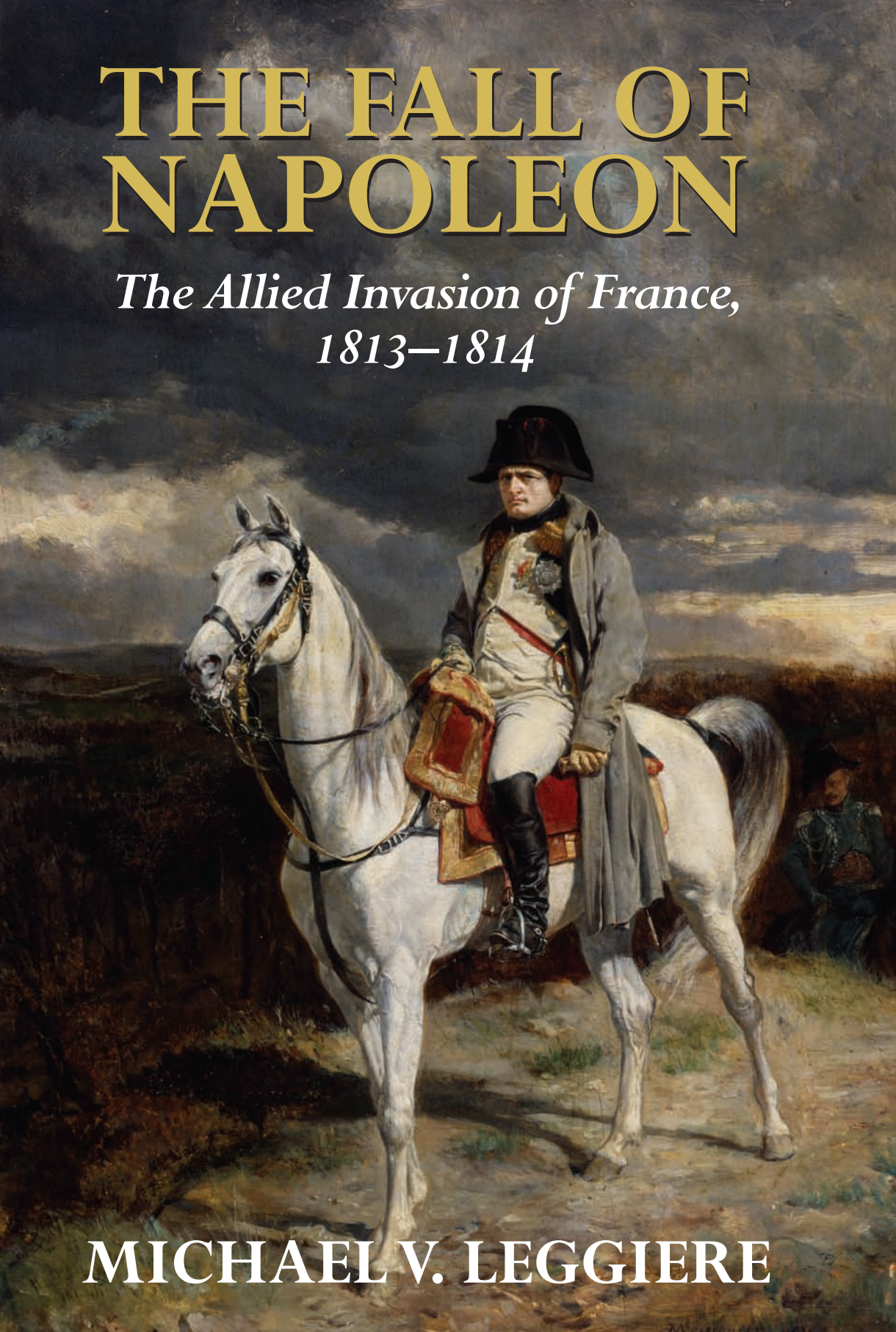
THE FALL OF NAPOLEON

The Allied Invasion of France, 1813–1814



MICHAEL V. LEGGIERE

The Fall of Napoleon

Crushing defeats in Russia (1812) and Germany (1813) caused the collapse of Napoleon's empire and brought his enemies to the Rhine River at the close of 1813. With a depleted and exhausted army, Napoleon attempted to direct the defense of his frontier from the Alps to the North Sea while he mobilized France. From Paris, the new Prometheus watched helplessly as his marshals conducted a headlong retreat from the Rhine to the Marne in less than one month. The breakdown of the French command structure and overwhelming Allied superiority placed the French marshals charged with defending the Rhine in an impossible situation. Although Napoleon needed them to use their scant forces to make a desperate stand on the Rhine and away from the administrative apparatus that fed his war machine, the marshals believed they had to trade land for time – the exact opposite of what Napoleon needed to maintain his crown.

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Volume 1

The Allied Invasion of France, 1813–1814

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For Michele, loving wife and devoted friend

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Preface

In October 1813, Emperor Napoleon I entrenched himself in the Saxon city of Leipzig and prepared for a showdown with his enemies for control of Germany. Four Allied armies eventually surrounded the French during the epic Battle of Nations. Napoleon held Leipzig for four days until exhausting his ammunition supply. He then exploited a gap in the Allied lines to lead 70,000 of his soldiers out of the beleaguered city. In the weeks that followed, the Allied armies failed to catch the French army as it retreated to the Rhine River. After Napoleon escaped across the Rhine in early November, the Allies held a great council of war at Frankfurt-am-Main. These deliberations ended with the decision to launch a comprehensive invasion of France from the North Sea to Switzerland.

In late November, 40,000 Prussian, British, and Russian troops invaded Holland. One month later, 200,000 Allied soldiers crossed the upper Rhine to invade Alsace, Switzerland, and Franche-Comté. Shortly after, on New Year's Day, an additional 75,000 men crossed the middle Rhine and drove through Lorraine toward the fortress of Metz. To stop the Allied masses, Napoleon spread approximately 56,000 tired troops in a thin cordon along the length of the Rhine River. Napoleon himself remained at Paris during the Allied invasion to direct a mobilization that he expected would produce a new army of almost 400,000 men. The emperor fully expected that the skeletons of his shattered corps would stop the Allies at the Rhine. After this proved impossible, he implored his marshals to hold the Allies in Alsace, Lorraine, and Holland. However, by the end of January, Holland and Belgium had fallen, and two Allied armies stood at the Marne and Aube Rivers ready to march on Paris. This circumstance forced Bonaparte to leave his capital and finally assume personal command of the army.

This work analyzes the invasion of France from both the French and Allied perspectives. In particular, the performance of the four French marshals

who received the overwhelming task of guarding the "sacred territory" is scrutinized. Gone were the marshals who had helped Bonaparte build the Grand Empire almost a decade earlier. Jean Lannes was dead, a somewhat disgraced André Masséna was in retirement, Louis-Nicholas Davout was shot in Hamburg, and Joachim Murat was on the verge of defecting to the Allies to keep his Neapolitan crown. In their absence, the marshals who held commands on the eastern front had to perform under extremely trying circumstances. Ultimate blame for their failures falls squarely on Napoleon for violating some of the fundamental principles of war that he himself had made famous. Stung by his subordinates' abysmal record of independent command during the 1813 German campaign, Napoleon refused to appoint a commander in chief to coordinate operations along the eastern front, despite repeated pleas from the marshals themselves. Instead, he issued desperate calls from Paris for his marshals to coordinate their operations. The emperor should have learned the lesson provided by the Peninsular War, in which his subordinates repeatedly failed to support one another. Not only did the French marshals fail to cooperate, they resorted to blaming one another for a retreat that took them from the Rhine to the Marne in less than one month.

Although the lack of unity of command considerably undermined French operations on the eastern front, Napoleon's inability to provide his subordinates with a clear objective led to the loss of Holland, Belgium, Alsace, Lorraine, and Franche-Comté. The marshals thought they had to preserve their troops for the emperor's eventual use. Fed by the propaganda machine in Paris, they believed Napoleon soon would field a massive new army. His genius again would direct them and provide them with an escape from what appeared to be the curse of independent command. Thus, it appeared urgent to save every man possible, retreat to the interior, and unite with the emperor. What the marshals did not realize and what Napoleon failed to convey was that every administrative district that fell to the Allies deprived the emperor of the precious manpower and revenue needed to complete this very mobilization – not to mention the damage Allied occupation caused imperial prestige. Soldiers whose homes fell behind Allied lines thought only of deserting rather than marching to the French interior in freezing temperatures with empty bellies.

On the other side of the Rhine, the Allies assembled the most powerful coalition history would see until the world wars of the twentieth century. For the first time during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, Great Britain, Austria, Russia, and Prussia marshaled their resources for an epic showdown against Bonaparte. The victory at Leipzig ended French hegemony by shattering Napoleon's control of central Europe. Paradoxically, this victory did more to undermine the unity of the coalition than to cement Allied resolve. Austria and Russia emerged as rivals over the issue of invading France and the fate of the French crown. Between these two behemoths stood Prussia,

whose king and chancellor secretly supported Austria but feared being cast adrift by their benefactor, the Russian tsar. Great Britain had its own unique objectives, which its government feared would be ignored by the continental powers. Consequently, two factions emerged in the Allied camp: one, led by Tsar Alexander I, wanted to invade France, the other, which was dominated by the great Austrian statesman Klemens Wenzel von Metternich, called for a negotiated peace with Bonaparte. The result was hardly a coalition of the willing. The decision was made to invade France, yet the statesmen and generals who belonged to the peace party worked diligently and successfully to direct the war according to their politics.

This work examines the invasion of France from the perspective of a coalition undertaking, in which politics influenced strategy and military operations affected diplomacy. It is also dedicated to the old military history. It is about generals – their thoughts, plans, hopes, and despair. It tells the story of commanders and their operations during one of the most intense periods of European history: the Allied invasion of France in the twilight of the Napoleonic epoch. Although the soldier's perspective certainly has a place in history, this work focuses on the command of armies at the strategic and operational levels. The principal purpose of this work is to fill a surprising gap in the literature concerning the final year of Napoleon's reign. Numerous volumes tell the story of French disasters in Spain and Portugal. Napoleon's catastrophic 1812 campaign in Russia, where as many as 500,000 soldiers may have perished, likewise is told in monumental detail. Yet only a handful of scholarly studies are devoted to the details of the invasion of greater France at the end of 1813 and beginning of 1814.

Between 1814 and 1914, German, French, Austrian, and Russian historians, both civilian and military, published studies that examine various aspects of the invasion of France from a nationalist perspective. The vast majority of works concerning the 1814 campaign begin with the emperor leaving Paris on 25 January to take command of his army, thus ignoring the first critical month of the Allied invasion, during which the French marshals abandoned all of "New France." Based on Austrian, German, French, Russian, and private archival documents, this book provides the first modern comprehensive study of the Allied invasion of France. No previous study presents such an inclusive examination of the military operations that took place from Holland to Switzerland. Against this backdrop, this book expands Gordon Craig's noteworthy treatise on the problems of coalition warfare. Moreover, it will serve as the military supplement to the great works on the diplomacy of the period by Wilhelm Oncken, August Fournier, Henry Kissinger, Harold Nicholson, and Paul Schroeder.

I wrote this book with a Michelin motoring atlas by my side. Although this resource greatly enhanced my understanding of the campaign, I keenly felt the need to provide the reader with excellent maps. With a few exceptions,

every population center mentioned in the book can be found on the maps. I included roads where space permitted. As much as possible I used native, modern spellings of villages, towns, smaller cities, and geographic features. Larger cities, capitals, and rivers such as Antwerp, Geneva, the Rhine, and the Moselle are anglicized; the spelling of rivers is standardized from country to country. Names of persons are likewise native, except for monarchs, whose names are anglicized. To avoid confusion, all generals are referred to simply as "general."

This six-year odyssey could not have been completed without the generous assistance of several people and institutions. First and foremost I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to Dennis Showalter, whose vision and insight encouraged me to write the complete history of the Allied invasion of France. Next I must express my heartfelt appreciation to my editor, Frank Smith, whose patience and persistent support sustained me during this long project. Geoff Wawro and the superb manuscript reviewers provided valuable insight and constructive criticism; I owe much to their suggestions and corrections. I also especially wish to thank Maggie Meitzler, Elizabeth Budd, Simina Calin, and the countless others involved in the production of this work.

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I am indebted to several friends and colleagues at the Louisiana State University in Shreveport. My former chairman and fellow Napoleonic historian, Milton Finley, provided years of support and advice. Jason Mackowiak offered crucial technical support to prepare the maps. Megan Conway, Cecilia Smith, and Wolfgang Hinck contributed invaluable assistance translating French and German colloquialisms and phrases. The staff of the Noel Library diligently obtained books for me on the shortest notice. John Vassar and Cheryl White provided great moral support. Finally, I want to acknowledge Merrell Knighten, former dean of the College of Liberal Arts, whose financial support made possible three research trips to Europe.

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I have to thank the kind of friend that every European historian should have: Beatrice Watt. Not only did Beatrice help me wade through the more difficult French translations, she also mobilized her extended family to assist me in Europe. Her extremely kind aunt and uncle became my surrogate family in Austria: every day her uncle, Siguy Baumgartner, drove me to and from Klosterneuburg to downtown Vienna. In the evenings, his wife, Lili, prepared a wonderful dinner. As a rule the wine flowed, sacking my plans to catch up on some reading during the crisp December nights in the suburbs of Vienna. I am deeply indebted to the Baumgartners: their kindness to a complete stranger and their willingness to inconvenience themselves and open their home to me represents all that is good in this world. Moving from Vienna to Paris, I had the good fortune of being hosted by Beatrice's father, Jacques Durantet, and his companion, Florence. Once again, these kind folks did the utmost to assist me as well as to show me the side of Paris that few Americans ever see. In addition, I must thank the Fifth Count Bülow von Dennewitz, Joachim-Albrecht, as well as his son, Hasso. Count Bülow kindly gave me two privately printed volumes of his ancestor's unpublished correspondence. For several years, both he and Hasso have produced a constant stream of documents and information that have greatly broadened my knowledge of the Prussian army. Lastly, I thank Peter Harrington of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection at Brown University for locating the artwork that accompanies the text.

I dedicate this volume to my wife of eight years and companion of thirteen, who patiently endured my absence during numerous research trips to Europe, who coped with endless days of my short temper due to sleep deprivation, and who for years talked to the back of my head because I was facing the computer. While I was writing this book she experienced two pregnancies and gave birth to our beautiful children, Jordyn and Nicholas. Finally, I thank my parents, Rosalie and Tom, who have always been a source of solid support.

1

The New Charlemagne

Starting in 1797 with his first conquest of a great power, Austria, Napoleon Bonaparte built an empire greater than those of Caesar, Charlemagne, and Hitler. When he crowned himself emperor of the French in 1804, he was master of a France that dominated Italy, Switzerland, the left bank of the Rhine, and the Low Countries. Whether conquered by him or by the forces that Revolutionary France unleashed on Europe while Bonaparte was a mere junior officer, Napoleon presented himself to the French people as the guarantor of the gains of the Revolution, be it territory or equality before the law. By the beginning of 1806, he had defeated the European powers in no less than three coalition wars. His aggrandizement, partly the cause of these wars and partly the result of them, brought Napoleon new laurels. He was king of Italy, protector of the Confederation of the Rhine, and mediator of the Swiss. Ancient and historic cities such as Rome, Geneva, Brussels, Antwerp, and Amsterdam belonged to France proper, and Naples, Milan, Venice, Mainz, Frankfurt, and Hamburg were among those of the Grand Empire. Following another victorious war in 1806–7, Napoleon distributed the crowns of Europe to his siblings. Joseph became the king of Spain, Caroline the queen of Naples, Louis the king of Holland, and Jerome the king of Westphalia. By 1808, Napoleon was master of Europe.

Of his rivals, Bonaparte defeated Austria in 1797, 1801, and 1805 – worse was yet to come for Vienna in 1809 after a fourth war with France ended in failure. Prussia challenged the French emperor only once, lost, and was almost erased from the map of Europe. After feeling the bite of three failed wars against France, Russia also made peace with the self-proclaimed child of the Revolution. In July 1807, Napoleon met with Tsar Alexander I to negotiate an end to the War of the Fourth Coalition. During the many talks that produced the monumental Treaty of Tilsit, the two monarchs established a general entente, which to the rest of Europe appeared to be an unholy alliance.

Essentially, the two emperors agreed to divide Europe between Russia and France, and each pledged to help the other pursue foreign policy objectives. For Napoleon, this meant Russian assistance in his perpetual struggle with Great Britain.

Napoleon inherited an Anglo–French rivalry that had locked the two countries at war since early 1793. After a short truce in 1802, London continued its policy of financing Bonaparte's enemies to wage war against him. Seemingly, the British wanted to restore the balance of power in Europe by forcing France to surrender conquests such as the Low Countries. Yet London wanted a balance of power that left Great Britain master of the seas and with a clear monopoly on global trade. By destroying Bonaparte's fleet in October 1805, the British slammed the door on Napoleon's dreams of ever defeating the Royal Navy and invading Great Britain. Thus, Napoleon had to devise another strategy to defeat his great foe. By all accounts a genius, the French emperor understood the essence of his problem. He realized that as long as the British continued to buy allies on the Continent, he would be forced to fight enemy coalitions every few years. Although he could not defeat the British militarily, he planned to crush them financially. Waging economic warfare to destroy the British economy became his strategy in late 1806. If he could wreck British finances, London would be denied the funds to pay the Continental powers to wage war against France. Ideally, the British merchants would be so hurt they would demand a change from a pro-war, anti-French cabinet to a pro-peace government that might be willing to cut cards with Bonaparte. He thus formulated the Continental System – a mammoth plan and undertaking. Accordingly, all European ports would be closed to British goods in an economic boycott. Any British goods found on the Continent would be seized as contraband. To make this ambitious plan work, Napoleon needed tight control of Europe's ports. Pursuit of this objective led him down the path of committing his two greatest mistakes: the Peninsular War in Iberia and the invasion of Russia.

By 1808, only Portugal, a staunch British satellite, continued to trade with Great Britain. Despite numerous French threats, Portuguese ports remained open to British shipping. Napoleon responded by invading Portugal. After securing Spain's agreement to assist the French with the conquest of Portugal in return for a slice of the Atlantic state, Napoleon unleashed his legions. Early in the war, his generals reported that the Spaniards were not complying with their treaty obligations. No friend of the Bourbon dynasty, a branch of which still ruled Spain, Napoleon arranged for the arrest and forced abdication of Spain's royal family. In the aftermath of what amounted to abduction and highway robbery, Napoleon awarded the Spanish crown to his older brother, Joseph. The Spanish reacted violently not so much to the usurpation of their throne but to fears the French would place restrictions on the Catholic Church of Spain. Rioting that French troops failed to quell erupted in Madrid. Soon

a guerilla war spread throughout the country. Meanwhile, the French army reached Portugal, marching into Lisbon just as the Portuguese royal family sailed away with the state's treasury.

Taken together, the invasion of Portugal and the suppression of Spain are known as the Peninsular War. A broad range of insurmountable problems confronted Napoleon during this bloody conflict, which consumed the flower of his Grande Armée between the years 1808 and 1814. First and foremost, the emperor could not conduct the war personally. Concern over central Europe kept Bonaparte at Paris for most of the first year of the war, but French reverses eventually forced him to venture across the Pyrenees. Second, he never fully grasped the brutal nature of the guerilla war in Spain, which he referred to as his "bleeding ulcer." Third, the British ultimately changed policy and committed their small but highly trained army to the Continent. Supported by the Royal Navy, British land forces established a foothold in Portugal, united with the Portuguese army, and eventually drove out the French. Under the command of Arthur Wellesley, the duke of Wellington, the Anglo–Portuguese army crossed the Spanish frontier to add to the French military's deplorable situation. Finally, French defeats in Spain and Portugal brought hope to the conquered peoples of central Europe. Napoleon's setbacks in Iberia eroded the belief of French invulnerability. Russia and Prussia remained neutral, but Austria made another attempt to restore its shattered power in the 1809 War of the Fifth Coalition. Although another French victory, the conflict proved Napoleon could not turn his back on the rest of Europe to wage war in Spain – his marshals and generals would have to get the job done.

As the war raged in Iberia, Franco–Russian relations steadily deteriorated. Before departing for Spain in the fall of 1808, Napoleon hosted the Erfurt Conference from 27 September to 14 October. He hoped to bolster the 1807 agreements made with his ally, Alexander, and gain the tsar's assurance that the Russian court would do everything in its power to maintain the status quo in central Europe. Alexander insincerely agreed. The Russians neither participated in the War of the Fifth Coalition as France's ally nor did they attempt to stop the Austrians through diplomacy. A few strong words to the Prussian court sufficed to keep Berlin from intervening, but that was the extent of Russia's involvement.

Other issues widened the rift between the emperors of the West and East. The Russian imperial family snubbed Napoleon when he came calling for a Romanov princess to be his second wife. Not forgetting the affront, he simply moved on to the Habsburgs, who gratefully offered Marie Louis, the daughter of Kaiser Francis I. Because of the Austrian marriage, it appeared Vienna would replace St. Petersburg in Bonaparte's power-sharing structure. Nagging complaints by the tsar over the mistreatment of relatives whom Napoleon had driven from the thrones of minor German states as well as insincere efforts on the part of the French to assist Russia in its perpetual war with the Ottoman

Empire kept the embers of Franco–Russian relations smoldering. The final issue came when Alexander announced that he would pull Russia out of the Continental System, which had become the bane of Europe. Although the economic warfare hurt the British, it ruined the economies of Napoleon's satellites and allies. Domestic unrest over its financial hardships prompted Alexander to open Russia's ports to British trade. Despite Napoleon's warning that this would constitute an act of war, the Russian tsar followed through with his plan. In 1811, both Napoleon and Alexander prepared for war.

On 24 June 1812, Napoleon invaded Russia with his multinational Grande Armée – almost 600,000 strong with contingents from every continental European state west of the Russian frontier, including Austria and Prussia. Bonaparte personally led the main force toward Moscow. One week after the badly mauled Russian army limped away from the fields of Borodino, French forces entered the Russian capital. Napoleon attempted to negotiate a peace, but Alexander ignored him. Faced with the onset of winter, Napoleon ordered the fateful retreat to begin on 19 October. His main army finally staggered toward the Prussian frontier with barely 7,000 men under arms; over two-thirds of the Grande Armée had perished in six months. The emperor left the army on 5 December and raced back to Paris to rebuild his decimated forces and rehabilitate his shattered prestige.

Tsar Alexander was committed to carrying the war into central Europe and building a Russian-dominated coalition to liberate Europe, reestablish the balance of power, and expand his own empire.[1] Ever since Napoleon created the Grand Duchy of Warsaw in 1807, the tsar had eyed the rump Polish state with covetous intentions. He secretly desired to annex the majority of Poland by way of a personal union with Russia. Napoleon's disaster provided the opportunity to pursue this dream. He acknowledged the tremendous ramifications these plans would have on Europe, especially because the other eastern powers would undoubtedly object and Napoleon would seek revenge. "Making public my intentions on Poland will certainly drive Austria and Prussia into the arms of France," he noted on 13 January 1813.[2] Consequently, Alexander needed to weaken Napoleon's influence as much as possible to eliminate French resistance to a Romanov Poland. His designs required Russia to wage war to reduce French power. Because of the losses his own army suffered, he needed allies: Prussia seemed the logical choice.

Although indecision seized the Prussian government, the army acted. General Hans David Ludwig von Yorck, the commander of the Prussian contingent of the Grande Armée, negotiated the Convention of Tauroggen on 30 December 1812 with the Russians. By doing so, Yorck neutralized his corps and personally took the first step in breaking Prussia's alliance with France. Moreover, the East Prussian frontier now lay open to the advancing Russian army. According to all serious accounts, Yorck proceeded without Berlin's authorization, and King Frederick William III was quick to renounce

his general's rebellious act. Regardless of the royal repudiation, forces the Hohenzollern monarch could not control were at work. An East Prussian provincial assembly convened, declared war on France, and issued a call for recruits. Caught between France and Russia, Prussian State Chancellor Karl von Hardenberg engaged in damage control. Initially he hoped to negotiate with Napoleon to restore Prussia's independence, but Tauroggen and the events in East Prussia tied his hands. Not averse to war with Napoleon, Hardenberg first sought to place Prussia in the best possible situation before taking that fateful step. Uncertain of the tsar's intentions and apprehensive over the price the Russians would demand to liberate Prussia, Hardenberg feared Prussia would become a Russian satellite, merely exchanging one foreign overlord for another. As a result, he requested Austria join Prussia in an armed neutrality to mediate between France and Russia. Should the Austrians refuse, the Prussians wanted Austria's formal support of a Russo–Prussian alliance in a desperate attempt to somehow commit Vienna to Berlin. However, Austrian Foreign Minister Clemens von Metternich recognized that an Austro–Prussian bloc would frustrate his own plans to arbitrate between Napoleon and Alexander. Metternich rejected an Austro–Prussian partnership and merely encouraged a Russo–Prussian alliance without offering Austria's formal support. After this failure, Hardenberg turned to the Russians, hoping for fair alliance terms.[3]

Although the tsar needed a Continental ally, he held the advantage when direct negotiations opened with the Prussians. From the start, the Russians made it very clear that they would be the senior partner in any Russo–Prussian alliance. After Alexander divulged his intentions regarding Poland, the fate of Prussia's Polish provinces became a point of contention. Concessions from both sides finally cleared the way for the signing of the Treaty of Kalisch on 28 February 1813. According to the terms, Alexander vowed to restore Prussia's pre-1806 material strength, and Frederick William acknowledged he would cede much of his Polish territory to Russia in return for compensation in Germany. The British did their part to bolster the new alliance by promptly dispatching material aid.

Frederick William issued a formal declaration of war against France on 16 March 1813. Three days later, on 19 March 1813, the Russians and Prussians signed the Treaty of Breslau in which Alexander affirmed his agreement to restore Prussia to its pre-1806 status and renounced his plans to annex East Prussia as stated in the 1812 Russo–Swedish Convention of Abo. He also relinquished his dream of reuniting all of Poland under the Russian monarchy. As for now, the tsar promised Frederick William enough Polish territory to connect East Prussia with Silesia. Prussia would be compensated in Germany for the loss of other Polish territory: Saxony became the target.

As for the Austrians, Prince Karl Philip zu Schwarzenberg, the commander of the Austrian Auxiliary Corps attached to the Grande Armée during

the Russian campaign, signed an agreement with the Russians on 30 January 1813. Similar to the Russo–Prussian Convention of Tauroggen, the pact neutralized Schwarzenberg's corps and allowed it to withdraw through the Grand Duchy of Warsaw to the Austrian province of Galicia. Schwarzenberg had opened negotiations with the Russians on 20 December, but, unlike the Prussians, Metternich directed the entire affair from Vienna. Both he and Schwarzenberg properly notified the French High Command that Austria was withdrawing from the war.[4] Although bitter, the French could do nothing, and the Austro–Russian agreement, although long in coming, was no surprise. For the moment, Austria stood as an armed neutral, endeavoring to mediate between Napoleon and Alexander. Metternich's complex national security objectives meant Austria remained a wildcard; neither side could count on Vienna's support. He initially wanted to keep war far from Austria's frontiers until the army completed an extensive rearmament. Austria's treaty with France, solidified by the marriage of the emperor's daughter to Napoleon, also influenced decision making in Vienna. Although not bound to Bonaparte because of the marriage, Metternich felt Austria had to pursue a peaceful resolution before breaking a treaty with France because, according to German historian Thomas Nipperdey, "Austria's whole existence rested on the 'sanctity' of treaties." Thus, Metternich carefully extricated the Austrian Auxiliary Corps from its treaty obligations with France. In addition, the popular undertones of the Prussian mobilization and nationalist agitation in Germany alarmed the foreign minister. As far as he was concerned, the war would not be a "people's war, not a revolutionary nationalist war of patriots and emancipators, and certainly not a crusade. It would be a war of states to restore the balance of power in Europe . . . a war fought by politicians and diplomats with rational and clearly limited goals." Any "revolutionary nationalist sentiments" had to be harnessed and directed to serve the purposes of a cabinet war. "Only this," concludes Nipperdey, "would serve the security and power interests of the dynastic, artificial state of Austria." Agreement over war aims and the future European order were more important to Metternich than throwing the resources of Austria behind either belligerent to achieve victory.[5]

Because of the dynastic ties between France and Austria, the French emperor hoped Vienna would remain neutral or even ally with him. A decisive French victory over the Russians and Prussians certainly would impress Kaiser Francis, whose multinational state had been ravished by Napoleon's treaties on four previous occasions. As for the Russians, their councils of war had been divided for some time. Although Alexander fashioned himself the liberator of Europe, many Russian commanders opposed carrying the war into central Europe and expressed concerns over their tenuous supply lines. Crushing the Russian army on the battlefield amid so much disagreement would have put them to flight, similar to the aftermath of Napoleon's great

victory over them at Austerlitz in 1805. Little question surrounded Prussia's fate: Frederick William would lose his throne and perhaps see Prussia partitioned in the event of another disastrous war against Bonaparte.

To achieve this victory, Napoleon rapidly rebuilt his army. Of the 600,000 men and 1,300 guns of the Grande Armée of 1812, only 93,000 men and 250 pieces returned from Russia. With remarkable speed, Bonaparte fielded the 140,000-man Army of the Main. Together with the Army of the Elbe, French forces amounted to 202,000 combatants by the end of April 1813. Napoleon began his counteroffensive on 30 April by leading 120,000 men across the Saale River to confront the Allied army in Saxony, where he achieved victories on 2 May at Lützen and 22 May at Bautzen.

Austria finally acted in early June. Instead of entering the war, Vienna proposed an armistice, which the belligerents signed at Pläswitz on 4 June. Subsequent negotiations extended the cease-fire to 10 August with a further six-day suspension of hostilities. Napoleon hoped the respite would allow him to rebuild his cavalry and rest his exhausted army, whose sick list numbered 90,000 men. He also sought a diplomatic coup by either splitting the allies or convincing Kaiser Francis to support France. The Allies, too, needed time to rest, reorganize, secure more subsidies from London, and court the Austrians.

Diplomatically, the armistice proved disastrous for Napoleon. London used gold to cement a new coalition – the Sixth. British granted subsidies to the Prussians and Russians amounting to 7,000,000. In return, Alexander and Frederick William pledged not to sign a separate peace with Napoleon. To increase Allied combat power, the British also ratified a generous subsidy treaty with Sweden. For 30,000 Swedes to fight on the continent, London granted Sweden a 1,000,000 subsidy, naval support in Sweden's war against Denmark for possession of Norway, and held out the possibility of Stockholm's acquisition of Guadeloupe.

Although willing to negotiate with Napoleon, the Allies demanded harsh terms. On 16 May, Hardenberg and Russian Foreign Minister Karl Robert von Nesselrode had expanded the Kalisch–Breslau war aims to include the dissolution of the Confederation of the Rhine (known as the Rheinbund) and the liberation of Spain, Holland, and Italy. Metternich agreed in principle with these terms yet believed the Allies would have to offer a minimum program to attract Napoleon to the peace table. Moreover, he sought to undermine the cornerstone of the Russo–Prussian alliance – the exchange of Prussian Poland for Saxony – which challenged Austria's national security objectives of limiting Prussia's influence in Germany and restraining Russian expansion in central Europe. Although unaware of the details, the Austrians knew of the tsar's desire for Poland. Metternich feared the Russians planned to make extensive changes to the map of central Europe that would destroy the balance of power and threaten Austrian national security more than Napoleonic France. He suspected Alexander would offer Francis conquered French provinces

in return for his Polish provinces: specifically, Alsace for Galicia, which the Austrians would not accept.

Metternich used this opportunity to push his own peace plan, which not only added perplexing questions concerning Italy and Illyria but jeopardized the compromise between Russia, Prussia, and Great Britain. His blueprint called for Russia and France to retire behind their respective frontiers of the Vistula and the Rhine Rivers and remain separated by an independent and strengthened central Europe. Metternich wanted to weaken Napoleon and force him to relinquish control of Italy and Germany. Conversely, the Austrian statesman would demand that Napoleon cede territory to restore Austria and Prussia to their respective 1805–6 material status. In this way, no provinces would remain to compensate either for the cession of their Polish provinces to Russia. In Metternich's opinion, France had to remain strong enough to counter Russian ambition. He did not think the twin goals of destroying the French Empire and preventing Russian hegemony could be achieved. As a result, Austrian politics during the War of the Sixth Coalition sought to reduce French predominance and prevent Russian preponderance. This produced friction between Russia and Austria throughout the war and determined the various factions within the Allied camp. Alexander emerged as the leader of the hawks, and Metternich stood as master of the bloc that favored peace.

Napoleon's victory at Bautzen strengthened the Austrian position. Over the next month, Metternich worked to convince the Allies to offer Bonaparte a program of minimum demands as the basis for opening peace negotiations. On 27 June, the Austrians, Prussians, and Russians signed the Convention of Reichenbach, which authorized the Austrian minister to present a minimum program to Napoleon as the conditions for a peace conference. The Reichenbach Protocol demanded the end of French control over the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and its partition, Prussia's expansion eastward, the return of the Adriatic coast (Illyria) to Austria, and the independence of the Hanseatic cities in North Germany. Should Napoleon refuse these terms, Austria would join the Sixth Coalition with at least 150,000 men and fight for the harsher, maximum program as formulated by Hardenberg and Nesselrode. In July, Metternich presented the Reichenbach Protocol to Napoleon, who refused to make any major concessions for peace after defeating the Russo–Prussian army twice. During the course of a nine-hour discussion, Napoleon confessed to Metternich that he, the self-proclaimed son of the Revolution and a nonlegitimate monarch, simply could not present himself to the French people as a defeated man. With the collapse of their self-serving diplomatic initiative, the Austrians joined the Sixth Coalition in August. For the first time in Napoleon's career, France faced the combined efforts of Europe's other great powers.[6]

Metternich secured the supreme command of all Allied forces for his compatriot, the forty-two-year-old Schwarzenberg. Besides serving as Allied

commander in chief, Schwarzenberg also commanded the main Allied army: the 252,200 men of the Army of Bohemia. Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, the former French marshal and adopted crown prince of Sweden, received command of the 150,000-man Army of North Germany. The Prussian Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher led the 87,000 soldiers of the Army of Silesia.[7] Subsequent negotiations produced the Trachenberg Plan. Accordingly, the three Allied armies would form a wide arc around French forces in Saxony and only engage detached enemy corps; pitched battles with Napoleon were to be avoided. Should the emperor concentrate against any one army, it would retreat while the other two converged on his flanks and communications. The plan sought to overcome Napoleon's advantage of interior lines by splitting and exhausting French forces. Initial agreements called for Schwarzenberg's army to concentrate in the Bohemian mountains and confront French forces in either Saxony or Silesia. Bernadotte's army would assemble south of Berlin, cross the Elbe River at the end of the armistice, and march on Leipzig; Blücher would lead his army from Silesia into Saxony.

With 77,000 soldiers garrisoned in fortresses on the Elbe, Oder, and Vistula Rivers, Napoleon still managed to field an army of 422,000 men to face 530,500 Allied soldiers. He planned to open the campaign with an operation against Berlin. Napoleon assigned the task of capturing the Prussian capital to Marshal Nicolas-Charles Oudinot, who received command of the 70,000-man Army of Berlin. To facilitate Oudinot's operations, the emperor placed 130,000 men under the command of Marshal Etienne-Jacques-Joseph-Alexandre Macdonald. Situated in two lines on the Katzbach and Bober Rivers, this force, later christened the Army of the Bober, shielded Oudinot's right flank. The emperor himself led his remaining forces east to destroy Blücher. Although anxious to grapple with Napoleon, Blücher honored the Trachenberg Plan and withdrew into Silesia. After the Silesian Army eluded him, the emperor learned Schwarzenberg was advancing on Dresden. He instructed Macdonald to hold the Silesian Army east of the Bober River and immediately departed for Dresden. Despite the emperor's orders, Macdonald continued the offensive. On 26 August, Blücher smashed the marshal's army as it attempted to cross the rain-swollen Katzbach. Macdonald lost 15,000 men, and his army collapsed in the aftermath.

Meanwhile, Oudinot's army advanced toward Berlin along three roads that prevented mutual support. Despite Bernadotte's willingness to sacrifice the city, his corps commanders stopped the French army on 23 August a few miles south of the Prussian capital. A disheartened Oudinot retreated fifty-five miles south to Wittenberg. His headlong retreat exposed Macdonald's communications and limited Napoleon's operations by uncovering the rear of the Grande Armée. A disgusted Napoleon commented that few could be as stupid as Oudinot; he relieved the luckless marshal and placed Marshal Michel Ney in command of the Army of Berlin.

Upon reaching Dresden, Napoleon found the entire Bohemian Army stretched before the Saxon capital. At Frederick William's urging, Schwarzenberg elected to accept battle rather than retreat. During two days of heavy fighting on 26 and 27 August, the emperor inflicted 35,000 casualties on the main Allied army. Schwarzenberg retreated into the mountains of Bohemia during the night of 30 August pursued by General Dominique-Joseph-René Vandamme's I Corps. As Vandamme engaged the Russians, General Friedrich Heinrich von Kleist's Prussian II Corps surprised the French at Kulm. Vandamme, himself taken prisoner, lost approximately 15,000 men.

East of Dresden, Blücher pursued Macdonald's beleaguered army. His pressure required Napoleon's personal intervention to save the marshal. Bonaparte repulsed the Silesian Army's advance guard on 4 September and monitored Blücher's movements throughout the next day. Realizing Napoleon himself commanded the attack on the 4th, Blücher again withdrew eastward. Sensing his adversary had escaped, Napoleon ordered the VI Infantry and I Cavalry Corps to begin the march to Berlin. Although he had hoped to unite with Ney and personally command the offensive against the Prussian capital, Napoleon was forced to abandon these plans after reports arrived of Schwarzenberg's renewed advance toward Dresden. Napoleon recalled the two corps and sped back to the Saxon capital; Ney continued the operation against Berlin. On 6 September, the fiery marshal attempted to smash through the Prussian III and IV Corps at Dennewitz, forty miles south of the Prussian capital. This battle proved to be a disaster for the Army of Berlin. Ney's losses amounted to 21,500 men. Although the Prussians lost 9,700, Ney's army collapsed during the ensuing retreat across the Elbe.

These Allied victories further cemented the alliance against France. On 7 September, the three eastern powers signed the Teplitz Accords. The general terms called for the material restoration of Austria and Prussia to their pre–1805–6 material status; the restoration of the states of northwestern Europe to their 1803 status; the dissolution of the Rheinbund; the independence of the German states between the Rhine and the western frontiers of Austria and Prussia; and the partition of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw along lines that would be determined later. All three governments vowed not to make a separate peace with Napoleon, and each agreed to keep an army in the field until the end of the war.[8]

Although something could be found in the Teplitz Accords that satisfied each eastern power, Metternich achieved another victory. The stated goal of the alliance was not the ultimate destruction of France. For Austria's geopolitical interests, Metternich needed to retain a powerful and preferably Napoleonic France to help contain Russia. The accords ignored Italy, Holland, and Spain; Metternich figured he could use these issues later to coerce the British into accepting his designs for central Europe. More important, the people's war now had become a cabinet war, a war of the great powers. "The aim of the

war," contends Nipperdey, "was not emancipation, freedom, or even national unity; it was order and the restoration of a balance of power. This was possible, of course, because in the last analysis, Russia and Prussia were also antirevolutionary powers."[9] Yet Teplitz was not a total victory for the Austrians, and Tsar Alexander recovered some of the diplomatic initiative he lost to Metternich during the armistice.[10] Both Prussia and Austria remained dependent on Russia to secure their postwar objectives. For Prussia, Frederick William could take comfort in the fact that as long as he remained loyal to the tsar, Prussian influence in Germany would increase, despite the Austrians.

Due to the numerous Allied victories over his subordinates, Napoleon's situation became critical by late September. To the north, Ney failed to dislodge Bernadotte's army from its bridgeheads on the left bank of the Elbe. On the southern front, a force of 45,000 men under Napoleon's brother-in-law, King Joachim Murat of Naples, attempted to slow Schwarzenberg's march on Leipzig. Napoleon held his main force of 80,000 men between the approaching Allied armies – he had no information on the whereabouts of Blücher. The idea of abandoning Germany crossed his mind as early as 27 September, when he ordered the French fortresses on the Rhine River prepared for defense.

Blücher had in fact marched down the Elbe toward Wittenberg. Bernadotte pledged that if the Silesian Army crossed the Elbe, the Army of North Germany would follow. That was enough to satisfy the seventy-year-old Blücher. On 3 October, Yorck's Prussian I Corps led the Silesian Army across the Elbe; the Army of North Germany followed. Ney retreated south with his 25,000 survivors to reunite with Napoleon. News that Blücher and Bernadotte had crossed the Elbe reached the emperor on 5 October. From his central position at Leipzig, he hoped to destroy at least one of these Allied armies. Leaving Murat's 45,000 men to hold Schwarzenberg south of Leipzig, the emperor moved the remainder of the Grande Armée to Wittenberg to engage Blücher and Bernadotte before Schwarzenberg reached Leipzig. By 8 October, the emperor had 140,000 men concentrated just south of Blücher's position. Forewarned of Napoleon's advance, Blücher and Bernadotte surprised the emperor by withdrawing west to the left bank of the Saale River between 8 and 11 October. The decision to retreat proved momentous as the French spent the 10th and 11th searching for the enemy armies. At 3:00 A.M. on the 12th, Napoleon finally learned they had retreated to Halle two days earlier. He initially ordered a pursuit but then changed his mind after receiving the discouraging news that Schwarzenberg accelerated his march. The emperor decided to turn south, concentrate his army at Leipzig, and draw the Allies to him for an epic struggle: the Battle of Nations.

As Blücher's army approached Leipzig from the northwest and Schwarzenberg steadily advanced from the south, General Levin August Theophile von Bennigsen's 50,000-man Army of Poland closed in from the east. Napoleon concentrated 177,000 men around the Saxon city on the

evening of 14 October. Both sides spent much of the 15th probing and planning for the next day's battle. While Napoleon intended to destroy Schwarzenberg's army between the Pleisse and the Parthe Rivers, the Allies decided Schwarzenberg would launch the main attack in this southern sector; Blücher's army would assault Leipzig from the northwest. Bernadotte also planned to concentrate his army northwest of Leipzig on the 16th, but his three corps did not arrive in time.

On 16 October, the Silesian and Bohemian Armies executed their operations and attacked as planned. Heavy combat ensued along the northern, western, and southern sectors of the front with struggles centering around the villages of Möckern, Lindenau, and Wachau. The confusion caused by Blücher's unexpected arrival robbed Napoleon of the forces he planned to use against Schwarzenberg. By nightfall, the French had repulsed Schwarzenberg's offensive in the Wachau area and held Lindenau in the western sector, but lost at Möckern, where Yorck's Prussians fought a savage battle. French losses for the day amounted to 25,000 men; Allied casualties numbered 30,000, including one-third of Yorck's corps.

Fighting was minimal on the 17th as both sides rested to renew the struggle on the following day. Bernadotte and Bennigsen moved their armies into positions north and east of Leipzig, respectively. On the morning of 18 October, 295,000 Allied soldiers supported by 1,466 cannon launched six massive attacks along the entire front. Bonaparte stood in the middle of this whirlwind with 160,000 men. The Allies probably sustained another 20,000 casualties, and the French lost approximately 10,000 killed and wounded. Yet Napoleon's dwindling ammunition and Allied numerical superiority decided the issue. At 2:00 A.M. on the 19th, the French army started withdrawing from Leipzig. A rearguard of 30,000 men remained behind to defend the city as the army escaped.

Allied forces drove the French from Leipzig's suburbs and into the inner city by 11:00 A.M. on the 19th. Within Leipzig, "the slaughter was so awful that in places the Pleisse River was choked by a gruesome dam of dead men and horses, across which their comrades found a means of escape to the gardens beyond, only to be surrounded there and forced to surrender."[11] The battle ended; staggering losses marked the four-day struggle. Napoleon lost around 73,000 men, including 30,000 prisoners, 5,000 German deserters, 325 guns, and 40,000 muskets. Of the marshals, Prince Josef Anton Poniatowski drowned in the Elster River just twelve hours after receiving his baton, and Ney, Macdonald, and Auguste-Frédéric-Louis Marmont were wounded. Coalition forces also captured thirty-six French generals. The Allies sustained an estimated 54,000 casualties.

Although Napoleon's decisive defeat ended French hegemony east of the Rhine, the Allies did not believe the war was over. All agreed to continue operations to destroy the French army before it reached the Rhine. Discussions

over the next move occurred both before and after the storming of Leipzig. A council of war took place when Alexander met Schwarzenberg on the battlefield during the morning of the 19th. According to a British observer in Austrian headquarters, Robert Wilson, Alexander presented himself as the new Allied commander in chief, "but professing not to understand the *métier* sufficiently, he said he would have a council to direct him. Metternich frankly told him that he would never obtain the consent of Austria; moreover, he had declared himself unqualified; and that a council on the field of battle was a project that would never produce any result other than misfortune and disgrace."[12]

Despite the tsar's hubris, Alexander and Schwarzenberg made the preliminary arrangements for a pursuit, which called for the Silesian Army to move north of Leipzig and then turn west to harry Napoleon's right flank. Schwarzenberg's Bohemian Army would advance southwest of Leipzig in two massive columns. Bernadotte, with the combined North German and Polish Armies, would immediately follow Blücher and then slide between the Silesian and Bohemian Armies. In this way, the French would be herded toward an Austro–Bavarian army commanded by General Karl Philipp von Wrede. Thus caught between the Allied forces, the remnant of Napoleon's army would be destroyed before it could escape across the Rhine.

This plan achieved only partial success. Wrede managed to block Napoleon's line of retreat, but the emperor smashed through the Austro–Bavarian army at Hanau, a few miles east of Frankfurt-am-Main, on 30 October. Unfortunately for Wrede, Napoleon outsmarted Schwarzenberg. The Allied generalissimo assumed he would turn off the main highway that ran southwest from Fulda through Frankfurt to Mainz to avoid Wrede. Schwarzenberg believed the French army would proceed due west through Wetzlar to cross the Rhine at Koblenz, where Blücher's army would be waiting. Napoleon made no such adjustment. Although Wrede reported the march of a French column toward Frankfurt, Schwarzenberg assured him this was a flank column of no more than 20,000 men meant to cover Napoleon's left as he crossed the Rhine at Koblenz. Wrede planned to pounce on this French column at Hanau with his 43,000 men. Rather than a flank column, Wrede confronted the emperor himself. After shattering the smaller Allied force and inflicting 9,000 casualties, Napoleon commented that although he had made Wrede a count, he had failed to make him a general.[13]

The battle of Hanau cost Napoleon significantly fewer men than Wrede, but the disorganization of the French army reached deplorable levels in its aftermath. Between 28 and 31 October, the Allies captured as many as 10,000 stragglers.[14] "Troops as disorganized as those we commanded," explains Marmont, "as harassed, as exhausted by marching and fighting, by reverses and privations, soon surrendered to indiscipline. The inability to regularly provide sufficient rations provoked and justified their actions. Each man's primary

concern was finding food; as all military discipline collapsed, an indescribable depression and disgust took its place." The marshal estimates that of the 60,000 to 70,000 soldiers who still remained, "20,000 formed themselves into bands of eight or ten, scouring the countryside and marching on the flanks. The army gave these soldiers a nickname, which has become historic and recalls their sole occupation: the search for the means to survive. They were called *fricoteurs* (marauders)."[15] On 1 November, the main body of the French army reached Frankfurt, less than twenty miles from the fortress of Mainz and the safety of the Rhine.

After receiving reports that Napoleon had not changed course to reach Koblenz but instead remained on the highway that ran through Frankfurt to the Rhine, Schwarzenberg ordered the Bohemian Army to pursue on the same road. Cold weather and supply shortages slowed the march of his usually torpid army. On 6 November Schwarzenberg's advance guard relieved the forward troops of Wrede's Austro–Bavarian army and drove the French from Hochheim, just east of Mainz.[16]

Napoleon harbored no illusions over the state of his army. Weakened physically, mentally, and materially, it could not confront the main Allied armies: the retreat continued across the Rhine. Daily desertions combined with attrition to rob Napoleon of precious combat power; at most, the emperor commanded 70,000 soldiers. According to Professor Heinrich Steffens, a propaganda specialist attached to Blücher's headquarters:

> The rapidity of their flight completely exhausted the greater part of the army. At first we saw single Frenchmen lying among the bushes; as we proceeded the number of the exhausted, dying sufferers increased, and we found large groups of dead and dying. It pained me to observe that they believed it was a great evil to be discovered by us. Although we offered them assistance, they preferred to be left alone to perish from hunger and exhaustion among the undergrowth. I confess I wished myself away from the horrid scene, it was more terrible to me than the violence of the fiercest battle.[17]

The last units of the French army crossed the Rhine but maintained positions on the right bank at Wesel and the bridgeheads at Kastel and Kehl, facing Mainz and Strasbourg, respectively.

With their armies at the Rhine, the Allied monarchs, generals, and statesmen had to decide their next step. Disagreements had been few during the fall campaign when the Coalition labored to drive the French from central Europe. Allied unity began to wane shortly after their armies converged on the Rhine. For some, reaching this historic landmark symbolized Germany's liberation from French rule; driving the French across the river signaled the end of the war. This was particularly the case with the Russian officers, some of whom had questioned the wisdom of pursuing the French beyond Russia's frontiers. Many felt they had done their part to avenge themselves on the

French and the time had come to turn their backs on the troubles of western Europe. Another bloc – Metternich's doves – saw the Rhine as a geographic objective, the attainment of which would lead to a negotiated peace. Such a peace would not only restore the balance of power, but, by maintaining a Napoleonic France, the plans of ambitious allies could be held in check. The main question for this faction was not how the war should be continued but whether the war should be continued at all. Still for others, reaching the Rhine did not mark the end of the war but merely the conclusion of one campaign and the start of another. The hawks insisted on immediately crossing the Rhine and launching a rapid, decisive campaign against Paris. Peace terms would be dictated in the French capital.

Blücher and his chief of staff, General August Wilhelm Anton von Gneisenau, harbored no doubts over the next step. Shortly after the battle of Leipzig, Gneisenau informed Carl von Clausewitz that "the enemy makes his way toward Erfurt. If the enemy escapes or is destroyed, we go to Kassel and, if one gives us a free hand, to the Lower Rhine" (Appendix A).[18] Shortly after, Gneisenau formally submitted his thoughts to King Frederick William. As the "simplest plan," he suggested having three armies cross the upper, middle, and lower Rhine, respectively, while a fourth moved into Holland. His letter outlined the operations plan he would submit at the upcoming council of war at Frankfurt. The most important aspects of Gneisenau's proposal included his firm belief that of the four proposed Allied armies, the Silesian army should cross the lower Rhine and proceed toward Maastricht. Accordingly, this movement would deny Napoleon the resources of Holland and threaten the fortresses of northern France. Regarding these fortresses, Gneisenau insisted that they were "definitely poorly equipped with those effects that cannot be lacking [for] a strong defense."

This point led to Gneisenau's second basic tenet: in Napoleon's current crisis, the emperor would not be able "to create new field armies and provide his numerous fortresses with garrisons and other means of defense." Should he form a field army only, his denuded fortresses would fall; conversely, should he garrison the fortresses, few troops would be available for mobile operations. "In a word, we wanted garrisons," agrees French historian Adolphe Thiers, "and it was to be feared that in forming them we might weaken the active army, already so much impoverished."[19] In his memo, Gneisenau explains that "the fortresses are so numerous that all conscripts which he [Napoleon] can raise will not suffice to form garrisons." He informed the ever-cautious Frederick William that despite what some may advise, the French fortresses should not be avoided. Instead, Gneisenau's third point called for the Allies to take a position that "can threaten as many fortresses as possible to force the enemy to have concern for all." A movement toward Maastricht would serve this purpose. He assured the king that such measures would facilitate the conquest of Holland and place the Silesian army in a position to build a solid

operations base on the lower Rhine. Gneisenau concluded his report with a request to allow the Silesian Army to march to the lower Rhine, promising that Blücher would then "be in the position to attain in a decisive manner . . . an honorable and lasting peace."[20]

On the same day Gneisenau wrote the king, he submitted a detailed version of his plan to Charles Stewart, the British ambassador to the Prussian court and half-brother of Britain's foreign minister, Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh. "France has between 120 and 130 fortresses," explains Gneisenau. "Bonaparte left most of these places without garrisons, which gave him the forces to build numerous armies. If we compel him to leave garrisons in a greater part of these fortresses, we will prevent him from fielding an army with sufficient strength to oppose us." Gneisenau argued that "the frontier fortresses in France lack everything that is needed for defense and we can probably take them at little cost." Later in his letter, he explains that "in the previous year [1812], the enemy lost an army of 400,000 and in the current campaign another 300,000 men." Thus, the Allies had to exploit Napoleon's obvious shortage of trained manpower.

Both supporters and opponents of Gneisenau's plan claimed the attrition of the Allied armies during the German campaign had been too great. Before crossing the Rhine, the Allied soldiers needed rest and recovery. In his letter to Stewart, Gneisenau responded to this criticism:

> You say that our army has suffered too much and our numbers have decreased? This is true. Of the 39,000 men of Yorck's corps who started the campaign, no more than 10,000–11,000 men remain. But we have received 3,000 reinforcements and the Russians 15,000. I will attempt to raise 20,000–30,000 new conscripts from our former provinces. . . . The Hessians will probably join us – as well as the Saxon army – because the Elector will entrust his troops to a Prussian general. All of this will make a formidable army, which can undertake the conquest of Holland.[21]

Stewart issued a prompt, yet cautious reply that foreshadowed the opposition Gneisenau would encounter during the upcoming council of war:

> It appears essential to me that the operations of each army continue through general communication and agreement. At the moment, everything appears to be in disarray and the armies operate according to the ideas of each commander. I already have told you: you will lead, but according to a plan. Everything you have said to me concerning Holland shows great genius, and I completely agree that a large army must go there . . . but would it not be better to first make your levée and rebuild your troops before you invade Holland or cross the Rhine?[22]

Although a close friend of Gneisenau, Clausewitz, in his 1835 critique of the 1814 campaign, rejects Gneisenau's idea regarding the dispersion of Allied forces in four armies. Clausewitz maintains that after Leipzig, the

Kulminationspunkte for total Allied victory was a second defeat of the French army or the capture of Paris. Both required the Allies to cross the Rhine immediately and en masse, and the latter would lead Coalition forces deep within France. Clausewitz estimates the Allied armies at Leipzig to number around 290,000 men. After adding Wrede's army and subtracting losses and Bernadotte's march to Hamburg, he figures the Allies reached the Rhine with 245,000. Detaching 65,000 men for the necessary sieges and observation of the Rhenish fortresses, 180,000 men would remain to cross the Rhine. "By using great economy of force, 150,000 of this number could have been available on the battlefield. It has been proven and it was foreseen with the highest certainty that Bonaparte, aside from what he could draw from the Italian and Spanish armies, could have opposed this force with at most 60,000–70,000 men in the beginning of December." Although it was widely known that Paris served as the central nervous system of the French army, Clausewitz justified making Paris the Allied objective on political grounds. "In general, the political factions that exist in great and extensive empires can be mastered only from the core, this was especially the case in France. By rule the capital is the square root of these factions and Paris more so than any other. Thus, the objective of the strategic attack must be the total defeat of the enemy's military forces and the conquest of the capital. One without the other would not suffice."[23]

Joseph Radetzky von Radetz, who served as both the Allied chief of staff and Chief of the General Staff of the Austrian Army, submitted his views to Schwarzenberg in a memorandum likewise dated 31 October (Appendix B). According to Radetzky, only two operations could be considered *if* the French continued their retreat across the Rhine. The first involved all three Allied armies taking winter quarters along the right bank of the Rhine from Basel to the mouth of the Ems River. He estimated 246,000 Allied troops would occupy this line during the winter months. His other suggestion called for the Silesian and Bohemian armies to take winter quarters, while the Army of North Germany conquered Holland, and a portion of the Austrian Reserve moved into Italy. For the operation against Holland, Radetzky claimed it would be necessary to reinforce Bernadotte with one of Blücher's corps. Nevertheless, the Austrian officer advised against an Allied operation in a region of the French Empire that would figure prominently in any political negotiations. Radetzky also touched on a subject that would soon cause a rupture in Austro–Russian relations. "The situation may arise," he wrote, "in which the forces on the Upper Rhine must operate there in order to support the political measures of the Swiss and enter Switzerland." His treatise attempted to preempt the revenge-minded Prussian generals by first securing Austrian objectives in Italy. Radetzky claimed that only the occupation of the region between the Adige and Mincio Rivers as well as the capture of the Italian fortresses of Peschiera, Mantua, and Ferrara would "ensure operations against Paris at the

beginning of the new campaign."[24] Much to Gneisenau's chagrin, Austrian national interests became more pronounced in the weeks to come.

The ideas circulating in Schwarzenberg's headquarters did little to deter Blücher, who was anxious to stomp his boots on French soil. On 5 November, he received news that the French army teetered on the brink of collapse, despite Napoleon's victory at Hanau. "If we quickly set out for Holland and cross the Rhine with double strength," predicts Blücher's quartermaster-general, Friedreich Karl von Müffling, "the conquest of Holland will be completed in two months and a lasting peace concluded. *If we remain on this side and allow ourselves to be delayed by negotiations, I thus predict a bloody campaign in 1814*. Napoleon is in the most awful situation . . . I am most eager to see how his genius will extract himself."[25] Agreeing with his staff officers, Blücher submitted his thoughts to the king and requested permission to cross the Rhine:

> I will immediately march from here to Köln on the lower Rhine in order to cross as quickly as possible and support the conquest of Holland, which Your Royal Majesty, I suspect, will assign to a part of the Army of North Germany. I do not see anything that can prevent me from overrunning a part of the Netherlands and thus facilitating the conquest of Holland. As long as we remain on the right bank of the Rhine the enemy has no need to garrison his many fortresses, but if we force him to occupy them, he will be too weak to operate in the field against us; if he keeps his men in the field, he will thus lose the fortresses. I await your orders.[26]

None of the reports Blücher received indicated the concentration of French reserves at the frontier. Moreover, spies and sympathizers claimed the French had not armed, provisioned, nor adequately garrisoned the left bank fortresses. "Places indispensable to our home protection, Huningue, Strasbourg, Landau, Mainz, Metz, Mézières, Valenciennes, and Lille, were left utterly defenseless," laments Thiers. "The guns were not mounted; there was a shortage of tools, of wood for blinds, of bridges of communication between the works, of horses for transport, of smiths and carpenters. Provisions had yet to arrive, and money, which can provide for so many needs, was not forthcoming, and it was doubtful whether it could be sent in time and in sufficient quantities."[27]

Reports also indicated the crown prince of Sweden had reached Hanover, which led Blücher to conclude that the Army of North Germany would soon invade Holland. Blücher refused to ignore these favorable circumstances. He and his staff devised another plan, this time calling for the Silesian army to cross the middle Rhine and advance through Aachen and Liège toward Brussels. According to the Prussians, Schwarzenberg would cross the Rhine between Mannheim and Mainz. Paris would be the general goal of all operations.[28] The Prussians hoped to surprise the French and capture several key fortresses during the confusion caused by the Allied invasion.

By marching to Belgium, the Silesian army would deprive Napoleon of valuable resources, including the armament factories at Liège and Namur. Blücher believed he would be ready to cross the Rhine on 15 November and estimated reaching Brussels ten days later. On 7 November, an optimistic Gneisenau left for Frankfurt to seek approval of this plan. Without authorization, Blücher led his army northwest toward Köln that same day. It was all for naught. Four days later, he received explicit orders from Tsar Alexander to turn around and besiege Mainz.

In early November, the question that faced the Coalition was whether Allied forces should cross the Rhine and pursue Napoleon's weak army. "The moment is of the greatest importance," Schwarzenberg explains to his wife, Maria Anna, "now it comes down to the decisive question, should one begin a winter campaign?"[29] The exhausted state of their armies suggested the Allies needed to halt at the Rhine. Yet Müffling's prediction that delay would result in a bloody campaign in 1814 adequately summarized the thought process behind the planning at Silesian army headquarters. By immediately resuming the campaign, they were prepared to accept further losses and impose further hardships on the soldiers. The reason was not callous indifference to the suffering of their men nor bloodthirsty revenge as the Austrians suggested, but the simple belief that by exploiting Napoleon's weakness the struggle would end sooner with less loss than if they allowed the master of war to recover. While en route to the Rhine, the Allies discovered Napoleon had implemented measures to rebuild his army. In several German cities, they found French newspapers dated as early as 13 October that announced the emperor's decree to raise 280,000 conscripts.[30] Only two alternatives remained to the Coalition: continue the war, or negotiate with Bonaparte.

The operations of the Silesian and Bohemian armies halted in November for both practical and political reasons. Physical and material exhaustion required rest, reorganization, and replenishment. Revitalizing on the march in the midst of winter did not appear feasible. Regardless of the dilapidated state of his army, Blücher's plan to march to Belgium in early November probably would have succeeded without much detriment to his men. French forces were in no condition to resist, and the march route of the Silesian Army would have avoided the departments of "old France," where the hostility of the local population posed a threat to rear-area security. Once in Belgium, Blücher would have facilitated General Friedrich Wilhelm von Bülow's invasion of Holland with the Prussian III Corps, detached from Bernadotte's Army of North Germany. Blücher's operation would have enabled Bülow's corps as well as General Ferdinand Federovich von Wintzingerode's Russian army corps to unite with the Silesian army before the end of 1813. Thus reinforced, the Prussian commander could have invaded old France with an army of 125,000 men. Taking strategic consumption into consideration, this figure is still quadruple the actual size of the Silesian army when it reached

the Marne River in late January 1814. Moreover, an invasion of "new" France could have commenced one full month before the Bohemian Army started the Allied invasion by crossing the upper Rhine at Basel, and six weeks before the Silesian Army finally received authorization to cross the Rhine near Mainz. The distance between Mainz and Paris was double the stretch that separated the French capital from Belgium's southern border. Had Blücher invaded new France and reached Belgium before the end of November, the war could have taken a completely different turn. With the Silesian army much closer to the French capital and with the mobilization of the French army still in its infant stage, Blücher may well have reached Paris before the end of the year.

Blücher's recall after he initiated the march to Belgium also reflected the politics of the Sixth Coalition. At the head of the peace party stood Metternich. His concern over Russia increased with every mile the Allies advanced after the victory at Leipzig. If only Napoleon's power could be reduced rather than destroyed, France could counter postwar Russian hegemony. Metternich opposed the complete destruction and overthrow of Napoleon out of fear the succeeding French ruler might be a Russian puppet. Conversely, in the back of every Allied monarch's mind remained the fear that a Jacobin government could seize power in France and resume the Revolution's crusade against thrones.

Although the German campaign had required true military and political cooperation, the Prussian generals enjoyed enough independence to wage a war of retribution against Napoleon. After the Allies liberated Germany and reached the Rhine, Metternich had to slow the pace of the war to restrain the Prussians, whose impetuosity threatened his ability to direct the conflict at its most crucial stage. For this task, he received the assistance of many. Metternich himself attempted to manipulate the perceptions of peace and victory in the minds of Alexander and Frederick William. Relics from the eighteenth-century school of warfare who served as advisors influenced strategy and persistently undermined Gneisenau. Metternich also used Schwarzenberg himself to ensure that Allied military strategy did not supersede Austrian political interests. The Russian generals yearned for peace – in part from war weariness, in part because Russia appeared to have no interests west of the Rhine. Nevertheless, like Napoleon, Blücher and Gneisenau still measured victory only in terms of success on the battlefield. For this reason, they wanted to lead the Silesian Army across the Rhine at the first opportunity and make for the heart of France. On the basis of this desire, they formed a natural partnership with the tsar. Yet despite the demands of the war party, the Allies lost precious time in long deliberations at Frankfurt rather than pursuing Napoleon's defeated army across the Rhine. Instead of achieving a quick, decisive end to the conflict in 1813, the war continued into 1814, another campaign was fought, and tens of thousands of unfortunate men, women, and children lost their lives.

2

Barbarians at the Gate

Metternich schemed to outmaneuver the tsar at every opportunity, even with the arrival of the Allied monarchs at Frankfurt. "I want to regulate with you the entrance of the Kaiser in Frankfurt, which I want to be solemn and in the middle of his troops," he wrote to Schwarzenberg. "I desire that the Kaiser arrive before the Tsar of Russia. The first to arrive has a step up."[1] Despite his machinations, Tsar Alexander paraded into Frankfurt at the head of the Russo–Prussian Guard on 5 November. The following day, "Red Breeches," the popular nickname for Kaiser Francis, entered the former imperial city where he had been crowned Holy Roman Emperor twenty-one years earlier. Frederick William was absent, having returned to Berlin following the battle of Leipzig. "We were well-received," claims Wilson, "although Bonaparte warned the inhabitants not to commit any follies, since he would reappear in the spring." Describing the kaiser's entry on 6 November, Wilson notes: "*Te Deum* followed his entry, and for two hours we froze in a cold church. The troops then filed by the sovereigns, and this ceremony was almost as chilling. We then went to dine with Mr. Bethmann, who gave a *grande fête*. Afterwards we passed to the opera, where *Titus* was performed before the emperors and an overflowing house by some very talented actors."[2]

With Schwarzenberg making Frankfurt the headquarters of the Bohemian Army as well, the city served as Grand Allied Headquarters. It also became the prelude to the Congress of Vienna as monarchs, ministers, and courtiers made their way to the old city. Moreover, the German princes who had voluntarily seceded from the Rheinbund or had been forced to make peace with the Allies also gravitated to Frankfurt. "The entry of the Kaiser in this old German city . . . was very moving and extremely solemn," wrote Schwarzenberg. "But now I want to leave these walls. Kings, princes, and representatives from all sides stream here, and the time hardly suffices to deal with the current business."[3] Aside from the military planning, the futures of Germany and

Figure 1. General August Wilhelm Anton von Gneisenau (1760–1831). Chief of the General Staff of the Prussian Army.

France, as well as the general security of Europe, emerged as key issues. In this atmosphere, intrigue rather than unity reigned supreme. With victory at hand, national self-interest moved to the fore.

A great council of war convened on 7 November. Count Karl Emil von Löwenhielm delivered the crown prince of Sweden's proposed plan of campaign. According to Bernadotte, the Bohemian Army should place its left wing on the Main River and extend its right to the confluence of the Sieg with the Rhine. The Silesian Army would form the center, placing its left on the Sieg and its right toward Düsseldorf. After eliminating Marshal Davout's force at Hamburg, Bernadotte's Army of North Germany would invade and liberate Holland. From their positions along the right bank of the Rhine, the Bohemian and Silesian Armies would rest and reorganize. Operations would commence on the left bank of the Rhine "at the earliest moment."[4]

Gneisenau opened his argument by first expressing opposition to any negotiations with the French emperor, maintaining that Napoleon "could only be defeated through war, war, and more war."[5] He pressed for an immediate invasion of France (Appendix C). Gneisenau again explained how Napoleon would be forced to divide his limited manpower between the frontier fortresses and a field army. After losing so much manpower, the emperor did not have the resources to occupy the fortresses and field a considerable army. Instead of skirting the fortresses, Gneisenau wanted the Allies to proceed right through their midst.[6] Napoleon would be compelled to either leave

a portion of the fortresses unoccupied, thus conceding strongholds in his own territory, or occupy all of the fortresses, which would deny him manpower for a field army. The Prussian general argued that by crossing the lower Rhine on 15 November and invading Belgium, the Silesian Army could simultaneously detach Holland from French control, liberate the Dutch, and threaten the fortresses of northern France. Gneisenau also proposed that Bülow drive across the Ijssel River and into Holland, while Schwarzenberg's Bohemian army invade France between Mainz and Strasbourg. In addition, a small auxiliary corps would advance through Switzerland to occupy Franche-Comté. Gneisenau did not offer any details regarding objectives, but it was clear to all in attendance that the Prussians targeted Paris as their ultimate goal.[7]

Gneisenau's proposal enjoyed the council's support; only the Austrian generals suggested reducing the size of the army on the middle Rhine to increase the forces moving through Switzerland. In addition, the Austrians wanted to secure the Alpine state to prevent the enemy from threatening the communications of any Allied forces en route to the French interior. The sole voice of opposition came from Gneisenau's own countryman: General Karl Friedrich von dem Knesebeck. The king's military advisor, Knesebeck liked to claim that he adhered "little to the old principles of war" but instead had formed his own art of war or essentially had none: "rather each time I discern what the situation demands and I do it."[8] His counterproposal called for a part of the Army of North Germany, mainly Bülow's corps, to invade Holland, while the Silesian and Bohemian Armies moved into winter quarters on the Rhine to pin the French at Mainz.[9] Knesebeck's plan generated much discussion and the day ended before the Allies reached a decision.

On the following day, 8 November, Radetzky presented his own proposal, which agreed with Gneisenau's plan on two important points: the immediate resumption of Allied operations and the Silesian army's conquest of the Netherlands. Radetzky called for the Bohemian army to move up the Rhine to Switzerland, cross the river, and invade southern France. Blücher's army would then proceed to the Netherlands. The idea of advancing on widely separated wings exaggerated both the strength of the numerous fortresses on the French eastern frontier as well as the memory of the failed campaign of 1792, when the main Austro–Prussian army advanced from Koblenz to Paris along a single axis that offered no flank protection nor permitted much mutual support.[10] Both Radetzky and Schwarzenberg feared a prolonged delay of the invasion of France. Schwarzenberg based his concerns on the inability to feed the army in its current position, which made advancing or retreating the only options. Moreover, Radetzky did not want to grant Napoleon time to "convert 100,000 demoralized men into 300,000 soldiers. We shall rue the time we have allowed to pass unused."[11]

Radetzky's plan appeared risky to some of his own compatriots, who feared undertaking an operation before neutralizing the French fortresses

that could threaten the flank and rear of the Bohemian army. The kaiser's childhood friend, Peter Duka von Kadar, who now served as the monarch's principal military advisor, insisted on taking winter quarters on the right bank of the Rhine to begin a methodical invasion by besieging the enemy's frontier fortresses in 1814. The Bavarian general, Wrede, opposed Duka by insisting that the Allies immediately launch surprise attacks on the French fortresses along the middle and upper Rhine, all of which were purportedly in an excessively weak state of defense.[12] Regardless, Francis supported Duka until Schwarzenberg countered that the army could not be fed in winter quarters.

Although the kaiser did not see the merits of Radetzky's plan, it did serve Austrian grand strategy. By advancing through Switzerland, the Austrians could impose a pro-Austrian government on the Swiss. Likewise, the Habsburgs hoped to regain their lost lands in Italy, and Austrian operations against the French army in Italy could be facilitated by controlling Switzerland. French historian Alphonse de Beauchamp offers an interesting interpretation of the Austrian plan, asserting that it "presented another important question: what point should be attacked? The Austrian cabinet, whose principal objective was the conquest of Italy, argued that the invasion must take place through Switzerland and the eastern frontier. In this scenario, the conquest of Lyon had to precede the movement on Paris, and the main Allied army had to cut France in half by linking its operations in the east with those of Lord Wellington." Although, as Beauchamp admits, "the Russian cabinet insisted on marching straight to Paris," the mixing of Austrian strategy and Russian pressure later resulted in the erratic and confused operations of Schwarzenberg's left wing in southern France.[13]

National self-interest combined with the views of the Austrian General Staff in Radetzky's proposal. Although Schwarzenberg completely dedicated himself to helping Metternich achieve his grand strategy, the Austrian General Staff's direct complicity with the diplomat's scheming remains unclear. In fact, John Fane, Lord Burghersh, the British attaché to the Austrian army, provides a logical explanation for Radetzky's proposal: "It was an evident advantage to the Austrians to place their army in a situation from where, even in case of defeat, they could pour their forces into Italy, overwhelming the troops of the enemy, and thus securing for themselves an extension of territory."[14] The other officers of the Austrian General Staff supported Radetzky's draft according to their strategic views. The plan itself appeared to offer the possibility of waging war in a grand perspective. With the actual offensive commencing from Geneva, the Allies could, as Radetzky claimed, either detach troops to threaten the rear of the French forces in Italy and with the remainder march directly on Paris, or they could cooperate with the duke of Wellington in southern France. In either case, the Austrians firmly believed Napoleon would make peace after the loss of his frontier provinces.[15]

For the moment, Alexander did not perceive the covert aspects of this plan and endorsed the suggestion. Gneisenau, too, did not object to Radetzky's modification, although it would prevent tactical cooperation between the Silesian and Bohemian armies. By invading France from Belgium and Switzerland, Blücher and Schwarzenberg would not be able to unite their forces. Gneisenau did object to the projected timetable: Radetzky suggested postponing the Rhine passage until 1 January 1814 to reorganize the Allied armies. On the first of the year, the invasion of France would begin with Blücher advancing from Belgium and Schwarzenberg leading his army through Switzerland.

When the debate continued on 8 November, Knesebeck emerged as a dangerous opponent to Gneisenau's plans. Similar to the opposition the Kaiser's military advisor, Duka, made to Radetzky, the Austrian General Staff Chief, Frederick William's strategic councilor now challenged the proposals made by Gneisenau, the Chief of the General Staff of the Prussian Army. Indicative of the sharp differences that divided not just allies, but officers within the same army, such disagreement reflects the rift between the officers steeped in the traditions of eighteenth-century warfare and those who adopted the modern, "Napoleonic" principles of war. Knesebeck amended his argument and endorsed the idea of having the Bohemian Army invade southern France through Switzerland because this region contained the least number of fortresses. To cover Schwarzenberg's exposed right flank, he suggested that the Silesian army forego Gneisenau's proposed operation in the Netherlands, temporarily besiege Mainz, and take winter quarters along the Rhine to present the threat of a sudden breakout. After the Bohemian army completed its wheeling movement, Blücher could then operate on the left bank of the Rhine according to circumstances. The conquest of Holland and Belgium would be left to the crown prince of Sweden.[16] "You may recall the fire of the discussion with which I fought for my plan in the presence of the tsar," Knesebeck later wrote to Gneisenau in an attempt to justify his actions, "and the patient persistence which I exhibited, when Englishman and Dutchman, monarch and minister, assailed me because the former believed Holland would again be lost – and the latter wanted to completely finish the enemy. I wanted the same as you . . . to remain strong and firm when other men of strength looked on as weaklings."[17] Gneisenau never accepted Knesebeck's explanation and certainly could not see how this plan would produce greater results than his own.

Gneisenau held his ground in the face of Knesebeck's charge and throughout the debate on 9 November. By the end of the day, he outmaneuvered Knesebeck to win the support of the tsar and the Austrian generals. Schwarzenberg and Radetzky opted for an immediate invasion of France while Napoleon was unprepared and his people demoralized. Gneisenau made common cause with the Austrians, whose fair plan attracted him despite the obvious influence of

Figure 2. General Karl Friedrich von dem Knesebeck (1768–1848). Chief military advisor to King Frederick William III of Prussia.

Austrian politics. According to the Austrian plan, the Bohemian army would drive through Switzerland into France; one corps would observe Mainz, and another at Koblenz would sever French communications; the Silesian army would advance through Brabant and Flanders; the Army of North Germany would liberate Holland. The generals submitted this plan to the tsar, who gave his consent after long deliberations. The Allies designated 15 November for the historic crossing of the Rhine.[18]

On the next day, 10 November, Schwarzenberg summoned Gneisenau to another council on the grounds that Knesebeck had raised important concerns. After Gneisenau arrived, Knesebeck read a written statement calling for the Bohemian army to wheel through Switzerland into southern France to unite with Field Marshal Johann von Hiller's Austrian army in Italy. After the Bohemian army entered France, Schwarzenberg would attempt to arrange an operation against Paris with Wellington's Anglo-Portuguese army, which was in the midst of crossing the Pyrenees. Knesebeck reiterated his belief that the Silesian army had to remain at Mainz to cover Schwarzenberg's flank and rear. Gneisenau again argued the importance of liberating the Low Countries. According to Knesebeck, this task would be left to the good will of the crown prince of Sweden. Knesebeck contended that even if Bernadotte

concentrated his efforts in north Germany to secure Norway, Holland and Belgium were secondary objectives that could be obtained at the peace table. Frustrated by his Prussian rival, Gneisenau fervently protested against leaving Napoleon in possession of the Netherlands. He repeated his belief that the French emperor would be allowed to reinforce his field army significantly unless the Allies threatened the fortresses on his northern frontier. On a practical note, Gneisenau dismissed as unlikely the intended cooperation with the Austro–Italian and Anglo–Portuguese armies. Knesebeck's draft contained enough similarities to Radetzky's original plan to receive the approval of the majority of Austrian generals. Although the representatives of the House of Orange and the British – who naturally had great interest in the liberation of Holland – gave their full support to Gneisenau, the rest of the council favored Knesebeck's suggestions. Moreover, although they never really expected to execute a campaign against Paris, to entice Alexander the Austrians did not rule out its possibility. Like Gneisenau, the authors of this plan said nothing about what would come next; unlike Gneisenau, they had no intention of marching on Paris. In a vote, the Austrian generals approved Knesebeck's proposals and submitted the changes to the tsar for his approval. Captivated by the idea of cooperating with the Austro–Italian and Anglo–Portuguese armies and ignoring the prospects of French resistance in Italy and western France, Alexander endorsed this plan.[19]

Symbolic of the chaos that sometimes characterized Allied war planning, Alexander and Gneisenau drafted another operations plan on 10 November. According to this scheme, the crown prince of Sweden with 50,000 men would turn against Hamburg, while the other 80,000 men of his army – mainly the corps of Bülow and Wintzingerode – would cross the Rhine at Köln and detach Holland from France. Blücher with 52,000 men in his first line and 80,000 men (Russo–Prussian reinforcements, Hessians, Westphalians, Württembergers, Badeners, Darmstädters, and Kleist's II Corps) in his second would occupy Koblenz and cross the Rhine at Mannheim, cover the right-wing and communications of the Bohemian army, and conduct offensive operations according to circumstances. The Bohemian army's 200,000 men would besiege Breisach and Kehl and invade France from across the upper Rhine. An Austro–Italian army of 68,000 men would attempt to reach the Var River to establish communication with the armies of Schwarzenberg and Wellington.[20]

That same day, 10 November, Gneisenau forwarded the tsar's plan to Silesian army headquarters. In a cover letter to Müffling, he distinguished between fact and fiction. He doubted the tsar would be able to induce the crown prince of Sweden to detach such a large force, despite the former's promise to use "resolute language." "Herr Bernhard [Bernadotte] has a very miserable demeanor," wrote Gneisenau. "In everything we have had to drag him by the hair and in our important undertakings has he left us completely in

the lurch. We have completed our business without him, but he is very detrimental to us, because he deprives us of our troops, which we could use much better elsewhere."[21] Should the crown prince refuse to support this operation, Gneisenau viewed the Coalition's inability to attack the Netherlands as "very unsatisfactory." He also revealed to Müffling that he continued to fail in his attempts to convince the tsar to allow the Silesian army to cross the Rhine immediately. Gneisenau did have success protesting Blücher's passive role, and Alexander agreed to an eventual offensive on the left bank of the Rhine for the Silesian army. Moreover, the Russian monarch assured Gneisenau that if the crown prince of Sweden refused to support the Silesian army, he would detach the Prussians and Russians from the Army of North Germany and place these units under Blücher's command. As for the supposed 80,000 men who would form the second line of the Silesian army, Gneisenau revealed the truth: "The Hessians have yet to organize. The Württembergers have returned to their country to complete the mobilization. The Badenese and Darmstädters are likewise in no condition to join us. Kleist shall move toward us only when Erfurt surrenders. The 20,000 recruits from Westphalia will never join us because the crown prince of Sweden has decided that Bülow will recruit there and the king wants these recruits for the regiments of the Mark. For the present, we must rely upon our own strength." He concludes by lamenting that "the headquarters of the court and of the [Bohemian] army will, I fear, remain here still longer."[22]

Two plans of operations now existed, the "original," as Radetzky called the Knesebeck–Austrian scheme, and the tsar's plan. At least the two plans contained enough similarities so that it is possible to say that the Allies finally reached a consensus on *how* to invade France. Nevertheless, the larger question remained: *Would* the Allies invade France? Numerous opponents still refused to cross the Rhine, yet Napoleon did not remain idle. As early as 11 November, Wilson recorded in his diary that "the enemy is also making gigantic efforts, and all the tales respecting the want of men in France now bear their just character of fallacy. Never will France have had such a force on foot, and it must be remembered that it will be, with very little exception, a French force."[23]

The Prussian king, who arrived in Frankfurt on 13 November, refused to support an invasion and personally opposed Gneisenau. "He is a mischievous, meddling being who requires constant surveillance," purportedly commented the king to Wilson. According to this British officer, Frederick William was not alone in his aversion to the Prussian chief of staff. Wilson claims that Alexander described Gneisenau "as a man with a wild, heated imagination, and the most intemperate. He has two or three times nearly ruined our affairs with the crown prince of Sweden. He is an agent of the Hanoverian interest. His connection with Count Münster . . . shows that this agency exists. He requires watching, and it is most fortunate that he has a sovereign with judgement and

circumspection enough to weigh well his character and observe his conduct." Count Ernst Friedrich zu Münster was King George III of England's voice in Hanover. Although the king himself was insane, his government absolutely wanted the French out of Holland, and the Hanoverians likewise would never feel secure with Holland remaining in French hands. These issues provided the connection between Münster and Gneisenau and certainly caused suspicion of the latter's motives and insistence on military operations to liberate the Low Countries. Even Radetzky, a fellow staff chief, also shared a low opinion over Gneisenau: "I have received such and such a plan, and have had such and such a conversation, but I have told the prince [Schwarzenberg] that this man is not counseling by his head, but by the necessities of his purse. He is, I am sure, a *mauvais sujet* in some foreign pay."[24]

Frederick William's cautious nature made him immune to the influences of Gneisenau and Blücher, who saw Napoleon's total defeat as the Coalition's task. The Prussian king simply wanted peace. According to Stewart: "after his misfortunes, public and private, the king preferred it [peace] to any war. . . . Instead, the amiable domestic habits of this monarch led him to seek a mournful consolation near the tomb of his departed queen in Charlottenburg."[25] Hardenberg likewise did not embrace the idea of invading France. The Prussian chancellor secretly harbored fears concerning Russian hegemony, and his solution complemented Metternich's plans: remaining on the Rhine would be the best means to limit Russian expansion in Poland.[26] Moreover, neither Frederick William nor Hardenberg wanted to jeopardize the gains that the Coalition had achieved thus far. The condition in which his troops reached the Rhine further persuaded the monarch that an invasion of France should be postponed until the soldiers recovered.

The Prussian king's fears of invading France were not assuaged by Bernadotte's unsolicited advice. From afar, the crown prince of Sweden warned against crossing the Rhine and emphasized the dangers of invading French soil: a *levée en masse* – popular resistance – and ultimately an Allied defeat.[27] He wanted the Allies to negotiate with Napoleon, and only when they could inform the French people that the emperor refused peace would the time be right to invade France. According to the crown prince, such a peace included the separation of Holland from France, but the French frontiers would be those of 1807. In addition, Bernadotte did not hide his growing interest in the future of the French government. "The crown prince," states a report to Frederick William from the Prussian envoy attached to Bernadotte's headquarters, Friedrich Wilhelm von Krusemark, "has just authorized me to inform Your Majesty, that since he believes neither you nor the Tsar of Russia will make claims on the French throne his elevation to this throne can be exchanged very advantageously with the Emperor Napoleon."[28]

Like the Prussians, disagreement also divided the Austrian camp. Kaiser Francis still agreed with Duka, who wanted to move into winter quarters

and begin a spring campaign with the systematic siege of France's frontier fortresses. Duka and Radetzky chided each other in a meeting attended by Francis, Schwarzenberg, and Metternich. According to Radetzky: "Duka, who no longer knew how to reply to my reasons for crossing the Rhine and marching straight to Paris, was so angry that he pounded his fist on the table so hard that the ink splashed up, shouting: 'confound it. Are you trying to be more clever than Prince Eugene [of Savoy]'? 'Prince Eugene would have crossed the Rhine long ago,' was my reply." Radetzky finally won the Kaiser's support but not before wearing out his monarch's eyes and ears. "The emperor sent for me and said: 'Among other things, if you do not stop sending me your plans and if you can think of nothing more clever than your plan of operations, I shall have you imprisoned in the Spielberg or made a head shorter'." All of this bickering took a toll on Radetzky's health:

> By the time I reached Basel during the campaign of 1813 my health was so shattered that I could scarcely manage the exhausting work. . . . Several doctors explained that I should stay behind, but our senior staff physician, who appreciated how impossible this would be, advised me to drink a glass of mulled Bordeaux wine every day at noon. Tsar Alexander learned of this, and wherever I happened to be, whether in camp or facing the enemy, a Cossack who already knew me well and always found me, God knows how, brought me a bottle of Bordeaux every day.[29]

As for the tsar, such debates did not disturb his councils. Although his officers and men believed the war was over for them, they understood that thoughts of crossing the Rhine and invading France consumed their master. "The Russian army remained quiet," laments Metternich in his memoirs.[30] Victory in Germany did not satiate Alexander. His dreams combined fantastic ideas of benevolence with harsh thoughts of vengeance. He first wanted to liberate and then reconstitute Europe under his magnanimous domination. Conversely, he wanted to punish France and completely destroy Napoleon's power. It mattered little that his faithful ally, Frederick William, did not wish to continue the war: The king's doglike loyalty would not allow him to forsake his Russian benefactor, and Alexander knew it.

Meanwhile, the Austrian intention to march through Switzerland increased tensions in Allied headquarters. Switzerland's political situation became complicated because of the growing conflict between Austria and Russia over Allied strategy, as well as the fact that both wanted influence over the Swiss.[31] Alexander promised to respect Swiss neutrality and the Austrians assured him they would honor his pledge. Schwarzenberg's campaign plan, however, called for the Bohemian army to move through Switzerland. In a letter to his wife, the commander in chief offers a concise evaluation of the Alpine state's importance:

Figure 3. Field Marshal Prince Karl Philipp zu Schwarzenberg (1771–1820). Allied commander in chief and commander of the Army of Bohemia.

> Here the great question will now be decided: whether we will recognize the neutrality of Switzerland or not. My opinion is clear: no salvation for the Allied army without the possession of Switzerland. The relationship of this land with France is of the kind that neutrality, in regard to France, is only a word without meaning, for nothing can hinder them, as soon as they concentrate their forces . . . from invading Switzerland and too late we would then regret a military sin, which nothing less than the whole world will have to atone. By far the majority of the Swiss wish to shake off the French yoke, the minority I must reconcile. From Switzerland one can seriously threaten France; through the military possession of Switzerland we can take Italy in the rear. A half-measure here is inexcusable. We are at the point where no rest is allowed; as risky as each step is, we must nevertheless be strong and bold. Vacillation here could be high treason to the welfare of Europe.[32]

To get around Swiss neutrality, the Allies sought one of two possible scenarios: either the Swiss would join the Coalition or they would grant the Allies free passage. The Swiss government not only rejected the invitation to join the Coalition but on 18 November passed a declaration of strict neutrality that closed Switzerland's borders. Regardless of this technicality, many of the military minds in Allied headquarters recognized the strategic value of Switzerland. "With respect to Switzerland," explains Stewart, "although deputies had arrived to proclaim its neutrality and arrange a route into France that did not infringe on its territory . . . it was evidently too important a

military feature, both for the safety of Germany and Italy, not to secure it against any attempt from France."[33] Moreover, the Austrians did not feel obligated to recognize the neutrality of a state whose constitution affirmed Napoleon's title of "Mediator." In addition, the Swiss were actively recruiting to honor the 1803 Franco-Swiss alliance that called for them to provide 16,000 men for the French army.

According to Metternich, the tsar sought to strike a compromise between the plans posed by the "Austrian and Prussian generals" to honor Swiss neutrality. In his memoirs, Metternich recalls that Swiss nationals such as the tsar's own childhood tutor "[Frederick] La Harpe, [Antoine] Jomini, and other Swiss revolutionaries vehemently urged Tsar Alexander to respect what they called Helvetian neutrality." A Swiss deputation arrived in Frankfurt to meet with the tsar, who provided them "with a confident hope that the neutrality of Switzerland would not be violated." In a meeting with Metternich and the Allied generals, Alexander explained that although he agreed with the strategic advantages offered by a movement through Switzerland, he could never agree to the violation of Swiss neutrality. The Russian sovereign did consent to a plan for the Allies to use the bridge at Basel on the condition that they first obtain Swiss permission. He declared that Allied forces could move to the border but not violate Swiss neutrality. Alexander believed Austrian arguments for occupying Switzerland had more to do with their desire to gain control of Switzerland and Italy rather than supporting his goal of defeating Napoleon. Learning of this "Austrian trickery" from La Harpe and Jomini, he refused to discuss the issue further. The stalemate over Switzerland thus produced an Austro–Russian dispute.[34] "I am furious with Tsar Alexander," fumed Metternich to Schwarzenberg. "He is more than ever against any operation in Switzerland. We will march there and we will be there – that is best!"[35]

Gneisenau took advantage of this unexpected dissension to open a second round of debates over Allied strategy. The Prussian officer drafted another plan to impress his views on the tsar. Once again he proposed a rapid resumption of offensive operations to surprise Napoleon before he completed his mobilization. Reminiscent of the 1792 invasion plan, Gneisenau called for a joint offensive by the Bohemian and Silesian armies through Metz to Paris. To the north, Bülow and Wintzingerode would conquer the Netherlands while Bernadotte pursued his war with the Danes. Gneisenau resorted to blatant flattery to entice Alexander. "Instead of being satisfied with chasing the enemy from the borders of your empire," he explained to the tsar, "Your Imperial Majesty saved Europe by carrying the war into the heart of Germany. You can rescue Europe once more . . . you are the soul of the union of all people who were oppressed or menaced by France. Your Majesty can still save Europe if you hasten the movement of the army assembled on the Rhine; and you will dictate the peace to your insolent enemy if you strike his forces at the present moment."

Gneisenau also pointed to the crucial issue of timing: "This campaign plan has the advantage of being able to execute it immediately." He assured the Russian monarch that "disorder reigns in the departments on the left bank of the Rhine; the people no longer obey, and the government no longer possesses the power to enforce obedience. The fortresses are denuded of everything. French families flee to Paris, the soldiers desert, and two-thirds of the army is without arms." He concluded that such chaos invited "an immediate invasion of the departments of the left bank of the Rhine and the use of the good will of its inhabitants. Moreover the ice, which will form on the Rhine in the beginning of winter, dictates that we must hasten our operations."[36]

This plan failed to convince its opponents despite the support of the former Prussian chancellor Heinrich Friedrich Karl vom Stein. Now the tsar's principal advisor on German affairs, Stein branded Napoleon "the enemy of the human race" and declared that the shame of the French yoke had to be "washed away in streams of French blood."[37] Although Stein added a powerful voice to the war party, his rants did not prevent Gneisenau's latest proposal from being victimized by the Austrians. Radetzky deemed the advance of such a huge force on a single axis to be impossible. He also judged an advance straight across the middle Rhine as dangerous for three reasons. First, the significant fortress of Mainz would remain in the rear and threaten all communications. Second, the Allied armies would be forced to cross the natural obstacles of the Vosges Mountains and the Moselle and Meuse Rivers. Third, passing through the triple row of Vauban fortresses, which Schwarzenberg's general-quartermaster, Karl Friedrich von Langenau, numbered at 103 between Dunkirk and Huningue, appeared daunting. The tsar likewise exaggerated the strength of the fortress belt that guarded France's eastern frontier and thus did not relish the idea of marching through its midst.[38] "It was reiterated in vain," explains Burghersh, "that the 140 fortresses that surrounded France and which in other times had been of essential service to her defense were a burden in the present reduced state of her military resources: she was utterly unable to garrison and provision them. Such arguments were made to no avail."[39]

After the provisional negotiations with the Swiss proved fruitless and Alexander rejected the Austrian suggestion to force a passage, Gneisenau addressed another memo to the tsar that contained nine key points regarding the necessity of invading the Low Countries (Appendix D). He sent his note first to Knesebeck for comment, with the request that he share its contents with the tsar's adjutant, General Peter Mikhailovich Volkonsky II. The tone of his cover letter to Knesebeck suggests mounting frustration:

> According to the reports that arrived today, Holland, Brabant, and the entire left bank of the Rhine are rife with rebellion. One awaits the crossing of the Rhine with longing. Seven weeks will be lost before the campaign in southern

> France can even start. How much one can accomplish in seven weeks to prepare a defensive you and all of us know from experience. I refer you to the Armistice of Pläswitz. We should immediately attack the Belgian and Batavian states, and designate the attack on southern France as the second act of this new campaign.[40]

Knesebeck did show the memo to Volkonsky but added no support because he disagreed with Gneisenau. Moreover, he returned the memo on 18 November and refused to make any attempt to show it to the tsar. Gneisenau was amazed by his countryman's actions, and the business at Frankfurt began to wear on his mental and physical well-being. "For my part, I live here very lonely and rant in written doctrines, which is not easy," he wrote his wife, Caroline. "At the conferences all scream over one another and things are decided which look good on paper, but for all intents and purposes are impracticable. I am already half-sick from the aggravation and the stuffy atmosphere."[41]

The issue over Switzerland remained and ushered in a third phase of military planning as Metternich sought to adjust Allied strategy Austrian national interests. The Knesebeck–Austrian plan called for the Bohemian Army to march through Switzerland, invade southern France, and conduct a general offensive in unison with Wellington and Hiller. This plan would have enabled Metternich to correlate his diplomatic objectives with limited military operations – as opposed to Gneisenau's general offensive – and would have served Austrian policy in regards to Switzerland and Italy. However, when this scheme appeared to lose support, Schwarzenberg scrapped the invasion of southern France. Despite the initial enthusiasm over the idea, the Austrian General Staff, like Gneisenau, questioned the likelihood of actually linking with Wellington's army. It also expressed displeasure with Hiller's unproductive offensive in Italy by replacing him with General Heinrich von Bellegarde and opening negotiations with Napoleon's brother-in-law, King Joachim Murat of Naples. Furthermore, the Austrian staff doubted that an invasion of France's southern departments would bring Napoleon to the peace table. As for Metternich, he measured every move within the parameters of his contest with Alexander. By opening the new campaign with an invasion of southern France, the Austrians would not be able to conceal their intentions to occupy all of Switzerland. After the tsar's vehement opposition to the suggested violation of Swiss neutrality, Metternich could expect him to veto any plan that called for the Allies to move through the length of the Alpine state.[42]

As the deadlock ensued, Frederick William made one last attempt to stop the Allies from crossing the Rhine and instead limit themselves to the liberation of Holland. He dictated his proposal to Knesebeck, who in turn drafted a memo to the tsar that contained his own thoughts as well as the king's. Knesebeck did not oppose crossing of the Rhine but feared the passage

would be too risky without possession of Switzerland. As long as Switzerland remained neutral, he viewed a campaign in France as unfeasible. Instead, he suggested awaiting the outcome of negotiations before invading France, because an offensive across the Rhine would gain the French government the moral support of the people. Frederick William presented this memo to Alexander on 7 December, but nothing became of it; even Metternich was committed to resuming hostilities.[43]

On 7 December, Radetzky likewise submitted yet another plan of campaign. Accordingly, the majority of the Bohemian army would cross the upper Rhine to bypass the sources of the Moselle and the Meuse Rivers and advance between the Vosges and the Jura Mountains to the Plateau of Langres.[44] Bernadotte's army again received the task of liberating the Low Countries, but Blücher would cross the middle Rhine and proceed through Metz to attract the enemy's attention and thus facilitate Schwarzenberg's march. If it appeared that Schwarzenberg could envelop the enemy's main army, the Bohemian army would advance to Troyes. Furthermore, to prevent the resources of the southern departments from reaching Paris, he would detach a portion of his army to Orléans. Yet if Blücher could execute the envelopment with better results, he would summon Bülow and Wintzingerode from the Netherlands and launch a general advance on Paris through the Marne Valley. According to the projected time-tables, Schwarzenberg would reach Langres on 15 January – the same day that Blücher should arrive at Metz. All Cossacks and available Streifkorps would immediately cross the Rhine, hinder French mobilization, and interrupt communications. Paris became the goal of further operations that would be determined later. On the basis of this plan, the Allies would invade France across a front that stretched from the North Sea to Switzerland.

Langenau supported the change in strategy, claiming that the Plateau of Langres dominated France and would allow the Allies to take control of the entire country – Knesebeck agreed. The Meuse, the Marne, and the tributaries of the Seine all flowed from Langres to the North Sea, whereas the tributary of the Saône flowed from the plateau to the Mediterranean. An army that crossed the upper Rhine could skirt the Vosges and the Moselle and circumvent the Meuse and the Marne at their sources. By taking a position at Langres to threaten the French interior, the Austrians hoped to avoid a bloody battle and force Napoleon to negotiate seriously. Finally, with Langres as the objective, the Bohemian army needed only to proceed through northern Switzerland to reach the bridges that spanned the upper Rhine. The Austrians hoped this concession would satisfy the tsar.[45]

Schwarzenberg changed the goal of the advance from southern France to Langres, yet he remained committed to cooperating with Wellington and Bellegarde. Alexander's eager support of a union with the Anglo–Portuguese army prompted Schwarzenberg to maintain this element of the previous

campaign plan, which gave "the appearance of a grand and sweeping war of annihilation."[46] At this point, however, the Allied generalissimo did not have a clear idea of how he would achieve his objectives. Upon reaching Langres, would he proceed toward Paris or attempt to unite with the British commander? Schwarzenberg's later halt at Langres indicates that he had not fully considered this question and most likely had proceeded in the hope that peace would be concluded before the Bohemian army reached Langres.

Although the Austrians appeared to forego the occupation of Switzerland in favor of passing through Basel to facilitate the Rhine passage, this was not the case. Radetzky had referred to the possession of Switzerland as "indispensable."[47] In late November, Schwarzenberg had authorized his subordinates to advance through Switzerland in mid-December. Alexander, however, persuaded Francis to honor his decision regarding the inviolability of Swiss neutrality and the kaiser directed Schwarzenberg to countermand his orders.[48] Schwarzenberg conceded for the moment, but when he left Frankfurt on 9 December for the upper Rhine, he was still determined to march through Switzerland.[49]

Alexander's entourage opposed the plan. In particular, Jomini drafted a long rebuttal of the proposed cooperation with Wellington and Bellegarde. "Thus I will summarize to the best of my ability," wrote the former French staff officer. "First, the armies of Italy and Wellington only can be regarded as divisions or secondary armies, and it is not necessary for them to operate simultaneously with us. Second, the armies on the Rhine cannot be used for an invasion of inner France because it is impossible for them to extend too far beyond their base of operations on the Rhine in the face of a captain as energetic and bold as Napoleon, having the fortresses that he does in his possession. Third, it is necessary to have at least 200,000 men for the campaign [in France] not including the corps of observation on the Rhine and those in Holland."[50]

Regarding Switzerland, Alexander recognized the advantages of invading France from this direction, but still refused to violate Swiss neutrality. He insisted that the Bohemian army advance to Langres by marching through Badenese territory to cross the Rhine downstream of Basel. Resorting to what the Russian historian Bogdanovich refers to as "trickery," Metternich generated support in Bern for Austrian intervention in Switzerland. He then convinced Francis to authorize Schwarzenberg to march through the Alpine state. Metternich explained to the kaiser that the majority of the Swiss wanted the Allies to occupy their state to protect them from Napoleon. The Austrians also insisted that the Allies needed Basel to secure their communications. Alexander finally sanctioned the use of Basel on the condition that Allied forces move no further into Swiss territory. This concession did not satisfy Metternich, who instructed Schwarzenberg to move the army to points of passage further upstream from Basel. From there, Schwarzenberg could unexpectedly march into Swiss territory upon the request of the pro-Austrian Swiss faction

before the tsar could counter. Without the tsar's prior knowledge, Schwarzenberg instructed the commander of his advance guard to open negotiations with Swiss military authorities.

According to the final version of the Allied invasion plan, the Bohemian army would advance from Basel to Langres. To the north, Bülow and Wintzingerode would invade the Netherlands. Blücher's army, reinforced by Kleist's corps, would operate between these two Allied forces. After Blücher left behind part of his army to besiege Mainz, he could either cross the Rhine at Kaub and advance through Trier and Saarlouis or cross the Rhine upstream of Mainz and advance through Kaiserslautern to cover Schwarzenberg's communications. Essentially this plan allowed the Bohemian army to avoid most of the French fortresses that guarded the Rhine. In addition, by making for the gap between the Jura and Vosges Mountains, the majority of the army would be spared from crossing difficult terrain in the midst of winter. By extending his left wing southward, Schwarzenberg would be able to sever French communication with Italy through the Simplon and Mount Cenis Passes. Such a threat could even induce the French to withdraw from Italy, thus allowing the Austrian army to cross the Alps, pacify southern France, and link Schwarzenberg's left with Wellington's right.[51]

To Gneisenau and his supporters, the fact that six or seven weeks would be lost while the Bohemian army maneuvered through Switzerland to the French frontier remained incomprehensible. "I am inconsolable over this inactivity," complains Stewart to Gneisenau, "your army must go to Flanders without further delay, while the Main [Bohemian] Army operates on the upper Rhine and the crown prince in Holland."[52] The Prussians felt that the outcome of the war depended on denying Napoleon the time to raise a new army and prepare his defenses (Appendix E). "We remained idle for seven costly weeks," Gneisenau later wrote. "My proposals were to deny the enemy rest, to immediately cross the Rhine, and to hinder all troop concentrations in France. Had one seized this decision, we would be in Paris today and dictating the peace. But there was a lack of decisiveness. The diplomats and many others loved Frankfurt, and this place almost became our Capula."[53] Clausewitz argues that the Allied armies should have rested on the Rhine for only eight days before crossing the river in mid-November. "Once one had decided not to cross the middle Rhine before January, the march through Breisgau and Switzerland was seen as nothing more than a waste of time and to an extent useless," notes the philosopher of war.[54] "Time, however, was of vital consequence in the proposed operations," notes British historian Frederick Maycock, "though Blücher and Gneisenau alone of the senior commanders seemed fully to recognize the fact, and the prolonged delay caused by the inability of the Allies to decide on a plan of campaign and by Schwarzenberg's unnecessary march, undoubtedly enabled Napoleon to offer a much more effective resistance than would otherwise have been possible."[55]

Gneisenau adequately summarized his frustration in a letter to Colonel Hermann von Boyen, chief of staff of the Prussian III Corps: "I studied these diplomats during my stay in Frankfurt. From my interactions with them I have once again learned [that] if the general does not sweep them away, they will make the most ludicrous moves. To go to Paris and dictate peace there, as we must, is hysterical audacity to them. . . . Not only diplomats, but generals and regents think this way as well."[56] He saved his most powerful argument for a 20 November note to the king:

> So far Your Majesty's arms and those of the Allies have been very fortunate, but we have now reached a point where the choice is between two evils. Should we remain on the Rhine, allow the troops time to recuperate, and await our needs and reinforcements? Or should we make yet another effort and allow the enemy no rest in order to secure the fruits of our victory and to dictate a durable peace? These are now the two most important questions. Should we do the first, we will provide time for the enemy to assemble recruits and to make these recruits combat-ready. A few months will pass and we will again see numerous armies appear, with whom our brave soldiers will have to battle again. The course of this campaign has taught us many times that we must atone with blood for what we neglect through oversight. This consideration establishes the present issue as a matter of conscience. On the other hand, should we continue to pursue our course of victory, we will thus inflict hardships on our respectable soldiers, who already have endured so much deprivation. *Nevertheless, the hope that through a campaign of perhaps two months time we will be spared two years of war, rivers of blood, and uncertain battles that can once again threaten Your Majesty's throne, allows me to look past this reproach regarding the hardships.*[57]

Both contemporaries and historians have passed judgment over the Allied invasion plan and the objective of Langres. According to Stewart, the colorful Bernadotte "said that if the plan was that of the tsar of Russia, or of any military man of great character, he would, bad as he thought it, be disposed to acquiesce; but he knew it was either the offspring of the ideas of those *Faircuis*, alluding, I apprehend, to the Russian General Staff, who had yet to be instructed in war as much as he was; or else a plan which Austria was anxious to grasp to recover her hereditary states in Italy, to liberate that country, and to forward her own objectives rather than the common cause, or else it would not have been adopted."[58] More serious and less self-absorbing is Clausewitz's assessment. He criticizes the plan by arguing that the point of attack should have been designated to correspond with the objective of the operation: the French army and Paris. Although the shortest route ran from Mainz through Metz and Châlons-en-Champagne to Paris, the combined Allied armies could not utilize one road. Therefore, three "great columns" should have been formed to cross the Rhine between Koblenz and Mannheim to strike the three shortest highways leading to Paris. According to Clausewitz, the first column would

advance from Trier through Luxembourg, the second from Kaiserslautern upon Metz, and the third from Phalsbourg through Nancy. Surprisingly, he does claim that the "main characteristics" of the Allied operations plan were very similar to his own, but that "one did not need to cross the Rhine through Switzerland . . . in order to establish his line of communication on the upper Rhine."[59] Maycock notes that the invasion plan "had several weak points." The offensive would take place along such an enormous front, and thus "a dangerous dispersion . . . was inevitable and an accurately timed cooperation almost impossible. Hence Napoleon would almost certainly be afforded an opportunity to fall on some isolated portion of the force and defeat the Allies in detail."[60] According to French historian Ignace Campana, "this strange plan, which had the effect of dispersing the two armies along a front of several hundred kilometers, planted the seeds of the mistakes that Napoleon would forcibly exploit to defeat his adversaries, despite their formidable numbers."[61] Another French historian, General Guillaume Vaudoncourt, makes the weak claim that it was Napoleon's cordon system that ultimately dictated Allied operations and strategy. "It was according to these considerations that the Coalition established its plan of campaign. The direction of their columns were fixed by the disposition of the defensive system of the French frontiers." Vaudoncourt also states that "the plan of invasion contained one major strategic fault that cannot be excused and which was certainly caused by the Coalition's belief in the weakness of the means that France possessed to oppose it. There remained a huge gap between the two Allied armies, which initially was around twenty-five leagues."[62]

Writing on the eve of the First World War, the German General Staff historian Rudolf Friederich notes that "the military value of the Plateau of Langres marks the folly of the pre-Napoleonic military theories, and at the same time demonstrates how little had been learned from the events of the past decade."[63] His colleague in the historical section of the German General Staff, Janson, contends that the Austrians believed it would be easier to descend on and master the lowlands of France from Langres: "Without striking a blow the enemy would be forced to abandon all those river lines, which would be enveloped, in order to take positions further rearwards, where he would have to confront the Allies as they descended from their higher position, which is always a force multiplier; it was not possible to find a position whose front was more covered by significant rivers than this."[64] Janson also provides an interesting, yet typical Prusso–German view of the Austrians: "The politics fully corresponded to the tendency of the then Austrian way of war, which in the Napoleonic Wars had learned nothing and had forgotten nothing. So it was touch and go if warfare would take a step backwards and if one would move into winter quarters as during the Seven Years' War."[65] Commenting on the Austrians, the German historian Roloff maintains that "all still lived in the theories of the eighteenth century and sought the decision not so much in

battle and the defeat of the enemy's forces as in maneuver and the occupation of a so-called master point. To them, such a master point was the Plateau of Langres in France."[66] A more recent assessment by the late Gunther Rothenberg states: "Altogether, the plan exemplified classic eighteenth century maneuver strategy designed to avoid bloody actions while exerting pressure on the enemy to come to terms. The plan was sound, and if Prussian historians have criticized it as 'timid, hesitant, and old-fashioned', it served the political ends of Austrian policy that neither desired to rout Napoleon totally nor to achieve needless and costly military triumphs."[67]

Regarding logistics, the troubling prospect of feeding 200,000 men in hostile territory during the winter influenced the campaign plan considerably. "It was emphasized," explains Burghersh, "that the weakest point of the French frontier always had been acknowledged to be on the side of Switzerland; that Austria had suffered too much in the first years of the Revolutionary War by operating from the Netherlands and the lower Rhine; that the natural line for her to adopt was the one proposed, receiving her supplies from her own provinces by the Danube, and the direct communications [with Austria] through Bavaria."[68]

With France defenseless, Napoleon would not have been able to stop the Coalition's superior forces. The Allies could have sent numerous columns marching on the highways that led directly to Paris. At most, the Allies needed 150,000 men to continue the pursuit across the Rhine in early November. After driving through the remnants of the French army, Paris would have fallen – and with it Napoleon's power and prestige. Instead, the Allies granted Napoleon two months – all of November and December – to prepare his defenses and mobilize new conscripts. Moreover, the tsar and Schwarzenberg chose a roundabout detour as the invasion route for Schwarzenberg's army rather than the closer roads that led from the middle Rhine to the heart of France. By exaggerating the threat posed by the French fortress chain, the Allies deprived themselves of surprise and mass. Because of their weak garrisons and dilapidated conditions, these fortresses hardly deserved such concern. The Austrians believed that upon reaching Langres, Napoleon would immediately conclude a peace. If not, they planned to conduct a war of attrition by once again implementing the Trachenberg Plan. Rather than confront the emperor in a decisive battle, his rear, flanks, communications, and detached subordinates would be targeted.

In the final analysis of the great council of war at Frankfurt, the opposition Gneisenau encountered was based on very human factors. Despite Napoleon's recent catastrophic setbacks, many of the Allied generals and statesmen still stood in awe of the French emperor, and many shuddered at the thought of invading France itself. "If the masses who are today under arms are commanded by a single general and are animated by a single sentiment," wrote Jomini to the tsar, "I believe this general should not hesitate to make a

resolution. But as my opinion is based on the facts and the interests of a great monarch and prince are at stake, I must tremble at the consequences of an invasion with the elements that we have and those that we will have to fight. In this state of things I believe that a prudent combination of well-based offensive operations is preferable to that which could expose us to great hazards."[69] "We must further consider," explains the tsar's secretary, Alexander Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, "that the Allied generals . . . were in many respects inferior to him who was looked upon as the first captain of the age, and who was master of his actions and accountable to no one."[70] "The name of Bonaparte was still appalling," adds Burghersh, "and the idea of attacking France, defended by his talents, considerably staggered many of those who were about to be called upon to do so. There was general fear and hesitation at the prospect of attacking this nation, which had put forth such resources and which, for the defense of its own soil, appeared invincible in the early part of its revolutionary career."[71] "One also must not forget," warns Bogdanovich, "the misfortune earlier coalitions suffered by invading France; thus both the diplomats as well as the army commanders gazed with suspicion on any offensive operation; the unsuccessful campaign in Champagne [1792] and the entire string of victories that Napoleon achieved in the previous campaigns still stood before them as a bogey-man."[72]

3

The Frankfurt Proposals

Contention over military operations must be viewed within the larger context of Coalition politics, national self-interest, and the grand strategy of the three eastern powers. Before the battle of Leipzig, the general objective of the Alliance was to liberate central Europe from French control. Yet the attainment of this goal would provide only *one* essential component of each power's complex and unique grand strategy. Aside from Metternich's subtle undermining of the Kalisch–Breslau agreement, no serious dissension in Coalition politics could be perceived while the three continental powers cooperated to complete this core task. However, upon reaching the Rhine, they could not agree on their next and ultimate objective: should they continue the war to overthrow Napoleon or should they negotiate a peace with the French emperor? At this moment, the facade of the concert ended, and the masks were torn off. Liberating Germany provided only one step, albeit a monumental step, toward the achievement of greater national security objectives. Russian – and by extension Prussian – as well as Austrian grand strategy demanded more than reaching the Rhine could provide, although Metternich perceived he was much closer to the realization of his goals than Alexander. As a result, Coalition politics immediately eclipsed both military operations and military cooperation. Naturally, Metternich wanted the Alliance to follow a course that reflected Austria's grand strategy and was conducive to acquiring Austrian national security objectives. The same held true for the tsar. In a letter to Münster, Gneisenau describes the relationship between Allied politics, grand strategy, and military operations:

> I will describe for you briefly the political situation although none of the monarchs nor their ministers have expressed themselves publicly. Tsar Alexander will retain all of Poland and, out of revenge, the king of Saxony will give us all his land. The Austrians do not want this. This has yet to be declared openly

> of course, but we can perceive this from many signs. Austria's intentions are thus: they expect to gain control of a large part of Italy. For this reason there will be an invasion of southern France from Switzerland, and thus little value has been placed on the conquest of Holland, which alone can secure North Germany.[1]

Theoretically, the three Allied monarchs were at the heart of the decision-making process. None of the three sovereigns served as commander in chief, which Metternich secured for his countryman, Schwarzenberg. Although his army and the headquarters of the monarchs separated many times, each sovereign attempted to influence operations either by assuming leadership in a certain matter or by direct influence on the units of his own national army. Of the three monarchs, Francis made himself least conspicuous, preferring to have Metternich press Austrian policy in Allied councils. Frederick William, who Metternich accused of being "susceptible to petty fears," labored under the anxiety that an Allied mistake, or worse, Allied failure, would result in the loss of his crown.[2] Consequently, he harbored little sympathy for the impetuosity of the war party, among whom Blücher and several Prussian officers were counted. Rather than invade France, the grand-nephew of Frederick the Great preferred to negotiate a peace. His closest adviser, Knesebeck, failed to provide a balance between the king's prudence and Blücher's impulsiveness. Frederick William endeavored to conserve the Prussian army, which he would need for leverage at the peace table – a view that would prove the king to be far more insightful than Blücher. Moreover, as crown prince of Prussia, he had participated in the campaigns of 1792 and 1793. These operations firmly impressed on him the idea that despite the appearance of weakness, France could prove unexpectedly formidable.

The intrepid tsar provided the antithesis to the Prussian king. "Tsar Alexander is always conciliatory, benevolent, and steadfast;" wrote Stein, "he inspires confidence and a sentiment of devotion in all those who approach him. The king [of Prussia] is somewhat crabby, more or less snubbing those who see him."[3] In the pursuit of his ultimate prize, the tsar did not refrain from interfering with Schwarzenberg's leadership. Alexander also managed to redress Frederick William's reiterated misgivings and convince him to voice support for Russian objectives.[4] Consequently, Metternich emerged as his archrival for control of the Coalition.

Alexander provided the driving force at Allied headquarters and found a natural connection with Blücher, even if the respective motives of each varied at times. "His decided opinion always favored pushing the war to the last extremity," explains Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, "and he maintained it despite the general wish of the foreign cabinets. By rejecting peace, Alexander stood alone in the Allied camp, as did Napoleon in France."[5] Metternich would have easily outmaneuvered the "war party," represented by Blücher,

Gneisenau, Stein, and Münster if not for the tsar.[6] Unmitigated hatred of Napoleon and a boundless desire for revenge formed the bond between Alexander and the Prussians of Blücher's entourage. Thiers offers an interesting French perspective regarding this relationship:

> They [the Prussians] were not content with winning over their own king, they enticed Tsar Alexander with flattery, calling him the king of kings, the Supreme Chief of the Coalition, by attributing to him the great decisions of the war, by promising to conduct him to Paris; all of which excited the vanity of this prince to a delirious height. Alexander, complaisant by nature and by calculation, adding to his natural amiability a continual care to flatter the passions of all, cajoled the Prussians, whose courage and patriotism he did not cease to praise, in order to have them on his side against the Austrians, of whom he was jealous.[7]

At the heart of the competition between Alexander and Metternich festered long-standing rivalries, national security objectives, and the inherent difficulties of a multinational coalition. During the spring campaign of 1813, the three original members of the Sixth Coalition – Russia, Prussia, and Great Britain – forged their objectives into an alliance. Alexander desired to reconstitute Poland into a Romanov possession. Frederick William would surrender his Polish provinces to the Russians and be compensated with Saxony to reestablish Prussia's pre-1806 material strength. In return for allowing its allies a free hand in central Europe, London could do as it pleased with Spain, Portugal, Sicily, Belgium, and Holland. Regarding Great Britain's insistence on "maritime rights" and possession of the colonies snatched from France and its satellites, the two eastern powers had little interest and even less to say as long as France was rendered incapable of further aggression.[8]

Austria's accession to the Sixth Coalition in August 1813 upset this balance. Beyond providing a commander in chief and 300,000 troops for the Allied armies, Vienna introduced new and complex issues such as the fate of Italy and Illyria. Metternich initially alienated the British by attempting to detach their objectives from those of the Coalition. Furthermore, he pursued a twofold policy that contradicted Russo–Prussian war aims. On one hand, the Austrian foreign minister wanted to create a balance between the great powers by using France as a counterweight against Russia. On the other, he wanted to establish an equilibrium of power among all European states: the powerful and the weak, the victors and the vanquished.[9] To counter Russia, Metternich needed a strong, preferably Napoleonic, France. To establish an equilibrium, Metternich had to thwart Russo–Prussian designs on Poland and Saxony as well as any other plans of retribution Berlin entertained regarding the Third Germany.

Metternich started implementing this dual policy before the battle of Leipzig. September's Teplitz Accords undermined the Kalisch–Breslau

Figure 4. Prince Clemens Lothar Wensceslas von Metternich (1773–1859). Austrian foreign minister and chancellor.

agreements regarding Poland and Saxony by stating that Allied war aims included the "entire and absolute independence" of the German states.[10] One month later, he assumed control over Allied occupation policy in the former Rheinbund in order to lay the groundwork for a postwar Germany that reflected Austrian interests.[11] Despite a long history of opposition, the Austrians and Bavarians signed the Treaty of Ried on 8 October 1813.[12] Historian Paul Schroeder describes the treaty as Metternich's "greatest victory in this campaign," and Nipperdey adds that the treaty "was to be of the utmost significance for the future of Germany."[13] With the Habsburg emperor's guarantee of Bavaria's sovereignty, King Max-Joseph entered the war not as a member of the Sixth Coalition but as Austria's ally. In German matters, Bavaria would be Austria's partner to frustrate Prussian plans for redemption. This diplomatic coup established the pattern for Napoleon's remaining German satellites to defect. Some in the Allied camp recognized Metternich's self-serving motives. "The arrangements made with the Bavarians tie our hands and are harmful to the general measures to be taken," wrote Stein to Hardenberg.[14] Yet Metternich's German policy fell completely in line with his strategy. Preferring stability and legitimacy over revolution, chaos, and upheaval, the Austrian minister purposefully maintained Napoleon's territorial reorganization of Germany. He understood that any attempt to make considerable changes to the German status quo would destabilize the equilibrium of

central Europe and upset the balance of power, possibly even leading to a war between the great powers.[15]

On 30 October, Stein wrote a memorandum calling for harsh measures against the German princes who remained loyal to Napoleon, yet the Rheinbund collapsed shortly after the Allies reached the Rhine.[16] Of its three kings, Max-Joseph of Bavaria already had allied with Austria and King Frederick August of Saxony was taken prisoner at Leipzig after the battle. King Frederick of Württemberg signed the Treaty of Fulda – a convention similar to the Treaty of Ried – on 2 November.[17] Throughout this month, Metternich used the Treaty of Ried as a model to entice other former Rheinbund states into the Austrian camp by concluding similar conventions with Würzburg, Saxe-Coburg, Hesse-Darmstadt, Baden, Nassau, and Hesse-Kassel. Promises of protection, the retention of royal titles, and guarantees of territorial integrity provided a strong motive for Napoleon's former allies to base their future on Austrian benevolence. In essence, the Confederation of the Rhine would not be conquered and the Napoleonic reorganization of Germany became part of the postwar European order. The guarantee of individual sovereignty and the recognition of the historic issue of states' rights earned Metternich the ire of nineteenth-century German nationalist historians, who viewed his policy as a major setback for German political development.[18]

Metternich's masterful comprehension of the political landscape earned him considerable advantages not only in laying the groundwork for a postwar Europe that satisfied Austrian national security objectives but also in the perpetual struggle to restrain his allies. Wilson recounts a dinner hosted by Metternich on the night of 5 November during which the British officer sat next to the Austrian minister and the two engaged in a "very interesting conversation. He [Metternich] said that if the Allies would be cordial as to their real objects and put confidence in him, he would engage to make a satisfactory peace or deprive Bonaparte of the support of France, which alone could enable him to make the necessary efforts." The British officer recalls that Metternich "adds to the talents of a minister all the accomplishments of a liberal host, a gallant gentleman, and a *bel esprit*; so his table and his soirees are very delightful points of rendezvous."[19]

Whereas Great Britain's objectives remained relatively consistent throughout 1813, success on the battlefield substantially inflated those of Prussia and Russia. According to historian Paul Sweet, Hardenberg appointed his chief assistant, Wilhelm von Humboldt, "to articulate and promote a policy on the future of Germany that would reflect Prussia's perception of its interests and role as a great power." Sweet asserts that Allied victories in Germany, "which the Prussian army ascribed largely to its own prowess, had given rise to the illusion that Prussia, as the paladin of nationalist hopes in Germany, could impose its will on the settlement to come."[20] However, Metternich's alliances with the former Rheinbund princes shrewdly prevented the Prussians from exacting

revenge on the Third Germany by treating its states as occupied territories and dictating the future of their political existence. For example, Metternich's guarantee to Max-Joseph in the Treaty of Ried regarding the retention of the provinces of Ansbach and Bayreuth as well as Bavarian expansion north of the Main River constituted what historian Enno Kraehe describes as "a blow to Prussia's aspirations comparable to the threat to Austria inherent in the Saxon question. On these grounds alone Hardenberg had reason to feel cheated by the treaty." Hardenberg demanded the reduction of the German states enlarged by Napoleon "for the aggrandizement of Austria and Prussia and to facilitate the partitioning of Germany between the two powers." Whereas Stein attempted to minimize Allied aggrandizement in the Third Germany, Hardenberg supported Austrian hegemony in the south to gain support for Prussian preponderance in the north. He planned to annex Saxony, most of Berg, parts of Westphalia, and to create a Prussian-dominated federal union.

On 21 October 1813, Austria, Prussia, and Russia had signed agreements creating the Central Executive Department for German Territories. The Allies vested this agency with authority to raise funds, mobilize troops, and draw supplies. Named the director of this body, Stein also received the dual task of mobilizing the resources of the former Rheinbund states to assist the Allied war effort and of temporarily governing conquered German states that had no government or whose rulers had not yet joined the Coalition. In his vision of Germany's future, Stein sought a tripartite arrangement. Mecklenburg, Holstein, and Saxony would go to Prussia, while Austria would be restored to its 1805 status and given the province of Ansbach. For the remaining German states, Stein hoped to create a third entity that had its own central government "with power over war and peace, foreign and military affairs, coinage and tariffs." Kraehe explains that "there was to be a Habsburg emperor, but the connection with Austria would be that of a personal union only. The three parts – Austria, Prussia, and 'Germany' – each with a population of about ten million, were then to be bound together in a perpetual defensive alliance."[21]

Metternich extended his hand to the German states as part of his efforts to undermine the "rabid nationalism" of the German patriots led by Stein, to ensure further that the conflict with France did not become a peoples' war, and to undermine Russian influence in Germany. He feared the creation of a German national state that could contribute to the dissolution of the Habsburg supranational empire or the European balance of power. Indifferent to Hardenberg's suggestion that Vienna establish hegemony over south Germany, Metternich envisioned Austria becoming an European rather than a Germanic power in the postwar order.[22]

In addition, the Russian colossus always remained a concern. Kraehe notes that if Metternich "now sought to appease the Rheinbund sovereigns rather than punish them, the reason was not dread of revolution or German unity, but rather fear of the limitless ambitions of Russia."[23] Alexander's interest in

liberating Germany manifested itself early in the war with the Proclamation of Kalisch. Issued by Russian High Command on 25 March 1813, it contained the Russian and Prussian pledged of support for a united Germany.[24] This document called on the princes and peoples of Germany to accept the tsar's protection and lead in creating a free and independent Germany. Thus the aim of the war was to dissolve the Confederation of the Rhine and restore a "rejuvenated united empire with a constitution 'based on the inherent spirit of the German people'."[25] It promised the destruction of Napoleon's German allies should they refuse. Although the Teplitz Accords eliminated the objective of creating a united Germany, Metternich viewed Alexander's German policy with extreme suspicion. Brendan Simms claims that "by 1811 dynastic and political links between the Tsar and the southern German states, especially with Württemberg, represented a kind of *Rheinbundist* insurance policy against the collapse of French power and the renewal of Austro–Prussian tutelage."[26] "With Bonaparte destroyed," continues Kraehe, "Alexander would be the sole mediator in a German Reich and could resume his former role as protector of uncles, cousins, and in-laws in the middle states. What was important was the recovery of his following in the Third Germany without the competition from Bonaparte and without driving Austria from the Coalition."[27]

The guarantee to respect the sovereignty of these states and to uphold the deeply rooted German tradition of states' rights enabled Metternich to thwart any attempt to submerge the former members of the Rheinbund into a federally unified Germany. Nor did he wish to resurrect the antediluvian Holy Roman Empire. Instead, he wanted to base German and thus central European security on what historian Robert Billinger refers to as a "confederation of German princes and free cities dedicated to the preservation of the security of the individual German states." Although a German imperial prince himself, Metternich placed Habsburg national security above any sentiments for the German fatherland. He saw that his main concern, the survival of the Habsburg empire, could be advanced by turning the German states into a "central European defense community [to serve] as a barrier against France and Russia and as the keystone of continental equilibrium."[28] By the end of the year, Metternich eliminated any prospect of creating a unified Germany, leaving Humboldt to lament: "For German matters Metternich has . . . little feeling. If it turns out as he wishes, there will be pieces of Germany without . . . any connection to each other, or at the most a very loose one. . . . In my view, this is pernicious to the highest degree, for I believe that there must be a closer bond linking them together. To tie this knot, I feel, is going to be difficult, and it will not hold together forever, but nevertheless it can to some extent keep alive the idea that Germans are one people."[29]

Any discussion of Russian war aims must begin with Tsar Alexander. Contemporaries and historians alike have left many colorful descriptions of

this fascinating individual. Gordon Craig provides one of the most biting caricatures: "Alexander was neurotic and possibly schizophrenic. He went through life haunted by a sense of guilt incurred when he was elevated to the throne over the murdered corpse of his father, and his attempts to escape from this by posing alternately as the scourge and as the savior of Europe, by indulging in paroxysms of idealistic reform and frenzies of sexual excess, and, finally, by giving his support to experiments in religious mysticism, failed to ease his troubled spirit or to prevent his eventual collapse . . . into the depths of manic depression."[30] Henry Kissinger adds: "At the same time mystic and cunning, idealistic and calculating, he presented an ambivalent mixture of universal principles justifying specifically Russian gains, of high motives supporting aspirations considered selfish in lesser men."[31] "The tsar," explains historian Steven Ross, "a cunning mystic and a Machiavellian idealist, who was convinced that his goals were identical with universal justice and that universal justice was identical with Russian strategic and diplomatic interests, apparently was planning to organize what he regarded as inevitable victory in such a manner as to leave Russia the arbiter of Europe."[32] Schwarzenberg perhaps states it best in a letter to Metternich: "There is no doubt that the word enigma explains the pertinacity of our dear weak Alexander."[33] Metternich himself bluntly recorded in his dubious memoirs: "The tsar of Russia, prepossessed by revolutionary ideas . . . entertained plans that would have led the world to ruin."[34] Finally, Nipperdey concludes that "the tsar styled himself as a liberator. His actions were, of course, bound with the power interests of Russia. No politician could predict how Russian power interests and the Russian ideology of liberation – especially considering the Tsar's unpredictability – would develop."[35]

The tsar convinced himself that he would risk continuing the war without the Austrians. At that moment, the Russians and Prussians together possessed adequate combat power to invade France without the Austrians. Metternich undoubtedly realized this, and, once again, his political acumen led him to an accurate evaluation of the situation. Time became crucial to Metternich: peace with Napoleon had to be achieved before Alexander invaded France without Austrian participation. Persuading Napoleon to accept peace and restraining the tsar became Metternich's primary objectives in the winter of 1813–14.[36]

As for peace with Napoleon, the Allies initially ignored their first opportunity to open negotiations when he proposed an armistice to his father-in-law, Francis, on 17 October during the battle of Leipzig. In discussing the possibility of peace with the captured Austrian corps commander, General Maximilian von Merveldt, Napoleon appeared disposed to surrender control over all of Germany and perhaps Italy as well. Yet he insisted the British presented the true obstacles to peace. Bonaparte believed London would attempt to limit the French fleet to an unacceptable thirty ships of the line.[37]

Figure 5. Alexander I (1777–1825), tsar of Russia.

Less than two weeks later, on 27 October, Metternich met with the tsar and the British ambassador to Austria, George Hamilton Gordon, Lord Aberdeen. They agreed to reply to Napoleon's overtures by means of a captured French chargé d'affaires, Nicolas-Auguste St. Aignan. Metternich and Aberdeen negotiated the details with Russian Foreign Minister Nesselrode; the Prussians were not consulted. Humboldt, the Prussian ambassador to Vienna, attempted to participate, but Metternich informed him that Hardenberg, who had not yet reached Frankfurt, already had deferred to Austria's judgment in this matter. Yet after Hardenberg arrived, Metternich ignored him as well.

During these three-way talks, Aberdeen sided with Metternich to oppose Nesselrode's insistence on harsh peace terms. Furthermore, Aberdeen committed an unforgivable error in the eyes of the British cabinet by agreeing that London would negotiate maritime rights – a point British statesmen had steadfastly refused to discuss. Metternich instructed St. Aignan to convey an oral summary of an informal conversation between the Austrian and Russian ministers on the evening of 9 November; by design Aberdeen stumbled on the meeting and added Great Britain's supposed concessions.

To be sure, Aberdeen committed a gigantic faux pas of which many attempts have been made to explain both the cause and the effect. Regarding

the former, British historian Charles Webster claims that Aberdeen "had been deeply moved by the terrible scenes that he had witnessed. The ride across the Leipzig battlefield, while the screams of the wounded lying amidst the masses of dead fell unheeded on the ears of the cavalcade, made an indelible impression on the sensitive nature of the young envoy and affected all his future life. He realized the horror of war as no other British minister has ever done, and was more than ready to listen to Metternich's proposals."[38] "For three or four miles the ground is covered with bodies of men and horses, many not dead," wrote Aberdeen himself after the battle of Leipzig. "Wounded wretches unable to crawl, crying for water amidst heaps of putrefying bodies. Their screams are heard at an immense distance, and still ring in my ears."[39]

Regarding the consequences of Aberdeen's agreement to negotiate maritime rights: "it was a question in which the mediation of any ally with Great Britain could not be accepted," explains Charles Stewart, "and it was still less a question which Great Britain would ever discuss at a general congress."[40] According to Kissinger: "In his eagerness to gain the glory of pacifying Europe, Aberdeen forgot that no power can agree to negotiate about what it considers the condition of its existence."[41] Rory Muir agrees, stating that "where Castlereagh was willing to make peace to satisfy the Allies, Aberdeen was positively eager: He was genuinely horrified by war, and he wanted to go home with all the *éclat* of having negotiated a peace settlement."[42] Nevertheless, disagreement exists over Aberdeen's complicity with Metternich. Schroeder contends that Aberdeen "expressly reserved Britain's position on the maritime code, but did not try to stop the mission."[43] "Aberdeen," adds Nicolson, "while making verbal reservations regarding this formula, did not reject it completely." Moreover, Nicolson claims that St. Aignan himself twisted the meaning of the offer to insinuate that the British would accept French claims regarding free trade and navigation.[44] Aside from the subsequent historiography, Foreign Minister Castlereagh made it perfectly clear to his young subordinate how the British government felt over the issue of maritime rights: "At all times, a maritime question touches us to the quick."[45]

St. Aignan left for Paris on the 10th and arrived four days later; Napoleon received him on the 15th. The Allies insisted that Napoleon withdraw behind France's "natural" frontiers prior to the commencement of negotiations. St. Aignan's report to Napoleon, which contains the details of the conversation he had with the Allied ministers, states: "The Coalition powers have unanimously agreed that France must retain its integrity and be contained within its natural boundaries, which are the Alps, the Rhine, and the Pyrenees." Moreover, the Bourbon dynasty had to be restored in Spain. Although Napoleon would be forced to surrender Holland, Germany, Italy, and Spain, he could retain Belgium, the left bank of the Rhine, and Savoy in northwestern Italy – the original conquests of the Revolution. Collectively known as the Frankfurt