

accounts of treaties entered into and broken; although such examples are common in history, the author of this work could not justify himself, if he had no better reasons for excusing his conduct.

The interest of the State must serve as the rule for the conduct of sovereigns. Cases when alliances must be broken are the following: (1) When the ally fails to fulfill his engagements; (2) when the ally plans to deceive one, and when one has no other means to prevent him; (3) when *force majeure* hangs over one and compels one to break one's treaties; (4) finally, when one lacks the means for continuing the war. By a sort of fatality, which I cannot explain, wealth of resources exercises an influence upon everything, and princes are the slaves of their means; the interest of the State is a law unto them, and this law is inviolable. If the prince is under obligation to sacrifice his very self for the salvation of his subjects, he must *a fortiori* sacrifice engagements, the continuation of which might become harmful to them. Examples of treaties of this nature which have been broken are commonly met with in history; it is not our intention to justify all such cases; I venture, however, to affirm that there are such treaties which necessity, wisdom, prudence, or the welfare of the people compel sovereigns to break, because there is no other means left by which to avoid ruin. . . . It appears to me clear and obvious that a private individual must scrupulously observe his pledged word, even if he should have inconsiderately made such a pledge: if another private individual fails to observe his given word, the person against whom such violation is committed can have recourse to the protection of the laws, and, whatever may be the result of such an act, it is only an individual who suffers; but to what tribunals can a sovereign have recourse if another prince violates engagements entered into with him? The word of a private individual involves but the misfortune of one man; the word of sovereigns may lead to calamities involving entire nations. This matter may, therefore, be stated as follows: Is it better that a people should perish, or that a prince should break his treaty? Where would one find the imbecile who would hesitate in answering this question?<sup>1</sup>

In this work you will meet with treaties entered into and broken; and I must tell you, in regard to this matter, that we are subordinated to our means and to our capacities: when our interests change, we must change our actions accordingly. We are employed to watch

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire de mon temps*, tome i, avant-propos (1775), pp. xxvi-xxvii; *Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, tome ii.