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Transcript

THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO, TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER

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JAN TECHAU: Let me welcome you to Carnegie Europe, and to a conversation about one of the many, many days that we commemorate this year, and these years, really. It's so full of centenaries and other commemorative occasions, that it's very hard to actually follow suit and to be alert to all of them, but we thought, when Brendan Simms came to my office in March of last year, and we talked about Waterloo, and we immediately thought that we needed to do this.

Because Waterloo, the battle itself is interesting enough, but it also points to some of the political realities of today, some of the military realities of today, and so we said okay let's do this, once the book is out. And the book is indeed out, you've seen it, it's on sale here tonight, and we can have a discussion about this, and invite one of the best commentators on these kinds of affairs on stage, which of course is Jamie Shea, who has been with Carnegie Europe quite often, a great friend of ours. And who is one of these landmark people, if there are such things here, in Brussels, who appears often on stage, and always with something brilliant to say. And it's also great because we have a Cambridge versus Oxford kind of race here today. Jamie's got his PhD from Oxford, and Brendan is teaching history in Cambridge. So we have basically all elements for a great fun night here.

Also I see General Bradshaw here who has joined us tonight, which is a great honour, thank you very much, the deputy [unclear] here tonight with us, a fantastic honour for us, thanks for coming over. I know that you are tight on time, but we really appreciate that you could make it over.

This is a momentous time in Europe, and we have discussions about the European order, left and right, about the political and the military order of Europe. We've seen momentous events last year. And the modern European order really came all about with Napoleon. And Napoleon ended two hundred years ago at Waterloo, and so basically the lessons from that time, and the decisions that he made, and the opposition against him, that finally prevailed, shaped Europe in many ways that are still relevant today.

And we want to actually inquire about that, apart from the book that we want to praise, and the actual events on the ground on that day. We also want to talk about what that means for today. And we will talk about coalitions, because it was an interesting coalition, of course, that was pitted against Napoleon; and we want to talk perhaps a little bit at least about the crucial role of Germany, which is a bit of a special issue for Brendan, whose big book The Struggle for Supremacy was all really about this.

And the current book on Waterloo to a certain extent is also about that, in a different way. And perhaps we also want to, just for the fun of it, look at a few historical counterfactuals, which is in the specific Napoleonic case very, very fascinating.

Brendan Simms is a Professor for History at Cambridge University. He's also establishing a Centre for Geopolitics and Grand Strategy at that university, and he is also the founder of the Project for a Democratic Union, which is really a think-tank that thinks about the future of Europe. And so we have a polymath here who can tell us all about the stuff that we need to do, and finally actually heed, and then we will have a better future.

And then we have Jamie here, who is of course working for the coalition of today, the Alliance, and it keeps us all safe and secure, and who is one of the primary spokespeople, still, for NATO. And think-tankers love you, Jamie, because you will actually say something, and it's fantastic, and that's why we have you back.

We will also, as I said, sell the book. It was already on sale, and we will sell it afterwards as well, and it will be signed by Brendan Simms if that's what you want, so please approach Brendan afterwards and he'll write into your copy of the book. And then we will have a reception afterwards, a quick one, it's our strategy of cheap and yummy, which is what we have to do at Carnegie, and you can eat at Carnegie all of the things that you would usually not eat, which is chips and cheese and all of that stuff, without any of the nutritious, positive element that you should actually eat – you can eat them here guilt free and wash them down with a little bit of wine afterwards. And hopefully we will continue the discussion then.

Now I have talked way too long, I want to hand it over to Brendan, who will give us a ten minute rundown into the topics that I've talked about, Jamie will comment, we will have a bit of a discussion here, and then of course we will open it to your questions, and then I hope we have a great evening here tonight. Thanks again for coming. Brendan, it's yours.

BRENDAN SIMMS: Thank you very much, Jan, for that kind introduction, and indeed for the invitation. And I extend my thanks more generally to Carnegie Europe for their hospitality. I've been invited to reflect on the battle 200 years on, which, as the invitation said, marked the end of Napoleonic tyranny in Europe, and ushered in almost half a century of European peace.
But we're also here, I think it's been alluded to, to discuss the importance of Waterloo for today's strategy debate. And we might get a bit of a glimpse of what Europe's future could be like, in the light of one of the more important dates of commemoration in 2015.

Of course, we look at the anniversary of Waterloo in the light of other events, and other factors. So for instance, last year we commemorated the start of the First World War, which rather crowded out the 200th [sic] anniversary of the personal union between Great Britain and the north German principality of Hanover, ruled by George Ludwig, Elector of Hanover, who then became King of Great Britain.

And this was a dynastic link which lasted from 1714 to the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837. And the King's German liege, and the events I'll be talking about today, that particular snapshot in the Battle of Waterloo, would not have existed if it had not been for this personal union. But I fear that commemoration was somewhat overshadowed, understandably, by that of the First World War.

We're also speaking against the background of the current European crisis, the currency and political crisis, but more particularly, and I think Jamie Shea will speak more about this, the strategic crisis of Europe, mainly in the east – the Baltic and the Ukraine.

But this crisis is, I think, at its roots, a crisis about Europe itself, and particularly the German question, which is how to engage and mobilise the country at the heart of Europe, which has, as a result of the Second World War, a strong pacifist tradition, and unease with the use of military force, which has been by and large a retardative factor in dealing with crises such as Russia and Libya.

And a little bit of what I want to do in the book, and this evening, is to point to the existence of an alternative German tradition, which perhaps could be drawn upon by not only Germany today, but eurozoners in general.

Now Waterloo was a decisive battle. It was regarded as such by contemporaries, it's listed as such in most of the books. It decides the question of French domination in Europe. It settles the so called Western Question, which is that that French domination should end, and it led to, of course, the system in Europe of the Congress of Vienna, which was conservative, if you will, but largely liberal in terms of international governance. In other words, there would be no domination by one single power.

So Waterloo is decisive. But what was the decisive moment in the Battle of Waterloo? Many of these have been claimed. The defence of Hougoumont, the arrival of the Prussians, Napoleon started too late, and so on. All of these are reasonable points, but the reason why I'm here is because I’ve written on what I regard as the crucial factor, which is the defence of the farmhouse of La Haye Sainte that afternoon, in June 1815.

And by the way, we have one of the owners of La Haye Sainte, Suzanne Cornet d’Elzius, here in the audience this evening, I thank you again for your help in writing the book.

And Napoleon’s strategy, very briefly, was to punch his way through the Allied centre. He had to grapple with Wellington, defeat him, before Blücher could unite with his ally. So he couldn't go around the Allied position, there wasn’t time. So he had to plough through the middle. And right at the heart of that position, as I say, was this farmhouse.

And it was defended at the start of the battle by 378 riflemen of the Second Light Battalion of the King’s German Legion, commanded by a Major Baring. Now, he was later joined by reinforcements, but he is a principle figure, and those men are the principle protagonists in the story. They are attacked close to the start of the battle by the main French thrust of the corp of d’Erlon, the left wing of which attacks La Haye Sainte.

And the French fail to take the farmhouse at the first attempt. And in the course of the afternoon, repeated attacks are repulsed, and the book – I won’t go into detail here – but the book describes the drama of those hours. So for instance figures like Rifleman Lindau of the Second Light Battalion, who although heavily injured continues to fight on, refuses Baring’s injunctions to go to the rear to have his wounds dressed, in fact pours rum into the wound, seems to be medically somewhat problematic, but in any case did the trick.

The story of the burning barn, where the newly arrived Nassauers used their field kettles to ferry water from the pond to put out the fire. The confused hand to hand combat in the courtyard, and in the house, when the French finally scale the walls, and break in. The frantic withdrawal supervised by Baring, but covered by a intrepid rear guard.

There’s a story of the troops of the King’s German Legion outside the farm, particularly the remarkable vignette of the brigade commander, Colonel Ompteda, who was told to retake this farm, because it’s so tactically important, and although he regards the instruction as suicidal, leads his men and is in fact killed, and many of his troops likewise lose their lives. A pointless death, in many ways.
But the point is that even though eventually the defenders run out of ammunition, and withdraw, and only 42 men are left with Baring’s unit at the end, so 42 out of 378 – the balance are not dead, let me hasten to add, but they’re dispersed elsewhere on the battlefield. The point is that these men have held up Napoleon almost five hours, which gave time for the Prussians to arrive in strength, and thus decide the battle in favour of Wellington, and against Napoleon.

So that’s the drama of the story, and that’s why it’s significant, I think, for European history. But the other reason why I'm here is to talk about the remarkable nature of this body of troops, the King’s German Legion. It’s established in 1803 to mobilise the Hanoverian subjects of George III against Napoleon. So Hanover, which is the homeland of these people, has been overrun by Napoleon, and the British Army sets up a unit, this is not an auxiliary unit, this is a unit of the British Army, but it is made up very largely of foreigners.

It draws in not merely Hanoverians, but Germans from all parts of the former Holy Roman Empire. And what results is a curious military and cultural hybrid, it's an Anglo-German hybrid. So it's bilingual, both militarily and culturally, and the people, both offices and to a certain extent men, regard themselves also as in some sense English, culturally. They take on English names, for instance, they adopt English customs, English sports, cricket, that sort of thing. And these last on, by the way, in the Hanoverian army after 1815.

But there's also a very strong ideological motivation with these men, a little bit like the Free French of the Second World War. I cite many examples of where they see their role is to liberate the fatherland, to free Hanover from the humiliation of Napoleonic occupation. And this is true even of the rank and file. So it's not a case simply of these people being desperate for payment, that they're somehow the scum of the Earth, in a much used phrase in another context. These are in many ways ideological warriors.

And the King's German Legion served very widely in the Napoleonic wars. The Second Light Battalion had previously fought in Spain, in the Low Countries, and southern France. And I think the remarkable resilience of these men at La Haye Sainte, which I document at length, is to do partly to their being a primary group, a cohesion which is regionally derived, but also many of the men who are from other units had known each other before, but in many case most of them have a strong ideological sense of being embarked in a project against Napoleonic domination.

Now, why do I see the King's German Legion as a potential model for NATO, or for a eurozone army, which would be the obvious extension? Obvious to me, at any rate. It's because the King's German Legion mobilised the resources of Germany and the Holy Roman Empire for the common project of freeing Europe from French domination.

It placed them into units where the language of command was English, equipment and uniforms were standard across the British Army. So the line units wore red, the riflemen wore green. So they were part of a multi-national army within a coalition, with a supreme commander, Wellington. Whose army was, in a sense, European.

So even before the Prussians arrive, only 36% of his army are British, 10% are King's German Legion, i.e. German, 10% Nassauers, again Germans, 8% Brunswickers, 13% Dutch, 6% Belgian. So the majority are in fact not English speakers in the narrow sense. I say this not to deny the British involvement, or to say that this was a German victory, but to make the point that this is a European effort. And Lord Bramall, former chief of the British Defence Staff, once described it as the first NATO victory.

Now, I am aware there is an alternative Napoleonic tradition for a European army. Napoleon's army is very multi-national. They recruited within metropolitan France, the satellite states, the conquered areas. The Grande Armee which went into Russia in 1812 famously contained a preponderance of non-Frenchmen. And even at Leipzig in 1813, there were many Germans in the French Army.

My point, though, is that first of all, by Waterloo, the French Army was no longer a European one, so it was truly a European army facing a largely French one. But also that even when Napoleon's army was European, in many respects, it was not an appropriate model for the present day, because it was a hegemonic and aggressive model, as opposed to being a federal and defensive one, which is what I believe the King's German Legion and Wellington's army largely stood for.

So finally, I would argue that the King's German Legion is a better model for a future eurozone army. It would, in particular, solve the German problem within the military mobilisation of Europe. That is to say, it provides an example of how the military resources of central Europe could be mobilised for a common cause. It's a tradition to which the Germans, who as I said have an unease with military power, could appeal.

Party because it would be a common ideological project, which is the defence of democracy in Europe. Partly also because somebody like Baring, commander at La Haye Sainte, is the model of a responsible commander. He does not, unlike Ompteda for example, sacrifice himself or his men in a forlorn hope. He completes his mission, he defends as long as he can, he holds on as long as he can, and then he withdraws, without sacrificing his men pointlessly.

So for all these reasons, and this would be my parting shot, I commend to you the story of the King's German Legion at Waterloo. First of all, as an engrossing drama of courage and endurance in its own right, and secondly, as a model for the common eurozone army we so desperately need today. Thank you for your attention.

JAN TECHAU: Thank you very much Brendan. This is clearly something that you don't hear that often any more in Brussels these days – first of all really sound military history, and then also a plea for a really federalised European army. Those are things that Brussels doesn't really talk about a lot, and this is why it's very much our gain that you've come tonight.

I have a quick question. You are stressing that this was a European army, very much integrated in a way that few military armies usually are. If they had lost that battle, could that international army have survived? What would it have done?

BRENDAN SIMMS: Well, I think the first thing to be said is that if Wellington had been defeated at Waterloo, it's highly likely that Napoleon would then have caught up with Blücher, and destroyed Blücher's army. Whether Napoleon would then have won the war, or have at least reached some kind of negotiated settlement, of which he'd in the past shown himself incapable, and thereby change the course of European history, of course, is not clear.

Because you could make the objection that there were Austrian and Russian and other armies hastening towards France, and that you would simply have had a rerun of what had happened in 1813/14. And I can't exclude that. But the fact is, Wellington did win in 1815, and therefore the victory bore, quite rightly, his imprint, and it was very much also something which gave Britain standing in the continuing negotiations at the Congress of Vienna.

JAN TECHAU: I'm asking this because, of course, it's not only the army that matters here, but whether the idea behind such an international army could have survived. And therefore, in a sense, the European idea, in the way that you're describing it.

BRENDAN SIMMS: That's a fair point, on the other hand you could argue that it was precisely the Napoleonic challenge which had driven this high degree of European unity. And so that Europe had come progressively together, having started out in the 1790s, and really for more than a decade, been very divided over how to respond, eventually found themselves more or less on the same page.

And you could argue that the absence of a direct military threat after 1815 is one of the factors which then causes European unity somewhat to fragment. Of course, they are trying to keep an eye on France, who've got an army of occupation and so on, but the French basically play ball after 1815.

So the counterfactual might be how would Europe have looked if you'd had a Napoleonic regime after 1815 just waiting to restart, if you like, a kind of a cold war post 1945 style. That would probably have been quite conducive to greater European understanding. But that's as a counterfactual – you asked me to play the game.

JAN TECHAU: Thank you very much Brendan. I'll hand it over to Jamie, who is already shivering with anticipation. He wants to say a few things, I can almost feel it, and so the stage is yours.

JAMIE SHEA: Thanks Jan. I've been reading so many books that I simply have to at least say a few words to sort of justify to my wife my self-imposed monastic isolation over Christmas, trying to become an overnight expert on the Battle of Waterloo, but thanks a lot for inviting me. These are the things I really like to do.

The first thing, looking also, and commenting on what Brendan has said, is to look at the significance of Waterloo as a decisive battle. The irony of this is that Napoleon had fought 60 battles, or 59 before Waterloo, won the vast majority – I think he lost seven. And each time he was looking for that decisive battle which would persuade the Russians, the Prussians, the Austrians, even the Brits, to give up, and allow him his hegemony of Europe.

And of course he was great at winning battles, but he never had the decisive one. And sooner or later, the peace broke down, and the war resumed. The irony is that the decisive battle was the one, ultimately, against him. And Brendan, at the beginning of his book, quotes from Victor Hugo, who says that Waterloo was not just a battle, but a change in the direction of the world.

Metternich finished his memoirs in 1815 saying that after that, history had become ordinary, and it's true that Waterloo puts a stop to this rather dramatic, even exciting period in human history. Life becomes a little bit more boring afterwards. But that said, let's not forget that it's very easy to start wars, it's very difficult to bring wars to an end.

We speak of the 100 Years War, the 30 Years War, the Seven Years War. World War One was the prelude to World War Two. Even that was the experience of Napoleon. He couldn't end wars. The animosity that was built up started a new cycle very quickly. And those Napoleonic wars were devastating for Europe.

After the Second World War, of course, probably a figure of three million dead may look comparatively modest, but three million soldiers died in the Napoleonic wars, which dragged on for 25 years. 1.4 of those were French. In other words, the French lost about the same as they lost in World War One, military dead. One million civilians were killed.

So this was a devastating period of human history, European history. It took seven coalitions, alone, to defeat to Napoleon. But as Brendan says, the first point is that after Waterloo, we had a period of relative peace. Brendan spoke of 50 years, I would even push it as far as 100. Of course there were wars in between, Crimea, the Franco-Prussian War, but the basic sort of state system prevented Europe from degenerating into a generalised warfare until 1914. So Waterloo I think was significant in that finally, a war came to an end.

And as obviously we look at the Ukraine at the moment, the new conflict starting, let’s remind ourselves that it’s very easy for people to start these conflicts, it’s not so easy to end them. And again, Napoleon was a good general, he was hopeless at political reconciliation. He couldn't transform his victories into lasting understandings. He tried with the Tsar at Tilsit in 1807, it broke down. He tried with Metternich. He even married himself into the Austrian royal family to try to secure peace. He was not a good reconciler.

Secondly, the consequences of Waterloo. And Brendan mentioned it. So Waterloo had some major impacts. Look at the UK. Before the Napoleonic wars, we were basically a colonial power. Wellington was an Indian general. That’s where he made his reputation. We had a colonial army. We finished Waterloo with 600,000 Brits in the army, the largest at the time.

We became the European off-shore balancer for the remainder of the 19th Century, but the peace of Waterloo, because it led to peace, allowed the UK to then distract its efforts and build an empire. The British Empire would not have happened without Waterloo. Ironically, in 1814, the bulk of our forces were in the United States, still confronting the Americans at that time.

But the peace of Waterloo also came at the same time, as Brendan points out in his magisterial book, Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy, with the Treaty of Ghent, which put a stop to the war against the United States. So that peace vis a vis the US, peace in Europe, is the foundation of British empire building, and the 19th Century, because of Waterloo, became largely a British century.

But secondly, look at Prussia being beaten, very easily, by Napoleon, at the beginning of the wars, suddenly transforming itself, through military organisation, under Hardenberg and Stein, into a significant military power. There’s no doubt about it, that Napoleon didn’t quite get the German unification he’d intended, based on French hegemony and the Confederation of the Rhine, but Austria no longer was a western power – Brendan, you point that out.

After Waterloo, Prussia became the dominant force in Germany. Russia too, Russia comes in, for the first time significantly, into the European balance of power through Waterloo. In 1814 the Cossacks were camping out in the Bois de Boulogne, they expanded their territory significantly after Waterloo, into Finland, into Bessarabia, and so this whole question of we need Russia as an ally – think World War One, think World War Two – to defeat the European troublemakers, but what price do we pay when we engage such a large and often rapacious power, historically, into the European system.

And because we’re in Belgium, I can’t but mention that, of course, Napoleon’s defeat leads to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Belgians are put under Dutch rule, but not for very long, in 1830. So even the emergence of Belgian independence is something. But the real consequences, which I found very interesting, of all of this, are the fact that suddenly, European security depends upon the cooperation of the Great Powers. Brendan, you mentioned this.

They come together to fight Napoleon, the hegemony, very successfully, and the lesson is, as you said, Napoleon is great at defeating them individually, but once they combine into a coalition, he can’t do that any longer. The aftermath of Waterloo was a sort of hope that we would have a sort of new Golden Age of European security, when the Congress of Vienna would act as a kind of Concert of Europe as a state system, to deal with troublemakers and enhance cooperation.

It was a security order, and of course today as we look at embracing Russia, going back also to an entente among Europeans, major players, are we able to go back to that particular model?

Just a few remarks on the battle itself. Waterloo, two thirds of the deaths were through artillery. It was a defensive battle. Wellington was inferior in numbers, and massively inferior in guns, but he won. He staked out a defensive position, and he forced Napoleon to attack him. One thinks of the link between Waterloo and, to some degree, the trenches of World War One. It starts to mark, after a period in which war was mainly manoeuvre, outflanking – we think of Napoleon's early victories – horsemen, soldiers, to where – there's tactics, defensive positions, fortifications like Hougoumont, La Haye Sainte, which become virtually impregnable, at least for much of the battle, artillery begin to weigh.

And the destructiveness. Waterloo was one of, with Borodino, the most destructive battles in European history up until that time, with 30,000 French killed, 17,000 Anglo-Dutch, about 7,000 Prussians.

Napoleon should have won before Waterloo, that's the great irony. If he'd been a bit more astute at exploiting his successes against Prussia at Ligny two days before, or at Quatre Bras, against Wellington. If they'd exploited the retreat of the Brits at the time, and the Anglo-Dutch, or the Prussians, Napoleon could have won. To some degree, for Napoleon, Waterloo was an unnecessary battle which resulted from his earlier failures.

What also is important, as you mentioned, the notion of not exploiting success. Terrible situational awareness, not knowing where your enemy is. Napoleon wasted his assets, sending them off to find the Prussians in different locations, Grouchy in Wavre, Lobau on the Lasne River, and not finding the Prussians, and this sort of fog of war.

And as we think of the situation that NATO is in today, having the right situational awareness so that your troops are in the right place against the right threat at the right time I think is a key lesson that we should learn.

Would it have mattered? I tend here to agree with Brendan. I think the victory of the Allies, to some degree, was more important than the defeat of Napoleon, because I think by the time that Napoleon had returned after his exile in Elba, the French were very exhausted. He could only get 15,000 volunteers, he had to use conscription in order to have an army, and even if we'd lost Waterloo, I think that the coalition, which was not to defeat France – the Congress of Vienna did not declare war on France, because the legitimate power in France was Louis XVIII, they declared war on Napoleon – I think they probably would have held together. France was exhausted.

Even though Napoleon, in a fit of madness, did return to France temporarily, and entertain the prospect that he could raise 150,000 troops and return to the battle.

Well, what are the lessons? Abba, in their famous song, say that the history book on the shelf is always repeating itself. And I think that there is some truth. But there are four things I just very briefly would like to return to at the end.

Number one, trust among allies. Wellington took unbelievable risks at Waterloo with an inferior force in numbers, but he could hold on, and that Blücher would arrive. And Blücher, having been completely wasted at Ligny, and with his chief of staff Gneisenau sort of advising him at stages to pull back to Liege, could have well decided to leave it to Wellington. But they trusted each other to stay together as allies. That was the decisive thing.

As Obama said, he had my back. And again, at a time when NATO is looking at the eastern European allies who are a little bit nervous at what has happened in the wake of Ukraine, no military strategy works unless it's based on that degree of trust.

The second lesson: hold on to your alliances. As Brendan says, the great tragedy of post-Waterloo is that, for example, the Brits and the Germans, in particular, who had this magnificent sort of entente based on the joint monarchy of Hanover, with the 46 odd percent of the Anglo-Dutch army, based on German speakers – and don't forget that 20% were Belgians and Dutch as well – that having sort of had that wonderful entente we were able to keep it.

And by the late 19th Century, Britain and Germany, despite interlocked royal families and business interests and a great deal of mutual admiration – even attempts to form alliances with each other – failed and became adversaries. I'm not arguing that the First World War was caused because the Anglo-German relationship broke down, but I think you could argue that it was one of the decisive factors.

So if you've got an alliance, hold onto it. And I think looking at the United States at the moment, and our Canadian friends, in the current context, our ability to stay together is key.

The third thing I'd like to say, particularly looking at Mr. Putin, in Ukraine at the moment, is the lesson of Napoleon is that you can't force your ideology down somebody else's throat with military power. At least not for long. Talleyrand famously warned Napoleon that he couldn't export freedom at the barrel of a gun, that this would fail. The Napoleonic system had to be based on consent, which clearly it wasn't. And of course afterwards the coalition, the Concert of Vienna, went through the same experience in trying to force reaction – think of Nicolas I in particular – down the throats of the Poles or the Austrians, down the throats of the Italians. And so on.

This attempt to ward off the springtime of the nations through reaction – lasted a while, but ultimately failed as well. Hitler's project also failed. So ultimately, we cannot employ military force to stop people expressing their aspirations.

Finally, the Europeans had to take responsibility for themselves in 1815, and here I sort of come very much to Brendan's thinking of, if not about a European army, or a eurozone army, but at least a sense of European defensive cooperation, even if we have to keep the alliance with the United States.

It was this sort of wake up call, particularly among the Russians and the Prussians and the Austrians, who had their own rivalries, the Brits who realised that they couldn't simply finance the coalitions. Remember, Wellington and Napoleon faced each other at Waterloo for the first time. It was the Bony versus Nosy clash. Neither could become the complete general before they defeated the other.

Wellington said of Napoleon that his presence was worth 40,000 troops, although that didn't work on that day. And when Napoleon died, Wellington said great, now I'm the world's most famous general. So to some degree, it was a fantastic clash of personalities. But the victory came because this sudden realising, including the British at the time, that they had to put a force on the land, on the continent, they had to defeat Napoleon on his doorstep, you know, they couldn't simply pay for the others to try to do the job.

This realisation that we can only deal with the job, we're all in the same boat. And I think again there's a big lesson for European defence today as well for all of us.

So those would be my sort of passing thoughts. Hold on to alliances, trust, you can't impose ideology at the barrel of the gun, and ultimately Europe can only be successful if everybody buries the hatchet of rivalries and takes a collective responsibility for their own security. Thank you.

JAN TECHAU: Jamie, fantastic, thank you very much. As always, fit to print. Let me be the devil's advocate just for one question, actually.

You said that you can't export ideology at the barrel of the gun, and force down your political model or social model down occupied people, in a sense. But what Napoleon indeed exported, at least to a certain extent, and this is what his defenders always say, was a version of modernity, of modern statehood, of proper administration, of better education, of a legal code that modernised Europe.
And of course that also came to an end. And what we saw then afterwards was the Congress of Vienna, restoration, the old order coming back. To a certain extent, that was going back to a state of pre-modern political order, in a way. Or is that a completely false way of describing it?

JAMIE SHEA: Well, again, I turn to Brendan here, who's the historian, but what I would say is that first of all, Napoleon's vision, and he was very explicit about this, was that the European system, which would be an Enlightenment system, and indeed Andrew Roberts, in his fantastic biography of Napoleon which I read to prepare for today, called Napoleon: Enlightenment on Horseback, which is quite a wonderful expression.

So yes, you're right, Napoleon spread his Code, he was proud of this. He once said that nobody will remember my 40 victories, but after I die everybody will remember the Code Napoleon and the French legal system, and to some degree he's right, several other countries in Europe still follow that Code today.

But it was very much an extractive system. No doubt about that. The Continental system was designed explicitly to aid the French economy. The French conscripted, as Brendan says, large numbers of Germans and others to go and fight. The difference was that at Waterloo, those others, the Dutch, the Belgians, the German speakers, the King's German Legion, actually stood up and fought.

Whereas the 50% of German speakers that Napoleon sent off to Russia, many of them deserted. Really it was only the French by the time they reached Moscow. So yes, it brought enlightenment, but very much under the notion that it would be good for France, it would be led for France, it would be directly under French domination, and therefore at the end of the day, particularly, I think, in Germany, Waterloo was seen as sort of liberation from yes, an enlightened sort of dictator, or tyrant, but a tyrant nonetheless.

And you could argue that if Napoleon maybe had been less extractive, for example imposing his Continental system on Russia, or on the northern German states, which crippled their economies because it prevented them from trading, they might have been happier in the Napoleonic community for a long time. But the Continental system, as I say, was seen as a major economic loss for their trade.

But I'd turn to Brendan here, who's got probably more knowledge of that. Even Hitler imagined, in his day, that he was bringing enlightenment, just like the Soviet Union believed also, in its day, that the export of Communism was bringing a fairer, more just system, the future, and a sense of enlightenment. So to some degree, all great dictatorships believe that they are also spreading a certain sort of model, but whether the subject people see it in quite the same way as the hegemonic power is something we can debate. And I don't think they did.

BRENDAN SIMMS: The rhetoric and the aspiration is, in many respects, enlightened, but the reality, as Jamie says, was anything but. It's not just – and he's absolutely right – a question of the extractive nature of the French state. There's also the attempts to reintroduce slavery in the Caribbean, as part of a revival of the French colonial project, arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, judicial murder, perpetual war we've already spoken about. The war on religion, on simple revealed and received belief, as opposed to on superstition.

And the creation of a new nobility, a re-feudalisation of Europe, a distribution of spoils, and the creation of a whole new aristocratic class of landed proprietors, essentially his generals, with lands in Italy and particularly in Germany. So highly exploitative and dominatory systems, the back of which, I think, was very fortunately seen in 1815. Whatever the problems were with the order that followed.

JAMIE SHEA: And he imposed, every time he won a victory, massive indemnities, reparations I think we would have called them after 1919, on the countries that had been defeated, which ransacked their treasury. The French armies, of course, as armies did at that time, more or less fed themselves off the land and so on, causing major food shortages.

Of course, certain countries, like Russia, with their scorched earth policy, also inflicted tremendous damage on their own populations, at least in terms of denying Napoleon that type of access. So I tend to agree with Brendan. I think if you were an average citizen, this probably didn't feel very much like enlightenment or liberation.

JAN TECHAU: I rest my case here, obviously, but the other question that I have is: here in Brussels, in the Euro bubble, when there was a high degree of idealism still for the integration project, and people will of course say that this is kind of the result of history, and that the Second World War, the First World War, are all heavily inscribed into this new political order that the Europeans sought for themselves.

They never wanted to repeat these things, and so the DNA of today's Europe is certainly, in the early 20th Century, the first half… to what extent do you think today's European DNA still has some of that Napoleonic time inscribed into it? To what extent maybe even Waterloo in it? Are there traces that still inform the debate, or is it a historian's hobby?

BRENDAN SIMMS: I think those echoes are there, certainly in current rhetoric. So you'll hear, probably much more than I do, people in Britain writing about Brussels and the Commission and the bureaucracy as having a Napoleonic, hierarchical vision for Europe, against which a doughty Britain is resisting. So it's there in that.

And also in the aspiration for standardisationment, a key and certain extent, and this kind of thing, so I think it is omnipresent, yes.

JAN TECHAU: Before we hand it to the audience, I have a final question on Germany in this context. Germany, at the time, was still an undefined land mass in the centre of Europe. Napoleon had tried to consolidate it a little bit, was partly successful. The Prussians then emerged as a more important power at the time, but still it was fractured, and European history, as you described so brilliantly in your supremacy book, was a struggle over dominance of that kind of undefined, unstructured mess in the middle.

And today, we have a debate again about Germany having to lead, partially already leading, having a certain idea, but not really being up to it entirely. It's now much more defined territorially, obviously, but that central power of Europe that lies still in the middle of the continent is at least partially undefined still. It doesn't really know what to do with it.

Is that a fair thing? How does the historian look at this? We are here in the trenches of the daily political battles, but what has the historian to say about this, and where do you think the travel is going?

BRENDAN SIMMS: Well, it was ever thus. The principal argument of my book on Europe – which is much bigger than this little shocker on the Battle of Waterloo – its central argument is that what's driving European history is the German question. Which we were talking about just now, is to do with how you order that space at the heart of Europe in such a way that it will be resilient enough to deter outside predators, because whoever controls Germany will control the resources of Germany. So be it Louis XIV, be it Sultan Suleiman, or whoever.

And yet, at the same time, it should not be so strong as to threaten, from the centre, the peace of Europe, which is of course what happened ultimately under the Kaiser. You can argue who was principally to blame for that, certainly that was true under Hitler. And the arrangements that were put in place after the Battle of Waterloo reflected that preoccupation, which was: you have a German confederation which is meant to have a confederal army made up of contingents from the different German states, which are designed in such a way as to keep out the French and the Russians, essentially.

And yet, they're not really strong enough, credibly, to deter France, for example, during the Rhine crisis of 1840. And the result is that the Prussians, whom you mentioned in your question, become the protagonists, the guardian of the gate in the west. And as a result of the Vienna Settlement, they've been given the Rhineland, so they've been given a territory contiguous with France to guard against French expansion.

And therefore the Prussians take on the mantle of German nationalism. So that is how the German question leads to the 19th Century problem, which leads to the 20th Century cataclysms which produce the European Union. So the European Union, therefore, understood conventionally as a project to diffuse the tensions of central and western Europeans amongst each other.

But that of course is only part of the story, because it's not merely to diffuse, to contain Germany, it's also conceived very much in the 50s as a project to mobilise. Think of the European Defence Community. A way of getting Europeans to defend themselves against the threat of Soviet Communism. And that's rather an aspect of the European project I think that's been lost over time.
But either way, Germany is absolutely central to this, because Germany has to be either contained or, better still, mobilised, but it's always at the heart of this story, whether that be in the big picture, as I said in my book on Europe, or in this little picture at Waterloo, which for me is a microcosmic example of how it can be done. The King's German Legion is an instance of how Germans can be mobilised for the good cause within a multi-lateral context.

JAN TECHAU: Mobilising Germany, how can it be done? Your big boss, in an interview in Berlin, just said, Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary-General, said that Germany was really key to the future structure of NATO in this current standoff also, over Ukraine perhaps, and the readiness action plan, and the Wales conclusions. And that Germany was the key building block in this.

If Germany wouldn't come to the fore, then the rest of the alliance would have a problem. So from what Brendan just said, to your daily troubles of today, how do you see that? I know that you can't completely trounce the Germans now.

JAMIE SHEA: Wouldn't want to, actually. The first thing, of course, is that Germany today doesn't have to deal any longer with Bismarck's cushion of the coalitions. In other words, worrying about a war on the western front, or conflict on the eastern front, and his perpetual shifting of alliances that went on from the Bismarck period onwards to try to find the perfect combination.

So to that extent the German issue is solved, to the extent that German and NATO and the European Union, it's now embedded in a strong system of security. The problem of course with that is that when your security problem is more or less solved, the rationale for an army or for defence diminishes as well.

We are at peace for the first time in our history, we have neighbours on all sides, our friends, we don't need any longer to balance. The problem of Waterloo, very briefly, was that it created a five power system in Europe. No one was dominant, not even Germany. And therefore security meant that I've got to have three out of five. And Bismarck always, with the Dreikaiserbund, and others, the Reassurance Treaty, was very keen to make sure he had three, and the others, the French in particular, the [foreign language], only two.

And of course that was the system that disappeared after Bismarck disappeared. That issue is solved now for Germany. Germany has now got 28 all on its side. So the problem, Jan, is to sort of give a convincing rationale for why armies, why military force, when it's really about helping your neighbours much more than helping yourself.

That said, you as a think-tanker, you're paid to be pessimistic, and I as a distinguished bureaucrat are paid to be optimistic, and I think in general, the way in which Germany has responded to the Ukraine crisis does show an acceptance of responsibility. Okay, it's true, the defence budget has not shot up to the magical 2% of GDP mark that everybody agreed to at the Wales summit, but if you look at what Germany's doing, it's put ships in the Baltic sea, it's been part of the reassurance issues.

It's one of the first nations to contribute to NATO's Very High Readiness Force, it's offered this German/Polish headquarters in Poland as the basic building block for this type of structure. So you do see that the Germans are not absent from all of this. They key issue, though, is that we are now coming to a time when our military forces are under more pressure than at any time before.

And indeed, look at the way the military are now being used for homeland defence. Belgium has got troops on the streets of Brussels. France has had to keep 10,000 troops back from Mali, or Central African Republic, or at least preparation, to put them on the streets of Paris. We have the east and the south. So that kind of weight of the major expeditionary operations that was on the shoulders of the British and the French isn't sustainable any longer.

You look around, Europe's most powerful economy, the only one that doesn't have any budget deficit for the time being, the one with obviously the leading role, obviously has to therefore take on an additional responsibility, simply given the multiplicity of different tasks that our armed forces are being asked to serve.

I think the evolution in Germany is happening, the question is: what can we do at NATO, and what can my boss do to sort of speed it up a little bit. But I don't see it in totally negative terms.

JAN TECHAU: We've covered a lot of ground. Thank you very much. And now I hope that you have your questions ready, and that we will have a good discussion. We've covered so much ground, from your farmhouse to our world today. General Bradshaw, I know that your time is limited, so I want to give you the first question, and then we go over to Nicolas, and then to Sven, and then to the other side.

ADRIAN BRADSHAW: Thanks very much. Well, it's not so much a question as an observation, before I thin out, which is probably a bit of a cheat's thing to do, but firstly to thank the two speakers for two fascinating talks, and Jamie, congratulations on getting Abba into a talk at such a highbrow [overtalking]…

JAMIE SHEA: Sorry to lower the tone of the proceedings.

ADRIAN BRADSHAW: But of course you couldn't leave them out in something that was about Waterloo, I suppose.

Anyway, Brendan, you presented a vision of a security model for Europe in the future, with a multi-national alliance, rather like Wellington's army, and I would say that you've got that with NATO, with, within its structures, of about a brigade size, which are relying on a framework nation with a number of smaller nations in them, and I think you're just about to see that emerge in a series of Very High Readiness joint taskforce forces, which have come out of the Ukrainian problem, but actually will have utility, not just in the sense of collective defence against Russia or whoever else, but also to deal with a number of problems around the margins of NATO.

And you talked of a mobilised Germany, and I have to say I'm struggling to see the sense in which Germany hasn't been mobilised for the defence of Europe since the formation of NATO, since it's been a key player throughout. And even in our external activity, in Afghanistan, despite the reticence in Germany about overseas expeditionary activity, they are one of the bigger players in Operation Resolute support in Afghanistan now.

But the Very High Readiness taskforces will be based around a framework nation, we hope there will be five or six of them. They will be about brigade sized, but have a number of nations within them. The UK have already indicated that they will be providing the framework for one of those, and it might well see a number of nations who are operating within the UK joint expeditionary force, that is to say, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, also Denmark, Norway, possibly Holland, so quite a good multi-national grouping.

And we expect to see, as I say, five or six of these come forward. So I think the sort of model you describe is the model that we will have, and Germany is indicating fairly positively that they also will be a framework nation for one of these Very High Readiness joint taskforces. We very much hope they'll make an announcement, and maybe even in the next couple of days at a meeting here in Brussels we'll hear something of that nature.

So I think the vision you spell out is on the verge of delivery. And interestingly, the United States probably won't be the framework nation for one of the Very High Readiness joint taskforces, but remains locked in by providing support to all of them. So a model for European defence, the fighting elements of which, the high readiness forward fighting elements of which are very much European.

JAN TECHAU: Brendan, a rapid response to this, real quick.

BRENDAN SIMMS: Thank you. Well, it's good to hear that things are moving in the right direction. I think the vision that I outlined is a bit different from yours, in the sense that yours is still a confederal picture, as it has to be, given the existence of sovereign states. What I think is necessary is actually eurozone single states, which would then have its own single army.

The advantage of the King's German Legion was that it was a formation within the British Army, it wasn't, as it were, an auxiliary, and that a European, or a eurozone state army, would be, in some sense, the aggregation of all those legions. That's really what I had in mind.

As to the mobilisation of Germany, I think what you say is absolutely correct, until the end of the Cold War. But I think for the reasons that Jamie gave, there has been considerable slippage from that, as a result of the fact that for the first time in European history, Germany is surrounded only by democratic friends, and this has led her to be not merely embedded, but in a sense feather-bedded, insulated, from the outside.

And so you have a situation where the European body has a chest which doesn't actually feel the pain of its extremities in the Baltic and the Mediterranean, the way that a full integrated human being, by analogy, should. And I think it is true, although the Germans have considerably upped their game in the last few months, their reaction to the Ukraine crisis, Crimea, and harassment in the Baltic has been weak.

And I was in Tartu, at the Baltic Defence College, only a few weeks before Christmas, and it was very striking that nobody there believed that the Germans were part of a collective effort to defend them, and German presence at the conference was absolutely minimal. And it was striking that the one country within Europe which was furthest away, the United Kingdom, was the one that was the most strongly represented, both rhetorically and in other ways.

So I slightly disagree with you on the extent to which the Germans are mobilised, but they certainly are more mobilised now than they were six months ago, I agree with you on that.

JAN TECHAU: Thank you very much. I would like to take Nicolas and then Sven, and I think this gentleman over there has a question, take those three, and then we go over to this side, and it's Hugh and then the next round. Nicolas first, please.

NICHOLAS WHYTE: Thanks. Nicholas Whyte, from APCO Worldwide, but speaking very much in a personal capacity. This was very, very interesting, and the one point I missed was actually raised just now by the General, and it's the question of what are you offering to the smaller countries? You've talked a lot about England, France, Germany, Russia, Austria, the balance of the five.

There was a sort of reference to the Duke of Wellington's earlier career, what was he bringing to the Indians exactly? I'm not quite sure. And at the same time, when you go to Ljubljana in Slovenia, you will find there a pillar in which are interred the ashes of the Unknown French Soldier, mort pour notre liberte. Ljubljana is perhaps the one capital in Europe where you will find a monument to the Unknown Soldier of the Napoleonic armies outside France.

So I really wonder what is being offered from either of your perspectives to the smaller and more subject nations in Europe, including, of course, Ireland, where we have a certain interest. That's a provocative question.

I have a nice question as well, which is, do you have a favourite literary treatment of the Battle of Waterloo? Victor Hugo, Les Miserables? Thackeray, from Vanity Fair? Or is there one that I've missed?

SVEN BISCOP: Thank you, I'm Sven Biscop, from Egmont, the Royal Institute for International Relations of Belgium, and I teach at the University of Ghent. And one of my courses there is on Belgian foreign policy, and there's many counter-intuitive bits in that. It's perhaps counter-intuitive as such that Belgium has a foreign policy, but we used to.

And at two instances, Belgium really requested the United Kingdom to assume the leadership of Europe, and twice Britain refused. First, to some extent, after World War One, and Britain said, well, you know, we still have an empire to run, not interested. And then after World War Two, Spaak almost begged Britain to assume the leadership of his project of the Western Union, and Britain answered, well, now we're losing an empire, we definitely don't have time, and so Britain refused to assume the lead of what Spaak saw as an integrated political, economic but also defence security Europe, as a third way, between the two blocs.

And so my question is therefore to link to the Napoleonic wars, you both stressed the importance of coalitions, but you could also say what made these coalitions tick was Britain, British leadership, recreating them, time and again, and bankrolling them. And so the whole thing works because Britain took the lead. And then I could ask, well, where is Britain today in taking the lead?

Is it sort of stuck in this self-assumed role of eternal deputy sheriff of the United States? Where it could very well be the number one magistrate of this eurozone army – well, let's call it the European army, you can keep the pound sterling for a little while.

JAN TECHAU: Thanks Sven. And then this gentleman over here, and then we take your answers. Please introduce yourself.

ULRICH SANTE: Ulrich Sante, from the German representation at NATO. First of all, many thanks to Brendan Simms, for a great idea, of looking at the coalition in Waterloo as perhaps the point of inspiration and departure for what one day may become a European army. Many thanks to Jamie Shea and to [unclear] for explaining the German position, and what we do at the moment to implement Wales.

I may want to add that the interim VJTF will be led by Germany, and it will be used as the test bed for the VJTF to come. So there's a lot that Germany contributes, I think, in the first row, to implementing what was decided by the heads of state and government in Wales these days.

I would like to come back to the idea of a European army. What I see is that between France and Germany today, the idea of creating a European army is not such a big deal, and Germany I think would be willing to even give up some of its sovereignty to enable such a European army to become a reality, which actually in Article 42, I think, if I remember right, in the Treaty of Lisbon, is the vision of the Treaty of Lisbon.

I see that France and Great Britain, on the other hand, looking at the summit of 2010 or 2011, actually agreed on many issues which could be taken as the basic structure of some military corporation which could lead, in the end, perhaps, to something more structured in military cooperation within Europe.
What I don't see is what Brendan Simms, at the beginning of his talk, actually saw as a vision, namely a cooperation between Germany and Great Britain, between UK and Great Britain [sic], as being the

starting point for a European army. So my question to you both is, what has to change in Europe, what has to change in the UK, in Great Britain, what has to change in Germany, to actually bring these three together?

That at one point in history, 200 years ago, and through history, have jointly worked together at one point and the other, and nowadays, where we need the most, they don't seem to be able to agree on what they signed in Lisbon as their common vision.

JAN TECHAU: Thank you very much. Great questions, big questions, who wants to start?

BRENDAN SIMMS: Thank you very much. I'll turn first to my compatriot, Nicholas Whyte. What does this vision offer to smaller countries? It depends, obviously, on the smaller country, but the principle smaller countries that would benefit from such a security union would be the Baltic States, would be Romania, anybody in the front line against the Russians. I think also Portugal, Malta, anybody in the front line in the Mediterranean.

One country which I think would not benefit from it is Ireland. And the simple reason for that is that Ireland has, in geo-political terms, absolute A1 piece of real estate in 21st Century history. And if you want to be located in the best position, you are located between the United Kingdom and the United States. Things can go wrong, but that is probably the best place to be.

Where you don't want to be, in the 20th Century [sic], is between Germany and Russia, and that is the fate of very many people, and if you think of the enormous racket that Irish nationalists make about their fate, and you compare it with the fate of other Europeans, and I think Ireland would have to be a net contributor to such a security union, and it would be a net beneficiary, economically and in other ways.

It's a deal. You put in, you take out, and you take out in different ways. I'll come back to that in a minute, vis a vis the United Kingdom. And the best literary representation is of course Sharpe's Waterloo. That's slightly tongue in cheek, but I do recommend it. Also the TV series.

The other two questions were extremely apposite, because again they related to the issue of where Britain fits in in contemporary Europe. And here I'm going to annoy a lot of people by saying that I do see that Britain has historically been a leader of these coalitions in the past. Britain was turned to by Spark, as you say, after World War Two, but that's very much a federal vision for Europe, which was to end at some point in basically a European federation.

And Churchill in that case, he gave the speech in Zurich about the need for a federal Europe, but he was very clear that Britain would not be part of it. And the reason for that is that the European project – there's no nice way of saying this – was designed, and is designed, to fix something in Europe that was never broken in Britain. Which is the fact that Europe was in the throes of a dictatorship, exposed to external attack, and so on.

Britain was really the only country in Europe, only major player, which came through that challenge victorious. And so the argument as to why a people should give up its sovereignty for a greater good, that's an argument that doesn't apply to Great Britain, because it has its own union, for very similar reasons, in 1707, when the English and the Scots pooled their sovereignty, and their military power, and their economic power.

And my meta-argument, which I didn't make tonight, but I've made in the European book, and various pieces in the popular prints, is that what the eurozone needs to do is a variant of that historical experience that the English and the Scots underwent, which is the creation of a security and fiscal union. So we don't need – to make the point unambiguously clear – which is more or less the implication of both of your questions, we don't need a European Britain, but we need a British Europe.

In other words, a eurozone built up on these Anglo-American constitutional principles of security union. And if we have that, then the problem that you've both described goes away. Because you simply have a re-alignment within NATO. Instead of having lots of different states within NATO, you'll essentially have two European ones, which is the United Kingdom and the united eurozone state. So that would be my answer on that.

JAMIE SHEA: I'll have a stab at these as well. First of all, Nick, I'll ignore your remark about Wellington and India, because I wasn't making the point that he was there as a liberator, as you well know. But you're right, of course. The Napoleonic period, in a way, is not conducive to the interests of small states, let's be clear.

You could argue that Napoleon did, with his Rhineland Confederation, his creation of the Duchy of Warsaw, which was not the same thing as an independent Poland, his sponsorship of the Transalpine Republic and different arrangements in Italy, at least set in train the kind of sense of nationalism and self determination in a very limited way that obviously became such a feature of Europe after Versailles and Woodrow Wilson and the 14 points in 1919. In reality, looking at it, the only small state that really did well out of the Napoleonic wars was Switzerland, which had its neutrality internationally guaranteed at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

Literary model, I'm going to choose Stendhal, one of my favourite writers, and La Chartreuse de Parme, one of my favourite novels, with Fabrice del Dongo being on the battlefield of Waterloo, and becoming totally confused with what's going on. Wellington famously said, when he was asked to describe the Battle of Waterloo, it's impossible, it's like asking me to describe a dance.

But what's interesting, and here I come to Brendan's book, which of course is the purpose of our debate this evening, because what I think Brendan does very well in this book, and I'm not trying to flatter you Brendan, or even to sell you more copies, for which I will receive not even 1% of your royalties, modest as no doubt they are, but it is that you've managed to sort of describe this fog of war sense, the sense of chaos that is going on all around, particularly for these 400 beleaguered members of the King's German Legion in the farmhouse, by giving a sense of the overall battle.

The great tragedy, to my mind, for the French at Waterloo, was that that sort of confusion of Fabrice del Dongo existed at the level of the generals, particularly Ney, wasting the French cavalry, thinking he's pursuing retreating Anglo-Dutch soldiers, when in fact they're not retreating at all, and so on. So the idea of confusion in warfare.

The UK, Sven's question. Absolutely. The Brits, as I said, during the Napoleonic wars, believed that they would deal with Napoleon by financing other people's coalitions. We were the Paymasters-General. It was only when Britain, as I said, realised that it had to engage, along with the others, and put skin in the game, even at the cost of a lot of British soldiers who died in Spain and at Waterloo, that finally we had a resolution.

Unfortunately, yes, you're right, the UK didn't learn that lesson. Waterloo succeeded too well, because then we went back to this role of the offshore balancer, and indeed maybe the tragedy is that the countries that we fought the First World War with, or could have been in alliance with, like Germany, we came into antagonism with those countries precisely because we weren't dealing with them in Europe. We were competing with them in colonial expeditions.

Remember, Germany and the Weltpolitik, the naval build-up, the fear that Germany would take away – yes, the [unclear] – and take away Britain's colonies, or disrupt our trade routes, to fight with France over Morocco, Egypt, Fashoda, the fights with Russia over Afghanistan and India. To some degree, if we'd have been more focused on Europe, we might have formed alliances sooner.

The great tragedy of the First World War is both the French and the Russians believed that they could count on the British to stay in, the Germans, right up to the end, were convinced that they could persuade Britain to stay out, because our position was basically ambiguous about where our commitments were.

There's a family story, Jan, of the Kaiser ordering champagne to be opened two days before the war broke out, because he had a message from the German ambassador in London saying that he'd heard that the UK was now going to declare neutrality. It was totally wrong. But the fact is the Germans believed this. So to some degree our ambiguity regarding our commitments have not helped us.

And then of course finally, we've always been great, you think of World War One, the British Expeditionary Force, you think of World War Two, you think of the Napoleonic wars. We've been very good at sort of coming in after the wars have started to try to sort things out. We haven't been so good at the prevention strategy in the first place. And of course after the Second World War, we refused to join the European Defence Community and so on.

So what's the hope for the future? Well, this is very politically incorrect, but my sense now is two things, two remarks. Number one, we have to have a referendum, we have to clear the air, we have to lance the boil. We have to have a debate that makes it clear that we are part of Europe. We have to have the debate, we have to have the campaign, and we have to fight that.

Just like Waterloo, there has to be a decisive victory of the pro-Europeans over the anti-Europeans, and that won't happen without a referendum. Because until that time, the eurosceptics will have the majority of the coverage.

Secondly, if you look at the Scottish referendum, if you look at what's happening in Wales, in Ireland, and so on, you will see that a substantial part of the United Kingdom would probably break away if there is a sense that Britain is not going to be part of Europe. So to come back to what Brendan was saying at the Act of Settlement, I see that the ability of the UK to hold itself together is to some degree now dependent upon defining, durably, its European role and European identity. But we have to go through the referendum campaign first.

The trouble today – final remark – is that if you think of Tony Blair, he felt that Britain could be part of Europe in defence and security, while being outside in the euro and the economic sense and the social chapters and legislation and so many other things. I think we've recognised now that that's not going to happen. We're either totally part of Europe, or we're not part of Europe, but we can't have this pick and choose kind of attitude.

If it doesn't work in economics, it's not going to work in defence as well. And that's something I think the Germans realise, and the French realise, but we don't.

Final, final word: while Britain sorts itself out in all of this, the one area of the British policy where we're not very rational, we need patience. I think it's very easy sometimes for the French, for the Germans, our Scandinavian friends, to get a bit impatient with us, and we need their patience to help us along while we have this debate, and always make it clear that they want us to be in Europe, rather than being on the outside. So to some degree, it's more what Berlin does than what London does.

JAN TECHAU: Brilliant, very good. We have about four minutes left or so. I have perhaps time for two ultra quick and very short questions. This gentleman and the one here in the front row, and then ultra super-speedy answers, and then we go over to the drinking and eating part of this thing.

CHRISTER E. HAMMARLUND: Christer E. Hammarlund from the European Commission. I've been here 25 years, so I went to the re-enactment 175 years after the Battle of Waterloo, having learned from an English teacher that the Battle of Waterloo was down in Trafalgar somewhere, and I said, no that's the Battle of Trafalgar, you've mixed them up.

Coming on to European DNA first. I come from a country which has not had any wars for 200 years. 1809 with Russia. Sweden. So luckily stayed out of all the conundrums of political warfare, if you like, and military warfare in Europe. That being said, the DNA in Sweden has changed. Why? Because of the October incident in the Stockholm Archipelago. Where before that, we said as soon as the navy starts telling us there's a Russian mini-sub, oh, it's because you need more budget for military spending.

Eventually we now agree that we need to become members of NATO, because NATO is for the 28, and we're outside the 28. We're inside another 28, but that doesn't cut it.

Now to the future, let's say, evolution of a eurozone army, or a European army. What sort of components would it have? Sweden is right now faced with cutting down one of the military services, either the navy, the air force, or the army. We can't sustain all three. That's what the military commanders have said, and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of Sweden.

What about cyber warfare? We've seen what happened with North Korea attacking Sony Pictures through Internet, we've seen what the US capabilities are on the Internet to shut down a country completely off the Internet, and maybe the future warfare will be not to destroy, but to take over the infrastructure and use it for economic gains. So where does cyber warfare play?

And one thing about books, there's a book coming out soon, I haven't actually got hold of it yet, it's call the improbable war, where the argument is: as long as one power has control over fear and can monopolise that in the world, everything is fine. When two start fighting over it, there will be military chaos. Thanks.

I monopolised two minutes out of four.

JAN TECHAU: That was not ultra-quick, but it was nevertheless very substantial. And now we have this question here, and then a final round with the two presenters.

TIM KING: Hello, my name is Tim King, and I'm editor of something called European Voice. As a journalist, I have sometimes indulged myself in quoting the words of Abba and so on, and there's always a lovely proximity between the European Council in June and the re-enactment.

And I love this historical stuff, but the bit I want to come in and sort of piss on the parade, really, is to say yes, Waterloo is a lovely convenient model, and we can see all the battle buffs love the fact that they can get to this battlefield, and a lot of it is still intact, and they can see the layout of things and play games. And you've got the picturesqueness of everything, of the quantity of bright uniforms and so on. And you've got the literary and film representations.

But what if actually this is the kind of wrong model whatsoever? That actually you get caught up in creating conversations which are the extension of the 19th Century into 20th Century history, but what if actually, as a model for what's going on in the 21st Century, this is all a great distraction?

And so I think there's a lot of us that can very much enjoy replaying an anniversary of Waterloo, but maybe that's what we shouldn't be doing. What a heretical thought.

JAN TECHAU: Brilliant last question for an event that has been going on for 90 minutes. And thanks for being the skunk at the garden party, that's a great role to play in any of these. And it's a great question I think, and we have two masters to give us the answers for this. This time it's Jamie who has to go first.

JAMIE SHEA: Well, on the Swedish thing, of course, to some degree Sweden was Napoleon's ultimate legacy, it was the only part of his – well, Brendan referred to his setting up of all of these principalities and kingdoms under the rule of his own marshals. Sweden was the only one that survived, at the end of the day, because that was under Bernadotte, whose descendants sit on your throne even today. But of course Bernadotte turned against Napoleon, which is the reason why he survived.

On the question regarding today, obviously it's for Sweden itself to draw the consequences of the current situation vis a vis the possible challenges, vis a vis your resources, and to decide where you want to be. That's not something that NATO, unlike Napoleon, is going to sort of impose on you.
The only thing I could say that at NATO, we would see it in our interests not to sort of enter that debate, because it would be counterproductive from the word go, but at least to make it clear that you would be welcome, if that would be your decision, number one.

But if that is not your decision, if you decide to stay where you are – I wouldn't call it neutral, because I don't believe that represents really what Sweden does, which is to contribute in a major way to NATO's various operations – Afghanistan, Libya, and so on. But if you decide not to join the alliance, then to obviously facilitate pragmatic cooperation, everything except Article 5, because it's in our interests as much as your interests, and that certainly includes the cyber elements, where you are part of a group of seven partners with whom we have a high degree of cooperation.

Second issue – I take this very – it's not the skunk at a party. I think it's something that anybody who dabbles in history has to deal with. What are the uses, as Margaret MacMillan has famously put it, or abuses of history? And I certainly wouldn't like to get into the over-interpretation game of thinking that there are fixed lessons, or that the present it exactly like the past.

In fact, statesmen who have tended to be guided by history have often come a-cropper, because it's often given them a sort of mechanical sense that situations were going to repeat themselves, and that they should do certain things. So I don't think that what we're doing tonight is any other than entertaining if somewhat idle speculation.

But the intellectual exercise of trying to think about history and draw the parallels does, if you do it properly, sharpen your appreciation not just of the similarities and the differences, and it does sharpen your analysis of the type of situation that we're in today. So I see this exercise as a kind of intellectual clarifier. And you're right, statesmen shouldn't apply it to coming up with the next interpretation of Waterloo, but to deal better with the challenges of the present.

That's why some of the best statesmen are historians, or people who read history. And a lot of the eminent statespeople of today, including the Chinese Premier, the Japanese Prime Minister, very active students of history. Because it's not that I need to know about the past and act in the future, but if I understand the past I'm more likely to have a sophisticated intellectual appreciation of the predicament that I'm facing at the moment.

So it's like anything else – a very fast car. If you know how to use it, it's perfectly safe, and even a great advantage. If you don't know how to use it, it can get you killed in five minutes.

JAN TECHAU: Jamie, thank you. Brendan.

BRENDAN SIMMS: Very quickly – I agree with what Jamie said in response to the question about Sweden. The only point I would add is that Sweden, whatever its military problems, I think is among the better organised and robust elements in Europe. And clearly if Europe were made up entirely of Swedens and United Kingdoms, it would have less of a military problem.
I see the advantage of a single eurozone state and army as being precisely a device to mobilise those who would otherwise not be mobilised.

On the question from Tim King, I welcome heresy. Of course there is a danger, first of all in falling into whimsy, which is always an element in these conversations. Whimsy, I meant, on my part. And secondly, the dangers of distraction, drawing the wrong lessons. Re-fighting the battles of the past, and not being aware of the threats, the challenges as you call them nowadays, of the future.

The only point I would make is that when I sat down to write this book, or research it, in 2010 or thereabouts, and when my Europe book was going through its various drafts, I had very much in my mind external threats to Europe. And indeed, the final paragraphs of the Europe book talk about potential threats from outside which could unite Europe.

This is now written in 2012, published in 2013, and I mention specifically Russian challenge to Ukraine, and the danger of an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East. And one of my reviewers, who shall remain nameless, he was Richard Evans, the former Regius Professor of History in Cambridge, in his review in The Guardian, before the annexation of the Crimea, said, well, this is all just fantasy.
The Europe we live in is not a Europe of hard power and of threats and all the rest of it, and it's all much more interlinked and independent [rated?], and so on and so forth. So obviously he didn't foresee, and very kindly the reviewer in the Frankfurt Allgemeine went back, when the German edition came out, after the annexation of the Crimea, and said look, he did actually write it beforehand.

So my point being that that emphasis on the persistence of hard power threats on the need to devise imaginative ways of mobilising Europe against these threats, that I think is still a current question. Which doesn't mean that we shouldn't be aware of being distracted.

TIM KING [Inaudible] to the Crimean War as much justice as Waterloo.

BRENDAN SIMMS: Exactly. We don't know, and this is really the final word, of course, which bit of history. It's a bit like the man who spends his money on advertising, and he says he knows half of it is wasted, he just doesn't know which half. And it's always a problem for the historian who operates by analogy, certainly.

JAN TECHAU: Great, thank you very much. We have covered a lot of ground, and of course there's always more questions afterwards than we have answers. We have Waterloo as a potential model, we have Waterloo not as a model at all. We have Germany mobilised, we have Germany not really mobilised. And we have Britain finally fully in Europe, and then we have Britain never really fully in Europe.

So that's great, that's fantastic. That sums it about up, I guess, for tonight, and to actually stomach all of this, and survive it, we offer you a drink and a couple of snacks here, and I hope that you have an inspired discussion afterwards. Thank you very much to both you, Brendan, and to you Jamie, for coming over, for reading plenty of books, but I'm sure you know all of this beforehand already. And we are certainly a lot smarter despite having more questions.
Thank you very much, and thanks to all of you for coming tonight.