

“That such a coalition...could be formed...was a significant indication that Louis’ disregard for European opinion had been carried too far, and that the initiative in Europe was slowly passing to his enemies”.¹

Was Louis XIV’s foreign policy successful?

When Louis finally came to personally rule in 1661, he inherited a France barely removed from almost three decades of continuous warfare.² Yet, France was merely one cog in this machine of ceaseless strife that had characterised Europe in the first half of the 17th century.³ Territorial ambitions, religious tensions, the Habsburg-Bourbon rivalry, economic disputes and countless other issues had perpetuated and ensured the continuance of the Thirty Years War.⁴ Although Louis had been born during the concluding years of the wider European war, he matured in a France that was at war with Spain for all of his young life, only making peace in 1659.⁵ When France’s key minister Cardinal Mazarin died in 1661, Louis took the opportunity to declare the onset of his personal rule.⁶ Still a young man, Louis remained fixated upon the pastime that had been so commonplace during his youth: war. It was through war, Louis believed, that he could acquire the glory he desired.

Indeed, war would provide Louis with some of his most satisfying exploits, triumphant conquests and the distinction of *le Grand*. Yet, war would also ruin France economically, spur Louis to make drastic and ill-advised policy decisions, and eventually turn the European continent against him. Louis played a large part in provoking further costly and unwinnable wars against ever-growing coalitions of European powers that remained unconvinced of Louis’ sincerity and determined to halt the ambitions of an all-powerful France. Louis’

¹ Attributed to David Maland by Victor Mallia-Milanes, *Louis XIV and France: Documents and Debates* (London, 1986), p. 3.

² For a background to the Thirty Years War see: Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years War* (London, 1984). For an examination of the Franco-Spanish aspects of the war see: R. A. Stradling, ‘Olivares and the Origins of the Franco-Spanish War, 1627-1635’. *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 398 (Jan, 1986), pp. 68-94.

³ The Spanish-Dutch period of war is exhaustively examined by: J. I. Israel, ‘A Conflict of Empires: Spain and the Netherlands 1618-1648’. *Past & Present*, No. 76 (August, 1977), pp. 34-74 and K. H. D. Haley, *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1972), pp. 9-114.

⁴ For an examination of Atlantic trade during the war years see: Filipa Robeiro da Silva, ‘Crossing Empires: Portuguese, Sephardic, and Dutch Business Networks in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1580–1674’. *The Americas*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (July 2011), pp. 7-32.

⁵ For a comparison between the Treaty of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years War and the Peace of the Pyrenees that ended the Franco-Spanish War in 1659 see: Claire Gatnet, ‘Peace Ceremonies and Respect for Authority: The *Res Publica* 1648-1660’. *French History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2004), pp. 272-290. For the Peace of the Pyrenees placed in context see: C. Eden Quainton, ‘Colonel Lockhart and the Peace of the Pyrenees’. *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Sep., 1935), pp. 267-280.

⁶ For An account of France’s regency government before Louis began his personal rule see: Anthony Levi, *Louis XIV* (London, 2004), pp. 35-133; Louis’ decision to assume the responsibilities of Mazarin’s office and expel his successor is examined by Vincent Cronin, *Louis XIV* (London, 1990), pp. 125-140.

apparent ignorance of these fears, his frequent refusal to give ground and his periodically disastrous foreign and domestic blunders add to the picture of a monarch who was out of touch with foreign opinion and placed his realm in often grave danger because of it. Yet by the time of his death it was difficult to deny that France was Europe's predominant power,⁷ even if the costs of achieving such a transformation had been legion.

This essay will pass judgement on Louis XIV's foreign policies. The five wars that Louis' France became involved in will be examined, as will the notable misjudgements in domestic policy that drew the ire of foreign opinion, such as the Edict of Fontainebleau. Louis' wrongs, deliberate or otherwise, will constitute the theme of this essay, and will be balanced against the instances in which he did consider foreign opinion or where France made gains. Thus, this essay has three broad aims; to highlight foreign and domestic events in France, to assess the changing relationship between France's continental rivals, and finally to judge whether Louis' long monopoly over French foreign policy can be considered a success.

Historians are agreed that Louis' desire to acquire *gloire* was foremost in his mind at the beginning of his reign.⁸ Indeed, such a quest for *gloire* characterised the first two wars of Louis' reign.⁹ However, John O'Connor notes that *gloire* 'cannot simply be translated into English as "glory"'. The reason for this, O'Connor explains, is that *gloire*...

...was thought of as a lifelong quest by an aristocrat, something well above the ambitions of mere commoners. In practice, it meant testing your mettle, rising to challenges and attempting to fulfil your potential...A concern for *gloire* would be ever present in the Sun King's handling of foreign affairs.¹⁰

Louis XIV was by no means the only European monarch of Early Modern Europe to view the pursuit of *gloire* in such a way; not even his contemporaries could present *gloire* as a 'French disease', since they very much understood the concept and sought after it themselves.¹¹ France's first foray into war under Louis came against Spain, more specifically its holdings in the Spanish Netherlands in autumn 1667. Louis' forces marched based on what Louis viewed

⁷ Mallia-Milanes (1986), pp. 116-117.

⁸ John A Lynn, *The Wars of Louis XIV 1667-1714* (New York, 2013), pp. 23-38; David J Sturdy, *Louis XIV* (London, 1998), pp. 123; Ian Dunlop, *Louis XIV* (London, 1999), pp. 218-220; Jonathan Spangler, 'A Lesson in Diplomacy for Louis XIV: the Treaty of Montmartre 1662, and the Princes of the House of Lorraine'. *French History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2003), pp. 225-229.

⁹ The theory that Louis' first two wars revolved around the pursuit of *gloire*, and that his later three wars were more concerned with security, is addressed most convincingly by: Lynn (2012), pp. 31-41.

¹⁰ John T. O'Connor, 'Chapter Nine: Diplomatic History of the Reign' in *The Reign of Louis XIV*, ed. Paul Sonnino (London, 1990), p. 145.

¹¹ Lynn (2013), pp. 31-32 notes that Leopold I, Charles II and William III all concerned themselves with *gloire*.

as the failure of Spain to uphold its side of the arranged marriage between himself and Maria Theresa; a daughter of the late King Philip IV of Spain by his first marriage. Since a term of the marriage was that Maria Theresa would revoke her claims on Spanish lands upon the provision of a large dowry, Madrid hoped this would prevent succession disputes occurring in the future. Yet, this dowry was in fact so large that it was never paid and this, as far as Louis was concerned, repudiated his side of the agreement: the Spanish Netherlands were thus his by right of marriage.¹²

Louis' armies made rapid progress against the Spanish garrisons, so much so that Europe appeared to be stirring against him. To the shock of his diplomats operating in The Hague and London, news emerged in early 1668 of an Anglo-Dutch alliance. To make matters worse; 'in not so secret articles, they threatened that if he continued the war, they would ally with Spain and force him to relinquish his conquests'.¹³ With the addition of Sweden to this agreement, a dangerous continental alliance had emerged, with the sole purpose of containing any further French gains. Nonetheless, some of Louis' advisors, particularly the commanding Marshal Turenne, advocated continuing the war since 'he believed he could have conquered the Spanish Netherlands in that year'.¹⁴ Yet instead of continuing the war, such European intervention guaranteed a search for peace. Peace with Spain was signed in May 1668, and although Louis is recorded as remaining positive and looking forward to visiting the conquests he had gained through the campaign,¹⁵ he would write later in his *Mémoires*;

Their [the Dutch] insolence struck me and I came close, at the risk of endangering my conquests in the Spanish Low Countries, to turning my arms against this haughty and ungrateful nation.¹⁶

Louis' subsequent preparations validate the fact that Dutch interference in his affairs greatly offended him. Almost immediately, he sought to first pull apart the alliance poised against France, and thereafter prepare for war against the Netherlands. Louis understood the need to diplomatically isolate the Dutch before declaring war;¹⁷ a lesson he had likely learned from the previous war that had warranted such inopportune foreign involvement. The idea that the

¹² The legal argument that led to the War of Devolution is best examined by: Lynn (2013), pp. 107-108; Levi (2004), pp. 246-247.

¹³ Paul Sonnino, *Louis XIV and the Origins of the Dutch War* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 23.

¹⁴ Lynn (2013), p. 109.

¹⁵ Sonnino (1988), p. 28.

¹⁶ Cited in Sonnino (1988), p. 23.

¹⁷ For an examination of Anglo-French accord that led to the Treaty of Dover between the two states see: Gabriel Glickman, 'Christian Reunion, the Anglo-French Alliance and the English Catholic Imagination, 1660-72'. *English Historical Review*, Vol. 128, No. 531 (2013), pp. 263-291.

Sun King would remain in peace, satisfied with his limited gains of the previous war, was at this stage anathema to Louis' character.¹⁸

It is difficult to assess whether had Louis grasped the reason why Dutch diplomacy orchestrated an alliance against him in the late 1660's, or why it had proved relatively easy to entice other powers, and even the former French ally Sweden, to join. Louis' success had frightened the Dutch. Believing that it would be better to have a weak Spanish rather than a strong French neighbour, they endeavoured to block any further French gains with the pen rather than the sword. Whether Louis anticipated that further French military success would inspire the same fear of France in *Europe* as had previously been instilled in the Dutch is hard to gauge. Louis' diplomatic prowess and the activities of his ambassadors certainly provided France with a strong position from which to attack the Dutch in 1672;¹⁹ not only had the English dropped their Dutch alliance, but under their King Charles II they planned to attack the Dutch alongside the French. The Swedes, moreover, had been bought by French money and the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I had similarly promised neutrality following previous negotiations with Louis over the possible partition of the Spanish Empire.²⁰ Thus, we can conclude from these developments that Louis understood the importance of preparing diplomatic arrangements for his actions against the Dutch, but he seems ignorant of the impact his subsequent actions would have on European opinion.

If war with France was the last thing that the Dutch Republic wanted; war with an Anglo-French coalition appeared apocalyptic. Indeed, the unstoppable French advance against Dutch garrisons that Louis had deliberately led into a false sense of security,²¹ alongside the ominous naval support of the formidable English enemy that the Netherlands had struggled against in two previous wars,²² suggested the Republic's end. The term *Rampjaar*, or 'year of disaster' was coined in the Netherlands to describe the events of 1672.²³ In the backdrop of Dutch military collapse, the mercantilist aristocracy party headed by Johan de Witt came to a

¹⁸ See Sturdy (1998), pp. 136-137; Sturdy describes Louis as 'itching' to fight another war.

¹⁹ For an in-depth examination of Louis XIV's ambassadors see: William J. Roosen, 'The Functioning of Ambassadors under Louis XIV'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1970), pp. 319-322.

²⁰ See: Sturdy (1998), pp. 135-136; O'Connor (1990), pp. 148-149.

²¹ Dunlop (1999), pp. 222-224.

²² For an examination of Anglo-Dutch Wars of the preceding years see: J. R. Jones, *The Anglo-Dutch Wars of the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1996), pp. 107-179; K. H. D. Haley, *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1972), pp. 177-185.

²³ Guy Rowlands, 'Foreign Service in the Age of Absolute Monarchy: Louis XIV and His Forces Étrangères'. *War in History*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2010), pp. 146-153; Enid M. G. Routh, 'The Attempts to Establish a Balance of Power in Europe during the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century (1648-1702): (Alexander Prize, 1903)'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, New Series, Vol. 18 (1904), pp. 48-49.

brutal end as he was lynched by a mob calling for the restoration of the House of Orange at the head of the Dutch State.²⁴ For the Dutch it was a year of disaster, for Louis it was the realisation of his triumphal quest for *gloire*. The French campaign was conducted with a level of precision that capitalised upon the months of preparation Louis had set in place. Undermanned Dutch fortress towns were submerged in a swollen French torrent of men and siege machinery. Having captured numerous Dutch fortress towns on the Lower Rhine, the main French army under the Great Condé then swept west across the Rhine into the Republic proper, where an anaemic Dutch defence awaited. After capturing Utrecht on 30th June, following only two months of war with the Dutch, desperate peace negotiations began.²⁵ Very favourable terms, including Maastricht and 10 million livres, were offered by the assailed Dutch. In the face of such desperation, Louis could well have accepted the offer, made a triumphal return to France, and felt satisfied in his quest for *gloire*. Yet, as Lynn notes;

Louis, a lifelong victim of recurrent bouts of arrogance, overplayed his hand through July and asked for rapacious terms...such terms would have left the United Provinces dependent on France. While the negotiators haggled, the situation improved for the Dutch, and they finally broke off negotiations.²⁶

Louis' grave mistake to present terms so 'pointlessly humiliating' would cost his war aims dearly, since as the Dutch desperately flooded the plains around Amsterdam and the French offensive became bogged down, foreign opinion began to sway in favour of the Dutch.²⁷ The Great Elector of Brandenburg, fulfilling an alliance that Louis had not dissolved, directed his forces against France in late August. As Marshall Turenne was directed towards the Rhine to halt the Great Elector's advance, Louis' armies lost the military initiative.²⁸ With the coming of 1673, Habsburg unease at the French attack was soon to manifest itself, while the English Parliament's dissatisfaction with the war and with Charles' French alliance in general was a further ill-omen for French security.²⁹ Although Marshall Turenne knocked Brandenburg out of the war,³⁰ the distraction enabled the new Dutch Stadtholder William III to regroup and

²⁴ See: Charles-Edouard Levillain, 'William III's Military and Political Career in Neo-Roman Context, 1672-1702'. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (June, 2005), pp.325-328.

²⁵ Cronin (1990), pp. 197-198.

²⁶ Lynn (2013), pp. 115-116.

²⁷ Levi (2004), p. 249.

²⁸ Lynn (2013), p. 117.

²⁹ Glickman (2013), pp. 289-291.

³⁰ For an examination of Turenne's importance to Louis XIV see: Harriet Stone, 'A Battle for Hearts and Minds: Turenne and Louis XIV'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (June, 2014), pp. 74-83.

refocus the energies of his once scattered armed forces. By August 1673, the two Habsburg branches in Austria and Spain had concluded an alliance with the Dutch, to be joined by Lorraine, the troublesome Duchy on Louis' doorstep.³¹ Combined with the withdrawal of England from the French orbit and the increased strength and confidence of the Dutch, not to mention the collapse of Louis' German bloc and the re-entry of Brandenburg into the conflict, the war Louis had planned to confine had expanded and mutated out of his control.³² Ekberg summarised Louis' new position when he wrote that 'the French, who had isolated the Dutch in preparation for the war, were now isolating themselves.'³³ With the evacuation of the Netherlands evaporated the original impetus for the war in the first place, as French forces had to be withdrawn from the Dutch Republic in 1674 to bolster new campaigns in Spain, Germany and the Spanish Netherlands.³⁴

Louis did make great territorial gains in the Dutch War despite the fact that Europe had mobilised against him and that the war became the kind of long, drawn out struggle that Louis' advisors had originally urged him to avoid. As per the Peace of Nijmegen which ended the war in August 1678, Louis gained Franche-Comté and 'half of Flanders', while he ensured that his Swedish allies recouped their losses, and he stood firm in the face of renewed English pressure.³⁵ Louis had acquired the *gloire* he desired, and was proclaimed the Sun King.³⁶ Yet, for Louis, the purpose of war had now changed; he had certainly attained the level of *gloire* appropriate to satisfy his legend and legacy, but another concern now plagued him: that of French security.³⁷ Having witnessed the exposed nature of the French realm, the creation of a defensible frontier became paramount, especially along the Rhine. With this in mind, Louis began to seize in peacetime what he had left behind in war. The fortress city of Strasburg, the last Imperial stronghold in Alsace and located strategically along the Rhine, was captured on 30th September 1681 and on the same day, his forces marched into Casale, an Italian fortress over the Alps. However, when it was learned that the Ottoman Empire was besieging Vienna, the decision was made to call off the siege of Luxemburg. Louis XIV, as

³¹ French policy towards Lorraine during this period is examined by: Philip McCluskey, 'From Regime Change to Réunion: Louis XIV's Quest for Legitimacy in Lorraine, 1670–97'. *English Historical Review*, Vol. 126, No. 523 (2011), pp. 1,396-1,403.

³² Carl J. Ekberg noted that Louis had 'vastly overextended himself by 1673'; Carl J. Ekberg, 'From Dutch to European War: Louis XIV and Louvois Are Tested'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Spring, 1974), p. 398.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 405.

³⁴ Bertrand Fonck & George Satterfield, 'The essence of war: French armies and small war in the Low Countries (1672–1697)'. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 25, No. 4, (2014), pp. 768-776.

³⁵ Cronin (1990), pp. 205-208.

³⁶ Lynn (2013), p. 159.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 160-165.

the Most Christian King, believed it would be somewhat impolitic to take advantage of the situation when the Holy Roman Emperor was under dire threat from the Turkish invader.³⁸

Does Louis' hesitation in the face of the Habsburg difficulties demonstrate his awareness of foreign opinion? Louis only postponed his policy of peacetime acquisitions, and when they resulted in yet another war with Spain in late October 1683 he seemed perfectly willing to further his gains in the Spanish Netherlands. With Madrid unable to source allies from the distracted Holy Roman Empire, Louis was free to fight the disadvantaged Spain alone. The results of such Spanish isolation were stunning French successes, and as per the Peace of Ratisbon signed in mid-August 1684, Louis kept Strasburg and Luxemburg.³⁹ These so-called 'Reunions' marked the high point of Louis' reign. Yet, the rosy picture painted by Louis' successes on paper does not tell the whole story. One of Louis' contemporaries and a loyal German supporter, William Egon von Furstenberg, urged Louis to cease the process of the Reunions lest the minor German princes 'throw themselves blindly into the arms of the emperor and all the enemies of France in the hope of thus maintaining what belongs to them.' Furstenberg also noted that although 'the reunions are grounded in the Treaty of Munster...the manner in which they have been brought about is not quite tenable'.⁴⁰

John Lynn scathingly noted that throughout this period of acquisition 'Louis showed himself unnecessarily disdainful of European opinion and demonstrated just how far he had abandoned the more conciliatory diplomacy of Mazarin'.⁴¹ Andrew Lossky described the process of the Reunions as 'indiscriminate' and 'an abandonment of the sensible aim of seeking a defensible frontier'.⁴² Indeed, one gets the impression that while, as Lynn points out, the capture of Strasburg along the Rhine made perfect strategic sense to a French King who had seen Germans invade over its bridges countless times, Louis' conduct was laced with an abrasive arrogance that inflamed those he claimed victory over.⁴³ Louis' ministers were by no means adverse to the use of force, but some, like Furstenberg in this case, as well

³⁸ The Ottoman siege of Vienna and its impact is examined by: Bernard Lewis, 'Some Reflections on the Decline of the Ottoman Empire'. *Studia Islamica*, No. 9 (1958), pp. 115-125.

³⁹ Roosen (1970), p. 315; Black (1988), p. 201. The Spanish struggle and how its state apparatus dealt with it is examined by: Christopher Storres, 'Intelligence and the Formulation of Policy and Strategy in Early Modern Europe: The Spanish Monarchy in the Reign of Charles II (1665-1700)'. *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2006), pp. 502-519.

⁴⁰ Cited in: John T. O'Connor, 'William Egon von Furstenberg, German Agent in the Service of Louis XIV'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Autumn, 1967), p. 136.

⁴¹ Lynn (2013), p. 169.

⁴² Andrew Lossky, *Louis XIV and the French Monarchy* (NJ, 1994), p. 171.

⁴³ Lynn (2013), p. 169. Another historian who upholds the strategic sense of Louis' moves but criticises his methods is Jeremy Black; see 'Louis XIV's Foreign Policy Reassessed'. *Seventeenth Century French Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1988), pp. 207-209.

as the French economic minister Jean Baptiste Colbert and his brother Charles Colbert who served as the minister for foreign affairs,⁴⁴ believed that a more delicate method would have been preferable in the case of the Reunions. 'The problem was', as O'Connor noted, that by this stage in his foreign policy Louis had so come to depend on threats of unilateral action that he 'seldom gave much consideration to any approach other than the use of brute force. His tactics were never more in evidence than in the seizure of Strasbourg in September, 1681'.⁴⁵

By 1685, Louis had made great conquests and strategically reinforced his immediate borders, eliminating Alsace, Lorraine, Franche-Comté and fortress towns in the Spanish Netherlands as possible threats. France was now secure in its borders and its King was renowned for his military successes, but at what cost? The Marquis de La Fare notes the indelible mark that Louis' original decision to wage war against the Dutch had left;

It was never our intention to take Holland, but merely to punish her; a bad idea because we implanted fear and hatred in the hearts of a people who, in their own interest, were our natural allies. We caused them to abandon themselves to a leader who had made them warlike, and a republic which, in the state it was in, could never have been a danger to us, has become the strongest of our enemies, and one without which the others were not capable of resisting us.⁴⁶

By planning a coalition war in secret against his former Dutch ally, Louis had lit a fire under the United Provinces, a fire that would burn for the duration of his reign and lead to some of the most formidable alliance blocs set against France in her history. Louis' reckless decision to attack the Dutch had created this new European system, in which the two former allies now faced each other as determined foes; the Dutch could never trust the words or deeds of Louis again. Louis' miscalculation and his arrogance in dealing with the assailed Dutch in 1672 encouraged foreign intervention, and as Louis' ministers attempted to improvise in the face of a growing coalition, 'France was not led but rather stumbled into the first of the great wars of attrition that would help to exhaust the realm by the end of Louis XIV's reign'.⁴⁷ Louis' later actions in the Reunions startled and concerned his European rivals, as the distracted Habsburgs dealt with a fleeting Ottoman presence and the Dutch attempted to

⁴⁴ Jean Baptiste Colbert's career is examined by: John C. Rule, 'A Career in the Making: The Education of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Marquis de Torcy'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Special Issue: Biography (Autumn, 1996), pp.967-996.

⁴⁵ O'Connor (1967), p. 136.

⁴⁶ Cited in Dunlop (1999), pp. 236-237.

⁴⁷ Ekberg (1974), p. 408.

shore up the Spanish in the face of a peacetime, then wartime, French advance.⁴⁸ On paper then, it certainly appeared as though Louis had favourably impacted France's standing, but his acquisitions, while impressive, came at the cost of foreign opinion, and so long as these actions remained within living memory, there would be less difficulties in the future in forming a coalition against France. Certainly, Louis' conduct after 1685 did not suggest that the Sun King had learned to fear the formation of any coalition whatsoever.

The history of France in the 16th century was characterised by the same religious turmoil that ripped the rest of Europe apart and culminated in the Thirty Years War.⁴⁹ Louis XIV's Grandfather Henry IV was originally a Protestant and had been a member of the French Huguenot minority, but converted to Catholicism in 1595. In order to ensure religious tolerance for that segment of the population of which he had once been a member, Henry issued the Edict of Nantes in 1598, which guaranteed freedom of worship for Protestant Huguenots across France.⁵⁰ In the years that followed, France was by no means cured of its religious conflicts, but such issues certainly did not dominate the French agenda as they had before. By the time of Louis' birth, the Edict of Nantes was an accepted part of French society and a guarantor of the rights of French Huguenots.⁵¹ However, with the Edict of Fontainebleau 22nd October 1685, Louis erased what had been 'nearly a century of tolerance', as the practice of Protestant worship was outlawed.⁵² The wealth of condemnation at Louis' decision, as well as his resulting efforts to implement the Edict, also affected his foreign relations. The courts of Europe, struck by anecdotes of fleeing French Huguenots and what it could mean for religious tensions across the continent, were aghast.⁵³ One Protestant Elector in particular invoked the Edict of Potsdam to entice fleeing French citizens into Brandenburg.⁵⁴ The exodus of French citizens resulted in a loss of productive and skilled

⁴⁸ Lynn (2013), p. 166.

⁴⁹ An analysis of how religious issues tore apart Dutch society is examined by: Charles H. Parker, 'To the Attentive, Nonpartisan Reader: The Appeal to History and National Identity in the Religious Disputes of the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands'. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 57-78.

⁵⁰ For an examination of the immediate impact that the implementation of the Edict of Nantes had in France see: Katharine J. Lualdi, 'Persevering in the Faith: Catholic Worship and Communal Identity in the Wake of the Edict of Nantes'. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Fall, 2004), pp. 717-734.

⁵¹ For an examination of Huguenots and the Edict of Nantes from 1643 to 1661 see: Ruth Kleinman, 'Changing Interpretations of the Edict of Nantes: The Administrative Aspect, 1643-1661'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 541-571.

⁵² Lynn (2013), p. 177.

⁵³ One such anecdote is addressed by: Carolyn Lougee Chappell, "'The Pains I Took to Save My/His Family": Escape Accounts by a Huguenot Mother and Daughter after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Winter, 1999), pp. 1-64.

⁵⁴ For more information on the Great Elector's Edict of Potsdam see: Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947* (London, 2007), pp. 139-142.

individuals,⁵⁵ not to mention the impact it had on the armed and naval forces, many of whom defected to Dutch or German armies.⁵⁶

In short, Louis' Edict of Fontainebleau was an unmitigated disaster for France; it portrayed his rule as one of religious repression and intolerance, while anti-French propaganda was able to spread as far as America as a direct result.⁵⁷ Sturdy notes that 'after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes the Protestant states which joined anti-French coalitions were inspired in part by a desire to avenge the suffering of their fellow Protestants'.⁵⁸ Not even the papacy approved of Louis' actions, remarking that 'Christ did not use armed forces to further the gospel'.⁵⁹ It was not just the ideology but the means by which Louis implemented the Edict that drew consternation from Europe; for example, his direct interference in Piedmont and his insistence that its resident sovereign duke persecute any Protestants in the region resulted in thousands of deaths amidst a protracted guerrilla campaign. By attempting to apply his domestic policies in places where he had no business, Louis was presenting himself as a monarch whose tactless wartime diplomacy was matched only by his peacetime religious intolerance.⁶⁰

Louis' heavy-handed approach to implementing his religious policies matches the arrogant tone of his victorious diplomacy, like the aforementioned Dutch negotiations in late 1672. By revoking the Edict of Nantes, Louis needlessly provoked a loyal minority, and made it clear that he would no longer accept the peaceful status quo. It is a policy comparable to his war against the Dutch, since in this case also Louis attacked an ally willing to go to any lengths to maintain the French friendship.⁶¹ By creating enemies within and without, Louis was setting France up for a disastrous encounter with the consequences of policies he had set in motion.

⁵⁵ The exodus of French citizens is examined by: Susanne Lachenicht, 'Huguenot Immigrants and the Formation of National Identities, 1548-1787'. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (June, 2007), pp. 310-311.

⁵⁶ Lynn (2013), pp. 178-179.

⁵⁷ For information about anti-French propaganda in America see: Howard C. Rice, 'Cotton Mather Speaks to France: American Propaganda in the Age of Louis XIV'. *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June, 1943), pp. 198-233.

⁵⁸ Sturdy (1998), p. 142.

⁵⁹ Cited in Dunlop (1999), p. 306. See also: Louis O'Brien, 'The Huguenot Policy of Louis XIV and Pope Innocent XI'. *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (April, 1931), pp. 29-42.

⁶⁰ Lynn (2013), pp. 179-181 examines the struggles of the Vaudois, a Protestant community in Savoy, and the pressures Louis placed upon its duke to ensure the forced conversion of the region.

⁶¹ See: Dunlop (1999), p. 223.

It is thus little wonder that Lynn noted cuttingly ‘Louis only found religious turmoil in France when he had created it himself.’⁶²

The next major war Louis faced is often referred to as a major miscalculation.⁶³ Such a label is appropriate because, in contrast to previous wars for *gloire*, Louis no longer sought war for the mere sake of it. His subsequent policies of war and acquisitions had the end goal of security, though because his conduct and methods were the same it is likely that his rivals could not tell the difference. Such a point is important because it helps to explain why, when Louis sought again to effectively bully compliance and an ultimatum out of the Holy Roman Emperor and some minor German princes in late 1688, he was so vociferously opposed.⁶⁴ Although Louis may have believed he was merely ensuring French security by demanding that his previous gains be guaranteed, his ultimatums and threatening tone merely echoed his previous conduct; in effect they confirmed to Europe that the King of France was not willing to coexist peacefully with his neighbours.⁶⁵

The Nine Years War (1688-1697) would plunge France into an abyss of debt, domestic strife and external crises. It is important for the purpose of this essay to note that Louis did not intend to fight the long, protracted war that history now recounts took place. The immediate cause of the war stemmed from the issue of succession; one in the Palatinate and another in Cologne. Louis would, especially in the case of the latter, draw the ire of Europe for his interference in the region, this despite the simple fact that as Anthony Levi notes, ‘Louis had no rights in the matter at all’ and only acted because he ‘saw a pretext and demanded a share in the succession’.⁶⁶ Louis believed that by seizing what he required along the Rhine and issuing demands to potential enemies from an advantageous position he could avoid a war, or at least wage one on a limited, affordable budget.⁶⁷ Yet, as he had done in previous years, Louis accounted neither for foreign intransigence, nor for the determination of William of Orange to rally European opinion against him in the hope of forming another anti-French

⁶² Lynn (2013), p. 182. For more on French persecution of the Huguenots see: Dunlop (1999), pp. 270-283; Cronin (1990), pp. 266-270.

⁶³ George Clark, ‘The Character of the Nine Years War, 1688-97’. *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1954), p. 174; Levi (2004), p. 255; Dunlop (1999), p. 308-309.

⁶⁴ Richard Place, ‘Bavaria and the Collapse of Louis XIV's German Policy, 1687-1688’. *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Sep, 1977), pp. 374-376; Black (1988), p. 210.

⁶⁵ Routh (1904), pp. 62-64; McCluskey (2011), p. 1,405; see also: Mark A. Thomson, ‘Louis XIV and William III, 1689-1697’. *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 76, No. 298 (Jan, 1961), pp. 37-38; Guy Rowlands, ‘Louis XIV, Vittorio Amedeo II and French Military Failure in Italy, 1689-96’. *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No. 462 (June, 2000), pp. 534-535.

⁶⁶ Levi (2004), p. 254.

⁶⁷ Sturdy (1998), p. 142; Dunlop (1999), pp. 308-310; Lynn (2013), pp. 192-193; Place (1977), pp. 390-393.

coalition; an act which the now English King continued until the early 18th century.⁶⁸ Louis issued his manifesto in late September 1688, in which he demanded that the previous Treaty of Ratisbon that had ended the process of Reunions with Spain be made permanent, and that the succession crisis in the Electorate of Cologne be resolved in favour of the French candidate, William von Furstenberg. Louis gave the Holy Roman Emperor, still distracted with his Ottoman war, three months to comply.⁶⁹ To ensure that his demands were met, Louis began a process of forced coercion that resulted in a further inflammation of European opinion against him; he invaded the Palatinate and seized the strategically important fortress of Philipsburg, thus sealing the Rhine against his enemies.⁷⁰ By so acting, Louis could claim that he sought only guarantees from the German princes in the region and Leopold I; on the other hand if the Holy Roman Emperor managed to redirect a portion of his forces away from the Turkish struggle then Louis would be in a sound strategic position to defend his realm and interests.⁷¹

Louis' miscalculation, as it transpired, was expecting the minor German princes to capitulate. Although Louis could claim that he desired no further territorial concessions save from the guarantees he requested, his foreign policy in Germany was failing and Bavaria, Brandenburg and Hannover, as well as a number of other German princes, were fashioning an alliance against him.⁷² To this alliance of German princes were added the powers of Spain and Sweden, while the Imperial Diet would declare war on Louis in January 1689.⁷³ Further events gave Louis cause for concern; 1688 had been a crisis year for his English partnership, as years of financial and political support for the regime first of Charles and then his brother James⁷⁴ evaporated with the onset of the 'Glorious Revolution' and the succession to the English throne of Louis' prolific Dutch enemy, William of Orange.⁷⁵ With England and the

⁶⁸ For information on the extent of William of Orange's diplomacy in this era see: Preben Torntoft, 'William III and Denmark-Norway, 1697-1702'. *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 318 (Jan., 1966), pp. 1-25; Vladimir Matveev, 'Summit Diplomacy Of The Seventeenth Century: William III and Peter I in Utrecht and London, 1697-98'. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2000), pp. 29-48; J. F. Chance, 'England and Sweden in the Time of William III and Anne'. *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 16, No. 64 (Oct., 1901), pp. 686-711. For a general overview see: M. Lane, 'The Diplomatic Service under William III'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fourth Series, Vol. 10 (1927), pp. 87-109.

⁶⁹ Lynn (2013), p. 192.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 193.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, pp. 193-194.

⁷² Place (1977), pp. 380-382.

⁷³ Routh (1904), pp. 61-63; Lynn (2013), p. 195.

⁷⁴ For an examination of the French support given to Charles' regime see: Clyde L. Grose 'Louis XIV's Financial Relations with Charles II and the English Parliament'. *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (June, 1929), pp. 177-204.

⁷⁵ William III's intention to seize the English crown is examined by: Tony Claydon, 'William III's Declaration of Reasons and the Glorious Revolution'. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (March, 1996), pp. 87-108.

United Provinces now united under a common monarch and guaranteed to participate in the slowly mounting coalition of states against him,⁷⁶ the League of Augsburg- the greatest consequence of Louis' foreign policy to date- came into being.⁷⁷ The resulting war lasted for nine terrible years, and was destined to be the costliest and most desperate conflict that Louis had yet fought.⁷⁸ The struggles therein virtually erased what had been a period of glory for the Sun King in the minds of most of his subjects, as social discontent began to manifest itself with a newfound vengeance.⁷⁹

The very fact that Louis' foreign policy had resulted in another unwanted coalition war against France demonstrates its severe shortcomings. Yet again, as he had in 1674, Louis had grossly misjudged the international situation; not only that, but the orders Louis sent to his officials along the Rhine in early 1689, while the Grand Alliance was forming against him, read like a recipe for international provocation. Having frightened minor German princes, alienated former allies and handed pieces of propaganda on a platter to his nemesis by acting so recklessly along the Rhine in the first place,⁸⁰ Louis continued to display a flagrant disregard for foreign opinion by ordering his agents to adopt a scorched earth policy. The French act of burning the Palatinate thus began in earnest.⁸¹ By ordering such a savage and extreme policy, Louis may have believed he was ensuring French security by creating a wasteland in between his realm and that of the enemy, but in reality he pushed further neutral German princes into opposition against him. Once it became clear that Leopold would not be intimidated, French methods became even more savage, as the cities of Worms, Heidelberg and Speyer were razed to the ground, and German tales of the 'French Attila' became commonplace.⁸² Louis made it clear he would not tolerate those rulers that resisted his demands; giving express orders to 'punish' the Elector of Trier for resisting French advances

⁷⁶ The issue of English resistance to William's rule is best addressed by: Robert D. McJimsey, 'A Country Divided? English Politics and the Nine Years' War'. *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 61-74. Division among those who plotted to bring William to power in England is examined by: W. A. Speck, 'The Orangist Conspiracy against James II'. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (June, 1987), pp. 453-462.

⁷⁷ Lynn (2013), pp. 192-194; Sturdy (1998), pp. 143-144; Dunlop (1999), p. 307.

⁷⁸ Rowlands (2000), p. 534; Mallia-Milanes (1986), pp. 92-93.

⁷⁹ Social discontent in France is examined best in this period by: Richard Bonney, 'Vindication of the Fronde? The Cost of Louis XIV's Versailles Building Programme'. *Society for the Study of French History* (2007), pp. 209-215. For a detailed examination of uprisings during Louis' reign proper see: Leon Bernard, 'French Society and Popular Uprisings under Louis XIV'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Autumn, 1964), pp. 454-474.

⁸⁰ Black (1988), p. 209.

⁸¹ Place (1977), pp. 389-391. Lynn (2013), pp. 195-199 gives the best account of the extent of French savagery and desperation along the Rhine.

⁸² Sturdy (1998), p. 143.

along the Rhine.⁸³ By 1690, it was apparent that France stood virtually alone in Europe; faced with a coalition composed of England, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Lorraine, Savoy, Brandenburg, Bavaria, Hannover and Austria, as well as minor German principalities who now looked to the Holy Roman Emperor for their security against the Sun King's seemingly boundless ambition and ruthlessness.⁸⁴

When peace finally came in 1697 Louis' France was still intact; in itself a remarkable feat considering the forces levelled against her. Yet, though the Peace of Ryswick in late September 1697 did not strip France of her sovereignty or significantly stunt subsequent French ambition, they did inexorably force her king to give ground. The list of concessions is striking; Louis recognised William of Orange as the King of England, he handed back his territorial gains made during the Reunions of the early 1680's, save for Strasburg; he had handed the other coup of the Reunions, the Alps fortress of Casale, back to the duke of Savoy in the previous year.⁸⁵ France withdrew from Catalonia, signed a trade agreement that favoured the Dutch, allowed eleven fortress towns to devolve back to Dutch control, and Louis acquiesced to the successions of Cologne and the Palatine that had perpetuated his ill-advised interference in German affairs a decade before.⁸⁶ Philip McCluskey noted on the aftermath of the war that;

The Nine Years War marked a real turning point in the reign of Louis XIV; the Sun King now found himself engaged in a conflict he could only extricate himself from by offering significant concessions to his enemies. Lorraine, by now fully integrated into the kingdom, loomed large as one of these possible concessions.⁸⁷

By returning Lorraine to its duke under the terms of the treaty signed in 1661, after occupying it since 1670,⁸⁸ Louis was conceding one his earliest acquisitions. Such a capitulation embodies the desperate state of France in the close of the 17th century. Louis' misjudgements, his hideous policies of pillage and burn and his ability to turn Europe against him had warranted these significant French concessions. Had Louis' reign ended in 1685, one would be accurate in labelling him 'the Great'; one could justifiably term his foreign policy a success. Yet, even with French gains in power, prestige, influence and land by 1685, Louis

⁸³ Dunlop (1999), p. 308.

⁸⁴ Routh (1904), p. 62; Levi (2004), p. 257.

⁸⁵ Sturdy (1998), p. 144; Rowlands (2000), pp. 564-569.

⁸⁶ Levi (2004), p. 259.

⁸⁷ McCluskey (2011), p. 1,405.

⁸⁸ Spangler (2003), pp. 231-237.

had cast France as the enemy of European peace. The Sun King had too often disregarded foreign opinion in the past, but before the Nine Years War France had not deservedly suffered for it.

The Nine Years War can therefore be considered the bill for Louis' excesses. Blinded by his previous successes, by his contempt for the Holy Roman Emperor's forces and by his own ignorance of foreign opinion,⁸⁹ Louis XIV operated on the eve of the Nine Years War as though Europe would continue to tolerate the overbearing aspects of his foreign policy. He did not suitably consider the possible consequences of his actions on the eve of war in 1688 because his previous involvement in foreign affairs had produced none of note for France. Although his interest in foreign policy had shifted from seeking *gloire* to seeking security,⁹⁰ his methods and attitude remained the same to the extent that Europe was unable to tell the difference between the blustering and belligerent young man of the late 1660's and the Sun King of the late 1680's- and that in itself constitutes a failure of his policy. Thus Louis was only able to end the war that his own miscalculations had induced by sacrificing the vast majority of the prizes he had acquired since he began his personal rule. Some of his contemporaries believed he was excessively generous at the bargaining table,⁹¹ and that potential unrest in the allied camp may have enabled Louis to demand a higher price for peace.⁹² Additional figures at the time noted the necessity of achieving peace in Europe; the Spanish King was dying without any direct issue, and the succession that loomed threatened to perpetuate yet another weighted struggle.⁹³

The War of the Spanish Succession is often portrayed as the attempt of Louis XIV to unite the Franco-Spanish crowns and establish a massive Bourbon bloc in Europe.⁹⁴ The truth is far more complex; while the war that began in 1702 and ended in 1714 represents the last, most exhaustive struggle of Louis' reign and arguably the manifestation of all his foreign policy failures, its origins lie in the system of marital bonds that had been woven into the diplomatic

⁸⁹ A fascinating glimpse into the regard Louis and his ministers held for the armed forces of the Holy Roman Empire on the eve of the Nine Years War can be found in: Richard Place, 'The Self-Deception of the Strong: France on the Eve of the War of the League of Augsburg'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Autumn, 1970), pp. 459-473.

⁹⁰ Lynn (2013), p. 105; Cronin (1990), pp. 189-191; Dunlop (1999), pp. 218-222.

⁹¹ Routh (1903), pp. 62-63; Sturdy (1998), p. 145.

⁹² For discord at William of Orange's rule in the England see: Lois G. Schwoerer, 'The Role of King William III of England in the Standing Army Controversy- 1697-1699'. *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (May, 1966), pp. 74-94. Some historians also denote the importance of Savoy signing a separate peace with Louis in the year before; see: Rowlands (2000), pp. 566-569.

⁹³ Dunlop (1999), pp. 349-353.

⁹⁴ Routh (1903), pp. 69-71; Levi (2004), p. 260.

framework of Europe over the previous four decades.⁹⁵ Again, it is worth noting that the guiding principle of all interested parties, including Louis XIV, was to avoid another war over the succession issue, and thus a partition treaty had been devised to appease all sides.⁹⁶ Such treaties encountered setbacks when the agreed upon heir to Spanish throne- a minor Bavarian prince- died in 1699, thus prompting another series of negotiations. The issues were still being contested when Charles II died on 1st November 1700.⁹⁷ Although the death of Charles injected a certain level of urgency into the negotiations, the most significant revelation was contained in Charles' will, in which the late Spanish king named Louis' grandson Philip, duke of Anjou, as heir to Spain and all of its dependencies. Louis was thus faced with the dilemma of accepting Charles' will and placing his grandson on the Spanish throne, perhaps unduly offending the former members of the Grand Alliance in the process, or ignoring the will and the implications that it had for Bourbon fortunes in the world.⁹⁸

The fact that Louis chose to accept Charles' will did not necessitate war against the members of the Grand Alliance; all of Europe had expended vast resources fighting the Nine Years War, while the Holy Roman Emperor had endured sixteen years of war with the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁹ Louis' argument since invading the Spanish Netherlands in 1667 was that his wife's renunciation of her Spanish inheritance had been made null and void thanks to the Spanish failure to uphold their side of the agreement; he now had to prove his passion for the inheritance issue when war with a resurrected Grand Alliance might be the penalty.¹⁰⁰ Louis believed emphatically in the divine right of kings and it is thus incorrect, some would say unfair, to judge this stage of his decision making process as a step towards the domination of Europe; if anything, Louis upheld that he could not disobey the will of God, which

⁹⁵ For an in-depth examination of the origins of the War of the Spanish Succession see: Mark A. Thomson, 'Louis XIV and the Origins of the War of the Spanish Succession'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 4 (1954), pp. 111-134.

⁹⁶ The treaty of partition is examined by: A. D. Francis, 'The Grand Alliance in 1698'. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1967), pp. 352-360.

⁹⁷ Levi (2004), p. 260.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 260-261.

⁹⁹ The traumatic effects of the war on Europe's countryside are examined by: John A. Lynn, 'How War Fed War: The Tax of Violence and Contributions during the Grand Siècle'. *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (June, 1993), pp. 302-310. For an excellent comparison of institutional and financial effects that the war had on both France and the Ottoman Empire see: Eliana Balla And Noel D. Johnson, 'Fiscal Crisis and Institutional Change in the Ottoman Empire and France'. *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Sept, 2009), pp. 815-845. For an examination of the war's impact on trade within Europe and the Levant see: Mehmet Bulut, 'The Role of the Ottomans and Dutch in the Commercial Integration between the Levant and Atlantic in the Seventeenth Century'. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2002), pp. 224-230.

¹⁰⁰ Sturdy (1998), pp. 146-147.

manifested itself in the continued succession of Europe's dynasties, including his own.¹⁰¹ This belief was a common theme throughout Louis' reign, but it must be emphasised that Louis' beliefs did not ensure the outbreak of the following war. It was not Louis' acceptance of Charles' will or even the dispatching of his grandson to Madrid that began the War of the Spanish Succession; instead it was Louis' reckless arrogance and his brazen method of dealing with his European rivals who, after fighting Louis' France already for nine long years, would be so inflamed by his foreign policy that they resurrected the Grand Alliance and realised all of Louis' fears; as a war more protracted, costly and disastrous than the Sun King had ever known, was fought against him for twelve appalling years.¹⁰²

Almost two years passed between Louis' acceptance of the Spanish crown and the outbreak of war over the Spanish Succession; during that period a peace-eager Europe should have been faced with reassuring signals and messages from Louis explaining his intentions regarding the fundamentally noble decision he made to accept Charles' will. Instead, Louis' rivals were confronted with the belligerent image of French forces seizing crucial fortresses in the Spanish Netherlands from the Dutch, and of intimidating the Dutch Republic into accepting the new Spanish King 'Philip V'.¹⁰³ Louis followed this ill-advised military policy with an economic one; he ensured through his new Spanish connections that the right of *asiento*, or the lucrative supply of slaves to the Spanish colonies, would be exclusively held by France, thus barring the English and Dutch from any profit in the matter. Such an act provided an example of how Louis expected the two crowns to work together; it made economic sense, but to the Maritime Powers such an act demonstrated how potentially powerful and dangerous the Franco-Spanish bloc could be when it acted in concert.¹⁰⁴

A further blow to the peace came when the exiled former king of England James II died in France. As Anthony Levi notes; 'Louis picked up the challenge by immediately and unnecessarily recognising James' thirteen year old son as James III, going back on his recognition of William as the English King at Ryswick'.¹⁰⁵ The situation soon escalated; Leopold sent troops into Italy and resurrected the Grand Alliance in late 1701, and with its

¹⁰¹ An examination of this mindset and how affected the prelude to the War of the Spanish Succession can be found in: Herbert H. Rowen, "L'Etat c'est a moi": Louis XIV and the State'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring, 1961), pp. 95-98.

¹⁰² Sturdy (1998), pp. 149-150; Levi (2004), p. 262-263; Dunlop (1999), pp. 364-366; Thomson (1954), p. 117-125.

¹⁰³ Lynn (2013), p. 269.

¹⁰⁴ Thomson (1954), p. 125. See also: da Silva (2011), pp. 29-32.

¹⁰⁵ Levi (2004), p. 262.

rebirth the failings of Louis' foreign policy became apparent. Unable to convince Europe that he had changed, the Sun King instead managed to intimidate and anger a war-weary coalition into reforming and making war against him only five years after the Nine Years War had ended.

Although France survived the war, and its outcome resulted in the creation of a Bourbon Spanish line, the war cannot be considered a French victory. Allied victories led by the Duke of Marlborough and Eugene of Savoy ensured that France remained on the defensive at least until 1710.¹⁰⁶ The war ruined France financially.¹⁰⁷ Its continuation in the midst of famine, harsh winter and military crisis after crisis seemed to suggest the end of French sovereignty. Yet, Louis held on despite the severest of setbacks; he continued the war despite the agonised pleas of the citizenry for change and social upheaval,¹⁰⁸ and he remained intransigent, to the point that his original goals for France in Spain were eventually met in the 1714 peace,¹⁰⁹ though at a cost so high the outcome appeared unworthy.¹¹⁰

On his deathbed Louis declared to his five year old heir, his great grandson Louis XV that 'I have been too fond of war; do not imitate me in that'.¹¹¹ Such a confession is certainly revealing, but does it demonstrate an admission on the part of Louis that his foreign policy had failed? Louis' famed engineer Vauban in fact provides us with the means to pass such a judgement; Vauban posited that a king's greatness, including that of his foreign policy, is to be measured by the resulting prosperity and contentment of his subjects.¹¹² If historians were to assess Louis' foreign policy based on these criteria though, the Sun King would certainly fail the test. Instead, what is required is the ability of the historian to place Louis' actions in context; were his policies successful in their reaping of benefits in prestige, land or glory? Again, it is difficult to argue that Louis' ends justified the means; far too often did Louis wage war in the name of an outcome that could have been achieved without conflict and with more diplomatic finesse. Louis did not wish to wage the kind of coalition war that emerged in 1674, 1688 or 1702; yet because of his arrogant dealings with the Dutch, his burning of the Palatinate and his failure to assure Europe of his peaceful intentions, each of these issues

¹⁰⁶ The best account of the war's course is examined by: Lynn (2013), pp. 270-357.

¹⁰⁷ Lynn (2013), p. 362, claims that Louis XIV left the country 2.5 billion livres in debt upon his death.

¹⁰⁸ For an account of social unrest in the latter half of Louis' reign see: Phyllis K. Leffler, 'French Historians and the Challenge to Louis XIV's Absolutism'. *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), pp. 1-22.

¹⁰⁹ Levi (2004), p. 273.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 275.

¹¹¹ Cited in: Mallia-Milanes (1986), p. 117.

¹¹² Levi (2004), pp. 263-264 notes Vauban's proposal of this idea and others in his program of reform.

mutated and expanded into the kind of protracted struggle which France simply could not afford, and which in the long run bankrupted, starved and isolated her.

Thus Louis' diplomatic blunders actually made his own mission of bettering France more difficult; he cast France as the enemy of Europe's religious freedoms, as the disturber of the peace, as the continental intimidator determined to bully his way through international practice. These shortcomings must be construed as a fundamental failure in his foreign policy; Louis simply did not possess the ability to assess foreign opinion and act accordingly. Louis' control over foreign policy spanned four decades; an era that seemed, both to his enemies on the continent, and to his subjects who would celebrate his death,¹¹³ four decades too long. France would remain a predominant power throughout the 18th century, and would actually recover in remarkably quick time.¹¹⁴ However, such a recovery and predominance in European affairs must be viewed as an accomplishment that the French nation achieved in spite of the Sun King's control over foreign policy, rather than because of it.

¹¹³ Mallia-Milanes (1986), pp. 109-120.

¹¹⁴ An examination of French foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of Louis' death is addressed by: Jeremy Black, 'French Foreign Policy in the Age of Fleury Reassessed'. *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 407 (April, 1988), pp. 359-384.

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