

The Grand Alliances

by Andrew Thompson

European politics in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were dominated by warfare. This article considers the sources of the conflict and the ways in which alliances to counter the power of Louis XIV were formed and maintained. Although a general desire to minimise French influence was evident, states had a variety of motives for joining alliances. Participation often came at a price. The difficulties of maintaining a united front were most frequently apparent at the end of conflicts. Peacemaking also highlighted where power within the alliances really lay.

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Introduction

European politics in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were dominated by conflict. Many of the major conflicts in this period were not fought between single states but between coalitions and alliances. Consequently, European powers, both great and small, were drawn frequently and extensively into warfare and, as a result, states increasingly had to make a choice about which grouping to back. Nonalignment and neutrality became harder to maintain while taking sides was becoming the norm. Using alliances in times of war was not, of course, novel – the desire to seek allies when faced with an external threat is as old as history itself. However, the ways in which alliances were negotiated and maintained, partly as a consequence of a more general trend towards diplomatic professionalization, was becoming more structured and formalised. Additionally, alliance diplomacy, in both peace and war, was also increasingly recognised as a constitutive part of a general system that preserved an equilibrium or balance within European politics. Thus, at both a practical and theoretical level, the alliance diplomacy of this period had a structuring impact on the imagination of European political elites that lasted well beyond the conflicts between Louis XIV (1638–1715) (→ [Media Link #ab](#)) and his opponents that initially gave birth to it. The major fault line within European diplomacy was not new – indeed a struggle between Austrian and French, or, more correctly, between Habsburg and Valois-Bourbon, power had been central since at least the early sixteenth century.¹ However, the wars of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries served to perpetuate and enhance this division and supported the creation of rival European power blocs. First of all, this article looks into the diplomatic and historical context that gave rise to the growth of alliance diplomacy. It discusses the various mechanisms by which alliances were constructed and maintained, and examines the rhetorical context in which this approach to international politics emerged and how this related to wider considerations of a European system. Finally, it attempts to evaluate the impact and legacy of these alliances and the ways in which, particularly in the British context, they rapidly became part of the diplomatic furniture – a potentially universal panacea and a model to be invoked whenever foreign political manoeuvres ran into difficulties.

▲ 1

The Origins of the Grand Alliance

Mention of alliance diplomacy most frequently brings to mind the "Grand Alliance" signed between the United Provinces and Austria in May 1689. This alliance was an immediate response to the invasion of the Rhineland that had occurred in the previous year as the result of Louis XIV's attempt to secure the election of his favoured candidate to the strategically important electorate of Cologne. However, Louis XIV's pre-emptive strike, in laying waste to large areas of the south-western corner of the Holy Roman Empire, was the culmination of a longer period of tensions between the French king and his neighbours. It is in these events that the origins of the Grand Alliance can be found.²

▲ 2

Louis XIV had become king during a period of internal upheaval and strife within France. During the king's minority, discontented nobles held considerable power and, in some cases, were engaged in open insubordination to the crown. Following Cardinal Jules Mazarin's (1602–1661) (→ Media Link #ac) death, Louis XIV assumed the reins of power with the dual aims of restoring the monarchy's power and securing France's external borders. Recent research has suggested that the French king's aims in securing his frontiers, through the acquisition of strategically important fortresses such as Luxembourg, Strasbourg or Casale, were largely defensive, rather than expansive, in nature.³ It is, however, easy to understand why some of his neighbours found more sinister explanations for Louis's actions. The acquisition of these new territories had been carried out almost entirely by military force. Special French courts known as "Chambers of Reunion" had previously considered and (unsurprisingly) approved the French claims to give a quasi-legal justification to the actions. Although Louis's actions had briefly provoked open conflict, his seizures were temporarily accepted by both Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705) (→ Media Link #ad) at the Truce of Regensburg (August 1684).⁴

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One reason why Leopold I had been willing to accept France's eastern and northern expansion was that he faced a more serious threat much closer to home. Ottoman troops had reached the gates of Vienna in 1683 and the Roman Emperor was engaged in an existential struggle to preserve his own territories. The slow swinging of the initiative back in Leopold's favour after 1684 was one of the factors that led Louis to invade the Empire. The French king was concerned that his tactic of keeping Leopold occupied through support for the Ottomans might no longer be as effective. Another reason was a growing realisation that French power within the Empire seemed to be waning. The formation of the League of Augsburg in 1686 brought the Emperor, Spain, Sweden, Saxony, Bavaria, the Palatinate and a number of smaller powers in the Bavarian, Franconian and Upper Rhenish circles into an alliance designed to prevent further French expansion, either through diplomacy or by force.⁵

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Louis XIV's army left a trail of destruction in its wake in south-west Germany. Mannheim, Heidelberg, Heilbronn, Speyer and Worms were all caught in a wave of destruction and devastation. Leopold tried to move quickly to respond but the bulk of his army was situated in the east, ready to fight the Turks. It had been Louis's hope that an attack on the Empire would not only resolve various issues in his favour but would also persuade the Ottomans to keep up the pressure on Leopold, thus keeping his rival in check. However, the response of the Emperor and the other European powers to the "shock and awe" tactics of the French king was robust. William III (1650–1702) (→ Media Link #ae) signed an alliance with Leopold, in his capacity as Stadtholder of the United Provinces, in May and added his signature as king of England, Scotland and Ireland in September 1689.⁶

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The Grand Alliance signalled a fundamental shift in European politics. It demonstrated Leopold's determination to prepare for the defence of the Holy Roman Empire in the West. After consultations with his theologians he overcame objections against an alliance between himself, a Catholic monarch, and the Protestant Stadtholder of the United Provinces, William III, who had just ousted a Catholic king from the throne of England. European power politics took precedence over religious antagonism. The Grand Alliance also marked a new phase in British politics. Parliament not only accepted an alliance with a Catholic power but Britain turned now clearly against France. This marked the beginning of what has been called by some the second Hundred Years' War lasting until 1815. The Grand Alliance became a key term, almost an ideology, used repeatedly for mobilising domestic and foreign support in the following century.⁷

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The Grand Alliance in Practice

Louis XIV's decision to invade the Empire proved to be something of a false step. His tactics did much to alienate opinion within the Holy Roman Empire and French attempts to re-establish a strong anti-Habsburg party within the Empire met with little success. William III, who had been a tireless supporter of nearly every attempt to contain French power since 1672, found it remarkably easy to bring powers together into an anti-Bourbon coalition. Support, however, as so often in international affairs, came at a price. Leopold I, for example, made the backing of the Maritime Powers (as Britain and the United Provinces were known) for his claims to the Spanish throne in the highly likely event of the failure of the ruling Spanish Habsburg line a pre-condition for his support. Other powers drove different bargains.⁸

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While membership of the Grand Alliance was initially limited, it soon expanded to include other states. Spain and Savoy joined in 1690. Both had different motivations for joining. Charles II of Spain (1661–1700) (→ Media Link #af) feared French incursions into the Spanish Netherlands and also worried about whether Louis XIV might want to expand his territory in the south and west, as well as the north and east. Victor Amadeus of Savoy (1666–1732) (→ Media Link #ag) had already lost territory to Louis XIV in Savoy

and was anxious about further French incursions into Piedmont. His price for adhering to the Grand Alliance was the recognition of Savoy as a sovereign state and the return of territory taken by France. Both the Spanish Netherlands and North Italy were to become important theatres in the ensuing conflict. Several of the German princes had joined together in 1688 to oppose the French invasion of the Rhineland and a number of these were eventually to join the Grand Alliance in their own right, notably Bavaria and Brandenburg. Sweden, partly because of its possessions within the Empire and its status as a guarantor power of the Westphalian treaties (1648), was also drawn into the struggle.⁹

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Even in circumstances where the threat posed by France to the stability and order of the Empire was clear, rulers still sought to extract maximum advantage for themselves from the political situation. The behaviour of Ernest Augustus, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1629–1698) (→ Media Link #ah), more commonly known as Hanover, was typical in this respect.¹⁰ In October 1688 Ernest Augustus, along with the Electors of Brandenburg and Saxony and the Landgrave of Hessen-Kassel, had agreed to mobilise his troops in response to the French invasion of the Rhineland. Louis had hoped that Leopold would be detained by the Ottoman threat so the active opposition of the north-German princes was an unwelcome surprise. Nevertheless, French diplomatic efforts continued. As well as Hanover, France targeted Münster, Saxony, Gotha, Sweden and Denmark in an effort to build up a neutral bloc within the Empire.¹¹ Offers of French help and assistance were not always well-received but Ernest Augustus was prepared to listen to Louis's admonitions to remain neutral because of his broader political ambitions. The primary aim of Ernest Augustus's policy in this period was to enhance his family's position by raising Brunswick-Lüneburg into the top tier of German states through the acquisition of electoral status for its rulers.¹² To that end he was prepared to listen to French pleas and he used offers of French support and the threat of withholding troops as part of his negotiating strategy with the Emperor during the early years of the war. This strategy involved both carrots and sticks. On the positive side Ernest Augustus was perfectly willing to contribute some of his regiments, in exchange for handsome subsidies, to the collective Imperial efforts against France. When efforts to win Imperial concessions were not yielding results, however, Ernest Augustus withdrew some of his forces in 1691. The disruption that this, and similar actions by Münster, caused was sufficient to give both Leopold I and William III pause for thought. Renewed diplomatic efforts were made to detach Ernest Augustus from France and these eventually proved successful. Whether Ernest Augustus ever seriously intended to ally openly with France is unclear. He was certainly prepared to extract maximum advantage from the situation to get what he wanted. The promise of recognition of Hanover's claims to electoral status by the Emperor resulted in a full commitment of troops to Leopold's eastern campaigns. Once the electoral cap had been secured in 1692, Ernest Augustus quickly moved to join the alliance formally. His willingness to hire out his troops to Britain and the United Provinces for use in the Spanish Netherlands in exchange for their recognition of his elevated status also helped secure his commitment to the alliance. Ernest Augustus's deliberate policy of seeking maximum advantage was arguably better rewarded than that of his elder brother, George William of Celle (1624–1705) (→ Media Link #ai), whose adherence to William III yielded less in the way of tangible results.

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Ernest Augustus's strategy is illustrative of the broader considerations and difficulties that maintaining the Grand Alliance entailed. On the one hand, there was a clear division between the primary powers and those of the second rank. This was most obvious when it came to the question of providing troops. Those states which were able to pay others to provide them with troops were by definition in a stronger position than those that were simply providers of troops. However, as the Hanoverian example makes clear, it was still perfectly possible for those willing to hire their troops out to the highest bidder to extract concessions in the context of a competitive market for those troops. The Grand Alliance was maintained by more than simple good will and altruism. There was a healthy dose of self-interest that served to bind it together. The nature of these ties varied. They could be purely financial, with allies kept together through the promise of subsidies to keep troops in the field. Yet money alone was probably insufficient to maintain the alliance. The promise of territorial gains or recognition for enhanced status was also helpful. The Grand Alliance was not, therefore, just a means for the strong to exert their influence over the weak. There was a strongly and recognisably reciprocal element to relations.

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The Grand Alliance and the Peace of Ryswick

While in practice keeping an alliance together relied upon a degree of compromise, there were certain situations in which questions of status and precedence tended to come to the fore. One of these was about what to do when it came to negotiating peace treaties. An acceptable settlement was, after all, the ultimate aim in any conflict. The issue for the members of the Grand Alliance was who would be represented at the negotiating table. There was no doubt that both Leopold I and William III would have to be there but how far the other members of the alliance would be included directly in the negotiations was unclear. Contemporary diplomacy was strongly influenced by strict hierarchical principles.¹³ The way in which monarchs and rulers addressed each other, the way in which diplomats were received at court and even the order in which they sat at table were all the subject of strict rules. European rulers were all aware of the rank order in which they were placed and what their relative position within it was. At the top was the Emperor, followed by the Kings of France and Spain and then the other European monarchs. Electors of the Holy Roman Em-

pire were in the tier immediately below monarchs and so viewed themselves as superior to other territorial rulers within the Empire. Ernest Augustus, Frederick III of Brandenburg (1657–1713) (→ Media Link #aj), Maximilian II. Emanuel of Bavaria (1662–1726) (→ Media Link #ak) and Lothar Franz von Schönborn (1655–1729) (→ Media Link #al), Archbishop-Elector of Mainz, all entertained hopes that they might be personally represented at the negotiations to bring the Nine Years' War to a close. Leopold I, by contrast, viewed the electors' pretensions as inappropriate and was keen to assert his own authority by ensuring that he was able to act solely for the Empire in the talks with Louis XIV. He was helped in this by the reluctance of both Louis XIV and William III to admit new members to the monarchical club and so Leopold I was able to outmanoeuvre the electors and exclude them from the negotiations.¹⁴

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The Emperor was able to preserve diplomatic proprieties but his victory was not without costs. By excluding the German princes Leopold I was showing who was in charge but he was also implicitly assuming responsibility for the peace, signed at Ryswick in the autumn of 1697,¹⁵ which brought the war to an end. The settlement was not especially favourable for the Empire. The allies, it is true, had made some gains. France evacuated the Rhineland and gave Lorraine back to duke Leopold (1679–1729) (→ Media Link #am). Luxembourg was returned to Spain and Kehl and Philippsburg, important Rhine fortresses, were also returned. Louis XIV, however, retained Strasbourg and by the infamous fourth clause, suggested by the Elector Palatine, was able to ensure that Catholicism would continue in places where it had been established during the French occupation, mainly but not solely within the Palatinate.¹⁶

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More generally, the nature and timing of the settlement had illustrated the difficulties of keeping a coalition of divergent interests together. Louis XIV had consistently sought to weaken the alliance by negotiating with individual members in efforts to secure a separate peace. It had taken some time to achieve a breakthrough because the French monarch had initially refused to consider sacrificing any of his gains to achieve peace, and he resolutely refused to acknowledge William III's rights to the British throne and give up on his support for the exiled James II (1633–1701) (→ Media Link #an). Nevertheless, by 1696 his efforts had begun to meet with some success. In exchange for the return of the fortress of Pinerolo and French abandonment of Casale, Victor Amadeus of Savoy agreed to make a separate peace. The departure of Savoy from the alliance immediately left Spanish and Austrian troops vulnerable in the Italian theatre and a hasty truce was agreed. Realising that this turn of events would enable Louis XIV to redeploy his forces elsewhere, and aware of the increasing war-weariness within Britain, William III accepted that a settlement was becoming necessary. His close advisor and confidant, Hans Willem van Bentinck, earl of Portland (1649–1709) (→ Media Link #ao), was able to negotiate the deal which formed the basis of the Peace of Ryswick with the French general Louis François de Boufflers (1644–1711) (→ Media Link #ap). Louis agreed to recognise William's de facto rights to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland but refused to expel the Jacobite court from his domains. This recognition was sufficient for William and, having secured it, he was less interested in pursuing Leopold's claims to the Spanish inheritance at this stage. Faced with William's unwillingness to continue the fight and the consequent drying-up of Dutch and British subsidies and manpower, the Emperor had little option but to sign a peace as well.¹⁷ Part of the point of alliances was that they enabled powers that were unable to engage in conflict by themselves to achieve their aims collectively. By extension, once the coalition began to splinter, it became impossible for the last power standing to continue by itself.

▲ 13

Between War and Peace

One of the reasons why Louis had been willing to make concessions to secure peace was his growing awareness that a struggle over the future of the Spanish throne was drawing ever closer. Consequently, he realised that a period of peace to allow for recovery and rebuilding was desirable. It had been clear for some time that a dispute over the future of the Spanish empire was likely. Charles II, the last of the Spanish Habsburgs, lacked male heirs and his health was increasingly poor. Both Louis and Leopold had claims to succeed Charles. Regardless of the legal niceties of the situation (both had extensive connections via marriage with the Spanish royal family (→ Media Link #aq)), it was clear that the future of the Spanish throne could not be resolved without William because of the extensive strategic and commercial interests of Britain and the United Provinces in the future of the Spanish Netherlands and access to Spanish colonies.¹⁸

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The prospect of Spain passing directly to either Louis or Leopold was not one that William, or other European rulers, viewed with any degree of enthusiasm. A glance at a map of Europe revealed the huge advantage that either state would gain, in terms of size and resources, through the acquisition of Spanish dominions.

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William therefore sought to avoid such direct aggrandizement of his neighbours through the negotiation of partition treaties. The first partition treaty sought to avoid conflict by giving Spain to a grandson of Leopold I by his first Spanish wife, Joseph Ferdinand (1692–1699) (→ Media Link #ar), electoral prince of Bavaria. Joseph Ferdinand's untimely death at the age of six rendered this solution redundant. A second effort was made which gave Spanish possessions in north Italy to Louis XIV's eldest son, the Grand Dauphin Louis (1661–1711) (→ Media Link #as), and the rest of the Spanish inheritance (Spain itself, the overseas empire and the Spanish Netherlands) to Leopold I's younger son, the Archduke Charles, the future Charles VI (1685–1740) (→ Media Link #at). The problem with this arrangement was that, while it may have suited William and Louis, it did little to meet Leopold's interests. The Emperor was most interested in acquiring Spanish possessions in Italy, mainly because of their proximity to his core territories.

▲ 16

Moreover, his bargaining position had been strengthened by the Peace of Karlowitz (January 1699) with the Ottomans.¹⁹ This meant that for the first time in nearly two decades Leopold was free to concentrate his attention entirely on events in Western Europe, free from the pressures of having to defend his borders against marauding Turks. Moreover, the Spanish themselves were reluctant to see their territory parcelled up as part of a general plan to avoid European conflict. Just before his death, Charles II of Spain was persuaded to write a new will. In it he left his territories to Louis's grandson, Philip, duke of Anjou (1683–1746) (→ Media Link #au), the second son of the Dauphin. Philip had, as a condition of the inheritance, to renounce his claims to the French throne. If he refused, Spain was to go to the Archduke Charles instead.²⁰

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Louis, unsurprisingly, was prepared to accept Charles's will but Leopold refused to do so. While the Emperor began to move troops into Italy to take possession of Spanish territories by force, politicians in Britain and the United Provinces were worried by the prospect of Spain becoming a French satellite, irrespective of Philip's attitude to the French crown. The presence of French advisors with Philip in Madrid and French occupation of the barrier fortresses in the Spanish Netherlands reinforced this view. Fears that the French king aspired towards universal monarchy and domination of the European continent were rekindled.²¹ Suspicion of Louis's motives was not allayed by his recognition of the exiled James II's eldest son as James III (1688–1766) (→ Media Link #av), following the former's death in September 1701.

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The Grand Alliance Revived

It was in this context that William sought to limit French power once more through a revitalised Grand Alliance. From the propagandistic perspective, the necessity of the re-formed alliance was justified on the basis of countering French efforts to attain universal monarchy and ensuring that the European state system was maintained. The vision of what constituted the ideal system for the relationship between the European powers was increasingly expressed in the language of the balance of power.²² The intervention of the Grand Alliance in the Spanish succession dispute was portrayed as an unfortunate but necessary means to ensure that a balance was maintained. At a more practical level, the coalition wanted to partition the Spanish inheritance. Although Philip would be allowed to retain Spain itself, subject to further reassurances about the continued separation of France and Spain, the Spanish Netherlands and Spanish possessions in Italy were to go to the Archduke Charles. Leopold's presence in the southern Netherlands would provide a barrier to the United Provinces against the prospect of French expansion. Philip would also be forced to accept trade concessions, increasing the access of the Maritime Powers to Spain's colonial empire. An agreement was signed between Britain, the United Provinces and Austria in September 1701. Leopold agreed to guarantee the Protestant succession in Britain shortly afterwards.²³

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As before, a complicated web of overlapping interests had given rise to a coalition that had a clear idea of what it wanted to prevent – French domination – but a more opaque vision of how this might be achieved. Other powers quickly sought to join the coalition but, again, ulterior motives were to the fore. One of the lessons that the north German electors had learnt from their dealings with Leopold at the time of the Peace of Ryswick was that enhanced status was the key to be taken seriously by the emperor.²⁴ The electors of Saxony, Brandenburg and Hanover all actively sought to raise their profiles after 1697. Frederik Augustus I of Saxony (1670–1733) (→ Media Link #aw) acquired royal status through election to the Polish throne in 1697. In exchange for the right to call himself king in Prussia, Frederick III was prepared to commit troops to the allied cause. He hoped that his active participation in the alliance would enhance the chances for international acceptance of his new status.²⁵ Georg Ludwig of Hanover, the future king George I of Great Britain (1660–1727) (→ Media Link #ax), who had succeeded his father as elector in 1698, hoped that his involvement would increase the likelihood of him attaining the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland. The Act of Settlement (1701) had named his mother as the successor to William III's sister-in-law Queen Anne (1665–1714) (→ Media Link #ay).²⁶ Other German princes were very ready to hire out their troops as auxiliaries to enhance the armies on the Rhine and in the Spanish Netherlands. Cash was one incentive that worked well. Another was force. Both Wolfenbüttel and Gotha, who had wavered in their support for Leopold, found large Hanoverian and Prussian forces on their doorsteps and requests to hire regiments to the Grand Al-

liance.²⁷ Yet the ability of both Britain and the United Provinces to fund a substantial and prolonged war effort through paying for their own armies and navies and providing the means to hire extra forces was to prove crucial to sustaining the coalition. Elsewhere, Victor Amadeus of Savoy was persuaded to switch sides in late 1703 with the promise of territorial gains at the expense of Milan. The desire of the Maritime Powers to enhance their naval and commercial position led them into negotiations with Portugal to allow access to naval bases from which to prosecute the war further. Pedro II (1648–1706) (→ Media Link #az) agreed to these demands but he extracted the concession that the allies would commit to removing Philip from Spain entirely.²⁸

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The expansion of war aims was not popular in Vienna. Leopold objected to committing troops to an exercise that he saw largely as designed to help the Maritime Powers increase their commercial strength.²⁹ Yet the Emperor's freedom of action was increasingly curtailed. Unlike Britain and the United Provinces, Austria lacked developed credit systems that would have enabled it to borrow money cheaply in the long term. Without a national bank to coordinate the management of state credit, Austria was heavily reliant on individual financiers. The precariousness of Leopold's situation was graphically exposed with the death of one of Vienna's leading financiers, Samuel Oppenheimer (ca. 1635–1703) (→ Media Link #b0). It emerged that the Austrian treasury could only repay about half of the 11 million florins that Oppenheimer had advanced since 1701.³⁰ Fiscal problems were further exacerbated by the Rákóczi uprising in Hungary, which disrupted the collection of taxes and created further pressure on the treasury. The Austrian war effort was increasingly dependent on Anglo-Dutch finance and there were some strings attached to the case. Leopold's treatment of Hungarian Protestants, for example, was questioned and the Emperor had to make concessions to the Hungarian rebels.³¹

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Overall, the Grand Alliance was successful in its initial aim of containing Louis XIV's power but the additional objective of putting the Archduke Charles onto the Spanish throne proved to be unachievable. The longer the war went on, the more desirable a negotiated settlement became. Once more, the divergent interests of the members of the alliance meant that reaching an acceptable peace would be a complicated process. Allied victories against Louis XIV in the Low Countries during 1707–1708 had forced the French king to the negotiating table in early 1709. Although eager to reach an agreement, Louis was not prepared to accede to allied demands to join in the campaign to remove his grandson from the Spanish throne. The talks failed and the war continued, with the bloodiest battle of the war occurring at Malplaquet in September 1709 (→ Media Link #b1). Further talks in 1710 at Geertruidenberg also ended without agreement.³² The stalemate was broken by two developments. In April, Joseph I (1678–1711) (→ Media Link #b2), who had succeeded his father as Emperor in 1705, died. This left the Archduke Charles, or Charles III of Spain, as heir to the Habsburg inheritance. Fears about a combined Franco-Spanish state disturbing the peace of Europe were rapidly replaced by visions of an Austro-Spanish conglomerate disrupting the balance of power. Anglo-Dutch support for a settlement that involved the partition of Spanish territory grew. The desire for peace had been strengthened by a Tory victory in the British election of 1710. The Tories had portrayed their Whig opponents as warmongers, unsympathetic to the financial costs of continued conflict and eager to enrich themselves through financial speculation. This tactic had worked and the new government had a mandate to make peace on essentially British terms.³³

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An outline agreement was concluded between Britain and France in October 1711. British subsidies were removed from 1712 and the Grand Alliance began to fall apart. German auxiliaries were taken into Dutch pay but the remaining allies lost at Denain in July 1712. Other members of the alliance were either anxious to reach their own agreements with France or increasingly distracted – both Hanover and Prussia were turning their attention to the Great Northern War. Britain and the United Provinces signed a peace with France at Utrecht in 1713,³⁴ Charles VI, who succeeded his brother Joseph I in 1711, had to wait until 1714 to complete a deal with France. As at the end of the Nine Years War, Charles took it upon himself to negotiate on behalf of the Empire.³⁵

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Conclusions and Legacy

Why did states want to join the Grand Alliance? On the one hand, it provided the means to achieve collective ends that could not be obtained individually. Containment of French power was chief among these, and in this respect the alliances were largely successful. However, beneath this shared aim, a number of more self-interested objectives lurked. Reducing Louis XIV's power might have concomitant territorial or commercial benefits for his opponents. The alliance was always an uneasy union between a shared antipathy towards France and a series of potentially conflicting subsidiary aims on the part of its members. The way in which securing a partition of the Spanish inheritance expanded to include the total removal of Philip V in the War of the Spanish Succession is a graphic example of this. The alliance's initial aims had been largely achieved by 1708 but yet the conflict dragged on for several more years.³⁶ Although there were some attempts to portray the alliance as the product of shared interests, through defending a balance of power in Europe, practical political considerations often disrupted this sense of unity. This was most apparent when it came to making peace. Securing the best deal for an individual state frequently overrode considerations of collective action. In these cases, the Maritime Powers, whose financing of the alliance gave them considerable leverage, frequently came off best. Nev-

ertheless, abandonment of allies might have unfortunate and unforeseen consequences. Georg Ludwig of Hanover remembered with considerable irritation the way in which the Tories had dashed to make peace after 1710. When he acceded to the British throne as George I in 1714 his personal mistrust of the Tories was one of the factors that led to an extended period in the political wilderness for the party.³⁷ Moreover, the era of the Grand Alliance was seen in retrospect as providing an important model for how the British should conduct their foreign policy. "The Old System", as the union of the Maritime Powers with Austria came to be known, was still being cited as exemplary in the 1750s.³⁸ With the passage of time the difficulties of building and maintaining alliances had apparently been forgotten.

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Although the Grand Alliance itself came to an end with the treaty of Utrecht, many of the problems it was designed to counteract were to continue into the next generation and beyond. The 1720s witnessed several (unsuccessful) attempts to resolve the issues left over from the Utrecht settlement through congresses of the major powers. Where formal congresses failed, ad hoc alliances sometimes succeeded. The process of negotiating and maintaining alliances went hand in hand with an increasingly professional approach to diplomatic activity. Yet even within formalised structures of decision-making, personal contacts and relationships remained important. The impact of the Grand Alliance on diplomatic culture was somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, alliance-making suggested that it was possible for powers to join together to solve Europe's problems on the basis of shared interests and without the need to resort to more formalised and permanent institutions. On the other hand, it was also clear that this approach was only ever likely to achieve temporary solutions.

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Appendix

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Notes

1. ^ Scott, Birth 2006, pp. 139–140.
2. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, pp. 36–42.

3. ^ Hochedlinger, Wars 2003, p. 169.
4. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, p. 39.
5. ^ Hochedlinger, Wars 2003, pp. 156–157; Wilson, Armies 1998, p. 76.
6. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, p. 45.
7. ^ Duchhardt, Vorabend 2003, pp. 208f. and 220; Malettke, Hegemonie 2012, pp. 419–447.
8. ^ Hochedlinger, Wars 2003, p. 171.
9. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, p. 45.
10. ^ Schnath, Geschichte 1938, pp. 506–556.
11. ^ Wilson, Armies 1998, pp. 96–97.
12. ^ Hatton, George 1978, p. 46.
13. ^ Scott, Birth 2006, pp. 124–125.
14. ^ Wilson, Armies 1998, pp. 98–99.
15. ^ Digitized peace treaty of Ryswick, 22/09/1697, provided by the Leibniz Institute of European History, project "Europäische Friedensverträge der Vormoderne" [16/01/2013].
16. ^ Thompson, Britain 2006, p. 54.
17. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, pp. 50–53.
18. ^ ibidem, pp. 54–55.
19. ^ Digitized peace treaty of Karlowitz, 26/01/1699, provided by the Leibniz Institute of European History, project "Europäische Friedensverträge der Vormoderne" [16/01/2013].
20. ^ Hochedlinger, Wars 2003, pp. 174–175.
21. ^ Thompson, Britain 2006, pp. 36–39; Wilson, Armies 1998, p. 104.
22. ^ Simms, Victories 2007, p. 45; Claydon, England 2007, pp. 194–197.
23. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, pp. 57–58.
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27. ^ Wilson, Armies 1998, pp. 106–107.
28. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, p. 59; Ingraio, Habsburg 2000, p. 108.
29. ^ Wilson, Armies 1998, p. 112.
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31. ^ Wilson, Armies 1998, p. 113.
32. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, pp. 62–63.
33. ^ Simms, Victories 2007, pp. 57–67.
34. ^ Digitized peace treaty of Utrecht, 11/04/1713, provided by the Leibniz Institute of European History, project "Europäische Friedensverträge der Vormoderne" [16/01/2013].
35. ^ Hochedlinger, Wars 2003, pp. 186–187.
36. ^ McKay / Scott, Rise 1983, pp. 60–61.
37. ^ Hatton, George 1978, pp. 119–120.
38. ^ Thompson, Britain 2006, pp. 202–208.

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