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"Problems of Coalition Warfare: The Military Alliance Against Napoleon, 1813 – 1814"

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For some six generations now, the campaigns of 1813 and 1814 in Germany and France have exercised a powerful fascination over the minds of historians, and it is understandable that this should be so. It would be difficult to find another time in the modern age as full of dramatic crises as the autumn that saw Napoleon's strength and reputation broken at Leipzig and the spring that witnessed his brilliant but unavailing attempts to break out of the ring of steel that forced him towards surrender. To members of an older generation, the spectacle of this greatest of Great Captains fighting tenaciously but with shrinking resources to save the New Order he had created possessed all the qualities of classical tragedy, and they studied the details of his last campaigns with admiration for the flashes of inspiration that lightened the gathering pall of defeat and with sympathy for the desperate twistings and turnings that preceded the end. "The campaign of 1814," wrote a British historian in a book that appeared almost exactly a century after the events it described, "is certainly a wonderful example of what Napoleon's genius could do in circumstances which . . . had become so desperate that no other general of the time would have even attempted to make head against them."¹

Napoleon doubtless has as many admirers today as when that judgment was written fifty years ago. But circumstances alter cases and even have the power to change the prescription of the glasses through which the historian peers back at the past. What we see in history and the things in it that stir our active interest are largely determined by our own experience and by the perplexities of our own time; and that is why, living as we do in a country which, in the last quarter of a century, has fought two wars in alliance with other powers and is presently a member of the greatest peacetime alliance in history (although admittedly one that is very difficult to hold together), we are apt to be less interested in the purely military features of the last struggle against Napoleon than in those things that mirror our current and recent concerns. The tactical virtuosity of Napoleon will make a weaker claim upon the attention of our historians than do the problems of the coalition that opposed him, and particularly such things as the difficulties its members experienced in establishing an effective command structure, their incomplete success in reaching agreement on war aims, and the repercussions this had on their operational efficiency, and the problems caused within their alliance by imperfect governmental control over commanders in the field, which threatened to expand the war against Napoleon to a new and frightening dimension. All of the thorny problems with which Western statesmen have wrestled during the Second World War, the Korean conflict, and the troubled history of NATO can be found, in hardly altered form, within the anti-Napoleonic coalition, a fact that suggests that certain problems are endemic to military alliances, which may or may not be comforting.

I

At the outset of the autumn campaign of 1813, Napoleon had at his disposal about 442,000 combat troops, of whom 40,000 were cavalry, supported by 1,284 guns. The bulk of this army, about 314,000 men, was concentrated north of the Bohemian mountains in an arc extending from Dresden to Liegnitz in Silesia; a force of 70,000 under Oudinot was poised on the southern border of Mark Brandenburg, within striking distance of Berlin; an observation corps under Margaron was bivouacked at Leipzig; and Davout commanded a mixed force of Frenchmen and Danes at Hamburg. Another 80,000 men were in garrison in the Elbe fortresses and those of Prussia and Poland, and an additional 43,000 stood in reserve.² The Emperor had largely repaired the losses that had forced him to accept an armistice after his successes over the Russians and the Prussians at Lutzen and Bautzen in May.³ He was still

short of supply and deficient in certain arms, but his new troop levies, while raw, were commanded by battle-trying veterans; their spirit was good; they could shoot; and French tactics- the advance in column- required no special skill in execution. In addition, the army had the great advantage of fighting on interior lines under the sole direction of a man of energy and purpose.

Napoleon's opponents were superior to him in every category but the last. The original Russo-Prussian alliance had now been strengthened by the adhesion of Sweden, whose Crown Prince, the former French Marshal Bernadotte, had brought a force of 35,000 troops to Pomerania in May, 4 and- a more important addition- by that of Austria, whose forces swelled the allied total to some 570,000 effectives, plus reserves and fortress troops. This force was, however, split into three widely separated groups: a mixed Prussian-Russian-Swedish force under Bernadotte based on Berlin (the so-called Northern Army); the Silesian Army (Prussians and Russians commanded by Field Marshal Blucher) at Breslau; and the larger Bohemian Army (Austrians, plus Russian and Prussian contingents) stationed south of the Erzgebirge under the command of Field Marshal Prince Schwarzenberg. For successful employment against a determined and centrally positioned opponent, this federated force needed an effective command structure and a strategical plan that was accepted by all its members.

With respect to the first of these, it became clear, once Austria had joined the alliance, that supreme command would have to be vested in an Austrian general. The Russians and the Prussians had shown no particular talent for strategical direction during the spring campaign, and the defeats suffered at Lutzen and Bautzen had been due on the one hand to Prussian impetuosity and inattention to detail and on the other to Emperor Alexander's penchant for superseding his commander in chief at crucial moments in battle and then becoming discouraged and relinquishing command when things went wrong.⁵ Bernadotte, who was accorded a degree of respect that he did not subsequently justify by his actions in the campaign (it was mistakenly believed by Emperor Francis of Austria, among others, that the Swedish Crown Prince knew the most intimate secrets of Napoleon's art of war and would turn them against its author), had not supplied enough troops to the alliance to qualify for the post. No one was clearer about this than the Austrian Chancellor Metternich, whose devious diplomatic campaign during the spring and summer of 1813 had been accompanied by an armament effort of great energy, which had brought Austrian troop strength, by August, to 479,000 officers and men, including 298,000 combat troops.⁷ Metternich was determined that this contribution should receive the recognition it deserved and that he should be entitled to name the supreme commander. "The important thing," he wrote to one of his associates on August 13, "is to have the decisive voice in the determination of the military dispositions, and to maintain against everyone- as I have been emphasizing to the Emperor Alexander- the principle that the power that puts 300,000 men into the field is the first power, and all the others only auxiliaries."⁸

The Tsar ceded this point, but not without an attempt to influence the selection of the supreme commander. The logical choice, he suggested, would be the first man who had ever defeated Napoleon in the open field, Archduke Charles of Austria, the victor at Aspern in 1809, and the best possible chief for his general staff would be the Swiss Antoine Henri Jomini, formerly general de brigade in the French army and chef to Marshal Ney. Alexander's proposal is still intriguing to the historian who likes to speculate about might-have-beens. Next to Clausewitz, Jomini was the best known military theorist of the first half of the nineteenth century and the most incisive analyst of Napoleon's methods of war; and a partnership between him and the Archduke Charles, who, more than any other soldier of his day, enjoyed the love and admiration of Austrian troops, might have been a happy and fruitful combination.⁹ Or again, it might not: their common prejudice in favor of the methodical position warfare characteristic of the eighteenth century would not have commended them to the commanders of the Silesian Army, who were, in any case, scornful of French renegades like Bernadotte, Moreau and Jomini. Moreover; it is possible that Jomini shone to best advantage in the study rather than in the field; the Silesian Army's Quartermaster General wrote later that Jomini's advice to the Tsar during the

fighting around Dresden in August 1813 was so impractical that no one ever took him seriously again.¹⁰

The partnership between the Tsar's candidates never had an opportunity to prove itself because Metternich never considered it seriously. He was aware not only that Jomini was a member of Alexander's military suite but that Archduke Charles was in love with Alexander's sister Caroline and hoped to secure the Tsar's permission to marry her. "In these circumstances, the two nominations promised to give the Russians a preponderance of influence at Supreme Headquarters. Even if that had not been true, the relationship between Charles and his brother, the Emperor Francis, had never been an easy one, and Charles had a record of conflict with civilian authorities that dated back to the 1790's and was regarded (not wholly justly) as a commander who was not amenable to governmental control.¹² Metternich expected to have enough troubles with his allies without compounding them with differences within the Austrian camp. He said at this time: "We want a Feldherr who will make war, not one who is a politician. The Archduke wants to be minister for foreign affairs too, a position that does not accord with the functions of a Feldherr."¹³

With all this in mind, therefore, the chancellor decided not to take Alexander's advice. With his sovereign's approval, he selected a man of Charles' age but of different temperament, the 42 year old Karl Philipp Furst zu Schwarzenberg. A soldier without personal ambition, who admired Metternich and enjoyed his confidence, Schwarzenberg deserves a better reputation than that given him by historians, who have perhaps been unduly influenced by Clausewitz's biased and second-hand criticism of his generalship.¹⁴ The new supreme commander's talents were, to be sure, more diplomatic than strictly military, and it was probably a good thing that this was so. Like Dwight D. Eisenhower in another great coalition a hundred and thirty years later, his great gift was his ability, by patience and the arts of ingratiation, to hold together a military alliance which before Napoleon was finally defeated comprised fourteen members, and to persuade the quarrelling monarchs and their field commanders to give more than lip service to the alliance's strategical plan. This was not, as we shall see, an easy task or one that could be performed with perfect or continuous success.

In the strategical direction of the war, Schwarzenberg's chief assistants were Lieutenant Field Marshal Count Radetzky von Radetz, the chief of his general staff, and Lieutenant Field Marshal Freiherr von Langenau, a Saxon officer who defected to the allies in the summer of 1813 and who served as head of the operations section.¹⁵ Radetzky, the future hero of the Italian campaign of 1848-49, was the author of the strategical plan that guided the movements of the three armies during the autumn campaign of 1813, although his claim to this distinction has been contested by the Russians and the Swedes. As early as May 1813, foreseeing Austrian intervention in the war, he had laid an operational plan before his chief. In June, when he met the Tsar's Quartermaster General Toll at Gitschin, he had found that officer in complete agreement with his views; and in July, when the allies gathered (without Austrian participation) at Trachenberg, they accepted an operational plan sponsored by Bernadotte and Toll which was very similar to Radetzky's original plan and which was later amended to make it correspond even more closely to his concept.¹⁶

Based upon the strategy of attrition- and hence depreciated by all Prussian-German military publicists until the time of Hans Delbruck on the mistaken assumption that Ermattungsstrategie was an inferior form of war¹⁷- Radetzky's plan was intended to make Napoleon split his forces, to wear himself out in constant movement, and, in the end, having lost the advantage of interior lines because of the constriction of the territory he controlled, to fight against armies advancing simultaneously against his center, flanks and communications. The method of achieving this he described as a coordinated advance by the three allied armies in such a manner that each of them would act offensively against detached French units but would withdraw if Napoleon sought to concentrate his forces against it, always refraining carefully from becoming involved in a major fight with a superior force, "lest the principal objective of the joint operation be lost, "namely, "to strike the final blow with

assurance."18 In general, as he wrote years later, the plan called for "the Austrian Army to be the pivot, while the allies would form the swinging wings."19

Although this plan won general acceptance, difficulties arose as soon as it was put into effect, partly because of the gap that always exists between paper plans and actual operations but also because of limitations upon the authority of the supreme commander which manifested themselves as soon as fighting began on August 17. During the whole of the autumn campaign of 1813, life was enormously complicated for Schwarzenberg and Radetzky by the presence of three of the allied sovereigns at, or uncomfortably close to, General Headquarters. These rulers had to be briefed on all specific operational plans and, when they were consulted, often gave less weight to the advice of the supreme commander than they did to their private military advisers. Of the latter there were many. Emperor Francis placed great confidence in General Duka, a courtly desk general with whom Radetzky did not always see eye to eye. King Frederick William III of Prussia relied upon the judgment of his adjutant general Karl Friedrich Freiherr von dem Knesebeck, a man who had played an important role in the reform of the Prussian army but who, as an adviser on operations, was timorous and vacillating, excessively respectful of Napoleon's capacities, and inclined to believe that a strictly defensive posture was the best way of dealing with him.20 As for the Russian Emperor, he was surrounded by clouds of professional soldiers from all the countries on the map, chief among whom were his own countrymen Wolkonsky, Arakcheiev and Diebitsch and the Frenchmen Jomini and Moreau (until he was killed at Dresden). Life at General Headquarters was one continual war council, in which all of these royal advisers subjected operational plans to niggling criticism or proposed substitutes of their own. Before the campaign was far advanced, the usually mild-mannered Schwarzenberg was writing, "It is really inhuman what I must tolerate and bear, surrounded as I am by feeble-minded people, fools of every description, eccentric project-makers, intriguers, asses, babblers, criticasters; I often think I'm going to collapse under their weight."21

Fully as irritating as this constant criticism was the tendency of the monarchs- like a group of early Charles de Gaulles- to withdraw troops from the joint command for their own purposes or to threaten to do so out of personal pique. From the very beginning of the campaign, Emperor Alexander reserved exclusive command over Russian contingents in the Bohemian Army, as well as over the sizeable Russian reserve, and Schwarzenberg could not always count on their presence in the line of battle when they were needed. As early as September 1813, the commander in chief was complaining to his sovereign that this uncertainty subjected him to pressures and tempted him to make concessions that might be dangerous to the state interest and the common cause; it was essential, he argued, that Russian troops be placed under the effective control of the supreme command.22 Emperor Francis, unfortunately, had no power to satisfy this demand, and Schwarzenberg was forced to go on worrying about the Russians until Napoleon was overthrown. Nor was he concerned about them alone. There were moments during the autumn campaign, and particularly during the spring campaign in France, when the King of Prussia intimated to the Silesian Army command that he thought it advisable to avoid committing Prussian troops to battle, since further losses might weaken Prussia's voice when the peace talks began.23 As for the Crown Prince of Sweden, he not only tried to keep his own forces intact but made incessant demands for the assignment of additional Russian and Prussian corps to his command- in order to gratify his self-esteem, one must suppose, since he was very chary of using what was granted him.

Orders from the Supreme Command were transmitted to the Northern and Silesian Armies by the monarchs themselves or by their military plenipotentiaries on Schwarzenberg's staff, the Russian Gen. Toll and the Prussian Gen. von Hake. But instructions were not always carried out in the manner intended, for conditions at the army level were not dissimilar to those that prevailed at the Supreme Command. In the Silesian Army, there were differences between Blucher and his chef Gneisenau, on the one hand, and Muffling, the Quartermaster General, and some of the corps commanders on the other. York and Langeron, in particular; were worried by Blucher's lack of caution and sought, by

means that sometimes verged on insubordination, to restrain it; and instructions from Schwarzenberg sometimes got lost in the clash of personalities. In the Northern Army there were similar difficulties. Bernadotte was suspicious of all orders emanating from the Supreme Command lest they overtax his resources and make it impossible for him to attain his real objective in the war; which was the acquisition of Norway for Sweden. The Prussian and Russian corps commanders, Generals von Bulow and Winzingerode, suspected him of sacrificing their troops for his private interest, while saving his own, and, before the campaign in Germany was over; they were accusing him of carrying on secret negotiations with the French. The Crown Prince, on his side, complained continually that he could not count on his generals obeying him.²⁴

In the face of these disruptive factors on every level of the command structure, it is remarkable that the strategical task confronting the allies was carried out at all, let alone within a bare three months. To direct a widely separated group of armies toward a common goal and a decisive battle in an age in which there were no railways and few good roads, and no telephone or telegraph, was a formidable enough undertaking even without the trouble caused by administrative duplication, international professional jealousies, and personal feuding within the separate commands. That it was accomplished was doubtless a tribute to the patience and forbearance of Schwarzenberg, but it was certainly due more to the general fear of Napoleon and the common awareness that he was still far from being beaten. The divisive factors were always held in restraint by the common danger, and the allied war plan was enabled to achieve its objective.

Thus it was that, despite the brilliance of Napoleon's employment of his depleted forces and despite some discreditable episodes on the allied side- York's disinclination to accept direction from army headquarters during the fight on the Katzbach²⁵ and the panic that inspired the monarchs and their staffs when Napoleon appeared like an apparition before Dresden²⁶- the first four weeks of the autumn campaign were, on balance, gloomy ones for the French Emperor. Oudinot was beaten at Grossbeeren by Bernadotte, MacDonald on the Katzbach by Blucher; Vandamme at Kulm by a mixed force working for once with superb coordination,²⁷ Ney at Dennewitz by Bulow. Prevented by Radetzky's strategy from concentrating against a single enemy, worn out by constant movement, Napoleon slowly fell back upon Leipzig, where he found himself threatened by the three converging allied armies and elected to risk battle against them. The resultant Battle of the Peoples, which extended over three days of hard fighting, was marred by faults of tactical coordination and breakdowns of command efficiency on the part of the allies and by a stubborn refusal on the part of the Swedish Crown Prince to commit anything but his artillery to the common effort (he is reported to have said: "Provided the French are beaten, it is indifferent to me whether I or my army take a part, and of the two, I had much rather we did not." ²⁸), but, when it was over, Napoleon's armies were broken and caught up in a retreat that was not to stop short of the Rhine. Despite their failure to devise a perfectly functioning command system, the allies had succeeded in liberating all of Germany.

II

Henry A. Kissinger has written recently:²⁹

As long as the enemy is more powerful than any single member of the coalition, the need for unity outweighs all considerations of individual gain. Then the powers of repose can insist on the definition of war aims which, as all conditions, represent limitations. But when the enemy has been so weakened that each ally has the power to achieve its ends alone, a coalition is at the mercy of its most determined member. Confronted with the complete collapse of one of the elements of the equilibrium, all other powers will tend to raise their claims in order to keep pace.

This describes very well what happened to the allied coalition after the battle of Leipzig. The military-technical questions which had troubled the allies in the past continued to be a source of

irritation, but they became far less important than the political divisions which now threatened to destroy the alliance utterly.

It was not, of course, immediately clear that "the enemy (had) been so weakened that each ally (had) the power to achieve its ends alone." When the allied sovereigns and their military advisers gathered in Frankfurt-am-Main in November in order to discuss the future course of the war, there was no agreement as to Napoleon's strength and capabilities. Blucher, scornful of what he called "the swarm of monarchs and princes . . . that spoils everything" might have felt that "it is perfectly certain that, had we all, without delay, crossed the Rhine, Napoleon would by this time be suing for peace,"³⁰ but York was of a different opinion, pointing out that his corps had already lost two-thirds of its effectives, and York's views, laid before the King by Knesebeck, impressed that ruler.³¹ Bernadotte, who had by now diverted his attention to a campaign in Denmark for the possession of Norway, took the view (perhaps natural, given his interests) that a campaign in France might jeopardize everything that had been won so far; a position shared by the Austrian General Count Bubna, who had the ear of Emperor Francis and who believed that an advance into France would provoke a national rising beyond the power of the allies to control. "We must," he said, "carefully avoid driving a people to desperate resolves by insults to its honor."³² Among the allied sovereigns only Alexander was anxious for an immediate advance into France, and even his optimism was momentarily dampened by the doubts of his generals and the signs of war weariness among his troops.

The Tsar's periods of self-restraint were never, however, of long duration, and Napoleon's failure to make use of the opportunity given him by the pause at Frankfurt in order to secure a peace settlement on the basis of the Rhine frontier led the Russian ruler to renew his pleas for a reopening of hostilities. And from the moment when the Rhine was crossed in late December, Alexander's self-confidence and his ambition grew until they assumed grandiose proportions. As Sorel has written, he began to fancy himself as "the Agamemnon of the new Iliad." He began to revert to dreams of his youth, in which he had determined one day "to reconstitute Europe and assume the place usurped by Napoleon in the domination of the continent." He wanted now to take vengeance³³

for the insults he had suffered . . . to persecute the war relentlessly, to show no moderation to the perfidious enemy, but to destroy his army and overthrow his power. . . . He would dominate France, a Latin Poland, give new institutions to the land of Montesquieu, give a king to the Revolution. The destiny yearned for since Tilsit was now being fulfilled; the hour had struck for the revelation of his genius.

None of this was lost on Metternich, who realized that Alexander's fantasies, if unchecked, could lead to a costly prolongation of the war, ending not in a restoration of European order but a complete subversion of it in the Russian interest. Years later the elder Moltke was to say that the trouble with the Russians was that they always came too late and then were too strong. Metternich must have felt something of this. The Russian forces were fresher than those of their allies and their reserves were larger; their losses at Leipzig, in comparison with Austria's and Prussia's, had been very low. If the Tsar decided that his forces were strong enough to secure his objectives in defiance of his allies, then the consequences might be grave indeed. A peace settlement must therefore be arranged with Napoleon before France had become so weakened that Alexander would conclude that he could go it alone; and whatever military operations were authorized must support this political strategy.

To persuade Napoleon to conclude peace and to restrain Alexander were, therefore, the two poles of Metternich's policy from the winter of 1813 onward. He had hoped to end the war in December on terms that would leave France the boundaries of the Rhine and the Alps. When Napoleon refused to treat on that basis, the Austrian chancellor reluctantly agreed to a renewal of hostilities. But he and Schwarzenberg refused to consider the kind of headlong offensive against the Rhine fortresses that was advocated by Alexander and the chiefs of the Silesian Army. Instead, they proposed and, after much

haggling, persuaded their allies to accept, a plan which called for an advance of the Bohemian Army in a great looping movement through northern Switzerland into the Franche-Comte and thence to the plain of Langres, where it would threaten Napoleon's communications. Meanwhile, the Silesian Army would cross the Rhine and advance through the Palatinate to Metz and eventually to the Marne, where it would fall in on the right wing of the Bohemian Army.³⁴ It was a strategy designed to avoid bloody encounters, while exerting the kind of pressure on Napoleon that would induce him to negotiate seriously. Metternich was quite explicit on this point, instructing Schwarzenberg in January 1814 to advance "cautiously" and "to utilize the desire of the common man in France for peace by avoiding warlike acts."³⁵

The lengthy debate over this plan had exacerbated relations between Metternich and Emperor Alexander,³⁶ and they did not improve in the weeks that followed, as the sovereigns moved towards France in the wake of the soldiers. Exasperated by the long delays, the Tsar was soon openly accusing Schwarzenberg of sabotaging a genuine war effort, and his references to Metternich were hardly more flattering. By the time the monarchs had reached Basel in mid-January, Alexander was so exercised that he announced that he was opposed to any further negotiations with Napoleon indeed, that he intended to demand the Corsican's abdication; and he let it be known, in addition, that he considered the Crown Prince of Sweden, Bernadotte, as a logical successor to the throne.

To this body blow Metternich replied in kind. On January 16 he instructed Schwarzenberg, whose troops were now at Langres, to avoid any further forward action until the political situation had been clarified; and simultaneously he urged the King of Prussia to order Blucher to stand at Metz. The time had come, the Austrian statesman saw, for a showdown and a redefinition of purpose.³⁷

All our engagements are fulfilled," he wrote to one of his ministers all former goals of the coalition have been not only achieved but exceeded. Now we must get clear once more about our purpose, for it is with alliances as with all fraternizations; if they do not have a strictly determinate aim, they disintegrate.

Metternich found an ally in the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, who arrived at Basel on January 18. The Englishman was appalled when he learned of Alexander's plans for the future government of France and also disturbed by the violence of tone employed by Alexander's supporters in the Silesian Army, from which an intemperate memorandum from Gneisenau's pen had just arrived, demanding an immediate advance on Paris. After a long and exasperating interview with the Tsar, who was in one of his most exalted moods, Castlereagh had no difficulty in agreeing with Metternich that a redefinition of the aims of the alliance was necessary. Armed with this support, and the private knowledge that the Prussian Chancellor Hardenberg felt the same way and that even the Tsar's closest advisers, Stein and Pozzo di Borgo, were dismayed by his plans for Bernadotte, Metternich went on the offensive against both Alexander and Gneisenau. From Schwarzenberg he extracted a report which painted the military situation in hardly encouraging hues, since it underlined the high incidence of illness and desertion in the Bohemian Army, the disaffection of the local population, the difficulties of supply, the still formidable resources of Napoleon, and other factors that threw doubt on the feasibility of an easy advance on the French capital.³⁹ Using this as a basis for argument, he wrote an alarmed memorandum of his own to Emperor Francis, pointing out that success in the war so far had been the result of a carefully coordinated politico-military strategy in which operations and negotiations went hand in hand. This strategy should not be abandoned lightly, although that seemed to be the intention of Alexander and Gneisenau. Before steps were taken which- in view of the facts stated by Schwarzenberg- might well be disastrous, the four powers must consult on fundamental questions.⁴⁰

The Austrian Emperor agreed with this view entirely, as did Hardenberg and the Tsar's own Foreign Minister, Nesselrode. Even so, Alexander did not immediately give way. The showdown between Metternich and his imperial antagonist came on January 26-27, when the chancellor warned

that if Russia intended to force Napoleon's abdication, Austrian troops could no longer participate in the campaign, and Alexander responded by threatening to march on Paris alone or with his Prussian ally. These threats were less serious than they appeared, however; or at least, once made, they induced second thoughts. It did not take much counting on the fingers to convince the Tsar that it would not be easy to defeat Napoleon without Austrian assistance, or much ratiocination to remind Metternich that he could not safely withdraw from the war, since a Russo-Prussian defeat or a Russo-Prussian victory in a campaign in France would be equally dangerous to Austrian interests. A private conversation between chancellor and Tsar on January 28 somewhat relieved the acerbity of their relations and paved the way for more general talks; and on January 29-30, at Langres, the Allies agreed that military operations should be resumed under the direction of Schwarzenberg, who would pay "appropriate attention to military expediency" (a graceful way of saying that he would proceed in accordance with his own methodical plan rather than in the manner desired by Gneisenau). At the same time, negotiations would be opened at Chatillon with Napoleon's representative Caulaincourt to explore the possibility of a peace settlement on the basis of the frontiers of 1792. With Napoleon presumably remaining on the throne, since the Tsar had privately promised to refrain from interfering further in dynastic matters.⁴¹

It is indicative of the constant but sometimes curious interrelationship of politics and war that this undoubted political victory for Metternich should now have been upset by an unforeseen military success. On January 29, Blucher's army, advancing on Brienne, became unexpectedly involved in heavy fighting with Napoleon's main force, and, although it was rolled back to Trannes, received strong reinforcements from Schwarzenberg and renewed the fight at La Rothiere on February 1. By eight o'clock in the evening, the French line had been broken and Napoleon's grenadiers were retreating in disorder towards Brienne, leaving 3600 dead, 2400 prisoners, and 73 guns on the field. Allied casualties were almost as high, but Schwarzenberg and Blucher had won a clear moral victory, defeating Bonaparte decisively for the first time on his own soil.⁴²

This splendid success had the unfortunate effect of reviving all of the Tsar's ambitions, and he had no compunction about violating the agreement just made at Langres. He instructed Razumowsky, his representative at Chatillon, to do everything in his power to delay a successful issue of the talks there; he refused to consider a French request for an armistice; and he began to talk once more of marching on Paris, dethroning Napoleon, and giving the French people a king of his own choosing. The kind of threat that had restrained him at Langres now seemed to have lost its effect. The Tsar had used his strong personal influence over the wavering Frederick William III to win a promise from that sovereign that he would stand by him through thick and thin. Now, thanks to the blow suffered by Napoleon at La Rothiere, Alexander could, as an American historian has written recently,⁴³

seriously contemplate withdrawing the 61,000 Russian troops from Schwarzenberg's Bohemian Army, joining them to Blucher's Silesian Army, two-thirds of which were Russians anyway, and leaving the Austrians to their own devices. Were Alexander to try it and were he to succeed, his hegemony on the continent would be an accomplished fact.

For Metternich this was a grim prospect. But he was rescued by Napoleon- or perhaps, more accurately, by his antagonists within the allied camp, Blucher and Gneisenau. The impetuosity that had become the hallmark of the Silesian Army had long worried some of their professional colleagues. General Muffling, who in later life was to become a distinguished and influential Chief of the Prussian General Staff, had noted during the spring campaign that his chiefs spent more time making inspirational speeches to their troops than providing for their security and that Gneisenau's conspicuous weakness was his failure to plan carefully, his excessive emphasis upon bravery as the determinant of victory, and his confidence in his own ability to inspire it whenever it was needed. In the days before La Rothiere, Schwarzenberg had remarked on the same dangerous tendencies and had written:⁴⁵

Blucher; and still more Gneisenau- for the old fellow has to lend his name- are urging the march on Paris with such perfectly childish rage that they trample under foot every single rule of warfare. Without placing any considerable force to guard the road from Chalons to Nancy, they rush like mad to Brienne. Regardless of their rear and of their flanks, they do nothing but plan *parties fines* at the Palais Royal. This is indeed frivolous at such an important moment.

It was probably inevitable that this disregard of the fundamental rules of war would catch up with Blucher and Gneisenau sooner or later; and it did so in the second week of February when, in the neighborhood of BautempsEtoges, Napoleon fell like a thunderbolt upon their overextended and hopelessly disarticulated forces and proceeded to defeat them corps by corps, inflicting over 15,000 casualties in five days of fighting and almost bagging Blucher himself in an ambush at Montmirail.⁴⁶

The news of this shattering reverse caused a near panic at Supreme Headquarters, and the phlegmatic Castlereagh noted with disgust that this affected not only the princes of the lesser German states but the Tsar as well. Only a few days ago, Alexander had been talking of marching on Paris alone; now he was clamoring for an armistice.⁴⁷ But this sudden imperial collapse did have the happy effect in the end of reducing the tensions within the alliance and preparing the way for ultimate victory. It enabled Metternich to isolate the Tsar diplomatically when he was most conscious of the slump of his military fortunes, by threatening a separate peace on the part of Austria and the lesser German states, to force him, on February 15, to adhere to a formal interallied agreement. Stipulating that military operations and diplomatic negotiations would continue side by side but that regardless of the fate of either, France's borders should in the end remain those of 1792, that if Napoleon accepted these, he would remain on the throne but that if he were deposed, the allies would regard the Bourbon pretender Louis XVIII as his successor. Also that if Paris were occupied by the allies, they would administer it in common.⁴⁸

These terms assured France of an honorable place in the postwar balance of power under a ruler with a claim to legitimacy. They relieved Metternich of his fears that the country might be depressed into the position of a Russian satellite and, because they did so, permitted him to view the reopening of military operations in a more relaxed mood, even to the extent of agreeing that the Silesian Army should be authorized to start once more for Paris (although only after it had been reinforced by Russian and Prussian units detached from Bernadotte's inactive Northern Army, since- as Castlereagh said- Blucher was clearly "too daring to be trusted with a Small force").⁴⁹ At long last, the first days of March saw the beginning of the resolution of the political differences that had weighed so heavily upon the alliance and slowed down operations on so many occasions; and, after the treaty of Chaumont of March 4 had confirmed and elaborated the agreement of February 15 and had converted the coalition into a permanent alliance, the total military resources of the partners could be turned, without let or hindrance, against Napoleon. There followed in quick succession the battles of Craonne, Laon and Arcis sur Aube, and, on March 31, the allies entered Paris.

III

From what has been said above, it will have become clear that it was not only imperfect command relationships and differences on war aims that caused internal strains within the anti-Napoleonic coalition, but the problem of civil-military relations also played an important role. Even before Austria had joined the alliance, Metternich was expressing doubts as to whether the Prussian army was an entirely reliable instrument of its government, and during the campaigns of 1814 and 1815 British statesmen also came to regard the behavior of Prussian soldiers with misgivings.

Although most nineteenth century German historians sought to deny it, the war of liberation against Napoleon began with an act of insubordination by the Prussian military against its royal commander. Tension between King Frederick William III and his soldiers had existed since 1809,

when the King had refused to join Austria in the campaign that ended at Wagram. Frederick William was a melancholy and pessimistic man who had more faith in the genius of Napoleon than in the ability of his people or his army to oppose him effectively,⁵⁰ and he turned a deaf ear to the counsel of soldiers like Gneisenau who urged him to resort to the levee en masse in order to free his country. His attitude embittered the patriotic party and, when the King capitulated to Napoleon's pressure in 1811 and placed Prussian troops at his disposal, this feeling turned to a suppressed fury. "We will receive the fate we deserve," Gneisenau wrote of the King's action. "We will go down in shame, for we dare not conceal from ourselves the truth that a nation is as bad as its government." And again, with something bordering on contempt: "The King stands ever by the throne on which he has never sat."⁵¹

When Napoleon's fortunes changed in Russia and the long retreat from Moscow began, Blucher; Gneisenau, Grolman, Clausewitz and others once more raised the cry of war and, when the King did not respond, became increasingly critical of him and his chosen ministers- notably Hardenberg- and increasingly inclined to a rebellious forcing play which would bring Prussia into the war on Russia's side. The capitulation of Napoleon's Prussian auxiliary corps, led by Gen. York, to the Russians at Taugoggen in December 1812 was such an action, and it was bitterly resented by the King, even after he had yielded to the popular enthusiasm aroused by it and had summoned his people to arms.⁵² The way in which Prussian intervention had been effected was not lost on foreign observers. The Austrian minister in Breslau wrote home in February 1813: "Under the guise of patriotism, the military and the leaders of the sects have seized complete control of the reins of government, and the chancellor (Hardenberg) is swept along by the stream."⁵³

Few things have so disturbing an effect upon statesmen engaged in a common war effort than the thought that the soldiers might begin to take important decisions into their own hands. The nervousness shown by our own allies during the Korean War as they observed the behavior and read the press releases of Gen. Douglas MacArthur is a case in point. And it was paralleled throughout the campaigns of 1813 and 1814 by the apprehension of Prussia's allies as they listened to the complaints and objections and demands of the Silesian Army commanders, their constantly reiterated opposition to any form of restraint, their violent criticism of the strategy of the Supreme Command, and their ill-disguised contempt for "the diplomats," whom Blucher once called "Schuftens who deserve the gallows."⁵⁴

Disturbing enough during the months leading up to Napoleon's fall, the soldiers' impatience with governmental control reached new heights after Napoleon's return from Elba and his second defeat. Blucher's headquarters in Paris in 1815 was a center of disaffection in which insubordination was the order of the day. Only the intervention of the British prevented Blucher from levying a contribution of a hundred million francs on the people of Paris and from taking other measures for which he had neither royal nor allied authorization. Col. Hardinge, the British liaison officer at his headquarters, reported that the King of Prussia was experiencing the gravest of difficulty in checking "the very unusual spirit of political interference existing in this army and its reported intimate connection with popular feeling in Prussia."⁵⁵ The autumn of 1815 was marked by a lengthy dispute between Hardenberg and Blucher's headquarters over occupation policy, and the Field Marshal's open disobedience of instructions forced the King to intervene in October with an order explicitly stating that the chancellor was to be regarded as the final authority in political matters. Blucher and his most radical advisor, Grolman, were clearly trying to do what Moltke was to attempt in 1870 and Ludendorff was to succeed in doing in 1916- namely, to supersede the civilian authorities in a vital area of war policy.⁵⁶ The spectacle of their doing so alarmed Castlereagh, who admitted that he looked "with considerable anxiety at the tendency of (Prussian) politics" and noted that "the army is by no means subordinate to the civil authorities,"⁵⁷ and it led Emperor Alexander to say to a group of his generals: "It is possible that some time we shall have to come to the aid of the King of Prussia against his army."⁵⁸

Metternich was less concerned over the effects of the behavior of Blucher and his colleagues upon the authority of the Prussian crown than he was over the threat it represented to the common interests of the alliance. He sensed what it is easier for us, with twentieth century experience, to recognize: namely, that the Silesian Army commanders were fighting, or wanted to fight, a different kind of war than the allied sovereigns and ministers. The latter- and this was true even of Emperor Alexander, whose enthusiasms were always restrained before they went too far by a cool appreciation of state interest- were fighting for political objectives; the Prussian soldiers were fighting for ideological ones. In Blucher's headquarters, Gneisenau, Grolman and the others rubbed shoulders with fantasists and demagogues like Arndt, Gorres and Jahn and partook of that mystical nationalism which turned the war against Napoleon into a fight against evil, a struggle against the anti-Christ and his minions. Gneisenau's quarrels with Schwarzenberg were not really about strategy; they were, at least to Gneisenau, about something much more fundamental, about faith, about religion. When he pressed for a headlong drive towards Paris, he talked of it as a crusade. "Destiny brought us here," he wrote to Stein in January 1814.

We must take revenge for the so many sorrows inflicted on the nations, for so much arrogance, so that the principle *discite justitiam moniti non temnere divos* may be observed. If we do not do that, then we are miserable wretches, who deserve to be shocked out of our lazy peace every two years and to be threatened with the scourge of slavery.

And again:

We must answer the visits of the French to our cities by visiting them in theirs. So long as that does not happen, our revenge and triumph will be incomplete. If the Silesian Army gets to Paris first, I shall at once have the bridges of Austerlitz and Jena blown up, as well as the Arc de Triomphe.

In these words, and in the behavior of Blucher in Paris in 1815, we sense a spirit which, if uncontrolled, could only expand the war to new dimensions of bitterness and devastation and make a viable peace settlement impossible. In them we find already an intimation of the ideological passions which were, in the twentieth century, to make it so difficult to keep war within the limitations that statecraft requires. Metternich and Castlereagh had every reason to be alarmed.

IV

When one reviews the history of the Grand Alliance of 1813-1815 and contemplates the serious deficiencies of the command relationships, the fundamental differences in political ambition and objective between the partners, and the dangers posed by the insubordination and ideological incompatibility of the Prussian soldiers, it is not immediately easy to understand how the coalition managed to survive even the first winter of the war. It did so, of course, because of the existence of that almost elemental force mentioned only occasionally in these pages- Napoleon Bonaparte himself, formidable even on a stricken field, endlessly resilient and resourceful, always ready to strike hammer blows against the weak points in the coalition arrayed against him. The pressure exerted by the mere knowledge that Bonaparte was still at large, reinforced as it was by his sudden and dreadful appearances, was enough to hold the alliance together in moments of crisis and eventually to persuade it to consolidate its resources in such a way that victory became possible.

It is always dangerous to attempt to draw lessons from history, and there are, in any event, profound differences between the Grand Alliance discussed here and the great peacetime alliance of which we are a part today. Even so, at a time when we hear so much about the crisis of NATO and when so much is written about the difficulties of reforming its command structure or resolving

the strategical and political differences of its members, it may be useful to reflect that others have found it possible to live with administrative deficiencies and conflicts of interest and yet to be effective partners and that we may do so too, provided we remember why our alliance was established in the first place and provided we do not lose sight of the fact that our Bonapartes too are always in the near distance and that their menace is undiminished. The Grand Alliance of 1813-1815 is interesting because it is a kind of prototype of all alliances, with all the troubles to which they are heir. Its history may be a source of encouragement to us if we note that its internal divisions were deeper and more fundamental than those which affect the Atlantic Alliance today but that it survived and was victorious.

1. F. Loraine Petre, *Napoleon at Bay*, 1814 (London, 1914), p.203.
2. Freiherr von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Kriegslehren nach Clausewit aus den Feldzugen 1813 und 1814* (Berlin, 1908), p.11.
3. On the reasons for his seeking an armistice, see Colonel F. N. Maude, *The Leipzig Campaign 1813* (London, 1908), pp.142-43; and J. F. C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World, II* (New York, 1955), pp. 464f.
4. On Bernadotte's role in the subsequent campaign, see Franklin D. Scott, *Bernadotte and the Fall of Napoleon* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935).
5. See Friedrich Carl Ferdinand Freiherr von Muffling, *Aus meinem Leben* (Berlin, 1851), pp. 36ff.; *Die Befreiungskriege*, herausgegeben von der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Wehrpolitik und Webrwissenschaften (Berlin, 1938), p.25; E. F. Henderson, *Blucher and the Uprising of Prussia against Napoleon, 1806-1815* (London, 1911), pp. 105, 108; Andrei A. Lobanov-Rostovsky, *Russia and Europe, 1789-1825* (Durham, N.C., 1947), pp. 249f.
6. Helrnuth Rossler, *Oesterreichs Kampf urn Deutschlands Befreiung* (2. Aun., Hamburg, 1940), II, p.148.
7. On the financial and other obstacles that had to be overcome before this was possible, see *ibid.*, pp. 132f., 221.
8. Oskar Regele, *Feldmarschall Radetsky, Leben, Leistung, Erbe* (Wien, 1957), p.118. On Metternich's sense of military affairs and the coordination between his military policy and his diplomacy, see *ibid.*, p.108.
9. On Jomini, see the essay by Crane Brinton in *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* edited by Edward Mead Earle, Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, 1943), pp.77-92. On Archduke Charles, see Rossler, *Oesterreichs Kampf*, I, pp. 109-150; Ludwig Jedlicka, "Erzherzog Karl, der Sieger von Aspern," in *Gettalter der Getchicke Oesterreichs*, edited by Hugo Hantsch (Innsbruck, Wien, 1962); R. Lorenz, "Erzherzog Karl als Denker," in *Das Bild des Kneges im deutschen Denken*, edited by August Faust, I (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1941); and Hans Delbruck, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst* (new edition, Berlin, 1962), IV, p.503.
10. Muffling, *Aus meinem Leben*, p.82.
11. Rossler, *Oesterrichs Kampf II*, pp. 149f, 234f.
12. See Gordon A. Craig, "Command and Staff Problems in the Austrian Army, 1740-1866," in *The Theory and Practice of War* edited by Michael Howard (London, 1955).
13. Regele, *Radetzky*, p.118.
14. See, *inter alia*, Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Knege*, p.16. Aufl., edited by Werner Hallweg (Bonn, 1952), p.222.
15. On Langenau, an able but vain and ambitious soldier, see Regele, *Radetzky*, p.178.
16. On the Trachenberg talks, see *ibid.*, pp. 124ff.; Scott, *Bernadotte*, pp. 84ff.; General-leutnant von Caemmerer, *Die Befreiungskriege 1813-1815: ein strategischer Uberbuck* (Berlin, 1907), pp. 41ff.; Rudolf Friederich, *Die Befreiungskriege 1813-1815, II* (Berlin, 1912), pp.34-41; and, for some biting comments, Muffling, *Aus meinem Leben*, pp. 56f.

17. For a discussion of this view, which was based essentially on a misreading of Clausewitz, see Gordon A. Craig, "Delbruck: The Military Historian," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, pp.272-275.
18. Regele, *Radetzky*, pp. 121ff.
19. *Ibid.*, p.126.
20. On Knesebeck's reforming activities, see W. O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms, 1786-1813* (New York, 1945), pp. 75ff., 226. On his presence at Supreme Headquarters, see Rossler, *Oesterrichs Kampf*, II, p.152.
21. Regele, *Radetzky*, p.136.
22. Hugo Kerchnawe and A. Veltze, *Karl Fust zu Schwarzenberg* (Wien, 1913), pp. 166f.
23. Muffling, *Aus meinem Lehen*, pp. 149ff.; Generalleutnant von Janson, *Getchichie des Feldzuges 1814 in Frankreich* (Berlin, 1903-1905), II, p.98.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 80f.; Scott, *Bernadotte*, pp. 99ff.
25. Muffling, *Aus metnem Leben*, pp. 61ff.
26. Henderson, *Blucher*, pp. 134f.
27. Rudolf Friederich, *Geschichte des Herbstfeldzuges 1813*, II (Berlin, 1904), pp. 41ff
28. Scott, *Bernadotte*, p.114.
29. Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored* (new edition, New York, 1964), p.109.
30. Henderson, *Blucher*, p.197.
31. F. von Cochenhausen, "Vor 125 Jahren: Politische und militarische Fuhung im Feldzug 1814," in *Wissen und Wehi*; XX (1939), pp. Sif.
32. Muffling, *Aus meinem Leben*, p.90.
33. A. Sorel, *L'Europe et la Revolution francaise* (Paris, 1904), VIII, pp. 18Sf.
34. See Cochenhausen in *Wissen und Wehr XX* (1939), pp. 82ff. for Gneisenau's objections to this plan and the amendments which freed the Silesian Army from the original restrictions placed on it.
35. Kissinger, *A World Restored*, p.112.
36. This was partly caused by the Swiss issue, for Alexander did not want to violate the neutrality of the country of his old tutor La Harpe. On this and other aspects of the dispute, see Gustav Roloff, *Politik und Kreigfuhung wahrend des Krieges von 1814* (Berlin, 1891), p.28.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 35f.; Kissinger, *A World Restored*, p.113.
38. See C. K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1812-1815* (London, 1931), pp. 200-203.
39. That Schwarzenberg's picture was not an exaggerated one, as most Prussian historians have been inclined to argue, is shown by a report of Sir Charles Stewart of February 28, 1814,cited in *ibid.*, p.219 n.
40. Roloff, *Politik*, pp. 45f.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 49ff.
42. For descriptions of the battle, see Janson, *Geschichte*, I, pp.169-214, and Friederich, *Befreiungskriege*, III, pp. 99ff. Muffling, *Aus meinem Leben*, pp. 137ff., defends Schwarzenberg's conduct of the battle against the charges made in Clausewitz, *Der Feldzug von 1814* (Berlin, 1835).
43. Enno F. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy: I. The Contest with Napoleon, 1799-1814* (Princeton, 1963), p.296.
44. Ml'ffling, *Aus meinem Leben*, pp. 33f., 36ff.
45. Henderson, *Blucher*; pp. 206f.
46. Accounts of the battle are to be found in Janson, *Geschichte*, I, pp. 237ff.; Friederich, *Befreiungskriege*, III, pp. 116ff.; Henderson, *Blucher* pp. 217ff.; Petre, *Napoleon at Bay*, pp. 55ff.; Cochenhausen in *Wissen und Wehi*; XX (1939), pp. 8Sf.
47. Webster, *Castlereagh*, p.218.
48. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I, pp. 297ff.
49. Webster, *Castlereagh*, p.220. Cf. Hans Delbruck and G. Pertz, *Das Leben des Feld-*

marschalis Grafen Neidhardt von Gneisenau, IV (Berlin, 1880), pp. 82ff. and F. von Conrady, *Leben und Wirken des Generals Carl von Grolman* (Berlin, 1894-96), II, pp. 193f.

50. See Max Lehmann, *Scharnhorst* (Leipzig, 1886-87), II, p.295.

51. Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk*, I (Munchen, 1954), p.104.

52. On the debate among historians on the question of whether Tauroggen was an act of insubordination, see Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford, 1955), p.59 n.

53. Lehmann, *Scharnhorst*, II, p.514.

54. Ritter, *Staatskunst*, I, pp. 106ff.

55. Webster, *Castlereagh*, p.463.

56. Ritter, *Staatskunst*, I, pp.115-116.

57. H. G. Schenk, *The Aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars* (New York, 1947), pp. 116f.

58. Friedrich Meinecke, *Das Leben des Generalfeldmarschalls Hermann von Boyen* (Stuttgart, 1895-99), II, p.73.

59. Ritter, *Staatskunst*, I, pp.110-111.

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