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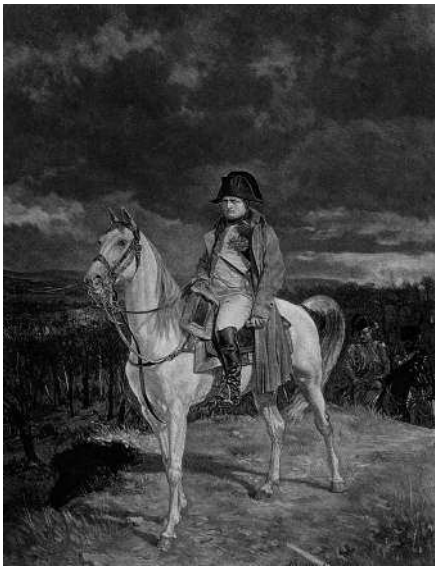
Odd man out

Prussia withdrew from the struggle against Revolutionary France known as the War of the First Coalition (1792–1797) in the year 1795. Declaring neutrality, Berlin followed this course while the other powers again fought France in the War of the Second Coalition (1798–1801). During this conflict, General Bonaparte overthrew the French government and proclaimed himself dictator under the title of First Consul. Citizen Bonaparte led France to victory in that war and concluded peace with Great Britain in 1802. His 1803 reorganization of Germany awarded Prussia generous territorial compensation for Rhineland districts lost to French expansion. Diplomatic relations between France and Prussia remained strong, with Napoleon insinuating that he supported Berlin's goal of organizing North Germany into a Prussian-dominated confederation. Renewed war between France and Britain in 1803 prompted Napoleon to occupy Hanover, a possession of the British crown, with 30,000 French troops. His actions threatened Prussian national security because of Hanover's proximity to Brandenburg. Moreover, the Prussians secretly coveted the Electorate.

Relations between France and Prussia considerably deteriorated two years later during the 1805 War of the Third Coalition. Moved by a November meeting with Tsar Alexander I at Potsdam, Frederick William III agreed to issue an ultimatum to Napoleon that among other stipulations demanded a French withdrawal west of the Rhine. Should Napoleon refuse, the Prussians would join the Third Coalition: Russia, Great Britain, and Austria. After the Prussian foreign minister, Christian von Haugwitz, reached Napoleon's headquarters deep in Bohemia to deliver the ultimatum, the French emperor refused to see him, knowing the reason for his arrival. Shortly after, Napoleon's stunning 2 December 1805 victory over the Austro-Russian army at Austerlitz ended the Third Coalition. Napoleon then summoned Haugwitz. Rather than presenting his ultimatum, Haugwitz received a



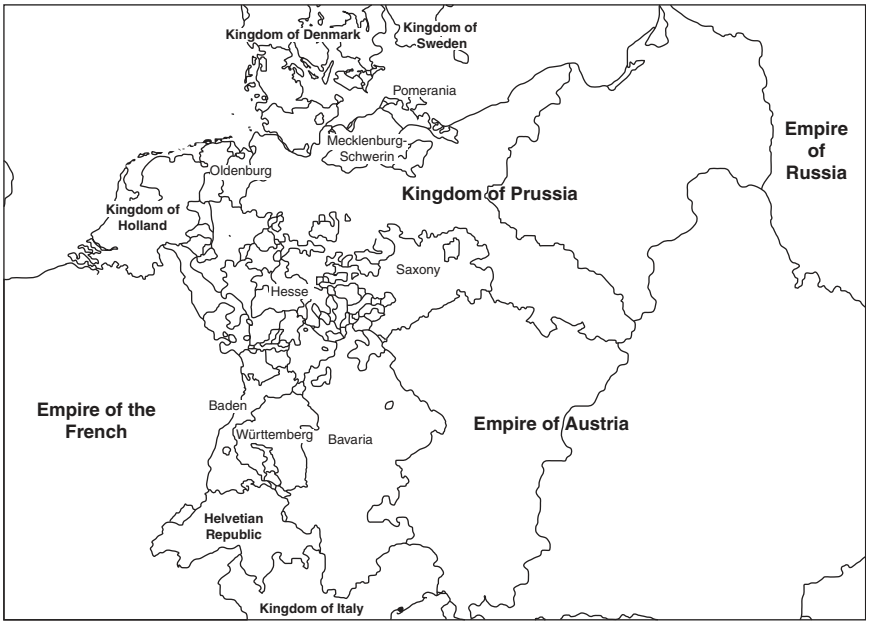
1 Napoleon I, 1769–1821

2 Frederick William III, 1770–1840

3 Alexander I, 1777–1825

humiliating Franco-Prussian treaty of alliance. Although the Prussians attempted to escape the trap, their efforts resulted in Napoleon issuing harsher demands. With the victorious Grande Armée stationed in Germany and the Russian army limping home after its drubbing at Austerlitz, Frederick William could do little but accept the treaty or face war with France. As his reward for signing, Frederick William received Hanover. Always ready to give away that which did not belong to him, Napoleon knew well that the Prussians would earn the enmity of the British crown as long as they possessed Hanover. To ensure that Berlin earned London's ire, Napoleon forced the Prussians to close the North German coast to all British commerce. These steps succeeded in prompting the British to declare war on Prussia in April 1806.

During the summer of 1806, Napoleon continued to expand French influence. In particular, his creation of the Rheinbund (Confederation of the Rhine) jolted the Prussians. As its official "Protector," the emperor harnessed the resources of the German states, effectively eliminating Austrian and Prussian influence. In addition to these momentous changes in Germany, Napoleon needed to stabilize southern Italy, where French forces had driven the Bourbons from their Kingdom of Naples in 1805. Fleeing to



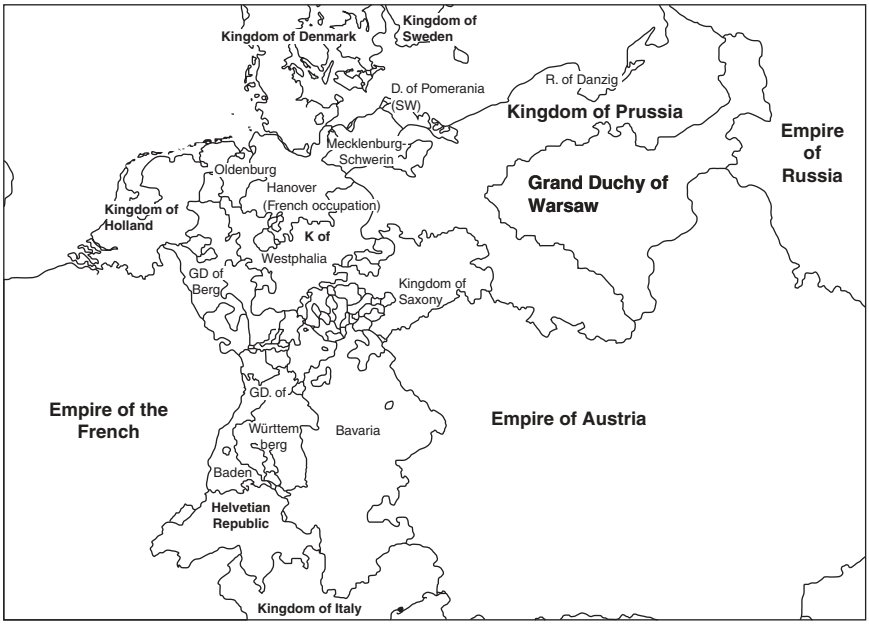
8. Prussia in 1806

the island of Sicily, King Ferdinand IV established a government in exile under British protection. As for Naples, Napoleon installed his brother, Joseph, as the new king. From Sicily, the British supported a revolt in Calabria to destabilize Joseph's regime. To ease the pressure on his brother, Napoleon commenced secret negotiations with London during the summer of 1806. Exasperating the Prussians, he offered to return Hanover to King George III if the British withdrew their support for the Neapolitan Bourbons.

Napoleon's duplicity provided the final straw for the Prussians. Frederick William addressed another ultimatum to Napoleon, summoned help from Russia, and healed the rift with Great Britain to form the Fourth Coalition. The next eleven months proved to be a nightmare for the Prussian king. On 14 October, Napoleon destroyed the Prussian army at the twin battles of Jena and Auerstedt. Less than two weeks later, French forces occupied Berlin. During the following month, Prussia's powerful fortresses capitulated, along with the remnant of the field army. Frederick William and the royal family fled first to Königsberg and then to the fortress of Memel (Klaipėda), today in Lithuania. Although Prussian troops assisted the Russians in battling Napoleon to a stalemate in the 7–8 February 1807 battle of Eylau in East Prussia, Frederick William needed a miracle. Spring in

East Prussia brought no such miracle. Although few choices remained for the king but to fight on, Tsar Alexander retained options. After Napoleon smashed his army at the 14 June Battle of Friedland, Alexander requested an armistice that led to the signing of the Franco-Russian and Franco-Prussian treaties at Tilsit on 7 and 9 July 1807 respectively.

Tilsit's draconian terms reduced the Prussian state to a listless rump: Frederick William lost half his kingdom. Although Alexander intervened to save Silesia and Pomerania, fewer than five million subjects remained from Prussia's pre-war population of 9,752,731 inhabitants, while the state's territorial extent of 5,570 square miles had shrunk to 2,877. Napoleon awarded the provinces of New East Prussia and South Prussia to the new Grand Duchy of Warsaw; Danzig on the Baltic Sea became a free city under French authority. Most of Prussia's western possessions, including the Universities of Duisberg, Erlangen, and Halle, went to Jerome Bonaparte's new Kingdom of Westphalia, or Caroline and Joachim Murat's Grand Duchy of Berg. Other conditions stipulated that French troops would occupy all Prussian fortresses, including the great bastions on the Oder River: Stettin, Küstrin (Kostrzyn), and Glogau, with the exception of Kolberg (Kołobrzeg) on the Baltic coast; Graudenz (Grudziądz) and Pillau (Baltiysk) in East Prussia; and Glatz (Kłodzko), Silberberg (Srebrna Góra), and Kosel (Koźle) in Silesia.



9. Prussia after the Treaty of Tilsit

Forced into the Napoleonic state system, Prussia convulsed under the weight of imperial occupation, which would end only after Berlin paid a crippling indemnity. Imperial troops took extensive quarters throughout Prussia to facilitate supply; the strong French presence at Berlin kept the royal family and government in self-imposed exile at Königsberg. The fact that Tilsit tied the withdrawal of French troops from Prussia to an indemnity – the amount of which would be determined at a later date – gave the appearance of endless French martial rule. In addition to the unspecified indemnity, Napoleon insisted that the Prussians cover the cost of provisioning imperial garrisons throughout Prussia and for maintaining the highways he planned to build between the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and the Confederation of the Rhine: an estimated total cost of 216 million francs. Finally, the Prussians found themselves again at war with Great Britain thanks to the conditions that incorporated Prussia into Napoleon's Continental System. Participation in the economic boycott of Great Britain devastated Prussian trade as grain, wood, and wool exports to the British ceased. Other French demands stipulated that Silesian linen could no longer be exported to Italy and Spain. Along with the linen trade, the silk trade fell by 50 percent and grain prices by 70 percent, and the cost of imports such as cotton, sugar, tobacco, and coffee rose sharply.[1]

Tilsit's severe conditions represented a growing trend in Napoleonic statesmanship. On the battlefield, Napoleon's way of war overwhelmed the eighteenth-century military establishments that the French faced in Italy and Germany. Yet in the 1797 Treaty of Campo Formio that ended the War of the First Coalition and the 1801 Treaty of Lunéville that concluded the War of the Second Coalition, he continued the eighteenth-century diplomatic practice of compensation. According to this concept, the peace treaty awarded all parties equitable restitution – usually in the form of land – for the great expenditures that war required. In this way, the principal states that participated in the conflict received a return on their investment in the war, and the gap between victor and vanquished remained narrow. This created a balance of power that prevented the rise of continental hegemons by ensuring that the great powers increased their strength incrementally rather than in radical leaps and bounds. At the same time, the abundance of secondary and tertiary states in Europe allowed predatory cooperation among the primary states, as seen in the three partitions that wiped Poland from the map.

Initially, Napoleon honored the concept of compensation. The Wars of the First and Second Coalitions ended in treaties that awarded Austria – Great Britain's last remaining coalition partner in each conflict – the territory of a third party, in both cases the Republic of Venice. Napoleon negotiated both Campo Formio and Lunéville as well as the 1802 Treaty of Amiens with Great Britain, which even allowed London to maintain control over former French colonies. After his victory over the Third

Coalition, Napoleon imposed the devastatingly harsh Treaty of Pressburg on Austria, the first of the coalition powers to surrender. While Pressburg stripped Vienna of one-sixth of its territory and three million subjects, Kaiser Francis received the paltry compensation of the Electorate of Salzburg. Napoleon's victory over the Prussians in the War of the Fourth Coalition ended his experiments with compensation. Victory would be decided on the battlefield and *all* spoils would go to the victor: he extended his strategy of annihilation to the peace table. Various explanations can be offered to interpret this policy change, but all relate to Napoleon's evolution from general to emperor as well as the genesis of the Napoleonic state system that emerged in 1805 and continued to expand until 1812.

A Franco-Spanish invasion of Portugal in October 1807 resulted in the massive escalation of French forces in Spain after Napoleon decided to oust the Spanish Bourbons. Yet before he could effect the regime change, the people of Madrid revolted against French forces in the heroic Dos de Mayo uprising. Although Napoleon's brother-in-law, Joachim Murat, savagely crushed the Spaniards, the insurrection spread. To the conquered peoples of the French Empire, the struggle in Spain appeared to be a war of liberation. Many Prussian patriots discussed exploiting Napoleon's situation to Prussia's advantage. After news spread that a war party had formed at the Austrian court to agitate for another confrontation with France, Prussian patriots wasted no time in sending war plans to the king at Königsberg. Frederick William knew better: neither his army nor his finances could wage war. Thus, any thoughts of siding with the Austrians should they make a move against France terrified Frederick William. After meeting with the king, Scharnhorst wrote to Stein on 23 August 1808:

> First, I gather that he [Frederick William] expects Russia to guarantee his crown and his state and not the outcome of the war between France and Austria; and, second, that he thus does not believe starting the war in unison with Austria would be good because he fears Austria will not win. These views lead to half-measures, as in the year 1805. The result of this is easy to foresee. The king must provide a yes or no answer to the question of whether he will lead all forces against France in unison with Austria as soon as war breaks out between France and Austria. In the affirmative case, our preparations and measures will continue; but in the opposite case nothing must occur – otherwise it is risking people's lives and compromising the state without sufficient cause. In this case the king must completely side with the French party and remove the people who the world knows are against Napoleon and the French. This, I believe, is what we must say to the king.[2]

Like a blacksmith pounding hot iron, Napoleon molded his empire into the form conceived by his restless mind. In September 1808, the emperor's

hammer again fell on the Prussians as a result of his growing commitment in Spain. The arrest in Berlin of a Prussian agent bearing an imprudent letter authored by Stein, Prussia's Chief Minister of Domestic and Foreign Affairs, caught Napoleon's attention. Stein's letter, addressed to Prince Wilhelm Ludwig Georg zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, a Prussian envoy to the British government, called for a Spanish-style insurrection throughout Germany. "The exasperation of Germany daily increases," wrote the Prussian minister; "we must cultivate it and try to influence the people. I want to keep ready contacts in Hesse and Westphalia for any events ... Affairs in Spain are making a lively impression. It would be very useful to prudently spread this news because it shows ... what a nation that has strength and courage can do." Napoleon read the intercepted documents on 3 September. This gift gave him pretext to tighten his choke-hold on Prussia as the expanding war in Iberia forced him to withdraw troops from Germany. Stein's letter handed the Imperator a golden opportunity to substitute diplomatic force for military might.[3]

On the same day that Napoleon read the letter, 3 September, his foreign minister, Jean-Baptiste de Champagny, summoned the king's brother, Prince William, who had joined Prussia's diplomatic mission at Paris, and the Prussian ambassador, Karl Christian von Brockhausen, for a meeting. Champagny presented a new treaty, telling William he needed to accept its terms within twenty-four hours. William's refusal prompted Champagny to produce Stein's letter. Brockhausen immediately rejected it as a fraud but the savvy foreign minister presented other letters signed by Stein for comparison, thus silencing the ambassador. William received an extension but he could not consult his brother. Fearing harsher terms if he did not agree, William signed the Treaty of Paris on 8 September 1808.

The best-known article of the treaty limited the size of the Prussian army to 42,000 men for a period of ten years, effective 1 January 1809. According to the specific terms, the Prussian army would consist of 10 infantry regiments totaling no more than 22,000 men; 8 regiments or 32 squadrons of cavalry not surpassing 8,000 troopers; a corps of gunners, miners, and sappers totaling no more than 6,000 men; and a royal guard of infantry, cavalry, and artillery that did not exceed 6,000 men. "At the expiration of the ten years," stated the agreement, "His Majesty the King of Prussia shall reenter into the common right and shall maintain the number of troops that appears suitable to him according to circumstances." In addition, the treaty prohibited conscription, a militia, and a national guard, thus strictly forbidding any measure to increase the size of the army.

Moreover, Napoleon finally set the amount of the indemnity at 140,000,000 francs, half of which would be paid to the French army within twenty days of the treaty's ratification "in ready money or in good and acceptable bills of exchange" guaranteed by the Prussian treasury. The other

half would be financed by mortgages on royal domains reimbursable within twelve to eighteen months of ratification. Glogau, Stettin, and Küstrin would remain occupied until the Prussians completed payment. Frederick William also would officially recognize Napoleon's most recent regime changes: Joseph-Napoleon Bonaparte as the king of Spain and the Indies and Joachim-Napoleon Murat as the king of Naples. In return for the emperor's "friendship," Frederick William had to promise "to make common cause" with Napoleon in case of war between France and Austria within the next ten years and provide a division of 16,000 infantry, cavalry, and artillery for use against the Austrians. Frederick William would not have to provide a contingent if the war began in 1808. Moreover, if a Franco-Austrian war should come in 1809, the size of the Prussian contingent would be only 12,000 infantry and cavalry. Starting in 1810, the Prussians would be responsible for providing the full 16,000-man contingent.[4]

At the least, the terms of the 8 September 1808 Treaty of Paris implied that much of the 200,000-man imperial occupation force would leave Prussia, with only garrisons remaining behind to guarantee the payment of reparations. Few patriots viewed this latest humiliation in such an optimistic light, particularly in view of Stein's fate. Forced by Napoleon to resign and flee to Austria in late 1808, Stein departed before he could finish his great task of reforming Prussia. Regardless, although his reforms fell short of those achieved by the French Revolution, they successfully altered the social fabric of Prussia by accelerating the evolutionary transformation of subject to citizen within an absolutist framework. Frederick William wanted to appoint Hardenberg – himself forced out of his office of foreign minister by the Treaty of Tilsit – as Stein's successor, but Napoleon refused. Despite this setback, Hardenberg remained active behind the scenes, securing the appointment of his protégé, Karl vom Stein zu Altenstein, who co-administered the government with the minister of the interior, Count Friedrich Ferdinand zu Dohna-Schlobitten. Other than promoting the establishment of the new Berlin university, the Altenstein–Dohna ministry could not overcome Prussia's economic crisis. To pay the indemnity, Altenstein proposed ceding Silesia to France. This unpopular idea so weakened Altenstein's position that he resigned on 4 June 1810. This opened the door for Hardenberg to return to office, and this time Napoleon did not interfere. Frederick William not only recalled Hardenberg, but handed him full control of the government under the new title of Staatskanzler (state chancellor). The seemingly unassailable position in Central Europe that Napoleon had created after 1807 may explain his acceptance of Hardenberg's appointment.

Military setbacks in Iberia indirectly accounted for the solidification of French hegemony between the Rhine and the Russian frontier. After a British army chased his brother from Madrid, Napoleon decided to go to Spain and personally oversee military operations. Concerned that the

Austrians would take advantage of his absence to commence the anticipated war, he wanted to meet with Tsar Alexander to reaffirm their alliance. This desire led to the meeting of all crowned heads of Europe in the ostentatious Congress of Erfurt between 27 September and 14 October 1808. Napoleon primarily sought Alexander's assurance to maintain the status quo in Central Europe but the tsar provided only a vague promise of supporting French interests in the case of an Austrian declaration of war. He did persuade Napoleon to reduce the Prussian indemnity by 20,000,000 francs.

Despite the Congress or perhaps because of it, war erupted between France and Austria on 9 April 1809. This Franco-Austrian conflict became part of the wider War of the Fifth Coalition. After having been mauled militarily and diplomatically by Napoleon in the Wars of the First, Second, and Third Coalitions, Kaiser Francis hoped to take advantage of French reverses in Spain and Napoleon's increasing military commitment to the Iberian theater. The Austrians believed they had finally found the answers to beat the French. First, the kaiser's younger brother and Austrian commander in chief, Archduke Charles, attempted to reorganize the Austrian army based on the French corps system. Although still tweaking the new system when his brother declared war, Charles led a much improved Austrian army into the field. Second, Austrian propaganda attempted to portray the struggle as a war of liberation against French rule. Vienna hoped all Germans would rise up, fight foreign tyranny, and cast off the "yoke" of French oppression. Austria itself experimented with the idea of a people's struggle within the context of an absolutist system by organizing a Landwehr (militia). Certainly, the Austrians could not depend solely on patriotic songs, incendiary pamphlets, and overweight middle-class burghers drilling on the town square: Vienna needed allies. London answered the call but St. Petersburg remained neutral, which in itself should be viewed as a victory for Austria, considering Alexander's alliance with Napoleon. Austrian thoughts turned to their Spartan rivals in North Germany: would the Prussians answer the call with their small army of 45,897 men?[5]

At the outset of the struggle, Frederick William appeared more inclined to side with the Austrians. Although Napoleon returned Berlin to Prussian control, the royals remained at Königsberg, where cautious advisors eventually mastered the king. Patriotic war hawks did all they could to convince the monarch to support Austria. Major Karl Friedrich von dem Knesebeck, the Prussian liaison at Austrian headquarters, reported to Frederick William that Archduke Charles and his army remained determined to defeat Napoleon, even after suffering reverses at Regensburg and Abensberg. He suggested that the king dispatch an envoy to judge the feasibility of combined operations with the Austrians. Receiving this task himself, Knesebeck recommended Prussia's direct participation in the war as well as its leadership in raising North Germany against the French. Frederick William viewed such advice with skepticism.