

# Treaty of utrecht essay

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In the fall of 1709, the notoriously brutal Battle of Malplaquet drew the war of Spanish Succession into a stalemate. In Austria, Charles VI succeeded the Austrian throne; this potential Habsburg hegemony, together with the invincible French Army provided the Allies neither feasibility nor desirability of conquering Spain. The Dutch Republic was discontent towards England about the commercial benefits and the Barrier Treaty; In England, Tories who were not in favor of continental warfare came into power. On top of these political unrests were there serious financial debts suffered by almost all European states involved in the war.

A peace was needed. The Peace of Utrecht was negotiated and finalized on April 1713. This treaty's binding power that compelled major European powers in equilibrium was coined as " the Balance of Power". The Peace of Utrecht was significant in the course of state relations because it marked the start of the " balance of power" doctrine.

However, as the word " balance" had such ambiguities, more attention was needed for the implication behind the notion of " balance of power. While the Peace of Utrecht did achieve a balance among major powers, it was not truly an equilibrium system of its own, but rather the pretence of an application of the dominant power, England. In other words, the balance of power established by the Peace of Utrecht was not a true balance since the ability of adjusting and maintaining it was held by one major power, in this case, England. England already had the dominance in the Grand Alliance as early as in the beginning of the peace negotiation. Learned that the Tories government opened a secret peace negotiation with France in the summer of 1710 and that Bolingbroke issued the Restraining Orders in 1712, the Allies

were shocked and outraged. Bolingbroke was fully aware of this consequence and wanted to “teach” Europe that none of them has the ability to hold the war without England. Although the Allies were outraged by England breaking the Grand Alliance Treaty, they simply could not do anything but “submit” to the agreements proposed by England and France, and further “submitting” to the peace. The so called “balance of power” started out with an “unbalanced peace negotiation”.

Although the United Provinces, the Austrians and the Germanic princes tried to strive for their own terms, the effort was futile because their minor, even negative contribution in the war did not provide them the ground for such demand. In the war, England was almost a “cat’s paw” according to Swift in *The Conduct of the Allies*: the United Provinces, escaping their own responsibilities of the war, expected England to bear the burden of finance and man power; in Austria, Joseph I cheated on the Allies by diverting the resources subsidized by England to fight in Hungary. Thus apparently, the United Provinces was not likely to get the commercial concession and the Barrier claims it wanted from Spain. Austria did not have the ground for any claim either, due to such unreliability as an ally. Additionally, Charles VI’s personal obsession of the Spanish throne was no longer possible to achieve given the fear of the unification of the two Habsburgs. England therefore, provided its great contribution in the war both financially and militarily, was able to negotiate terms towards its own advantages, and to turn the interest of the Grand Alliance into that of England’s own.

England’s influence of the peace in Europe was exerted through interlocking territories, naval supremacy, political victory and financial dominance. One

thing that was established under the Peace of Utrecht was the interlocking territories of European states, providing counter-balance which was needed for peace. The territory scheme lay out by the Peace of Utrecht seemed to well ensure the stability and peace of Europe after the war, but the tranquility was ostensible: the plans were actually England's manipulation towards its own benefit.

France was to cede the Spanish Netherlands to Austria, while the Dutch Republic acquired the rights to garrison major fortresses in that area. This created a counter-balance between the Dutch Republic and Austria, and also to some extent provided the Dutch a buffer zone against France, which the Dutch had always wanted. The previous Barrier Treaty of 1709 between the Dutch and England was broken by the English when Tories came to power, causing hatred among the Dutch. With the Dutch getting fortresses that won by Marlborough from France, and together with some other fortresses in Charles VI's dominion, this new barrier settlement of Utrecht after 4 years was far less satisfactory to the Dutch; however, the Dutch were too weak to bargain with England, and had to submit and receive whatever was offered in the new barrier settlement of Utrecht. Charles VI did not care much about this gain in the Austrian Netherlands, because such a piece of separate territory which was not even entirely title to his own was of no interest to the landlocked Austria.

The Dutch were weakened and disappointed, the Austrians did not care; England remained to be the one who benefitted the most from this settlement: with the terms laid out in the barrier treaty, the Dutch, though reluctantly, was “back on board” as a support for Britain in her Protestant

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Succession; the Britain also brutally exploited the Austrian Netherlands through tariffs, while Charles was too indifferent to defend. France had to return all the Germanic territories along the right bank of Rhine which it had previously acquired. Brandenburg-Prussia was recognized as a kingdom due to its contribution in the war, as well as Savoy; Bavaria, Cologne and other Germanic princes all received certain degree of recognition – either territories or title, which enabled a “ barrier” to be built along the French border. These German princes, just like the Dutch in the Austrian Netherlands, acted as a counterbalance both against France as well as Austria of their potential aggression. These arrangements were again made effective only by England’s intervention: it was England who largely ensured the effectiveness of vigilance, which in Lord Brougham’s words meant “ the prevalence of that national jealousy, and anxious attention to the affairs of other states, which is the master principle of the modern balance of power system. ” Although the German princes acted as a check to any preponderance, they were too weak to actually assert their power independently on either France or Austria without the support of England.

One fact cannot be neglected: England remained to be the only major power that was not checked by any other power. Situations in the Mediterranean were no different. The Spanish Empire was partitioned; although Charles VI did not get Spain which he had been dreaming for, he received the Italian lands of Milan and Naples which were also of equal significance to Austria. However he was not to enjoy dominance on the Mediterranean.

France proposed that Sicily should go to the Elector of Bavaria; England, while strongly objected Sicily being handover to a French puppet, gave Sicily

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to his favorite ally Savoy. Savoy was to receive Sicily with a royal crown, as well places such as Exilles, Fenestrelle, Valenza and so on along the Alps. Savoy now possessed a fairly strong fortification along the Alps that enabled it to watch from both directions, for possible French and Austrian aggression. France also agreed that if Philip's line failed, Victor Amadeus was to inherit Spain. This was a huge gain for Victor Amadeus of Savoy, but should be credited to England and Bolingbroke, for they fought hard for it; and the fact that Savoy was England's favorite ally in the war showed England's manipulative power in the negotiation. Besides that this arrangement was again, of huge benefit to England as well.

The gain of Gibraltar together with the supreme Royal Navy already enabled England to exert its influence on the Mediterranean; now with a good friend Savoy watching the two biggest enemies for him and weakening Austria by possessing Sicily, England could only be better off. Savoy's possession of Mediterranean islands was more than just the awards of being a good friend — Savoy had no naval pretensions of his own, thus will not threaten England's consolidation of her naval supremacy. Although Savoy gave Sicily back to Austria the next year, she received Sardinia in return, which also didn't change much in England's concern. Austria not receiving both islands weakened her position in the Mediterranean, but in turn strengthened that of England.

Clearly, the balance of power established by the Treaty of Utrecht was not simply equilibrium of major powers, but one with England possessing a special role in it. Apart from the territorial changes in the Treaty of Utrecht that proved England to be the main beneficiary, in military and political

terms the Treaty also achieved England's aims. England's ally with Denmark already strengthened her sea power in the north; the war had weakened the naval power of Spain, France and the United Provinces.

In fact, the Dutch fleet was weakened so much as to act merely like a junior partner of Britain. Now with the Treaty demanding France to destroy its navy bases in Dunkirk and Mardyck, England's sea power was further consolidated and even expanded into the south, based on England's possession of Gibraltar, which were also guaranteed to England in the Treaty. England was even more strengthened when she showed affection towards Portugal, since Lisbon could be useful for fleet operations. Politically England also had major victories. Philip V while keeping the title of a Spanish King, agreed to renounce his French succession. The original objective of the Grand Alliance was achieved: Spain was to be kept separately with France; Habsburg and Bourbon would never unite. However England took a step further, turning this universal objective of the Allies into an interest of her own.

To ensure the arrangement of succession being carried out, England proposed that this arrangement should be officially recognized by their legislative institutions, the Parlement in France and the Cortes in Spain. French agreement with this idea of "civil contract" meant that she had to violate its core belief of "divine rights to rule", which was also rooted in Louis XIV's personalities. It also implied the possibilities of France ceased to support the Jacobites; after all it was the "divine rights to rule" that had been the reason for Louis XIV's past support towards the Old Pretender. This was England's aim – recognition of its own Protestant Succession. France at last accepted the term to validity Philip V's renunciation; they also

recognized the claims of the Protestant Hanoverians to the throne of England, and the Pretender was removed to Lorraine in February 1713. These were all laid out in the Peace of Utrecht; the latter in particular demonstrated England's self-serving deception, using "peace" as a pretension to cover up her own agenda.

Commerce had always been England's top concern, and it was demonstrated to the largest extent in the Treaty of Utrecht and the "peace" it had established. In other words, if territorially and militarily England did make certain concessions to other states, and did not exert its power like Louis XIV did decades ago, on commercial issues England absolutely revealed her greed. Starting from 1703 and throughout the peace negotiation, Britain successfully concluded a series of commercial treaties with various countries: Portugal, Savoy, France, Spain, the Austrian Netherlands, and et cetera. Among those commercial treaty of 1713, France was granted "the most favored nation" in terms of her exports of luxury goods to England; While Portugal had always been a steady importer of England's manufactured goods, the commercial treaty with Portugal at Utrecht gave England monopolizing advantage in trade with Portugal, and Portuguese Brazil. Continental trades were profitable already, not to mention the most lucrative slave trade Asiento and all the trade in Latin America that England deprived from Spain. However, England did not share these commercial privileges with the Dutch, her maritime ally; England's objective of achieving trading dominance did not provide such incentive at all. The Dutch as a nation did not have as much agricultural and industrial resources as England did; her development largely depended on her trade. Now with all the



trading benefits taken away and England becoming a trade monopoly, the Dutch was inevitably in decline.

England, through the Treaty of Utrecht, successfully eliminated her largest commercial rivalry for centuries, and instead turning the Dutch into a secondary power, a satellite of England. Through the Treaty of Utrecht, Bolingbroke finally succeeded in imposing England's will on Europe.

According to Martin Wight, there are nine distinct meaning of the notion “balance of power”; under different context, these meanings slid into each other quite often and unnoticeably. The Peace of Utrecht was the point where England's “special role” in maintaining the power balance started to transform into a “special advantage”, almost equalizing some degree of freedom of action, and future slid into “predominance”. Apart from what had been laid out in the Treaty of Utrecht, Britain's own geography also helped to explain why England could exert such influence on European Peace. Britain was an island country isolated from the rest of the continent, thus the unnecessary of a strong land army allowed her to focus on her navy. England shared no borders with major European powers; this left her with little intent to invade other states for defensive security and territory gain. The sense of detachment from continental affairs secured her position as to hold the balance, despite the verbs of the phrase “passed from possession to identification: from holding, through inclining, to ‘constituting’ or ‘being’.

After the Treaty of Utrecht was signed, a memorial medal was erected in the city of Utrecht which had the words *Spes Felicitatis Orbis, Pax Ultrajuctensis*. The motto might be over optimistic, yet not totally unjustified. The Treaty did weaken and restrain major European powers to an extent that none of them

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can ever rise to pose any imminent threat against the rest of the continent. Louis XIV's ambition died with him so did Austria's; England had little interest in European territory aggression, and had little intent to invading others. Peace was achieved, but peace alone would not make the situation a true "balance"; it was after all, an excuse that England used to exert its own power, though not militarily brutal like Louis XIV, but as decisive and influential. It was astonishingly accurate when Winston Churchill later described England's role in the European situation, though more than two centuries apart: "Thus there was a balance created in which Britain, whose major interest was the cessation of the quarrel between [major powers], and was to a large extent arbiter and umpire. It was then apparent that England's impact on international relations would be nothing like that of Louis XIV's. However, calling Louis XIV's aggression as potential hegemony but concluding England's enormous diplomatic influence, naval supremacy and commercial monopoly as truly "maintaining a balance of power" is merely an assertion in haste.