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## Gustav III of Sweden on the fall of the Bastille, 1789

Letter from Gustav III to Count Stendingk, his ambassador  
at St Petersburg, 7 August 1789

Nothing is more terrible than the events at Paris between 12th and 15th July: the *Invalides* broken into; canon and armed force used against the Bastille; this fortress taken by storm; the governor, Monsieur de Launay, dragged by the mob to the Place de Grève and decapitated; his head carried in triumph around the town; the same treatment meted out to the chief magistrate; the formation of a civil militia of 48,000 men; the French and Swiss guards joined with the people; Monsieur de Lafayette proclaimed commander-in-chief of the Paris militia; blue and red cockades raised,<sup>5</sup> the Estates declaring the King's ministers and the civil and military authorities to be responsible to the nation; and the King, alone with the Comte de Provence and the Comte d'Artois,<sup>6</sup> going on foot, without escort, to the Assembly, almost to apologise, and to request assistance to put down the disturbances: this is how weakness, uncertainty and an imprudent violence will overturn the throne of Louis XVI. I am still so disturbed by this news that I am afraid my letter shows it.

*Source:* A. Lentin (ed.), *Enlightened Absolutism (1760–1790). A Documentary Sourcebook*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Averro Publications, 1985, p. 281.

<sup>5</sup> Blue and red were the colours of the city of Paris. The tricolor (red, white and blue) devised by Lafayette, replaced the white fleur-de-lys of the house of Bourbon as the flag of Revolutionary France on 17 July 1789.

<sup>6</sup> The king's brothers, later Louis XVIII (1814–24) and Charles X (1824–30).