

but when they present themselves, we must seize them in order to exploit them. That is why finances must be in order, so that the government is ready to act the moment political considerations indicate that the time is ripe. War itself should be waged according to political principles, in order to inflict the bloodiest blow on the enemy. Small states are quickly crushed, unless they are active, vigorous and dynamic. These are a few of my reflections and ideas on the government of this country, which, until it acquires far greater strength and better frontiers, must be ruled by monarchs who are always alert, wary of their neighbours and ready to defend themselves from one day to the next against their enemies' designs.

Source: *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, volume IX, Berlin, 1848, pp.186, 190-1.

Document 12

Frederick on foreign policy

*Confidential memorandum intended for the use of his heir*⁹ (in French), 'Account of the government of Prussia', 1776

As for the question of what acquisitions would suit this Prussian monarchy, the Saxon states would without doubt be the most appropriate: they would round it off and form a barrier for it by the mountains separating Saxony and Bohemia, which would have to be fortified. It is hard to predict how this acquisition could take place. The surest way would be to conquer Bohemia and Moravia, and exchange them for Saxony; or it could be done by other exchanges or with the Rhineland possessions, including Jülich or Berg; or by some other means. This acquisition is absolutely essential in order to give this State the solidity it lacks. For as soon as we are at war, the enemy can march straight on Berlin without meeting the least opposition in his path. I say nothing, however, of our rights of succession in Ansbach, Jülich and Berg, and Mecklenburg, because our claims there are well known, and we shall have to wait on events. As the State is not rich, we must above all avoid becoming involved in wars where there is nothing to gain; we exhaust ourselves to no purpose; and if a profitable occasion arose later, we would be unable to exploit it. All distant acquisitions are a burden

upon the State. A village on the frontier is worth more than a principality sixty leagues away.

Source: *Die Politischen Testamente Friedrichs des Grossen*, edited by G.B. Voltz, Berlin, 1920, pp.241-2.

Document 13

Frederick II on eighteenth-century warfare

Letter from Frederick II to d'Alembert (in French), 18 October 1770

After all, standing armies do not depopulate the countryside or impair industry. In any country, there can only be a certain number of farmers in proportion to the amount of land available for cultivation, and a certain number of workers in proportion to the size of the market; the rest would become beggars or highwaymen. Moreover, these large armies cause money to circulate, and spread equally across the provinces the revenues that the people supply to the government. The costly upkeep of these armies shortens the length of the wars; instead of thirty years which they lasted over a century ago, rulers are obliged to end them far more quickly out of sheer insolvency. In our day, seven or eight annual campaigns at most exhaust the rulers' funds and make them amenable to peace negotiations.

It is also to be observed that these standing armies determine the conditions of war more definitely than was formerly the case. Today, at the first trumpet-blast, neither the farmer, the manufacturer, the lawyer, nor the scholar, are diverted from their work; they continue peacefully to pursue their normal occupations, leaving to the nation's defenders the task of avenging the nation. In former times, at the first alarm, troops were hastily levied, everyone became a soldier, the only thought was to repel the enemy; the fields lay fallow, the professions languished, and the soldiers, ill-paid, ill-kept, ill-disciplined, lived only by looting, and lived like bandits on the unhappy areas that were the scene of their depredations. All that has greatly changed; not that such disgraceful looting no longer exists in some armies; but the whole business of war bears no resemblance to the chaos that once prevailed.

Source: *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, volume XXIV, Berlin, 1848, pp.506-7.

⁹ This part of the memorandum was suppressed throughout the nineteenth century and published only in 1920.