

Austria had few good options on its southeastern frontier. To achieve security here, it needed to manage two very different competitors, one weaker than itself and the other stronger, across a 800-mile border on which the range of its army was restricted, the landscape inhospitable and much of the local population unfriendly. In this environment, it needed to accomplish two contradictory objectives: to benefit from Turkey's weakness without losing it as a factor of stability, and to enlist Russia's help in the West without allowing it to dominate the East. Even if it succeeded unambiguously in both tasks, the local rewards were likely to be minimal. Yet if it failed, the risks to its overall position were high.

Assessing the success of Austrian strategies on this frontier is therefore not a straightforward exercise. It is less about how many wars the Monarchy won or lost or territory gained, and more about how well Austria avoided the worst possible outcomes (Ottoman collapse and Russian dominance) while realizing the best possible ones (retention of buffers and mobilizing Russian help against Prussia).

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 512.

Viewed through this lens, Austria's southeastern strategies were largely successful. By the end of the 18th Century, Austria possessed a beneficial if increasingly uneven security alliance with Russia through which it had achieved the single most important goal for its survival: containing Prussia. It retained stable buffers to the East, where Russia was still not in possession of the Danubian Principalities. While it is true that Austria permanently lost much of Eugene's earlier conquests, it nevertheless held a large, contiguous and consolidated line of possessions that included not only Hungary but the Banat, Bukovina and Galicia. Its Hungarian population, while equivocally loyal in many regards, was a much more politically and economically integrated part of the Monarchy than they had been in 1699. As a frontier empire, Austria had succeeded in finding a maximal range of expansion that, while not as great as its rulers had hoped, was territorially intact and viable.

Perhaps the best measure of Austria's accomplishment in the southeast, however, can be seen, not in what it achieved but in what it avoided. Not once in the 18th Century did the Habsburg Monarchy fight a war against a western rival in which either of its two eastern rivals were also fighting against it. In the defining struggles of the century—the War of Spanish Succession, War of Austrian Succession and Seven Years War—the Ottomans did enter on the sides of Austria's enemies, and in all but the first of these the Hungarians did not rebel. On the three occasions when Austria launched wars on this frontier, it avoided open-ended quagmires. Neither the 1716 war nor 1737 war lasted more than two campaigning seasons. While Joseph II's Turkish war was longer than expected, it was because of a calculated decision to prioritize a more valuable objective: safety against Prussia. When the wider strategic environment ceased to make concentration in the south possible, Vienna ended the war.

Austria also avoided unbearable costs in the southeast. High financial outlays are often incurred by empires that reach their maximal line of expansion in hostile environments and try to keep going.³²⁵ Austria moderated the expenses of managing the Balkans, its harshest and

³²⁵ Lattimore, p.147.

least rewarding frontier, by avoiding a rigid *Limes* and relying on more flexible defensive systems. It benefited from extensive, prior construction of forts along this frontier, and, in the Military Border, developed an effective expedient, the costs of which were largely self-supporting. In exchange for a few wooden palisades and some tax incentives, by 1780 it was receiving the manpower equivalent of 17 infantry regiments—so many soldiers that the Border became a net exporter to its other wars.

Buffer states also offset the costs of frontier security; as troublesome as Wallachia and Moldova often were, they would have been far costlier as attempted experiments under direct Habsburg rule. Similarly, the money spent on bribery at the Sultan's court was a fraction of what would have been required to sustain military build-ups on the frontier. The Russian alliance also helped to lower frontier costs, both by freeing up resources needed elsewhere and by allowing Austrian commanders to “buck-pass” in field operations. At a strategic level, even after the partition of Poland, this alliance would enable Austria to effectively avoid permanent, large-scale defenses and troop presence across virtually the entire length of its northeastern frontier until well into the 19th Century. For an empire whose greatest geopolitical handicap lie in encirclement, this *de facto* demilitarization of an entire frontier represented a not inconsiderable gain from the Russian alliance.

As we will see, the challenges involved in managing the Balkans would only intensify in the following Century, while Austria's viable options for managing them narrowed. In the meantime, the Monarchy's greatest task would lie not in quelling a turbulent backyard but in managing far graver dangers to the north and west, the subject of the next two chapters.

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Chapter VI.
‘The Monster’:
Prussia and the Northwestern Frontier

“The king of France only gnaws at the edges of those countries that border on it...the king of Prussia proceeds directly to the heart.” – Prince Salm

“Fuck the Austrians.” – Frederick II, King of Prussia

Summary

On its northwestern frontier, the Habsburg Monarchy contended for most of its history with the military kingdom of Prussia. Though a member of the German Reich and titular supplicant to the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor, Prussia possessed predatory ambitions and a military machine with which to realize them. Under Frederick II (“the Great”), Prussia launched a series of wars against the Habsburg lands that would span four decades and bring the Monarchy to the brink of collapse. Though physically larger than Prussia, Austria was rarely able to defeat Frederick’s armies in the field. Instead, it used strategies of attrition, centered on terrain and time-management, to draw out the contests and mobilize advantages in manpower and allies. (1) In the period of greatest crisis, 1740-48, Austria used tactics of delay to separate, wear down and repel the numerically superior armies of Frederick and his allies. (2) From 1748-63, Austria engineered allied coalitions and reorganized its field army to offset Prussian advantages and force Frederick onto the strategic defensive. (3) From 1764-1779, it built fortifications to deter Prussia and finally seal off the northern frontier. Together, these techniques enabled Austria to survive repeated invasions, contain the threat from Prussia and reincorporate it into the Habsburg-led German system.

Northern Dilemmas

At the same time that the Habsburgs were expanding eastward under the Treaty of Karlowitz, they were in the midst of a period of retrenchment in the west. For centuries, the foundation of Habsburg power had been the dynasty’s status as elective leaders of the Holy Roman Empire,

or German *Reich*—an amalgam of kingdoms, principalities and bishoprics that had endured since its creation by Charlemagne in the 8th Century. Since the mid-15th Century, the Habsburgs had maintained primacy among the princes of the *Reich* as their elective Emperor, using German resources to extend their power and influence across Europe. In the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) imperial armies had fought the combined forces of northern Europe to a standstill, bleeding Germany white and exhausting Habsburg resources.

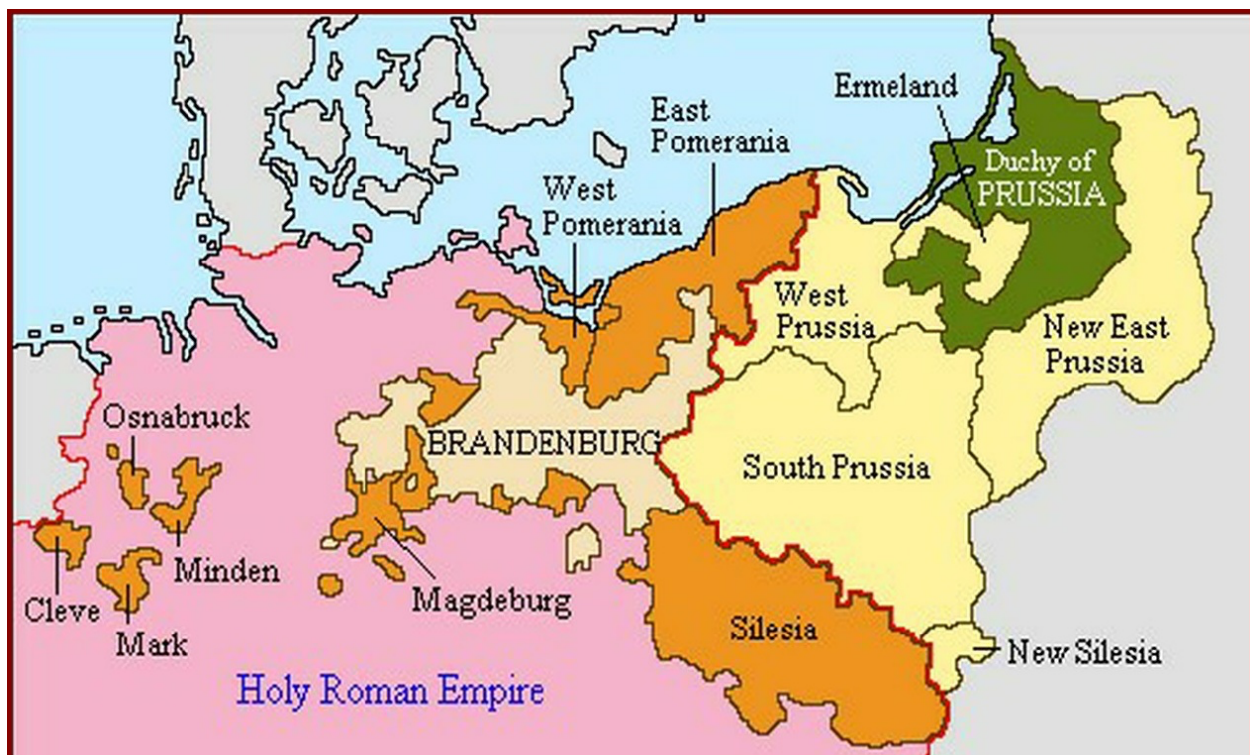
The end of the war diminished Habsburg power in Germany. The concluding Treaty of Westphalia recognized French and Swedish influence in the affairs of the *Reich* and strengthened the sovereignty of its members. More importantly, the war demonstrated the dynasty's inability to dominate Germany by force of arms. Afterwards, the Habsburgs retained their status as Emperors. But the body over which they presided was much changed from its earlier Medieval form, now containing wealthy and willful states less constrained than before by German patriotism or loyalty to the Emperor and more conscious of their prerogatives and interests as separate states.

Among the Protestant states that emerged from the Thirty Years War was the northern German Electorate of Brandenburg-Prussia. Formed over the course of the 17th Century through a series of mergers between the Margraviate of Brandenburg, historic seat of the Hohenzollerns, and Duchy of Prussia, former Teutonic vassal to the Kingdom of Poland, Prussia was, at face value, unimpressive. By the late 17th Century, it was an archipelago of disconnected lands that together were a fraction the size of the Habsburg Monarchy. It was not physically large or populous (a little over 2 million, compared to more than 20 million for the Habsburg Monarchy). It was no more prosperous in commerce than its neighbors and, as a result of the sandy soils of the Baltic, less well-endowed for agriculture. Entering the 18th Century, it possessed few of the attributes that normally explain the rise of state to the status of Great Power.

Sparta of the Baltic

What set Prussia apart was its leaders and army. Avid centralizers, its Electors had broken the power of the Estates at an early point in their history. Under Frederick William I, the “Great Elector,” Prussia spent the middle decades of the 17th Century creating a strong central government and standing army. In 1701 his son, Elector Frederick III, was able to leverage these strengths to extract consent from the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I for Prussia to attain the status of a kingdom and its rulers the title of “kings in Prussia.” Under his son, Frederick William I, Prussia became the militarized state with which its name would later become synonymous. Known as the “Soldier King,” the dour and frugal Frederick William I built up a powerful professional army backed by a large bureaucracy.

Growth of Prussia, 1600-1795



Source: Habsburg Territorial Maps.

At all levels, the energies of the Prussian state were harnessed to the task of war. An educated, conservative landowning class provided the substrate for a loyal Officer Corps. A

religiously and linguistically homogenous populous, bolstered by policies of strategic immigration targeting other Protestant states, provided the basis for a cohesive army in which 4 and a half percent of the population was under arms by the early decades of the 18th Century (about one in 28 subjects, compared to one in 310 in Britain).³²⁶ Frederick William kept tidy finances, using efficient tax policies to maximize revenue and tariffs to expand a small but productive economic base devoted to producing war materiel.³²⁷ These habits enabled Prussia to achieve a disproportionate scale of resource mobilization for a state its size. As Metternich later wrote:

In less than [a century] a barren and thinly populated country rose to a height of power which assigned to its rulers more than once the part of umpires in Europe... Its standing army, though out of all proportion to the number of the people or the resources of the country, far from exhausting these, on the contrary, raised [Prussia] to a height of power not aspired to in the wildest dreams of its greatest princes.³²⁸

An additional advantage was geography. Prussia's central position had in earlier times made it a highway for invading Swedish armies and would again become a military liability later in its history. But as Swedish power declined and Prussia's armies matured, the surrounding geography presented Prussia with a target-rich environment for expansion. To the west and south lay a mosaic of weaker German states—Hanover, Braunschweig, Muenster, Saxony—none of which posed a meaningful military threat. To the east sat the sprawling Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, an inert giant inviting predation. The military machine at Prussia's disposal provided a powerful and largely unchecked tool for shaping the surrounding environment. A garrison state surrounded by less warlike polities, it was poised to grow at the expense of its neighbors.

³²⁶ Browning, p. 24.

³²⁷ Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 174.

³²⁸ Clemens Wenzel Lothar Metternich, *Autobiographical Memoir* (2012: Forgotten Books), p. 71. Metternich's description of Prussia bears comparison to Paul Rahe's description of classical Sparta: "she was no ordinary pólis, and everyone knew it. She possessed resources—moral, political and military—that...no other city could even hope to match." See Paul Rahe, *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta: The Persian Challenge* (Yale: Yale Library of Military History, 2016).

Naked Frontier

One of these neighbors was the Habsburg Monarchy. Though physically larger and more populous than Prussia, Austria's circumstances in the mid-18th Century were not favorable for dealing with a military threat from Prussia. One problem was geography. Of all of Austria's frontiers, the north was the weakest. Unlike in the south, where large expanses of poor territory gave Austria time to prepare for an attack, in the north the threat was a stone's throw from its richest territories. Unlike in Italy and southern Germany, where numerous buffer states separated Austria from France, in the north there was only one—Saxony—whose coverage of the frontier was partial. To the east, the Oder River valley provided a direct route deep into Habsburg territory. And while mountains sheltered most of the Czech lands, the territory of Silesia, one of the Monarchy's wealthiest provinces, sat exposed on a plain north of the mountains. Once in Silesia, an enemy would have little difficulty transiting the numerous, well-marked mountain passes to strike at the heart of the *Erblande*, feeding off of the fattest Habsburg lands along the way.

Northern Frontier of the Habsburg Monarchy



Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

Austria had weak military options for dealing with a threat from the north. Following the death of Eugene, its army had fallen into neglect, suffering defeats in the War of Polish Succession and then in the catastrophic Turkish War of 1737-9. At the end of these wars Habsburg finances were depleted, its army at half-strength and scattered across the empire.³²⁹ Unlike in the south, Austria's defenses were virtually naked in the north. The four forts in Silesia at Glogau, Brieg, Breslau and Glatz were aging and dilapidated.³³⁰ The passes were unguarded, Bohemia and Moravia lacked major fortresses, and there were few depots or magazines. A 1736 review of defenses in the area noted these inadequacies but was ignored.³³¹ Nor were Austria's alliances in good repair. Britain was distracted and weary from its recent war with Spain. Russia was consumed by internal turmoil following the death of Tsarina Anna.³³²

Then there was the succession problem. Habsburg relations with allies and foes alike were dominated by the question of the Pragmatic Sanction, a legal instrument created by the Emperor Charles VI to ensure the eventual succession of his daughter, Maria Theresa. Under Salic Law, the code that had determined European rights of succession since the 6th Century, women were barred from princely inheritance. Without male heirs, Charles VI needed to engineer agreement from other courts to respect the coronation of his daughter when he died and not to launch a succession struggle of the kind that perennially wracked Europe. For more than two decades, Habsburg diplomacy was consumed by this quest. Led by Johann Christoph von Bartenstein, Charles VI's chief advisor and diplomat, these efforts succeeded in winning acceptance from all of the major powers of Europe including, notably, Frederick I of Prussia.

Despite Bartenstein's success, the matter of the succession hung in the air in the years leading up to Charles VI's death. It was especially problematic within the German *Reich*, where two

³²⁹ Browning, p. 20.

³³⁰ Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresas*, Band 2, p. 137; and Browning, p. 42.

³³¹ Hochedlinger, p. 125.

³³² Clark, p. 191.

members—Saxony and Bavaria—had been the only states in Europe to not consent to the Pragmatic Sanction. Saxony's Elector, Frederick Augustus II was married to one of the daughters of Charles VI's elder brother, Joseph I, and the Bavarian Elector, Charles, was married to another. On this basis, both saw for their offspring claims to the Habsburg lands. With the Bavarians, there was the added dimension of a centuries-long rivalry between their ruling house, the Wittelsbachs, and the Habsburgs, for the title of Emperor. Elective rather than hereditary, this title was not covered by the Pragmatic Sanction and therefore vulnerable to contestation after the succession.

These dynamics weakened Austria's ability to use the *Reich* as a political tool. Under normal circumstances it would have provided a natural mechanism to aid in the task of containing Prussian ambition. A federative body in which Prussia was a vassal to the Emperor, the *Reich* offered the Habsburg monarchs levers for the influencing and disciplining wayward princelings. One was the *Reichshofrat*, or Aulic Council, a judicial body through which the Emperor could bribe or cajole members involved in territorial feuds.³³³ The *Reich* also provided some military tools. By declaring a *Reichskrieg*, a collective defense provision not unlike NATO's Article 5, the Habsburg Emperor could call on the German states to provide military contingents and fulfill financial quota in support of a war effort. Even in the *Reich's* reduced post-Westphalian state, it had proven useful in this role, providing a major addition to Habsburg military power in the war against Bourbon France earlier in the century. However, such arrangements were designed to counter threats from outside powers, not from a fellow German power. Such influence as Austria possessed for rallying the military aid of *Reich* states would be impeded by the inevitable struggles over the title of Emperor.

Frederick Strikes

It was in this volatile climate that a new Prussian king came to the throne in 1740. Frederick II was twenty-eight when he succeeded his father. At this stage, there was little to indicate the

³³³ Ingraio, *In Quest*, p. 38.

military prowess of the future Frederick the Great. Frederick's bent was philosophical and musical; he played the flute, wrote poetry and corresponded with Voltaire. But his nature was stamped for war. Frederick's Enlightenment proclivities masked a caustic and controlling personality who wrote vulgar doggerel to mock his enemies and carried a vial of poison around his neck in case he failed in battle.³³⁴ Misogynistic and atheistic, he preferred male company and referred to Christianity as an "odd metaphysical fiction." It would be hard to imagine a ruler more different from the pious and often dilatory monarchs of the Habsburg Empire.

From his father, Frederick inherited a well-drilled army of 90,000 and a budget surplus of 8 million taler.³³⁵ In Silesia, he saw a vulnerable and valuable prize that, if taken, would enrich his small kingdom and round off its southern frontiers. Rich in metals and home to a third of Habsburg industry and annual tax revenue, Silesia was one of the richest territories in Europe. Frederick was scornful of the Habsburg Army's ability to hold these territories. As a younger man he had accompanied Eugene of Savoy to the siege of Phillipsburg and been appalled by the laggardly comportment of Austrian troops. Contemptuous of the Habsburgs as a dynasty and eager to expand his realm, he had no compunctions about seizing their lands or even, if circumstances permitted, dismembering their realm altogether; as he would later write bluntly to his foreign minister, "Fuck the Austrians."³³⁶

When Charles VI died on October 20, 1740, Frederick was poised to strike. In addition to a march-ready army he had made secret overtures to France to arrange the opening of a second front against Austria in the west, once the war begun. On December 16, without a declaration of war and disregarding his father's consent to the Pragmatic Sanction, Frederick led 27,000 troops across the Austrian frontier into Silesia.

³³⁴ For a modern biographical treatment of Frederick II see Tim Blanning, *Frederick the Great: King of Prussia* (New York: Random House, 2016).

³³⁵ Browning, p. 20.

³³⁶ Literally, "f.....-vous les Austrichiens." Friedrich an den Etatsminister von Podewils in Breslau, September 1, 1741 in *Politische Correspondenz Friedrichs des Grossen*, Vol. I (1879: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz), p. 323.

Frederick's move marked the beginning, not just of a war, but of a running, forty-year struggle that would see the Habsburg heartland repeatedly invaded, involve continuous fighting on three of the Monarchy's four frontiers, and eventually engulf all of Europe and much of the known world. For the House of Habsburg, these wars would be as desperate as the Turkish invasion of the previous century, longer than all of Austria's previous 18th Century wars combined, and more threatening to its existence than anything it would face until the revolutions of the mid-19th Century.

Survival and Strategy

The Habsburg ruler who bore the brunt of these wars Maria Theresa. The dynasty's only female monarch, she was 23 years old when her father died in the winter of 1740. Like Frederick, Maria Theresa had little prior experience in affairs of state and, being a woman, had had even less exposure to the military. Also like Frederick, she was drawn to the rationalist ideas of the Enlightenment and would become perhaps the boldest and most successful state reformer in Habsburg history. But unlike Frederick, Maria Theresa was deeply religious and familial, eventually producing eleven children. Intelligent, resolute and hearty in physical constitution, she later described the daunting scene she found on taking the thrown, "without money, without credit, without army, without experience...without counsel." In the years that followed she would be animated by a hatred of Frederick, who she called "the Monster," and as determined to retake Silesia as he was to keep it.

From the outset, the main problem facing Maria Theresa was the military superiority of her enemy. A revisionist-minded ruler with a powerful army, Frederick possessed the advantage of the strategic initiative and, it quickly became apparent, tactical dominance on the battlefield as well. His forces, and in particular his infantry, outmatched hers in almost every regard— leadership, logistics, discipline, speed and offensive spirit. Under Frederick's gifted command, Prussian armies were virtually unbeatable in the early phases of the conflict. And while Habsburg fighting skills would improve substantially over time, eventually surpassing the

Prussians in cavalry and especially artillery, Frederick would prove capable of inflicting defeats on larger Austrian armies all the way into the 1760s.

In formulating a response to the Prussian challenge, Maria Theresa did not have the benefit of a sustained period of reflection or a pre-existing strategic framework of the kind that her predecessors had had in dealing with the Turks. The enemy was present, active and powerful; the threat existential. The methods that Maria Theresa and her advisors developed for handling this problem were initially reactive, aimed purely at survival. But over time they would congeal into a coherent set of strategies specifically tailored to the Prussian threat. They were rooted in the premise, familiar to weak states throughout history, that the best way to defeat an unbeatable enemy is to avoid fighting on his terms. Unable to overpower Frederick on the battlefield, Maria Theresa would try to outlast him. The essence of her approach was the defensive use of Time, both on the battlefield, by employing terrain to deny combat until conditions were favorable, and in diplomacy, to avoid bearing the full brunt of war until Austria's alliances and manpower could be mobilized.

This basic template would endure throughout the long contest with Prussia and can be broken into three phases. (1) In the first war (1740-48), Austria fought to preserve itself using delay, sequencing and harassment. (2) In the second war (1748-63), Austria sought to recuperate and retake Silesia using restructured alliances and a reformed army. (3) In the third war (1764-1779) Austria used preventative strategies to seal off the frontier and deter future attacks.

1. Preservative Strategies: Stagger and Delay (1740-1748)

In the opening phases of the War of Austrian Succession, Habsburg strategy was defined less by what could be achieved than by what had to be avoided.³³⁷ Maria Theresa's aims can be understood as the inverse of Frederick's. Opportunistically revisionist, Frederick sought a short and decisive conquest of Silesia, fought on his terms and concluded by diplomatic ratification;

³³⁷ This was technically a series of separate wars, the First and Second Silesian and the fighting that followed the latter in Italy. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to them collectively as the War of Austrian Succession.

and to support this goal, a wider conflict that, by bringing other invaders into Austria, would increase his bargaining position and the pressure to cede Silesia. Maria Theresa needed the opposite: Time to mobilize her resources, and ‘turn off’ other threats to focus on her greatest threat. Over the course of the 8-year conflict, Maria Theresa and her advisors developed tools, some rough-and-ready, others rooted in Habsburg strategic culture and prior experience, to achieve both goals and manipulate the timing of the contest to its advantage.

Buying Time to Mobilize

Austria’s opening moves were dictated by the imperative of warding off existential threats to the *Erblande* while setting in motion a mobilization of resources that would take time to bear results. By 1741, four invading armies sat on Austrian soil and the situation was desperate; as one minister wrote, “the Turks seemed...already in Hungary, the Hungarians already in arms, the Saxons in Bohemia and the Bavarians approaching the gates of Vienna.”³³⁸

While dispatching armies to the north, Maria Theresa reached out to traditional allies—England, Holland and Russia—to organize military pressure on Frederick’s flanks and get subsidies flowing to fund the scale of mobilization that would be needed to get Austria’s scattered and poorly-equipped manpower into the field. In rallying this coalition, the Empress concentrated on those powers that had reasons to fear Prussian ambition. This included in particular the states closest to the revisionist powers: Hannover, and through it, its patron Britain; Saxony, Prussia’s weaker southern neighbor; the Dutch, sandwiched between France and Prussia; and Piedmont, vulnerable to both Spain and France. Such a collection of states, like all coalitions in war, would be difficult to coordinate and hold together. But much as Austrian diplomats had used fear of French hegemony to align otherwise status-quo-minded states behind the Monarchy in the wars with Louis XIV, fear of Prussian strength now provided a powerful glue for a defensive coalition.

³³⁸ Bassett, p. 85.

The Assault on Austria, 1741-2



Source: Kylia Historia.

As she rallied allies, Maria Theresa also moved in the opening stages of the war to mobilize the Monarchy's own manpower and resources. Because the enemy occupied Silesia and most of Bohemia and Moravia, these efforts would need to be focused on Austria proper and the territories to the south and east. That meant Hungary. This was a challenge, given the dynasty's longstanding difficulties organizing regiments and munitions from the Magyar nobility. In addition, Maria Theresa still needed to win the formal ratification of her succession from the Hungarian Diet. But above all, it was imperative that Austria avoid a Hungarian uprising to take advantage of the crisis in the west, of the kind that had distracted Habsburg attention and resources during the Spanish succession war.

Against the odds, Maria Theresa accomplished all of these goals. Weak as the Monarchy may have been amidst the Prussian invasion, she still had two levers with the Hungarians: constitutional concessions, and Magyar pride. Traveling to Pressburg, she appealed directly to the Hungarian Diet. From start to finish, the trip was a public-relations coup. Arriving by the Danube on a boat festooned in Hungarian red, white and green, the young Empress used her presumed frailty to charm the Magyar magnates and excite their sense of duty. For months prior to the trip, and though pregnant, Maria Theresa had practiced her equestrian skills in anticipation of the coronation ceremony, which required her to ride to the top of a hill to receive the Crown of St. Stephen. She also brought constitutional concessions, widening the Kingdom's tax exemptions and confirming Hungary's separate administrative treatment in Habsburg government.³³⁹ Her methods worked. The Hungarians not only approved her succession but called a *generalis insurrection*, or general levy, promising more than 100,000 troops, mostly cavalry, for the war effort. While many of these pledges would never be met in full, Maria Theresa's diplomacy had accomplished something more valuable: prevention of a Magyar revolt both now and through the duration of the Prussian wars.

More effective for Habsburg manpower needs was Maria Theresa's mobilization of the troops of the Military Border. As we have seen, the *Grenzers* were not conventional soldiers on the European mold but rather irregular warfighters trained in the methods of *Kleinkrieg*—raiding, harassment and guerilla tactics. Use of such soldiers on western battlefields had not been attempted on a large scale. But for Maria Theresa, these troops represented an untapped pool of manpower that was numerous, loyal and, as events would prove, terrifyingly skillful. In the years that followed the Military Border would contribute large numbers of troops to the Austrian armies in the west: 45,000 in the Austrian succession war (out of a total Habsburg Army of 140,000) and 50,000 in the the Seven Years War, all for about a fifth the cost that would have been required to field similar numbers of regular units.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Browning, pp. 66-67.

³⁴⁰ Hochedlinger, pp. 243 and 323.

Dividing Enemies

Maria Theresa also employed what would become a signature Habsburg technique of the wars with Prussia: sequencing the conflict to avoid fighting all of her enemies at once. Austria had used such methods to juggle between fronts in Italy, the Netherlands, Germany and Hungary in the War of Spanish Succession (see Chapter 7). In the opening war with Frederick, it faced a similarly dispersed set of challenges. In addition to France, Prussia was joined in its invasion by the armies of Bavaria and Saxony. As the conflict widened, Spain also became involved as an enemy of Austria, as well as smaller Italian players, Genoa and Naples. Altogether, before the war ended, Austria faced active fronts in Bohemia, Moravia, Upper Austria, the Rhine and Italy.

If Austria tried to fight all of these enemies simultaneously, it would lose. The Monarchy was particularly susceptible to exhaustion in the early phases of the conflict, when its allies had not yet taken the field and its own forces were still assembling. To survive, it needed to find ways to concentrate scarce resources until the balance of power had begun to swing in its favor.

Maria Theresa did this in several ways.

First, she worked to prevent new enemies from coming into the war. One technique that Austria had learned in the Spanish succession war, as discussed in chapter 5, was to proactively appease threats that had not yet entered an existing conflict. Engagement with the Hungarians was done with this in mind. Similarly, Maria Theresa's worked to ensure quiet relations with the Ottoman Empire. Repeating methods used earlier in the century by Joseph I, Maria Theresa sought to tamp down tensions with Turks, ordering her diplomats to wrap up outstanding issues from the recent war and employing bribery in the Sultan's Court to ensure that The Porte did not enter the war on Prussia's side.

Second, Maria Theresa sought to prioritize among the various enemies who had already entered the war. Among these, Prussia represented the ultimate danger, but also the one enemy that Austria was least prepared to fight at this stage. Maria Theresa therefore sought a temporary peace, or *recueillement*, to recover strength and concentrate elsewhere. Early on in the conflict, she had instructed her diplomats to seek a ceasefire with the Prussians for precisely this purpose. The opening was eventually provided by Frederick himself, who wanted a short war to grab Silesia. Using this urge to their advantage, Austrian diplomats brokered the Convention of Kleinschnellendorf, a temporary peace that allowed their armies to disengage in the north. That their purpose to concentrate against other foes can be seen in the fact that Maria Theresa rejected Frederick's offer of a "general pacification" in the conflict.³⁴¹ The Austrian Empress *wanted* the war to go on, only on her terms and not her enemies'. That she intended to resume the contest with Frederick once she had dealt with other foes is illustrated by the fact that her diplomats would not cede permanent ground to the Prussians in the Convention, ultimately only consenting to a loss of parts of Silesia, and vaguely.

Third, with this ceasefire in place, Maria Theresa prioritized the gravest danger—a Franco-Bavarian threat to Upper Austria and the capital. In the Spanish succession war, Austria had been able to safely de-prioritize the *Erblande* when threatened by *kurucs* from the East, relying on hastily erected defenses to keep the raiders at bay while prioritizing economically valuable lands in Italy.³⁴² But a threat from conventional European armies was a different matter. In late 1741, such a threat existed in the form of a Franco-Bavarian army that had moved in force into Upper Austria and captured Linz. With the north quieted by the ceasefire, Maria Theresa massed Austria's forces against this threat, sending reinforcements from Hungary and shifting troops from Silesia and Italy. Launching a winter offensive unusual for Austrian armies in the 18th Century, she took the enemy off guard, pushing them out of Austria and across the Bavarian frontier.³⁴³ While the move came at the expense of temporarily ceding Silesia to

341 Browning, p. 73.

342 Höbelt, p. 5.

343 Browning, p. 92.

Prussia and weakened Austrian positions in Italy, it consolidated Austria's position on home territory and instilled confidence in the Monarchy's foreign allies.

With her concentration of force in Upper Austria, the Empress had placed Bavaria, the smallest member of Frederick's coalition, on the defensive, forcing its units to return home from their deployments in Bohemia. She now moved Austrian forces into Bavaria, including large numbers of Croats and other Military Border units, who savaged not only the enemy army but the population. Militarily, the move chiseled off a target that the Habsburg Army could handle, depriving Frederick of an ally once the war in the north was resumed. Politically, it dealt a severe blow to the home base of the Elector of Bavaria, the Habsburgs' main rival in Germany who became Holy Roman Emperor following the succession. By making this move early in the conflict, Maria Theresa sent a message to the other *Reich* states about Austria's continued military potency, increasing the likelihood that they would side with her as the war progressed.

Guerilla War

Maria Theresa's effort to sequence the war to Austria's advantage was made possible not just by diplomatic ceasefires but by guerilla war. While concentrating against the Bavarians, the Empress had to find ways of ensuring that the large enemy forces still in Bohemia and Moravia were not neglected altogether. The main method that she used to preoccupy them was *Kleinkrieg*, the practice of irregular warfighting imported from Austria's southern frontier. Maria Theresa had a wild assortment of troops available for this task that included Hungarian hussars and other frontier light cavalry, as well as large numbers of Croat, Serb and *Hajduk* irregular infantry. Known collectively as *Pandurs*, these forces comprised not only regimented *Grenzers* of the kind organized in the Military Border's administrative districts but numerous free corps raised specifically for the war. The latter often consisted of rogue elements—bandits, criminals and adventurers—assembled from the hardscrabble Balkan countryside.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ Bassett, pp. 95-100.

The War of Austrian Succession

THE AUSTRIAN WAR OF SUCCESSION



Source: Kyla Historia.

The fighting techniques used by these troops were very different from the linear warfare of the period on which Frederick had based his military machine. *Kleinkrieg* was a savage form of warfare similar to that practiced by the Cossacks, Comanches and other tribal irregulars found in the world's frontier regions. A contemporary observer described them as:

fierce to the highest degree; they live among mountains and forests, are inured to hardships from their infancy, and live more by hunting and fishing than by the milder arts of manufacture and cultivating the ground. Every enemy with whom they are at war, have complained of their want of generosity after a battle,

and of their rapine and barbarity when stationed in a country with whom their Sovereign is at war.³⁴⁵

The Prussians feared the *Pandurs*. As one of Frederick's officers wrote: "they are always hidden behind trees like thieves and robbers and never show themselves in the open field, as is proper for brave soldiers"³⁴⁶ Frederick told his generals that they could do little to harm Prussian units in the field, but that:

It is a different question in the woods and mountains. In that kind of terrain the Croats throw themselves to the ground and hide behind the rocks and trees. This means that you cannot see where they are firing from, and you have no means of repaying them for the casualties they inflict on you.³⁴⁷

Deployed against the Prussians and French in Bohemia, the *Pandurs* targeted supply lines, depots, baggage trains and isolated detachments. Such methods hit the weak spot of 18th Century armies: the logistical arteries supporting armies in the field. Their raids were especially effective against Frederick's army in Moravia in winter, when the Prussians needed to forage for provisions. *Pandur* units mercilessly stalked Prussian detachments in the countryside, wearing down their numbers, munitions and morale. Frederick complained, "We are going to be flooded with Hungarians, and with the most cursed brood that God has created."³⁴⁸

Pandur raiding was augmented by resistance from the local population. Resentful of the heavy-handed Prussian occupation, Moravian peasants were encouraged to fight by Vienna, which sent weapons and instructors to help them.³⁴⁹ Together, the *Pandurs* and local insurgents harassed the Prussians, allowing Austria to concentrate the bulk of its regular army elsewhere. When Frederick finally left Moravia, his forces were weakened and demoralized for the next phase of the conflict.

³⁴⁵ And. Henderson, *Memoirs of Count Daun* (1757: A.M. London: R. Withy and J. Ryall), p. 61.

³⁴⁶ Hans Delbrück, Transl. by Walter J. Renfro Jr., *The Dawn of Modern Warfare: History of the Art of War*, Volume IV (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 281.

³⁴⁷ Quoted in Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Maria Theresa: The Armed Forces of Imperial Austria, 1740-1780* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1977), p. 82.

³⁴⁸ Browning, p. 95.

³⁴⁹ Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresas*, Band 2, p. 46.

When Austria did engage the Prussians on a large scale, it looked for ways to magnify the strategic effects of its irregular forces on the enemy. This moment came in 1744, when Frederick ended the temporary peace and invaded Bohemia yet again with 80,000 men. This time he quickly took Prague and penetrated south to threaten Vienna while the main Habsburg army was deployed on the Rhine against the French. Redirecting her forces, Maria Theresa now had much larger and more experienced armies than she had had earlier in the war. They were commanded by Prince Charles of Lorraine and his lieutenant, Field Marshal Count Traun.

Traun was a capable officer who had won distinction in the War of Polish Succession at the siege of Capua, where he held out for seven months with 6,000 men against a Franco-Spanish force of 20,000.³⁵⁰ The strategy that Traun and Lorraine now used against Frederick was aimed at wearing down Prussian strength rather than confronting it directly. With Bavaria neutralized and French armies pushed back into Germany, Austria would eventually be able to concentrate significant strength against Frederick in Bohemia, once its forces had been collected from their far-flung positions. As Lorraine wrote to his brother, if Frederick persisted in driving so hard into the province, it would be easy starve him out; “I believe God has blinded him, because his movements are those of a madman.”³⁵¹ Frederick himself quickly saw the difficulty of his position, finding that despite the strength of his armies he was unable to subdue the land, whose entire population “from the high nobility, to the city mayors and general public spirit are devoted to the House of Austria.”³⁵²

With the populace on their side and reinforcements converging from the west, the Austrians played for time, harrying and exhausting Frederick’s forces. Playing to Frederick’s weaknesses, they avoided pitched battle and made careful use of terrain, skirting enemy columns along major rivers and selecting strong defensive locations for encampment. In these movements, Traun reflected Montecuccoli’s admonition that “even limited battle should be sought only when one has superior numbers and troops of better quality.”³⁵³ In today’s terms,

350 Browning, p. 97

351 Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresas*, Band 2, p. 429.

352 Ibid.

353 Barker, p. 61.

Traun's methods resembled what would be called a "logistical persisting strategy"—the practice of creating an inhospitable environment in which an invader can neither sustainably victual himself nor bring the defender to decisive engagement.³⁵⁴ Accompanied by swarms of *Pandurs*, Traun's forces chipped away at Frederick rearguards and flanks until Lorraine arrived with the main army, by which point the Prussians had been sufficiently depleted to be driven out of the province without a major battle.

2. Recuperative Strategies: Allies, Artillery and Revenge (1748-1763)

Austria survived the war of succession but at an enormous cost, spending eight times its annual revenue on the war and losing hundreds of thousands of lives and its richest territory to Prussia.³⁵⁵ As the war drew to a close, the writing was on the wall: if the House of Habsburg wanted to endure, it would need to be better prepared for the next phase of the war.

Even before hostilities ended, Maria Theresa had already begun to make provisions for the future. She was assisted in these tasks by Prince Wenzel Anton of Kaunitz, who served as State Chancellor from 1753 until the start of the French wars four decades later. Scion of one of the few surviving families of the old Bohemian nobility, Kaunitz had served during the previous war as an envoy in Italy and the Netherlands and later chief Austrian representative at the concluding negotiations. Charming, deceptive and patient, Kaunitz formed a close bond with Maria Theresa not unlike that which would later form between Disraeli and Queen Victoria, holding, as one biographer put it, "power like that of a demonic seducer" over the Empress in matters big and small.³⁵⁶ He would exercise far-reaching influence over the shape of Habsburg reform and the conduct of both diplomatic and military strategy in the next war.

Kaunitz's sought to steer Austria away from its longstanding reliance on Britain, which had proven a fickle and demanding partner in the war, toward closer ties to the powers best

³⁵⁴ Archer Jones, *The Art of War in the Western World* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 676-677.

³⁵⁵ Hochedlinger, p. 281.

³⁵⁶ Duffy, *Army of Maria Theresa*, p. 20.

positioned to help Austria militarily: Russia and France. He had laid the foundation for this shuffle at the concluding peace of Aix-la-Chapelle by deprioritizing the Austrian Netherlands in favor of a strengthened position in Italy, thus reducing Austria's reliance on the help of the Royal Navy.³⁵⁷ After the war, Kaunitz worked to engineer what would become known as the "Diplomatic Revolution" of 1756—a rapprochement with Austria's centuries-old rival France rooted in the promise of mutual military assistance against Prussia. As a makeweight Kaunitz brokered a renewal of the 1746 treaty with Russia "to make war against the King of Prussia' in order to reconquer Silesia and Glatz and place him in a position whereby he could no longer disturb the peace."³⁵⁸

At the same time, Kaunitz worked to restore confidence in Habsburg power among the states of the *Reich*. Maria Theresa had had this goal in mind in the late phases of the succession struggle when she treated generously with those members that had sided against Austria. At the Treaty of Füssen in 1745, she had given the Bavarians, still recovering from despoliation by the *Pandurs*, new territory while occupying key towns as "hostages" to guarantee their support for the reelection of a Habsburg as Holy Roman Emperor.³⁵⁹ By dealing with Bavaria and Saxony magnanimously, Maria Theresa had strengthened *Reich* support for the Monarchy as, in the words of one Austrian memo, a "neither an all-powerful nor an all-too-powerful" hegemon.³⁶⁰

Maria Theresa also worked systematically to strengthen Austrian domestic capabilities for war. Acting under the dictum that "it is better to rely on one's own strength than to beg for foreign money and thereby remain in eternal subordination," Maria Theresa and her ministers undertook a wholesale reorganization of the Habsburg state and economy.³⁶¹ In 1748, the year the war ended, she succeeded in the long-running battle to curb the power of the Estates, introducing requirements for higher contributions to the budget to be negotiated at ten- rather

357 Browning, p. 257.

358 Herbert H. Kaplan, *Russia and the Outbreak of the Seven Years' War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 122.

359 Browning, pp. 203-4.

360 *Ibid.*, pp. 227.

361 *Ibid.*, pp. 351.

than one-year intervals.³⁶² She launched a comprehensive census, tallying the properties of rich and poor alike and streamlining tax collection. Maria Theresa also streamlined government to cut waste, eliminating redundant institutions and subjugating provincial bodies to Vienna. To staff this rationalized bureaucracy, she expanded the political elite, issuing new patents of nobility and pardoning nobles who been disloyal in the war. At the same time she abolished the vestiges of feudalism, reducing the work obligations of the peasantry and transferring their regular labor quota – the hated *Robot* – into fixed cash payments.³⁶³ These changes not only made revenue flows larger and more predictable in wartime but increased the loyalty of the populace to the Crown.

Military Reform

Maria Theresa also reformed the military, beginning at the level of command and control. A General Staff was formed, and the *Hofkriegsrat* was overhauled and made into a leaner and more efficient institution; eventually, it would be combined with the state chancellery and *Directorium* to create a centralized “war cabinet” in the next conflict.³⁶⁴ A new military commissariat was created and given ministerial status to bring order to the chaotic supply system that had crippled Austrian forces in the early stages of the last war. A new military academy was created at Wiener Neustadt, as well as a finishing school for officers and a revamped engineering academy.

At the rank-and-file level, the Army was expanded to create the basis for a standing force of 108,000 men. Maria Theresa worked to increase Hungarian military contributions, merging Magyar and non-Magyar units and making the Army an outlet for Hungarian social mobility.³⁶⁵ She also sought to more systematically leverage the manpower potential of the Military Border. The previous war had shown the enormous potential that the *Grenzers* held for warfare in places other than the frontier. Half-way through the previous war, Vienna had begun to look for

³⁶² Judson, p. 28.

³⁶³ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

³⁶⁴ Hochedlinger, p. 272.

³⁶⁵ Judson, p. 46.

ways to maximize its contributions. Under Prince Joseph Sachsen-Hildburghausen, a new military code was introduced and the unpredictable free corps replaced by larger and more standardized formations.³⁶⁶ Importantly, these organizational changes were made without attempting to alter the indigenous warfighting methods of the *Grenzers*.

While expanding the size of the Army, Maria Theresa also sought to improve its quality. Recent battlefield experiences offered abundant lessons in tactics and technology. To absorb these, a Military Reform Commission was created and given the task of systematically preparing the forces for future conflict.³⁶⁷ Chaired by Lorraine, it was composed of officers with combat experience from the recent war, including Count Leopold Joseph von Daun, a talented disciple of Traun who had assisted in the successful relocation of the army from the Rhine in the 1744 campaign and Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein, who had led Austrian forces to victory in Italy. Within a year of its creation the commission produced a standardized drill manual. The first of its kind for Austrian forces, the new *Regulament* simplified infantry movements and tactics on the Prussian model, implementing changes that would remain in place until 1805.³⁶⁸ To learn the *Regulament* and improve tactics, the Army formed large exercise camps in Bohemia to re-train, drill and equip large formations.³⁶⁹

In the technological realm, the Austrians devoted particular attention and resources to improving the artillery. For armies of this period, the artillery represented the most labor- and capital-intensive weaponry to develop, requiring large-scale state investment, advanced metallurgy and industry to produce. In their collisions with Prussian forces in the 1740s, Austrian armies had found that they lagged dangerously behind in this technology. Overcoming this disadvantage became the focus of a major modernization effort after the war. Achieving “catch-up” in artillery was not a quick or easy task, requiring not only the

³⁶⁶ Duffy, *Army of Maria Theresa*, p. 84.

³⁶⁷ Franz A.J. Szabo, *The Seven Years War in Europe: 1756-1763* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 25 and Bassett, p. 110.

³⁶⁸ Duffy, *The Army of Maria Theresa*, pp. 76-77.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

development of the weapons themselves but the cultivation of specialized technical skills and a supporting military body to sustain them.

The effort to improve the artillery was led by Prince Liechtenstein. A member of perhaps the wealthiest family, Liechtenstein had almost been killed by Prussian artillery at the Battle of Chotusitz in 1742. Drawing heavily on his own wealth, the Prince funded ballistic experiments and created a new artillery corps headquarters in Bohemia.³⁷⁰ Altogether, Liechtenstein spent 10 million florins on the project, eventually producing a new class of improved guns in 1753.³⁷¹ His efforts essentially comprised a private R&D facility that moved more quickly than would otherwise have likely been possible. A measure of his success can be seen by comparing Austria's artillery in its first and second wars with Frederick. In the first, it possessed 800 artillerists. In the second, it had 3,100 men servicing 768 guns, supported by specialized fusilier, munitions and mining detachments.³⁷² From one of the Habsburg Army's most neglected elements, the artillery would become its *corps d'elite* with a claim to being "18th-century Austria's major contribution to the art of war."³⁷³

By reforming alliances and expanding the Army, Maria Theresa and Kaunitz sought to position the Habsburg Monarchy for renewed war with Prussia. The goal was partly offensive, in the sense that they were preparing to initiate a conflict to retake Silesia. Like Carthage after the loss of Spain to Rome and France after Prussia's seizure of Alsace-Lorraine, Austria's leaders were animated by the desire to repatriate a province that was not only economically valuable but symbolized their Monarchy's strength and influence in the balance of power. Viewed more broadly, however, her efforts were based on the correct assumption that Frederick would continue to launch revisionist wars in search of more territory. While the immediate aim was to take back Silesia, Austria's leaders wished to substantially reduce Prussia's potential as a long-term threat to their state. Kaunitz envisioned "a post-war environment without the evil of 'remaining armed beyond our means and burdening loyal subjects with still more taxes rather

³⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 105-6.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 108 and Bassett, p. 110.

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 105.

than granting relief from their burdens.”³⁷⁴ In this sense, Maria Theresa’s aims were preventative in nature, seeking to restore lost balance and preclude future disruptions on the scale that Austria had narrowly survived in the 1740s.

To achieve this goal, Maria Theresa pursued a strategy based on two components. First, she would use a larger number of allies than Austria possessed in the previous war to take the offensive against Frederick. In this, her aim was to exploit Prussia’s own interstitial geography and create the same disadvantage of a multi-front war that he had created for Austria in the previous previous conflict, thus shifting the economic burden of war away from the Habsburg home territories and onto Prussia itself. In addition to Russia and France, she succeeded in bringing Saxony, which had changed sides in the previous war, and traditional enemy Bavaria onboard as allies.

Second, as a byproduct of these alliances, Maria Theresa sought to achieve a greater concentration of force for the Habsburg Army than it had in the previous war. The absence of threats from France and Bavaria would enable Austrian forces to concentrate on one unified front against Prussia. This goal was further supported by pre-war treaties aimed at pacifying not only the Ottoman front but Italy as well. Paradoxically, the loss of Silesia allowed the army to develop improved forward positions in the defensive terrain around Bohemia’s rivers. Here, Austrian commanders planned to concentrate the Monarchy’s now-enlarged forces.³⁷⁵

Frederick Strikes Again

Anticipating Maria’s intentions, Frederick launched a preemptive strike into Bohemia in August 1756. Frederick’s war aims were similar to those of the previous war. He planned to blitz through, seize and profit from the resources of the Habsburg buffer state of Saxony; penetrate Bohemia and take Prague; and forming a winter position there, to “disorder the finances of

³⁷⁴ Quoted in Bassett, p. 147.

³⁷⁵ Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresas*, Band V, pp. 170-72.

Vienna and perhaps render that court more reasonable.”³⁷⁶ As in the previous war, the Prussian king sought to advance on a line of two objectives, holding Austria’s richest province hostage while threatening to raid and plunder Moravia or move in force against Vienna.

On entering Bohemia, Frederick found himself confronted by a very different Austrian army than in the past. From the outset, the Austrians showed higher force concentrations, stronger defensive positions and better logistics than they had sixteen years earlier, placing 32,000 men in well-entrenched positions in Bohemia and 22,000 in Moravia. At Lobowitz, near the border, Frederick was intercepted by a large force under Field Marshal Maximilian Ulysses Browne, who ironically had commanded Austria’s Silesia’s garrisons in the first invasion of 1740. In a foretaste of coming battles, Browne positioned his army behind defensive terrain at a bend in the Elbe with his flanks anchored on mountains and marshes. Swarms of Croat skirmishers picked gaps in the Prussian ranks from the tree lines while batteries of the improved Austrian artillery raked its infantry columns at long range. While eventually yielding ground, Browne mauled the invaders and gave pause to their king. One Prussian officer noted, “Frederick did not come up against the same kind of Austrians he had beaten in four battles in a row... He faced an army which during ten years of peace had attained a greater mastery of the arts of war...”³⁷⁷

The campaigns that followed showed that the Austrian army had profited from its interwar investments, deploying tools and techniques that negated many of their adversary’s traditional battlefield advantages. The Habsburg infantry was steadier, better drilled and did not break when pressed. The Croats still harassed the Prussian flanks and supply lines as before but were now more numerous and integrated into the Austrian battle order during pitched combat, inflicting casualties on advancing Prussian units before they could make contact with the main Austrian lines.

³⁷⁶ Blanning, p. 224.

³⁷⁷ Duffy, *Army of Maria Theresa*, p. 173.

Most noticeably, the Austrian artillery was more abundant, better handled and technically superior to that of the Prussians. As the 19th Century German military writer Hans Delbrück, no fan of the Austrians, later conceded:

The principal change in this arm—that is, the huge increase of heavy artillery—originated not with the Prussians but with the Austrians, who sought and found in these heavy guns their protection against the aggressive spirit of the Prussians. Frederick then reluctantly agreed with the necessity of following the Austrians along this path. At Mollwitz [in 1740] the Austrian army had 19 cannon, one to every thousand men, while the Prussians had 53, or 2-1/2 for every thousand men. At Torgau [in 1760] the Austrians had 360 cannon, or 7 for every thousand men, and the Prussians had 276, or 6 per thousand men.³⁷⁸

Improved artillery tilted the battlefield advantage to the defensive, in Austria's favor. Where Prussian offensive tactics required light, mobile guns that sacrificed range in order to keep pace with advancing units, Austria's investments had gone in the other direction, developing heavier, longer-range pieces that could hit the Prussians' main advantage—the infantry—at a greater distance than the infantry, or even Prussian artillery could return fire. By placing large batteries of these heavier guns behind defensive terrain, the Austrians forced Frederick to fight on unfavorable terms in one encounter after another, subjecting his army to attrition on the battlefield while Austrian irregulars subjected it to logistical attrition off the battlefield. Frederick acknowledged the change in Austrian fighting capabilities, noting that his adversaries had become “masters of the defensive as a result of their campcraft, their march tactics, and their artillery fire.”³⁷⁹

Fabius and Hannibal

These improvements notwithstanding, Habsburg war strategy faced a serious handicap that grew more pronounced as the new war continued. Despite its modernization, the Army remained an essentially defensive tool, while the political objective for which it was deployed—the reduction of Prussia—was offensive. Austria could use its reformed armies to go beyond

³⁷⁸ Delbrück, pp. 284-285.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 353-354.

the purely “preservative” strategies of the previous war and frequently defeat Frederick in battle. But the nature of its forces and the mindset of its generals did not lend themselves to prosecuting an offensive war into the Prussian heartland on the scale that was required for achieving the Monarchy’s full territorial and diplomatic aims.

No one embodied this tension more than Leopold von Daun, Maria Theresa’s senior commander in Bohemia and most successful Habsburg general in the war. An understudy of Field Marshal Traun, Daun had come of age in the army of Prince Eugene, under whom he had served at Peterwardin and, as one contemporary wrote, “learned the first rudiments of the art of war.”³⁸⁰ Drawn from the impoverished German nobility of Bohemia, Daun had a stolid and cerebral personality well-matched to the Habsburg military, being “so conversant in maps...[that] there was not a village either in Germany, Hungary, Bohemia...but he knew its longitude and latitude.”³⁸¹ At Kolin in June 1757, Daun handed Frederick the first major defeat of his career. Taking up a defensive position with protected flanks on heights near the Elbe River, he forced Frederick to advance up the slopes into entrenched artillery fire and then harassed his retreat with clouds of Croats.

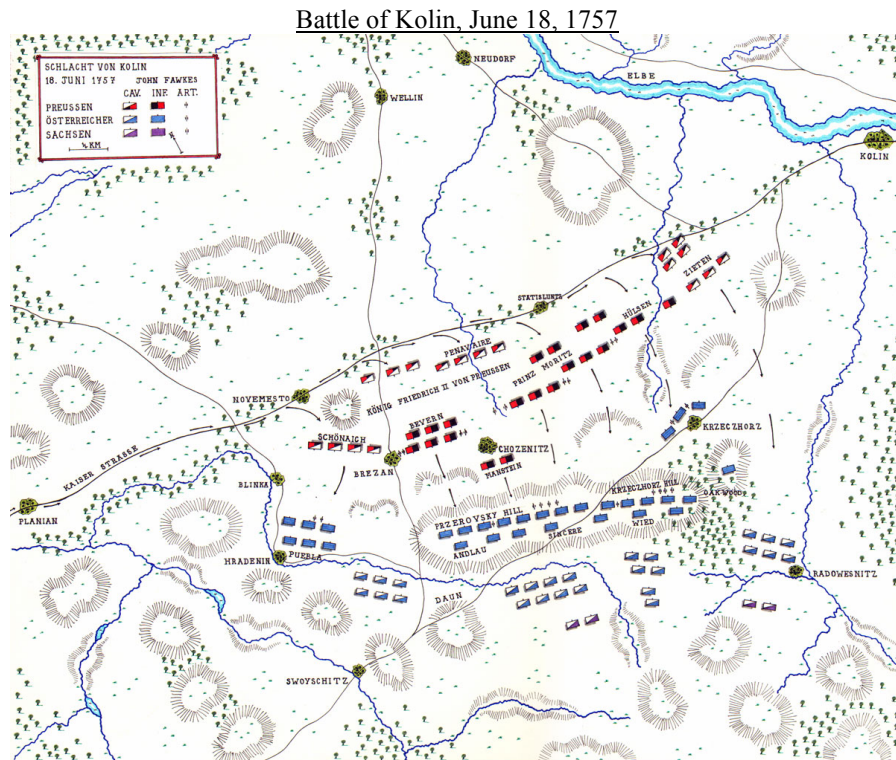
So severe was Frederick’s loss at Kolin that he was forced to give up his invasion of Bohemia and retreat across the border. In a more offensive army, such a battle would have been an opening for a vigorous pursuit into Prussian territory—the very objective of Maria Theresa’s war strategy. But Daun was unwilling to capitalize on Frederick’s difficulties. Modeling himself on the Roman general Quintus Fabius Maximus, who had hounded the stronger armies of Hannibal while avoiding battle, Daun believed that Austria’s advantages lie in defensive warfare. In words that Montecuccoli would have recognized, he wrote that Austrian generals “should offer battle [only] when you find that the advantage you gain from victory will be greater, in proportion, than the damage you will sustain if you retreat or are beaten.”³⁸² And

³⁸⁰ Henderson, p. 6.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁸² Duffy, *Army of Maria Theresa*, p. 144.

elsewhere, “God knows that I am no coward, but I will never set my hand to anything which I judge impossible, or to the disadvantage of Your Majesty’s service.”³⁸³



Source: John Fawkes, BritishBattles.com

Despite pressure from Maria Theresa and Kaunitz, Daun could not be brought to prosecute a more aggressive war against Frederick. A few bold raids followed, mostly corresponding to Austria’s strength in irregulars—including, notably, a hussar attack that momentarily seized Berlin itself. But the main army remained largely on the defensive. As Frederick commented of himself, “a Fabius can always turn into a Hannibal; but I do not believe that a Hannibal is capable of following the conduct of a Fabius.”³⁸⁴ Daun’s behavior now showed that the opposite was also true—a Fabius such as himself could not so easily turn into a Hannibal, even when the political object of war demanded it. Austria’s armies were not an offensive tool. Even in victory, they reverted to what they knew best: a strategy of delay and harassment.

³⁸³ Daun quoted in Duffy, “The Seven Year’s War as a Limited War” in Rothenberg, Kiraly and Sugar, Eds., pp. 73-4.

³⁸⁴ Delbrück, p. 310.

Austria faced a similar problem diplomatically. While Kaunitz had been successful in marshaling numerous allies before the war, he was less successful in converting the coalition into an offensive instrument. As with the Army, this was mainly a reflection of the traditionally defensive nature of Habsburg diplomacy. Historically, Austrian efforts at *managing* groups of allies had usually involved the smaller client states around its borders. In large wars Austria was more often a subordinate, and financial supplicant, to another power—usually Britain.

In assuming the role of alliance-manager, Austria lacked the financial heft to provide subsidies and direct allies toward a shared goal. Moreover, the Monarchy's defensive military nature did not lend itself to coordination in the field with other allies that had different fighting styles and political objectives, as the army found in half-heartedly trying to combine with the Russians and force a decisive battle with Frederick. As with its military reforms, Austrian alliance formulation was an example of how the Monarchy's geopolitical position and composition simultaneously necessitated the development of strategy for survival and placed natural limits on how far such strategies could be taken.

Caging Frederick

Even with these limitations, Austria's army and allies brought Frederick to heel. Converging Habsburg, Russian and Swedish armies eventually forced the Prussians onto the defensive in their own territory. While Frederick still retained much of the initiative, these multi-directional pressures effectively negated even the large victories Frederick was able to score at Rossbach, Leuthen and Zorndorf. Unlike the first war, Austrian strategy in the second forced Frederick to do less fighting on Austrian soil and more on his own. When he attempted to return to Moravia for a final time in 1758, the presence of active enemies on his flanks prevented a long stay; bogged down by the Habsburg fortress at Olmuetz and with his supply columns hounded by Croats, he was forced to withdraw. Within a year, Daun's lieutenants had achieved the long-sought convergence with the Russians at Kunersdorf in 1759, inflicting a devastating defeat that almost destroyed the Prussian army as a fighting force.

In the concluding Treaty of Hubertsburg, Austria did not regain Silesia. But the balance sheet from a Habsburg perspective was arguably better than if Maria Theresa had never reformed its army and alliances. While retaining his booty from the 1740-48 war, Frederick's military expansion had been checked. Austria defeated Frederick's attempts at cannibalizing its Saxon buffer and confirmed the line of the Elbe as a limit to Prussian power. As importantly, Austria emerged from the conflict with its prestige as a Great Power restored. Frederick affirmed Prussia's status as a vassal to the Habsburg Emperors. Compared to its straightened circumstances in 1740, Austria had restored its status as a powerful and permanent fixture of the international system capable of leading coalitions in support of continental stability.

3. Preventative Strategies: Forts, Rivers and Deterrence (1764-1779)

After the second Prussian war Austria again turned its attention to the future. Twenty-three years of almost continuous warfare had taken a toll on the Monarchy. The recent war alone had cost more than 300,000 Austrian casualties. The state was burdened by heavy debts and large swaths of the northern countryside were still recovering from years of occupation, pillage and depleted manpower at harvest time. The question facing Austria's leaders was how to avoid all of this happening again.

The man who would grapple with this question more than any other was Joseph II, named co-regent alongside his mother, Maria Theresa, in 1765 and sole monarch from 1780. Joseph was a creature of the Prussian wars. Maria Theresa had been pregnant with him while she practiced horse-riding ahead of her trip to the Hungarian Diet at the start of the first Silesian war. Raised amid the turmoil of constant invasion, Joseph took an interest in military affairs from a young age and was enamored with Frederick. Like the Prussian king, he was an absolutist monarch committed to building a strong central state grounded in toleration and enlightened administration. Intelligent and impulsive, he chafed at his mother's Baroque religiosity and continuing control in matters of state.

Joseph believed that Habsburg security could be put on a stronger long-term footing by applying the tools of reason: logical study, deliberation and planning. He took long rides across the Monarchy's frontiers, accompanied by his generals, examining every detail of local towns and topography. In the north, Joseph visited the battlefields of the recent wars with Frederick and devoted close study to the hills and rivers of northern Bohemia that, with Silesia gone, now made up the northern frontier. In Vienna, he composed countless memoranda and commissions to debate the question how the frontier should be secured against yet another Prussian invasion.

Joseph's collaborator in these exercises was General Moritz von Lacy, a talented protégé of Marshal Daun who served as the first head of the Austrian General Staff and as President of the *Hofkriegsrat* in the years after Daun's death. The central lesson that both Joseph and Lacy took from the Prussian wars was that a lack of preparation not only made Austria's defense more difficult, but invited such attacks to begin with. These wars, Joseph wrote, "proved quite clearly the necessity of preparing sound arrangements for the future."³⁸⁵ One important ingredient in being better prepared was the deployment of a larger standing army. Maria Theresa's expansion of the military between the wars had helped to shorten Frederick's campaigns in Bohemia and prevent the loss of new territory. "During the previous campaign," a report by senior generals after the war argued, "it became clear that, unless we maintain equally large bodies of troops at the border to what the enemy is able to deploy, the enemy can come and go without hindrance."³⁸⁶

To deal with the Prussian threat in the future, Austria's generals estimated they would need 140,000 troops—three times more than on the Turkish frontier and not counting whatever troops would be needed in Italy, Germany and Galicia. One report stated:

The situation in Bohemia and Moravia requires that the King of Prussia be opposed by no fewer than his own numbers, meaning 130 to 140,000 men at any time. Against the Turks, at least 40 to 50,000 troops

³⁸⁵ "Si vis pacem para bellum," Mem. 2/20, KA, Wien.

³⁸⁶ Blasek, p. 737.

will need to be stationed in the Banat and positioned around the Danube... In order to ensure just the *minimum* of defense against both sides, the War-President thus recommends at least 200,000 men to be kept in the field...[But] one ought to then consider the aforementioned restrictions in the case of a two-front war which would require a force of 310,000 men, including garrisons.³⁸⁷

Meeting these demands on a standing basis would not be easy. At the time the estimates were produced, Austrian forces in the north already fell short of the desired number by 60,000 men. Filling the gap would be expensive. Already in 1763, the military budget had been raised to 17 million florins, and an additional 5 million was sought.³⁸⁸ Joseph was an advocate of both a larger force and larger budget, but also understood the financial burdens that these preparations would bring. “We must try always to combine the necessary security with the country’s welfare,” he wrote to his brother, “and ensure that the former protects the latter as cheaply as possible.”³⁸⁹

Even if it could afford a larger army, that alone would not buy security against Prussia. Larger forces had not deterred Frederick’s invasion in 1756, which had only been ejected with difficulty. Once deployed to the north, Austria’s field armies had to worry about guarding multiple invasion routes while keeping an eye on other frontiers. As Maria Theresa wrote:

[Frederick] has the advantage of interior lines, while we need to cover double the distance to get into position. He owns forts, which we lack. We have to protect very large areas and are exposed to all manner of invasions and insurrections...One knows the Prussian machinations...that he leaves no means untried to rush us and fall upon our necks...³⁹⁰

With Silesia in Prussian hands an invading force could enter through mountain passes from more than one direction, forcing Austrian commanders to parcel out their strength, as one general put it, without “the faintest idea of Prussian intentions.”³⁹¹ Recent experience had shown that this could all happen at short notice, and by the time the Army reacted Frederick

387 “Festsetzung eines zuverlässigen Defensions-Systeme.”

388 Beales, vol. 1, p. 189.

389 Ibid.

390 Maria Theresa an Josef. 14. März 1778 in Schneider, pp. 34-35. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>.

391 Mayer, Part II, p. 493.

was already on the path to Vienna. Once lodged in Bohemia, he could linger while the Army chased him, feeding his forces on Austria's fattest provinces—as Maria Theresa put it, “this monster stretches out his campaigns...until everything is sorted and saved.”³⁹²

The Elbe Fortresses

To deter future Prussian invasions, Joseph and Lacy envisioned the construction of a series of fortresses across the northern half of Bohemia. “As a principle,” Lacy wrote, “fortifications are absolutely necessary for security of the country.”³⁹³ The absence of such defenses was believed to have encouraged Frederick's attacks, while forcing the army to “rely upon the establishment of rearward strongholds and magazines, which make the transport of supplies difficult, costly and burdensome for the country.”³⁹⁴ As long as no such fortifications existed, Joseph and Lacy believed, Frederick would not be deterred from attacking. As Lacy worried in 1767, “given that we did not commence construction [of forts] immediately after our most recent war, the King of Prussia [may not] wait for completion of such a project, [but rather] act on his aggressive intent before being faced with a new bulwark.”³⁹⁵

The potential for well-sited fortresses to strengthen Bohemia's defenses had been demonstrated by the ease with which the entrenched camp at Olmuetz had thwarted Frederick's last attempted invasion in 1758. Local terrain, too, favored fixed defenses. As Daun and Lacy had found in recent campaigns, the shape of the Elbe River, with its numerous elbows and tributaries, were ideal for protecting the flanks of a prepared defensive position. The river's course just south of the base of the mountains, set back somewhat from the main ingresses, allowed a defender located at its center to quickly pivot eastward or westward and thus cover a broad section of frontier.

³⁹² Maria Theresia an Josef. 26. September 1778 in Schneider, pp. 94-96. Accessed Online: <http://sophie.byu.edu/node/3669>.

³⁹³ Lacy memorandum on forts, attached to “Festsetzung eines zuverlässigen Defensions-Systeme.”

³⁹⁴ “Si vis pacem para bellum,” Mem. 2/20, KA, Wien.

³⁹⁵ “Festsetzung eines zuverlässigen Defensions-Systeme.”

To fortify the region, Joseph and Lacy solicited the advice of a team of French military engineers, eventually selecting sites to cover each of the main invasion routes—one at the west end of the Elbe, south of the Nachod Pass; the other at the east end of the river, south of the gap leading from Dresden to Prague. At the former, the Austrians built a large fortress near the intersection of the Adler and Elbe at Koeniggratz.³⁹⁶ A few years later, a second fortress, Josephstadt, was built twelve miles upriver at Pless, where a large plain provided a space suitable for assembling large forces. Together, these two forts placed obstacles at what the spot at which the Prussians normally formed up after exiting the Sudeten passes—as Joseph II described it, “naturally the weakest stretch of the Elbe.”³⁹⁷ To cover the eastern approach, a third fortress was built near the intersection of the Eger and Elbe and named Theresienstadt. More than three square kilometers in size, it was placed astride Frederick’s 1741 and 1744 invasion routes, denying Prussian armies the advantage they had enjoyed of shipping forces down the Elbe to Leitmeritz.³⁹⁸ In addition to these large structures, numerous smaller forts were built. A star-shaped earthwork was built near the pass at Jablunka, blockhouses and watchtowers were sprinkled in the mountain valleys, forward depots and arsenals were established, and the defenses of major cities strengthened.

The Question of Cordons

Lacy’s efforts to fortify the northern frontier would later become associated with the idea of “cordons”—the practice of trying to spread forces evenly across wide distances to cover all possible points of attack simultaneously.³⁹⁹ Cordons often appeared in 18th and early 19th Century military writing, particularly for dealing with problems in rugged terrain.⁴⁰⁰ The Austrian army would use them in various forms, often spreading division-sized units across the frontier in the opening phases of a war to detect and intercept an invader whose exact location

³⁹⁶ Christopher Duffy, *The Fortress in the Age of Vauban and Frederick the Great 1660-1789* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 132-33.

³⁹⁷ Duffy, *The Fortress*, p. 134.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁹⁹ See for example Gunther E. Rothenberg, *Napoleon’s Great Adversary: Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army 1792-1814* (Jackson: De Capo Press, 1995), p. 36 and Rauchensteiner, “The Development of War Theories,” in Rothenberg, Kiraly and Sugar, Eds.

⁴⁰⁰ Clausewitz, p. 432.

or strength was unknown. As we will see, doing so placed Habsburg forces at a disadvantage in the early days of the French Revolutionary wars. Afterwards, an Austrian military writer, Wilhelm Muller von Muhlwerth, attributed the practice to Lacy and criticized him for advocating dispersed positions that lent themselves to defeat by a more concentrated opponent.⁴⁰¹

This is not an altogether accurate characterization of Lacy's thinking. First, while his plans for Bohemia did involve a string of forts at the frontier, their main purpose was not to disperse force but to concentrate it. As a protégé of Daun, he would have agreed with his mentor's comment that "you cannot defend everywhere at once."⁴⁰² Lacy wrote that "the magnitude and quantity of the army is not the decisive factor in war, as experience has taught us" and warned against trying to "take too many objects together."⁴⁰³ The question was how to achieve concentration in an empire where it was rendered inherently difficult by geopolitical encirclement and large distances. In the era before railways, the answer to this problem was to build forts to allow some forces to remain in theater. Forts enabled a handful of troops to monitor an area that otherwise might have required an entire Corps, allowing the rest to be pulled into the interior. When trouble arose, troops could coalesce to, as Lacy put it, do "surgery" at the threatened point:

If a crisis were to break out somewhere else, troops could be shifted according to need...besides the necessity of being able to man all the forward positions with the garrisoned troops present, it may also be required that, in accordance with the demands of war and the movement of the enemy, all forces can be deployed to a single fort. Thus, that all, however unevenly distributed, garrisons be at a readiness level that allows for alternative operations.⁴⁰⁴

Second, Lacy's concept for northern defense was not staked on a single, exposed line of forts defeating an invader. As an 18th Century military officer, he appreciated the importance of placing rows of forts in echelon to ensure their mutual support in emergency. As an Austrian fortifications manual of the period described this practice:

⁴⁰¹ Brüning, p. 273.

⁴⁰² Duffy, *Army of Maria Theresa*, p. 144.

⁴⁰³ Lacy memorandum on forts, attached to "Festsetzung eines zuverlässigen Defensions-Systeme."

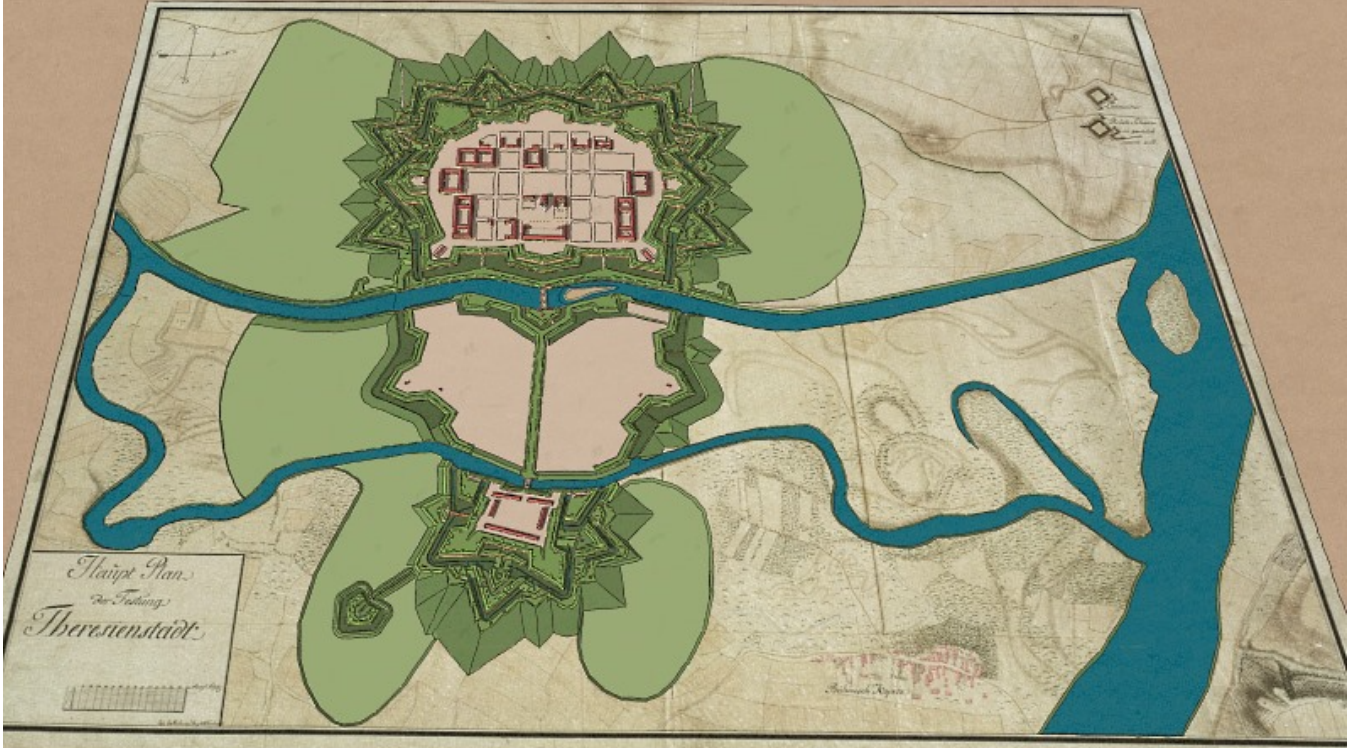
⁴⁰⁴ "Festsetzung eines zuverlässigen Defensions-Systeme."

Protecting an entire country...with just one fort would be as inadequate as having only one recruit for a position... The obstacle to be overcome by an enemy trying to enter the country becomes formidable with two lines of fortifications, placed *en échiquier*, in a row. In the defense of a country without [these], the protection of depots and magazines would require the defender to always have these in his back. A chain of forts protects all magazines and protects the positions of operating corps or armies. They can reinforce and recover damages according to circumstances even to evade a major confrontation. Chains of fortifications protect the backs and flanks of our forces, so that they may position themselves and move freely between the forts, whereas the enemy will be hesitant to move between such positions.⁴⁰⁵

The value of arranging forts in this manner was well-understood from antiquity. The fortresses of Austria's southern frontier sat in exactly such a pattern, with border fortresses supported by forts anywhere from 100-200 miles in the interior. By contrast, in the north, there were no forward posts, and the interior forts—Olmütz, Prague and Brünn—had therefore been forced to bear the brunt of defense in recent wars, with devastating consequences for adjacent farmland and the Habsburg economy. By constructing forts on the Elbe, Lacy was attempting to remedy this deficit; his aim was not to build an unsupported forward cordon but rather to provide the missing pieces to a defense-in-depth posture that, with Silesia's loss, was now over-reliant on its rearward elements.

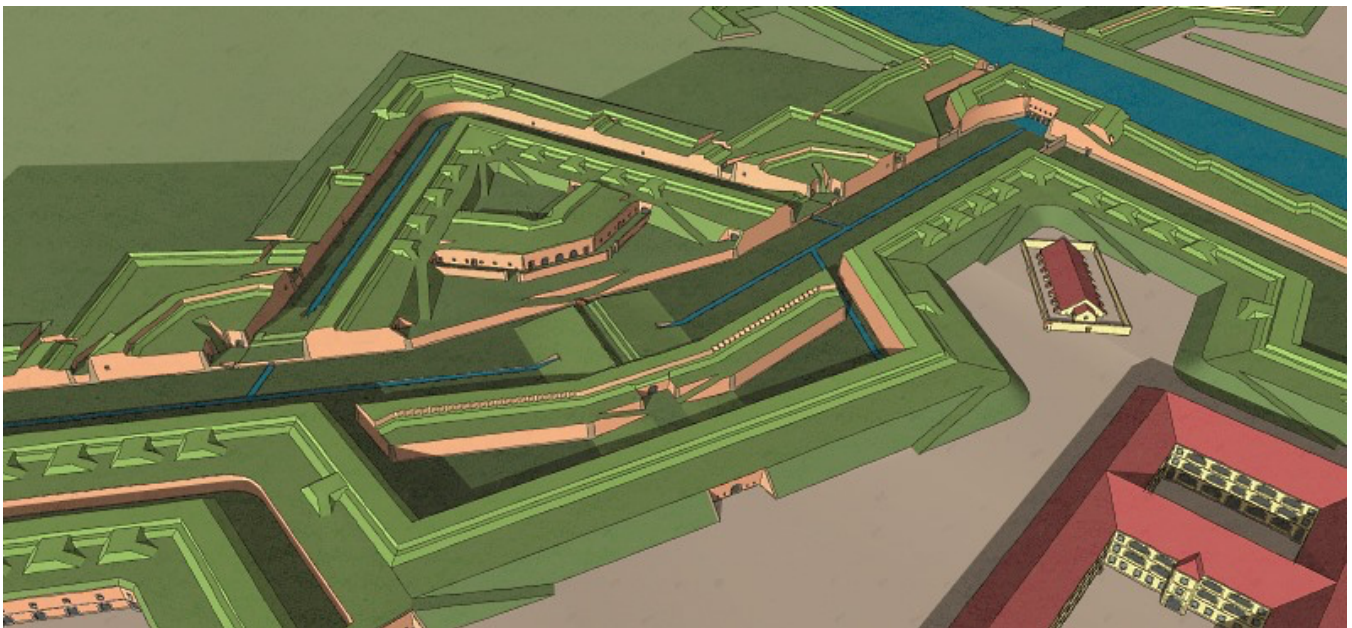
Theresienstadt Fortress

⁴⁰⁵ Kinsky, pp. 19-20.



Source: Petr Capek, 2016.

Detail of Defenses at Theresienstadt Fortress



Source: Petr Capek, 2016.

Third, Lacy's defensive plans have to be understood in the context of multi-front war. "Considering that conditions may always change," he wrote, "it would be smart to prepare with whatever resources the Monarchy has available for the case of a war on two fronts." In the event of such a war, Austria's forces would be stretched thin in an effort to juggle between fronts. Forts helped by allowing a small number of troops to hold down the enemy in one sector while concentrating its main strength against the other. In the 1760s, at a moment when Austria lacked forts in the north, its southern forts enabled to shift the bulk of its field army to the north. By building similar fortifications in the north, Lacy wanted be able to do the reverse as well.

But nor did Lacy assume that forts alone would bring Austria protection. His planning did not attempt to provide 360-degree security through thin ribbons of frontier fortresses but rather viewed forts as part of a wider system of layered defenses. Beyond the frontier, the enemy would, if Austrian diplomacy succeeded, first have to contend "assistance that could be expected from our allies" and perhaps the army of a neighboring buffer state, such as Saxony. At the frontier itself, the invader would be intercepted by frontier fortresses, behind which lay prepositioned munitions, a second line of interior fortresses and, finally, the field army. This layering of natural and manmade obstacles helped to Austria's defenses resiliency in a multi-front crisis but were especially helpful in the north, where it lacked extensive insulating space to buffer the *Erblande* from sudden attack.

Lacy's Plan in Action

Perhaps the best indication that Lacy sought concentration rather than dispersal can be seen when his plans were put to the test in 1778, in the short War of Bavarian Succession. As they had done on so many previous occasions, the Prussians invaded through the mountain passes—Frederick with the main army through Nachod and Prince Henry southward from Lausitz. As in previous wars, Frederick's plan was to move these forces in a pincer, converging on the long-familiar portage near Leitmeritz, placing the Austrians on the horns of the same old dilemmas of choosing to guard Moravia or the capital while his armies wrecked the provinces

and lived off the land.

Rather than take the bait, Lacy foiled the invasion through a defensive concentration on the middle Elbe. Though not all of his preparations had been completed, the fortress at Königgrätz had just undergone substantial improvement and earthworks were in place at Theresienstadt.⁴⁰⁶ Lacy spelled out Austrian strategy in a war plan entitled *Defensionsplan für das Koenigreich Böhmen*:

Since [Bohemia] is open on all sides... [and] the approaching danger is therefore also multi-sided... we must fix such a concentrated plan ... [whereby] our armies, which have not yet fully gathered, can ensure the ability to link up and at the same time keep the enemy columns separated from one another.⁴⁰⁷

In earlier planning, Lacy had already ensured that sufficient forces would be prepositioned in theater to avoid the problems of surprise and weakness that had crippled Habsburg forces at the outset of the first Silesian War. Unlike in the past, Lacy's preparations confronted Frederick with a dense phalanx of defending Corps in entrenchments behind the Elbe. Noting that "the river makes a bow in Bohemia, as the Upper Elbe runs from Arnau to Königgrätz," Lacy's war plan concluded "it is in this sector where our main Defensive position should be developed."

Lacy's chosen spot on the Elbe turned out to be exactly where Frederick had envisioned his own columns linking up. When the Prussians arrived they were surprised to find the Austrians present in strength. With the Austrian Corps tightly spaced and supported by a "numerous artillery of 15 guns per battalion," Frederick remained bottled up in Moravia and pitted against the converging forces of Duke Albrecht while Prince Henry's smaller force petered out in the countryside near Prague.⁴⁰⁸

Frederick declined to attack Lacy's position, loitering for three months before retreating back

⁴⁰⁶ Blasek, pp. 724 and 737.

⁴⁰⁷ Lacy, "Kurz zusammengezogener Defensionsplan für das Königreich Böhmen," in Criste, pp. 260-62.

⁴⁰⁸ J. Nosinich und L. Wiener, *Kaiser Josef II. als Staatsmann und Feldherr. Österreichs Politik und Kriege in den Jahren 1763 bis 1790*, Verfasst im K. K. Kriegs-Archive (Wien: L. W. Seidel & Sohn, 1885), p. 129.

across the border. The short war was expensive. But its outcome had validated Lacy's strategy of developing the Elbe into a defensive barrier.⁴⁰⁹ The war's nickname—"the potato war," from the potatoes that Prussian troops lived off of—is a fitting end to the Prussian wars from an Austrian perspective, insofar as the main objective of the post-1763 strategy had been to deprive Frederick of his accustomed habit of living off of the fattened Bohemian lands to the south. Lacy's defensive line had accomplished this goal, depriving the Prussians of supply and Frederick the ability to squeeze Vienna economically for concessions. A very different outcome would occur in the next century, when Austrian and Prussian armies squared off in the same place using similar strategies. But for now, Lacy's efforts to close the Monarchy's northern backdoor had succeeded.

Conclusion

The Prussian wars forced Austria to adapt. Unlike in the south, where centuries of conflict had led to the evolution of defensive concepts and infrastructure, Austria had no significant history of conflict with Prussia prior to 1740. Aside from a few neglected garrisons and the rusty machinery of the German *Reich*, it started the long wars against Frederick with little in the way of a coherent strategy or tools. Three wars and 39 years later, it emerged with a modern army, the best artillery in Europe, a rationalized system of revenue and administration, and an advanced network of fortresses.

Habsburg behavior evolved over the course of the Prussian wars, from a reactive effort to stay alive and avoid defeat to a recuperative strategy of systematically retaking lost land, and a preventative strategy to manage conflict on Austria's terms. The goal in the first was survival; in the second, renewal; and in the third stability. Unlike in the south, where Austria sought to ensure short wars against a weaker opponent, in the north it drew out the conflict to mobilize internal resources and alliances against a militarily stronger opponent. In the War of Austrian Succession, Habsburg diplomats used temporary treaties to stagger the conflict into

⁴⁰⁹ Delbrück, pp. 362-363.

manageable chunks, while Habsburg generals used terrain and irregulars to hound and hamper tactically-superior enemy armies. In the Seven Years War, Austria used widened alliances to bring time pressure to bear against Frederick II, creating theretofore unimaginable military opportunities that her armies were unable fully to exploit. In the War of Bavarian Succession, Austrian military technology, effectively intertwined with defensive terrain, secured tactical advantages that denied Frederick of his preferred strategy.

Austria coped with Prussian pressure in part by shifting the burden of containing it to other parties—first to the English and Dutch and later, more efficiently, to the French, Russians, Swedes and Saxons. The construction of fortresses also enabled burden-shifting, providing permanent structures that shielded its field army and made Austria less reliant on external aid for repelling, if not containing, Prussian strength. The success of this gradual evolution in mitigating enemy military pressure can be seen by the number of battles fought on Austrian soil in the three wars. The first war saw extensive fighting across Bohemia and into Upper Austria and lengthy Prussian and French occupations. The second saw Prussian incursions promptly ejected and most of the fighting on foreign territory. And the third ended without a single major battle or siege. Where the Austrian War of Succession lasted eight years, the War of Bavarian Succession, which opened with the same Prussian moves, lasted three months.

The Prussian wars produced lasting consequences for the Habsburg Monarchy. Geopolitically, they settled the question of how Central Europe would be managed—largely to Austria's advantage, not through opportunistic, land grabs but through a continuation of the methods of compromise and rules-based order that had long governed the *Reich*. In this sense, Kaunitz's objective of seeking a more stable post-war environment had been achieved. Perhaps more importantly for Austria's long-term prospects was the impact that the wars had on Habsburg strategic behavior. Frederick's invasions forced Austria to think about and plan for war on a proactive rather than reactive basis. Military necessity dictated the rationalization of strategic institutions, in the form of a more efficient government and General Staff. Post-war commissions habituated the Army to absorbing lessons from war and thinking systematically about the future.

The precedents set by Lacy's and Joseph II's post-war planning would become an ingrained part of Austrian military practice at the same time that Kaunitz's diplomatic revolution and intervention in wartime decision-making brought unprecedented coordination in Habsburg military and diplomatic planning. The resulting concepts, centered on a defensive army, frontier fortifications and anti-hegemonic coalitions, would form the backbone of Habsburg grand strategy for most of the Monarchy's remaining history. It is with these techniques, and the hard-learned skills of resilience against a predatory neighbor, that Austria would enter its next contest, against an even more powerful opponent—Napoleonic France.

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Chapter VII.

Teufelfranzosen:

France and the Western Frontier

“If we weigh the comparative strengths of Austria and France, we find on the one hand a population of 25 million, of which about half is paralyzed by differing constitutions and, on the other, a France with unhindered access to 40 million, over which it has imposed an iron conscription law...that knows no exemptions – a system, in short, of the kind that Your Majesty would never be able to implement in our lands.” – Archduke Charles

“Only one escape is left to us: to conserve our strength for better days, to work for our preservation with gentler means – and not to look back.” – Metternich

Summary

Along its western frontiers, the Habsburg dynasty the Habsburg dynasty was locked for most of its existence in an unequal contest with the military super-state of France. More advanced than the Ottomans and bigger than Prussia, France was capable of fielding large modern armies, engineering elaborate alliances and launching multi-sided invasions of the Eblande. In facing this threat, Austria was not able to count on the military-technological advantage that it enjoyed against the Turks, or the larger size and resources that gave it an edge against Prussia. Instead, it sought to contain French power through the defensive use of space, building extensive buffer zones to offset France’s advantages in offensive capabilities. Habsburg strategy on the western frontier evolved through three phases: (1) In wars with the Bourbon kings, successive Habsburg monarchs cultivated the smaller states of the German Reich and northern Italy as clients, committed to sharing the burden of defense through local armies and tutelary fortresses in wartime. (2) Against Napoleon, these buffers collapsed, forcing Austria to use strategies of delay and accommodation similar to those employed against Frederick II to wear down and outlast a stronger military opponent. (3) In the peace that followed, Austria restored and expanded its traditional western security system, using confederated buffers and frontier fortresses to deter renewed French revisionism.

Western Frontiers of the Habsburg Monarchy



Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

Playground of Empires

The western frontier of the Habsburg Monarchy ran across the middle mass of the European continent from the English Channel to the Mediterranean. At its epicenter lay the lands directly above and below the Alps, including the states of southern Germany and northern Italy that had formed the ancient heartland of Charlemagne's empire. Despite their separation by mountains, these territories represented a more or less contiguous zone of agriculturally fertile, mineral-rich land capable of sustaining high population densities, generating strong tax revenue and supporting the early development of industry. From the Middle Ages, the states of this region had shared the characteristic of political fragmentation, forming weakly organized clusters of small polities that were susceptible to domination and influence by outside powers.

The central location and political tractability of these lands endowed them with geopolitical importance for neighboring Great Powers. By the 14th Century, an intense competition had formed over control of these spaces between the Habsburgs and the Capetian dynasty of France, with its Valois and Bourbon branches, that would persist for almost five centuries. Both dynasties sought a similar object: to either possess or control the states of Germany and Italy, but in any event to prevent them from falling under the other's sway. The stakes for both empires were high. A France that could expand beyond the Rhine was capable of dominating Europe; one that could not faced the threat of being bottled up into the continent's westernmost corner and placed perpetually on the defensive against the combined strength of Germany. An Austria that could retain a deciding influence over Germany and Italy could add depth and wealth to its small Alpine core; one that could not would be reduced to the status of a marginal power and sequestered to Europe's eastern rim.

A Different Kind of Enemy

In this high-stakes competition, the Habsburgs faced a rival that was qualitatively different from their other competitors. France developed the resources and tools of a Great Power earlier than any Western state. Its kings achieved early mastery over the nobility, building a centralized military state that was backed by the resources of a large, defensible and well-proportioned landmass rich in natural wealth. To this was added a culturally and linguistically homogenous population that numbered 20 million by 1700 – larger than any other European power including Russia. Drawing on these resources, France could assemble large armies, supported by an ample treasury and the latest Western warfighting tools and techniques. Despite possessing a comparable landmass, Austria was usually unable to compete with France on equal military terms.⁴¹⁰

⁴¹⁰ Ingraio, *In Quest*, p. 28.

French Invasions of Austria, 18th and 19th Centuries



Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

Another French advantage was geography. Located at the westernmost tip of the European peninsula, it was flanked by the sea on three sides and screened by mountains across its landward frontier. Combined with its numerous population, these physical traits presented a secure geopolitical base that gave France a natural offensive orientation in its behavior. As a 19th Century Austrian military appraisal put it:

Bounded by oceans to its West and to its North...[France] has but one defensive line and one direction of war. [It has] a coherent national identity – characteristics shared by no other major power, except Russia. This alone gives her position advantageous for war and lessens the pains of any potential defeat or setback. It is impossible to imagine breaking up France, even if it were defeated in an attempt to destroy and divide the rest of Europe.⁴¹¹

These characteristics represented a significant advantage in strategic competition. In wars with Austria, France's geography was favorable for conducting offensives into the Danube Basin.

⁴¹¹ Von Aresin, *Festungsviereck von Ober-Italien, seine Bedeutung für Deutschland, die Schweiz und das Machtgleichgewicht von Europa* (Wien: k.k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1860), p. 3.

Its advantage lay in the topographical arrangement of the Alps, which fell on an east-west axis that enabled an invader approaching from the west to enter Austria along two separate avenues while keeping a substantial portion of its own forces screened. This advantage was amplified by Europe's rivers. North of the Alps, the Rhine valley's near-intersection with the Danube allowed for the swift eastward movement of troops and supplies directly into the Habsburg heartland. As Venturini wrote of this section of frontier:

The long border is throughout only beneficial for the French... The assertion of mountains... [means that] the French always have free reign there, a safe Rhine crossing and the most commodious positions to attack the Austrian front on the right flank. They have the same advantages at the Upper Rhine through the formation of their power in Switzerland. Thus, the Austrian army is in the highly disadvantageous position of defending a completely surrounded unfortified boarder against a strong enemy, operating from an extremely strong eccentric base.⁴¹²

To the south, France's Rhone River has a similar effect, aiding movement to the headwaters of Italy's River Po valley, down which armies could march through fertile plains to the 30-mile-wide 'Ljubljana Gap' through the Karawanken Alps of modern-day Slovenia and an open road to Vienna.⁴¹³ These two paths—one through Germany, the other through Italy—created what might be called a "Rhine-Po dilemma" for Austria in wars with France, enabling invaders to approach on a dual axis in the assurance that the defenders would not know until late in the game where their main blow would fall, by which point it would be too late to quickly shift forces from one front to the other.

A third French strength was alliances. As a state that combined the attributes of a maritime and continental power, France needed allies to support prolonged landward advances. An old dynasty, the Valois and their offshoots were skilled in collecting clients and advancing succession-based claims that formed the template for expansion until the late 18th Century. Partly through this tradition, France developed a sophisticated diplomatic culture that treated

⁴¹² Venturini, *Kritische Übersicht*, pp. 1, 5.

⁴¹³ J.E. Kaufmann and H.E. Kaufmann, *The Forts and Fortifications of Europe 1815-1945: The Central States: Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Czechoslovakia* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2014), p. 177.

alliances as an integral component of security policy. In the West, France's famous *Pactes de Famille* effectively sealed off its southern frontier and enlist Spain as a virtual proxy in contests on the European mainland. In Germany, France patronized those German states that chafed at Habsburg dominion, particularly Bavaria but occasionally Brandenburg and Saxony. Further east, it organized military alliances with second-rank states located on the opposite side of its rivals—the so-called *alliances de revers*. As early as the 8th Century the Carolingian kings had used such formulae to court the Abbasid Caliphate to harass the flanks of the Byzantine Empire. In the 16th Century it formed alliances with the still-extant kingdoms of Poland and Hungary, the latter of which would persist through patronage to renegade Magyar princes and offer France a ready base of opposition to the Habsburgs inside their own borders. Similar alliances would be nurtured with Sweden, Saxony-Poland and the Ottoman Empire as counters to Russian expansion and tourniquets to Austria's eastern flank, well into the 18th Century.

France's combination of large armies, favorable geography and alliances set France apart from other Habsburg rivals. Where the Ottomans had numerically numerous forces and the Prussians often possessed a technological-tactical edge, France had both. Its facility with alliances differentiated it both from the Ottomans, who rarely attempted to coordinate with Western powers, and Prussia, which until Bismarck showed only a marginal aptitude for sustaining alliances. Where both the Ottoman Empire and Prussia had to use great exertions of diplomacy to trigger crises in theaters other than their own, France could pose threats to two separate frontiers merely by virtue of its geographic location. Together, these military, diplomatic and geographic factors made it a full-spectrum peer competitor whose advantages were rendered all the more lethal by the fractious, harried and resource-constrained state in which the Habsburg Monarchy usually found itself.

1. Building Blocks of Western Strategy

To understand the strategies that Austria developed to deal with the French threat, it is first necessary to see what it could not do. The Bourbon wars made plain that the Monarchy could

not dominate France militarily. Nor did it have the option of absorbing all or most of the territories to their west as a more powerful empire might have attempted. France's alacrity and skill as an offensive land power and the high strategic and economic value of the German and Italian lands at stake, meant that Austria could not depend on a few fortresses and low-intensity border defenses of the kind it was able to employ across the barren expanses of the southeast. And while periods of détente and even alliance might be possible, conflicts between the two states often involved fundamental misalignments of strategic interest, foreclosing the option of a prolonged condominium of the kind that Austria developed with Russia.

Despite these limitations, Austria did possess certain advantages in the contests with France that, over time, would provide the building blocks for an effective strategy to counter its strength. Unlike on Austria's northern or southern frontiers, its western approaches were populated by scores of smaller and weaker states. Over previous centuries, the Habsburgs had amassed considerable influence over these states in their status as Holy Roman Emperors. The *Reich* itself was not a powerful offensive military tool; as noted in chapter 6, by the 18th Century it was a shadow of its former Medieval glory. Its influence in Italy was even weaker, with the region north of the Papal States existing under the nominal jurisdiction at best of the Emperor.

Nevertheless, the Habsburgs' status in both sets of lands, seemingly irrelevant in hard-power terms, conveyed a moral authority and sets of levers for political influence among the small states of Middle Europe that the Bourbon kings, for all their military strength, could not match.⁴¹⁴ This status provided a seemingly symbolic but decisive edge in the battle for political influence among the smaller states of Central Europe. Building on this foundation, the Habsburgs constructed a security system that, by the early decades of the 18th centuries would consist of three, inter-related pillars: (1) a protective belt of buffer states, (2) a network of fortresses and (3) anti-hegemonic coalitions.

⁴¹⁴ Ingrao, *In Quest*, p. 31.

Western Buffers: The 'Reichsbarriere'

At the heart of Habsburg strategy in the West was the concept, initially inchoate but increasingly formal with the passage of time, of a series of obstacles—political, military and spatial—to block eastward French expansion and organize the intervening territories under a Habsburg aegis. The overarching aim was to create a defensive bulwark, or *Reichsbarriere* as the Austrians called it, across the length of the western Habsburg frontier, from Switzerland to the English Channel. In the north this barrier was anchored on the Austrian Netherlands, which acted as a *point d'appui* for Austrian armies to threaten France in the rear, and in the south on the Alps, which provided a natural wall below the Rhine valley. 415 Between these points, the Habsburgs organized a line of buffer states, under the auspices of the *Reich*, which continued in a more loosely organized format into the territories of northern Italy.

Austria's German Buffers: States of the Holy Roman Empire ca. 1789



Source: Wikipedia

In engineering a Habsburg tilt among the states of this line, the Habsburgs enjoyed two advantages. One was fear. While German states were nominal vassals to the Habsburg throne, by the end of the Thirty Years War this was no longer a sufficient force to congeal them into an anti-French bloc. What could unite them behind a common strategic purpose, at least for short periods, was the threat of attack by an outside power. The acquisitive militarism of the French state under the Bourbon kings presented such a threat, made all the more adhesive by Louis XIV's habit of targeting weaker states for coercion.

Successive Habsburg monarchs harnessed German fears of the Bourbons to Austrian strategic needs, renovating the old collective defense mechanisms of the *Reich* for use against outside aggressors for first time since before the Reformation.⁴¹⁶ They focused in particular on organizing defensive clusters among the small states that lined France's frontiers and principal invasion routes. In 1702, Leopold I worked with the princes of the *Reich*'s most exposed members to form the Nördlingen Association, a sub-grouping of states whose purpose was to defend against attack from the west.⁴¹⁷ Not unlike U.S. cooperation with the Central and Eastern member states of NATO, the Nördlingen Association was an example of a security patron using mutual fear to both organize collective security and partly outsource the burden of defense against a common enemy. Within the *Reich*, the Nördlingen states helped to counterbalance opposition from northern or pro-French states to ensure the passage of a *Reichskrieg*—the equivalent of Article 5 in NATO—while lending credibility to Austria as a security patron in the eyes of its larger external allies.⁴¹⁸ Once war was declared, the group provided a mechanism for pooling defense resources well above the *Reich* average, often committing troops at triple the strength required by Diet while less exposed members underdelivered [see figure].⁴¹⁹

416 Ingraio, *In Quest*, p. 32.

417 Ludwig Bittner, *Chronologisches Verzeichnis der österreichischen Staatsverträge. 1, 1* (Wien: Holzhausen, 1970). p 119-20. See also: Whaley, p. 114 and Hochedlinger, p. 52.

418 Winfried Dotzauer, *Die deutschen Reichskreise (1383-1806): Geschichte und Aktenedition* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998), pp. 286-287.

419 See Dietmar-H. Voges, *Nördlingen seit der Reformation: aus dem Leben einer Stadt* (München: C.H. Beck, 1998), pp. 134-135 and Wilson, pp. 193-196.

Table 5.6 The Nördlingen Kreis Association, 1702

<i>Kreis</i>	Contingent
Franconia	8,000
Swabia	10,800
Upper Rhine	3,000
Electoral Rhine	6,500
Austria	16,000 ¹
Westphalia	9,180
Total	53,480

Sources: Recess and supplementary agreements printed in Lünig (ed.), *Corpus iuris militaris*, vol. 1 pp. 402–7; Hofmann (ed.), *Quellen zum Verfassungsorganismus*, pp. 269–71.

Note:

¹Plus 1,200 militia and 1,000 entrenchment workers.

Similar dynamics existed in Italy. Long a Habsburg stronghold, Italy's position in the wider Austrian orbit was reaffirmed in the Spanish succession war, with portions of Lombardy, including the duchies of Mantua and Milan, coming into Austrian possession in 1711. Between these territories and the *Erblände*, sat Venetia, through which Austria brokered rights of passage for troops and supplies, via the Brenner Pass, in wartime. To the west lay the kingdom of Sardinia, an independent polity with a history of vassalage to Spain that shared the Nördlingen states' proximity to and therefore fear of stronger powers immediately beyond its borders. Straddling the mountains, Sardinia looked with apprehension on the expansion of Bourbon strength.⁴²⁰ As in Germany, this anxiety provided an opening for Austria to cultivate close security links and, eventually, a glacis to French or Spanish reentry into the peninsula.

⁴²⁰ Browning, p. 99.

Austria's Italian Buffers: The States of Northern Italy, ca. 1700



Source: Wikipedia.

Another factor that aided the Habsburg Monarchy's efforts to build a western buffer system, paradoxically, was its own weakness. Where early 18th Century France appeared strong and predatory to Europe's smaller states, Austria, was already by this point widely seen as being unable to mount the attempts at continental primacy that it had attempted in its heyday of the 16th and 17th centuries. Capable of mounting significant military efforts, it nevertheless posed no threat of hegemony. Indeed, its primary goal as an ancient, weak power was a stable territorial status quo. This aligned well with small states' interests in self-preservation. Not surprisingly, Austria's greatest base of support in the western buffers were those states that had the most to lose from revisionism: in Germany, the smaller principalities and archbishoprics—Salzburg, Passau, the Imperial knights and southern free cities; in Italy, the small states of Lombardy and Sardinian satellite, which preferred a distant Viennese

paternalism to centralized Bourbon rule. 421 In both sets of territories, a basic bargain presented itself: small-state fealty and contributions to collective defense in exchange for benign Habsburg domination and protection.

The Habsburgs actively promoted this bargain. They used the largesse of the Emperor's office—jobs in the imperial administration, bribes and other favors—to reward loyal princes and, through the Aulic Council, punish disloyalty. At the same time, the *Reich* machinery limited imperial power through various checks and balances, including an Electoral College that ratified major decisions, a Diet that decided on declarations of *Reichskrieg*, and, ultimately, electoral confirmation of new emperors. However formulaic, these rules sets helped to make Austrian hegemony more palatable to client states by wrapping it in the arcana of rules and procedures.

Habsburg monarchs were conscious of the strength that came from restraint, cultivating a reputation for moderation in victory and leniency in dealings with wayward princes. An example, as we have seen, was Maria Theresa's extension of generous terms to the Bavarians at Füssen in 1745. Such magnanimity could be alternated with acts of brutality. But ultimately, the Habsburg rule was built on the foundation of a soft hegemony. This stemmed not from altruism but necessity; attempting a more coercive approach would simply not have worked, given the often tentative state of Habsburg military and financial power. In showing well-timed mercy, the dynasty was most likely to cultivate a voluntary willingness of states to remain loyal in future crises.

These measures did not make either Germany or Italy into uniformly pro-Habsburg domains. By definition, the nature of a buffer zone is that the states therein do not fall under the exclusive sway of either flanking power. Mid-sized members of the *Reich* often chafed at Habsburg dominance as a barrier to their own territorial growth and influence. Most notably, as we have seen, there was Bavaria, which in addition to bearing traces of the old Wittelsbach-

421 Ingraio, *In Quest*, p. 55.

Habsburg rivalry, was encircled by Habsburg possessions or allies and therefore felt as much a menace from Austria as Sardinia or the Nördlingen states felt from France. Noting this dynamic, Eugene said of the Bavarians, “geography prevented them from being men of honor.”⁴²² Saxony too, while more consistently in the Habsburg orbit, often oscillated between Austria and her enemies. France encouraged these dynamics—in Italy, by playing Sardinian court politics and stoking discontent in Lombardy; in Germany, by impeding efforts at a unified *Reich* military policy and fanning opposition to the Emperor.⁴²³ In both regions, Versailles dispensed bribes on a stupendous and exploited local factionalism. Above all it sought to nurture rival claimants to the imperial title, either by building German support for a Bourbon candidacy or backing that of a lesser German house hostile to the Habsburgs.

French efforts notwithstanding, armed opposition by the German princes to the Habsburgs was the exception rather than the rule. While French money could always find a fissure to exploit, more often than not, intra-buffer tensions were kept within bounds, taking the form of simmering discord rather than active revisionism. This was in part due to the fact that even the Habsburgs’ German rivals derived a benefit from its weak hegemony, which was bearable and, in any event, often preferable to a new and unknown foreign ascendancy. The *Reich*’s rickety rulemaking structures further channeled these currents into constitutional cul-de-sacs that tended to support continuation of the status quo. While Bavarian and certainly Prussian opposition could be formidable at times, the structures of the *Reich* gave Austrian diplomats options for managing these dynamics that they otherwise would have lacked. Even at the highpoint of its power, France never succeeded in building a permanent fifth column in *Reich* politics, and was only able to pull Sardinia fully into its sphere after the emergence of nationalist aspirations in the mid-19th Century.⁴²⁴

⁴²² Eugene, p. 26

⁴²³ Hochedlinger, pp. 50 and 72.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Tutelary Fortresses

Habsburg success in organizing buffer regions enabled Austria to do something Great Powers are rarely able to do in such spaces: maintain a military presence on the territory of intermediary states. The Bourbon wars demonstrated the utility that forward force deployments, and particularly fortresses, could have in both Germany and Italy. In the Spanish succession war, France employed the Lines of Brabant, a 130-mile-long network of strongholds and entrenchments from Antwerp to Meuse, to slow the advance of Marlborough's armies in the Low Countries. By contrast, Austria's fortifications in the west were initially meager, prompting Eugene to complain about the absence of even an "entrenched camp" here and to make repeated pleas to build forts in the west "to form a barrier against France, which might deter her from attacking us."⁴²⁵

However, through the *Reich*, Austria had access to the fortresses of fellow German states. Such defenses, particularly those along the Rhine that sat near the embarkation points of French armies, had proven effective at arresting the progress of French offensives early in their advance. Closer to Austria's borders, Ludwig of Baden's Stollhofen Line, while bypassed, fired imaginations about the potential for more fully-developed defensive positions to block the gap between the Black Forest and Rhine that formed the favored entry point for French armies into Austria.⁴²⁶ The rapid French reduction of Ulm, Regensburg, Menningen, and Neuburg, and subsequent enemy advance into the Tyrol illustrated the dangers that could materialize for Austria when this crucial route through southern Germany was unhindered.⁴²⁷

Through use of *Reich* forts during the Bourbon wars the Habsburg Army gradually developed a concept of western security in which the ability to place force beyond Austria's borders, on the soil of acquired territories or friendly states, was seen as the key to the defense of the *Erblände*. Under the terms of a *Reichskrieg*, Austrian armies could transverse and operate

⁴²⁵ Eugene, pp. 95 and 99. See also Duffy, *The Fortress*, p. 24.

⁴²⁶ Ingraio, *In Quest*, p. 65.

⁴²⁷ Duffy, *The Fortress*, p. 45.

from friendly *Reich* territory. When war was on the horizon, Vienna often negotiated terms with individual states allowing for sustained deployments or shared garrisoning of strategically-important points on their territory. In Germany, these included the fortresses of Mannheim and Philipsburg on the Middle Rhine; Mainz, Coblenz, Bonn and Cologne (the so-called “Bishop’s Alley”) on the Lower Rhine; and Kehl, Villingen, Freudenstadt, Heidelberg, Mannheim and Frankenthal and Freiburg, on the Danube.⁴²⁸

Similarly, Austria had access to numerous fortresses in Italy. Victory in the Spanish succession war brought possession of Fuentes, located near the mouth of the Adda; Pizzighettone, near Lake Garda; and the swamp-fortress of Mantua guarding the Tyrolean passes.⁴²⁹ Security arrangements with Venetia provided access to Peschiera, an island-fortress at the intersection of the Mincio and Lake Garda, and, to the west, the alliance with Sardinia informally incorporated the fortress at Turin and numerous smaller sites lining the Alpine passes.

While the main purpose of Habsburg buffer forts was defensive, their presence also expanded offensive options in wartime. Using the Rhine forts, Habsburg and *Reich* armies could converge on the Mosel valley, the point of the French frontier with the fewest obstacles to Paris. Especially notable in this regard were the forts of “Bishop’s Alley” and the strongholds at Mannheim and Philipsburg.⁴³⁰ Used in conjunction with the Austrian Netherlands and Habsburg positions in Italy, these fortress networks provided a means of projecting power along the full length of the French frontier and achieving concentration early in a conflict.

Once an invader got beyond the *Reichsbarriere*, an effective defense was harder to mount. As the Allied armies would find in World War Two, the physical orientation of the Rhine tributaries tends to speed invading armies while complicating internal coordination between defending forces.⁴³¹ Using these rivers and picking off *Reich* members en route, a French invasion could penetrate southern Germany and swiftly reach Austrian soil. This reality intertwined the

⁴²⁸ Ibid. p. 19-24.

⁴²⁹ Blasek, pp. 714-5 and 731.

⁴³⁰ Duffy, *The Fortress*, pp. 19-20.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

strategic fate of the Habsburg home territories with the territory of neighboring states, amplifying the importance of developing forward infrastructure on sites that were both militarily defensible and politically reliable.

Anti-Hegemonic Coalitions

The same weakness that made Austria a tolerable patron to Europe's middle states aided its efforts to recruit Great-Power allies against France. From the perspective of Europe's larger states, a France that was strong enough to break into the Netherlands and expand east of the Rhine and Alps was a France that would be hard to materially counterbalance on a long-term basis. The Habsburg Monarchy offered a force sufficiently strong to check this expansion without threatening to replace France as a danger to the European balance of power. In the East, Austria was an insurance policy against Ottoman decay devolving into vacuums that would invite predation by neighboring states. In the West, its client states and position in the Low Countries made it a natural barrier to French expansion on both a north-south and east-west axis.

In this combination of vulnerability and indispensability lay the origins of Austria's role as a geopolitical "necessity"—the "hinge upon which the fate of Europe must depend," as Castlereagh would later say.⁴³² In the old geopolitical pattern whereby large status-quo powers support weaker states to guard against the rise of new hegemony, Austria was a hybrid, possessing the attributes of a Great Power but, through its internal complexities and exposed geography the security dilemmas of a smaller state.

As an ally, Austria possessed certain attributes that stronger powers needed to manage the continent. One was location. Britain's wealth and naval power allowed it to provide subsidies, blockades and small expeditionary forces, but it needed Austria as an onshore organizer of land armies. Russia was rich in manpower but distant from contests with Western rivals which,

⁴³² Palmer, pp. 155-156.

unless impeded by Austria, would have the strength to contemplate eastward expansion. Another Habsburg strength, mentioned above, was legitimacy. Going back to the 16th Century, Austrian diplomacy had developed a culture of playing to the dynasty's status as a bulwark against the Turks to enlist the help of other European states. After the Treaty of Westphalia, the Habsburgs built on this tradition, positioning themselves as the defender of the sanctity of European treaties. Invoking legitimacy, the Monarchy became the guardian of treaty-based rights in the European states system. In the context of French military expansion, this positioned Austria to attract the patronage of other status-quo minded powers that stood to lose from force-based revisionism.

Western Time Management

The elements in Austria's western defenses worked together to give it greater control over sequencing in western conflicts. Buffer systems stalled invaders and won time to organize forces and recruit allies. Fortresses toughened middle-state terrain and ameliorated the Rhine-Po dilemma by enabling small forces on either side of the Alps to hold out until field armies could be shifted to the critical front. Allies heightened the effect by pressuring France's rearward approaches and providing relief armies to campaign on the Lower Rhine and Mosel, the points at which France was most vulnerable and the logistical reach of Austrian armies most constrained. This in turn enabled Austria to safely de-prioritize the front in Germany in the assurance that *Reich* armies (which faced jurisdictional obstacles to operating south of the Alps) and western allies could cover the north while it focused its own forces elsewhere. These various props allowed the Monarchy to adopt an essentially "radial" approach to western crises, stripping to the bone Austrian deployments on the Rhine theater and concentrating manpower elsewhere—sometimes Hungary but usually Italy, where the richest territories were most likely to be won by Vienna in the war.⁴³³

⁴³³ Ingraio, *In Quest*, p. 4.

This “radial” approach to managing the west could fail. In the War of Polish Succession, Austria was shorn of support from England and Holland and lost ground in Italy. In the War of Austrian Succession, the *Reich* failed to rally and allied help was weaker than in the Spanish succession war, forcing Austria to bear the brunt of multiple more on its own. Support from the maritime powers tended to focus on the Austrian Netherlands but resist Habsburg expenditures of subsidies or effort on Hungary. Russian aid too, as we have seen, could be slow to materialize and often came at the cost of a pound of flesh in the East. But by and large, the system held, partly through Austrian diplomacy but mainly because Europe’s Powers had few options but to sustain a central wedge to limit the growth of French strength, and Austria was the only game in town. From the beginning of Louis XIV’s reign until the rise of Frederick the Great, Austria fought five wars against France, in all of which it was on the side with a greater number of allies and, in all but one of which it arguably came out on the better side of the ledger. In this period, Austria’s western toolkit enabled it to offset most of France’s offensive power advantages at a financial and manpower cost that was manageable for itself.

2. System Collapse: The Napoleonic Wars

As we saw in chapter six, the emergence of Prussia brought a coda to Austro-French rivalry in the middle decades of the 18th Century, providing the basis for Kaunitz’s successful courtship of Versailles. This interlude was shattered in 1789 with the outbreak of the French Revolution. Its aftermath marked the reactivation of France as a predatory power, igniting wars in which France would resume the multi-axis military expansion it had begun under Louis XIV.

In their first encounters with the new Republic, the Austrians sought to use traditional methods to contain the threat. As in the past, Vienna rallied its buffer allies, mustering imperial forces and deploying the Army to advanced posts on client-state territory. It also enlisted extra-regional allies, showing dexterity in the resumption of alliance ties with Britain after decades of lapse and converting erstwhile enemy Prussia into a partner in a move as bold as Kaunitz’s early French and Ottoman flips. As the diplomatic wheels turned to align the bulk of Europe in Austria’s corner, the Army prepared for an offensive use of *Reich* fortresses in a plan of

operations that would have been recognizable to Eugene, amassing forces in forward positions at Coblenz for a concentric push from the Austrian Netherlands and Lower Rhine.

In the war that followed, Austria's plan and the century-old security system it embodied failed catastrophically. Ejecting allied armies from her frontiers, France invaded Austria's German and Italian buffers, imposing a peace at Campo Formio under which the Monarchy ceded Belgium and lost control of large sections of Northern Italy and the Rhineland.

The scale of Austria's defeat showed that the new French Republic was a more formidable threat than the Bourbons had been. Most noticeably, it was capable of generating larger armies. While France had always been able to sustain sizeable forces, the Republic's practice of placing all unmarried men 18-25 under arms allowed it to put three-quarters of a million troops in the field, an astonishing half-million of which were deployed for combat service.⁴³⁴ In some early battles, Austrian forces faced opponents with a three-to-one numerical advantage. Animating French forces was an offensive *geist* very different from contemporary armies. Aggressive and mobile, they moved fast, unencumbered by supply trains. On the battlefield, they attacked in fat columns screened by skirmishers and supported by lighter and more maneuverable canon, formed into large batteries.

The New Threat

Early campaigns against the French Republic were a foretaste of a new form of warfare for which Austria with its linear tactics and attritional approach to warfighting was ill-prepared. The man who would perfect these techniques was Napoleon Bonaparte. Born to parents of impoverished nobility on the island of Corsica, Napoleon was a junior artillery officer when the wars of the Revolution broke out. After bold campaigns in Italy and Egypt, he was named Consul in 1799 and, in 1804, declared himself Emperor of a new French Empire that would

⁴³⁴ Delbrück, p. 396.

wage more than two decades of almost continual war against the armies of the Habsburg Monarchy.

In Napoleon, the Habsburgs were confronted with a very different kind of enemy than anything they had faced before. Unlike the Bourbon armies of the past, Napoleon formed his forces into large formations—divisions and corps rather than just regiments—that were able to operate as separate, self-contained armies in the field. Combining mass and mobility, the new French armies moved swiftly across Europe, ignoring many of the strategic and tactical considerations that had dominated warfare in the past. Where Louis XIV, Frederick and the Turks had all to varying degree relied on large supply trains that tied them to depots, Napoleon's armies lived off of the land, marching as the crow flies.⁴³⁵ Where Frederick had prioritized the reduction of fortresses, Napoleon bypassed them, only besieging two in his entire career.⁴³⁶ Where the Bourbons and Frederick had used attrition to achieve a peace on favorable terms, Napoleon sought the *destruction* of the enemy army.

Austrian strategy contributed to Napoleon's successes. Faced with the dilemma of French forces being able to approach from both north and south of the Alps, Habsburg commanders dispersed their armies at the frontier in hopes of detecting and intercepting the enemy before it could reach the *Erblande*. The early phases of the War of the First Coalition war found the Army strung across a 300-mile front from Switzerland to the Rhine. To an even greater extent than in the past, fast-moving French armies could exploit the Rhine-Po dilemma. In 1800, they moved in parallel down both river valleys, occupying the Swiss passes to block Austrian movement between the two fronts. While Austrian units struggled to concentrate, Napoleon delivered the decisive blow in Italy. From this experience, the Austrians concluded that they needed to prioritize Italy. In 1805, they placed the main army there, allowing Napoleon to blitz down the Danube and defeat weaker Austrian forces at Ulm and Austerlitz.

⁴³⁵ Delbrück, p. 423.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

As dangerous as Napoleon's military behavior was his political moves. In his early campaigns in Italy and Germany, Napoleon revealed that he was motivated by a politically-based strategy that targeted the weak spot of the enemy's underlying strategic or political system. In Austria's case, this weak spot, or "joint," as B. H. Liddell Hart called it, was the Monarchy's numerous buffer states.⁴³⁷ Segmenting client-state armies from the Austrians and defeating them in detail, he then treated generously with their governments to undermine ties of loyalty to Vienna.

Using these methods, Napoleon took what had previously been a root strength of the Habsburgs—numerous, smaller clients—and turned it into a weakness. Napoleon's aim was to permanently cleave these states from Austria and adhere them to France in a "rampart of republics" spanning Italy and Germany.⁴³⁸ In 1806, Napoleon formalized this new arrangement by abolishing the Holy Roman Empire, the very superstructure of Habsburg buffer system, and replacing it with a new, French-dominated Confederation of the Rhine. He outlined his strategic intentions for this new body in a conversation with Metternich shortly after its creation:

I will tell you my secret. In Germany the small people want to be protected against the great people; the great wish to govern according to their own fancy; now, as I only want from the [German] federation men and money, and as it is the great and not the small who can provide me with both, I leave the former alone in peace, and the second have only to settle themselves as best they may!⁴³⁹

Grasping the underlying logic of Austria's traditional client-state model—that of guaranteeing the weak against the ambitions of the strong, Napoleon did the opposite, rewarding the strong at the expense of the weak to buy the former's loyalties, and armies, for France. Where the Bourbons had wanted merely to divide Germany and diminish its value as an Austrian glacis, Napoleon sought to undo the mechanics of Habsburg primacy and unite the remnants into an offensive tool.

⁴³⁷ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (Baltimore: Eigel Meirovich, 2009), p. 99.

⁴³⁸ Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary*, p. 65.

⁴³⁹ Metternich, *Memoirs*, p. 74.

The permanent and essentially political nature of Napoleon's ambitions made his threat to Austria not just territorial but existential. Unlike in competitions against the Bourbons, Austria could not undo Napoleon's wartime gains at the peace table. Initially, Habsburg diplomats had tried to use defeats by Napoleon to continue the long practice of "rounding off" Austrian territories. But as the conflict widened, Napoleon cut more and more deeply into the political fabric of Austria's buffers—and eventually, her home territories. At Pressburg in 1805 Napoleon took Dalmatia, gave Istria to a new Kingdom of Italy, and ceded Tyrol and Voralberg to France's German clients, allowing the French Army to occupy bases directly overlooking Austrian territory.⁴⁴⁰ At Tilsit in 1807, he went even further, forming a new Polish state, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and forcing Austrian recognition of an enlarged Kingdom of Westphalia.⁴⁴¹

By 1808 France and its surrogates hemmed the Monarchy in Italy, Germany and Poland. As Metternich commented, any war with France from this point on "would begin at the same time on the banks of the Inn and the Wieliczka."—frontier rivers some 400 miles apart.⁴⁴² These changes spelled an end to the old Habsburg buffer system and, with it, the ability to conduct wars on Austria's terms. This in turn put stress on the remaining component of Austria's western system: extra-regional allies. Successive military defeats undercut the logic of anti-hegemonic coalitions at the same time that they depleted Austrian resources for continued resistance. Prussia, an early and enthusiastic member of the anti-French coalitions vacillated between policies of opposition and neutrality. Britain, though the most determined to outlast Napoleon, could do little to help Austria on land. As Archduke Charles wrote in 1804:

Britain always needs to keep a part of its regular army at home. The past war proved that victory is not to be expected of English troops on the continent. The mercantilist England is further unlikely to consider continental politics as its true purpose. The history of the past 150 years has proved as much... Except for Marlborough, no Englishman ever found a way to pursue their maritime superiority on the Danube.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary*, p. 132.

⁴⁴¹ Palmer, p. 57.

⁴⁴² Ibid. p. 56.

⁴⁴³ Alfred Krauss, *Beilagen zu 1805 Der Feldzug von Ulm* (Wien: L.W. Seidel, 1912), p. 9.

By contrast, Russia possessed the greatest land-power reserves for sustaining a prolonged struggle. In 1800 and 1805, Austria replicated the pattern of military coordination from the Seven Years War, at one point brokering the intervention of large Russian formations, under Suvorov as far west as Italy. The fundamental problem in such arrangement was that, as Napoleon pressed deep into the Habsburg home area, any Russian relief armies would place as great a burden on these lands as the enemy himself. As Charles wrote, such allies:

...are good for little more than diversions [and] are of no consequence to the defense of the core territory. Even if another power were to allow 100,000-120,000 men to operate on Austrian soil, it should be kept in mind that the frontier provinces, Inner Austria and Tyrol, would not be able to sustain such a force. Importing such a mass of troops, if not entirely impossible, would be too expensive for Your Majesty's finances.⁴⁴⁴

Moreover, as in the wars against Frederick, Austro-Russian military cooperation was beset by large distances and conflicting military cultures. Where a linkup between the two armies at Kunersdorf in 1759 had given Frederick II his given greatest defeat, a similar linkup at Austerlitz in 1805 ended in Napoleon's greatest victory. In all of these alliances, the underlying challenge from an Austrian perspective was that its allies' money, ships or armies were too far away to make a difference at a sufficiently early point in each new war, leaving it to bear the brunt and expense of French aggression.

While facing unprecedented new external challenges, Austria also had to contend with its old internal problems, which grew more pronounced as the wars with Napoleon dragged on. By the 12th year of war, the Monarchy was bankrupt, forcing the military budget to be cut by more than half.⁴⁴⁵ Despite British subsidies, debts mounted, pressuring state finances and increasing the tax and inflationary burdens on the populace. Domestic strains emerged with a severity not seen since the early 18th Century. As in the Austrian succession war, the Hungarian diet voted a larger than usual revenue and military contribution for the war effort

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 16-17.

⁴⁴⁵ Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary*, p. 91.

which, as in that war, it failed to deliver. Previewing tactics they would later again later, the Magyar nobility used the state of emergency to hand the dynasty a list of demands for fresh constitutional concessions. The Diet refused conscription and, when the French attacked in 1805, commanders of the Magyar militia, or *insurrectio*, informed the invaders that Hungary “was neutral and would not fight.”⁴⁴⁶ Over time, the wars also steadily eroded the Monarchy’s material base for waging war, whittling away the manpower reserves at the same time that France accumulated new territories and clients through conquest.

Resistance and Recueillement: 1808-1812

By 1808, little remained of the security structures with which Austria had once secured its westward approaches. With its Italian and German buffers gone, the Monarchy could no longer intercept French armies before they reached its soil. Without the help of the *Reichsarmee* or maritime relief armies operating on the Rhine and Mosel, it could no longer outsource management of the German theater to allies while concentrating its own forces in Italy. With the *Reich* dissolved and Italy converted to a French enclave, the challenge of anticipating and countering dual-pronged enemy thrusts had become severe. Lacking their old early warning system, Habsburg forces would in any future campaign be confined to a restricted space—the Austrian home terminal area—upon which a French attack could fall suddenly, from two directions.

Faced with these straightened circumstances, Habsburg leaders debated two strategic options: to adjust to the French hegemony by accommodating Napoleon, or to fight a new war. Archduke Charles favored the former course. The Austrian chancellor, Count Stadion, advocated the latter, reasoning that Napoleon “not changed his hostile sentiments toward us and is only awaiting the right moment to prove it by deeds.”⁴⁴⁷ In the period since Austria’s last defeat Stadion had pursued a policy of *recueillement*, avoiding an direct challenges to France in order to rebuild the Monarchy’s finances and Army until an opportunity presented

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁴⁷ Eberhard Mayerhoffer von Vedropolje, *Krieg 1809* (Wien: Seidel, 1907), p. 61.

itself to use them to restore the Monarchy's geopolitical position. By 1808, Stadion believed this opportunity had arrived and that Austria should "seek self-defense by taking the offensive" rather than letting the enemy attack on his terms, on the basis of his new advanced positions in Germany and Italy.

The clenching argument for Austria to act at this particular moment was put forward by one of Stadion's young subordinates, Prince Klemens Wenzel von *Metternich*, then serving as *Ambassador to France*. In a series of persuasive memoranda, Metternich outlined the case for war. All three concentrated on the factor of timing. In the first, he argued that deteriorating French public support for Napoleon meant that in any new war, the French Emperor would be distracted at home. The second argued that Russia, despite its tacit 1807 alliance with France, would not attack Austria; "Alexander," Metternich wrote, "is not someone the French can enflame against us; to the contrary, he desires an intimate bond with us, which he believes we may yet reach through persistence."⁴⁴⁸ In the third memo, Metternich made his strongest strategic argument—that Napoleon's army was absorbed in and depleted by its attempt to subjugate Spain:

The war against Spain divulges a great secret—namely, that Napoleon has but one army, his *Grande Armee*... The questions to consider [are]:

- (1) What are the total forces of France and her allies at this present moment?
- (2) After deducting from the whole of these forces the number of men employed in the conquest of Spain, what number of effective troops could Napoleon bring against us?
- (3) What resources has Napoleon for carrying on the war against Spain and against us *at the same time* [emphasis added]? ...

The summary of the military position appears to me to be the following: (a) Napoleon can fight us now with 206,000 men, of whom 107,000 are French, 99,000 confederate and allies. (b) His reserves can after a time only be composed of conscripts below the age for service... Thus the forces of Austria, so inferior

⁴⁴⁸ The memorandum is reproduced in full in Adolf Beer, *Zehn Jahre österreichischer Politik, 1801-1810* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1877), p. 527.

to those of France before the insurrection in Spain, will be at least equal to them immediately after that event.⁴⁴⁹

Against France's divided forces Austria's generals believed that, through expanded conscription and the organization of militia units in politically-reliable parts of the Monarchy they could field the largest army in the Monarchy's history—some 550,000 troops.⁴⁵⁰ In addition, Stadion was convinced that the German popular sentiment recently stirred by Napoleon's conquest of Prussia could be harnessed to Austria's cause and that, with early victories, Russia and Prussia might be convinced to enter as allies.

The 1809 War

Given these favorable conditions, Stadion and the Emperor, Franz II, judged that the moment for war was better than it would be again at any time in the foreseeable future. Leading Habsburg forces in the coming campaign was the Emperor's younger brother, Archduke Charles. In 1809, Charles was 37 years old and in the prime of his military career. Unlike most of Austria's senior generals, he had shown the ability to hold his own against the French, delivering victories in Holland, Italy and Switzerland. In 1805, he had been with the main army in Italy when Napoleon entered Austria through Germany. Epileptic and cerebral, Charles was a cautious commander who prioritized retention of key points of terrain and protection of lines of communication over defeating the enemy (see chapter 4). Surveying Austria's financial and manpower shortages, he had misgivings about the timing of the campaign that would later be validated.

When war was declared, Napoleon quickly shifted attention and resources from Spain to the Danube, while Austria mobilized less manpower than expected.⁴⁵¹ Neither German popular

449 The memorandum is reproduced in full in Metternich, *Memoirs*, pp. 301-8: With the benefit of hindsight, Metternich would later imply in his memoirs that he had reservations about the timing of the 1809 campaign, on the grounds that Russia would be slow to help and that any popular spirit once stoked would "turn, not against Napoleon but against Austria." See pp. 389-90.

450 300,000 regulars and 250,000 militia. See Palmer, p. 64.

451 Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary*, pp. 162-3.

sentiment nor Russian and Prussian help materialized. As in the past, the dilemmas of Austria's multi-vector geography hurt it. With part of the army deployed in Italy, the Army had to choose between a concentration with the main force in Bohemia, whence to strike into Germany, or the River Inn, to cover the capital. Ultimately choosing the latter, he also had to siphon off units to cover the Tyrol, Dalmatia and Poland.⁴⁵² When the French invaded, Charles adopted a strategy not unlike that used by Daun against Frederick. Rather than trying to intercept Napoleon outside Vienna and seek a decisive battle on the right side of the Danube, he used Austria's rivers to delay and wear down the stronger enemy forces. Charles' Chief of Staff, Maximilian Freiherr von Wimpffen, outlined the strategy in a memorandum of May 17:

If the French lose the battle...they risk everything and us only a little. If we were to cross the Danube now, it would be the opposite: The Austrian Emperor would not even be able to negotiate anymore before the Monarchy were conquered. Fabius saved Rome, and Daun saved Austria not in haste, but through delay (*nicht durch Eile, sondern durch Zaudern*). We must emulate their example and prosecute the war according to our patterns, befitting the state of our armed forces. Our supports are close, whereas the enemy is far from his. In holding the left bank of the Danube, we are defending the greater part of the Monarchy. We would lose tremendously by crossing to the other side. Our army can reinforce itself from its depots, whereas Napoleon only expects another 12,000 Saxons...We require the resources of the left Danube bank for our armed forces, whereas the right side could not provide as such. If we make use of this quiet hour (*Schäferstunde*), we can prepare everything for quickly seizing the right moment.⁴⁵³

The ensuing campaign showed the influence of earlier Habsburg commanders in Charles' thinking. Preparing for a protracted war in the Austrian countryside like that which the Prussians had brought to Moravia a generation earlier, Charles anticipated the alienating effects that French requisitions of supply would have on the local population, instructing his own commanders to prevent similar behavior among their troops under threat of "severe punishments" (*strenge Strafen*).⁴⁵⁴ Taking up defensive positions behind the Danube, Charles emulated Prince Eugene at Zenta, allowing an interval between his lines and the river bank to

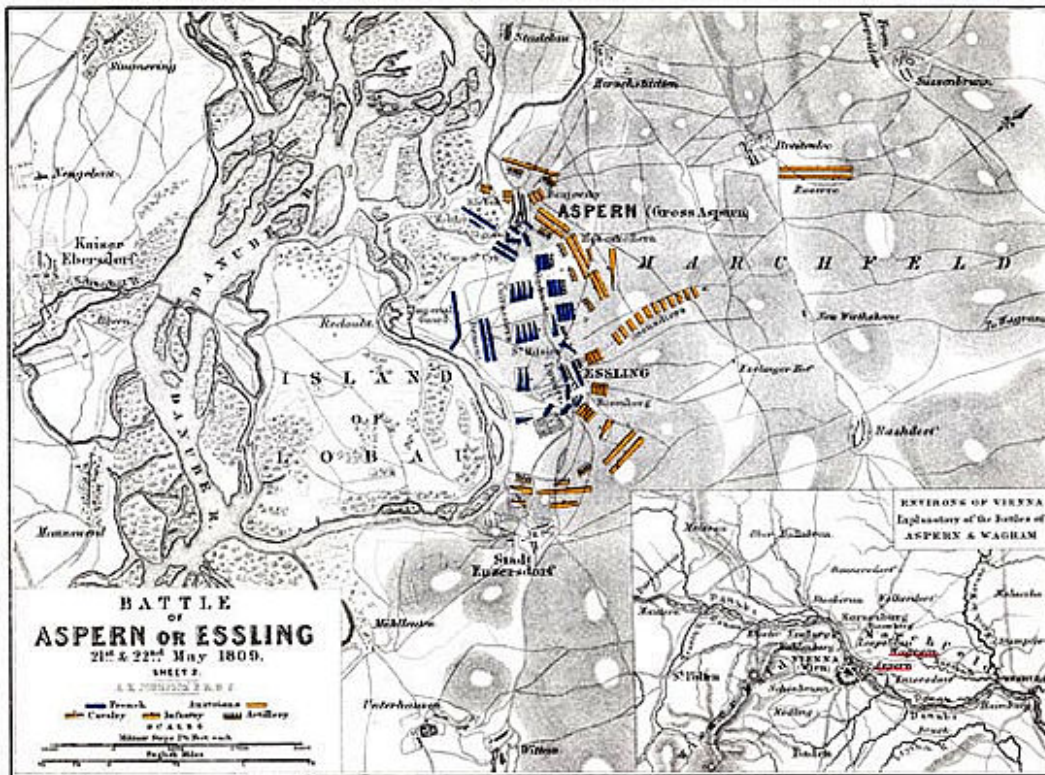
⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 161.

⁴⁵³ AFA Deutschland 1809, Hauptarmee XIII, F13, KA, Wien. See the discussion on this memo in Rothenburg, *Napoleon's Greatest Enemy*, p. 189.

⁴⁵⁴ AFA Deutschland, Hauptarmee XIII, F13, KA, Wien.

destroy the enemy in detail as it attempted to assemble after crossing.”⁴⁵⁵ The strategy worked: with Austrian armies en route from Italy to threaten the French rear and the danger of Russian or Prussian entry looming, Napoleon felt a time pressure not unlike that felt by Frederick in his Moravia campaigns. Attacking across the river, he suffered the first significant defeat of his career, at Aspern-Essling, on 21-22 May. While Montecucoli would have admired Charles’ dispositions along the Danube, his attachment to the precepts of attritional warfare prevented the Austrian army for not the last time in its history from capitalizing on victory.⁴⁵⁶ After the battle, Napoleon quickly recovered his equilibrium to defeat the Austrians at Wagram and force the Monarchy to sue for peace.

Battle of Aspern-Essling, May 21-22, 1809



Source: Napoleonicguide.com.

In the peace negotiations that followed, Austria lost a swath of valuable home territories to France and its allies: Salzburg to Bavaria, West Galicia to the Duchy of Warsaw, East Galicia

⁴⁵⁵ Quoted in Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary*: pp. 188-189.

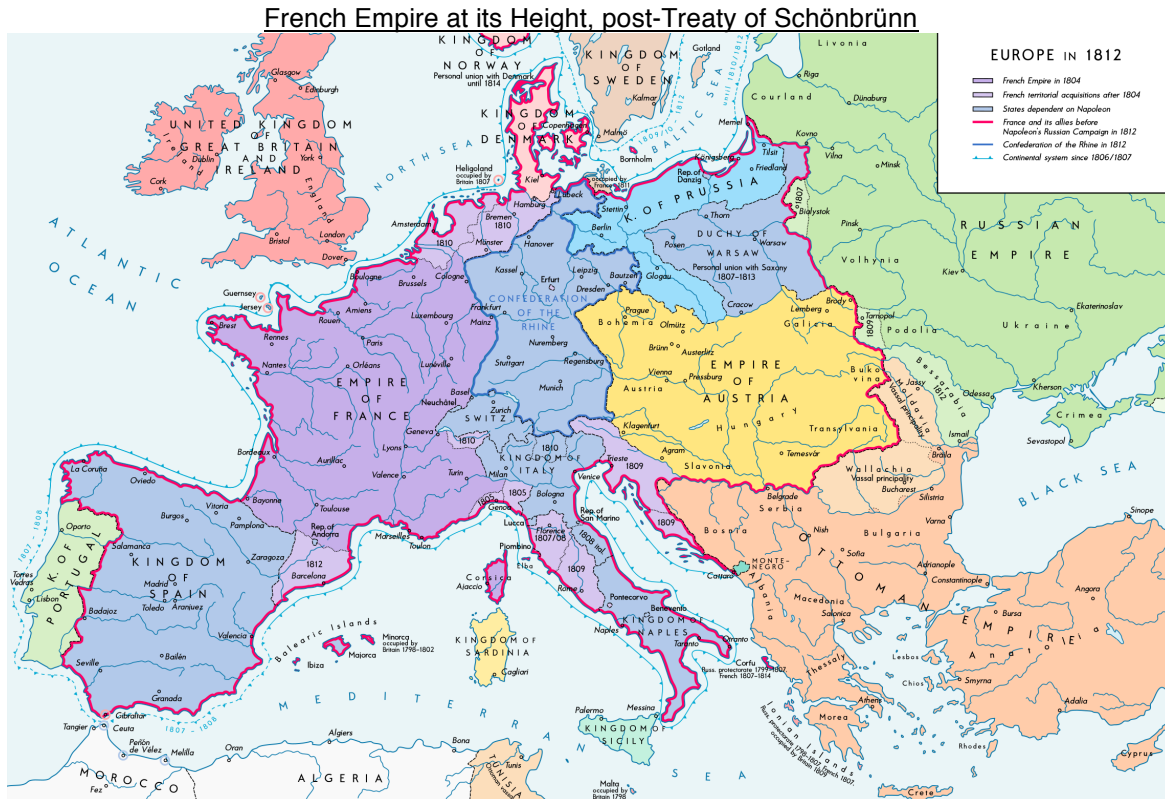
⁴⁵⁶ Delbrück, p. 435.

to Russia and southern Carinthia and Croatia, Istria, Dalmatia and the port of Trieste to France. Altogether, the peace of Schönbrunn carved 32,000 square miles and 3.5 million inhabitants out of the Habsburg Monarchy, while levying a large indemnity and restricting the Habsburg army to 150,000 men. Together with previous territorial losses, the new status quo sheared Austria of a substantial portion of its economic and manpower base for conducting future wars. Geopolitically, it was now encircled by Napoleon and his proxies in Italy, Germany, Poland and Croatia, making France the only opponent in Austria's history to attain a standing military presence on four Habsburg frontiers simultaneously.

Accommodating Napoleon

After the 1809 war, Austria's found itself in the position of shrinking second-rate power wedged between the French and Russian empires. With Metternich at the helm, Austria now adopted a strategy of accommodation. The Monarchy's only hope for survival, Metternich wrote, was "to tack, to efface ourselves, to come to terms with the Victor. Only thus may we perhaps preserve our existence till the day of general deliverance."

At face value, a new policy along these lines would seem to be diametrically opposite to the course of isolated resistance that Austria had pursued in the lead-up to the 1809 campaign. But there was more continuity than change in Austrian strategy, for Metternich's goal, like that of Stadion, was to achieve a period of *recueillement* in which to play for time and gather strength. To do so he now embraced the first of the two strategic options that Vienna had been debating since Pressburg and Tilsit: co-habitation with the enemy. This was not the first time Austria had had to accommodate a stronger foe to survive. Habsburg monarchs had long used temporary peace arrangements to improve the Monarchy's circumstances before returning to deal with an enemy from a position of strength. Joseph I's dealings with the Ottomans and Hungarians ahead of Eugene's campaigns was one example, Maria Theresa's acquiescence to the Convention of Kleinschnellendorf another.



Metternich proceeded on similar logic, but on a larger scale. Where Austria had often used tactical reprieves to gain positional advantages over enemies for short periods, Metternich faced the possibility of a long domination by a revolutionary opponent who had already demonstrated his capacity to dismantle the *ancien regime*. Where Stadion had aimed to break this hegemony and restore Austria's position in Germany and Italy, Metternich sought to come to terms with the hegemon in a prolonged marriage of convenience until a new day, however distant, dawned. If unsuccessful, Austria could face a gradual diminution between a Russian-dominated Balkans and a French-dominated Central Europe—in short, everything that its strategies had worked to avoid for more than a century. If Austria misplayed its hand, it was not imaginable that it could be carved up among the mosaic of Napoleon's Germanic client kingdoms.

Austria needed to stave off extinction while keeping an eye on how its moves would position it after the war. To this end, Metternich became an obliging if duplicitous handmaiden to the new order. To bond the two states more closely together, he brokered the marriage of Marie Louis, Emperor Francis' eldest daughter by his second wife, to Napoleon. Coming less than a year after Austria's 1809 defeat, the move was humiliating for the Habsburgs, entailing the unification of an 800-year-old dynasty with a self-made general who represented the negation of the social order that the Monarchy embodied. Nevertheless, the marriage served Metternich's goals, buying time by placating Napoleon and enhancing Austria's position relative to Russia.

In the spring of 1812, Metternich's policy reached its culmination when Austria entered into a formal military alliance with France, providing 30,000 troops to accompany Napoleon in his invasion of Russia. The fact that Metternich was willing to bandwagon with a revisionist power, even if largely symbolically, in an attack on a power that represented the linchpin of Austria's long-term security interests illustrates the desperation of Austria's position. Joining in the invasion aided in Austria's game of keeping its head down as Napoleon's gambles exhausted French strength. In his diplomacy, Metternich was waging a larger geopolitical game of Fabian evasion and attrition like that which Charles and Daun had used on the battlefield, paralleling the moves of a stronger opponent and avoiding actions that would overplay Austria's hand.

3. System Restoration: 1814 and the Metternich System

With Napoleon's defeat in Russia, the opening for which Metternich had waited intermittently since 1805 appeared. Unlike in 1809, circumstances now overwhelmingly favored military action. The scale of the disaster made France militarily weaker than it had been at any point since 1792. The series of *recueillements* undertaken by Stadion and Metternich had accomplished their purpose of giving Austria time to recuperate. As in the interlude between wars with Frederick II, Austria had used her post-1809 reprieve to mobilize internal capabilities, tending militia cadres and leveraging the resources of the Military Border. As a result, by the

time war broke out, the Monarchy possessed a veteran core around which to quickly assemble armies that would number 160,000 by April 1813, 479,000 by August, and eventually reach 568,000.⁴⁵⁷

As in the Prussian wars, the Austrians had learned from their defeats, forming post-war commissions to study lessons-learned and revamp tactics and doctrine—first in 1798-9 and again in 1801-4 and 1807. As in the Prussian wars, responsibility for military-strategy was centralized and eventually filled with better talent. Charles was given combined authority for the Hofkriegsrat and a new *Militär-Hof-Kommission* ahead of the 1805 and 1809 campaigns, and a young officer, Joseph Radetzky, was installed as Chief of the Quartermaster General Staff.⁴⁵⁸ As in previous wars, protracted emergency prompted a tighter interweaving of diplomatic and military goals, with Stadion and Metternich, like Kaunitz, exercising decisive influence on overall strategy.

External factors also favored action. Where Russia had been ponderous and distant in the earlier campaigns and neutral when Austria was losing in 1809, she was now bringing her large resources fully into play. Prussia too was entering the scales with a rebuilt army backed by patriotic fervor. Britain, committed as always, now raked in a harvest of easy gains on French peripheries rendered vulnerable by Napoleon's eastern gambit. With this alignment of forces, Austria could now, after four years of self-abasement, reenter the military competition with prospects of success.

At the same time, with the other powers mobilized and Austria still occupying its truncated post-Schoenbrunn form, the Monarchy was in a weak position to shape the coming contest. In particular, the growth of Russia as a military factor in European affairs, both through its acquisitions at Tilsit and the steady westward trek of its enlarged land armies, threatened to

⁴⁵⁷ Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary*, pp. 227-8

⁴⁵⁸ As Francis directed Charles: "From now on, this directorate with all its branches will be your responsibility entirely. You only answer only to me, and we shall decide all issues between us. I further expect from you a comprehensive plan for the reorganization and improvement of the military order of the entire Monarchy." Moritz von Angeli, *Erzherzog Carl von Österreich als Feldherr und Heeresorganisator 2* (Wien: Braumüller, 1896), pp. 92-93.

supplant French hegemony with *de facto* Russian dominance. To counter this prospect, Metternich adopted a strategy centered on restraining the growth of Russian influence in Europe.⁴⁵⁹ Its objectives were to retain France as a factor of balance against Russia, regain Austria's lost buffers, and engage the German states, most of which were now French allies, as factors of stability.

Preparing for the Post-War Order

These goals, already coagulating before Napoleon's defeat, would guide Habsburg policy well into the post-war period. Where Metternich had previously used accommodation to avoid unfavorable military outcomes, he now used the Army to avoid unfavorable diplomatic outcomes. He held two military cards with which to influence outcomes. One was control over the timing of when the Habsburg Army would enter the war. Rather than rushing into the conflict, Metternich delayed, remaining France's nominal ally and shifting to neutrality before entering the coalition. Withstanding pressure from the Russian and Prussian monarchs, he continued on this path until events on the battlefield ensured that Austria's entry would carry the greatest diplomatic impact. As Metternich later wrote:

The Emperor left it to me to fix the moment which I thought most suitable to announce to the belligerent powers that Austria had given up her neutrality, and to invite them to recognize her armed mediation as the most fitting attitude. Napoleon's victories at Lutzen and Bautzen were the signs that told me that the hour had come.⁴⁶⁰

Withholding Habsburg entry until Napoleon had won new battles allowed Metternich to maximize the Army's value to allies that were now less confident than in the earlier stages of the campaign and therefore more keenly aware of their need for Austrian assistance. It also helped to establish Austria as an independent force early in the campaign, wearing down both the French and Russian armies while leaving open as long as possible the potential for a

⁴⁵⁹ Michael V. Leggiere, "Austrian Grand Strategy and the Invasion of France in 1814," In *Selected Papers of the Consortium on the Revolutionary Era*, (2007) pp. 322-31.

⁴⁶⁰ Metternich, *Memoirs*, p. 167.

negotiated peace in which Austria, as the mediating power, would have held the scales between the two forces.

Once committed to the war, Austria had a second card to play: determining where its army would be deployed. In this, Metternich benefited from his and Stadion's earlier policies of *recueillement*. Out of a total coalition force of 570,000, Austria's troops made up 300,000, rendering it the largest military force in the alliance and the essential factor for taking the fight against France, which was capable of fielding 410,000 men.⁴⁶¹ On the reasoning that "the power placing 300,000 men in the field is the first power, the others are auxiliaries," Metternich insisted on an Austrian general, Prince Schwarzenberg, being named commander-in-chief of Allied forces.

In the field, Metternich used Austria's leadership of the alliance to advance his goal of avoiding a weakening of France that could fuel the growth of Russian power. Rather than advancing directly across the Rhine to deliver a decisive defeat on the recoiling French, he sought to slow and redirect operations to Austria's advantage.⁴⁶² Prussian military writers would long criticize Schwarzenberg's attritional plans as laggardly. As Hans Delbrueck complained a century later:

...the Austrians refused to move out and either intentionally or unintentionally clothed this reluctance with strategic considerations. They based their stand on the fact that neither Eugene nor Marlborough, both of whom were also great commanders, had ever directed their operations against Paris.⁴⁶³

From an Austrian strategic perspective, however, Schwarzenberg's actions conformed to Metternich's method of "always negotiating but negotiating only while advancing." Militarily, they was a triumph of attritional warfare, using numerous allied armies to apply a tourniquet that steadily deprived Napoleon of the benefit of interior lines while denying him the opportunity for decisive battle that would have played to advantage. Politically, the campaign maximized Austria's opportunities to consolidate its old buffers and create openings for a negotiated

⁴⁶¹ Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversary*, p. GR, 229.

⁴⁶² Radetzky, "Operationsentwurf, 5. October 1813" in *Denkschriften*, pp. 214-225.

⁴⁶³ Delbrück, p. 438.

settlement with France as counterbalance to Russia. Had the armies moved more quickly into France and the disoriented French army capitulated in 1813, as was likely, Russian influence over the resulting political configuration would have been greater and the odds of a postwar equilibrium smaller. By buying Austrian diplomacy a few extra months, Schwarzenberg helped to ensure that Metternich would not only have a stronger position vis-à-vis the other allied powers but be able to count as an Austrian ally whatever new French government came into being.⁴⁶⁴

Post-Napoleonic Western Security

Through his eleventh-hour maneuverings, Metternich positioned Austria to exercise a decisive influence over the post-war peace settlement. As we will see in the next chapter, the Congress method that he helped to engineer would mark the apogee of Habsburg diplomatic achievement. The fact that this system developed a pan-European character has tended to obscure its significance at the regional level vis-à-vis France specifically. For the purposes of this chapter, it is worth noting that the security system that Austria put in place after the Napoleonic wars to secure the western frontier was a reinstatement of the basic principles that had guided Habsburg strategy against the Bourbons but adapted to reflect lessons from the recent wars.

As before, Austrian security in the west was rooted in the maintenance of buffers. The wars with Napoleon highlighted the importance of these intermediary bodies while revealing their susceptibility to subversion by an outside power. This problem had both a military and political dimension. Militarily, Napoleon's armies had pried apart the patron-client link at its vulnerable "joint" (the client); politically, he had been able to exploit internal dynamics in client-state groupings by inverting the Habsburgs' traditional balancing of larger and smaller members while introducing the powerful new force of nationalism. Together, these methods represented

⁴⁶⁴ One historian has argued that Metternich's and Schwarzenberg's strategy operated on the logic of time and delayed the invasion for two months and, by giving Napoleon time to regroup, an additional ten weeks—a total of four and half months. See Leggiere, pp. 330-1.

a far more effective threat than anything the Bourbons had ever attempted through bribery and manipulation of middle-state courts. They had led to the death of the old German *Reich*; if used again in the future, such methods could conceivably lead to a lasting breakdown in Austria's western buffer-state system, placing the burden of security on the Army alone.

In its post-war actions, Austria moved to address both dimensions of this problem. In Germany, Metternich worked to retain a confederated format, allowing the old *Reich* to remain dead and devising in its place a reorganized and streamlined German *Bund*.⁴⁶⁵ In Italy, he sought to inject a greater degree of confederation than had existed in the past by grouping Austria's territories into a new Italian League modeled on the German *Bund*.⁴⁶⁶ While the latter failed, in both cases Metternich's aim was to enhance the political viscosity of Austria's buffers and improve serviceability as a geopolitical hedge. The number of states in Germany was reduced from 300 under the *Reich* to 39 in the *Bund*. The messy *Reichskrieg* process replaced by new Article 47 committing members to come to one another's aid if attacked. While shedding the title of Holy Roman Emperor, Metternich ensured that Austria retained its leadership role as president of a new Federal Diet. Where Austria had cemented its primacy in the old *Reich* by being a protector of the smallest and most vulnerable states, it now was able, by championing sovereignty against not only France but Prussia and the force of nationalism to expand its support base to include most of the new states in the *Bund*, including old enemies like Bavaria. These changes allowed Austria to emerge from the war not only with its German buffer intact but more geopolitically reliable than it had perhaps ever been.

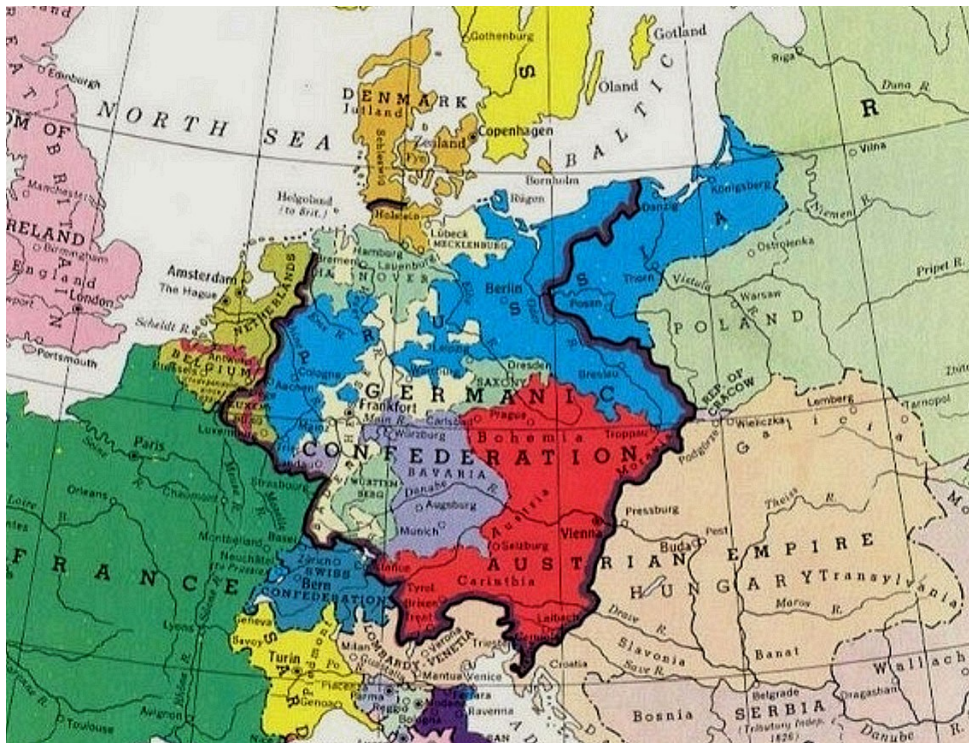
Similarly, the Napoleonic wars affected how the Austrian military thought about securing the western frontier. At a fundamental level, they reinforced longstanding conviction that the Monarchy's ability to defend itself here was inextricably linked to the fate of the intervening space between itself and France. The wars had shown more clearly than ever that Austria's western defense began on the Rhine and Po rivers. By the time a foe reached the Habsburg

⁴⁶⁵ Barbara Jelavich, *The Habsburg Empire in European affairs, 1814-1918* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1975), p. 18.

⁴⁶⁶ Schroeder, *Transformation*, p. 567.

border, the game was largely over. Should the territory of frontline states in these regions fall swiftly to an attacker, either because of their own under-developed defenses or because reinforcements could not reach them in time, the chances of waging a successful defensive campaign shrunk dramatically.

German *Bund*, ca. 1815



Source: Redlegagenda.com.

To address this problem, Vienna worked to enhance the ability of Austrian forces to maintain forward positions in Italy and Germany. Where past Habsburg defense policy had always been based to some extent on western networks of fortresses, it now sought to dramatically increase the size and number of fixed defenses in these territories while deepening their integration into the Monarchy's defense policy. Altogether in the post-war period, Austria's military planners envisioned seventeen fortresses to ring-fence the French frontier. In Germany, they worked with the *Bund* to eventually develop five large forts—Mainz, Landau, Luxemburg and, later, Ulm and Rastatt—tied together by smaller installations held by frontier

member-states and backed by an Austrian garrison in the Federal City of Frankfurt.⁴⁶⁷ In Italy, Austria expanded its old defensive positions near Lake Garda into a defensive complex—the famous “Quadrilateral”—linking Mantua, Peschiera, Legnago and Verona, while brokering rights to garrison the papal fortresses of Ferrara and Comacchio and the Parmesan Piacenza.⁴⁶⁸ Together, these defensive clusters were intended to alleviate the Po-Rhine dilemma by bogging down French offensives and buying time for reinforcement as needed, North or South of the Alps

As important as the physical location and extent of these fortifications was the Austrian system for garrisoning and financing them. As in the past, the Monarchy could not, in its parlous postwar financial position, afford to sustain extensive, permanent deployments and infrastructure in the west on its own. To defray the costs of the new defenses, Austria looked partly to its defeated foe, levying a 700-million-franc war indemnity, of which 60 million would go directly to the construction of the new Rhine fortresses. In addition, it looked to the buffer states themselves to share in the burden of defense, setting up a fund in the German Bund, endowed by member contributions, that was earmarked for the development and maintenance of western forts.⁴⁶⁹ The burden of manning these posts would be spread among *Bund* members, which were now required to maintain, train and outfit forces within the fortresses as well as a wider, revised *Bund* corps system on a fixed, proportional basis according to population.⁴⁷⁰

As a collective security structure, the forts of the *Bund* represented a considerable improvement over the old tutelary fortress model. Operationally, the standing military agreements of the new *Bund* were more dependable than reliance on a declaration of

467 Adalbert Daniel Hermann, *Deutschland nach seinen physischen und politischen Verhältnissen. Bd. 2* (Leipzig: Fues, 1870), p. 57.

468 Christian Gottfried Daniel Stein, n.d. *Handbuch der Geographie und Statistik nach den neuesten Ansichten für gebildete Stände, Gymnasien und Schulen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs), p. 262.

469 See Jürgen Angelow, *Von Wien nach Königgrätz: die Sicherheitspolitik des Deutschen Bundes im europäischen Gleichgewicht (1815-1866)* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1996); and Carl Wenceslaus von Rotteck and Carl Theodor Welcker, *Staats-Lexikon oder Encyclopädie der Staatswissenschaften in Verbindung mit vielen der angesehensten Publicisten Deutschlands*, 3. Auflage, 1856, pp. 507-520,

470 Angelow, pp. 65-71.

Reichskrieg, which even if successful tended to place disproportionate risks and costs on the shoulders of the *Reich's* most exposed states. The *Bund* format provided the Austrian military with what, in today's terms, would be the equivalent of 39 separate Status-of-Forces-Agreements ("SOFAs") in one fell-swoop. In essence, they transformed Germany into a giant-sized version of the old Nördlingen Association, ensuring higher and more evenly-spread defense contributions and committing even the least exposed members to the defense of the whole on a more predictable basis.

To underwrite Austria's expanded forward defenses, Metternich also updated the third pillar to its traditional western security system: Great Power alliances. As we will see in the next chapter, he brokered extensive new agreements committing other European powers to the maintenance of treaty rights, to be upheld through frequent congresses. For the western frontier specifically, he backed this with a formalized mechanism—the Quadruple Alliance—committing Britain, Prussia and Russia to mutual defense in the event of a reemergence of the French military threat. As with changes to the Austrian buffer system, this grouping represented the continuation of a longstanding Habsburg policy approach while evolving it into a more predictable format.

The Quadruple Alliance represented an improvement on the method of trying to recruit outside powers into co-management of Austria's German position through *ad hoc* military expeditions to the Mosel Valley and a more stable security mechanism than periodic, Kaunitzian *détentes* at the bilateral level. Rather than relying on last-minute anti-hegemonic groupings, the new setup made containment of France a system-wide responsibility, formally tying Austria's western security needs to the interests and resources of the Great Powers. While implicitly recognizing the public benefit that all states derived from prevention of hegemonic wars, the new alliance system disproportionately benefited the continent's central power, Austria, ensuring that the burdens for its maintenance would be born by several powers and not just by itself.

Conclusion

Viewed panoramically, Austria's long competition with France is the story of a relatively weak power outmaneuvering and outlasting a stronger rival. At no point in these wars, with the possible exception of the campaign of 1814, can Austria be said to have been a stronger military power than France. Its defense establishment was usually smaller, its internal composition always more fragile, its finances more tentative. And yet, by any measure, Austria has to be judged the winner in the majority of the contests between the two states. In a period of about a century and a half, it checked the northward and eastward expansion of Louis XIV, recruited his successors into joint containment of Prussia, staunched the Jacobin tide and organized six military coalitions against the republic and Napoleon, emerging as the arbiter of the European balance and presiding over the dismemberment of a French Empire that stretched from the Atlantic to Poland.

Austria's greatest asset in these contests, paradoxically, was its own weakness. At face value, the sprawling nature of Habsburg western interests presented an unmanageable set of security liabilities. But France's comparative strength across this large space, by making it a threat to other states, presented a natural base of resistance to French expansion that, with moderate effort, Austria could usually harness to its own security needs. The tools that Austria used for this purpose—the *Reich*, its Italian satellites, maritime alliances and the anti-Napoleonic coalitions—varied in format, but all essentially involved the co-optation of other states on the basis of shared fear to manage a threat that, while mutual, ultimately posed a disproportionate risk to the continent's central empire—Austria. In this sense, the Monarchy's exposure to Europe's seismic core made it a surety on the stability of the continent.

The groupings that Austria organized gave it a reservoir of manpower to even the odds against French military power. The wrinkle, so to speak, in all of these arrangements was time. Contests on the western frontier ultimately came down to which could be brought to bear more quickly: France's advantage in offensive military capabilities or Austria's advantage in alliances. The latter are, by nature, slower to activate. For this reason, Austria usually lost the

opening rounds of its wars with France, experiencing repeated losses in the Low Countries, seeing Rhine fortresses fall in the early stages of the Bourbon wars. Improvements in the speed of warfare brought by Napoleon were in this sense the culmination in a centuries-long arms race between offensive armies and defensive alliances.

It is in the mitigation of this French time advantage, rather than in evening manpower contests *per se*, that Austria's western security system therefore achieved its distinctive quality. The recruitment of Italian and German buffer states, initially a purely dynastic impulse, provided a medium that, as competition evolved, became more crucial for survival. The addition of fortresses enhanced buffer-state value, interposing a series of longitudinal barriers that compensated for the latitudinal layout of the Alps. In the Bourbon wars, buffer-fortress complexes allowed the Monarchy to toggle its own forces between frontiers, offsetting France's advantage as a three-front aggressor. When this system broke down in the Napoleonic wars, Austria developed a back-up strategy that was, again, focused on time, alternating between seasons of accommodation and short bursts of resistance that avoided overwhelming it financially, while drawing out the wider contest until its core advantages in allies and legitimacy could be brought to bear. At the end of these wars, Austria invested its post-conflict windfall to lock-in a lasting time advantage, effectively closing off southern Germany and to northern Italy as French military highways.

This progression of Habsburg techniques underscores the political rather than military nature of Austria's overall western strategy. Arrangements with other states had a higher geopolitical value if already in place before a conflict began. The more regularized the grouping, the more effective, both in absorbing the initial French military advances and reducing the standing defense costs that Austria would have to bear. There is a clear evolution in Habsburg strategy of seeking increasingly regularized alliance formats, both with weaker clients and with Great Powers, from Joseph I's renewal of the *Reichskrieg* format and Leopold's encouragement of the Nördlingen Association to Thugut's and Stadion's coalitions and, ultimately, Metternich's *Bund* and Congress system. In these groupings, the military value of buffers, measured in the

predictability of Austrian forward military deployments, increased in proportion to the viscosity of the underlying political arrangements.

By the early decades of the 19th Century, this evolution had placed the Habsburg Monarchy at the head of a large network of weaker states in Central Europe whose geopolitical configuration disproportionately benefited Austria but the defensive costs of which were primarily borne by others. The resulting informal empire was in many ways as impressive as the Habsburg Monarchy itself. It is from this position of apparent strength, the culmination of two centuries of war and statecraft, that Austria would enter the storm center of 19th Century European politics.

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Chapter VIII.

Barricades of Time:

Metternich and the Zenith of the Habsburg System

“Austria... can be called the haven of all the surrounding [smaller] nations, for she is their common refuge in every need, their protecting wall against every attack...” – Radetzky

“I have the feeling that I am in the middle of a web which I am spinning in the style of my friends the spiders, whom I like because I have admired them so often... A net of this kind is good to behold, woven with artistry, and strong enough to withstand a light attack, even if it cannot survive a mighty gust of wind.” – Metternich

Summary

The Habsburg Monarchy emerged from the Napoleonic Wars in a position of unprecedented strength. In the post-war settlement at the Congress of Vienna, Austria regained lost territories to form an expanded empire whose possessions and dependencies stretched from Venice to Krakow. To protect these enlarged holdings, Habsburg leaders extrapolated on past frontier strategies to build a European-wide security system based on two broad components: (1) A reorganized and fortified network of buffer territories integrating neighboring lands into Austrian defense; and (2) Elaborate diplomatic structures that mediated conflict and co-opted rivals into joint management of Habsburg buffers. The resulting “Vienna system” mitigated the time pressure of managing multiple frontiers while converting longstanding enemies into participants in the maintenance of Austrian power. This in turn obviated the need for large standing military commitments on the scale that would have been needed to manage such a large and exposed position through force alone. The apogee of Habsburg strategic statecraft, this system of security endowed Austria with many of the attributes of hegemony at an affordable cost to itself, while creating conditions of European peace and stability that lasted for half a century.

Pax Austrica

At the Vienna Peace Conference of 1814-15, the Habsburg Monarchy emerged as the most influential power in the European states system. Of all of Napoleon’s enemies, Austria had

endured the greatest financial and military strains and suffered the largest territorial losses. In the post-war settlement, she received the greatest compensations in land and population, repatriating lost possessions and acquiring new ones on almost every frontier. In the west, the Habsburgs regained their hereditary holdings of Tyrol and Salzburg and re-secured leadership of the German confederation. In the southwest, they regained northern Italy to form a new kingdom of Venetia-Lombardy while installing Habsburg rulers in Tuscany, Parma and Modena. In the south, they regained the Illyrian Provinces and those portions of the Military Border lost to French rule and acquired the Dalmatian port-republic of Ragusa. In the east, they regained portions of Poland lost to the Duchy of Warsaw plus Tarnopol in modern-day Ukraine.

These acquisitions brought the Habsburg Monarchy to its greatest extent since Eugene's Turkish war and secured its place as one of the largest land empires in Europe. With the Austrian Netherlands permanently ceded to form a new kingdom of Belgium, the Danubian state stood at its widest and territorially most compact configuration, with Habsburg rule extending from the shores of Lake Garda to Lemberg on the Russian border.

Problems of Postwar Order

At the Vienna Congress, Austria faced two main problems. The first was the growth of its flanking powers, Prussia and Russia, both of which had expanded in the course of the wars with Napoleon. While "all the powers that went to war with France exhausted themselves," Metternich later wrote, "Prussia alone" had drawn advantages from every turn in the conflict. "Every campaign gave her a pretext for extending her influence; every truce either confirmed an encroachment on a weak and timid neighbor, or contrived that such should voluntarily place itself under her banner; every peace brought her a reward for exertions which she had...made only to serve her own purposes."⁴⁷¹ Russia too had found opportunities for growth during the wars, both through accommodation of Napoleon and counter-offensives following the 1812

⁴⁷¹ Metternich, *Memoirs*, p. 71.

campaign. At war's end, both states possessed large armies backed by growing demographic and economic bases. Both sought to formally acquire yet more territory—Prussia through absorption of Saxony, Russia through annexation of Poland. With France forced back into her natural borders and the Austrian economy devastated from years of warfare, there was little to restrain these ambitions. Unless Austria could restrain their ambitions, it faced the prospect of exchanging Napoleon's bid for hegemony in the west with a new era of intense military competition in the north and east.

Austrian Empire in Europe, 1815



Source: The European Revolutions of 1848.

A second danger confronting Austria in 1815 was the growth of nationalism. The ideas of the French Revolution had awakened across Europe a spirit of national fervor, grounded in the concept of the nation-state as the sole expression of political legitimacy. In Napoleon's satellite kingdoms, French clientage left behind the model of a rationalist public administration and activist citizenry; in the territories of Napoleon's victims, French occupation stoked a popular desire to eject the invader and salvage national pride. In both cases, the long wars left behind populations animated by the idea of unification on the basis of shared language, custom and culture. And nowhere were these effects most intensely felt than in Austria's western buffers, Germany and Italy.

From an Austrian security standpoint, these two problems—nationalism and expansionist rivals—were intertwined. German nationalism represented a potential vehicle whereby Prussia, as the largest of the Germanic states, could potentially harness its ambitions for military domination of Central Europe to a popular spirit to which Austria, with its polyglot construction, could not appeal. Italian nationalism presented a similar, if less immediate, opportunity for France to eventually overturn Austrian primacy in Italy, while virtually any form of European nationalism presented an opening whereby an opportunistic Russia could undermine political order in its western rivals and use unrest as a pretext for armed intervention. Unless Austria could deal with this threat and de-link nationalism from the geopolitical urges of its rivals, it faced the danger of engines of perpetual crisis capable of generating unified national masses on its frontiers and spread revolution to the heart of the Monarchy.

1. The Metternich System

The scale of the problems facing Austria transcended its independent abilities to handle. Economically, the state was bankrupt from more than two decades of conflict. Militarily, the large armies allowed it to exercise such influence over the final peace settlements were unsustainable and required rapid dismantlement. Thus, Austria would have to find ways of

dealing with the post-Napoleonic landscape that were within the means of its constrained power capabilities.

The man to whom this task fell was Prince Clemens Wenzel Lothar Metternich, Austria's foremost statesman of the postwar period. By 1815, Metternich had been in continuous service to the Monarchy for nearly fourteen years, serving the Emperor Francis as minister to Paris and replacing Count Stadion as Foreign Minister after the 1809 defeat. Vain, worldly and calculating, he possessed a sharp instinct for power that tended to be masked by an easy charm, dilatory style of diplomacy and incurable affinity for attractive women. A Rhinelander by birth, Metternich had witnessed first-hand the destructive effects of the Revolution in the French confiscation of his family's hereditary estates in Germany. A product of the Enlightenment, he was an arch-rationalist who distrusted the universal claims and crusading zeal of the Revolution and the nationalisms that followed it. In these forces he saw a chaos that threatened to unravel the fabric of the ancient Habsburg Empire and upend the foundations of Christian civilization.

To check this threat, Metternich sought to create a bulwark against both the destabilizing effects of rampant nationalism and of renewed hegemonic warfare. Realizing that Austria did not possess the military strength to impose post-war stability, he sought instead to lay the foundation for a diplomatic-intensive security that would reduce the frequency and severity of tests of strength facing the Monarchy. His overarching aim was to shape a stable post-war order in which Austria could heal internally and position itself as a major player. In this, he replicated the intentions, on a larger scale, of previous Habsburg statesmen. Where Kaunitz (Metternich's father-in-law) had sought to create an environment after the wars with Frederick "without the evil of 'remaining armed beyond our means,'" Metternich envisioned a "long general peace" for an "Austria [that] was enduring the after-pains of a two-and-twenty years' war."⁴⁷²

⁴⁷² See Bassett, pp. 146-7 and Metternich, pp. 249-50.

While militarily weak, the Habsburg state possessed certain advantages for achieving this aim. One, paradoxically, was its central position: long a disadvantage, being located in the middle of the chessboard now gave Austria the ability to adjudicate tradeoffs between most of the major territorial questions facing post-war Europe. Another was Austria's unique position among the Great Powers as a defender of treaty rights. As the oldest empire in Europe and a state with domestic structures that gave it the most to lose from a period of renewed turmoil, Austria possessed a degree of moral credibility that allowed it to act as a conveyer of legitimacy in international disputes.

Another advantage was Metternich's style of diplomacy. As we have seen, he was keenly aware of the power of time in negotiations and particularly the use of delay to gain advantages against a militarily stronger opponent. His "greatest art," French contemporary Talleyrand once said, "is to make us waste our time." Or as Metternich himself said, "I barricade myself with time and make patience my weapon."⁴⁷³ Much as Metternich had used periods of *recueillement* to improve Austria's fighting strength and delayed entry into the War of the Sixth Coalition to improve its diplomatic position, Metternich now used tactics of delay and sequencing to divide Austria's rivals at the peace table. His task was time-management both in the narrow sense of seeking to juggle numerous frontiers and in the wider, civilizational sense of seeking to extend the lifespan of an ancient empire beset by forces of radical change.

In the post-war settlement Metternich pursued two specific objectives that would become the twin pillars of Austrian security in the ensuing half-century: (1) the retention of Austria's historic buffer zones; and (2) the recruitment of Europe's large powers, including Austria's rivals, into jointly managing these spaces and preventing war.

⁴⁷³ Quoted in Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored; Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p.156

Metternich's Buffers

Metternich's system must be understood first and foremost as a set of measures to provide for Austrian security, devised for the protection and prolongation of the Habsburg Monarchy. As for previous generations of Austrian statesmen, Metternich's first objective in securing the Monarchy was spatial in nature: to ensure geopolitical pluralism in the regions around its borders. In the immediate post-war period, this was a sizeable task. Hemmed in on every side by the satellites of Napoleonic France, Austria had lost not only its historic German and Italian buffers but substantial portions of its own frontier territories in the west, north and south. Like his predecessors, Metternich saw the inherent danger of conflict that arises through direct physical contact between large states. Where Kaunitz had long sought to ensure that Austria remained "not directly adjacent" to its rivals, Metternich sought "to remove our country from direct contact with France, and thus put an end to the wars which had been in consequence of this contact perpetually occurring between the two neighboring empires..."⁴⁷⁴

Under Metternich's guidance, the Congress of Vienna "revived and developed the 18th century idea of intermediary bodies, independent smaller states and areas designed to buffer, separate, and link contending Great Powers."⁴⁷⁵ The peace settlement dismantled Napoleon's "rampart of republics," evicting French influence from Germany, reinstalling the princely rulers of Italian states and demolishing the Duchy of Warsaw. In the northwest, Metternich used the peace settlement as an opportunity to divest from the Austrian Netherlands on the logic that, by providing direct physical contact of Habsburg territory with that of France, these lands increased the likelihood of future conflict between the two powers.⁴⁷⁶ In this, he was following the practice of his predecessor Thugut and earlier 18th Century Austrian diplomats of "rounding off" Austrian territory into a more compact geopolitical unit.

⁴⁷⁴ Metternich, p. 264 and Kaunitz, *Memoire über die Rätlichkeit, Nützlichkeit und Nothwendigkeit...Russland.*"

⁴⁷⁵ Schroeder, *Transformation*, p. 578.

⁴⁷⁶ Metternich, p. 264

Metternich's leadership would prove crucial for rebuilding buffers around Europe's center, as other continental powers would have preferred to absorb much of this territory for themselves. While France was for the time being at bay, Austria's rivals to the north and east were as-yet satiated and bent on using the Vienna Congress to expand their own frontiers. Prussia wanted to annex Saxony—the Monarchy's sole buffer state in this theater—as compensation for Prussian military exertions and to punish Saxony for its spirited participation as a Napoleonic client state. Tsar Alexander I sought to gain control of most of Poland, citing Slavic brotherhood but ultimately to increase Russia's strategic depth to the west.

If successful, Russian and Prussian expansion into Central Europe would place hostile armies in Dresden and Cracow, both within 200 miles of Vienna. Rebuffing these efforts was therefore a principle focus of Metternich's diplomacy. To disaggregate his rivals, Metternich employed elaborate tactics of delay. He feigned illnesses and long convalescences, kindled highly-publicized love affairs and other appeared socially distracted to exploit his rivals' impatience and need for Austrian consent on other demands. Splintering off Berlin first, Metternich granted a partial acquisition of Saxony in exchange for Prussian support on the Polish question and an enhancement to Austria's western buffer through absorption of the fortress at Mainz into the southern defenses of the German *Bund*.⁴⁷⁷ With Russia isolated, Metternich's first preference was to revert to the kind of full Polish buffer of the kind that Maria Theresa and Kaunitz had originally hoped but failed to retain. When his attempt at engineering Austro-British-Prussian guarantee for an independent Poland failed, Metternich organized an alliance of Austria, Britain and France and threatened war, which frightened Alexander I into allowing the creation of buffer territories around Cracow and Posen.

The lengths to which Metternich was willing to go in the quest for buffers around Austria's frontiers underscore the foundational significance that they held for post-war Habsburg security. His first aim was to simply to keep the territories in question from following under the direct control of Austria's rivals. Having done so, he then worked through the Congress to

⁴⁷⁷ Kissinger, p. 158

create elaborate international “rules and understandings for cooperation and concert” between Europe’s states of all sizes.⁴⁷⁸ The resulting framework gave the small states of Europe—the so-called *puissances intermediaires*—a greater degree of formalized influence and protection than they had perhaps ever enjoyed or would again until the construction of the European Union and NATO.

In fighting for space around Austria’s borders that was independent and free from rival control, Metternich was pursuing a goal that Habsburg statesmen had long considered a prerequisite to the Monarchy’s survival. The longer-term task was to make sure that such spaces, once created, would be politically managed to Austria’s advantage over the long-term. This was particularly a challenge in Germany, where Napoleon had not only abolished Austria’s traditional hegemonic position in the *Reich* but pursued a policy of enlarging lesser states with territory in order to adhere them to France at the cost of loyalty to Austria. “How profoundly different,” Metternich wrote of Germany in the post-war period, “were the situations of...Austria, and of the Princes of the confederation of the Rhine, who owed all the growth of their power to the wars of Napoleon!”⁴⁷⁹

As we saw in the previous chapter, Metternich’s solution to this problem was to build a new federalized German *Bund* consisting of larger and ultimately more tightly-knit units than had existed in the old *Reich*. In this, he utilized many of the same tools that past Austrian diplomats had used to cement loyalty to Vienna. Much as Joseph I and Maria Theresa had done in their time, Austria under Francis I was careful not to punish and alienate those Germanic states that had fought against it in the previous war. Thus Bavaria, one of Napoleon’s staunches allies, was granted territory, and Saxony was spared the full wrath of Prussian ambition. An additional glue, as in the past, was the prospect of a soft Austrian hegemony less onerous than the alternatives presented by other powers. Metternich brought this formula to new heights, playing on small states’ fear of Prussia to bind them to Austrian leadership while using Prussia’s fear of nationalism to co-opt Berlin into joint management of the *Bund*.

⁴⁷⁸ Schroeder, p. 578.

⁴⁷⁹ Metternich, p. 207.

The resulting structure offered a dual containment mechanism that kept Prussia's intra-Germanic ambitions in check while providing a joint defense for resisting encroachment by outside powers. Central to this design was Metternich's continued application of the bargain that lay at the heart of informal Habsburg empire in neighboring regions: relative political autonomy and protection by a weak hegemon in exchange for fealty and defensive security. Using this formula, Metternich positioned Austria as the voice of Germany's middle powers in the early decades of the 19th Century. As we will see, the failure to develop a similarly benign arrangement in Italy would prove to be a major strategic flaw in the new edifice of Habsburg security.

Co-Opting Rivals

While reconstituting buffers, Metternich also sought to ease the burdens on Austria by attracting large powers into treaties of restraint. This was not new to Habsburg diplomacy. A long line of Austrian statesmen had worked to align with former enemies as a means of enhancing Austrian strategic options and security. Bartenstein's courtship of Russia set an early precedent in the use of enmeshing diplomatic ties to monitor and control the expansion of an ambitious competitor. The various 'preemptive peace' arrangements struck with the Ottomans over the course of the 18th Century had shown the practical value that a well-timed détente could have in freeing Austria's hands to deal with problems on other frontiers. Most spectacularly, Kaunitz's reversal of Austria's longstanding enmity with France to focus on competition with Prussia and the later improvement of ties with Prussia to combine forces against Revolutionary France were demonstrations that Austria's understanding that as a centrally-located state it could not afford to permanently estrange former enemies.

However, what Metternich now envisioned was far grander in extent than anything that had come before. Previous Austrian attempts at co-opting rivals had usually dealt with one power at a time. They had usually been temporary in nature, aimed at "turning off" one frontier to turn attention and resources elsewhere for a limited period of time. Similarly, efforts at building

grouping coalitions had usually been task-specific, intended to deal with a specific threat at a given point in time, after which allied cooperation dissipated by mutual consent. The intermittent alliances with the Maritime Powers to contain Louis XIV in the 18th Century had been one set of examples; Joseph I's attempt to build a neutrality league to keep Sweden and Turkey out of the War of Spanish Succession another; Kaunitz's various alliances to box in Frederick II yet another.

By contrast, Metternich envisioned an alliance system for Austria after the war that would encompass all of Austria's security theaters and involve generally open-ended time horizons. Confronted with the old dilemma that had haunted Kaunitz of vulnerable frontiers in every direction that exposed Austria to perpetual military exertions beyond its ability to sustain, Metternich sought a means not of managing the latest crisis but of transcending the cycle of crisis altogether. Where previous generations of Austrian statesmen had labored to improve Austria's position for the *next* war, Metternich sought to make war itself less likely by rendering attempts at European primacy by a Frederick or Napoleon impossible. As Metternich put it, he envisioned nothing less than a "rejection of the system of conquest." He wanted to recruit not only Austria's most natural allies, but all of Europe's major powers into a standing league committed to the "principle of the solidarity of nations and of the balance of power" who would employ their "combined endeavors against the temporary predominance of any one [Power]."480

War Avoidance

Such a system of large-power coordination, if it could be achieved, would produce certain public goods that, while benefitting Europe generally, would work disproportionately to the advantage of Austria. The first and most obvious was war-avoidance. By the early 19th Century, all of Europe's states were exhausted from a century of continuous bids for primacy, beginning with Louis XIV and continuing through Frederick II and culminating in Napoleon.

480 Metternich, p. 37.

Austria in particular had suffered from these contests. Its sprawling, multi-regional posture meant that its frontiers touch most of Europe's major military flashpoints: Italy and Germany being the most recent, but in the late 18th Century also Poland and the Balkans. By locking Europe's Great Powers into continual contact for the resolution of disputes, Austria sought to make it more likely that a settlement could be reached on future crises in these regions—crises which, should they escalate, would adversely affect Austria more than any other power.

Over time, Metternich reinforced the Congress system with additional defensive alliances, each focused on constraining the powers most most likely to disturb the peace—in the west, a “Quadruple Alliance” of Austria, Britain, Russia and Prussia to contain France; in the east, a “Holy Alliance” of autocratic empires to restrain Russia; and in Germany, the new *Bund* to tie down Prussia. In these arrangements can be seen the first attempt at a European-wide collective security system, in which all lines lead back to the middle empire—Austria. By mitigating tensions on every frontier, these elaborate structures offered a means for Austria to relieve the unrelenting security pressures that sustained competition had brought to the Habsburg realm in the previous century.

Metternich's system was geared not only to restrain rivals but to yoke them together in combatting nationalist movements across the continent. Russia and Prussia proved particularly helpful in this regard; much as Metternich had been able to use the fear of nationalist uprisings to strengthen Austria's moral leadership among the monarchical German states and keep Prussia in line, he was able to use fear to focus Russian statesmen on the shared goal of opposing nationalist uprisings. The ability to coordinate resources for the suppression of revolts provided a benefit to all of these states, but it especially benefited the continent's central empire, which relied for its security on buffer regions in Germany and Italy where nationalism was most rampant. Metternich's arrangements gave the Monarchy a ready tool of outside help in intervention that could be used not only to offset the security burden for managing its own buffers but, in a worst case scenario, for providing a lifeline of military support to help suppress uprisings inside the Monarchy itself.

In the years following the peace settlement, Metternich's collective security measures allowed Europe to navigate a series of crises without escalating into war. At Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818, the Congress format enabled the powers to reach agreement on the removal of Allied armies of occupation from France in a way that avoided an open breach between Russia and Britain. At Carlsbad a year later, Metternich coordinated a response to the first stirrings of German nationalism that deepened Prussia's commitment to the Austrian-led confederal architecture. At Troppau and Laibach in 1820 and 1821, Metternich succeeded in winning support from the continental powers for Austrian military intervention against nationalist uprisings in Naples and Piedmont while avoiding an Austro-French clash.⁴⁸¹ At Verona the following year, a similar formula was used to support a French suppression of nationalist uprisings in Spain. And at Münchengrätz in 1833, Austria, Prussia and Russia agreed to mutual aid against revolution and joint approaches for managing Poland and Turkey as buffer zones.

One advantage of the Vienna system was that it made security a shared task.

When Austria needed to act militarily to secure its buffers, it was likely to have the prior political approval and backing of other powers. With the Congress' sanction, the Habsburg military undertook extensive gendarmerie functions in Naples and Piedmont in 1821, in Rome in 1830, Parma in 1831 and Modena in 1847. For the Austrian intervention in Naples and Piedmont in 1821, Russia dispatched a corps of 90,000 troops to the frontier to standby as reinforcements. The Tsar offered troops again at the Verona conference for the intervention in Italy. In 1846, Russian troops coordinated with the Habsburg Army to jointly suppress an armed Polish uprising around Krakow.

The fact that Russia was willing to provide military support for Austrian actions as far afield as Italy and in the Danubian Basin itself underscored the practical security value that Metternich's arrangements held for an empire that maintained the smallest military establishment of any European major power. The very rival whose armies had threatened to keep marching after

⁴⁸¹ Palmer, p. 200.

the fall of France to upset the stability of post-1815 Europe now stood as a chief prop to continental stability.

The scale of support that Austria enjoyed from her rivals in the fight against nationalism had an additional benefit, over and above the immediate problems that the various congresses were meant to solve: deterring other large powers. Russian military support for Austrian operations sent a signal that the Monarchy was likely to enjoy powerful backing in any crisis that escalated into a major confrontation between itself and another major power. In a similar way, Austria's effective coordination with Prussia in German affairs, with Prussian and Habsburg troops conducting joint policing missions in the *Bund*, sent the message that the Germanic powers would perform as a defensive block against encroachments from the west or east.

2. 'Strategic Points' and Forward Defense

Congress diplomacy formed the heart of a diplomatically-intensive security system in which military power was diminished to a secondary role. Nevertheless, the military did play an important part as a pillar to the Metternichian system. With Austria's territorial footprint effectively doubled from where it had stood following the truncations at Schöbrunn, the Monarchy needed tools with which to reassert its dominance in regained territories. This could only be partially accomplished by diplomatic means; like any empire, Austria had to possess the *ultima ratio* of armed force to secure its position. With its army diminished in size by post-war austerity, the Monarchy would have to find creative ways to signal its military capabilities to rivals and, when needed, to use those capabilities. As in the past, this took two forms: the military use of terrain, and the ways in which the Habsburgs used military technology to secure its frontiers.

Terrain retained its central importance in post-1815 Austrian strategy, in the quest for securing an intermediary zone between the Monarchy's home terminal area and the territory of major rivals. As we have seen, ensuring the political independence of the mostly small states in these regions was a major objective of Metternich's diplomacy. In parallel, the Austrian military

studied how to use the terrain at the Monarchy's frontiers in the event of conflict. At the heart of post-Napoleonic Austrian military thinking was the idea that success in warfare could be achieved through the retention of certain key pieces of terrain or "strategic points," which held a disproportionate importance in deciding geopolitical results. As discussed in chapter 4, the main proponent of this view was Archduke Charles, whose writings on war would emerge, after some delay, as a foundation for Austrian military science in the decades after 1815. In his military writings after the war, Charles argued for an empire-wide defense system rooted in the retention and defense of these "strategic points" around the frontiers.

In every state that has a defensive system, it should be a maxim of the state, to set such points in alert and preserve them in a high state of readiness even during peace, to be able to maintain them for a long time with little effort and to discourage every enemy from war by the belief in the difficulty of their conquest. 482

The operational questions facing the Army was where these points were located and how to defend them. On the first question, the view that emerged from the Napoleonic wars was that the most important strategic points were located beyond the frontier, on the territory of Habsburg buffers or recently acquired territories. This was not altogether new. Habsburg military planning had long been wed to the concept that Austria's security began beyond the physical border. As we have seen, Austrian strategy in the west had made extensive use of forward *Reich* fortresses, and Lacy had advocated a layered concept of security encompassing external allies and rows of forts.

However, the wars with Napoleon substantially strengthened this conviction by showing how quickly an enemy occupying strategic sites in the dominating terrain around the Alps and Upper Danube could dominate the Austrian heartland. To varying degrees, the 1800, 1805 and 1809 campaigns had all demonstrated how improvements in the speed of armies, made possible by new ways of organizing force and managing logistics, had amplified French offensive advantages in this theater. As early as 1802, Venturini had argued for a "general

482 Erzherzog Karl, "Grundsätze der Strategie," in Charles Waldstätten, p. 61.

defense system” to address this challenge, in which double rows of military sites on the Rhine, Danube and northern Italy would provide a defense-in-depth for Austria’s western approaches.⁴⁸³

Another soldier paid close attention to the lessons of these campaigns was Johan Josef Radetzky von Radetz. Descended from the same stock of German-Bohemian nobility that had produced Daun, Radetzky was a by-product, both of the military system that Maria Theresa built in response to the Prussian threat and of the bloody baptism that the Army had received in the wars against Napoleon. Radetzky came of age as a cavalry trooper in Joseph II’s Turkish war, where he absorbed important lessons on terrain and mobility. As an aide to Lacy, he watched Austria’s aging generals grapple with the problems of war planning. As Chief of Staff to General Schwarzenberg, he had developed the Allied war plan that blended Austria’s traditional emphasis on attritional warfare and new Napoleonic methods of organization and tactics.

By the time of the Vienna Congress, Radetzky had seen three decades of almost uninterrupted warfare and had served in every major theater of war around the empire’s borders. A lifelong student of history, Radetzky believed in the importance of learning from the past, contributing to the establishment of the *Kriegsarchiv* and commissioning military analyses of the campaigns of Eugene and the French wars.⁴⁸⁴ Through this study of history and experience in the field, Radetzky developed a conviction that Austria’s security began well beyond the political border, on the terrain of neighboring states and indeed, if possible, on the soil of the enemy himself.

For Radetzky, the main lesson from the wars with Napoleon had come from the 1809 war, which demonstrated in painful terms that if Austria could not stop an enemy beyond the frontier it would be essentially incapable of waging an effective self-defense. As Radetzky wrote in a lengthy memo assessing Austria’s defensive position:

⁴⁸³ Venturini, *Kritische Übersicht* pp. 7-8.

⁴⁸⁴ Sked, *Radetzky*, p. 89.

If the upper Danube is, as hitherto, neglected and our defense solely based on the stretch of river downwards from Vienna to Komarom [i.e., we are thrown back from the frontiers], at every sudden outbreak of war against an enemy approaching from the west, Upper Austria will have to be abandoned, Bohemia left to its own devices and the German provinces, which were a bountiful auxiliary resource for the Army, can be considered lost, because the enemy will be able to reach the imperial city faster than we can gather our forces.⁴⁸⁵

In light of past experiences, Radetzky believed, like Venturini, that what Austria needed most was strategic depth—insulating space from which to both threaten enemies and if necessary conduct a stalling retreat. As Radetzky wrote:

All possible points of attack derive from a state's frontiers, and against each of these there exist defensive measures that – at the point of contact – can deter or deny the enemy assault. We protect against attacks by a neighboring power by seeking alliances with land and sea powers who may themselves be in a position to attack our neighbor, thus offering an external form of defensive... Just as we seek out states as means of defense, we can offer our services to other states in a similar fashion. Thus emerge alliance systems and power.⁴⁸⁶

At the furthest distance from Austria, the Monarchy's big-power allies played the role of pinning down a peer competitor and dividing its forces in wartime. One square inward sat the Monarchy's numerous small-state allies and buffer territories, which Radetzky saw as the key to its defense:

Today, Austria borders the Papal States, Sardinia, Switzerland, the small states of Germany...and Turkey. The smaller states around us are too weak to attack us, either by themselves or united. However, they are similarly too impotent to prevent movement through their lands by a Great Power. Now if Austria wishes some reassurance against such movements, it will need to behave in a fashion that will lead the minor states to consider blocking such maneuvers as being in their own national interest. These small states will seek protection from any possible future convulsions in our part of the world, and will accept safety wherever it is most securely offered.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ Radetzky, "Militärische Betrachtung der Lage Österreichs, 1828," in *Denkschriften*, pp. 423-4.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

Radetzky's emphasis on incorporating buffers into Austria's system of security dovetailed with the military concepts of Venturini, Auracher and Charles, with their emphasis on strategic points. In Radetzky's view, Austria's previous wars had illuminated the "inner and outer" points where defensive arrangements were needed to secure its heartland. One of these was the stretch of Upper Rhine from Rastatt to Freiburg where French armies descended en route to the Austrian frontier.⁴⁸⁸ A second was the Upper Danube near Passau and adjacent Inns estuary where invaders could enter Habsburg territory unmolested.⁴⁸⁹ Another was the four-sided stretch of land in central Lombardy between the Mincio and Po rivers, centered on Verona, through which an invading army had to pass in order to threaten a two-pronged move on Austria through the Julian or Limestone Alps.⁴⁹⁰ And yet another was the gap between Eperies (Prešov) and Czacza (Košice) in the foothills of the Carpathians along the main route for an eastern invader approaching Budapest.⁴⁹¹

Fortifications

To secure these strategic points, Radetzky advocated the extensive use of fortifications. As we have seen, forts had been growing steadily in prominence in Austrian military thinking since at least the end of the Prussian wars. By the post-Napoleonic period, a firm orthodoxy had set in that fortresses, when cited correctly in surrounding terrain, could insulate, if not altogether inoculate, the Monarchy against the threat of Napoleonic and Frederician invasions. At first glance, this continued emphasis on fortresses is surprising, given the minor role that they had played in most of Napoleon's campaigns. Later military writers, especially in Prussia, would criticize Austria for its lingering attachment to fixed defenses after 1815. But Austrian soldiers saw it differently, for several reasons. One was the outsized results that forts had achieved in a handful of cases. The most notable of these was the small fortress of Bard, which with only 22

488 Radetzky, "Operationen der verbündeten Heere gegen Frankreich, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Armee des Oberrheins," 1832, in *Denkschriften*, pp. 479-81.

489 Radetzky, "Militaerische Betrachtung der Lage Oesterreichs," in *Denkschriften*, p. 423

490 Sked, pp. 92-93.

491 Radetzky, "Militärische Betrachtung der Lage Österreichs," in *Denkschriften*, p. 424.

cannons had held out for three weeks, complicating the movement of French heavy equipment in the exit from the Alps in the 1800 campaign, leading Napoleon to call it “a more considerable obstacle to the army than the Great St. Bernard [pass] itself.”⁴⁹²

More substantial was the impact that Austria’s own forts had had when used *against it*. Napoleon’s capture of the Sardinian fortresses provided the fulcrum from which he had conducted his successful offensives into Austria. A French garrison at Genoa withstood a blockade of 60 days and a siege of 40 against a force five times its size, ultimately preventing the Austrians from sweeping the forces left behind by Napoleon out of Italy.⁴⁹³ After the 1800 campaign, the French systematically strengthened the defensive works of northern Italy into two lines of forts. In 1805, it was the presence of these works that allowed Massena, with a weak force, to pin down Charles’ 90,000 men, thus sharpening Austria’s Rhine-Po dilemma and enabling Napoleon’s victory at Austerlitz. Ulm itself, once in French hands, had, in tandem with the bases taken by France on other frontiers, enabled the build-up of strength on Austria’s borders in the lead-up to the 1809 campaign. It was the possession of these defensive sites, in the eyes of Habsburg military men, that France had been able to steadily tighten the tourniquet on Austria over its various campaigns, eventually threatening the existence of the empire. This, rather than the disaster at Ulm or other examples of unsuccessful fortress warfare, is what stood out in their minds as Austria entered the years of peace.

While secondary in importance to Metternich’s diplomatic system, fortresses acted as a buttress to Austria’s overall strategy in the post-war period. Habsburg military men were aware of this political role, and the defensive concepts that they developed for fortifying “inner and outer” strategic points worked in tandem with the political leadership’s goals of containing rivals while combatting the forces of nationalism. In *Principles of War*, Archduke Charles outlines a rough system, whereby Austria could employ different kinds of fort for these different purposes:

⁴⁹² Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives, Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress, 1861-62, Vol. 4, No. 86, p. 320.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

Fortresses are destined either to the simple defense of a country or to serve to support offensive operations... For fortresses destined to serve as supports for offensive operations it is necessary to have regard principally to the points upon which an offensive war could and should be conducted against the enemy; in consequence at the principal entries to his country, and upon communications with the same country. They should be able to contain important magazines, and be situated in such a way that in case of contrary events they cover the retreat of the army, and impede the progress of the enemy. They should be by this of a considerable size. There is a third sort of fortress, which is less for the defense of frontiers than for the security and retention of the whole country. These fortresses should be placed in the interior of provinces and are properly called '*places d'armes*.'⁴⁹⁴

The fact that Austria faced enemies on every side as well as potentially internally while possessing a relatively weak army gave forts greater utility than for most states. As Radetzky wrote:

Every war has a specific enemy, sometimes more than one. Every war has its own dangers. Each makes its own demands on fortresses... Fortifications are means, defense is their purpose; however, their usefulness as a tool can only be assessed by understanding the fortress' purpose in a specific case... What should be fortified? Why are these fortifications necessary? And why does one require such means? ... [Ultimately] the defensive strength of a state consists in its monetary power, the strength of its armed forces and in the power of its alliances. [In this context] the purpose of fortifications is to make a defense of the few against an attack by the many possible. Natural fortifications are provided by the geographic shape of a country; through human skill fortifications provide a means of strengthening these traits and addressing partial or large deficiencies of the terrain.⁴⁹⁵

Fortresses located in forward positions played several roles vis-à-vis different audiences. In dealings with large enemy powers, they provided deterrence. By maintaining a strong and visible security presence around the main arteries, forts, as Charles put it, "discourage the enemy from war by the belief in the difficulty of their conquest."⁴⁹⁶ Should deterrence fail, forts assisted in the task of conducting a defense-in-depth; in Charles' words, "fortresses situated upon the frontiers of warring powers change all conditions of war"; their purpose is "to gain

⁴⁹⁴ Charles, *Principles*, pp. 10-13.

⁴⁹⁵ Radetzky, "Gedanken über Festungen," 1827, in *Denkschriften*, pp. 401-4.

⁴⁹⁶ Erzherzog Karl, "Grundsätze der Strategie," in *Waldstätten*, p. 61.

time,” an objective that “must never be lost sight of in the choice of emplacing fortresses to defend a country.”⁴⁹⁷ To accomplish this purpose, frontier fortresses should be “placed in such a manner that the enemy cannot easily leave them behind him without risking all for his communications... and that by this he is obliged to leave in his rear a considerable force...which will weaken his army and make it incapable of an ulterior offensive.”⁴⁹⁸ In Radetzky’s words, they “hinder the enemy from further advancement...secur[e] war munitions, shelter the army in case of defeat, protect against hostile superiority until reinforcements arrive...”⁴⁹⁹

In addition to their roles against external enemies, fortresses performed a political role vis-à-vis domestic audiences. “The rapport of one state with another,” Charles wrote, “and the measure of the influence it wishes to have on its neighbors or that its neighbors wish to have on it, determines the necessity and the importance of fortified points for the conservation of its proper independence.”⁵⁰⁰ In a similar vein, Radetzky wrote that “in all border countries, the necessity of fortifications and the form they should take depends upon on the political, geographical and military relations that an empire has with those states with which these provinces form the actual border countries...”; every adjoining state” around the Monarchy, is itself “a potential enemy that awakens our anxiety, not only by sharing a border with us, but because its internal situation and relation to the wider state system may provide triggers for war.”⁵⁰¹

Forward defensive sites reinforced the efforts of Austrian diplomats to cement Vienna’s ties with its tributaries. Embedded in this technique was an element of fear: communicating Austria’s determination to hold the territories she had regained after 1815. But there was also an element of reassurance and benevolent paternalism. Ultimately, the more Austria helped the territories and states around its borders, the more it helped itself, since “these small states

497 Ibid., p. 10.

498 Charles, *Principles*, p. 10.

499 Radetzky, “Gedanken über Festungen,” 1827, in *Denkschriften*, p. 401.

500 Charles, *Principles*, p. 12.

501 Radetzky, “Gedanken über Festungen,” 1827, in *Denkschriften*, pp. 402-4.

will seek protection from any possible future convulsions in our part of the world, and will accept safety wherever it is most securely offered.”⁵⁰² By coordinating defense with these states, “Austria... can be called the common haven of all the surrounding nations, for she is their common refuge in every need, their protecting wall against every attack...”⁵⁰³

Fortress Austria

With these political and military objectives in mind, the Habsburg Army set about in the years following the Vienna Congress to strengthen and refurbish the fortresses. Much as the wars with Frederick had produced systematic post-war reviews that led to the placement of forts on the Elbe, the Army after 1815 now studied on a much wider scale for how to devise a comprehensive defensive “system” to defend the Monarchy as a whole.⁵⁰⁴ Over the course of the first half of the 19th Century, a dizzying succession of commissions took up this task, with varying degrees of success. In 1818, Archduke Johann made a tour of fortifications in other major European countries in his role as General Director of Engineers and presented a draft plan which organized the Monarchy’s forts into three classes according to defensive value and proposed new works to guard the eastern and southwestern frontiers.⁵⁰⁵

The years that followed were spent with attempts at smaller upgrades, most of which were constrained by budgetary realities. In 1832, Johann and Radetzky presented joint plans for strengthening the defenses of Northern Italy and placing barrier forts in the passes of the Alps and Carpathians.⁵⁰⁶ Around the same time Archduke Maximilian undertook, largely at his own expense, the fortification of Linz using experimental new tower system that was ultimately discontinued due to budgetary constraints. Field Marshal Franz von Scholl later oversaw improvements to the forts of northern Italy and the nearby Alps, including the Brenner

⁵⁰² Radetzky, “Militärische Betrachtung der Lage Österreichs” in *Denkschriften*, p. 428.

⁵⁰³ Sked, p. 118.

⁵⁰⁴ See for example Erzherzog Karl, “Verteidigungssystem des Kriegsschauplatzes” in *Militärische Werke*, and “Versuch eines Kriegssystems des österreichischen Kaiserstaates” in Erich Hillbrand und Willibald Rosner, *Maximilian Joseph von Österreich-Este: Erzherzog, Festungsplaner, Hochmeister*, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁰⁵ Hillbrand und Rosner, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁰⁶ Georg von Alten und Hans von Albert, *Handbuch für Heer und Flotte: Enzyklopädie der Kriegswissenschaften und Verwandter Gebiete*, Band IV (Wien: Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong & Co., 1912).

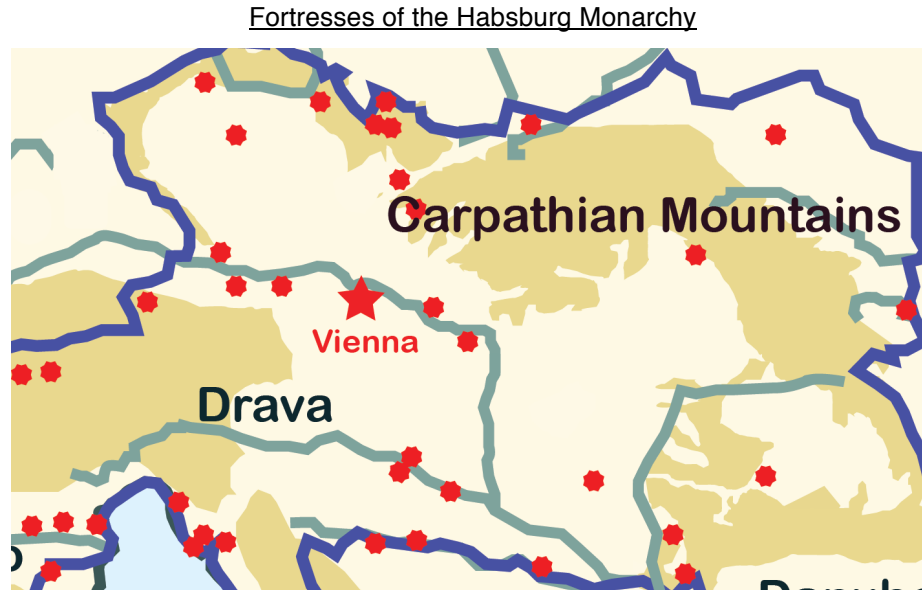
Pass.507 Plans of various shapes continued throughout the 1840s, with flurries of half-realized plans and a continuous construction of countless small *sperre* or barrier forts to guard the mountain passes and valleys in the Alps and Tatras. In 1850, jolted by the recent revolutions, an Imperial Forts Commission was established under the direction of Henrich Freiherr von Hess, which was given real money to work with.508

By mid-century Austria possessed a large number of forts of varying degrees of quality. Scattered in clusters and networks along the empire's frontiers, internal river systems and buffer territories, the shape and purpose of these defensive sites broadly trace the outlines of the categories that Charles, Radetzky and other Austrian soldiers had envisioned [See figure]. These included first-class fortresses at Mantua, Venice and Brixen in Italy; Salzburg and Enns in Austria; Komorn in Hungary; Peterwardein and Karlsburg on the Ottoman frontier; and Prague, Olmütz and Eperjes; as well as the older 'Northern Quadrilateral' forts at Königgrätz, Theresienstadt and Josephstadt. These complexes were supported by the large confederal fortresses at Mainz, Landau, Luxemburg, Ulm and Rastatt, backed by a large Austrian garrison in Frankfurt and, in Italy, by supporting networks of tutelary forts in adjacent territories under the rule of Habsburg family members or through agreed garrisoning rights, such as at the papal fortresses of Ferrara and Comacchio and Piacenza.509

507 Kaufmann and Kaufmann, p. 136.

508 *Denkschrift über die Reichsbefestigung der ehemalige Österreichisch-Ungarische Monarchie*, undated, KA, Wien, p. 55-60.

509 Daniel, p. 57 and Hugo Franz von Brachelli, *Handbuch der Geographie und Statistik für die gebildeten Stände*, Leipzig, 1861, p. 262.



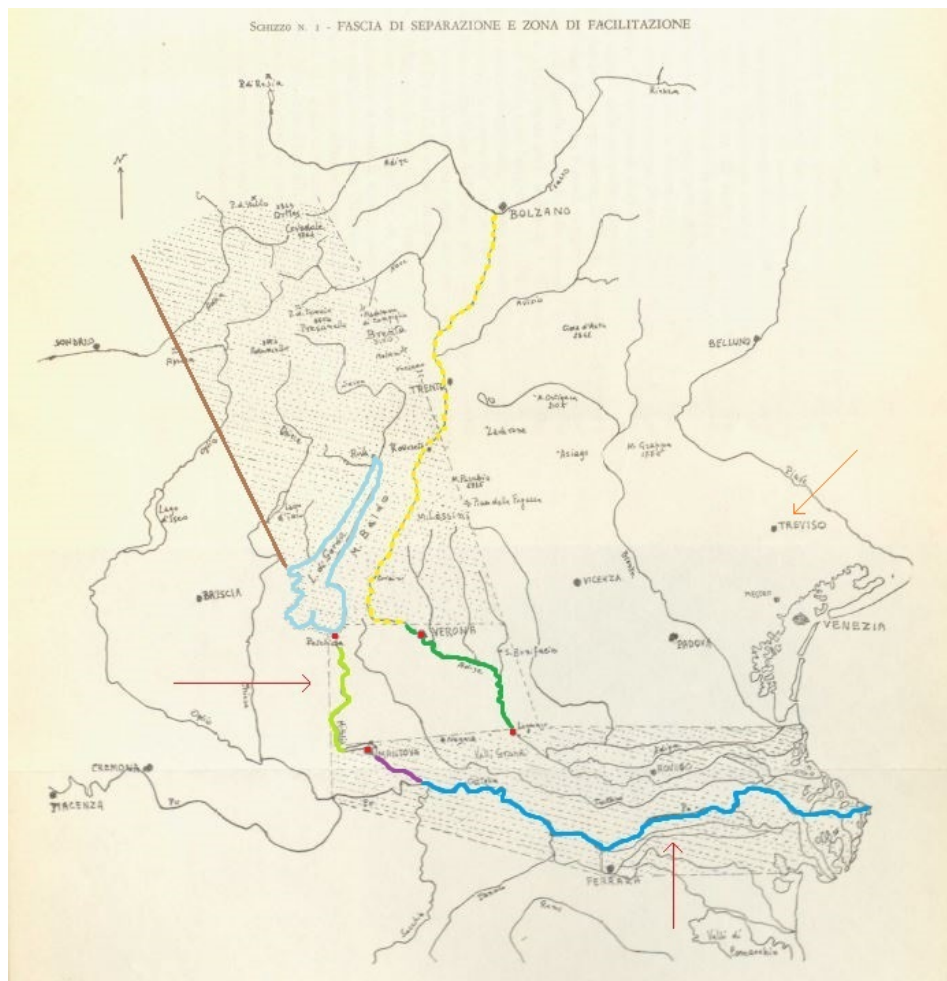
Source: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016.

Perhaps the best illustration of the role that forts in this period played in advancing Habsburg political and strategic goals can be seen in the famous “Quadrilateral” fortresses of Italy. Long of importance in the wars of this region, the fortified towns of Verona, Peschiera, Mantua and Legnano gained dramatically in importance with the extension of direct Austrian rule after 1815. To keep the French out and the nationalists down, the Monarchy needed to be able to project power beyond the Alps. Once there, Austrian forces found themselves on a flat plain which, as repeated wars had shown, were conducive to the movement of French armies, often enjoying numerical superiority, which unless intercepted, could quickly reach the Austrian frontier and use the numerous passes to threaten Vienna from both the north and south.

The Austrian solution to this problem was to construct a series of modern forts astride this military highway, in the center of the Lombardy plain. The citing of these fortresses was a masterpiece in the defensive use of terrain. In the north they were anchored on Lake Garda, in the south on the marshes of the River Po and in the east and west on the rivers Micio and Adige. The Austrians placed forts at the four coners formed by these obstacles. Built with the most advanced fortification technology of the day, these structures included hydraulic engines and, eventually, rifled artillery capable of shelling the surrounding countryside at distances of 7

km.510 They were connected to one another and the distant *Erblande* by telegraph and rail lines track lines, and supported by lesser fortresses stretching back to the frontier as well as a gunboat flotilla on Lake Garda. The largest fort, Verona, was capable of sheltering large armies for long periods of time, thus enabling local forces to undertake offensive operations in neighboring states if needed. The forts presented a defensive complex that was virtually impenetrable to armies approaching from the west or south—in the words of one contemporary observer, “the most formidable military base we have, perhaps, ever known.”⁵¹¹

The Quadrilateral Forts.

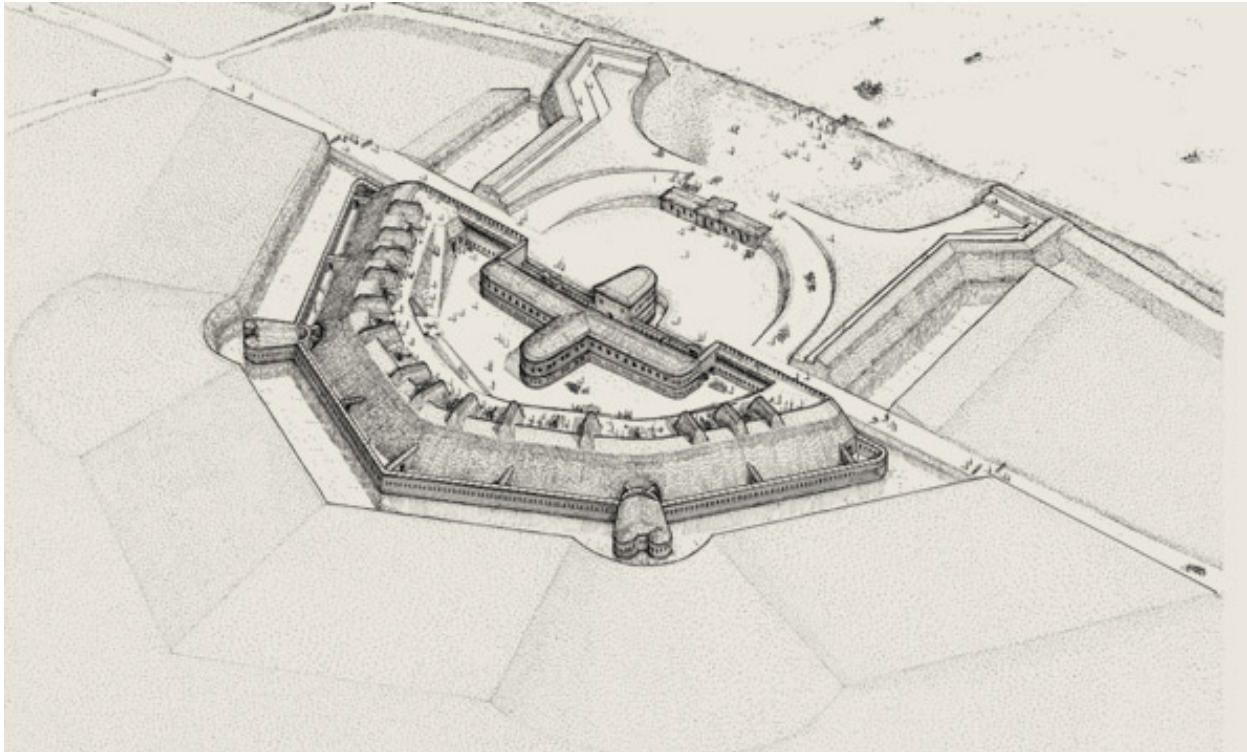


Source: Barbetta, Guido. “Il Quadrilatero Veneto.”

⁵¹⁰ M. Massari, *Sulla Necessità Delle Fortificazioni Per La Difesa Degli Stati in Generale E Dell'Italia in Particolare* (Palermo: Rivista Sicula, 1871), p. 56.

⁵¹¹ Bartolomeo Malfatti, “Il Quadrilatero, La Valle Del Po Ed Il Trentino.” in *Biblioteca Utile*, 9-72. Vol. 37 (Milano: Tipografia Internazionale, 1866).

Section of Habsburg Defenses at Mantua



Source: <http://www.mantovafortezza.it/it/fortificazioni>.

3. Peace on the Cheap

Viewed as a combined system, Austria's post-Napoleonic diplomacy and forts achieved security at an affordable cost during a vulnerable moment of recovery for the Monarchy. The pieces worked in tandem: Grouping coalitions coaxed rivals into joint stewardship of buffer regions; forts and tributary armies tethered these regions to Austrian leadership and provided instruments for dealing with any problems that fell through the cracks in diplomatic net. Together, these tools achieved a higher degree of success in addressing the problems of managing multiple frontiers than any previous Habsburg security system. While many historians have pointed to the setbacks that Metternich suffered in the post-1815 era, perhaps a better measure of the results of his system would be to compare the outcomes of this period with the goals that Metternich had set out to accomplish: a "long peace" in which Austria could

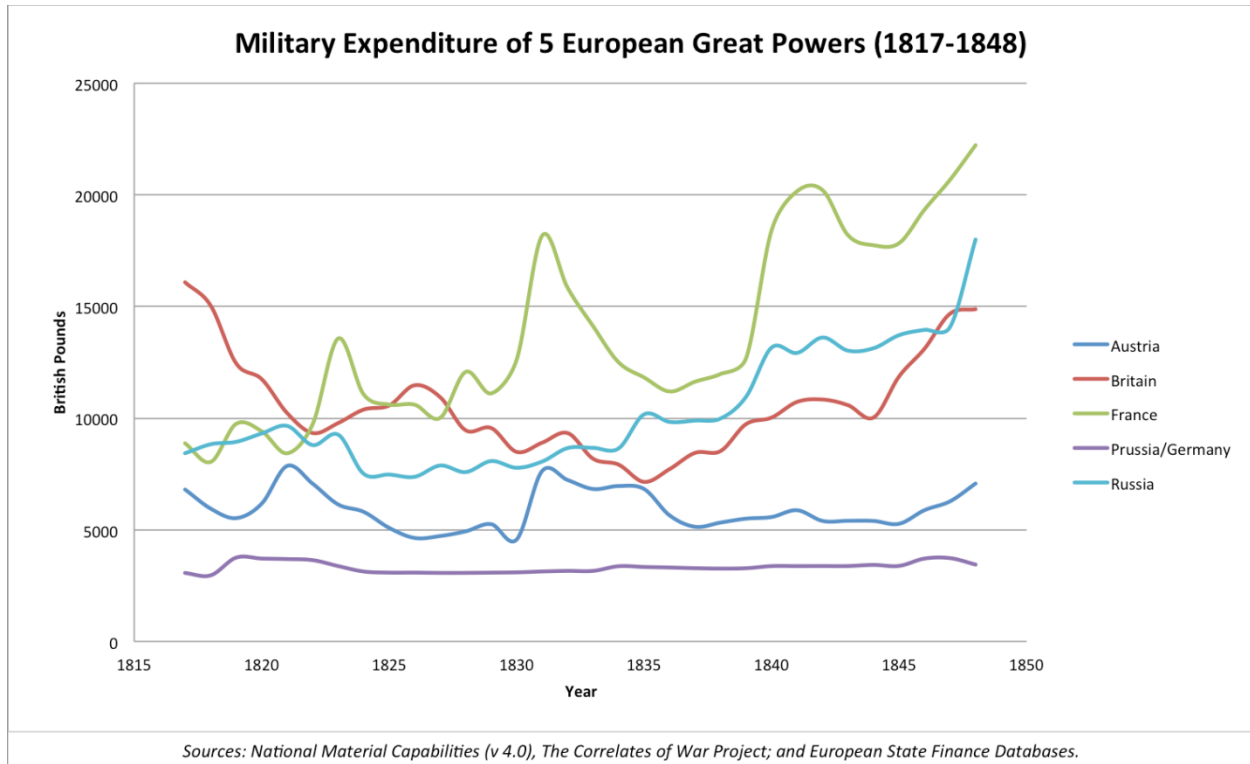
recover internally from the “after-pains” of 22 years of war, and a bulwark to suppress conflict and, specifically, address the twin dangers of Russian/Prussian expansion and nationalism.

The first of these goals was essentially economic in nature. Like most powers at the end of a major war, Austria therefore needed peace on the cheap. After the war, the Monarchy carried substantial debt overhangs, mostly involving commitments to Britain, and other lingering effects of war—manpower depletion, inflation, agricultural disruption, loss of specie—which fueled conditions of economic depression into the 1820s.⁵¹² Whatever arrangements Austria’s diplomats and soldiers devised for navigating the new geopolitical setting would therefore have to achieve imperial defense without worsening this economic situation. The components of the Vienna system worked in combination to achieve this goal. At the most fundamental level, the Congress system and its supporting alliances helped to provide the recovery period needed by averting the one thing most likely to lead to economic collapse: renewed Great-Power war.

The relative stability afforded by the first half of the century to Austria allowed it to maintain a substantially lower military footprint than would have been possible, had Europe immediately reverted after 1815 to the power politics of the pre-war period. As a result, the Habsburg state was able to drastically cut defense spending in the years following the peace. From a wartime environment in which Vienna had spent virtually all of its available resources to military resistance to Napoleon, the portion of the budget devoted to the Army was reduced to about half by 1817, to 23 percent in 1830 and to 20 percent in 1848.⁵¹³ The overall defense budget hovered at less than 100 million crowns throughout the 1820s, rising slightly in the 1830s and dipping back to the 100-million range throughout the 1840s, making Austria one of the lowest spender on defense in the decades after 1815 [See figure].

⁵¹² Pammer, p.167.

⁵¹³ Gunther E. Rothenberg, “The Austrian Army in the Age of Metternich” in *The Journal of Modern History*, 1968, 40 (2): 156-165, p. 156.



Austrian military policies also helped to reinforce the economic effects of Metternich's diplomacy. From antiquity, empires have used forts to economize force. Walls require fewer men to man than open country. Thus, the Romans employed modestly-trained militia in forts to reduce the costs of frontier defense by substituting capital for labor.⁵¹⁴ Austria's use of forts like the Quadrilateral offered to amplify the effects of such forces as it could deploy under reduced budgets. Because they increase force-space ratios and entail a form of warfare—defense—that is simpler to conduct, and thus train and arm for, than offense, fortifications amplify the fighting qualities of armies.⁵¹⁵ Their value tends to increase in inverse proportion to the quality of troops available to a state at a given moment. Hence France's use of fortifications in the post-World War I era to augment the quality of conscript troops attached to defensive doctrines. In a similar way, Austria was able to use fixed defenses to compensate for its army's overall effectiveness at a time of stagnation in doctrine, training and readiness.

⁵¹⁴ Jones, pp. 693-694.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

Placing such forces *in situ* at the most likely site of disturbances further increased their effectiveness and lowered the transportation costs of shifting forces from frontier to frontier in response to crises. In Italy, for example, the Army was able through the presence of a handful of forts and steadily smaller garrisons (from 104,000 troops in 1831 to 75,000 troops in 1833 to 49,000 in 1846) to hold a set of territories that provided more than a quarter of Austrian tax revenues.⁵¹⁶ The cost-effectiveness of these deployments was heightened by the fact that, when uprisings occurred, the Italian states requiring Austrian military intervention were ultimately required to bear the costs of the expeditions.⁵¹⁷ In the East, the close political relationship with Russia that was achieved through the Holy Alliance allowed the Monarchy to almost entirely forego the task of fortresses and large-scale deployments on its longest frontier while in Germany, as we have seen, the financial burden of maintaining numerous forts of the Rhine was carried to a large extent by the other German states. In addition, decentralization of security in many parts of the Habsburg security perimeter to buffer-state armies and the ability to rely on joint intervention by other Great Powers further defrayed the military costs of managing Austria's enlarged post-1815 territorial holdings.

Economic Stabilization

In part because of its reduced military expenditures, the Austrian economy was able to achieve a substantial recovery in the decades after 1815. Collectively known as the *Vormärz*, the years between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the 1848 Revolution were marked by significant and sustained growth. By the late 1820s, the Monarchy had recovered from the sustained post-war depression. In Bohemia and Upper Austria, mechanization was beginning to occur, first in textiles, then with increasing rapidity in other sectors. The result was a series of intermittent economic booms as markets stabilized and output increased after years of stagnation.

⁵¹⁶ Rothenberg, "The Austrian Army in the Age of Metternich," p. 163 and Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War*, p. 47.

⁵¹⁷ Palmer, p. 201.

This process occurred in parallel with population growth, which by the middle decades of the century was averaging 1.0 percent (high by contemporary standards).⁵¹⁸ Habsburg's large agricultural sector ensured that this expansion in population was internally sustainable, which in turn helped to fuel high economic growth rates. Supported by parallel revolutions in transportation (steam and rail), industrial output surged, with periods of growth as high as 2.5-3.3 percent and overall per capita rates of industrial output somewhere between 1.8 and 2.6 percent (compared to 1.7 percent and 1.9 percent in France and England respectively).⁵¹⁹ Coal consumption—often used as a measure of growth and technology diffusion—increased 8.6 percent annually for two decades from the 1830s (eventually averaging almost 10 percent), compared to consumption rates of 7.5 percent and 5.8 percent respectively.⁵²⁰ Overall, as one economist notes, “the behavior of population, output, and output per person in the *Vormärz* strongly indicates the emergence of modern economic growth.”

Military Security

Metternich's system also allowed provided measurable security for Austria against the twin threats of rival expansion and nationalist uprisings. As outlined above, Congress diplomacy provided a template for navigating numerous crises in Italy in the 1830s and 40s. In addition to dealing with the immediate problem, grouping coalitions allowed Metternich to avert escalation into Great-Power confrontations. Austria's fortresses amplified the effects of its diplomacy by providing an extra element of deterrence. One example of this deterrent at work can be seen in 1840, when Austria's improved fortresses on the Rhine helped to dissuade French military adventurism in south Germany. Another example is 1850, when a combination of Russian backing, the mobilization of 90,000 troops by Austria's *Bund* allies and reinforcement of the fortresses of Königgrätz, Josephstadt and Theresienstadt helped to deter Prussia from launching a war to supplant Habsburg leadership of Germany.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ Good, p. 45.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁵²¹ Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, p. 48.

However, the greatest geopolitical success of the Metternich system came in 1848, when revolutions spread across Europe and into the Habsburg Monarchy, eventually engulfing Italy, Hungary, Bohemia and Vienna itself. While involving armed insurgents rather than rival armies, Austria found itself facing many of the same challenges of balancing multiple theaters that it had faced in the Spanish and Austrian succession wars of the previous century. As in these earlier contests, the Monarchy needed to manage the sequencing of operations to avoid overwhelming its stretched military and the duration of the conflict to avoid unbearable strains on the Treasury.⁵²²

The tools at Austria's disposal under the Metternich system aided in this task. As in 1748, in 1848 the Monarchy sought to separate its enemies, concentrating on the weakest and most immediate threats first, then turning attention to stronger foes as it combined the forces freed up on other fronts. In pursuit of this goal, the Monarchy's earlier investments in forts was validated, as fortresses in Hungary and Italy allowed garrisons to preoccupy insurgents with sieges and buy time for the army on other frontiers. In Hungary, the fortress of Arad held out for 270 days and that at Temesvar for 59. In Italy, the forts of the Quadrilateral provided a shelter for Radetzky's beleaguered corps of 20,000 after Milan fell and the towns of Lombardy-Venetia rose in arms around them.

The forts showed their full military value when Charles Albert of Sardinia cast his lot into the struggle, amassing forces from most of the nearby Italian states to attempt an assault on Radetzky's position. Even with the fall of Peschiera, the other three forts were able to sustain one another and eventually allow Radetzky to launch a counter-offensive decisively defeating the numerically-superior Sardinian-nationalist forces at Custoza on July 24. Only when this had been achieved did Austrian forces turn attention to Bohemia, where General Windischgrätz defeated Czech nationalists in October.

⁵²² As one Austrian diplomat was instructed by Vienna, "it is absolutely necessary for us to bring the Italian problem to a speedy end... We lack the means to wage a war in a sufficiently effective manner and even a battle won would not solve the problem." See Sked, *Radetzky*, pp. 142-43.

Revolutions in Austria and Europe, 1848-9



Source: Thinglink.

As in earlier wars, Austria's diplomats used well-timed appeasement, ranging from the granting of a new constitution to the emperor's abdication, to buy temporary reprieves and aid in military concentration. This allowed the Army to defeat uprisings one theater at a time and eventually consolidate forces against their strongest opponent, the Hungarian army under Kossuth. As in the Prussian wars, Austria was able to draw on the enthusiastic manpower pool of the Military Border, which performed its role of inward containment when Croat forces under General Jellačić sortied northward to link up with the main force.

In this culminating act of the war, as in the wars against Frederick, Austria was able to bring its most powerful asset, the alliance with Russia, into play. Invoking the solidarity of the Holy Alliance, Tsar Nicholas I sent an army of 200,000 troops into Hungary in three columns from the north, east and south. The rebellion was swiftly quelled and Hungary pacified. As in earlier

wars, the active intervention of an ally bolstered the Monarchy in its hour of greatest need. It is in this final display of the Vienna system that the ultimate success of the arrangements that Metternich had made more than three decades can be seen, in furnishing the instruments that provided Austria salvation.

Conclusion

Metternich's security system represented an attempt by a weak power to shape a postwar order in which its abilities were outclassed by other powers. It succeeded in furnishing Austria with economic recovery and security while giving it a degree of influence in European affairs out of all proportion to the Monarchy's military capabilities.

In this regard, the *Pax Austriaca* compares favorably with the exploits of other powers involved in building post-war orders. In 1815, Austria's strength in relation to its rivals was smaller, on a proportional basis, than Britain's power in relation to its allies in 1919 and 1946. Yet, unlike Britain after World War One, Austria ushered in a long peace that bought time for itself and the rest of Europe to recover without triggering a recurrence of general war. Unlike the British Empire in 1946, Austria did not quickly give way to a shrinking, subordinate status vis-à-vis its stronger partners, instead positioning itself to be decisive shaper of the post-war environment to its own benefit.

It is the central fact of Austria's steadily growing weakness throughout the first half of the 19th Century that makes its position in the Vienna system so arresting. At no point between 1815 and 1848 did the Monarchy possess the ability to manage its extensive burdens using its own military power alone. To say that it succeeded by simply being a "necessity" to the rest of Europe is insufficient. The tools that it used to bridge the gap between capabilities and commitments—rings of forts, stable buffers, co-opting rivals—all required active development by Austria's leaders. In this task, Metternich and his contemporaries were, as George Kennan once said, "gardeners and not mechanics"—tenders to an organic and, in their view, ultimately transcendent, rules-based order that they had put right, rather than adjusters to a mechanistic

balance of power that relied on exact weights and counterweights.⁵²³ None was more a gardener than Metternich himself; the soil in which he dug was one of treaty rights between sovereign states and the spade he used was the legitimacy that Austria held as an ancient empire. The Army was there to pull the occasional weed, and its forts provided the picket fences separating the cultivated rows.

The accomplishment of Metternich's diplomacy was that it gave the interstitial empire of Austria strategic choices that it would not have had possessed in an environment of naked power politics. His system kept major crises away from the Habsburg core. Metternich's diplomacy did this in a temporal sense, by preempting problems at their source before they could metastasize into Europe-wide conflagrations; buffer zones and fortifications did it in a spatial sense, by stopping threats well outside the Austrian home area. In this way, the Metternich system created the potential for a truly "radial" method of strategic management, in which Europe's central power could deal with one problem and then pivot to another with a minimum of military risk or diplomatic costs to itself. By bringing Austria's multiple frontiers into one strategic frame in which Habsburg diplomats could mediate tradeoffs in a parlor in a few afternoons, Metternich accomplished a mastery of the time problem at the heart of Austria's position that earlier Habsburg monarchs could only have dreamed of in their attempts to prop up one faltering front after another.

Metternich's legacy can best be seen by what *did not* happen in this period. Austria did not sink into renewed depression under the weight of military spending and continued war. France and Austria did not come to blows over Italy for four decades. The Monarchy did not succumb to the centrifugal forces that hit in 1848. And Prussia did not succeed in ejecting Austria from German affairs on its first attempt in 1850. Each of these events, when they finally occurred later in the century, would take on the appearance of inevitability. In this sense, Metternich's system was truly a "barricade of time"—an edifice that held back the tide of events and gave Austria room to breath, rebuild and amass influence when by the natural march of time it might

⁵²³ Quoted in Wetzel, Jervis, and Levy. Eds., pp. 5-6.

well have been eclipsed by stronger forces. As Kissinger would later write, the success of the diplomatic system Metternich helped to construct should be measured, “not by its ultimate failure, but by the length of time it staved off inevitable disaster.”⁵²⁴ Or as Metternich himself would say late in life, “the consideration may suffice that from the foundations of the political peace which has subsisted for eight-and-thirty years...its most important decrees have been able not only to defy the storms which arose in the intermediate period, but even to survive the revolutions of the year 1848.”⁵²⁵ How well these foundations would stand up to the storms ahead is the subject of the next chapter.

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⁵²⁴ Kissinger, p.174.

⁵²⁵ Metternich, p. 253.

Chapter IX.

Between Hammer and Anvil: Eclipse of the Habsburg Monarchy

“Caught between a hammer and anvil, we are unable to attack in either direction without fearing for our back.” – Austrian officer, 1860

“The time has come, not to fight the Turks and their allies, but to concentrate all our efforts against perfidious Austria and to punish her severely for her shameful ingratitude.” – Tsar Nicholas I

Summary

In the middle decades of the 19th Century the Habsburg Monarchy suffered defeats in a series of short, sharp wars that would bring an end to the Metternich system and pave the way for Austria’s demise as a Great Power. This chapter will argue that these changes occurred not primarily because of economic decay or the empire’s internal complexity but because Austria lost the tools that it had used in the past to manage the sequencing and duration of its wars. This was the result of both structural changes beyond its leaders’ control but also avoidable errors and a deviation from the principles that had formerly its past statecraft. Specifically: (1) Austria’s leaders abandoned the flexible statecraft that had allowed them to control conflict sequencing and avoid isolation; (2) Rivals adopted new technologies that denied the Monarchy’s armies the ability to use attrition and terrain to prolong conflict and outlast stronger militaries; and (3) Nationalism trumped treaty-rights as a source of territorial legitimacy, allowing hostile polities to form in the areas that had previously served as the Monarchy’s buffer zones. Deprived of its traditional strategic toolkit, Austria was forced by its strongest rival to accept cohabitation with its strongest ethnic minority and for the first time had to absorb the full costs of managing a 360-degree defensive position.

The Puzzle of Austria’s Eclipse

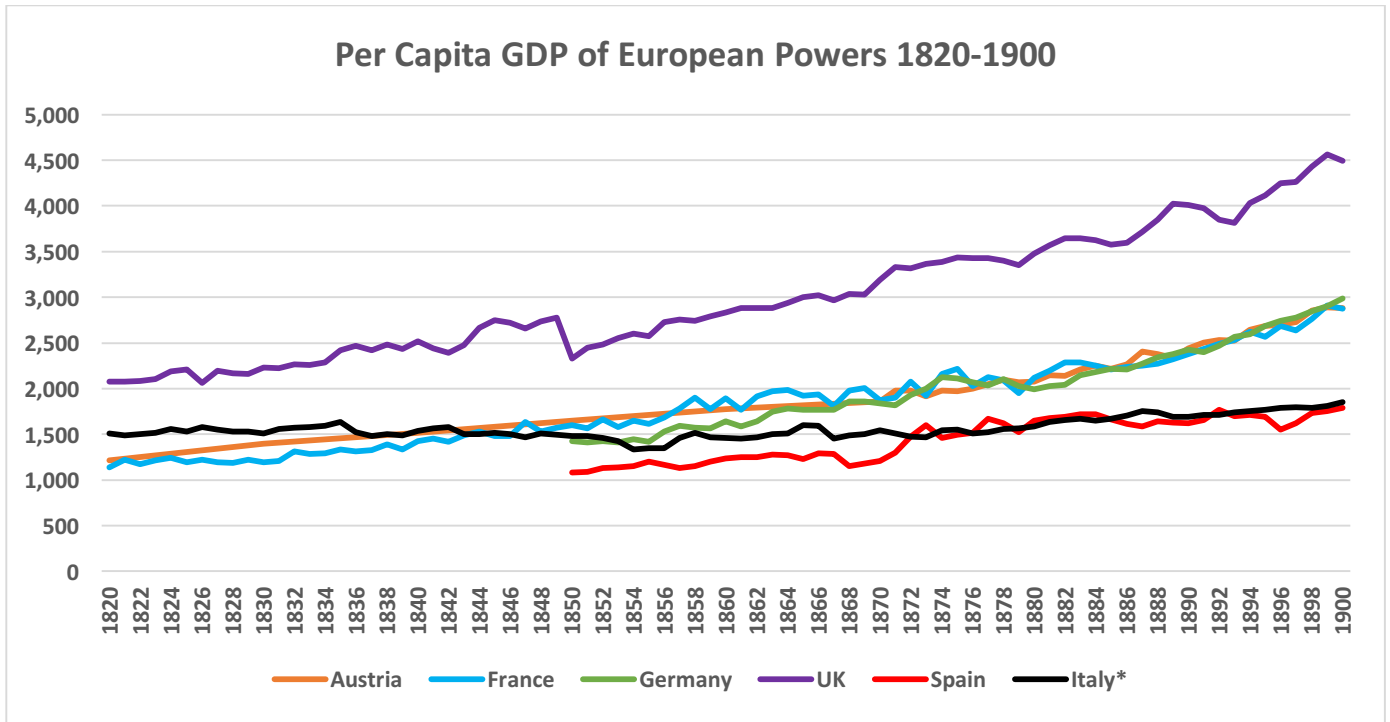
The Metternich era saw the high watermark of Habsburg influence in Europe. It endowed Austria with more alliances than it had possessed at any prior point, ensconced it in buffer

states secured by cooperative elites and client armies, and tilted the playing-board of geopolitical competition to Austria's advantage by making diplomacy rather than war the *sine qua non* of European politics. And yet, within less than fifty years the Monarchy would find itself isolated in a series of disastrous wars in which it would fight alone against more than one enemy and be gradually pushed to the sidelines of European diplomacy. By the time these wars ended, Austria not only no longer possessed the position of influence it had enjoyed under Metternich but would find its options for managing an independent foreign policy tightly constrained. Within another 50 years, and just a century after the highpoint of Habsburg power at the Congress of Vienna, Austria would fight a three-front war in which most of Europe would be aligned against it and subsequently disintegrate.

What happened? How did Austria go in such a short period from being an influential shaper of its environment to being a third-rate power whose demise would assume an aura of inevitability? Historically, the main reason that empires decline and fall is economic: uneven growth rates cause them to fall behind their peers in power capabilities.⁵²⁶ This was not entirely true for Austria; as we have seen, the Habsburg economy of the *Vormärz* period showed signs of dynamism and growth. [See figure]. While in a state of *relative* economic decline, the degree of deterioration in the Monarchy's power ranking was not terminal or even particularly precipitous; throughout the Century it remained firmly anchored in the middle of the European development gradient.⁵²⁷ Throughout this period, it would remain capable of fielding large land armies and even sustaining defense budgets that were among the highest in Europe. There is therefore no reason on the basis of economic performance alone to assume that it should have fallen from the ranks of the Great Powers—much less dissolved as a state.

526 For the classic formulation of this argument see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Kennedy, Paul M. 1987. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. xv.

527 In 1830, Austria ranked 5th in economic strength among Europe's top powers (4th if Germany is not counted as a whole) and 83 years later, on the eve of World War One, it held roughly the same position. The gap between itself and the strongest power would roughly double in this period, from about a 5.5-point spread to a 10-point spread. See Paul Bairoch, "European Gross National Product 1800-1975," in: *Journal of European Economic History*, 5, 1976. p. 282.



*Italian figures are Center-Northern Italy only, from 1820-1860. After 1861 figures include Kingdom of Italy.
Source: The Madison-Project, 2013 version.

Nor can Austria's eclipse be explained entirely by its most obvious congenital flaw as a Great Power—the presence of ethnic diversity inside the state. Undoubtedly, the Monarchy's internal complexion impeded its geopolitical performance. As we will see in this chapter, the force of nationalism, especially in the lands immediately around Austria's borders, would become a major factor in its foreign-policy predicaments. But from the vantage point of the mid-Century mark, the Monarchy seemed to have successfully weathered its severest storm. The uprisings of 1848-9 had been quelled and the dynasty re-established on a firm footing. With the exception of Italy, large-scale internal unrest was rare in the Habsburg lands in this period. Such tensions as existed did not constitute ingredients for civil war even, for the most part, in Italy.

Without doubt, both economic turmoil and ethnic tension would be ingredients in the empire's mid-Century crisis. But neither alone can entirely explain the outcomes of that crisis. Austria had faced economic problems off and on throughout its history and not succumbed to them. It

had frequently been beset by internal division. And it had lost battles and even wars. Yet it had always survived. In moments of supreme emergency—1701-14, 1741-48, 1809, 1848—it had always managed to avoid having to absorb the full burden of its predicament. This had usually boiled down to bringing some mixture of tools to bear to manipulate the timing of events so that it did not have to face its various external and internal problems simultaneously.

The first and most important of these tools was treaties. In life-or-death struggles, Austria had used preemptive diplomacy or even outright appeasement to deactivate secondary threats (whether external or internal) and formed defensive alliances, even with rivals, to defray the burden of containing its most dangerous enemy. This had allowed it to stagger contests and avoid multi-front wars.

A second tool was technology. When possible, Austria had often tried to avoid war entirely and, if that was not possible, avoid committing its loyal but often fragile army to contests it could not win. Instead, it had used force in combination with other aids—allies, client-state armies and defensive terrain. Above all it had maintained a largely defensive military outlook, seeking to hold and retain strategic ground and never gambling, even in victory. This had helped allowed Austria to conserve force and thereby exercise some influence over the length of wars, stringing out contests with stronger rivals until its deeper strengths—big armies, allied help, etc.—could be activated. After wars, Austria had usually thought ahead to the next war. It had used the post-war peace to retain the lands around its heartland as an insulating space to give it distance—and thus time—in future wars.

This combination of tools had never been an exact science, but rather a set of ad-hoc tools that evolved to meet challenges. Habsburg statesmen abided by them with only rare deviations which, when made, were often penalized by the hostile and constrained environment in which it lived. Metternich had brought these tools to their highest formal expression, creating structures that locked in certain advantages for Austria. Using them, Austria had weathered numerous potentially severe crises in the early decades of the 19th Century.

What made the crises that followed different is the conspicuous absence of these time-management methods. In the space of about a decade and a half, from the end of the 1848 revolution to Austria's defeat by Prussia in 1866, a combination of structural changes beyond the Monarchy's control and manmade errors would lead to the rapid erosion of Austria's traditional strategic toolkit. Specifically: (1) Austria's leaders abandoned the flexible statecraft that had allowed them to sequence conflicts and avoid isolation; (2) Austria's rivals adapted new technologies that denied the Monarchy's Armies the ability to use attrition and terrain to regulate the duration of Austria's wars to its advantage; and (3) Treaty-rights were supplanted by nationalism in post-war diplomacy, allowing hostile polities to form in the areas that had previously served as the Monarchy's buffer zones. Together, these changes would bring about a dramatic deterioration in Austria's geopolitical position, subjecting it to forces beyond its ability to manage and ultimately leading to its failure as an empire.

1. Abandoning Flexible Statecraft

Flexible statecraft had always been foundational to Habsburg security. Because cleverness is cheaper than arms, diplomacy provided a prime means by which a weak and encircled state could survive when its environment produced threats too powerful for it to resist militarily. Diplomacy did this for Austria in two ways. First, defensive alliances acted as power aggregators to amass more military capabilities than the state possessed on its own—in Austria's case, often involving arrangements that brought allied armies onto Habsburg soil to rescue it from existential crisis. An important sub-category of alliance for Austria was alliance of restraint, especially with its largest neighbor, Russia. As long as this held, Austria possessed a means by which to monitor and tame Russian moves but also employ Russian help in the West and—crucially—avoid military preparations on its longest and potentially most difficult frontier. A second kind of statecraft for Austria involved conflict avoidance with secondary threats. The Monarchy had frequently used preemptive appeasement to placate a rival in order to concentrate attention to a greater threat. This applied not only to external actors like the Ottomans but internal groups—most notably the Hungarians—and putative client states that had opposed Austria's agenda in neighboring regions.

Both forms of statecraft had required a high degree of flexibility on Austria's part. Because the Monarchy was surrounded by enemies it needed to be able to have a full array of options for managing each new threat as it emerged, and therefore could never afford to permanently estrange even its bitterest rival from a previous war. The willingness to appease also required flexibility, since it often meant the deliberate de-prioritization of an important issue with one threat in order to focus fully on another threat deemed more crucial at that moment. With internal groups or client states, this often required a degree of humility on the part of Habsburg dynasts to consciously forego prerogatives to which they were entitled or that would prevent the empire from mobilizing its full capabilities. Joseph I's handling of the Hungarians at Szatmar is one such example; Maria Theresa's leniency toward the Bavarians at Füssen and eschewal of increased demands on the Hungarians in the 1750s War are two others.

Showing flexibility in both forms of statecraft had allowed Austria, more often than not, to concentrate resources and attention against the greatest challenge it faced at a given moment. Metternich's system represented the apogee of Austrian flexibility. It created standing arrangements that aligned the resources of Europe behind Austria in opposition to nationalism and hegemonic war. It also brought the big powers into coordinating formats that disproportionately played to Austria's strengths. This system of commitments and restraints helped to ensure that the Monarchy would never find itself fully isolated in a time of crisis and would retain the maximum number of options for resolving the abundant problems of the spaces around its borders with diplomacy, which favored Austria, rather than military power, which did not.

As we have seen, Metternich's system successfully managed not only the challenges of the immediate post-1815 period but allowed Austria to pass the supreme test of the 1848 revolutions. It held together because other major powers perceived a greater gain to themselves through coordination than they did through independent action—as long, in other words, as they feared the consequences of going it alone (renewed war, exclusion, isolation and defeat) more than they feared the loss of marginal gains through mediated outcomes.

This calculus eventually fell apart. Like all human political orders, its demise was inevitable eventually, as memories of the horrors of war receded and a new generation of leaders emerged that saw prospects for gain in their environment. France and Prussia in particular perceived advantages from a European territorial reorganization and came to see Austria as an obstacle to their goals. Throughout the 1820s and 30s, their resentment was kept in check by fear of revolution—a fear that Austria was adept at stoking—and, most importantly, by Russia, whose support for Austria provided the ultimate deterrent to revisionism in Metternich's Europe. However, in the space of a few years after the 1848 revolutions, these restraints would disappear. Two specific flaws in the fabric of the Metternichian system—one involving Italy and the other the Balkans—made this happen when it did. Both had structural roots but were exacerbated by Austrian inflexibility.

The Italian Storm Center

The first Achilles Heel of Austria's post-1815 security architecture was the over-extension of its power in Italy. For centuries, Habsburg primacy in the Italian peninsula had been largely decentralized in form, relying on local elites to help shoulder the burdens of local administration in exchange for protection. This was in keeping with the logic of Habsburg buffer-management. On that logic, the Monarchy had led in Germany by moral authority rather than military dominance, had eschewed opportunities for direct rule in the Danubian Principalities, and treated Italy as a fractured glacis that mixed formal possessions and semi-detached clients over wholesale incorporation into the Monarchy. Managing buffers this way, especially in the west, had enabled Austria to derive many of the benefits of primacy—patronage, revenues and above all voluntary local resistance to outside encroachment—while bearing only a portion of the costs of empire.

Under the 1815 settlement, this pattern changed—at least in Italy. The territories of Lombardy and Venetia were incorporated not as client-states but as outright possessions to be ruled and administered directly from Vienna. Early on, Metternich had seen the dangers of doing this. In

1815 he wrote a memorandum to Emperor Francis arguing for indirect rule in Italy—and indeed much of the rest of the empire. “These lands must be governed here [in Italy],” he wrote, “and the government here must then let themselves be represented in Vienna.”⁵²⁸ Under Metternich’s formula, rule would be delegated to a local Viceroy and Italian interests represented in Vienna by a semi-autonomous Chancery and Court of Justice alongside similar structures established for other parts of the empire in a reorganized, federalized Habsburg state.

Initially Metternich seemed to have his way; in 1817, a Lombardi-Venetian Chancery was created and placed under a Milanese Conte. But this proved to be a façade. Instead, Italy was treated like an occupied territory. A large garrison was established and administration conducted directly from Vienna.⁵²⁹ Under Austrian rule the economy thrived as industrialization brought textiles, factories and jobs. Vienna introduced public works and infrastructure development. Habsburg Italians were economically better off than in neighboring Italian states, and by the 1850s, they were contributing a quarter of Habsburg tax revenues.⁵³⁰

But direct rule in Italy sowed the seeds for local and eventually international crisis. Treating these lands as normal administrative units of the Monarchy committed Austria to defense of territories in which foreign oversight was virtually guaranteed to stoke resentment while removing the options by which Austria had traditionally avoided overstretch. With the Austrian presence came costs of administration and supporting garrisons (numbering 70,000 by mid-Century), which in turn brought local taxes—and local animosities. Where previous generations of Italians had tended to “hate France and fear the emperor” this formula was gradually reversed. Local populations and even normally-supportive native princes came to view Austria as the occupier and France as a source sympathy and support.

⁵²⁸ Metternich to Emperor Francis, 29 December 1815, quoted in Palmer, p. 157.

⁵²⁹ Heinrich Benedikt, *Kaiseradler über dem Apenin: Die Österreicher in Italien 1700-1866*, (Wien: Verlag Herold, 1964) p. 113.

⁵³⁰ Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War*, p. 47.

As so often happens in history, seeds of crisis that had long been building were given fresh impetus by the arrival of new leaders. In 1831, the conservative king of Sardinia-Piedmont died and was succeeded by Carlo Alberto, a young king with liberal tendencies who yearned to become the champion of the burgeoning Italian nationalist movement. When revolution struck in Lombardy in 1848, Carlo Alberto cast in his lot with the nationalists, providing armed support to the uprisings and encouraging other Italian princes to do the same.⁵³¹ That same year, France elected as its president Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. Nephew of the Emperor Napoleon, Bonaparte was, like Carlo Alberto, driven by messianic ambitions, albeit on a far grander scale, who dreamed of restoring France to imperial greatness. Unlike his immediate predecessors, he saw Metternich's system as an impediment to be discarded. In Italy's and resistance to Austria's centralized rule, he saw ready means for not only challenging this system but conveying France with a moral cause as the renewed patron of European nationalism.

As the 1840s ended, the scene was therefore set for a sustained, Great Power-backed challenge to Austrian rule in Italy. From this point on, Italy would require an ever-larger share of Habsburg attention while creating a standing source of crisis virtually guaranteeing that a conflict facing Austria in any other theater would, unless effectively managed, quickly spread into a second front.

The Eastern Exception

Revisionist ambitions of the sort harbored by Louis-Napoleon and Carlo Alberto were manageable for Austria as long as Russia remained a committed status quo power willing to uphold the Monarchy's interests by force. At the same time that crisis was building in Italy, however, events on Austria's eastern frontier were threatening to remove this critical pillar of support to Habsburg security. The underlying problem, and the second major flaw of the Metternich system was the virtual exclusion of affairs in the East from the post-1815 congress framework.

⁵³¹ Antonio Gallenga, *Storia Del Piemonte Dai Primi Tempi Alla pace Di Parigi*. Vol. 2 (Turin: Eredi Botta, 1856).

As a non-participant in the Napoleonic conflict, Turkey was not party to the Vienna peace settlement. This was problematic, since Austria maintained pressing security interests in the Balkans—in particular, as we have seen in a previous chapter, the need to maintain the existence of the Ottoman Empire as a check to Russian expansion. By the early 19th Century this was becoming a more difficult task, as Turkish economic and political decay accelerated. Since 1812 Russia possessed the territory of Bessarabia and thus a direct window onto the territories of Wallachia and Moldavia. Since Vienna viewed the continued functioning of these territories as a buffer zone to be a prerequisite to regional stability, the growth of Russian presence on the eastern frontier increased the potential for conflict between it and Austria.

The problem for Austria was the connection of events in its eastern and western buffers. To manage the latter, Austria needed Russian support. This was especially true in Italy, where Russian military backing was required to keep a revisionist-minded France at bay, but also to in Germany, where Russia acted as a restraint on Prussia. This was not a new dynamic for Austria; at least since the 1730s it had always had to balance competing aims in east and west. What was new was the scale of strategic commitments that Austria assumed after 1815, and in particular the demands created by its attempt to exert centralized rule in Italy. If the Italian lands were going to be part of the Monarchy itself, then Austria was as committed to defending its interests there as it would be in Bohemia or Hungary. This tied Austria to something in the west which was immovable, and over which it could afford little flexibility. That, in turn, made Russian goodwill more essential, thus mandating flexibility in the east.

Metternich's formula for dealing with this dynamic had been similar to that used by Kaunitz and earlier Habsburg statesmen: to avoid challenging Russia outright in the east and, should a crisis emerge, to mollify its appetites without appearing to permanently take sides.⁵³² If this proved impossible, Austrian diplomacy had traditionally erred on the side of retaining Russia as an ally. The reason was that, when it came down to it, Russia could provide more as an ally

⁵³² Schroeder, *Transformation*, p. 661.

than the Western powers on the things most affected Austria's primary interests. Conversely, it could also potentially do more to harm Austria's interests if ever it were alienated—not just in the Danube Principalities but across the breadth of Central Europe. Moreover, while the Principalities themselves were important to Austria as a buffer, there was less at stake in Moldova and Wallachia in hard economic or geostrategic terms than in Germany or Italy, both of which touched on the Monarchy's highest revenue-generating territories and involved rivals who had, within recent memory, invaded and almost destroyed Austria. Russia, by contrast, had never invaded the Monarchy.

For some time, Austria did not have to choose sides: it could continue to manage Italy and Germany with Russian backing without having to confront Russia over the Balkans. At Laibach in 1821, Metternich's methods sufficed to corral the Tsar into suppressing an uprising in the Principalities organized by Russian officers while simultaneously winning his support for Austrian military activities in Italy. A similar formula worked in 1829, and four years later, at Münchengrätz, Metternich was able to partly plaster over the hole in the congress edifice by engineering a reaffirmation of the understanding between Austria, Russia and Prussia—the so-called Holy Alliance—that committed the three powers to joint policing of their neighborhood and guaranteeing the integrity of Turkey. In the decade that followed, Austria and Russia coordinated essentially co-manage portions of Poland, deploying joint military actions to quell nationalist insurrections.

Austria Chooses: the Crimea Crisis

As long as Metternich's approach held, Austria was able to balance its commitments in east and west. In 1854, however, a new crisis emerged that would bring an end to this success. Part of the reason that Austria had not faced a choice before now was the nature of Russian aims in the east. Until the early decades of the 19th Century, the center of gravity for Russian strategy on its western frontier was in the Baltic, where abundant forests provided the Tsarist

empire's main exports: timber, pitch and birch tar for the world's navies.⁵³³ As these fleets switched to steam power, Russia's export focus moved southward to the wheat-fields of the Ukraine. This in turn brought greater strategic attention to the nearest body of water that could serve as a highway for these exports: the Black Sea. With this came a change in the nature of Russian objectives vis-à-vis Turkey. In the past, these had primarily involved the acquisition of territory for frontier expansion. But as Turkey's decline accelerated, Russia wanted something different—political influence over the core of the Ottoman Empire itself and, specifically, control over the narrow passageways it dominated between the Black Sea and Mediterranean, where Russian ships would need to pass on the way to outside markets.

Already, a series of crises over this issue had occurred from the mid-1820s to mid-1840s in which Austria narrowly avoided being forced to choose sides. Each time, internal power struggles between the Sultan and rivals had created openings for Russian military expansion. And each time, the same pattern emerged: Metternich sought to organize a congress, Russia sought Austrian backing, and the maritime powers sought to cleave the two eastern powers apart. Each time, war was avoided not by Metternich's grouping coalitions but by the willingness of Russia and Britain, as the strongest players, to simply ignore the other powers and strike a deal over Austria's head.

In 1853, it appeared that this pattern would repeat itself. The immediate causes were trivial, involving the question of which Great Power—Russia or France—should act as the 'protector' of Christians in the Ottoman-controlled Holy Land. The deeper issue was, as before, the question of how the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire should be managed. As the dispute deteriorated into war, it brought the east-west dilemma in Habsburg diplomacy to the fore. As in the past, both the maritime powers and Russia courted Habsburg backing for their positions. Invoking the Holy Alliance, the Tsar requested the armed neutrality of Austria. France and Britain also courted Habsburg support in the hopes of splintering the Holy Alliance and opening a second front in the war at Austria's expense.

⁵³³ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 12.

None of the options facing Austria in the crisis were particularly good. If it did nothing, Vienna risked appearing irrelevant to the new power dynamic and being sidelined in a post-war settlement that was likely to involve longstanding Habsburg interests on the lower Danube. If it sided with the western powers, Austria risked alienating its chief ally and becoming the main battlefield in a conflict in which its eastern territories would bear the brunt of attacks from the large Russian land army. If it sided with Russia, it risked inviting a French attack against its western flank in Italy—a place that, with the build-up of Austrian tensions with Sardinia, seemed ready to boil over at any moment.

Initially, Count Buol, who had recently replaced an ailing Metternich as foreign minister, stuck with his predecessor's template and tried to broker a compromise. But when this failed, he chose to side with the western powers. In taking this course, Buol hoped to deliver a more definitive rebuff to Russia's ambitions in the east than had been possible in previous crises. If, by siding with the west, Austria could exclude Russia from the Danubian Principalities and form its own military presence there, it would come out of the conflict with something of lasting value. But above all, taking this course seemed the best way to safeguard Italy. As a guarantee, Buol brokered a treaty with France to maintain the *status quo* in the peninsula and another with Prussia to guard the Monarchy's back in Germany.

Austria's western frontiers thus secured, issued an ultimatum demanding Russian evacuation of the Principalities on threat of war and, to give the threat substance, undertook a massive buildup of military force on the empire's eastern territories.⁵³⁴ Doing so required full mobilization and a shift of the bulk of the Habsburg Army from garrisons in the west and north to Galicia and Transylvania.⁵³⁵ Altogether, eleven of the Army's corps—327,000 men—were sent to the east and only three left to guard Italy.⁵³⁶ The Army command was tasked with

⁵³⁴ Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War?: A Cautionary Tale* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985), p. 120.

⁵³⁵ Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, p. 50.

⁵³⁶ Heinrich Friedjung, *Der Krimkrieg und die Österreichische Politik*, (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1907), p. 98.

drawing up plans for an offensive war against Russia centered on the Bug River.⁵³⁷ In the ensuing conflict, Austria's forces did not fight. But the scale of its deployments on the eastern frontier forced Russia to split its forces and thus lack sufficient numbers to counter the Anglo-French operations in the Black Sea littoral. Buol's policy, in other words, sealed Russia's fate in the conflict.

Austria's military had opposed this policy. All of the senior generals except Archduke Albrecht argued that Austria's best strategic option, if forced to choose, was to side with Russia, on the grounds that the Army was better prepared to meet a French attack on Italy, where it possessed the Quadrilateral fortresses, than to meet a Russian attack in Galicia, where it was defenseless.⁵³⁸ Radetzky himself warned the emperor that losing Russia as an ally was a mistake, as it would expose Italy, the Monarchy's most valuable and vulnerable possession and his life's work ("*lebensaufgabe*") to attack by France.⁵³⁹

Buol's handling of the crisis represented a major break from Austria's past eastern strategy. The immediate issue at stake—the Principalities—was somewhat moot, since these territories had been occupied intermittently by Russia, with Austrian consent, since 1829. Russia was also willing to compromise over their future status. Franz Joseph's stipulation early in the crisis that he would back down "only if the tsar gives us a formal guarantee of the maintenance of the Turkish empire and promises to put the frontier peoples back in the position where they actually are under Turkish suzerainty" was not surprising to the Russians.⁵⁴⁰ The Tsar had repeatedly offered concessions on this issue, but Austria was intent on issuing an ultimatum.⁵⁴¹ The abrupt nature of this behavior, with Buol swinging wildly in a few months from discussions of neutrality to threats of war, was new.⁵⁴² Coming from a Monarchy who had always embodied predictability, and with whom the Russians had been in more or less

⁵³⁷ Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, p. 51.

⁵³⁸ Friedjung, p. 77.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, p. 59.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵⁴² Ibid., p. 64.

continuous contact on the Turkish problem for more than a century, came as a shock to Russia.

Buol understood himself to be acting in the tradition of Metternich, who had occasionally aligned with the western powers to tame Russian ambitions.⁵⁴³ But Metternich had never used the means employed by Buol, combining a war ultimatum and movements of the better part of the Habsburg Army to back up the threat. From the time of Kaunitz, Austrian statesmen had avoided moves that could permanently estrange Russia. When the chips were down, they had usually shown willingness to compromise on interests in the Black Sea, mainly because they knew that giving ground there would give the Monarchy something far more valuable: Russian support against serious predators in the west—France but especially Prussia. Key to this was not appearing to take sides. Metternich had written to Buol warning of this very danger—that the Monarchy must never be seen “either as the advance guard of the East against the West, or of the West against the East.”⁵⁴⁴ Buol abandoned this longstanding principle of Austrian strategy. By showing inflexibility on the immediate issues at hand, he would ultimately deprive Austria of the flexibility upon which the maintenance of its entire position depended.

Austria’s handling of the Crimean crisis would have far-reaching negative consequences for the Monarchy. Over the short-term, it failed to yield the benefits to which Buol had aspired. Austrian occupation of the Principalities proved no more sustainable than it had in the time of Eugene, paving the way for the creation of a new state—Rumania—that represented a far worse outcome for Austria than the *status quo ante bellum*. Longer term, the war created two significant new problems. First it required the permanent fortification of the eastern frontier. Since the 18th Century, Austria had been able to almost entirely neglect the defense of its longest border, stretching from the Vistula to the mouth of the Danube. This had amounted to a *de facto* Russian subsidization of Austrian security on other frontiers, allowing the Monarchy to

⁵⁴³ Wetzel, et al., p.10: and Paul, Schroeder, “Bruck Versus Buol: The Dispute Over Austrian Eastern Policy, 1853-55” in Wetzel, et al., pp. 59-75.

⁵⁴⁴ Palmer, pp. 334-335.

concentrate limited defense resources on Italy and Germany. Now, the east would need to be defended on a standing basis. This meant forts, garrison, supply infrastructure—the whole, expensive apparatus of round-the-clock frontier preparedness.

Second, while adding a significant new defense burden, the fallout from the war deprived Austria of active Russian support going forward. Since the mid-1700s, the pursuit of an alliance of some kind with Russia had been a constant in Austrian diplomacy. By the mid-19th Century, this alliance had become the keystone in the arch of Habsburg security, providing substantive backing against the forces of nationalism and political revisionism that constituted the main threats to Austria. As long as this alliance had held, even the worst blows to the edifice of Austrian security could be avoided or endured. Once it was gone, Austria faced the danger of diplomatic isolation. No other power could provide for Austria what Russia had provided in helping it maintain stable buffers; indeed, with the exception of Britain, the others stood to benefit in one way or another from tearing them down.

2. Technology Trumps Defensive Terrain

By undermining the Metternich treaty-system, the Crimean war significantly eroded the foremost tool—alliances—by which the Monarchy had traditionally influenced the time factor of its geopolitical competitions. From this point forward, Austria faced rivals on every side with little to protect it from a simultaneous, multi-front crisis. The chief beneficiaries of this change were the powers that possessed the greatest ambitions for revising the European order. The most powerful and motivated of these was Prussia.

Since the time of Frederick II, Prussia had aspired to be the predominant power of in Germany. Austro-Prussian competition had been temporarily suspended during the wars with Napoleon, but gradually re-intensified again in the *Vormärz* period as Prussian growth accelerated and fissures began to appear in the Metternichian system. However, like France, Prussia's ambitions throughout the *Vormärz* were kept in check by fear of revolution, and Russian military support for Austria. The first of these restraints had already begun to break down by

the time of the 1848 revolutions, which demonstrated both the fragility of Austrian power and the latent demographic and economic potential of Germany. By harnessing these forces to its own strategic interests, Prussia's political and military leaders saw an opportunity to catapult Prussia into the status of Central Europe's—and indeed Europe's—most powerful player.

The collapse of the Austro-Russian alliance over Crimea therefore presented an opportunity for Prussia to act on this goal. Nevertheless, it still faced a challenge. Physically, it was significantly smaller than the Habsburg Monarchy, with a fraction of the population, surface area and army. As previous standoffs had shown, Austria was capable of deploying a large army to the north while also mobilizing the client armies of its *Bund* allies, which in the 1850 crisis had produced a force of 130,000 to Prussia's 50,000.⁵⁴⁵ To effectively challenge Austria, Prussia would need to find a way to offset its rival's size and gaining strategic advantages for itself. An answer presented itself in the emerging technologies of the industrial revolution.

Disruptive Technologies

In the early decades of the 19th Century, a burst of technical breakthroughs occurred that held would revolutionary for any state capable of harnessing their military potential. Three in particular would give Prussia a competitive edge in its coming clash with Austria—one that made its armies more lethal, another that made them move faster and a third that made them easier to control.

The first came in the realm of ballistics. As is often the case after long wars, innovators applied the lessons of the recent conflict to the quest for more efficient ways to kill. The foundation for this small-arms revolution was laid in the late 1840s with the advent of the first modern bullet—"Minié ball"—a conical lead projectile that expanded after leaving the barrel of a rifle. By easing the process of forcing bullets down a rifled barrel, the Minie allowed rifles to be issued to entire

⁵⁴⁵ Bérenger, p. 194.

armies rather than just a few elite units. At the same time, it vastly improved the effective range of infantry on the battlefield, from about 75 yards to between 300 yards and 1,000 yards.

Equipped with mass-produced rifled weapons, soldiers could shoot further, with greater precision and penetration. Soon they could shoot faster as well. In 1841 the Prussian Army adopted the world's first mass-issue breech-loading rifle. Developed by a Prussian inventor named Johann Nikolaus von Dreyse it was called the *Zündnadelgewehr*, or "needle-gun," after the pronounced firing pin (or needle) that was used to penetrate a percussion cap at the bottom of a self-contained paper cartridge, which was inserted into an open chamber near the trigger (the "breech") instead of with a ramrod down the barrel. The *Dreyse* allowed infantry to achieve unprecedented rates of fire—10-12 shots per minute compared to 3-4 for a muzzle-loader—while firing from prone positions that freed them from the vulnerable standing and kneeling formations needed to operate muzzle-loaders.

Advances in the speed of communication and travel followed. After the invention of the steam engine in Britain in the early 1800s, rail networks sprouted across the continent. By the 1850s, trunk lines had appeared between major cities and the industrial hinterlands of Europe. These lines substantially cut travel time, propelling armies 4-6 times faster than they could achieve by road. At the same time, the development of the electric telegraph allowed for instantaneous communication across large swaths of Europe; by the early 1850s most major powers had developed national telegraph systems.

More than most European powers, Prussia would seek to develop these new technologies and harness them to its strategic interests. It embraced the breech-loading rifle a quarter-century before its major rivals, promoted the introduction of the world's first steel guns, and devote a large share of the national budget to the development of a rail grid that would become one of the densest in Europe, with five lines to the eastern frontier and six to the western frontier by the late 1860s.

In this effort it was aided by several factors. An important one, noted above, was willpower: Prussia's leaders wanted to change Germany and were looking for the means to do so. To this can be added opportunity: unlike Austria or Prussia's other *Bund* neighbors, it possessed the political attributes of a large homogenous German state to organize the economies and national aspirations of the smaller polities around it. Prussia also had the means—a large and compact industrial area in the Ruhr, manned by an educated and urban workforce, with which to support the indigenous military plant. The state cultivated its potential, using protectionism and investments to spur growth. It encouraged native inventors, backing promising projects and gave medals to those who succeeded.

But perhaps the biggest reason for Prussia's success in adapting new technologies lay in the fact that in the Prussian Army and its relation to the state. Unlike its rivals, Prussia had the advantage of a military elite committed to studying the question of how technology—and for that matter, practically any other potential advantage—could be exploited to win future wars. No one embodied this mindset more than Helmuth von Moltke. Chief of the General Staff of the Prussian Army from 1857 to 1888, Moltke was the embodiment of a military intellectual: shy but strict, brainy but conservative and devoted to his king and state. Like Radetzky, he was inspired by history, translating Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* as a young man.⁵⁴⁶ But unlike Radetzky, Moltke was a dedicated theorizer of war who devoted his energies to studying human conflict as an enterprise subject to mastery by a state willing to apply itself to the task.

In developing the capacities of the Prussian Army, Moltke had the advantage of drawing upon a coherent, homegrown framework that lent itself to the use of modern technology. He was a disciple of Carl von Clausewitz, a Prussian general and military writer who had served in the 1806 and 1813-14 campaigns. In his military treatise *Vom Kriege* ("On War") written in 1831, Clausewitz embraced and expanded upon the essentially political aims that Napoleon had

⁵⁴⁶ Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006), p. 123.

brought to warfare, advocating “maximum use of force” to secure the state and advance its political interests. “War,” he wrote, is:

...is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will... Force—that is, physical force, for moral force has no existence save as expressed in the state and the law—is thus the means of war; to impose our will on the enemy is its object. To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless; that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare... If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand... This is how the matter must be seen.”⁵⁴⁷

To achieve the means for compelling the enemy to do one’s will, Clausewitz advocated that the state “equip itself with the inventions of art and science,” viewing all elements of social and economic policy through the lens of its future needs in war.

As Chief of the General Staff, Moltke pushed to modernize the military and developed a new concept of war, centered on Clausewitz, at the heart which was the proposition that technology could enable Prussia to gain mastery of time in a conflict. In the opening phases of a war, Moltke advocated the aggressive employment of Prussia’s railways, using timetables developed by a special railway section of the General Staff, to achieve a rapid mobilization, deployment (*Aufmarsch*) and concentration against an enemy.

Once in motion, he envisioned large-scale offensives in which Prussia’s armies would move on multiple, converging paths toward a single theater of battle, using the railway and telegraph to avoid becoming entangled through stacking units on muddy roads as had so often occurred in the Napoleonic era. After arriving at the scene, Prussian troops would use their concentric angles of attack to create a “kessel,” or cauldron in which the still-concentrating enemy was encircled and annihilated using superior small-arms technology and tactics, thus avoiding a prolonged war of the kind that would bring logistical constraints and other disadvantages to bear against Prussia.

⁵⁴⁷ Clausewitz, pp. 75-6.

Austrian Military Expansion and Stasis

Habsburg statesmen and generals were aware of the Prussian threat. Tensions had brewed intermittently since the Vormarz period. As early as 1828, Radetzky warned that Prussia had not “renounced enlargement in Germany.” In 1850, the two states almost came to blows.⁵⁴⁸ The traditional Habsburg method for dealing with Prussia had been to use alliances, especially with Russia, to force it to divide its forces and either avoid war altogether or ensure that the conflict was fought on Austria’s terms. This was how Austria dealt with Frederick II in the second Prussian war, how Radetzky advised containing her throughout his lifetime, and ultimately what had deterred Prussia from launching an offensive war in 1850.

With the demise of the Austro-Russian alliance, the Monarchy had lost its main means for pursuing such a strategy. This left two others tools of past Austrian strategy: terrain (the empire’s natural topographical advantages) and technology (the Habsburg Army and such client-state forces as it could muster). Both, traditionally, had been means of preventing the full burden of survival from falling on the backs of the Army. The fragility of this instrument—its polyglot makeup, tactical limitations and the typically constrained Austrian military budget—had usually prevented Habsburg rulers from staking too much on its abilities alone. For this reason, as we have seen, the Army had often a secondary role in Austrian security strategies. While cultivating it and its cosmopolitan officer corps as a bastion of loyal support for the dynasty, Austrian monarchs had usually seen it as a last line of defense rather than a policy tool of first choice.

If it did come to war, the Army typically rarely attempted the insuperable task of achieving dominance on multiple frontiers, seeking instead to avoid defeat until other favorable factors could come into play. Against a militarily stronger foe, it usually had not tried to compete toe-to-toe but instead used defensive terrain to slow down the contest until the Monarchy’s latent resources could be brought into play. This often resulted in a long conflicts in which a series of

⁵⁴⁸ Radetzky, “Militärische Betrachtung der Lage Österreichs,” 1828, in *Denkschriften*, p. 432.

wars was interspersed with periods of recuperation. The ability to draw out contests in this way had allowed Austria to absorb defeats—sometimes even catastrophic ones—until its own armies had been able to catch up in areas in which the Monarchy may have fallen behind prior to the war. This ability to modulate the length of wars provided resiliency for the Habsburg Monarchy as a Great Power. While the results of such protracted contests could be ruinous for the economy in the short term, the long-term prize had been survival.

Moltke's new warfare methods posed a challenge to this traditional Austrian template for managing time in conflict. In the event of a war, Prussia was likely to be able to mobilize larger forces, more quickly, than either Frederick or Napoleon, and achieve a degree of lethality that would make it difficult to apply techniques of attrition and delay. In the event, Austria would make itself more susceptible to defeat by its own actions, in three ways: by failing to keep pace with technological change; by embracing offensive military doctrines not matched to Austria's needs or infrastructure; and by neglecting the empire's natural defensive advantages.

Failure to Modernize

Paradoxically, Austria would fall behind in military capabilities at a moment when its Army was larger and better-funded than at any prior point in history. The expansion of the Army occurred from the 1850s onward as a result of the 1848 revolution. The scale of the uprisings, involving not only Italy and Hungary but areas of the Monarchy's heartland normally considered reliable, came as a shock to the Habsburg elite. The Army's role in suppressing the revolt had underscored its indispensability to the dynasty at the same time that its relatively feeble capabilities highlighted the deleterious effects of decades of low defense spending under the Metternich system.

The Habsburg dynasty responded to the revolution with a fundamental reappraisal of the methods for its self-preservation. Emperor Ferdinand I, a harmless epileptic, abdicated in favor of his nephew, the 18-year-old Franz Joseph I. Later in life, Franz Joseph would become

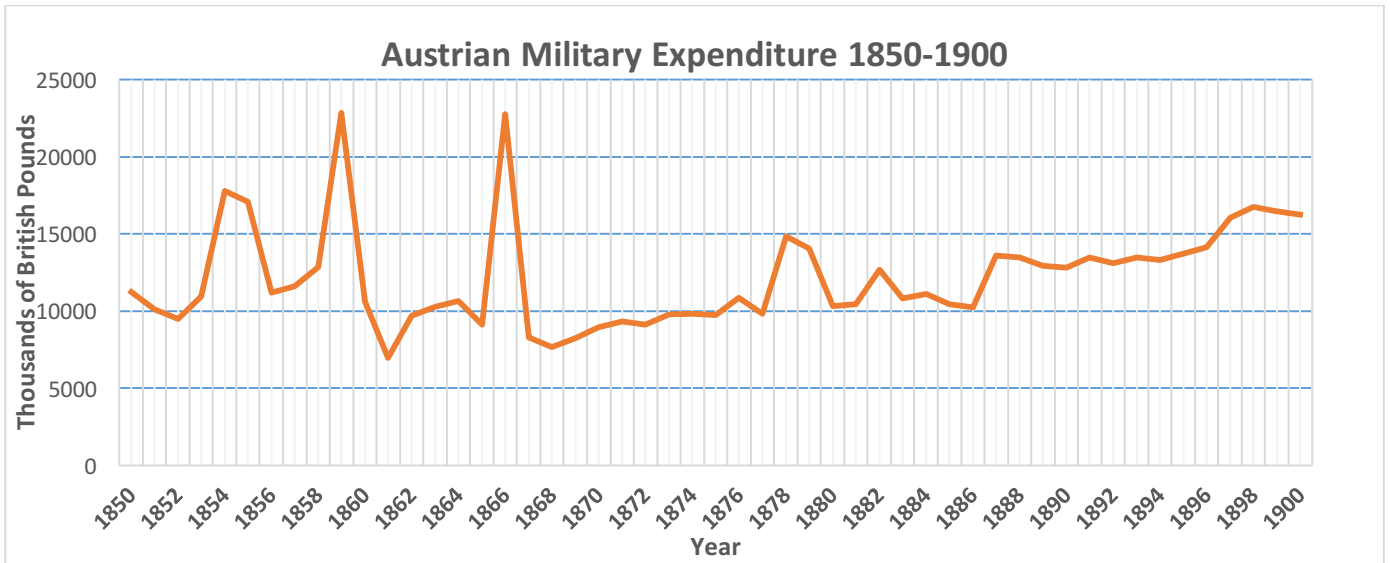
eponymous with the traits of weary devotion, bureaucratic tedium and resignation to fate that characterized the late phases of the Monarchy. But in his youth, he represented a season of renewal for the empire. Handsome and athletic, he possessed a combination of military interests, social charm and good looks rare in a Habsburg ruler. Beneath this exterior, however lay a rigid ruler motivated by deep sense insecurities about the future of his family. As emperor, Franz Joseph's highest aspiration would be to place the dynasty—and with it, Austria's prospects as a Great Power—on a more secure footing. Distrustful of decentralization, he sought a more stable domestic political order, supported by military autocracy and centralism of the kind that had occasionally tempted earlier Habsburg monarchs but had never been obtainable. In the years after 1848, he steered Austria onto a neo-absolutist path, forming a reactionary government under Schwarzenberg that revoked earlier constitutional concessions, suspended parliament and eliminated the Council of Ministers to place himself in direct control of domestic and military affairs.

An integral component of Franz Joseph's vision for the empire was military expansion. After decades of low spending, Habsburg defense budgets increased dramatically, from an annual outlay of about 50 million florins in the *Vormärz* to more than 200 million in 1855. [See figure.]⁵⁴⁹ Altogether between 1850 and 1861, Austria would spend two billion florins on the Army.⁵⁵⁰ By the early 1860s, its military spending was twice that of Prussia, on par with that of France and only slightly lower than Russia.⁵⁵¹ [See figure.] Historically one of the lowest defense spenders in Europe, Austria was now, in both total amounts and on a proportional basis according to state revenue, one of the highest.

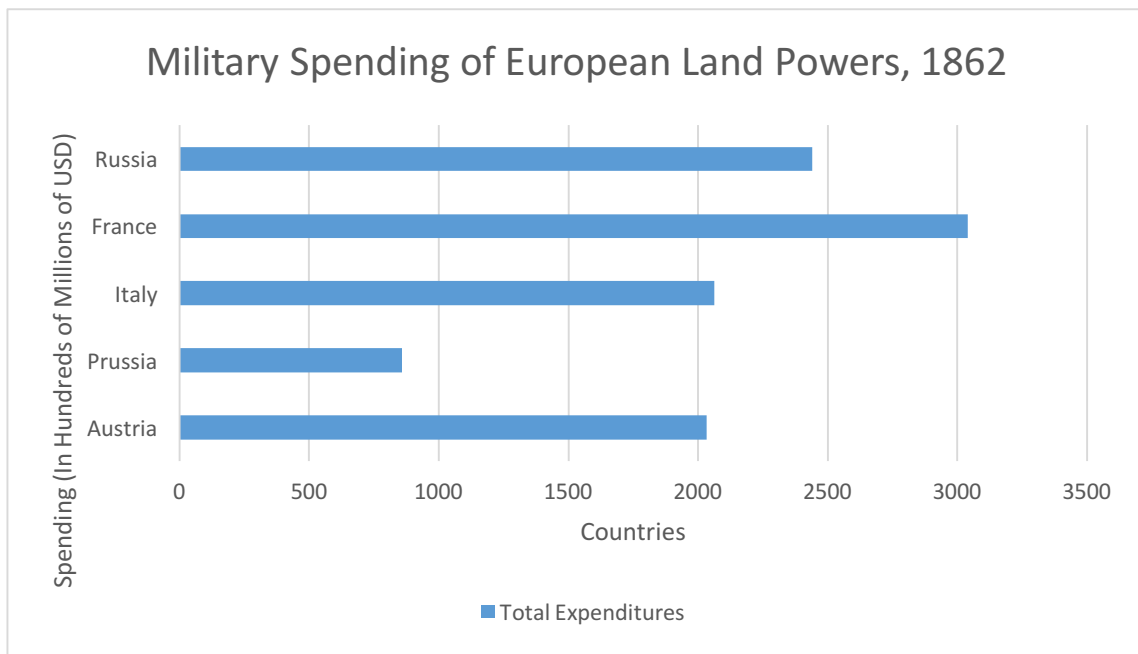
⁵⁴⁹ Pammer, p. 41.

⁵⁵⁰ *Stenographische Protokolle des Hauses der Abgeordneten des Reichsrathes*, 61. Sitzung der 2. Session am 11. December 1863, p. 1396; and Pammer, p. 142.

⁵⁵¹ Geoffrey Wawro, "Inside the Whale: The Tangled Finances of the Austrian Army, 1848-1866," *War in History* Vol. 3, Issue 1, (February 1996): 42-65, p.45.



Source: C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire*.



Source: Wawro, "Inside the Whale."

With this growth came an increased role for the military in the state. Franz Joseph assumed personal command of the Army—something not attempted by any prior ruler except for Joseph II. He gutted the Quartermaster-General Staff, abolished the War Ministry, expanded the imperial military chancery into a new *Militarzentrankanzlei* and created a supreme military

command with himself at its apex.⁵⁵² In place of Austria's long custom of a military dominated by civilians, he accumulated oversight in matters large and small to himself and a small circle of Army advisors. A starker contrast with Metternich's system could hardly be imagined; within the space of a few years, the Habsburg Monarchy went from having the most diplomatically-intensive security system in Europe to one of its most militarily-intensive.

Expansion in the size, however, did not mean that the Army was increasing in fighting capabilities relative to rivals. Even as Franz Joseph laid the foundations for a larger military machine, the Army failed to keep pace with the military-technological revolution underway in other parts of Europe. Despite the devastating effects that new forms of warfare were beginning to show in places like Crimea, the Army was slow to upgrade its weapons platforms. A committee to examine lessons from the 1854 war rejected breech-loading artillery on the grounds that muzzle-loading cannon were "superior to breech-loaders in simplicity of construction and compare favorably in their efficiency for active service."⁵⁵³ A similar commission rejected the *Dreyse* due to concerns that its rapid rate of fire would lead troops to waste ammunition in combat. Instead, Austria retained the muzzle-loader, adopting the *Infanteriegewehr M 1854*, or "Lorenz" rifle—a percussion-cap rifle that, while accurate at long ranges, fired at about a fifth the speed of a needle-gun.⁵⁵⁴

There were some structural reasons for retaining what were, by this point, increasingly outdated technology, but none were serious enough to explain why Austria fell behind. Financially, its increased budgets provided more than sufficient funds to purchase new weapons. Nor did the Monarchy lack the native know-how to produce such technologies on its own had it chosen to do so. Technical innovations flowed from Austria's proliferating polytechnical institutes throughout the *Vormärz* period, providing a vibrant link between

⁵⁵² Quoted in Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, p. 39.

⁵⁵³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁵⁵⁴ Gabriel, p. 316. An excellent series of analyses on the Austrian military of this period, the reasons for its resistance to technological change and the results of this conservatism on the battlefield can be found in the work of Geoffrey Wawro. See for example his articles "An 'Army of Pigs'" and "Inside the Whale: The Tangled Finances of the Austrian Army, 1848-1866."

science and industry with funding from Viennese banks⁵⁵⁵ Austrian firearms makers had experimented with various breech-loading rifles since the early 1800s and native firms like that of Josef Werndl were capable of producing them.⁵⁵⁶

A more serious obstacle was the Habsburg military's human make-up. Some officers viewed the Army's multi-lingual soldiers as intrinsically unfit for mastering the drill and marksmanship required for faster-shooting and more accurate firearms.⁵⁵⁷ Certainly, these factors made training a more complicated process than in most militaries. But from a purely technical standpoint, there was no reason why breech-loaders could not have been mastered by the Habsburg Army. With its 3-4 step loading process, the *Dreyse* needle-gun was easier to operate than muzzle-loaders, which involve numerous, complex motions, are more prone to fouling and hang-fires, more difficult to maintain in the field and, in the Lorenz's case, required complicated site adjustments.⁵⁵⁸ With proper investment, breech-loaders could be mastered by even the least educationally advanced infantry, as Britain demonstrated with the introduction breech-loaders to the multi-ethnic regiments of the Raj.

The main reason Austria's military did not adapt technologically was not financial or technical but political. Only a portion of outlays on defense were devoted to the maintenance and equipment of the Army; at least as much was spent on shoring up the dynasty's position among key domestic constituencies. For not the first or last time in history, the government of a Great Power used resources set aside for the defense of the state to operate a jobs program. The impetus for doing so came from the 1848 revolution, which prompted the dynasty to look for new ways to cement the loyalty of the empire's political elite. Habsburg monarchs had long used gifts of various kinds to cultivate a base of support among the nobility. What made Franz Joseph different was the scale of state resources that he employed this technique. Where Maria Theresa had given jobs in the imperial bureaucracy to a handful of Czech nobles re-gain their loyalty after the Prussian wars, Franz Joseph gave jobs to *hundreds* of aging officers. In

⁵⁵⁵ Good, p. 63.

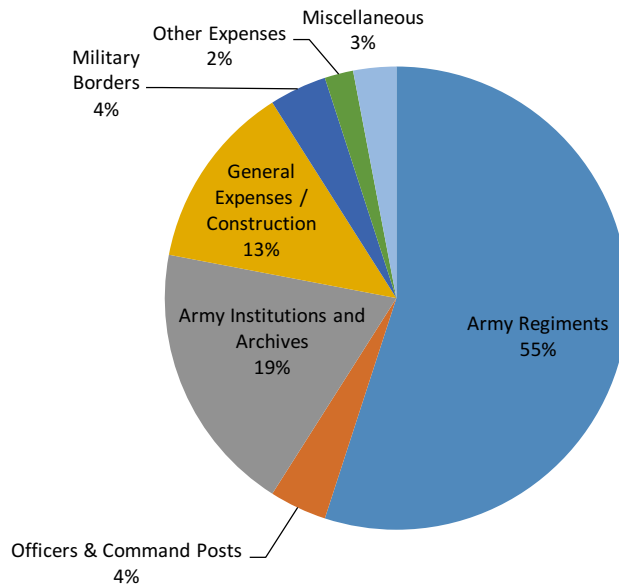
⁵⁵⁶ Gabriel, p. 356.

⁵⁵⁷ Wawro, "An Army of Pigs," pp. 409, 410 and 415.

⁵⁵⁸ Major-General George McClellan, *The Armies of Europe* (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1861), p. 65.

1864 there were 1,203 such officers, the combined salaries of which were “roughly equal to the annual maintenance costs of Austria's eighty line infantry regiments.”⁵⁵⁹

Habsburg Military Spending, 1862



Source: Wawro, Geoffrey. “Inside the Whale.”

Spending on fighting forces—military hardware, modernization, R&D and the fighting forces—as a proportion of the Austrian defense budget had remained relatively static for most of the period prior to Franz Joseph’s reign. Even at the high-point of Maria Theresa’s expansion of bureaucracy, the amount spent on essentially political functions—pensions and salaries for senior officers—had constituted between a quarter and a third of the defense budget.⁵⁶⁰ Under Franz Joseph, such expenses swelled to become higher as a proportion of defense spending than in any other European army. Out of a defense budget of 138 million-florin, only half went to the fighting forces while the rest went to pensions, salaries and various categories

⁵⁵⁹ Wawro, “Inside the Whale,” p.46

⁵⁶⁰ European State Finance Database; and P. G. M. Dickson, *Finance and Government under Maria Theresa, 1740-1780* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), vol. 2.

of supernumerary.⁵⁶¹ [See figure.] Of the half formally marked as spending on the regiments, a large portion was in fact diverted to non-military purposes, including large numbers of *ad latus* officers falsely listed as “active duty” to hide the costs from parliament.⁵⁶²

Expansion of bureaucracy crowded out resources for combat troops. In order to support the increase in supernumeraries, fighting units were decommissioned, while procurement of new technologies became one of the Army’s lowest priorities. Throughout the 1850s and early 1860s, the Habsburg military devoted a trickle of money to equipment maintenance and munitions while continuing to add *ad lati*. In 1865, spending on overhead for provincial commands alone would have been enough to arm eight infantry regiments, while the Army’s top six supernumeraries earned enough to kit out a regiment and a half of riflemen with *Dreyse* needle-guns.⁵⁶³

Embracing the Offensive

At the same time that it was beginning to lag behind rivals in key technologies, the Army gravitated toward offensive warfighting doctrines. There were precedents for this Habsburg military history; the Austrian infantry had favored the bayonet over firepower since the 18th Century while the campaigns of Eugene and Loudon and writings of Burcell had emphasized mobility and aggression. But for the most part, Habsburg strategic culture had been defensive, with a prevailing emphasis on logistics and attrition over annihilation. Underlying this had been a profound sense of the fragility of military power and aversion to unnecessary risks or gambles.

The transition to an offensive outlook began, as we have seen, in the Napoleonic wars, when the ability of fast-moving French armies to smash through linear formations left a deep impression on Habsburg officers. The obsession with offensive battlefield tactics grew in

⁵⁶¹ Wawro, “Inside the Whale,” p.48.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., pp.46 and 51.

ensuing decades, as Army orthodoxy settled on the column as the main formation of deployment even as other militaries began to embrace firepower as the main determinant of battle. Radetzky summed up the conventional attitude when he wrote that “modern infantry can trust only in the cold steel” [bayonets] for ensuring victory on the battlefield.”⁵⁶⁴ Under Radetzky’s guidance, Austria’s generals created offensive war plans, often modeled on the successful 1814 campaign, for operations against France in the 1830s, against Prussia in 1850 and against Russia during the Crimean crisis.⁵⁶⁵

This shift toward offensive thinking was not, as in Prussia, the result of intellectual study, but came in the form of a studied preference for audacity and animal vigor over intellectual contemplation in matters of war. As Franz Joseph built up the Army in the period after the 1848 revolution, he had discouraged intellectual currents in the military leadership. “The quality of my army,” the Emperor said, “does not depend on learned officers, but on brave and chivalrous men.”⁵⁶⁶ Senior officers were chosen on the basis of their loyalty to the Emperor and offensive spirit. Ludwig von Benedek, who would serve as commander of Austrian forces in the 1866 war against Prussia, summed up the pervasive attitude when he said, “I conduct the business of war according to simple rules and I am not impressed by complicated calculations.”⁵⁶⁷

The reasons for this anti-intellectual tilt were primarily dynastic in nature. While Austria had not developed philosophical writings on war in the period after 1815 on the scale of Prussia’s Clausewitz or France’s Jomini, it did possess a tradition of thinking defensively about war that was reflected in Archduke Charles’ treatises. And while most Habsburg monarchs had distrusted military talent, the Monarchy had since the period of Maria Theresa developed habits of extensive planning, including at the conceptual level, under men like Lacy. In Franz Joseph’s Army, by contrast, the Officer Corps came to “not merely to disregard learning but to

⁵⁶⁴ Wawro, “An Army of Pigs,” p. 410.

⁵⁶⁵ Radetzky, “Operationen der verbündeten Heere gegen Frankreich, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Armee des Oberrheins,” 1832, in *Denkschriften*, pp. 479-81. and Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, p. 48.

⁵⁶⁶ Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 38-9.

⁵⁶⁷ Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, p. 60.

distrust it.”⁵⁶⁸ Coming to power at a young age and at a moment of chaos, Franz Joseph associated intellectualism with revolutionaries and liberals in parliament. The men who had saved his empire in the 1848 were doers—“thrusters”—men like Windisch-grätz and Radetzky, who were veteran campaigners and practitioners with little interest in formal war theorizing.

Neglecting Core Advantages

Anti-intellectualism in the Army went hand-in-hand with a de-emphasis on many of the traditional focal points of Habsburg military thinking. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the reduced study of terrain. As the century wore on, the extensive requirements for staff training in cartography that had begun under Maria Theresa lapsed. When a member of the Austrian General Staff’s Geographical Bureau was tasked with creating a study of the military geography of Germany in 1864, he was told by his superior to go buy Baedeker travel guides.⁵⁶⁹ And when the Prussian military attaché to Vienna invited Austrian colleagues to play the war-game that the Prussian Army used for training officers, they were not interested because no gambling was involved.⁵⁷⁰ As a French officer noted at the time, the Austrians “pay no attention to variable factors like terrain”—a dramatic shift for an army that had once lived by the maxim “terrain is everything.”⁵⁷¹

The same mindset that rated offensive power above terrain deprioritized other aids that the Monarchy had traditionally used to enhance its defensive power. One was fixed defenses. While forts were playing a diminished role in warfare by the mid-19th Century, they were by no means obsolete. Modernized forts employing networks of diffuse, hardened positions were difficult to bypass and hard even for rifled artillery to reduce except by long siege. The Quadrilateral, with its network of 80 forts across an almost 1,000-km square area,

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁶⁹ Gordon Alexander Craig, *The Battle of Königgrätz; Prussia’s Victory over Austria, 1866* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964), p. 11.

⁵⁷⁰ Craig, p. 11.

⁵⁷¹ Similar structures would be used effectively throughout into the 20th Century—at Petersburg (1864), Belfort (1871), Plevna (1877), Port Arthur (1904), Przemyśl (1915) and Verdun (1916).

demonstrated the effectiveness of such defenses in both the 1848 and 1866 campaigns.⁵⁷² Forts like Verona and Olmütz, conceived as *places d'armes* and capable of hosting corps-sized troop formations continued to have a practical use, particularly for large land powers, as sites to house concentrations of force *in situ* near the frontier. Forts of the Vauban-style, by contrast, which were relatively compact and usually sited in terrain that had been chosen on the assumption of shorter and less powerful offensive weaponry were at best useful as forward depots.

A majority of Austria's 22 forts were of the latter variety—most notably in Bohemia, where the 18th Century fortresses at Josephstadt, Theresienstadt and Königgrätz remained largely unchanged from their original state.⁵⁷³ Years earlier, Radetzky had warned the Army to review the usefulness of such sites in light of technological change:

...it can happen, and indeed happens a lot, that a fortress which was highly necessary in one era becomes completely useless in another... Advances in military science, fortification techniques and siege-craft, improvement in gunnery and weaponry, new inventions for strengthening powder and the like – all have an effect on the utility of a fortress as it relates to a specific defense purpose. From all of these considerations it follows that, in assessing the value of an existing fortress one must examine: the purpose for which it was originally constructed; whether this purpose still exists; if so, how the fortress serves that purpose; if not, the nature of that change and the implications that follow from it; how the fortress may serve the altered purpose; ... [and] in the event that a given fortress is of no more use as instrument of defense against any foreseeable enemy, to remove it and use its building materials for other military purposes.⁵⁷⁴

Some debate on the matter did occur. “In modern times,” the leader of the Liberal Party complained in 1865, “when when artillery systems have changed, the construction of fortifications should be carried out with greater caution [since] fortresses, which were considered impregnable because of their physical layout on the old system now lie in range of

⁵⁷² Malfatti, p. 57. See also Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives, Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress, 1861-62, Vol. 4, No. 86, p. 320.

⁵⁷³ Blasek, p. 737; and Duffy, *The Fortress in the Age of Vauban*, p. 131.

⁵⁷⁴ Radetzky, “Über Festungen,” in *Denkschriften*, pp. 398-402.

new cannons so that the works can be bombarded and razed in very short time.”⁵⁷⁵ However, only after the catastrophic defeat the following year did Austria seriously reexamine the utility of its Vauban forts. Had it done so earlier, it might have concluded, as Prussia did at the time, that some forts were worth retaining as garrisons while others were demolished in favor of railway development, or that outdated structures should be replaced by a handful of large defensive clusters on the Verona model, to be used in coordination with rail and field armies.

Instead, the Austrian military kept its old forts. In the 1850s, Austria invested 100 million fl. in strengthening the Quadrilateral forts.⁵⁷⁶ And in 1861, the emperor initiated a 140-million fl. project to “close the gaps” in frontier defenses.⁵⁷⁷ But for most of the era, the story of Austria’s forts is one of neglect. In 1865, on the eve of its conflict with Prussia, the empire spent a paltry 0.9 percent (2.1 million fl.) on fortresses—about half the amount that went to supernumerary salaries and a tenth what it spent on annual travel.⁵⁷⁸ The Monarchy did not over-emphasize fortresses, as some authors have claimed.⁵⁷⁹ As a proportion of the defense budget, its spending on forts in this period was actually about the same as Prussia’s.⁵⁸⁰ But neither did it consciously upgrade them for new roles. Rather, Austria continued making blanket investments in legacy structures at levels too low to modernize them but high enough to detract from other uses. Little was done to conceptualize how forts should be used in conjunction, either with the Habsburg field army or with the Monarchy’s numerous client-state armies and territories.

⁵⁷⁵ *Stenographische Protokolle des Hauses der Abgeordneten des Reichsrathes*, 54. Sitzung der 3. Session am 3. Mai 1865, p. 1461.

⁵⁷⁶ Von Aresin, p. 8.

⁵⁷⁷ Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War*, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁷⁸ *Stenographische Protokolle des Hauses der Abgeordneten des Reichsrathes*, 53. Sitzung der 3. Session am 2. Mai 1865, p. 1445. See also Wawro, “Inside the Whale,” p. 55.

⁵⁷⁹ John Dredger argues in a well-reasoned analysis that the Austrians placed too much emphasis on fortifications in their planning of this period and spent too much on them, along with the Navy, relative to other possible uses. See: John Anthony Dredger, *Offensive Spending: Tactics and Procurement in the Habsburg Military, 1866-1918* (Manhattan: Kansas State University, Dissertation, Unpublished, 2013), pp. 18, 20, 23.

⁵⁸⁰ In 1865, Austria spent 1.2 million fl. (about 0.90 percent) of a 138-million fl. defense budget on 22 fortresses. Prussia spent 370,000 talers (about 0.85 percent) of a 43-million taler defense budget on 27 fortresses. See Robert Millward, *The State and Business in the Major Powers: an Economic History, 1815-1939* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 32; *Stenographische Protokolle*, p. 1445; and Wawro, “Inside the Whale,” p. 55.

While neglecting the fixed defenses that had been its time-management tool for warfare of the 18th Century, Austria was also neglecting the time-management tool of warfare in the 19th: railroads. Development in travel infrastructure had always represented a cost-effective investment for enhancing the interior lines of communication of the Danubian Basin. To this end, Maria Teresa and Joseph II had made road construction a strategic priority in the 18th Century. As with weaponry, there was no intrinsic reason why Austria should not have been able to keep pace in railway construction at levels capable of supporting a modern defensive capacity. Steam travel made an early appearance in the Austrian lands, and Vienna was quick to grasp its military potential. In 1841 an imperial decree laid the basis for four trunk lines, one to each of the Monarchy's major frontiers, producing more than 1,622 km of track over the following seven years.⁵⁸¹

Table 8.5 Railways (kilometres in operation)

	<i>Austria-Hungary</i>	<i>Prussia</i>
1841	351	375
1847	1,048	2,325
1850	1,357 + 122	2,967
1860	2,927 + 1,616	5,762
1865	3,698 + 2,160	6,895
1870	6,112 + 3,477	11,460 ¹

from

Breuilly, John. *Austria, Prussia and the Making of Germany 1806 - 1871*. 2nd ed. UK: Longman, 2011. p. 106

But railways would fail to spread in Austria at the pace that they did in other Western European states in the early years of Franz Joseph's reign. The reason lay in the nature of neo-absolutism and the disproportionate role that it gave to the state in controlling railway

⁵⁸¹ Good, p. 66.

development. By mid-century 68 percent of railways in Austria and 99 percent in Hungary.⁵⁸² Only after government lines were finally privatized in 1854 (a concession of the financial pressures created by the Crimean War) did the empire's rail net begin to expand increasing from 1,806 km of track to 15,697 in 19 years.⁵⁸³ However, at the time that Austria entered into its contest with Prussia, this process had just begun, and the Monarchy would enter the wars of 1866 with only one major line of track to each of the main war theaters.

Isolation and Defeat

By the late 1850s, therefore, the Habsburg Monarchy's security position can be summarized as one of diplomatic isolation, disproportionate reliance upon the Army for maintaining Great-Power status and as-yet undetected lag in those forces' actual war-fighting capabilities. The first indication of the catastrophic results that this mixture could produce came four years after Crimea, when the Monarchy became embroiled in its first military clash with a major rival since the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

The Austro-Sardinian *War of 1859* vividly demonstrated how severely the loss of Austria's traditional tools limited its options for time-management. As always, the Monarchy needed to be able to avoid fighting two powers at once. It lost this ability by a continuation of the inflexible diplomacy it had showed over Crimea and over-confidence in its offensive military. Defying Metternich's dictum that "before Austria enters a war it must secure not only its military but its moral position," Vienna allowed itself to be baited into striking first and ceding the moral high ground. With the Russian alliance defunct, there was nothing to dissuade Napoleon III from entering on Sardinia's side. Austria's sole option for support, Prussia, was estranged by Franz Joseph's unwillingness to concede to requests for leadership of federalist forces in Germany. Even when Britain succeeded in an 11th-hour bid at Sardinian disarmament, Franz Joseph

⁵⁸² Ibid. p. 99-100.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

rejected the deal; trusting in the abilities of the army he had spent the past decade building, he presented an ultimatum to Sardinia *in hopes of triggering war*.⁵⁸⁴

Austria needed a quick victory of the kind Radetzky had achieved in 1849 to mitigate pressure on its finances. But without an ally to preoccupy France, it was unable to bring superior force to bear against the weaker of its two enemies. Promising to “treat Austria as Austria had treated him during the Crimean war,” the Russian Tsar sought to pin down as many Austrian troops as possible in the east.⁵⁸⁵ Trusting in his army’s offensive power, Franz Joseph left the protection of the Quadrilateral and sought out the Franco-Sardinian army, ceding decades of built-up defensive advantages. Changes in technology quickly told against Austria. Using railways, French troops arrived at the combat scene faster than anticipated while Habsburg forces labored forward from scattered posts around the empire. On the field at Solferino, Austria’s unwieldy columns were outmaneuvered by smaller French formations and mauled by rifled artillery. A plan to use the Quadrilateral in the traditional defensive fashion, to “offer prolonged resistance so that the greater part of our army has the time to concentrate and rally” forced a halt to the French campaign.⁵⁸⁶ But unable to continue financially, Austria lost the war and most of Lombardy.

The Defeat at Königgrätz

The true cost of the 1859 war, and of Habsburg security policy under Franz Joseph, would come seven years later. Prussia had watched and learned from Austria’s defeats in Crimea and Italy. After a century of unsuccessful attempts, it now saw an opportunity to realize its quest for primacy in Germany.

Before the first shots were fired, Austria had lost control of the factor of time in the contest. The Prussian accomplishment in this regard was two-fold: de-activating its own interstitial dilemma

⁵⁸⁴ Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery*, p. 111.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵⁸⁶ Ramming, “Strategische Begründung der Dispositionen, für die auf Verona gestützte k. k. Armee,” 4. Juni 1859 in Beilage XVII, *Der Krieg in Italien 1859* (Verlag des k. k. Generalstabes: 1876), p. 63,

and activating that of Austria. This reflected the talents of the Prussian foreign minister, Otto von Bismarck, but much of his work had been done for him by Austria in the preceding twelve years. The old Kaunitzian option of triggering a *cauchemar des coalitions* to hem and harass Prussia was foreclosed from the outset by Austrian estrangement from Russia and entanglement with France over Italy. A belated bid to entice France into neutrality promised to promising to cede Venetia did little more than ensure that the Monarchy would face two enemies rather than three. Bismarck was able to easily enlist Sardinia as an ally and force Austria to split its army between two fronts.

Bismarck was also able to ensure that the duration of the war played out on Prussia's terms as a short and sharp encounter that deprived Austria of the ability to prolong the contest and mobilize its greater resources. Technology helped. Using abundant train lines and telegraphs, Moltke mobilized Prussia's forces in three weeks while Austria's took eight. He blitzed through the territory of Austria's *Bund* allies, most of which had no viable plan for joint defense alongside the Habsburg Army, converging on the Austrian frontier on five rail lines while Habsburg forces lumbered to Bohemia by road and the Monarchy's sole northward railway track.⁵⁸⁷ Bismarck's diplomacy gave Prussian forces a more favorable force ratio by forcing the Monarchy to detach three corps sent to Italy, leaving only seven corps for Bohemia—245,000 Austrians against 254,000 Prussians.⁵⁸⁸

Like Bismarck's diplomacy, Moltke's military effort to secure a quick victory was aided by Austria's neglect of its traditional advantages. The commander of Austria's Northern Army, General Benedek, made virtually no effective use of terrain. Initially, he had planned to take the offensive against Prussia, but then switched to a plan modeled on the methods that Daun had used to confound Frederick: manning prepared positions, protected by the Elbe and flanked by hills, from which they could conduct a fighting retreat into the empire's interior if necessary.

⁵⁸⁷ There were actually two, Vienna via Breslau to Dresden and Vienna via Prague and Olmütz, but the proximity of the former to the war zone made it unusable. See Arthur L. Wagner, *The Campaign of Königgrätz, a Study of the Austro-Prussian Conflict in the Light of the American Civil War* (Kansas-City: 1899), pp. 36-37.

⁵⁸⁸ Craig, p. 17.

This was classic Austrian defensive strategy, rooted in denial, logistics and terrain. The problem was that such a strategy made no sense in the context of Austria's diplomatic posture. The point of delay in Austria's wars had always been to buy time—but in 1866, there was nothing to buy time *for*. There were no allied military interventions on the horizons to await, as there had been in the 1758, 1805 and 1848. Russia was not coming, Britain was not coming and the one friendly neutral—France—was a long shot.

A terrain-based defensive strategy was also incongruous with the infrastructure and force investments that Austria had pursued prior to the war. A U.S. Army study of the war would later conclude that “Benedek might have found a Metz in Königgrätz or Josephstadt,” referring to the two-month Prussian siege of the French fortress of Metz in 1871.⁵⁸⁹ But Metz was a modernized fortress on the Verona model, and the nearest of these that Austria possessed in the north was Olmütz, 140 km east of the war zone. Instead of fighting defensively, Benedek imitated Franz Joseph's behavior at Solferino and took the army out beyond the protection of defensive terrain. Where Eugene and Charles had all made use of rivers as defensive barriers, Benedek deployed for battle in recessed ground north of the Elbe, with the river at his back. And where Daun at Kolin had occupied the heights to amplify the effects of Austria's one superior asset over the Prussians—artillery—Benedek, despite also possessing better artillery, largely ignored the nearby hills. As one Habsburg officer commented after the battle, “we were standing in a hole...a flat, uncovered plateau...completely dominated by heights with excellent gun positions only 2,000 paces distant...”⁵⁹⁰

Thus postured, Austria's forces never got the chance to attempt a Fabian campaign. Prussian infantry units armed with the Dreyse took up defensive positions in the terrain and peppered Austria's shock columns until the main Prussian army Crown Prince Frederick could arrive, achieving a classic *Kesselschlacht* at Königgrätz along the lines envisioned by Moltke.

⁵⁸⁹ Wagner, p. 62.

⁵⁹⁰ Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War*, p. 208.

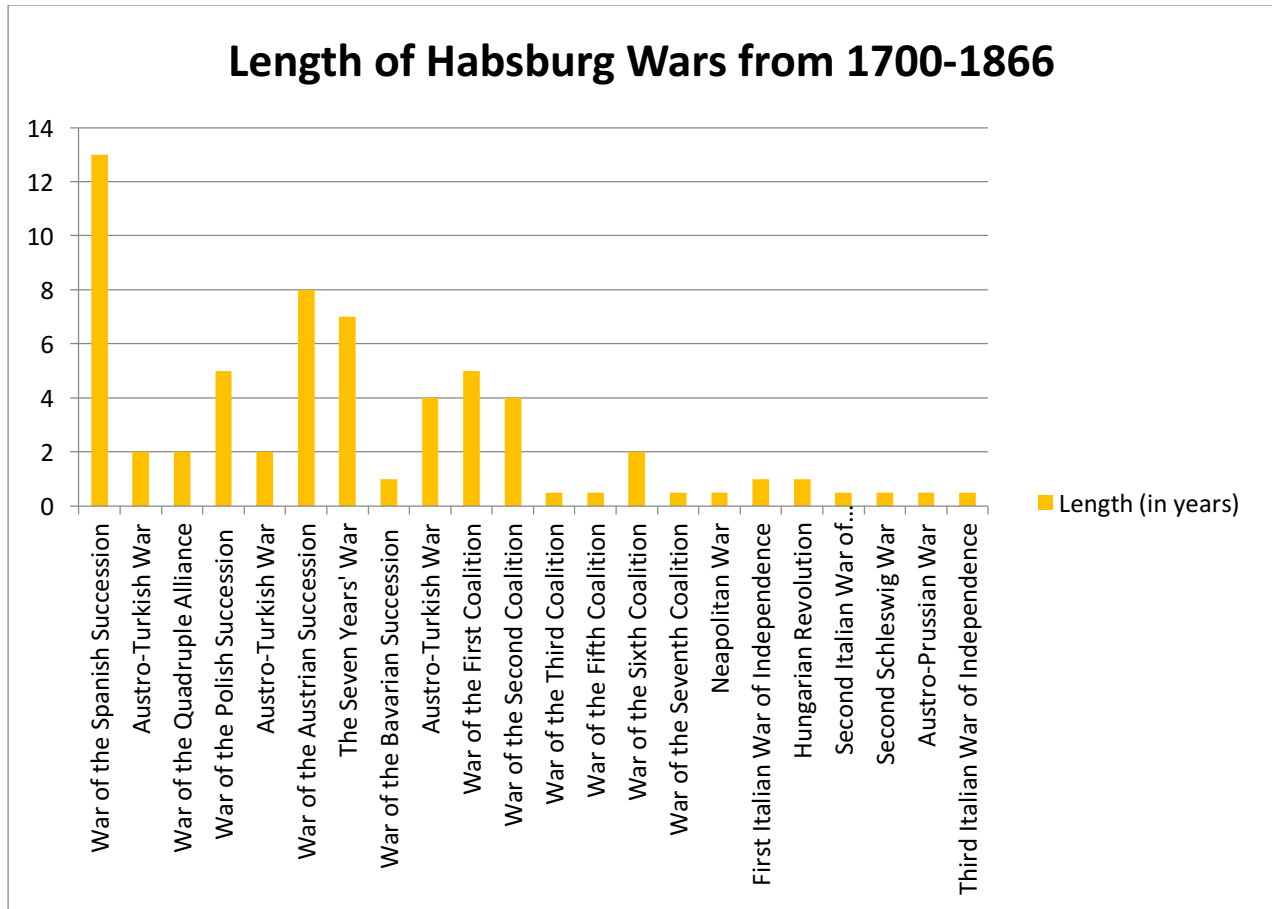
Trapped by the river behind them, the Austrian forces were bottled up, beaten and routed, with a loss of nearly 43,000 men and 641 guns.⁵⁹¹

The extent to which Benedek deviated from classic Habsburg military strategy can be seen by comparing the northern campaign of 1866 with events in the south, where Archduke Albrecht inflicted defeat on the Italians at Custoza. Like Radetzky in 1848, Albrecht conducted a largely defensive campaign, using the forts of the Quadrilateral to force the larger Italian army—120,000 to 72,000—to fight on ground of his choosing. It is noteworthy that both Radetzky and Albrecht professed skepticism about defensive warfare and yet ended up achieving Austria's greatest victories of the era by sticking to orthodox, terrain-based warfare, while Franz Joseph and Benedek in 1859 and 1866 eschewed defensive terrain, took the strategic offensive and lost. Albrecht's victory enabled Austria to shift troops northward, which might have had a significant impact on the course of the war if Benedek had managed to hold out longer. In a war council after Königgrätz, some of the emperor's advisors arguing for doing just that.⁵⁹² But the scale of the battlefield defeat forced a capitulation.

Austria might have lost the war in 1866 in any event. But the way that it lost deprived it of the options that it had used to achieve strategic resiliency in earlier contests. Where Austria had fought Prussia to a standstill in a war that lasted seven years a century earlier, it now lost to Prussia in seven *weeks*.

⁵⁹¹ *Österreichs Kämpfe Im Jahre 1866*, Vol. 3 (Vienna: KA, 1868), p. 385.

⁵⁹² Bérenger, p. 207.



3. Loss of Buffers; Co-Habitation

In the past, Austria had often been able to lose battles but win either the war or the resulting peace. This did not happen in 1866. Under the Peace of Prague, Prussia ejected Austria from Germany, abolishing the *Bund* and erecting a new Prussian-led North German Confederation. The Monarchy was also forced from its remaining positions in Italy, ceding Venetia and the forts of the Quadrilateral to Napoleon III, who gave them to Sardinia.

What made the new post-war order different from those of the past was the permanent change that occurred in Austria's buffer regions. Where treaty-rights and legitimacy had formerly provided a basis for preserving bands of smaller polities around the Monarchy's borders, the force of nationalism now held greater moral authority for determining territorial configurations.

On every side, nation-states now appeared—in the southwest, a unified Kingdom of Italy, in the northwest, a new German Empire and in the southeast a Kingdom of Romania under German tutelage.

Austria-Hungary, without Buffers, ca. 1878



Source: Wordpress.

With the extinction of its historic buffers, the Habsburg Monarchy lost the primary means by which it had managed time in strategy for more than a century and a half. In their place, it was surrounded by militarized frontiers that placed it in direct physical contact with major rivals. The military was forced to fall back to the frontier and stripped of the insulating effects of buffer-state terrain, client armies and tutelary fortresses. This drastically increased the responsibilities of the Habsburg Army. In the decades after 1866, the Monarchy would launch new rounds of fortress construction, attempting to compensate for the loss of space in buffers with steel and cement.⁵⁹³ While many of these structures would show the application of lessons learned in

⁵⁹³ Kaufmann, and Kaufmann, pp.140-171.

1866, they nevertheless represented capital investment in a form of warfare that had been bypassed by the Napoleonic and Moltkean military-technological revolutions. They were also expensive, requiring the equivalent of Maginot Line-style structures on not one but four sides to cover a security perimeter totaling more than 4,000 miles.

The war also tightened the financial pressure on the Habsburg state. Coming as the third crisis in a little more than a decade, it placed a catastrophic drain on public resources while significantly expanding the Monarchy's debts. Already, the mobilizations of 1854 and 1859 had brought the Monarchy to the brink of bankruptcy and undermined its international credit. This string of wars caused wild fluctuations to the money supply, foiling repeated attempts at monetary reform and silver convertibility.⁵⁹⁴ The empire's foreign policy effectively derailed the positive economic performance of the *Vormärz* period, crowding out investment and slowing overall growth.⁵⁹⁵

Straightened economic circumstances forced changes in the internal structure of the empire. Under Prussian pressure, the dynasty accepted a fundamental re-negotiation of its relationship with the Hungarians. In answering the demands that Hungary's elite now brought forward, Franz Joseph was weakened by the state of Austrian public finances, which together with the loss of Italian revenues and the emergence of Germany as a competing economic bloc, increased Austria's economic dependence on Hungary. He was also a victim of his own previous political intransigence; where earlier Habsburg monarchs had often extended concessions to the Magyar nobility preemptively ahead of conflicts, Franz Joseph's attempts at centralization restricted his options for resisting Hungarian co-rule now that Austria had lost in a major war.

The resulting compromise—the *Ausgleich* of 1867—brought an end to the Habsburg state as a unitary polity, introducing a dualist structure that required Austria to share power with a

⁵⁹⁴ Good, pp. 88-9.

⁵⁹⁵ Thomas Francis Huertas, *Economic Growth and Economic Policy in a Multinational Setting: the Habsburg Monarchy, 1841-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977), p. 45.

formally co-equal Hungary. Under the terms of the agreement, two political units were created that shared a common foreign policy but possessed separate governments, parliaments and fiscal policies. Critically, the new arrangement granted the Hungarians considerable power in shaping the Monarchy's behavior as a security actor. While the Emperor remained commander-in-chief, three armies now formed, including a semi-autonomous Hungarian defense force that would eventually obtain its own artillery. The Hungarian parliament exercised influence over the annual defense budget, and the financial terms of the Compromise subject to renegotiation at ten-year intervals. This meant that the Habsburg state would be subject to a greater political contestation of defense resources than in the past. More broadly, the *Ausgleich* would intensify the problem of equivocal loyalties that had stalked the Monarchy from its earliest days. The dynasty's historically loyal ethnicities—Croats, Slovaks, Romanians—were subjected to culturally assimilationist rule from Budapest. Inspired by the Hungarian example, the empire's largest ethnicity, the Slavs, would seek a similar deal.

The Hyphenated Empire: Austria-Hungary, ca. 1867



Source: Wikipedia.

Forced co-habitation and loss of buffers worked in tandem to weaken Habsburg security. The presence of new nation-states in what had previously been fragmented buffer zones exerted a new and powerful magnetic pull on Habsburg ethnicities, many of whom shared linguistic and cultural ties with their neighbors. The Slavs looked to Russia; the Italians to national Italy; the Rumanians to national Romania. Most dangerously, Austrian Germans now saw in Bismarck and the German Empire a vehicle for fulfilling the aspiration of regional dominance on a more efficient national basis than had been possible via the arcane structures of the Monarchy.

The Habsburg Monarchy would retain its role as a Great Power for another half-century. But in geopolitical terms, the game was up. Ironically, Austria would experience greater economic dynamism in the decades after 1866 than it had at any prior point in its history, as the turbulence of the mid-Century wars gave way to a period of stability in the money supply and unprecedented growth. But the ability to seize the opportunities created by this growth were constrained by the Monarchy's geopolitical circumstances, which effectively narrowed its options for steering an independent foreign-policy course.

No amount of economic growth could have equipped Austria with the size of military required to permanently man a fortified, four-sided defensive position surrounded by rivals that were at least as economically strong as itself and in many cases stronger. As Kaunitz had worried would someday happen if the Monarchy lost its buffers, the new Austria-Hungarian gravitated toward greater geopolitical dependence on its strongest neighbor as a means of ameliorating its 360-degree defense burden. With Russia now permanently estranged, Italy seeking to gain yet more Habsburg territory and the Ottoman Empire replaced by a belt of nettlesome independent statelets, this inevitably meant a closer relationship with Germany. In its final conflict, the Habsburg Monarchy would fight a war on three fronts, by the side of Europe's most revisionist power, without the moral high ground and without meaningful alliance options among the other Great Powers. The Habsburg Monarchy ran out of time, both in a narrow military sense and, with the war lost, in a broader geopolitical sense as a state.

Conclusion

There was nothing inevitable about the Habsburg Monarchy's eclipse as a Great Power. That it faced growing ethnic pressure, intermittent economic crisis and rising rivals cannot be denied. But it had faced these things in the past and survived. What made the crises of the mid-19th Century different was the extent to which Austria faced them without possessing *any* of its traditional tools for managing time in geopolitical competition. These tools had helped to ensure that Austria could bring its limited power to bear on limited problems, usually with the help of a major portion of the international system behind it. While Austria had frequently faced conflicts in which one or more of these tools had failed, the failure of all three simultaneously brought catastrophic defeat at a moment when rapid social and technological change made it far less possible to recuperate from mistakes than it had been in the past.

Certainly, the inordinate advantages that Austria had enjoyed under the Metternich system were bound to come to an end eventually. But the manner in which this system eroded was not foreordained. The loss of *all* options for Great-Power support proved especially crucial. With the possible example of Joseph II's brief Bavarian struggle, Habsburg monarchs had always adhered to one tenet of statecraft above all others: avoid isolation. With the support of at least one Great Power, both the 1859 and 1866 crises might have gone very differently. With Prussian or Russian backing, 1859 would probably have looked more like the crises of the 1830s or 1848, when Austria performed a localized policing action without French intervention. With Russian support, 1866 may very well not have happened at all or turned out like the stand-off in 1850, with Prussia ultimately backing down.

The fact that Austria lost its traditional strategic tools is attributable as much to the decisions of individual leaders as to any structural changes beyond their control. In particular, the loss of the alliance with Russia, which more than any single factor provided the foundation for the Monarchy's security appears in retrospect to have been an unforced error. Choices in the East had always been tough, but it is hard to escape the impression that Austria made the wrong decision in choosing military escalation in Crimea at a moment when Austria's wider position

depended on Russia and when Austria knew from long experience that the maritime powers could not take Russia's place in long-term Austrian security needs. The lost opportunities for Prussian support too, in 1848 but especially in 1859, when it would likely have prevented France from entering the conflict, seem unwise, especially since they involved a price—Prussian leadership of the armies of the *Bund*—far more affordable than the loss of Italy. The same can be said of Austria's choice to shun the peace brokered by Britain with Sardinia 1859 and opt voluntarily for war.

A common thread running through all of these choices is that they rested on greater estimations of military force as a policy tool than was usual for Austrian rulers and statesmen. Franz Joseph's development of the neo-absolutist state, with its heavy investment in the military, represented a departure from past Habsburg strategy. The self-sufficiency that the expanded Army seemed to indicate possible is inextricably linked to the inflexibility of Habsburg diplomacy of this period. Trusting in the military, the Monarchy neglected a central tenet of interstitial statecraft—that a surrounded empire cannot be strong everywhere, all the time. Austria had always needed to be flexible on at least one frontier—usually two—in order to achieve its objectives on a particular front; in Franz Joseph's time, it showed inflexibility on all four sides and lost.

In the end, Austria succumbed to another interstitial empire, Prussia, which had developed its own time-management techniques better attuned to the technological realities of the day. While the rival in question was possessed of significant advantages and led by an unusually wily strategist, its ability to concentrate and achieve victory was only possible because Austria had ceded the advantages—in treaties and alliances in the years leading up to the war but also in terrain once the war broke out—upon which its own time-based strategies had been based. Tending these advantages had never been particularly glamorous in a military sense, often involving war-avoidance and willingness to adjust to realities elsewhere in order to gain outside support. But they had worked. As Metternich said of Austria's alliance with France in 1809, "it was not heroic, but it saved an empire." Such an approach required humility and a

recognition of limits. These are what Austria lacked perhaps most in its hour of greatest crisis under Franz Joseph. And it cost the empire its life.

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Chapter X.

Conclusion:

Interstitial Empires, Then and Now

“For years U.S. defense planning and requirements were based on preparing to fight two major conventional wars at the same time... [an assumption] that persisted long after it was overtaken by events.” – Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

“People talk about...being everywhere at once and anticipating the enemy. Nobody desires this more than I do...God knows that I am no coward, but I will never set my hand to anything which I judge impossible, or to the disadvantage of Your Majesty’s service.” – Field Marshal Leopold von Daun

The Habsburg Monarchy was an unusual Great Power.⁵⁹⁶ Its surrounding geography placed it under perennial threat from all sides, while its internal structure placed greater constraints on its ability to counter those threats than is the case for most empires. Throughout the Monarchy’s history, the demands on its security surpassed its available resources by a significant margin. This reality deprived Austria of many of the options that other powers use in the pursuit of survival. It could not dominate its environment militarily; expansion usually brought new problems without necessarily augmenting its power capabilities. Nor could it hide from the effects geopolitical competition. The pressures bearing down upon it from without and within were severe and unrelenting.

The strategic problems that beset the Habsburg Monarchy have parallels in our own time. The United States is an interstitial power on a global scale, flanked by rivals that vary from revisionist Great Powers to rogue regimes armed with nuclear weapons and non-state terrorist groups. And while America is far more powerful than the Habsburg Monarchy in its heyday, with the passage of time and changes in the distribution of international power, it is becoming more susceptible to the military and financial pressures of multi-sided competition than it was in the immediate post-Cold War era.

⁵⁹⁶ As Schroeder writes: “The Habsburg monarchy was not a normal great power, and could not become one by expanding its military power or reforming itself internally in the directions of modernization and unity.” See *Transformation*, p. 527.

Advances in technology have only partially mitigated the effects of geography. Even with nuclear weapons and long-distance air strikes, the United States cannot assert military dominance over enemies in all three of the world's major security regions simultaneously. Nuclear proliferation and cyber warfare sharpen the interstitial problem by enabling enemies to strike from more directions, more quickly and more devastatingly than ever before. Resource constraints and strides in new weaponry by large rivals promise to make the United States even less capable of consistently achieving escalation dominance in future conflicts than was in the past. Already, these changes have forced the United States to rebalance diplomatic and military resources between regions and abandon the decades-old goal of being able to fight and win two major wars against rivals in Europe and Asia simultaneously.⁵⁹⁷

The domestic constraints facing the Habsburgs also find parallels in our time. While different in important ways, the United States is like Austria in its time a composite state for which political unity is not formed on the basis of membership in a dominant ethnicity. Although rooted in popular legitimacy and thus likely to prove more stable over the long term than allegiance to a dynasty, representative democracy is not immune to the challenges of multi-ethnic governance. In any political system, the existence of sub-state groups with different identities in a financially-constrained environment creates ingredients for political conflict, resource competition and bureaucratic gridlock. Nor is democracy impervious to influence by outside powers. Abundant diaspora groups, pockets of popular discontent and the open nature of the democratic system all present openings that can be exploited by creative foes. Over time these factors are likely to make America's internal composition more of a factor in its geopolitical competitions than it was in the past.

Finally, the United States faces constraints in how it mobilizes and uses military force in strategic competition. Despite possessing a far more powerful military than the Habsburg Empire did in its time, America is no more capable of dominating its numerous rivals through force of arms. Despite the prevalence of Clausewitzian thought in the U.S. military, America

⁵⁹⁷ *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2014).

faces constraints on applying an annihilationist approach to its wars. This is partly due to the nature of modern war itself, which involves a wide cast of opponents often diffuse in nature and seeking limited aims that make the task of achieving unambiguous victory more difficult. But it also has to do with the nature of the United States as a Great Power. Pluralistic democratic societies are less willing to inflict and accept casualties than the traditional nation-state. The U.S. public is quicker to feel and react politically to the adverse social and economic effects of long wars than the populaces of authoritarian and ethnically-homogenous powers. It is not unreasonable to assume that, in major conflicts of the future, Western policymakers will face greater obstacles to mobilizing their citizenries to bear the costs and exertions required for total war than powers like Russia or China.

In short, while vastly different from the Habsburg empire, the United States has inherited both of Austria's main problem-sets as a Great Power: the task of managing a *tous azimuts* threat environment and having to do so while facing significant limitations in its ability to mobilize and wield power. As was the case for the Habsburgs, the available resources for U.S. national security are almost always outpaced by the range of challenges. As global changes accelerate, public debt loads increase and demographic and economic shifts intensify, this gap between demands and capabilities is likely to widen and the dilemmas for securing America's multi-sided position intensify.

Can we learn anything from the Habsburg Monarchy? All states are different. Every time period has its own special circumstances which are not relatable to those of another. Like all states, the Habsburg empire's leaders ultimately reacted to crises as they emerged, according to the threats and opportunities immediately in front of them, rather than according to a fixed plan or blueprint. The goal was survival, and the tools utilized for this task were whatever was on hand.

Nevertheless, the very conditions that threatened the empire's existence demanded attempts at coherent strategy, narrowing and defining the range of viable options for successful statecraft. Its external and internal environments placed constraints on its behavior, penalizing

some survival strategies and rewarding others. Rulers who acted very far outside this range of options—for example, by over-emphasizing military power or attempting to centralize the state too fast—were usually forced to modify their approach, either because of the reactions of rivals or the financial or human limitations of the state. From these constraints emerge some points of continuity in Habsburg grand strategy—certain patterns or broad principles that, with some caveats, may be offered as insights for interstitial empires in any era.

1. *You can't be strong everywhere.*

Perhaps the main overriding lesson from Habsburg strategic history is that a Great Power which faces threats on every side is unlikely to be able to sustainably match the strength of all of its enemies on all of its frontiers at all times. Trying to do so will generate economic burdens in peacetime that are beyond the ability of the state to bear and, in wartime, stretch its military capabilities to the breaking point.

The temptation to try to be strong everywhere is often great, since states naturally seek security against all threats, however numerous. It is especially pronounced at moments of relative economic or military strength. For the United States, the post-Cold War preponderance of military and economic power fueled the perception that it possessed sufficiently enlarged national-power capabilities to deter or defeat any combination of threats to its interests in these regions.⁵⁹⁸ From this followed two assumptions—that America was capable of winning wars more or less everywhere, at all times, and second, that, for the most part, it therefore did not need to worry about resources shifts, or “pivots,” shifts, from one region to another to cover its liability.

The United States is now finding out that these assumptions were wrong or, in any event, not indefinitely valid. Resources are not infinite, even for the strongest superpower. Increasingly, the scale of demands on U.S. security exceed its power capabilities, and the gap is growing.

⁵⁹⁸ William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-41.

Problems arise in local forms requiring local responses; dealing with them inevitably means accepting some degree of vulnerability—and thus risks—in some other place. In this sense, it is impossible to be a truly “global” power. The challenge is that while it is not physically possible to be strong everywhere, the converse is equally or more dangerous; being weak everywhere can lead to disaster. The interstitial power need only fail at one critical place at the wrong moment in order to suffer potentially catastrophic defeat, while its various enemies only need to be strong in the one place most important to them in order to win.

Survival for an interstitial empire is therefore a byproduct of its ability to find ways of dealing with each threat that it faces without becoming inordinately exposed to other threats in the process. Since power is finite, it has to be used in a way that allows for effective action against the threat at hand without losing the ability to manage other threats which could materialize simultaneously. This comes down to a question of time, that is, how power is concentrated in a specific way, place and moment—what might be called the “when,” “where” and “how” of power.

[The “When” of Habsburg Power:]

2. Avoid war when possible.

War is bad for any state—in Archduke Charles words, “the greatest evil that can happen to a state or nation.” But it is especially dangerous for an interstitial power, for two reasons. First, it drains resources that are already stretched by the need to maintain numerous frontiers. Second, it sets in motion interaction dynamics—what Clausewitz called “friction”—that are inherently more complex for the surrounded state, because of the number of threats. In both cases, risk for an interstitial empire can be measured in time. The longer a war lasts, the greater the financial burden taken onto the state, and the greater the likelihood that other enemies will use your diversion as an opportunity to attack.

This implies a different relationship with risk for an interstitial empire compared to great powers with less numerous threat environments. Since war, once launched, takes on a rhythm all its own that is hard to control, such states must be more concerned with limiting risk rather than maximizing gains. Limiting risk involves avoiding war altogether if possible, and if not, then making it as short as possible. Paradoxically, this places a higher premium on the ability to conduct offensive or even preemptive wars—*if they are likely to be decisive*. If they are tried and fail, the risks become far greater than if they had never been attempted, both because of the scarce resources that were ventured and lost, and because of the encouragement that the opening failure may provide to other enemies to act.

In Austria's case, early strikes were often attempted but rarely successful because of the limited offensive capabilities of the Habsburg Army. As a result, defensive warfare was the safest bet for the state, since it reserved the greatest range of options for managing risk as the conflict unfolded. And in the pursuit of defensive war, Austria often faced incentives not to shorten a conflict but to draw it out in installments.

3. Delay engagement until the terms are favorable to you.

Since war cannot be avoided, the state should strive to avoid wars on terms unfavorable to itself—as Joseph II put it, to ensure that “our great-grandchildren can defend themselves with dignity.” Those Habsburg rulers who succeeded most in securing the realm were the ones who identified those wars that the Monarchy could not win and delayed decisive engagement until they had built up sufficient strength for the task.

As for any state, this involves some combination of mobilizing domestic strength (internal balancing) and outside allies (external balancing). The way in which this is done depends on the circumstances of war—i.e., whether it is foreseen and prepared for in advance or thrust upon the defender and thus requiring preparation while the war is underway.

The latter of these is the greatest danger that an interstitial empire can face. Unpreparedness in war is costly for any state but especially for one facing multiple enemies that are attacking on their terms, as Austria found in 1741-8. Gaining control of the time component of competition well before war begins is the most important strategic task that the leaders of an encircled can undertake. Succeeding in it requires a high degree of unity in the national-security elite about the identity of the main threat and the objectives for countering it.

4. *'Turn off' secondary problems first.*

Delay is only helpful if it is used to gain an advantage for the main struggle. One of the most consistent traits of Habsburg strategic behavior was the sequencing of contests—proactively addressing lesser threats in order to have a freer hand for dealing effectively with the main challenge.

This can take both diplomatic and military form. Joseph II placated the Turks to prioritize war in the west before returning to deal with the south from a position of strength. Maria Teresa employed a similar technique throughout the wars with Frederick II and, during the Austrian succession struggle, used a truce with Prussia to knock out the Bavarians before turning her attention back to the north. Joseph II sought, largely unsuccessfully, to deal swiftly with the Turks in 1788-91 before diverting attention back to Prussia; his failure to do so required large, simultaneous and expensive force concentrations on two fronts. A more successful example is 1848-9, when Austria first crushed the weaker revolts in Italy and Bohemia before sending its combined forces against the Hungarians.

Dealing with secondary threats first is advantageous for an interstitial state, for the obvious reason that it aids in concentration of effort against the more serious threat. But also because it creates a positive demonstration effect of the state's ability to achieve victory, which can help both to reassure allies and to deter lesser predators from bandwagoning.

5. Complexity is harder to manage during a conflict than before it.

Interaction dynamics are by definition more intense for a surrounded power. Even in peacetime, it must exist in a state of complexity; once a war begins, this complexity mounts dramatically. A move by one rival creates openings for other predators to act. It matters little whether this occurs by design or opportunism; for the interstitial state, the effect is the same: spiraling “friction,” in numerous places simultaneously, beyond the defender’s ability to anticipate or manage, much less control.

Austria’s most dangerous moments came when it failed to anticipate geopolitical shifts and found itself reacting to a multi-front war that had already broken out. The wars of the first half of the 18th Century, and particularly the Austrian succession crisis, show that pure crisis-management is inherently riskier for interstitial empires; to perhaps a greater extent than most states they have an existential need to “get ahead” of conflicts. The greatest accomplishments of Habsburg statecraft came in later wars, when its leaders had absorbed the lessons of the past and worked successfully to arrange their alliances so that, by the time war broke out, they could concentrate scarce resources on one, main threat rather than three or four.

For the United States, making a transition to anticipatory strategy may prove to be difficult. The degree of complexity in the array of security theaters in which America is involved brings a high degree of escalatory potential for future conflicts. The nature of modern weapons adds to this effect, with both enhanced conventional lethality and the shrinking threshold for tactical-nuclear exchanges increasing the escalatory dynamics of future battlefields. Once set in motion, the options for managing them shrink dramatically.

[The “Where” of Habsburg Power:]

6. If possible, force the enemy to fight on his territory rather than yours.

While Austria’s wars tended to be defensive in nature, Habsburg strategy frequently sought to deflect the brunt of offensive war by forcing the enemy to fight on or near his own territory. This is valuable for any state to achieve in war but especially so for an interstitial state, because it lessens the likelihood of attack on other fronts and buys the defender time to mobilize for the struggle.

This goal was reflected in Austrian defense infrastructure and alliance policy. The forts of the Rhine sought to hem France within its own frontiers, and the forts of the Elbe sought to contain Prussian attacks to a narrow sliver of frontier territory outside the economically-vital Bohemian hinterland. The Monarchy formed alliances with the maritime powers to attack Louis XIV’s seaward flank, used an alliance with former rival France to open a second front against Frederick II, used an alliance with former rival Prussia to open a second front against revolutionary France, and used alliances with Russia to threaten Prussia’s eastern frontier well into the 19th Century.

Forcing the enemy to fight on his territory buys time for the defender to mobilize strength. It is harder in the 21st Century, as technologies allow nations to threaten one another at greater distances. Nevertheless, conventional wars continue to be fought for territory, and the spaces nearest the point of conflict bear the brunt of the human and economic costs. For this reason, the same basic methods used by the Habsburgs—forward infrastructure and defensive alliances—retain utility today.

7. Maintain small states between yourself and your main rivals.

As time-management tools, forts and allies have limitations. Walls are static and, at best, detain an opponent for a short period. Allies are fickle and may change sides from one war to

the next. What provides the greatest aid in coping with multi-directional threats is physical space—territory around the frontiers that impose distance between oneself and a rival.

For most of its history the Habsburg empire sought to maintain belts of weaker states around its borders. For an interstitial empire, these spaces are existentially important. As long as they are intact, enemies do not share direct, border-on-border contact with the defender. In peacetime, this reduces the need for expensive round-the-clock defense preparations; in wartime, it provides a shock absorber, in the form of the territory and armies of the smaller states through which enemy armies must pass to reach home soil.

There is a view that the United States can insulate itself against rivals using a combination of oceans and long-range airpower.⁵⁹⁹ But even in the 21st Century, intermediary zones retain strategic utility. As a rule, passive objects like oceans or (in Austria's case) mountains are less valuable than space that is actively defended. Small, independent states in Europe and Asia are motivated to offer their own resistance to aggression before it reaches North America. As in Austria's time, they offer perhaps the single most important tool for an interstitial empire to manage, both by holding down one rival to deal with another, and by providing *points d'appui* for concentrating force quickly at the frontier to take the offensive to the enemy.

8. Prioritize regions that give long-term economic or strategic benefit.

In a multi-front war, interstitial empires must choose which frontier to prioritize. To some extent, this prioritization is decided by the enemy, since the greatest threat will usually receive the greatest attention. But to the extent that an option exists, it is prudent to prioritize places that are likely to bring the greatest benefit to the state in long-term strategic competition.

Habsburg diplomacy frequently put the most resource-rich regions at the top of the list for receiving military attention. Doing so ensured that, when the war ended, the dynasty was left

⁵⁹⁹ See the discussion in Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 215.

standing with the most valuable possessions, which in turn would put it at an advantage when the next war broke out.

Pursuing this strategy often came at the expense of the main war theater and thus the lengthening of the war. In the War of Spanish Succession, Joseph I went so far as to drain troops away from the Habsburg heartland and area around the imperial capital itself, despite persistent raids by Hungarian rebels, and even chose to relinquish the Spanish inheritance in order to secure the dynasty's rich holdings in Italy. On a similar logic, Metternich slow-rolled the 1813-14 campaign to ensure that the Austrian army, and not its allies, was the first to reach and occupy Italy. In both cases, the Monarchy leaned heavily upon those allies closest to the threat to bear the brunt of the main effort while Austria concentrated its own military resources on securing long-term advantages to itself.

[The "How" of Habsburg Power]

9. Use local solutions for local problems.

An interstitial power needs to be able to manage multiple threat vectors, each with its own intermediate spaces and local actors. Yet if it tries to do so through the extension of formal empire into these places, the task would quickly outstrip its own capabilities. The most effective and affordable solution is for the states that inhabit these spaces to voluntarily provide the bulk of the task of security.

At its height, the Habsburg Monarchy was able to effectively outsource a major share of the task of its own defense to scores of client armies and tutelary fortresses in the territories around its borders—in the west, the lesser German states; in the east, Poland; in the southwest, the northern Italian kingdoms and city-states. To the south, it attracted soldier-settlers from enemy territory to pacify the frontier and provide security to a wide swath of volatile territories. Relying on local actors in this way aided spared Austria the full costs of

defending its long security perimeter and provided a means of pinning down the local rival to free up Austria's own armies to deploy to the site of greatest danger at any given moment.

In all of these cases, Austria's eschewed the extension of more formal, centralized control over the frontier and worked with the momentum of local efforts to contain a common enemy. At the heart of this method of frontier management lay a recognition of the natural tendency of powerful states to spark fear in smaller neighbors. Attempting to be overly present in these spaces would drain Austria's own strength while leading locals to fear it rather than the adjacent rival; being too absent could ease the rival's job of spreading its own influence.

Instead, the Habsburgs positioned themselves as a powerful-yet-distant; not capable or desirous of threatening domination, but strong enough to help locals retain the thing they prized most—a continued independent existence. This typically took one of two forms. First, with those states that tended to most greatly fear the outside enemy—usually those that sat closest to its borders—the Habsburgs encouraged this dynamic by providing, preferential political relationships and other incentives to resist to the utmost. Two notable examples were the anti-French states of the Nordlingen Association and the anti-Ottoman Grenzer communities of the Military Border. Second, with those small states or groups that tended to align against *with* Austria's enemies in war—Bavaria being perhaps the prime example, the Hungarians another—Habsburg monarchs usually mixed brutality and leniency, crushing resistance ruthlessly to show the futility of opposing Austria but being quick to extend clemency after the war to avoid stoking the embers of future resistance.

10. Appease a rival to buy time, not to outsource a problem.

Appeasement was a frequent tool of Habsburg statecraft. It aided in time-management by providing a means of de-militarizing a theater vis-à-vis a particular rival and thus freeing up attention and resources to focus on another problem.

Appeasement took many forms for the Habsburgs. Austria frequently succeeded in deprioritizing disputes with bitter enemies, either to temporarily avoid war or to form common cause against a greater threat. Kaunitz's French and Turkish alliances to deal with Prussia and Russia respectively, Maria Theresa's acceptance of Hungarian demands ahead of the Seven Years War, the alliance with Prussia on the eve of the Napoleonic Wars and Metternich's alliance with Napoleon are all examples. Perhaps the greatest example, however, is the various Habsburg treaties with Russia, which brought peace to the eastern frontier for nearly a century and a half.

These examples fit within the context of strategies aimed at gaining time for the Monarchy. For such efforts not to backfire, they had to come at an acceptable cost. Détente with France was not about ceding Italy to a rival but about leveraging French fear of Prussia to augment Austrian defenses. Respite with the Hungarians were not about yielding permanent claims or advantages but rather withholding prosecution of Habsburg rights to the fullest extent in order to avoid ill-timed uprisings. Treaties with Russia did not outsource management of the east but rather sought to keep pace with their gains and, if possible, push the burdens of Turkish wars to the Russians.

In this sense, it is important to distinguish between these forms of appeasement and the term as it used today.⁶⁰⁰ Appeasement for the Habsburgs was not capitulation to a rival in order to avoid war at "any cost." Rather, it was a stratagem, often manipulative in nature, used to get something that the state would otherwise have lacked in the near-term—time—without ceding crucial advantages vis-à-vis that rival in the long-term. It was about diverting one enemy, either by going along temporarily with its wishes or focusing on a shared threat, in order to focus greater attention on another enemy.

⁶⁰⁰ For a discussion of the altered meaning of the term "appeasement" since the Second World War, see Paul Kennedy, "The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy 1865-1939," *British Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Oct., 1976), Cambridge University Press, pp. 195-215. See also Howard, *The Continental Commitment*, p. 79.

The key point in a modern context is that, for an interstitial power, diplomacy that hands away too many concessions to rivals can ultimately be as dangerous as military overstretch, since it runs the risk of whittling away at the independent spaces whose continued functioning the state relies upon most for long-term security.

11. Understand that internal complexity can be a geopolitical liability

Western states take pride in the pluralism and openness of their governmental systems. In the period since the Cold War, the view has taken root that these and other traits of democracy make it an asset in geopolitical competition. Democracies have proven more resilient in sustaining peaceful transitions of power over long periods of time than other forms of government. They represent by far the most successful format for generating happiness and creating and spreading economic wealth. And under the right conditions, the moral force of democracy can be used as a tool of strategic pressure against authoritarian opponents.

But democracy also entails a high degree of internal complexity, both in terms of the processes involved in producing change and in the ethnic and socioeconomic makeup of the polity. Even though the Habsburg Monarchy was not a democracy in the conventional sense of the term, its internal complexities as an actor in many ways bear more resemblance to modern Western states than the classic 19th Century European nation-state. Austria's history shows that for a state characterized by such complexity, domestic and foreign policy are inextricably intertwined. The internal cleavages that fuel the competition of ideas in a democratic system are not immune to manipulation by external rivals. To a greater extent than in the past, future geopolitical competition is likely to see the internal characteristics of Western powers brought into play.

12. The most dangerous frontier is financial.

War is a permanent feature of geopolitical competition, but it is a particularly persistent fact-of-life for an interstitial empire. By virtue of encirclement, threats are more numerous, and some

source of tension with one or more enemy is likely to exist at all times. War is usually imminent, underway or on the horizon.

This places an encircled power in almost constant preparation for war, which in turn creates potentially inexhaustible demands for defense resources. Money is time, in the sense that the scale of available economic resources determines how large the military resources will be for resisting many enemies at once. In the quest for time, interstitial empires have a greater propensity than perhaps most states to be drawn into debt spirals. This creates two disadvantages in geopolitical competition.

First, it makes easier for enemies to pursue cost-imposition strategies. The presence of mounting debt, and with it the costs of debt servicing, means that rivals have the ability to exacerbate the defender's difficulties through sustained military build-ups. They need only be strong on the one front to both gain a military edge and place stress on the defender's financial system and thus his position as a whole.

Second, untamed debt gives enemies greater control over the time parameters of war once it breaks out. In the mid-19th Century, Austria was defeated by a rival that, while nominally weaker than itself in most metrics of power, had a stronger financial position from which to prevent the Habsburgs from engaging in its accustomed method of drawing out a struggle to bring to bear its greater military and human resources to bear and beat back a militarily more advanced attacker.

The time pressures created by debt were heightened for the Habsburg Monarchy by its internal complexities. At the time of its final contest with Prussia, Austria was prioritizing defense (which eventually constituted 100 percent of state expenditures) to the exclusion of virtually all social spending, at considerable long-term expense to the development of its economy. So far, the United States has been able to sustain both large defense budgets and substantial social outlays, at the cost of amassing debts that now stand in excess of 100 percent of GDP.

Austria's experience suggests that this balancing act will become harder to maintain in future decades without either encountering significant constraints in military capabilities or social-foreign policy tradeoffs. In its severest form, interstitial geopolitics can generate simultaneous foreign policy crises on every side that tip debt beyond the point of sustainability and force a downward adjustment in the state's relative power position. The growth of debt, for the encircled power, imposes "financial-political frontiers" on the state's actions and is as great an enemy as any foreign power.⁶⁰¹

13. It's not enough to be a 'necessity.'

Much of the Habsburg Monarchy's durability as a state can be attributed to the view among other powers and even its rivals that it was a 'necessity'—an entity whose existence rendered a net benefit to the wider international system, the absence of which would present insoluble problems to Europe. Austria was no less a necessity in the last decades of its existence—indeed, as later events would show, it was more essential than ever to possess a stabilizing force at the center of Europe. And yet, this reality did not prevent most of Europe's powers, including many of its former allies, from turning against it and eventually presiding over its dismantlement as a state.

The fact that a state is a 'necessity' implies that a certain degree of passivity is possible on its part, since other states benefit from its continued existence and will voluntarily work to prop it up. In Austria's case, the leaders who succeeded Metternich embraced what was an essentially isolationist diplomatic course as a great power. For the first time in its history, Austria looked more or less exclusively to its own strength to conquer the challenges of its surrounding environment. It neglected traditional alliances, ceded the moral high ground and allowed itself to become embroiled on unfavorable terms in crises on three sides in which it was inflexible, became isolated and lost.

⁶⁰¹ Ignaz Plener quoted in Wawro, "Inside the Whale," p. 45.

The United States is a geopolitical necessity today.⁶⁰² To an even greater extent than in Metternich's Europe, the United States has set and managed the terms of the post-World War Two liberal international order. This order has brought greater economic prosperity and geopolitical stability to more people in more countries than any political order in prior human history, benefiting not just the United States and its allies but also its rivals.

Austria's experience shows that maintaining an order of this kind is more a matter of choice than a byproduct of inexorable structural forces. It casts a negative light on the idea that a supposedly "declining" United States will no longer be physically capable of decisively shaping its environment. Even at its high point, Metternich's Austria was far weaker in relative terms than the United States today and yet exercised a commanding influence over the affairs of Europe. However, the Habsburg experience also shows the speed with which such influence can be lost, and the security of the state imperiled, when leaders choose to neglect the sources of strength that have sustained a state's position in the past. Above all, it shows that self-isolation is the greatest danger facing an encircled state. Even the strongest power needs allies, especially in regions around its borders, in order to manage the factor of time on which both the security of its multi-sided position and the stability of the overall system rests.

Conclusion

How does the Habsburg Monarchy stack up as an empire? Despite the challenges arrayed against it, the House of Austria endured as a Danubian polity for a little more than two centuries, from the death of Charles II and loss of the Spanish inheritance in 1700 to the dissolution of Austria-Hungary at the Treaty of Trianon in 1919. If the Habsburg dynasty's broader European history is taken into account, the empire existed in various forms for more than 600 years—a total lifespan two and a half centuries longer than that of the British Empire, two centuries longer than the Roman Empire and three and a half centuries longer than the American Republic to date.

⁶⁰² Robert Kagan, *The World America Made* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2013), pp. 6-8.

One way of measuring Austria's performance as a strategic actor would be to compare the outcomes that it achieved to the costs and inputs required. Between the War of Spanish Succession in 1700 and the war Prussia in 1866, the Habsburg Monarchy fought a dozen wars.⁶⁰³ Of these, it was on the side with the greater number of allies in eight and ended on the winning side in about half. Of the remaining, it suffered clear-cut defeats in perhaps three. It amassed this record while maintaining an Army that at any given point was usually among the smallest of Europe's Great Powers and often a fraction the size of its main opponents. Altogether, its 58 fortresses withstood 20 sieges, 13 of which ended in defeats. The Austrian Army undoubtedly lost a majority of the major battles in which it participated, and yet the Monarchy accomplished a net gain of territory in the majority of the major wars in which it participated.

Yet another measure would be compare Austria's performance to that of Europe's other Germanic interstitial power—Prussia. After 1871, the new German Empire would pass through three separate forms in rapid succession. The time-management methods devised by Bismarck and Moltke, with their reliance on rapid military strikes to stage and sequence conflicts, would be used in modified form by their successors in 1914 and 1939. These methods continue to hold a mesmerizing effect in the military and national-security communities and are the subject of continual study. And yet, judged strictly by their outcomes, Germany's offensive strategies compare unfavorably with the seemingly antique defensive strategies employed by Austria. After Bismarck's victory over France, Germany would succumb to catastrophic defeats in two world wars. The state that he built would last from 1871 to 1945, a fraction of the lifespan of the Habsburgs.

But perhaps the best way to assess the Habsburg strategic performance would be to compare the outcomes that it achieved in the turbulent lands of Central and Eastern Europe to what came afterwards. All three of the 20th Century's global wars, two hot and one cold, had their

⁶⁰³ Counting the first two Silesian conflicts as one war—the War of Austrian Succession—and counting the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars as one conflict.

origins in the interstitial spaces that the Habsburg Monarchy once managed. In the century since the Monarchy's demise, this region has passed through no fewer than four distinct geopolitical orders. The Monarchy's collapse paved the way for geopolitical predation on a scale never seen in world history, as far more aggressive empires of both east and west sought to fill the vacuum. The result can be counted in casualties: 60 million in the Second World War and further millions in the Communist domination that followed, many of the victims of which were former subjects of Franz Joseph. Only in the past quarter-century since the enlargement of NATO have the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe come to experience the stability and surpass the prosperity that they enjoyed under the old empire.

In an age of instant communication, remote-controlled warfare and quests for definitive victory, the often dilatory methods of Habsburg statecraft look almost quaint. In the end, Metternich may have been right that Austria's rulers were only "propping up moldering buildings" destined to decay and collapse. But perhaps this itself is the greatest lesson that the Habsburgs can impart to modern statesmen—a sense of the inherently finite and fragile nature of all human effort. Realization of this transience forces a certain humility, an acceptance that problems can never be fully solved, only managed. It sees the central task of statecraft in all generations as building the sturdiest bulwarks possible against the permanent Chaos of geopolitics, even if these bulwarks last only for a season.

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Abbreviations

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KA	<i>Kriegsarchiv, Vienna</i>
AFA	<i>Alte Feldakten</i>

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