

VIII. The Era of the Balance of Power (1648-1789)

A. The World of Temporary Partnerships

1. Nations (like individuals) forge friendships on the basis of common values. In addition, they sometimes forge temporary alliances on the basis of a common enemy.
2. When this happens, it is common for people to say, “The enemy of my enemy is my *friend*.” This is false, however. As history demonstrates, when nations forge alliances on the basis of having a common enemy, they forge only *temporary alliances*. It's better to say: “The enemy of my enemy is my temporary ally.”
3. The goal of such temporary is always to create a “balance of power” against a powerful bully.

B. The Shifting Alliances of England, Netherlands, and Spain

1. Although they were allies against Hapsburg Spain in the Reformation, England and Netherlands became rivals in the *Anglo-Dutch Wars*.
2. In 1664, New Netherlands became New York during these wars.
3. Then, quite suddenly, England and Netherlands were thrown together as allies—and even allied with their former enemy Spain!—because France began to covet the Netherlands (including the “Spanish Netherlands”, which is now Belgium.)
4. The driving force behind all the shifting alliances of this time in Western Europe was the greatest bully of the era: Louis XIV of France (r.1643-1715), who had more power over his own kingdom than any other king up to that point in European history.
5. A temporary alliance was formed by England, Netherlands, Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, and Sweden to stop him in the *War of the Grand Alliance (1689-97)*.

C. War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714)

1. Louis XIV was married to a Spanish Hapsburg princess, Maria Theresa.
2. Her brother, Charles II died without an heir in 1700, and Louis hoped to put his grandson on the Spanish throne.
3. Of course, the rest of Europe could not accept Louis's plan to unite France and Spain.
4. Because of the war that followed, Louis was allowed to place his son Philip V on the throne of Spain, but Philip could not also be king of France.

D. The “Balance of Power” in Central Europe

1. Although the Hapsburgs had failed to force the lords of the Germany to stay Catholic and to follow the rule of Holy Roman Emperor, they did succeed in holding on to Bohemia and growing their empire to the east.
2. After being attacked by the Muslim Ottoman Empire, they retaliated and made gradual progress creating a large new empire that swallowed their neighbor Hungary.
3. A powerful Calvinist lord, the Elector of Brandenburg, became a great rival of the Hapsburgs after the *Thirty Years' War (1618-48)*, however, when he inherited the Duchy of Prussia in Poland, creating the combined “Brandenburg-Prussia.”
4. Following the Thirty Years' War, Brandenburg-Prussia was awarded territories in western Germany as part of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 also, making a three-part country in northern Germany.
5. When Louis XIV of France decided to cancel the Edict of Nantes in France, many Calvinists fled France into other parts of Europe. Large numbers made their way to Brandenburg-Prussia, giving that country a major boost in power.

E. The War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48)

1. The Austrian Hapsburg ruler Charles VI died without an heir in 1740.
2. By this time, Prussia had grown into its own kingdom, and its leader, Frederick “the Great,” believed this was a perfect opportunity to attack Austria in order to gain land.
3. He conquered Silesia (a territory in western Poland) from the Hapsburgs.
4. France, of course, was allies with Prussia against the Hapsburgs, because they wanted to keep Germany disunited and weak.
5. Not wishing France to gain any advantage over them, England and Netherlands joined Austria's side.
6. The major powers of Europe thus made temporary alliances that made another “balance of power.”
7. In the end, the temporary alliances prevented major changes to the map of Europe. Only Silesia changed hands (see the map to the right).



The rise of Prussia (brown) in central Europe caused huge changes in the alliance system.

F. The “Diplomatic Revolution”

1. The War of the Austrian Succession changed the European balance of power. It showed that Prussia had become stronger, and Austria had become weaker. This caused all the countries to rethink their alliances to try to maintain an advantage.
2. England decided that Prussia was a better counterbalance to France, and switched its alliance from Austria to Prussia.
3. Austria and France, so long enemies, thus became natural “temporary allies.” (An alliance between France and the Hapsburgs had been unthinkable for 250 years, but now the calculations of the balance of power made created a “revolution.”)
4. Russia and Sweden both viewed Prussia as the greater threat to their own ambitions so another strange (almost “revolutionary”) outcome of this shift was that Russia and Sweden joined the same side (Austria) against Prussia—*temporarily, of course*.
5. The Seven Years’ War (1756-63) followed, and Britain took North America from France, but the balance of power in Europe once again kept things stable.