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Wellington and the Reconstruction of the Allied Armies during the Hundred Days

THIS ESSAY IS not about the battle of Waterloo; if it relates to battles at all, it is about those battles never fought because of Waterloo. Upon the return of Napoleon from Elba, the allied powers did include a campaign in Flanders in their plans, but most of the generals visualized on the whole a recapitulation of the previous dispositions: that is to say an Austrian campaign in Italy; a drive, largely Prussian, from the Middle Rhine; a British attack from Belgium; and the main army, by far the largest, crossing the Upper Rhine near Basle. This was once more the strategy of encirclement; slow and steady strangulation, not that of seeking the one decisive battle. The major difference from 1814 involved Wellington. Then he had been in the south, advancing from Spain to Bordeaux and Toulouse. In 1815 the southern front was quiet, and he commanded the troops in Belgium – but only after an extended odyssey that found him deeply involved, and for a time exclusively involved, in assembling the forces rather than leading them.

For the sake of completing a circle, we can say that the odyssey began in August 1814 with an inspection tour of Belgian defences while the duke was *en route* to assume his ambassadorial duties in Paris. After several threats to his life there, the British prime minister, the earl of Liverpool, searched for pretexts to remove him: first to an army command in North America, later to Vienna as an adviser to the foreign secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, on territorial disputes. Wellington declined both assignments, but when Castlereagh proposed him as his successor at Vienna, he accepted the promotion, joining the great Congress as plenipotentiary on 3 February 1815 – and, incidentally, avoiding possible capture by Napoleon by a matter of weeks.¹

¹ Herbert Maxwell, *The Life of Wellington: The Restoration of the Martial Power of Great Britain* (2 vols., London, 1899), i. 387.

By this time, and more particularly by the time Castlereagh departed on 15 February, the major crisis of the Congress had been overcome: that is to say, the great struggle over the fate of Saxony and Poland. There remained nonetheless many serious disputes, most of them destined to compound the difficulties of reconstructing the allied armies. One was the future of Joachim Murat's regime in Naples. Since the beginning of the Congress the French plenipotentiary, Prince Talleyrand, had sought his overthrow in favour of the Bourbon Ferdinand. For different reasons Castlereagh sided tentatively with the French. Austria, on the other hand, whose troops were expected to do the job almost alone, hesitated to act as long as war over Saxony was a serious possibility.

With the disappearance of this threat, the Austrian pretext no longer sufficed, especially as Murat continued his aggressive ways in the Papal States. Wellington's first important success at Vienna came with persuading the Austrians to augment their forces in Italy from an observation corps of 70,000 to a truly intimidating army of 150,000,² precisely the number later assigned to duty there by a four-power military council.³ It was thus the first step in reconstituting the allied armies; and may also have been more than that. In the perennial debate regarding the poor timing of Napoleon's return (while allied statesmen were still convened in personal consultation and at least rudimentary forces were still on the French frontier), the factor too easily overlooked was the prospect of Murat's imminent demise, and with him the elimination of the only substantial army outside France that Napoleon might still hope to attract to his banner.

A second unresolved issue, or rather complex of issues, at the Congress was the future of Germany. This had both constitutional and territorial dimensions.⁴ Regarding the first, Prussia proposed to divide Germany into districts or *Kreise*, each headed by one of the larger states (Austria, Prussia, Hanover, Bavaria, and Württemberg) which would supervise administration, justice, and legislation in the *Kreis* and above all command its armed forces. In this way almost all the military resources of North Germany, outside of Hanover, would be absorbed by Prussia. Against this the Austrian chancellor, Prince Metternich, championed a system that would protect the equality and relative independence of the

² Wellington to Castlereagh, 25 Feb. 1815, *Supplementary Despatches and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington*, ed. 2d duke of Wellington (15 vols., London, 1858-72) [hereafter *WSD*], ix. 580.

³ Protocol of Conference of 11 March 1815, F[oreign] O[ffice Records] 92/14 [Public Record Office].

⁴ For this and following, Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, Vol. I: *The Congress of Vienna 1814-1815* (Princeton, 1983), 327-44.

lesser German states under the supervision of the whole by a mild collective central authority. In other words, when Wellington arrived at Vienna, a struggle for German manpower was already under way, and his particular task was to protect Hanover from the Prussians as effectively as possible.

For the lesser states, the highest priority was the establishment of an Austrian-style confederation or *Bund*. For the large states like Bavaria and Württemberg, the highest priority was the satisfaction of their territorial claims, and they steadfastly refused to join any confederation until these had been met. The bitterest dispute arose between Austria and Bavaria over the possession of Salzburg, and since the territorial question, as opposed to the German constitution, was the direct responsibility of the great powers, Great Britain was involved as much as anybody – more actually, as all parties sought Wellington's prestigious support to provide military justification for their claims.

Such were the ragged relationships among the allies when the electrifying news reached Vienna on the morning of 7 March that Napoleon had escaped from Elba and could not be found. But where would he go? Talleyrand guessed Italy, to join forces with Murat; Wellington and Metternich surmised France.⁵ Until one actually knew, there was little to be done except to alert existing forces.

In the more sanguine (in France, hysterical) accounts of the time, people spoke of ringing France with a million men or so, and even Wellington estimated 700,000.⁶ These figures, however, represented the maximum number of men that the allies could marshal from distant corners over many months, not the indifferently maintained units then camped in the occupation zones, which had been staked out the year before pending the conclusion of a definitive peace settlement. Until then each of the four allied powers was technically required to keep under arms 75,000 men;⁷ they had done so and more, but most of their formations were deployed not against France but against each other – in Saxony, Bohemia, and Poland. Opposite France in Belgium stood about 22,000 troops, nominally British but in reality mostly Dutch, Hanoverian, and Nassauer; a so-called 'federal corps' at Coblenz of about 30,000 under the command of the Prussian general, Emil von

⁵ Johann von Bourgoing, *Vom Wiener Kongress* (Brunn, Munich, and Vienna, 1943), p. 316; and G. de Bertier de Sauvigny, *Metternich* (Paris, 1986), p. 259.

⁶ For example, annex to Clancarty to Castlereagh, 1 April 1815, FO 92/17; and Maxwell, *Life of Wellington*, i. 391.

⁷ Convention of 29 June 1814, *Recueil des traités et conventions conclus par l'Autriche ... depuis 1763*, ed. Leopold Neumann (32 vols., Leipzig and Vienna, 1855-1912), ii. 488-90.

Kleist;⁸ a force of Austrians and Bavarians in the Rhine-Mosel triangle; an Austro-Prussian garrison of 9,000 at Mainz;⁹ and the Austrian force in Italy, which was now beginning to receive the reinforcements mentioned earlier. The Russians figured less prominently. Since yielding the occupation of Saxony to Prussia in October 1814, they had withdrawn the bulk of their forces, some 200,000, into Poland. Crown Prince Bernadotte's Swedes had also departed from the French theatre, and the Piedmontese on the south-eastern frontier were so debilitated that they were never assigned a serious role despite their strategic importance. The Portuguese and Spanish forces had likewise gone home, the latter to be fully occupied for the time being in shoring up the throne of Ferdinand VII.

Wellington, as it happened, along with Metternich and Talleyrand, was in Pressburg treating with the king of Saxony when the news of Napoleon's landing in France reached Vienna. In his absence a military council was held by Marshal Karl Schwarzenberg of Austria, General Karl von dem Knesebeck of Prussia, and General Peter Wolkonsky of Russia; and though their planning had no binding character at the time, it outlined fairly well the strategy later followed. It also foreshadowed the coming ferocious struggle over German manpower. Knesebeck proposed that virtually all the North German contingents as well as the Austrian and Bavarian troops in the Rhine-Mosel triangle and the Austro-Prussian garrison at Mainz should join Kleist's corps near Mainz, the fortress itself to be assigned to his exclusive use. Schwarzenberg protested. Fearing that the deployment adopted could well be perpetuated after the war in Prussian-controlled federal *Kreise*, he argued instead for the arrangements of the previous year, which had grouped the states of the Rhine-Main region into a corps of their own attached to his army. Mainz and all other fortresses, he insisted, should be open to all armies equally.¹⁰

In the end Schwarzenberg had his way, and the plan tentatively adopted was as follows: the Austrian force of 150,000 in Italy would cope with Murat; Kleist's corps, the garrison at Mainz, and units of several small states would be joined with the British, Hanoverians, and Dutch near Namur, all under Wellington's command; and a third army

⁸ Maxwell, *Life of Wellington*, i. 395. The force had been larger until 40,000 were removed to Saxony.

⁹ Austro-Prussian convention of 13 June 1814, *Traité par l'Autriche*, ii. 477 f.

¹⁰ Protocol of conference of 11 March 1814, and Knesebeck memoir annexed to Wellington to Castlereagh, 18 March 1815, FO 92/14. Cf. Julius von Pflugk-Hartung, 'Die Gegensätze zwischen England und Preussen wegen der Bundestruppen 1815', *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte*, xxiv (1911), 125, who confuses Knesebeck's memoir with the action taken.

would be deployed on the Upper Rhine under Schwarzenberg. This last, the projected main striking force as in the 1814 campaign, was expected to reach 200,000 eventually, but because of Austria's distance, its initial size was calculated at half that number, consisting almost entirely of contingents from Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden. The Russian army in Poland was assigned to a reserve position in Württemberg as soon as it could come forward.¹¹ The units under Schwarzenberg were solid enough, but he was seriously handicapped by having to depend so heavily on rulers who were loath to move without a territorial settlement first. Though not a party to the strategy, Wellington essentially agreed and was curiously optimistic. If he had to scrape together such scattered forces, Napoleon's problems were worse: seizing power and then rebuilding his own army. 'The King will destroy him without difficulty and in a short time,' the duke reported cheerfully. If not, however, 'the affair [would] be a serious one', for which preparations should promptly be made.¹²

In this spirit, the great powers pulled themselves together, on 13 March declaring Napoleon an outlaw but carefully not guaranteeing the regime of Louis XVIII. Wellington was in the thick of it, siding with the Austrians against a more vicious denunciation and finding himself beset on all sides by demands for subsidies, which he endorsed but had no authority to bestow. Then came the news from Grenoble: the Royal Fifth Regiment had refused to fire on their emperor. The worst case, which Wellington had almost dismissed, was reality.

The immediate consequence was another council of war, this time attended by Wellington and in his own quarters.¹³ The results were not satisfactory. Once Schwarzenberg had prevented the Prussians from dragooning the pivotal contingent from Hesse-Darmstadt into their system, he rather let them have their way north of the Main, except for Hanover, of course, as well as Oldenburg and Brunswick. Wellington, aghast, refused to sign the protocol, postponing the decision to another day. His first concern was probably the meagreness of the reinforcements allocated to his command, but the decisive argument came from the Hanoverian, Count Ernst Herbert Münster: namely, that Prussia's aim was 'to procure for herself a military supremacy over Northern Germany'.¹⁴ The Prussian plenipotentiary at Vienna, Prince Hardenberg,

¹¹ *Ibid.*; and Wellington to Castlereagh, 12 March 1815, in *British Diplomacy 1813-1815*, ed. Charles K. Webster (London, 1921), pp. 312 f.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See above, fn. 10.

¹⁴ Münster to Prince Regent, 25 March 1815, in Georg Herbert Count Münster, *Political Sketches of the State of Europe from 1814-1867* (Edinburgh, 1868), pp. 231 f.

virtually corroborated the point by offering reinforcements from the Prussian army if the small states went to Marshal Blücher. Prussian troops would always be returned; others could be lost for good.

The matter was further complicated by the question of subsidies.¹⁵ Despite Wellington's empty hands, everybody assumed that funds would flow eventually and that Great Britain, as in 1814, would fulfil her manpower obligations in part with money used to subsidize foreign troops. For his part, Wellington took this to mean the time-honoured British practice of hiring mercenaries from the smaller states and assigning them to his army in Belgium. Since the British manpower deficit was calculated at about 100,000 (of the required 150,000), he would in this fashion attract to his banner almost all the North German contingents, especially as these states feared that subordination to Prussia would be both harsh and permanent. They also desired to be in direct contact with the source of the money. Theoretically, of course, Great Britain might have recruited elsewhere – in Sweden, say, or Portugal – but why strip these potential alliance partners when the German troops were near at hand, and immensely cheaper to transport.

Hardenberg countered with an argument he had used throughout the Congress: that the lesser states, being bound by the accession treaties of 1813 to accept in advance any measures necessary for the defence of Germany, were not free to flock to the highest bidder but must conform to whatever the allied powers collectively decided for them. Wellington, who believed that captive states would be sullen and ineffective partners, insisted that what applied to the future confederation was not the issue, that the German states at this point were completely free, even to remain neutral if they wished. In this spirit he employed Münster to urge Hesse-Cassel and Brunswick to apply for union with the British army, this at the very time that a Prussian mission was in Cassel making a similar plea. Such was the bargaining power of the 'third world' in Germany at the time.

Wellington's argument was probably as specious as Hardenberg's, and though he had Metternich's support, he decided to compromise rather than delay further the conclusion of the alliance and his departure for the front. In the final agreement the several states, instead of exporting their subjects as British mercenaries, were to accede to the coalition as allies, each undertaking to provide a stipulated number of

¹⁵ Humboldt to General Friedrich von Zastrow, 31 March 1815, in Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Wilhelm von Humboldts gesammelte Schriften* (17 vols., Berlin, 1903-36), ii. 325 f.; Humboldt to wife Caroline, 18 and 30 March 1815, in Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Wilhelm und Caroline von Humboldt in ihren Briefen* (7 vols., Berlin, 1907-18), iv. 497 f., and 515-17; Wellington to Castlereagh, 25 March 1815, FO 92/14, pp. 234-6.

troops in return for conventional subsidies provided by Great Britain but administered by the three continental powers jointly. Wellington did not lose all control, however, as the central issue, the distribution of contingents, was to be settled by four-power agreement.¹⁶

This was progress, to be sure, but so far the alliance to which the small states were supposed to accede did not exist. Even the treaty of Chaumont, though still valid, limited the *casus foederis* to the event of actual French aggression, which had not yet occurred. The remaining obstacle now was a definition of war aims, Talleyrand demanding the restoration of the Bourbons if Louis fell, Wellington and Metternich refusing to go beyond the overthrow of Napoleon. The latter carried the day, and on 25 March the last coalition was formally created, each of the four powers pledging 150,000 men to enforce the treaties of Paris and Vienna and to place Bonaparte 'beyond all possibility' of ruling France.¹⁷ Smaller contingents kept in the field by additional British subsidies would count to Great Britain's quota, but as already noted, this did not necessarily mean that they would go to Wellington. As to subsidies for the powers themselves, Wellington could still make no promises. Disappointed, the new allies, the same who a few weeks before had threatened to fight each other without aid, now declared that without it they could not meet their commitments.¹⁸

In the case of Russia this reservation was only cautionary. As the tsar told Wellington two days later, his 200,000 from Poland were already on the way; additional subsidies would enable him to send a second 200,000 later and maintain a reserve of 150,000.¹⁹ This generosity was not so reassuring as it sounds. The great concern was that the Russians would either dominate the action or arrive on the scene in full vigour after all the others, Napoleon's army included, had been mauled in combat. Either way the tsar would be at the threshold of the continental hegemony that had eluded him the year before. It was still possible, Castlereagh advised from London, to find more money for the German troops and use the Russians sparingly. In unequivocal language he rejected the 'policy of preferring an excess of Russian force to the vigorous employment of Germans to fight for what they are hereafter to defend'.²⁰

¹⁶ Wellington to Castlereagh, 25 March 1815, as in fn. 15.

¹⁷ Text in *Le congrès de Vienne et les traités de 1815*, ed. Comte d'Angeberg (4 vols., Paris, 1864), iii. 975 f.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, iii. 971.

¹⁹ Razumovsky and Capodistria to Wellington, 27 March 1815, in USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Vneshnaia politika Rossii XIX i nachala XX veka*, 1st ser. (8 vols., Moscow, 1960-72), viii. 249 f. [hereafter *VPR*].

²⁰ Castlereagh to Wellington, 8 April 1815, FO 92/13, p. 44. This passage was omitted in the text in *British Diplomacy*, ed. Webster, pp. 319 f.

This concern was reason in itself for an early showdown on the battlefield, but probably more important to Wellington was the prospect of striking while royalist forces in France were still in the field, especially in the south. The latter hope was soon dashed: on 28 March the news reached Vienna that a week earlier Napoleon had entered Paris. Nevertheless, when Wellington departed the next day for his command in Flanders, he still hoped to commence operations by 1 May.²¹ With his departure from Vienna, his role in the reconstruction of the allied armies became less direct, but as the sole disburser of subsidies, he continued to influence significantly the raising of troops on all frontiers. Besides, the lines of policy he had laid down were continued – perhaps more stubbornly than before – by his successors: Lord Clancarty, who took over political affairs, and Earl Cathcart, who now represented him on the military commission.

On 31 March the soldiers again convened, joined this time by Marshal Prince Karl Wrede of Bavaria and Crown Prince William of Württemberg, whose presence not only underscored their importance for the army of the Upper Rhine but also set an important precedent for the demands to be made of other states acceding to the treaty. Believing that the scope of their independence would be governed by the size of their contingents, they volunteered contributions of two per cent of population, double the standard used in the previous campaign. In this way, it was agreed that Wrede would command a corps of 60,000 Bavarians and the crown prince a corps of 25,000 Württembergers reinforced by 8,000 Badenians and an equal number of Austrians – a total of about 100,000. By now 40,000 more Austrians were available, and Clancarty, evidently believing Wellington's needs to be greater than Schwarzenberg's, tried to have the Hesse-Darmstadt contingent of 8,000 transferred to Flanders. He failed, and as a result, the main allied army, though not in final deployment, stood at close to 150,000 with headquarters at Heilbronn.²²

Concerning the North German contingents, Cathcart continued Wellington's row with the Prussians, arguing that British subsidies entitled the duke to have his pick while Knesebeck insisted that only by serving with Prussia could the troops feel that they were fighting for Germany. Knesebeck eventually yielded on Hanover and Brunswick, whose dynastic ties to Great Britain were obvious, and on the Hanseatic Cities, and Oldenburg with its ties to the tsar; but regarding Nassau, Hesse-Cassel, and Saxony the argument was so fierce that the issue had to be passed

²¹ Nesselrode to Lieven (Russian envoy in London), 4 May 1815, *VPR*, viii. 302; Maxwell, *Life of Wellington*, i. 396.

²² Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, ii. 135.

on to the highest political authorities for resolution.²³ All three of these states were vital to Prussia's future plans for federal *Kreise*, the first two because they would provide contact with the new Rhenish and Westphalian provinces, Saxony because it was still under Prussian occupation, and membership in a Prussian *Kreis* would be the next best thing to annexation.

For these same reasons the three rulers concerned preferred to serve with Wellington. In the case of Nassau there were even closer ties. In the campaign of 1814, the Nassau contingent had contained troops from the German territories of the prince of Orange. Subsequently these had been merged with the army of the Netherlands as was a regiment from Nassau-Usingen that had surrendered to Wellington in the Peninsular campaign to be transported by sea to the Netherlands.²⁴ Hesse-Cassel's ties to Wellington were more tenuous, based mainly on a long tradition of selling mercenaries to Great Britain. In the last campaign, however, the Hessians had been tied by circumstances to Prussia. In the current jousting the Prussians tried to revive this arrangement, in direct negotiations promising the Elector William a lighter burden than the year before and even withholding from him the news of the alliance treaty, which held out the promise of British subsidies on a more dignified basis.²⁵

When the Conference of Five inherited the problem from the generals on 1 April, the natural compromise was to assign the Nassauers to Wellington, the Hessians to Kleist, along with numerous small contingents from the Thuringian states.²⁶ In the eventual collective treaty of accession, Nassau's quota was set at 6,080, Cassel's at 7,500 on the basis of two per cent of population.²⁷ In a separate treaty, however, Prussia promised her good offices to obtain an additional subsidy if the elector fielded 12,000 line troops plus a reserve. The elector did his part and eventually applied directly to Wellington for payment. Wellington, however, who considered the bargain a private Prussian one, never disbursed the funds.²⁸

As usual, the Saxon question was the most complicated of all. Because Prussia still occupied the entire country and the Saxon army was already serving with Kleist's corps, it seemed sensible to continue this arrangement. On the other hand, the reliability of these troops was suspect because the king, Frederick Augustus, in his sparring with the allies,

²³ Cathcart to Wellington, 1 April 1815, and Cathcart to Castlereagh, 1 April 1815, *WSD*, x.11-13; and Clancarty to Castlereagh, 1 April 1815 (private), FO 92/17.

²⁴ Pflugk-Hartung, 'Die Gegensätze', pp. 139-44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-74.

²⁶ Protocol of 1 April 1815, in *Congrès*, ed. d'Angeberg, iii.1000-1.

²⁷ Text of treaty of 27 April 1815, in *Traité par l'Autriche*, ed. Neumann, ii. 555-60.

²⁸ Pflugk-Hartung, 'Die Gegensätze', pp. 175-9.

refused to release them from their oaths to him; had he been free to choose, his preference, like that of other rulers, would obviously have been for Wellington. The low morale of the Saxon troops probably induced Hardenberg to offer a compromise: despite Prussia's *de facto* control, the troops from the part of Saxony remaining to the king would be released to Wellington; those from Prussian Saxony would stay with Blücher. The rationale was that under Wellington morale would be restored, and Hardenberg spoke glowingly of some 12-14,000 completely equipped soldiers. Clancarty accepted the deal.²⁹ When he heard of it a week later, Wellington was disappointed at not getting all the Saxons but still estimated that with them and the other German contingents he would have about 30,000 to reinforce his Anglo-Dutch-Hanoverian force of 60,000, which included the crack outfit known as the King's German Legion. Confidently, he predicted that by 1 May the allies could invade France with 270,000 men.³⁰

This was not to be. The expected resistance in France did not materialize³¹ nor did the hefty assistance of the Saxon contingent. By late April, Clancarty came to realize that Hardenberg's figure of 14,000 pertained to *all* the Saxon troops and worse yet, that in attempting to sort out the troops of Royal and Prussian Saxony, the integrity of most units had been destroyed. On 23 April he lodged a protest with the Conference of Five, insisting that Wellington deserved better than 'the picked and culled remains of the Saxon corps'.³² As a remedy he proposed that all the Saxons go to either Wellington or Blücher as a unit, and if to Blücher, that Prussia send an equivalent force from Hesse or some other German state to Wellington, or allow Great Britain to fill in with Danes or Portuguese, to be paid for out of Prussia's subsidy.³³ Ironically, except for a few cavalry units, neither Saxon contingent ever saw action. The unrest alluded to by Hardenberg in early May burst into open mutiny, and Blücher's firing squads finished off whatever fighting qualities were left.³⁴

The Saxon mutinies occurred in the midst of another imbroglio with

²⁹ Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, ii. 336, where the detailed documentation is given.

³⁰ Wellington to Clancarty, 9 April 1815, x. 48; and same to same, 10 April 1815, in Wellington, *The Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington*, ed. Lt.-Col. Gurwood (2d ed., in 8 vols., London, 1844-7) [hereafter *WD*], viii. 21-3.

³¹ Nesselrode to Lieven, 4 May 1815, *VPR*, viii. 302.

³² Clancarty to Wellington, 21 and 26 April 1815, *WSD*, x. 125-7, and 165.

³³ Clancarty's 'Observations', 21 April 1815, FO, *British and Foreign State Papers*, vols. i-iii (London, 1838-41), ii. 714 f.; and Clancarty to Wellington, 26 April 1815, *WSD*, x. 165.

³⁴ Detailed documentation in Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, ii. 342, n. 46; and Humboldt to Caroline, 12 May 1815, *Briefe*, iv. 548 ff.

the states of less than grand ducal rank, which when finally assured of their survival in the future confederation, on 27 April signed a collective instrument of accession. Four days later the military commission divided the third Germany into three zones, each the source of supplies to be purchased by the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian commissaries at fixed low prices. There was grumbling at the exclusion of Austria but the main target of complaint was Prussia. Her procurement zone included virtually all the German states fighting with Wellington. His own supply area was the Netherlands, whose merchants, with his permission, sold at market rates and strictly for cash. His small allies were thus compelled to pay dear to supply their own troops while selling cheap to Blücher and being, in Count Münster's words, 'abandoned to the rapacity of a Prussian commissariat'. It seemed almost like a preview of life in a Prussian *Kreis*, and they demanded redress.⁸⁵ Again the generals had to bring in the politicians on the Conference of Five, who finally agreed to allow the German contingents to pay German prices, leaving it to the Dutch government to reimburse its vendors for the difference. The Dutch naturally resisted but in time, under Wellington's pressure, acquiesced.⁸⁶

With or without Saxony, Wellington's search for troops continued. He was especially interested in the Portuguese, whose fighting quality was largely due to his own efforts in previous years. Although he formally appealed to the Portuguese plenipotentiary at the Congress, Don Pedro Palmella, for 20,000 men, privately he would have been satisfied with 12-14,000, fearing that a weakened home force would only invite an invasion by Spain.⁸⁷ On 8 April, Portugal acceded to the alliance with a pledge of 30,000, but owing to political intrigue in Lisbon even the lesser force did not reach the duke at all, let alone in time for Waterloo – a pity, too, as it would have more than compensated for the loss of the Saxons.

The plan to ship the Portuguese to the Netherlands reflected perhaps the most conspicuous departure from the strategy of the previous war. For considered in the abstract, what would have been more effective, as Napoleon raced to the north, than a combination of Iberian forces striking at his rear? This indeed is what the Russian and Prussian

⁸⁵ Protocols of military commission, 1 and 2 May 1815, *Congrès*, ed. d'Angeberg, iii.1136-8, and 1143; Pflugk-Hartung, 'Die Gegensätze', p. 136; and Münster to Prince Regent, 13 May 1815, Münster, *Political Sketches*, p. 259.

⁸⁶ Protocol of 3 May 1815, *Congrès*, ed. d'Angeberg, iv.1902-5; Pflugk-Hartung, 'Die Gegensätze', p. 136; and Josef Mayr, 'Aufbau und Arbeitsweise des Wiener Kongresses', *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, xlv.110.

⁸⁷ Wellington to Viscount Beresford, 24 March 1815, *WSD*, xiv. 539 f.

ministers in Madrid were pressing for.³⁸ Wellington, however, who knew the political climate there and what Great Britain might expect for her money, did not consider it a serious option. 'It is nonsense', he wrote to Viscount Beresford, who represented him in Lisbon, 'to suppose either that Great Britain can make an effort on the side of Spain or that without Great Britain, Spain and Portugal will or can do anything. Neither have [*sic*] any money, and Great Britain will not give them any.'³⁹ Nonetheless, Spain was among the states invited to accede to the alliance, and her envoy to the Congress, Don Pedro-Gomez Labrador, promptly accepted on condition that Spain sign as a principal party, not as an accessory.⁴⁰ The project, however, fell victim to the same unresolved territorial dispute that caused Spain to boycott the treaty of Vienna itself.⁴¹ Even without a formal accession, however, Castlereagh offered to support a small Spanish incursion into southern France; but that was after Waterloo, when the venture seemed much safer.⁴²

Like Spain and Portugal, Sweden, as one of the eight signatories to the treaty of Paris, might have been expected to sign up quickly, and indeed Bernadotte was eager to do so, offering to supply some 20-30,000 troops and assume command of Danish and other northern troops as well as his own. Like the kings of Bavaria and Württemberg, he believed that a large contribution would promote his independence, especially *vis-à-vis* Russia. After the fall of Murat, moreover, he was acutely aware that as the only 'Napoleonide' left on a European throne, his neutrality could be viewed with great suspicion. The main deterrent was Denmark, whose king, far from submitting to Bernadotte's command, emphatically preferred to serve under 'the victor of Salamanca and Vitoria' and vowed not to move a soldier until guaranteed against a Swedish attack and against Sweden's continuing territorial demands. Caught in the middle was the tsar, who backed Sweden and hesitated to undertake the guarantees. As a result, Sweden did not join the war, and Denmark did so only in mid-July, when her contingent of 15,000 began a relatively leisurely invasion of France, mainly to qualify for her subsidy.⁴³

³⁸ Henry Wellesley to Castlereagh, Madrid, 23 April 1815, *ibid.*, x, 143 f.

³⁹ Wellington to Beresford, 24 March 1815, as in fn. 37.

⁴⁰ Labrador note of 30 March 1815, *Congrès*, ed. d'Angeberg, iii, 941 f.

⁴¹ Labrador to Metternich, 4 April 1815, *ibid.*, iii, 1018-20. The dispute centred on Spanish claims to Parma, Piacenza, and Guastalla, which had been awarded to Marie-Louise.

⁴² Henry Wellesley to Wellington, 14 July 1815, *WSD*, xi, 29 f.

⁴³ Suchtelen, Russian envoy in Stockholm, to Nesselrode, 18 April 1815 and Nesselrode's reply of 12 May, *VPR*, viii, 273 f., and 317 f. Also Gabriel de Girod de L'ain, *Bernadotte, Chef de guerre et chef d'état* (Paris, 1968), pp. 534-8; Cathcart to Wellington, 26 May 1815, *WSD*, x, 379 f.; and General Waltersdorf to Wellington, 21 April and 4 July 1815, *ibid.*, x, 133.

Digressing still further from Wellington's immediate concerns, we need to consider two other states of high strategic importance: Sardinia-Piedmont and Switzerland, the keys to the Alps. The former signed readily enough,⁴⁴ pledging a contribution of only 15,000 men – far beneath the usual population standard but about the maximum the allies considered physically possible. Her role was not immediately defined, but after Austrian success in Italy enabled her to detach 60,000 men for service in the Alps under General Count Frimont, the Sardinians fell to his command (1 June) and participated in a post-Waterloo march towards Lyon.⁴⁵

The position of Switzerland was complicated by the declaration made by the allied powers on 20 March that proclaimed her neutrality under international guarantee. Clancarty, however, persuaded his allies that military necessity came first as Switzerland was vital to both the Italian operations and Schwarzenberg's security on the Upper Rhine. The treaty of accession, therefore, was a compromise: the Swiss cantons were to defend themselves with the 30,000 men they then had under arms and permit the transit of the allied armies. The cantons were to receive no subsidies: if they requested them, they could be required to join offensive operations against France if necessary. After all, the aim of the war was said to be the preservation of the peace settlement in which Switzerland's neutrality was rooted! The Swiss diet balked at this one-sided interpretation of neutrality but on 20 May finally accepted the treaty's terms. From the allied point of view the ring around France was for practical purposes now complete.⁴⁶

The armed ring, of course, resulted in only desultory engagements as the armies moved into France, but it should not for that reason be discounted. Without denigrating Waterloo it would be fair to say, in chess terms, that the victory took Napoleon's queen but did not obtain check-mate. It was rather the total situation after Waterloo that caused the politicians in Paris to waver and Napoleon himself, professional that he was, to resign the game.

For our purposes here it hardly matters how one explains his surrender. Whether we focus on Flanders or the overall reconstruction of the allied armies, Wellington's role was fundamental. In the scramble for German troops (who as common soldiers were the main victors in Flanders), Wellington was working directly to assemble a strong force for himself. In the larger picture, however, for Great Britain it was he

⁴⁴ Text of accession treaty of 9 April 1815, in *Congrès*, ed. d'Angeberg, iii.1052.

⁴⁵ Lord Charles Stewart to Wellington, Vienna, 25 April 1815, *WSD*, x. 159 f.

⁴⁶ Nesselrode to Baron Krüdener (in Bern), 18 April 1815, *VPR*, viii. 275 f.: text of treaty in *Congrès*, ed. d'Angeberg, iii.1207.

who handled the early military planning in Vienna, he who negotiated the renewal of the Grand Alliance, and he who became the paymaster of the all-important subsidies, once the money had been appropriated by parliament – largely at his urging. In these endeavours, moreover, he rose above a narrow theatre mentality. Very early he saw the importance of Italy and encouraged Austria to stress that theatre when his own purposes might have been better served by a greater diversion in France. With uncommon political sense he realized the futility of trying to repeat past glories with another Peninsular campaign. In treating with the German states he opposed the strong-arm tactics of Prussia even though he was more dependent on them than Blücher was for the bulk of his own army. His wisdom here, in contrast to Hardenberg's pursuit of future political goals, was most conspicuous in the fiasco that eliminated the Saxons almost entirely from the action. In an age that did not divide leadership neatly into civilian and military compartments, Wellington was a giant among political generals or, if you will, military statesmen.

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