Napoleon's Empire

European Politics in Global Perspective

Edited by Ute Planert

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Napoleon's Empire

European Politics in Global Perspective

Edited by

Ute Planert
University of Wuppertal, Germany

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de l'Antiquité à nos jours (2007); in collaboration with Jean-Luc Chappey, Guillaume Mazeau, Frédéric Régent, Pierre Serna *Pour quoi faire la Révolution* (2012) and *Couleurs, esclavages, libérations nationales (1804–1860)* (2013).

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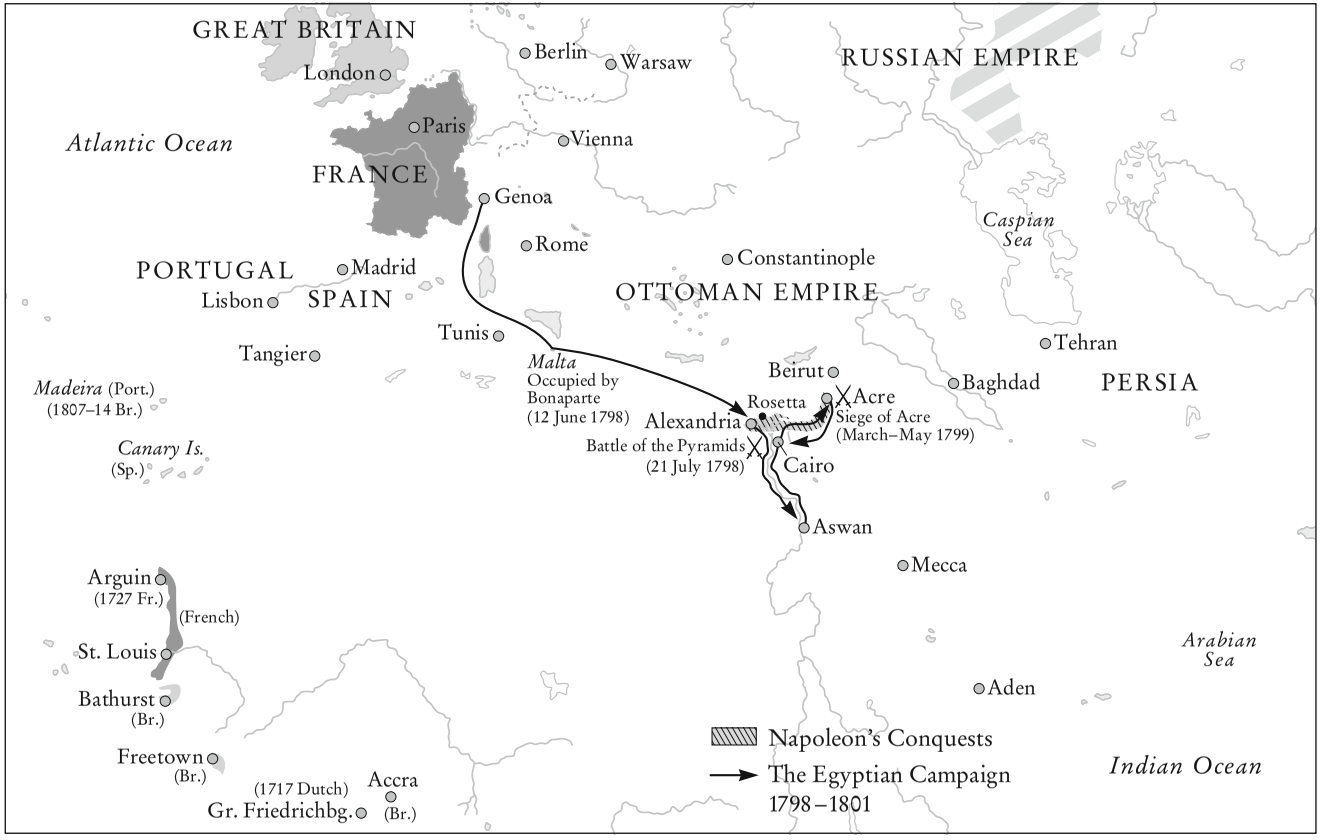
GREAT BRITAIN
London
Berlin
Warsaw
RUSSIAN EMPIRE
Atlantic Ocean
Paris
Vienna
FRANCE
Genoa
Caspian Sea
Rome
Constantinople
PORTUGAL
Madrid
Lisbon
SPAIN
OTTOMAN EMPIRE
Tunis
Tehran
Tangier
Malta
Occupied by Bonaparte
(12 June 1798)
Beirut
Baghdad
PERSIA
Madeira (Port.)
(1807–14 Br.)
Rosetta
Acre
Siege of Acre
(March–May 1799)
Alexandria
Battle of the Pyramids
(21 July 1798)
Canary Is.
(Sp.)
Cairo
Aswan
Mecca
Arguin
(1727 Fr.)
(French)
St. Louis
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Bathurst
(Br.)
Aden
Freetown
(Br.)
(1717 Dutch)
Accra
Gr. Friedrichbg.
(Br.)
Napoleon's Conquests
The Egyptian Campaign
1798–1801
Indian Ocean


Napoleonic Europe, 1812
Kingdom of France in 1789
French Empire 1812
Ruled by members of Napoleon's family
French Allies
Invasion of Russia, 1812
Norway
(Denmark; to Sweden 1814)
Atlantic Ocean
North Sea
SWEDEN
Baltic Sea
Moscow
Riga
Smolensk
Copenhagen
Tilsit
Vilna
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Sweden-Pomerania
PRUSSIA
Lithuanian
Mecklen-burg
Hamburg
Berlin
Bialystok
1807 Russian
RUSSIAN EMPIRE
Amsterdam
West-phalia
DUCHY OF WARSAW
Warsaw
London
Kiev
Cologne
Erfurt
Saxony
Brussels
CONFED. OF THE RHINE
Galicia
Prague
Frankfurt
Paris
AUSTRIAN EMPIRE
Baden
Bavaria
Vienna
Moldavia
Bessarabia
Hungary
FRANCE
SWISS CONF.
Tyrol
Black Sea
KINGDOM OF ITALY
Illyrian Provinces
Wallachia
Guastalla
Belgrade
La Coruña
Bayonne
Genoa
Lucca
Florence
Tuscany
Sofia
Constantinople
Piombino
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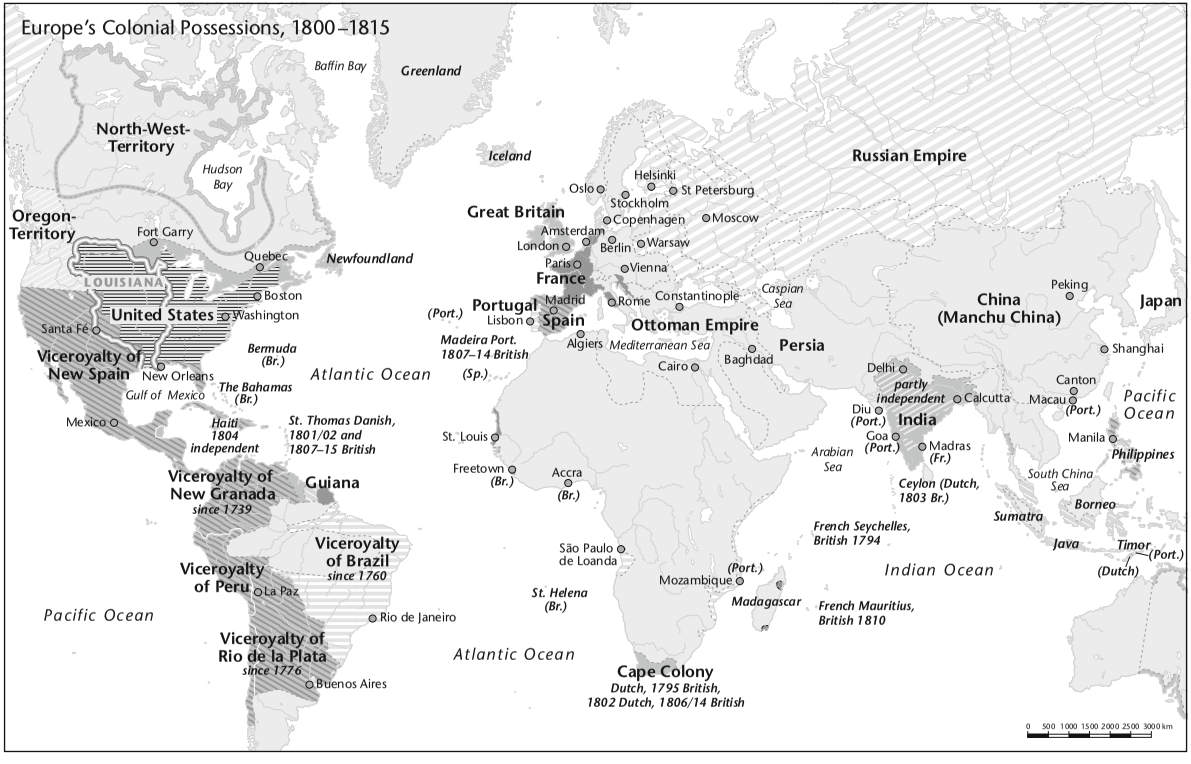
PORTUGAL
(French occupied 1807)
Catalonia
(French 1808–13)
Corsica
Rome
Madrid
OTTOMAN EMPIRE
Naples
Lisbon
SPAIN
SARDINIA
NAPLES
Corfu
(French 1807–14)
Balearic Is.
Ionian Is.
(Rep. under British protection)
Athens
Mediterranean Sea
Cadiz
Gibraltar (Br.)
SICILY
Algiers
Tunis
ALGERIA
Malta (British from 1800)
0 200 400 600 km


Europe's Colonial Possessions, 1800–1815
Baffin Bay
Greenland
North-West-Territory
Hudson Bay
Iceland
Russian Empire
Helsinki
Oslo
St Petersburg
Stockholm
Great Britain
Copenhagen
Moscow
Oregon-Territory
Fort Garry
Amsterdam
London
Berlin
Warsaw
Quebec
Newfoundland
Paris
Vienna
France
LOUISIANA
Boston
Madrid
Rome
Constantinople
Caspian Sea
Peking
China (Manchu China)
Japan
United States
Washington
(Port.)
Portugal
Lisbon
Spain
Ottoman Empire
Santa Fé
Algiers
Mediterranean Sea
Persia
Shanghai
Bermuda (Br.)
Madeira Port. 1807–14 British
(Sp.)
Cairo
Baghdad
Delhi
Viceroyalty of New Spain
New Orleans
Atlantic Ocean
Canton
partly independent
Calcutta
Macau (Port.)
Pacific Ocean
Gulf of Mexico
The Bahamas (Br.)
Diu (Port.)
India
Mexico
Haiti 1804 independent
St. Thomas Danish, 1801/02 and 1807–15 British
St. Louis
Goa (Port.)
Madras (Fr.)
Manila
Philippines
Arabian Sea
Freetown (Br.)
Accra (Br.)
Viceroyalty of New Granada since 1739
Guiana
Ceylon (Dutch, 1803 Br.)
South China Sea
Borneo
Sumatra
French Seychelles, British 1794
Viceroyalty of Brazil since 1760
São Paulo de Loanda
Java
Timor (Port.)
(Dutch)
Viceroyalty of Peru
La Paz
(Port.)
Mozambique
Indian Ocean
St. Helena (Br.)
Madagascar
French Mauritius, British 1810
Pacific Ocean
Rio de Janeiro
Viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata since 1776
Atlantic Ocean
Buenos Aires
Cape Colony
Dutch, 1795 British, 1802 Dutch, 1806/14 British
0 500 1000 1500 2000 2500 3000 km
Great Britain and its Colonial Possessions
France and its Colonial Possessions
Dutch Colonies (under British control 1795–1815, partially returned in 1815/17)
Portugal and its Colonial Possessions
Spain and its Colonial Possessions
Denmark and its Colonial Possessions
Russia (including spheres of influence in Siberia and Alaska)
United States of America (from 1783)
Louisiana (1763 Spain, 1800 France, 1803 sold to United States)


Latin America in 1830
UNITED STATES
Missouri
Mississippi
Boston
New York
Bermuda (Br.)
MEXICO
(1822/23 Empire,
1824 Republic)
Gulf of
Mexico
Florida
(1819 to US)
Atlantic
Ocean
Bahamas (Br.)
Mexico
CUBA
(Sp.)
DOMINICAN REP.
(under Haitian control 1822–44)
Jamaica (Br.)
Haiti
1804
Puerto Rico (Sp.)
(Br.)
Guatemala
HONDURAS
(1838)
(1838) GUATEMALA
(1841) EL SALVADOR
NICARAGUA
(1838)
COSTA RICA
(1838)
Caracas
Trinidad (Br.)
PANAMA
(Colombia until 1903)
VENEZUELA
(1830)
(Br.)
GUIANA
(Dutch)
(Fr.)
NEW GRANADA
(Colombia 1830/31)
Bogotá
Galápagos-Is.
Quito
ECUADOR
(1830)
Amazon
VICEROYALTY
OF BRAZIL
(1822)
Recife
PERU
(1821)
Lima
La Paz
BOLIVIA
(1825)
PARAGUAY
(1811)
Rio de Janeiro
Pacific Ocean
Asunción
São Paulo
VICEROYALTY
OF RÍO
DE LA PLATA
(1810)
URUGUAY (1828)
Montevideo
Santiago
CHILE
(1818)
Buenos
Aires
Patagonia
Atlantic Ocean
Federal Republic of Central
America, 1823–41
Republic of Colombia
("Gran Colombia"), 1819–30
0 500 1000 km

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Napoleon and Beyond: Reshaping Power in Europe and the World

Ute Planert

When, in June 1815, the European great powers sealed the end of the Napoleonic era by signing the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna, the world had become a different place. There is hardly any other era as abundant in profound change as the decades around 1800, centered on the axis of the French Revolution and Napoleon's rule. Kings came and went, empires dissolved after having been in existence for a thousand years, entire continents declared their independence. The last war, which had raged for nearly a quarter of a century, turned Europe into a slaughterhouse and left its mark far beyond. The people of Europe suffered – according to various estimates – between 3.5 and 5 million deaths. They also witnessed limits to the power of the centuries-old reign of the church and nobility. From Norway to Latin America, common people held meetings and negotiated constitutions, struggled over the issue of slavery and found new ways to adapt the economy to changing conditions. The world of the *ancien régime* underwent inconceivable transformation and appeared to dissolve. Indeed, the change in political and social circumstances and the heritage of the Napoleonic era marked the dawn of western modernism resulting in an even greater European dominance over the rest of the world.[1]

French expansionism and Napoleonic hegemony profoundly reshaped the political and territorial structure of Europe. The necessity to mobilize resources for a decades-long warfare fostered new levels of state authority and brought about a bureaucratic modernization unknown even to the early modern 'fiscal-military state'.[2] Therefore, when monarchs and ministers gathered in Vienna in 1814 and 1815 to reinstate European stability, they neither did, nor even intended to, restore the pre-revolutionary order, demonstrating the misleading notion of the post-war era as a 'Restoration.'[3] Instead, after over two decades of revolution and war, they sought to develop an enduring peace and the maintenance of the monarchical principle under the new social and political conditions.[4] Apart from the Ottoman Empire, all European states and royal dynasties sent representatives to Vienna.[5] There the great powers established a political and territorial order

that corresponded to the interests of the victorious states and, at the same time, prevented the formation of a new continental European hegemonic power. In terms of territory and structure the Congress did not return to the Europe of the *ancien régime*. The strengthening of the modern state at the expense of small dynastic, religious and territorial entities eradicated during the Napoleonic era remained in place, whereas the great power's spheres of influence were shaped according to geopolitical and economic interests.[6]

Great Britain's maritime ascent during the centuries-long colonial rivalry with France had assembled the traditional naval powers of Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain as allies of Napoleon. By 1814 they paid for that alliance with a profound loss of importance. Following Napoleon's defeat, Great Britain emerged as the sole imperial world power. As August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, Prussian general and army reformer, sharply observed, Great Britain had nobody to thank more for its prominence than its former archenemy.[7] After 1815 the 'queen of the oceans' had no serious rival to fear, neither at sea nor in international trade. Colonial and continental politics, often regarded and examined as separate spheres by historians, were in fact more closely intertwined during the era of the Atlantic Revolutions and French expansionism than ever before.[8]

In the meantime, the restructuring of central Europe based on the Napoleonic model continued. The almost thousand-year old Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation collapsed completely in 1806 faced by the storm of the French Wars and internal quarrels.[9] Secularization and mediatization put an end to the temporal rule of the Catholic Church and the sovereignty of small states and privileged domains.[10] Out of the 300 states that constituted the Holy Roman Empire only 38 survived its downfall. It was mainly Prussia and the former states of the Confederation of the Rhine that benefited from Napoleon's 'territorial revolution'. The enlarged states of the new German Confederation continued the Napoleonic policy of adjusting systems of measuring, weighing and coordinating currencies and the flow of goods in the *Deutscher Zollverein* (German Customs Union).

Thus, the years around 1800 laid the foundation of the economic performance of the German states and of the subsequent politics of unification.[11] Minor powers and the formerly proud Imperial Cities were left empty-handed. Only a few Imperial Cities such as Hamburg and Frankfurt, survived the reorganization as free city-states.[12] At Vienna the great powers also integrated the commercial republics of Genoa and Venice into larger states, marking an end to their sovereignty and long, rich mercantile traditions.[13]

The secularization that began with the French Revolution and spread with Napoleonic conquest was not reversed. Territories and domains of the church in central Europe, which had shaped the character of the old Holy Roman Empire, were wiped off the map. A vast number of abbeys were dissolved, resulting in dramatic consequences for the local economy,

infrastructure, education and social welfare.[14] Likewise, the dispossession of church properties in France and Italy was not reversed. The church's formerly substantial temporal power was broken and limited to the restored Papal States. Yet, even the pope had to accept a decrease in territory. Thus, relations between church and state in Europe were put on a new footing.[15]

The protagonists of the French Revolution had intended to establish a republic, yet in the end the monarchy emerged stronger than before from this period of transformation.[16] In Portugal, in the Austrian Netherlands and in several Italian states, such as Naples and Tuscany, enlightened reformers had tried to curtail the power of the church, to reform legislation and to modernize state, economy and society in the eighteenth century. Yet many of these efforts foundered on the resistance of their opponents or reached a deadlock after reform-minded monarchs had died.[17] The collapse of the old order in the wake of the French Revolution and the expansion of the Napoleonic Empire laid the foundations for continuing the reforms, removing traditional privileges and setting the course for a new social order. Drafting a civil code based on the principle of the equality of white men before the law, the freedom of trade and the protection of private property emerged as key characteristics of this development. These modern directives were also implemented in French colonial territories, where slavery remained in place until 1848 with only brief interruptions.[18]

By drafting the *cinq codes,* and particularly the *Code Civil,* Napoleon had created a comprehensive legal system that served as the foundation of civil society in many parts of the French Empire. Territorial shifts, and the fiscal and military requirements of war, contributed to strengthening the power of the state, to standardizing the judiciary and administration, and to hardening the grip of the state on its subjects by implementing a tight military, administrative and financial system.[19]

Napoleon's achievements in modernization survived his empire. The radical abolition of traditional privileges, standardized regulations and the implementation of a legal system enabled the development of an emerging capitalism; the political elites of the post-Napoleonic era approved and continued all these structural changes. Developing and expanding state infrastructure changed the perception of space and, along with the impact of the territorial reorganization, facilitated the exchange of goods and supported industrialization.[20] The *Code Civil* was still in force in many European states, although sometimes in different forms and versions, and acted as the model for several new constitutions in Latin America and Canada, and later in French-speaking African countries.[21] The successor states of the dissolved French Empire appreciated the efficiency of Napoleonic financial administration and the newly formed constabulary.[22] In many countries, the organization of the French military was considered exemplary and states modernized their forces along the lines of the Napoleonic model.[23] The French example of state modernization even had an effect in those countries

that explicitly distanced themselves from it. In this respect, the Napoleonic era actually had an integrative impact on Europe.[24]

All in all, the Napoleonic era was the hinge between the feudal state system of the Early Modern period and the bourgeois civil society that grew in prominence from the nineteenth century onwards. In many respects, reform policies of the French epoch drew on enlightened absolutist ideas and strategies, but were much more consistent in pursuing and adapting them to the necessities of the evolving bourgeois capitalist society. The degree of pressure applied by the Napoleonic Empire on European states and their willingness for reform – before and after 1815 – determined how far-reaching these changes would be. Considerable regional differences notwithstanding, the Napoleonic era in general triggered a push for modernization, which ultimately provided the cornerstone of Europe's global economic and technological dominance in the course of the nineteenth century.

The legacy of the Napoleonic Empire, negotiated at the Congress of Vienna, redrew the map of Europe and caused considerable shifts that would leave their mark on the nineteenth century. Even though the Congress advocated the concept of dynastic legitimacy in principle, the legitimacy of claims to power fell behind the politics of dominance pursued by the great powers. They restored the Papal States and the rule of the Bourbons in Spain and Naples. In contrast, they judged Poland's claim for independence and the restitution demands of the mediatized Imperial estates (*Reichsstände*) as incompatible with state security and consolidation. Louis XVIII, a Bourbon king, returned to the throne in France, albeit he – unlike his southern relatives – had to concede to political changes with the implementation of the *Charte constitutionnelle* in 1814. France regained her position as equal partner in the European Concert but had to withdraw to her 1792 borders after having lost many of her colonies.[25]

Moreover, Great Britain achieved its goal of curbing France's influence by surrounding it with militarily strong neighbor states. German-speaking territories that had been annexed by France were now allocated to the most important military powers in central Europe (apart from Austria) of Bavaria and Prussia. The Palatinate passed to Bavaria, whereas the prosperous industrial regions of the Rhine went to Prussia. Even though the Rhineland proved to be a political trouble spot during the nineteenth century,[26] its strong economy contributed considerably to Prussia's growing economic and political dominance. Austrian withdrawal from territorial claims in western Europe and expansion to the south and east, strengthened Prussia's geopolitical and economic claim to hegemony in the German Confederation.[27]

In line with security concerns over the English Channel, a new state emerged in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Memories of Napoleon's plans to convert the harbor of Antwerp to 'a gun pointed at the heart of England' remained fresh. Intent on averting the danger of any future invasion from

the continent and curbing French influence along the Channel coast, Britain supported uniting the Habsburg Netherlands with the territory of the States General of the Netherlands to form the new United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Despite centuries-old political and religious differences, the size of the new state was to represent a stable block to future French expansion. Since the crowned heads at the Congress of Vienna considered monarchy the most secure form of government, they converted the former republic into a kingdom under the rule of the Orange dynasty, which had traditionally provided the hereditary governor of the United Provinces before the family fled to England.[28]

Despite the relinquishment of the Austrian Netherlands – a dynamic province which emerged as one of the leading industrial regions of Europe – Austria continued its modernization and pursued a strategy of realigning boundaries in order to turn a loose conglomeration of provinces into a territorial state.[29] Opposition to the self-coronation of Napoleon in 1804 had transformed the Austrian Empire into the multi-ethnic, unitary *Gesamtstaat* Austria ruled by a hereditary monarchy. After the Congress of Vienna, it covered a contiguous area west to east from Lake Constance to Galicia and Transylvania, and from Bohemia in the north to Lombardo-Venetia and Dalmatia in the south. The geopolitical focus of the Danube monarchy shifted clearly to the south and east and thus diminished its presence in German-speaking central Europe.[30] Accordingly, the 'Eastern Question' played an important role in Metternich's foreign policy.[31]

Following the end of Napoleonic rule in the Kingdom of Italy, the political situation in the Apennine peninsula had to be reorganized. Due to divergent dynastic interests, a policy of unification was not feasible, yet it remained an intoxicating vision that lingered in the memory of those who were discontent with the situation after 1815. If at all, the term 'restoration', in the sense of a political restoration, applies to the Italian peninsula. The Habsburgs secured their claim to upper Italy, the pope returned to the, only slightly smaller, Papal States, and the Spanish Bourbon dynasty restored their rule in southern Italy. Finally the Congress of Vienna passed the dissolved Republic of Genoa on to the Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont, the greatest military power in Italy that – along with neutral Switzerland – was supposed to control France at her eastern border. Despite several efforts to restore the political and social authority of the *ancien régime*, the clock could not be turned back in the peninsula. After the end of French rule the Italian states evolved into constant trouble spots. It is hardly surprising that Europe's mid-century revolutions started in Italy.[32]

In the north, the Napoleonic Wars had created considerable momentum in Scandinavia resulting in a new power balance in the Baltic area.[33] Sweden had lost her status as a European great power to Russia as early as the Northern War. The tsar, a temporary ally of Napoleon, used favorable circumstances to conquer Swedish Finland and attached it to the Russian Empire as an

autonomous Grand Duchy in 1809. The childless king of Sweden and the state council decided to elect Napoleon's Marshal Bernadotte as successor to the throne. Later, however, Bernadotte switched sides and lined up with the anti-Napoleonic coalition. In turn the allies compensated Sweden with Norway, taken from Denmark, for its loss of Finland to Russia.[34]

The Kingdom of Denmark emerged as the real loser in Scandinavia. Hard-pressed and bullied by Great Britain and its Scandinavian neighbors, it had inclined toward Napoleonic France. As a consequence, Denmark had to give up its union with Norway that had existed since the fourteenth century.[35] Despite objections by the Norwegian people's representatives, the Congress in Vienna neither questioned the transfer of Norway to Sweden nor Finland's incorporation into the Russian Empire.

At the same time, Tsar Alexander I successfully pushed his claim to Poland. Despite having adopted the first modern constitution in 1791, Poland had been wiped off the map as a sovereign state in 1795 following three partitions between neighboring Prussia, Austria and Russia.[36] Restored as the Duchy of Warsaw by Napoleon in 1807, the Congress succumbed to Alexander I's demands to affiliate Poland as a kingdom with Russia. Subsequently the new Polish state came increasingly under Russian control.[37] The Russian Empire, furthermore, enlarged its territory in two wars against the Ottoman Empire and Persia, as far as Bessarabia and the Caspian Sea.[38] All in all, the Napoleonic era brought about a power shift in Scandinavia, strengthened Russia's hegemonic claims in the Baltic and initiated its considerable expansion towards the west and southeast.[39]

Although the Congress of Vienna appeared to favor a balance of power and the mutual reconciliation of interests in order to establish a lasting international peace in Europe, two clear hegemons emerged. In the end, both proof and recognition of the supreme status of two imperial powers – Britain and Russia – demonstrated that they benefited the most from the changes around 1800. The Russian Empire in the east and, even more, the British Empire emerged as the real winners from the Napoleonic era.[40]

Since Great Britain did not pursue territorial claims at the Congress of Vienna but acted as an arbiter, the pivotal importance of Britain's conflict with Napoleonic France for its future as a world empire is often overlooked. If British security lay on the continent, her interests lay overseas. From the seventeenth century onwards, with the help of trading companies, the Royal Navy and accompanying legislation by the crown, Britain had gradually established a global trade empire.[41] If the Congress excluded colonial decisions during the liquidation of the Napoleonic Empire, it was only because Britain had already concluded most favorable bi- and multilateral agreements in advance. This approach was in line with Britain's long-standing principles of foreign policy. Her seemingly defensive strategy to urge for a balance of power in Europe was a precondition for an overseas expansionist policy.[42]

As Christopher Bayly and others have shown, Britain's tightened grip on Asia in the decades from 1780 to 1830 was of pivotal importance for her further ascent to global dominance in the nineteenth century.[43] In many respects, this axial era was at least as important for the reshaping of imperial spaces and global spheres of interest as for the changes in the political situation in Europe itself.[44] A brief review will illuminate the background to this development.[45]

As early as around 1600 England, the Netherlands and France started to establish trading bases and colonies, particularly in Asia and on the American continent, just as Spain and Portugal had done before. In several naval wars against Spain, England gained a foothold in the Caribbean and won over large parts of the lucrative transatlantic triangular trade with slaves from Africa for Caribbean plantations. The Netherlands displaced Portugal from East Asia in a couple of wars and evolved into the most important European colonial power thanks to the profitable spice trade. As Spain expanded to the Gulf of Mexico, Florida and California, Portugal subsequently targeted the plantation economy in Brazil and the slave trade with West Africa. The confessionally charged conflicts between Protestant and Catholic seafaring nations fighting over Dutch independence from Spain gradually ushered in the end of the Iberian powers' global hegemony.[46] In the seventeenth century European expansion was increasingly dominated by France, England and the Netherlands. Apart from confessional and security considerations, English foreign policy was guided more and more by mercantile interests. After driving back Portuguese and Spanish influence, and in response to the growing Dutch competition in international trade, England did not hesitate to enforce its lopsided Navigation Acts by fighting several wars against former allies. Since the end of the seventeenth century England had pursued a second Hundred Years' War against France over the supremacy of the seas resulting in the dissolution of the first French colonial empire.[47]

By 1650 the Dutch trading empire was at the peak of its power. Amsterdam had become the world's leading financial center and Dutch ships transported half of the world's trade. The wealth of the Netherlands was based on outpost colonies in the Pacific Ocean, particularly in Indonesia, on Ceylon and along the shores of India, as well as a resupply outpost at the Cape of Good Hope that would later emerge as the South African Cape Colony. As the world's first company to issue stock, the United East India Company (VOC) pushed European rivals aside and monopolized trade activities in the Pacific Ocean. It was the profitable Dutch spice trade to England that triggered the Navigation Acts and their requirement that commodities from and to England were to be transported by English ships only. At the same time, the Acts sought to ensure that the English benefited from the prosperous transatlantic trade with the growing settlements in North America.

William of Orange's accession to the English throne put an end to the long-standing conflict between the two Protestant naval powers. A division in the spheres of interest – the Netherlands focused on the spice trade with Indonesia, England on the textile trade with India – subsequently worked to England's advantage. If the textile trade between India and Europe, with its increasing population, proved to be a lucrative business, profits from the spice trade declined as a result of changing habits of consumption, growing competition and mismanagement within the VOC.

Simultaneously with England's rise – joined with Scotland in 1707 as the United Kingdom of Great Britain – the Dutch overseas trade lost its influence. The fourth Anglo-Dutch Naval War ultimately sealed the economic decline of the Netherlands as a global maritime power. In reaction to Dutch support for the rebelling colonists in America, the British navy fought a privateering war. Countless Dutch ships were captured and the already crippled VOC lost a fortune. Not only were the Netherlands forced to cede their Indian trading bases as a result of the peace of 1784, they also had to open up their ocean lanes and trade monopolies to the British, which aggravated the crisis in Dutch overseas activities.[48]

France's colonial interests, on the other hand, had initially focused on the American continent, namely Canada and the Caribbean, and only later expanded towards the Indian Ocean. Supported by Jean-Baptiste Colbert's mercantilist policies, a wide network of military outposts, missionary and trading bases emerged in the area of the Saint Lawrence River. By 1700, *Nouvelle France* gradually expanded to the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley, Louisiana and the Ohio Valley. Yet France increasingly had to compete with the English settlers who greatly outnumbered the French. Conflicts over settlements and spheres of interest were inevitable. The French holdings in the Caribbean, first and foremost Saint Domingue, were among the most lucrative colonies worldwide. The French East India Company, however, never reached the level of prosperity of its Dutch and British models. Attempts to set up a profitable plantation system on Madagascar ultimately failed.

Since the mid-seventeenth century France had held trading bases on the Indian subcontinent. It was mainly due to good relations with the South Indian princes that France could evolve into the most influential European power of the subcontinent a hundred years later. Trading circles in Paris, however, showed less interest in the Indian project than did their counterparts in Amsterdam and London, and France's colonial success attracted the attention of British rivals.[49]

In the years after the Glorious Revolution Great Britain increasingly engaged in continental European conflicts. It pursued a policy of balance of power, which provided the basis for its own overseas commercial and colonial expansion. All inter-European wars of the eighteenth century were accompanied by colonial armed conflicts, which gradually consolidated

Great Britain's overseas hegemony. Though initially dynastic and confessional concerns also played a dominant role, from the 1720s at the latest, commercial and economic motives came to the fore. Eighteenth-century politics were shaped more and more by the colonial rivalry between France and Great Britain, a conflict that lasted well into the nineteenth century and deeply influenced Napoleon's politics, too.[50]

From the War of Palatine Succession to the Seven Years' War all European cabinet wars corresponded to military conflicts on the North American continent. Even though Spain and the Netherlands were also involved in overseas wars, these armed conflicts were mainly based on the rivalry between French-speaking and English settlers, their fatherlands and the indigenous population of North America. While Spain lost its maritime hegemony and its status as a European great power in the course of the Wars of Succession, Great Britain established more and more naval bases in the Mediterranean and expanded her sphere of influence in Asia and America at the expense of France. Moreover, the lucrative monopoly in the slave trade with Latin America fell into British hands.[51] Finally, the Seven Years' War turned into a global conflict with fighting taking place on all continents, apart from Australia. Historians no longer consider it a mere inner-European conflict but a first world war and global conflict between France and Great Britain for overseas supremacy.[52]

In Europe, Prussia emerged as the most recent player in the fellowship of great powers after the Peace of Paris in 1763. After successfully defeating rival Austria and retaining Silesia, it increasingly dominated politics in central Europe. The outcome of the Seven Years' War had even more dramatic consequences at international level. Left with half the tonnage of the British fleet, France lost the biggest part of her early modern colonial empire. After the capture of Quebec nothing was left of a *Nouvelle France* that had once stretched from Newfoundland to the Great Lakes and from the Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. France kept the most profitable Antillean island, Saint Domingue, yet had to cede Louisiana to Spain. This served as compensation, since Spain had lost Florida to Great Britain. Great Britain therefore controlled the whole of North America east of the Mississippi.

In Asia, France and England competed heavily over supremacy in India. Since the 1740s, ferocious battles had been fought from which the French initially emerged victorious. The Peace of Paris in 1763 marked a watershed and ultimately opened up the Indian subcontinent to British interests. France lost all territories occupied since 1749 and kept only a few trading bases. Moreover, French holdings on the western coast of Africa fell into British hands. In contrast to previous wars, maritime and colonial influence in overseas territories was the main focus of the Seven Years' War. While Great Britain evolved from a supreme European to a global imperial power with a clear future in overseas expansion, France lost her status as a dominant colonial power in the Atlantic area and in India.[53]

The Seven Years' War left all nations involved financially exhausted. Even Great Britain, whose incomes from overseas trade continued to grow year after year despite the war, found itself forced to raise taxes to refill the empty state coffers. This decision came at a cost: the loss of the consent of taxpayers in her North American colonies. Tax reforms in France failed on the domestic front. At least the French monarchy successfully rebuilt the fleet by implementing an ambitious program, based on huge financial efforts adding to the strain on the French coffers.[54]

Politically France was more than eager to take revenge on the British and tightened up relations with Spain and the Netherlands, states that had also suffered from British ambitions. When the British started their campaign against the disloyal colonists in North America, they faced three countries hoping to challenge British dominance by supporting the new United States. The American War of Independence turned, in fact, into a global conflict with military campaigns occurring in the Caribbean, Europe, India and Africa, as well as North America.

Nevertheless, North America's new independence could not stop Britannia from ruling the waves. The Atlantic trade, of pivotal importance for the British economy, soon exceeded pre-war levels and offset tax losses. The Treaties of Versailles returned Florida to Spain, while France regained some Caribbean islands, access to the Senegal area and a few Indian outposts. Even though this did not change the international balance of power in general, France did win back a foothold in Asia and Africa. The fall of the Dutch naval power, on the other hand, accelerated due to the defeat the Netherlands suffered in the last of the Anglo-Dutch Naval Wars and its harsh peace conditions. The long-distance consequences of the war aggravated hostilities between pro-British, aristocratic Orangists and the pro-French, democratic Patriotic Party. This finally led to the foundation of the Batavian Republic and the Netherlands leaning closer to France. The coalition policy of the maritime powers established during the American War of Independence – Great Britain against the alliance of the smaller naval powers – seemed to remain unchanged till the end of the Napoleonic era.[55]

Until recently historians studying the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras have focused on French hegemony over continental Europe. Yet the wars that shook Europe and the world from 1792 to 1815 represented much more than just a conflict between the *ancien régime* and revolutionary forces or the beginning of modern state-building amidst Napoleonic conquest. They were part of the centuries-old Anglo-French colonial dualism and also marked the final act in the struggle of the European powers for maritime hegemony.[56]

French support for the Irish rebellion in 1798 sought to weaken Great Britain. The proclamation of the Batavian Republic was followed by relinquishing the Dutch fleet to France. Subsequently Antwerp, after the French reopened the Scheldt River, became one of the most important

naval ports opposite the British coastline. When Napoleon endeavored to gain a foothold in Egypt it was neither a maverick's gamble nor the attempt to sideline an ambitious general. Instead, contemporaries considered the legendarily fertile Egypt as the key to Africa and Asia. The occupation of Egypt would have given France control over the lucrative Levant trade and laid the foundation for further imperial enterprises in Persia and India.[57] At the same time, taking possession of the Suez region would have disrupted the fast connection between Great Britain and her holdings in India, the foundation of expanding British rule in Asia during the years around 1800.[58]

After the failure of the Egyptian enterprise and the loss of numerous ships in the Battle of Aboukir, France's colonial ambitions focused again on America. Napoleon acquired Louisiana from Spain after renewing the former Bourbon Alliance and hoped to re-establish New France on the Gulf of Mexico. Moreover, the First Consul intended to reintroduce slavery in Saint Domingue, which had been abolished in the course of the French Revolution. Yet the resistance of the islanders, supported by the British and a rampant outbreak of yellow fever, thwarted those plans. Also, Britain's naval blockade established after the Peace of Amiens significantly hampered the transatlantic connection. In view of these difficulties, Napoleon finally decided to withdraw from America and sold Louisiana to the United States.[59]

The shipyards along the French coast operated at full capacity and, together with the ships of her allied maritime powers, the French fleet outnumbered the Royal Navy even after its losses overseas. It was hoped that an invasion of England would set the record straight, but it ended in a devastating defeat at Trafalgar from which the combined French and Spanish navies never recovered. It was only after Napoleon failed to challenge Britain's maritime supremacy that France turned to establishing a continental empire in Europe. Napoleon's strategy to bring Great Britain to its knees, not by military but by commercial means and to inflict the first economic war of modern times, initiated an intervention policy on the continent that in the end led to the downfall of the Napoleonic Empire.[60]

Thus, it was the French Wars that, once and for all, made Great Britain the indisputable mistress of the seas for the entire century to come. Between 1792 and 1814 Britain's naval rivals lost large parts of their fleets and many of their overseas holdings. The repercussions of the Napoleonic era rendered Spain unable to cope with the independence movements in its Latin American colonies; it retained only Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Portugal, allied with Great Britain, retained a presence in Africa but lost significant influence due to Brazil's independence.[61] The Dutch colonial empire was reduced to Indonesia. The Danes did not fare any better, despite their attempt to maintain an armed neutrality. As early as 1801, numerous ships were sunk or boarded in a sea battle off the coast