

The renewal of the treaty of Chaumont.

The news that Napoleon had escaped from Elba first reached Vienna on the evening of the 7th March 1815. Three days later, the Congress heard he had landed on the southern coast of France. According to Wellington's words "the first thing that was done by the ministers of the allies at Vienna was to renew and to render applicable to the circumstances of the moment, their former treaty of alliance, concluded at Chaumont in the month of March 1814." ¹

The reaction of the different powers was a determination to unite their efforts to support the system established by the peace of Paris. However, Napoleon's return raised some questions of international law. Talleyrand was the first to appreciate that if Napoleon were to topple the Bourbons and represent himself as the de facto ruler of France and then accept the terms of the treaty of Paris, the other signatories of that treaty would, legally speaking, have no grounds for not recognizing him, and certainly no justification for hostilities against him. The only way of avoiding this was to disqualify Napoleon himself, and that is what Talleyrand promptly set out to do. ²

Accordingly, by the 13th of March, a declaration signed by Austria, France, Britain, Prussia, Russia, Spain, Portugal and Sweden, was publicly issued. Under this declaration the Eight undertook to furnish "to the King of France and the French nation" the assistance to re-establish public tranquillity. At the same time they proclaimed that "Napoleon Bonaparte had placed himself outside the pale of civil and social relations" and that "as the disturbance of world repose he had exposed himself to public indictment." ³

Amongst the coalition there was a unanimous and irrevocable agreement to the exclusion of Napoleon. Yet, when it came down to the post-Napoleonic era, disagreements prevailed.

While the czar disliked and distrusted the Bourbons, Metternich opened secret negotiations with Fouché.

Clancarty defended the Bourbon interests at Vienna, but at home discussions raged within the political arena about a British intervention in the first place. While the Whigs were against the interference in French internal politics, the Tories feared a Russian withdrawal in case Britain would not join in. Eventually, the British – approved by Austria, Russia and Prussia – forced an addition to the declaration to the treaty of 25th March on the 15th of April to the effect that the war was not being waged to impose a special dynasty on France. A republic, with the duke of Orléans as king, a regency, was also suggested as expedient. A third declaration against Napoleon, drawn up in the interests of the Bourbons had to be abandoned owing to the differences of opinion among the powers.

Napoleon, in his turn, considered the statement of the 13th of March as unlawful, but his formal objection was formally rejected by a special commission of the coalition on the 12th of May. ⁴

After a first draft had been written on the 18th of March, it was seven days later, on the 25th March, that the renewal of the treaty of Chaumont was signed by Austria, Russia, Britain and Prussia. It meant that these countries would maintain the agreements laid down in the peace of Paris (30th May 1814) and the stipulations signed at the congress of Vienna in order to direct all their power against Napoleon. In this context, each participant obliged itself to keep at least 150,000 men in the field, of which at least 15,000 men of cavalry and a relative proportion of artillery (not including any garrisons), and to use them actively against Napoleon. All other European states were invited to confirm these agreements. As Britain had a major part of its forces in New Orleans, it was agreed that this country would pay a sum of 75 million francs to be divided equally over Prussia, Austria and Russia. ⁵

In reality, Britain subsidised the coalition with 275 million francs: Austria got 44, Russia 81, Prussia 59 and Hanover, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Italy, The Netherlands and the German states shared the remaining sum. Apart from large sums of money, Britain was also the

supplier of numerous arms, uniforms and other equipment for several European armies.

The moment Napoleon returned to France, the plenipotentiaries of the coalition began mustering their forces against him. Since the treaty of Paris of May 1814 the provinces, commonly called the Belgian provinces, were occupied by an army composed of British, Hanoverian, and Dutch troops, under the command of His royal highness the hereditary prince of Orange. The majority of the British army, however, had been detached to North America; and notwithstanding that the treaty of peace had been concluded at Ghent on the 24th December 1814, between Britain and the United States, insufficient time had elapsed to enable Britain to bring back forces from there to Europe the moment the war started.

The German provinces on the left bank of the Rhine, extending from the province of Loraine to the junction of the Rhine with the Meuse, were held by Prussian troops, while a German corps of roughly 30.000 men led by the Prussian general Von Kleist was at Koblenz. The Saxons were around Cologne.

The Italian provinces, forming what had been called the kingdom of Italy, were occupied by the Austrian army. Further south was its ally, marshal Murat, who was king of Naples since 1808. In 1814 he had, as a former marshal of Napoleon, joined the coalition against the French emperor, but his return to France had prompted Murat to choose his side once again. Although Napoleon had told him not to engage any military conflicts with the Austrians, he marched out against them in March 1815 and in doing so declared himself king of Italy.

The result was that Murat, like Napoleon, was declared by the allies an outlaw; Britain declared war on him. Meanwhile, although Murat's advance had an initial success, the Austrian forces in Italy moved quickly against him and eventually defeated Murat at Tolentino on the 2nd and 3rd of May. Murat fled for France to offer his services to Napoleon, but he refused to employ his services. Ferdinand IV returned from Sicily to resume his throne in Naples. Meanwhile, by March 1815, the Russian army had retired to the provinces in Poland, forming the kingdom of Saxon Poland.

General outline of the definitive allied invasion-plan into France.

As in 1814, the general idea behind a renewed invasion into France was to crush Napoleon's armies under the immense masses of the allied armies. In 1815, this was no different. Obviously, as a year before, this huge operation asked for an invasion-plan and a general headquarters to direct the general strategy. Alexander demanded for his own nomination as *generalissimo*, with Friedrich Wilhelm, Schwarzenberg and Wellington as his advisors, but this option was for Wellington in surmountable. Eventually, it was Schwarzenberg who came in charge of general headquarters.

The invasion was based upon a grand, converging manoeuvre of three large echelons, with Paris as their common target. The one to the right was formed by the armies led by Wellington and Blücher coming from the Netherlands. The one in the center was composed of prince Wrede's forces and came from the north part of the Upper Rhine. The echelon to the left was formed by Schwarzenberg's remaining forces, which were based in Switzerland. To the rear, the Russian army was approaching the Rhine on its extension between Koblenz and Mannheim.

In the plan, first of all, to the left, Schwarzenberg was supposed to cross the Rhine near Basle on the 24th of June. From there, he would move along Belfort to the Saône, where he would arrive by the 1st of July. Three days later he was supposed to have reached Langres, from where he would move towards Chaumont. So, basically, he used the natural corridor of Belfort which led him between the rivers Marne and Seine. ⁶

Second, Schwarzenberg was to reserve 41.000 men for the encirclement the *places fortes* of Besancon, Belfort, Auxonne, Huningue, Brisac, Schelstadt, as well as the fortresses of Youx, Salins and Ecluse. He was also to block Landau and Strasbourg with 18.000 men coming from the garrison of Mainz and 11.000 men of the Russian army.

Marshal Wrede was to cross the Rhine near Mannheim and take positions at its left bank, and be ready to take the offensive the moment sufficient Russian forces (50.000 men) would have arrived to block the *places fortes* at the rivers Sarre, Moselle and Meuse.

Barclay de Tolly, the commander of the Russian army, was expected to arrive with 150.000 men of his army on the Rhine between Mainz and Mannheim in the period 21st to the 29th of June. From there, he was to manoeuvre through Triers and the Argonne towards St.Dizier. In this way, the army would be able to support the neighboring armies led by Blücher and Wrede on either flank, depending upon the circumstances. Additionally, he was to detach some 35.000 men to encircle the *places fortes* of Metz, Thionville, Saarlouis, Bitsch and Phalsbourg.

On the right, both Wellington and Blücher were to advance into France on the 27th of June, along the corridor of the Oise, through Maubeuge and between Philippeville and Givet respectively.⁷

In this plan, Schwarzenberg was to move first as he was the most remote from Paris. But at least in Wellington's mind, there was another important reason for him to do so. As he had expressed back in May, the echelon in the Netherlands was the most advanced of the general allied line while at the same time the greatest French force was opposed to it. He therefore believed that it could not move as long as others of the allied corps would have relieved it from part of the enemy's force here. At the same time, the centre collected upon the Sarre would have to cross the Meuse on the day the left should be expected to be at Langres. And if these movements would not relieve the echelon on the right, they would have to be continued; that is to say, the left would have to continue its movements on both banks of the Marne, while the centre would cross the Aisne. At the same time, Wellington realized that the most probable result of these first movements would be the concentration of the enemy's forces upon the Aisne. In that case he believed the allies then had to throw their whole left across the Marne, while the right and the centre would either attack the enemy's position upon the Aisne, or endeavour to turn its left or the whole should cooperate in one general attack upon the enemy's position.⁸

In compliance with Wellington's wish to consider it a separate theatre, the operations from Switzerland and the Piedmont were not included in the formal invasion plan dated 10th of June. Yet, Schwarzenberg had included them in his draft plan of four days earlier, but how they relate to the final plan remains unclear. They basically implied an advance of 50.000 men, led by general Frimont, through Simplon to Genève, as well as one of 30.000 men of the army of Italy and Piedmont through Torino towards Coni. Lyon was their common general direction. The second column though was supposed to be on the defensive at Coni and to be reinforced there by 25.000 men led by general Bianchi coming from Naples, so as to manoeuvre from into the Provence right after.

Schwarzenberg's plan also provided for those cases in which Napoleon would engage into offensive operations, but whether these scenarios were an integrated part of the final plan is not clear. For that matter, in case Napoleon would move against Wrede and his supporting Russian corps, these were allowed to fall back to the Rhine. In this way, they would enable the Anglo-Prussian and Austrian armies to press their operations, envelop Napoleon's army and for Wellington and Blücher to march to the French capital and for Schwarzenberg to move through Epinal upon Nancy.

In the alternative case that Napoleon would fall upon Wellington and Blücher, the other armies were supposed to speed up their advance towards Nancy and Langres, or Langres and

Luneville. And in case such an offensive would prove to be a French success, an allied advance against Lyon, Langres and Nancy was thought to be fatal for Napoleon after all. Schwarzenberg also reckoned that in case Napoleon would assemble his forces in the interior of the country and strike against his army, there would be more than enough chance for the remaining allied forces to march against Paris and the Midi.

The only realistic chance of success for Napoleon against the sheer military strength of the seventh coalition lay in running down the allied flanks with armies of equal strength and attack their centre from there, but his adversaries knew that he lacked the number of forces to do so.⁹ Yet, if they would advance in one single, huge mass, it would be tempting for Napoleon to encircle it or to fall upon its communication. In this context, it was Schwarzenberg who was particularly nervous about his left flank, in case Napoleon would cut him off from the army in Italy and would expose Switzerland, “that stronghold of the Austrian monarchy.”

In overlooking the process of how the final plan for the invasion was established, it becomes clear that Schwarzenberg, aided by Wellington and Blücher, laid the foundations for it and that in its further development - while rejecting the plan of Von dem Knesebeck - he integrated elements provided by Wellington and the Russian czar. This development in both strengths and directions obviously determined the planning of it all, and this evolved from the 1st of May, through the 1st and 16th of June and eventually to the 27th of June.¹⁰

The German contingents.

On the 1st of April the allies planned to form three main armies, one on the Upper Rhine, one on the middle Rhine and one in the Netherlands, and it was agreed that Wellington's British army would be joined by certain north German contingents, in addition to German already in British service like the KGL. These formations were to join Wellington as allies, not mercenaries. An appropriate number of troops from the German states were to be placed under Blücher's Prussian army. The Prussians, Austrians and Russians separately undertook to ensure that all German princes who provided troops for the campaign would receive suitable subsidies from Britain.

On the 25th of March, apart from its subsidies to the coalition, it was stipulated that Britain would raise additional forces by employing mercenaries from the smaller German states. This element of the treaty led to an open competition between Britain and Prussia for recruits from these smaller states. The accession treaties yet allowed for some compromise between Britain and Prussia.

On the 31st of March it was agreed that the Prussians would raise an army of 153.000 men on the lower Rhine, and that Wellington would command a mixed-nationality army of unspecified strength in the Netherlands. The contingents of Nassau, the Kingdom of Saxony, Brunswick, Oldenburg and the Hanseatic troops came to Wellington, remainder was still a matter of debate.

By the 20th of April the German states and the Great Powers were able to draw up an outline of the composition of the allied armies. The army on the upper Rhine was to be made up of forces from Austria, Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, Hesse-Darmstadt, Hohenzollern, Liechtenstein and Frankfurt. On the middle and lower Rhine troops were to deploy from Prussia, the Electorate of Hesse, Mecklenburg, Saxon Duchies, Anhalt, Schwarzburg, Reuss, Lippe-Detmold, Schaumburg-Lippe, Waldeck. The army in the Netherlands was to be made up by Britain, the Netherlands, Hanover, Brunswick, Oldenburg and the Hanseatic towns. This army was to be joined by the Saxons and part of the Nassauers, while another Nassau contingent was to garrison Mainz.

However, by the outbreak of hostilities neither Wellington nor Blücher had actually received the contingents they had expected. Grand Duke Peter of Oldenburg sent off his army to join the North German Federal Corps under Kleist instead of to Wellington's army. The Hanseatic towns delayed the deployment of their contingents (they reached the Netherlands on 6th of July 1815) and the Saxons never saw action.¹¹

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¹ WSD, Vol.X p.514

² Zamoyski, A. - Rites of peace p.448

³ WD, Vol.XII p.269-270

⁴ WSD, Vol.X, p.339-344

⁵ WSD Vol.X, p.147-149

⁶ Cf. The preceding chapter on the defensive options of Napoleon.

⁷ Cf. The preceding chapter on the defensive options of Napoleon.

⁸ Gneisenau wrote a first invasion plan on the 3rd of April.

Based upon a swift march to Paris and upon numerical superiority, Gneisenau divided the forces in four armies: one in Belgium, one on the Middle-Rhine and one on the Upper-Rhine. In rear of the one at the Middle-Rhine was the largest army which formed the reserve. Lord Stewart, on the 28th of April, summarized it as: "Reckoning on a great numerical superiority over the enemy, each of these armies the General proposes should move independently upon Paris; each to mind its own base and communications. If one be attacked, to act defensively; if beaten, to fall back upon the reserve; the other two armies to move on, and, by preference, to keep four or five days from each other, and to have no mutual dependence or combination till near Paris." Lord Stewart to Wellington, 28th of April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.172

Having received Gneisenau's plan, the Prussian King forwarded it to his adjutant, general Knesebeck. It was Knesebeck who changed the plan in several aspects.

First of all, he changed the passages which were unfavourable to him and Schwarzenberg; additionally he stated that the troops which had to observe the fortified places had to besiege them too. Finally, he approved the link between the offensive in France and the campaign in Italy.

In his second one he further worked out the scenario of Wellington where the French would have concentrated their main forces around Paris. Although he did not specify any routes and dates, he proposed to swiftly invade France up to these French positions and from there to slowly constrict Napoleon. In Gneisenau's mind, this would force the French emperor to give battle to one of the allied armies, after which the others would race towards Paris and capture it. As Gneisenau had drafted this (second) plan on the 8th of June, it was too late to be assessed in Heidelberg before the war started.

For the first plan, cf.

Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.346

Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Nelson etc. p.45-46. He located the original in Von Knesebecks papers in the former Kriegsarchiv, Berlin.

The English and French versions are in:

Holland Rose, J. Sir H.Lowe etc. p.525-526

WSD, Vol.X p.196-197 and in GSA, VPH-HA, VIII, nr.1 p.7-11 and BL, Add.ms.20.192 p.232-233

⁹ The total strength of Wellington's, Blücher's, Barclay de Tolly's and Schwarzenberg's armies was more than half a million men (Wellington: 95.000, Blücher: 115.00, Barclay de Tolly: 150.000, Schwarzenberg: 210.000).

¹⁰ On the 19th of April the invasion was set for the 1st of June, while on the 28th of April it was postponed to the 16th of June. On the 10th of June it was finally set for the 27th of June.

¹¹ Von Pflugk Hartung – Die Gegensätze zwischen England und Preussen wegen der Bundestruppen 1815 p.127-139
Hofschroër, P. – 1815. The Waterloo campaign etc. p.40-46