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Self-Interest versus the Common Cause: Austria, Prussia and Russia against Napoleon

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ABSTRACT This essay re-examines coalition warfare during the Napoleonic era by looking at the three eastern European powers – Austria, Prussia and Russia – how they interacted over time with France as well as each other, and how they managed French preponderance on the Continent. Before 1812, coalition warfare was dominated by eighteenth-century military and diplomatic attitudes: overall foreign political goals were ill-defined and were characterised by deep mistrust. The result was that the eastern powers pursued their own interests with little regard to coalition cohesion. If the coalition held together in 1813 and 1814, on the other hand, it was largely because individual powers' self-interest coincided with the overall objectives of the coalition – an increased determination to defeat Napoleon – along with a never before seen numerical superiority in allied troops. In this, Austria and especially Chancellor Metternich's role in juggling conflicting interests between the allies so that they could present, for the first time, a united front against France was fundamental.

KEY WORDS: Napoleon, Sixth Coalition, Central Europe, Napoleonic Wars

The difficulties inherent in an alliance system made up of disparate powers with vastly diverse foreign political interests goes some way towards explaining the lack of military successes against France prior to 1813. Five coalitions, 1792–97, 1799–1801, 1805, 1806–07, 1809, combinations of various powers, ended in failure largely because of the lack of cooperation between Vienna, Berlin, St Petersburg and London, which resulted in no common political goals – indeed, sometimes contradictory goals – and no overall military strategy. The predominant foreign political attitudes that characterised these coalitions are defined by deep mistrust, expediency, opportunism, and self-interest, not to mention the urge to expand at the expense of smaller powers.

There were, moreover, always areas of potential conflict – Poland, the Balkans, control of central Europe, northern Italy – especially between the three eastern powers, which served to sustain if not increase their natural inclination towards suspicion and mistrust. Admittedly, there were vague noises from all of the allied great powers at various periods of the wars about a system of collective security, but ‘collective’ security was more often than not about self-interest, that is, defending oneself from Napoleon, not about creating a European system that went beyond traditional alliance politics.¹ The eastern powers, in other words, were more inclined to advance their own interests than in working in concert to prevent French expansion, a problem apparent to some contemporary observers.²

This attitude did not fundamentally change with the defeat of Napoleon in Russia and the formation of what is usually referred to as the ‘Grand Alliance of 1813’ (sometimes referred to as the Quadruple Alliance) when, for the first time during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, all the great powers were finally united against France. The Grand Alliance was born out of hesitation, and mistrust among the signatory powers was still the predominant sentiment. Moreover, the alliance was formed under exceptional circumstances: Napoleon and the French Empire were in a particularly weakened state; the Austrian Chancellor and Foreign Minister, Count (later Prince) Clemens von Metternich, pursued a policy of cooperation as the most effective means of defeating France; and Russia was more determined than at any other stage to carry the war into France. It calls into question the dictum iterated by Henry Kissinger, namely, ‘It is the essence of a coalition, by definition almost, that the differences between its members and the common enemy are greater than their internal

¹See ‘Metternich’s Sketch of a Political Scheme, January 1806’, in Prince Richard Metternich (ed.), *Memoirs of Prince Metternich, 1773–1815* (London: Charles Scribner 1880), II, 121–3; Frederick W. Kagan, *The End of the Old Order: Napoleon and Europe, 1801–1805* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press 2006), 145–6.

²The British foreign secretary, Lord Grenville, was aware of this difficulty as early as the First Coalition, but awareness did not translate into more effective cooperation between the allies (H.M. Scott, *The Birth of a Great Power System 1740–1815* (Harlow: Pearson-Longman 2006), 287–8). After his defeat at Ulm in 1805, Feldzeugmeister Baron Mack, accused by an Austrian investigating commission of having made too many mistakes in the field, took his cause to the public with a pamphlet in which the author argued that inter-allied disunity, pitted against Napoleon’s evident genius, was more to blame for defeat than Mack’s own military dispositions (Gunther E. Rothenberg, ‘The Habsburg Army in the Napoleonic Wars’, *Military Affairs* 37 (1973), 2).

differences among each other.³ The lessons of previous coalition failures were not really learnt in 1813–14. This essay is about understanding what conditions in 1813–14 allowed the eastern powers to defeat France and Napoleon when they had failed on every previous occasion.⁴

One of the problems was that the eastern powers, although reasonably adept at building short-term combinations of alliances, were not particularly good at holding them together in the face of military setbacks. Napoleon was much better at this than his opponents, that is, he was better at exploiting his alliance partners for his own ends. He did this either by creating new dynasties, putting his relatives onto thrones – Joseph Bonaparte in Naples and then in Spain, Louis Bonaparte in Holland, Jérôme Bonaparte in Westphalia, brother-in-law Marshal Joachim Murat in Berg and then Naples, stepson Eugène de Beauharnais Viceroy in Italy – or by obliging other medium-sized European states to provide him with both men and money. Some of these states, like Württemberg, did so willingly. Others, like Bavaria, were in many respects reluctant allies whose loyalty was questionable, despite supplying more troops than was actually required, and despite a political elite that was much more in tune with France than with the eastern powers.⁵

³Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1957), 94.

⁴It is for this reason that it deals almost exclusively with relations between Austria, Prussia and Russia, as well as relations between the eastern powers and France, largely ignoring the diplomatic role that Britain had to play. That role is covered, among others, by Paul W. Schroeder, “‘An Unnatural Natural Alliance’: Castlereagh, Metternich, and Aberdeen in 1813”, *International History Review* 10 (1988), 517–40. Besides, despite bankrolling the Sixth Coalition, Britain was virtually excluded from the councils of the eastern powers until Nov. 1813 (Muriel E. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen. A Political Biography* (London: Longman 1983), 122), and did not play a significant role in the diplomatic negotiations until Langres in Jan. 1814 (Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 118–9). The eastern powers not only faced many of the same foreign-political problems, but also bore the brunt of the fighting against France. For a brief analysis of the high-political developments of the three eastern powers during this period see, Brendan Simms, ‘The Eastern Empires from the Ancien Régime to the Challenge of the French Wars, 1780–c.1806’, and idem., ‘The Eastern Empires from the Challenge of Napoleon to the Restoration, c.1806–1830’, in Pamela Pilbeam (ed.), *Themes in Modern European History* (London: Routledge 1995), 65–84, and 83–106.

⁵Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, 2 vols. (Princeton UP 1963), I, 94–5; Marcel Dunan, *Napoléon et l'Allemagne: La Système Continentale et les Débuts du Royaume de Bavière, 1806–1810* (Paris: Plon 1943), 232–72. Michael Klang, ‘Bavaria and the War of Liberation, 1813–1814’, *French Historical Studies* 4 (1965), 27, 33–40, suggests that loyalty towards French inspired reforms among the Bavarian political elite

Either way, Napoleon was able to utilise these resources in ways that his opponents were not, at least not before the collapse of the Empire in Central Europe at the end of 1813. At the height of the Empire in 1810, including allied or client states such as the German Confederation, Napoleon was able to benefit from a population of more than 83 million people. The combined population of the three eastern powers at their peak, on the other hand, was no more than 73 million people.⁶ One cannot underestimate the importance of this resource in manpower. Belgium, for example, provided over 100,000 conscripts between 1798 and 1809.⁷ In 1805, the Confederation of the Rhine supplied the Grande Armée with 63,000 men, and in 1809, nearly 100,000 Germans were either incorporated into French divisions or organised into their own units.⁸ Napoleon imposed conscription on Bavaria (1804–05), the Italian Republic (1802), Naples (1809), Holland (1810) and even briefly Portugal (1807–08). Between 1805 and 1815, the Kingdom of Italy, with a population of six million, contributed about 200,000 men.⁹ The army destined for Russia in 1812 included a large contingent from Austria, Prussia and the Confederation of the Rhine, as many as 180,000 men.¹⁰

Napoleon, like his revolutionary predecessors, was thus able to raise armies of an unprecedented size, but that simply obliged his opponents to do likewise.¹¹ If between 1799 and 1813, the French conscription system was able to incorporate more than 2.6 million men into the Army – roughly seven per cent of the male population¹² – the Russians were able to raise 1.5 million men during the reign of Alexander I, that

was strong, but that this was not incompatible with an increasing hatred of Napoleon as tyrant.

⁶Austria, 27 million; Prussia, 8.7 million in 1806, 5 million after 1807; and Russia about 37.5 million (Clive Emsley, *The Longman Companion to Napoleonic Europe* (London: Longman 1993), 127, 141, 147, 149).

⁷Jeremy Black, *European Warfare, 1660–1815* (New Haven: Yale UP 1994), 224.

⁸Eric Dorn Brose, *German History, 1789–1871: From the Holy Roman Empire to the Bismarckian Reich* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books 1997), 51; Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Emperor's Last Victory. Napoleon and the Battle of Wagram* (London: Weidenfeld 2005), 55–6.

⁹Frederick C. Schneid, *Soldiers of Napoleon's Kingdom of Italy: Army, State and Society, 1800–1815* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1995), 14, 25.

¹⁰Brose, *German History*, 72.

¹¹Charles J. Esdaile, *The Wars of Napoleon* (London: Longman 1995), 41, 50–65.

¹²Annie Crépin, *Défendre la France: Les Français, la guerre et les service militaire, de la guerre de Sept Ans à Verdun* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes 2005), 157.

is, four per cent of the empire's total population.¹³ Figures for Austria and Prussia were even higher. In 1809 and 1813, Austria was able to mobilize 4.5 and 5.6 per cent of the population, and up to 14 per cent in the Military Border. During the latter stages of the wars, Prussia was able to mobilise anywhere between 6 and 11 per cent of its (reduced) population.¹⁴ The allies could, therefore, under the right circumstances, match and even outnumber the mobilising power of the French imperial regime. The problem was that the eastern powers were never united in their opposition to Napoleon before 1813.

The Grande Armée was able to benefit from something else the allies would never really have, and then only tenuously in 1813–14 – unity of command. The lack of an overall command structure in the coalition led to situations where, for example, Austria in 1805 and Prussia in 1806, rather than await the arrival of their coalition partners, decided to confront Napoleon before the bulk of their forces had time to combine. The Emperor of the French, on the other hand, had complete control over the direction of military affairs which gave him, generally speaking, the flexibility to strike when and where it pleased him. It was a decisive advantage in the field, especially since relations between coalition commanders were often strained.

Once defeated, the three eastern powers were obliged to tow the French line, at least as long as they tolerably could, on the whole prepared to accommodate Napoleon. Austria engaged in a rapprochement with France on two occasions – between 1801 and 1803, and again between 1809 and 1813 – largely because it was too isolated diplomatically and too weak financially to do otherwise.¹⁵ In 1809, after its fourth resounding defeat in a decade, Metternich did everything in his power to effect an Austrian alliance with France and, when that was concluded, to behave like a loyal ally. He dissuaded Denmark from entering into a neutral Scandinavian union; he

¹³Jacques Houdaille, 'Pertes de l'Armée de terre sous le Premier Empire, d'après les registres matricules', *Population* 27 (1972), 48; idem., 'Le problème des pertes de la guerre', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 17 (1970), 411–23; Rothenberg, *Art of Warfare*, 135. The Russian figure is from William C. Fuller, 'The Imperial Army', in Dominic Lieven (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: CUP 2006), II, 537.

¹⁴Oskar Regele, *Feldmarschall Radetsky* (Vienna: Verlagerhold 1957), 111–2.

¹⁵Karl Roider, 'The Habsburg Foreign Ministry and Political Reform, 1801–1805', *Central European History* 22 (1989), 161, 176; Charles Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618–1815* (Cambridge: CUP 1994), 238. On the financial crisis facing the regime see, idem., 'Austria's road to Austerlitz', in Kinley Brauer and William E. Wright (eds.), *Austria in the Age of the French Revolution, 1789–1815* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota 1990), 12–3.

suppressed reports of Spanish successes in Austrian newspapers so as not to arouse any public feelings against the French; he went out of his way to recognise Marshal Jean Bernadotte (Crown Prince of Sweden from August 1810) and Murat as newly created sovereigns; and he dissuaded Emperor Francis I from a potentially ill-fated alliance with Russia in 1811. Metternich also negotiated Austria's first formal treaty with France since the Revolution, in March 1812, that led to 30,000 Austrian troops being sent into Russia.¹⁶ It was based on the premise that Russia would lose the war and that Austria would be accordingly compensated territorially for its participation. A rapprochement with France had been effectively achieved in April 1810 with the marriage alliance. Even though Metternich was instrumental in arranging the marriage, he was also aware that in so doing Austria would be giving up its traditional role in central Europe.¹⁷ That was to be the price of peace. After that, Austria remained loyal to Napoleon until it could no longer remain so. Even after Napoleon's defeat in Russia, and indeed at the Battle of Leipzig, Metternich believed that the best chance at a general European peace was working with, not against France.¹⁸

Austria, however, was the only eastern power prepared to work with Napoleon: Prussia's attitude was ambivalent to say the least, and Russia's alliance at Tilsit, an aberration, lasted less than a year before tensions started to develop. Tsar Alexander had undergone a spiritual transformation of sorts and was suffering from the dangerous delusion that he was destined to 'save' Europe from France.¹⁹ Nevertheless, he had a vision of Russia and his own place in Europe.²⁰ In 1805, Alexander believed that in order to create a European political system, he had to either persuade or oblige Napoleon to respect certain territorial limits, that is, to adopt a more moderate foreign policy.²¹

¹⁶Ingrao, *Habsburg Monarchy*, 238. The Austrian troops, under General of Cavalry Karl Philip Prince Schwarzenberg, were not, it would appear, as inactive as has often been made out. Schwarzenberg lost a third of his men in the campaign. See Digby Smith, *The Greenhill Napoleonic Wars Data Book* (London: Greenhill Books 1998).

¹⁷Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: OUP 1994), 406–7.

¹⁸Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 465.

¹⁹Alexander M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries. Russian Conservative Thought and Politics in the Reign of Alexander I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP 1997), 144–5; Michael A. Pesenson, 'Napoleon Bonaparte and Apocalyptic Discourse in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia', *The Russian Review* 65 (2006), 379, 380–1.

²⁰See, for example, Foreign Minister Czartoryski's grand design in, W.H. Zawadzki, 'Prince Adam Czartoryski and Napoleonic France, 1801–1805: A Study in Political Attitudes', *Historical Journal* 18 (1975), 250–5.

²¹Zawadzki, 'Czartoryski and Napoleonic France', 252.

One way of doing that was to create buffer states in central, southern and eastern Europe.²² Ideas like that, however, usually ended up smashing on the rock of Napoleonic ambition. Within a few years of Napoleon's coming to power, almost all the European heads of state and many of his contemporaries had gone from thinking that they could work with the French leader to believing that he was possessed by an insatiable drive. This was certainly the case in Russia where between 1800 and 1804, Foreign Minister Polish-born Prince Adam Czartoryski had gone from willing to work with Napoleon to considering that he was the greatest danger Europe faced.²³ Russia's accommodation of Napoleon after Tilsit was short-lived and in reality only lasted until the appointment of Count Nikolai Petrovich Rumiantsev as foreign minister in 1808. Rumiantsev supported cooperation with the French, but he was in fact being used by Alexander in a Janus-faced game that hid his real intentions, to prepare for a future war with Napoleon.²⁴

Prussia, unlike either Austria or Russia, was extremely reluctant to become involved in a European war until its hand was forced in September 1806. Between the Peace of Basle ending Prussia's involvement in the war of the First Coalition in April 1795, and the outbreak of war with France in October 1806, Prussia's determined non-involvement was developed into a policy of neutrality, which brought about ten years of peace and prosperity to northern Germany.²⁵ Neutrality did not mean that Prussia was completely inactive. On the contrary, it was performing a desperate juggling act between France and Russia. At the beginning of 1804, Prussia signed a (secret) alliance with Russia which was aimed at protecting it against France, but like the Austro-Russian alliance that same year it had the potential to do more damage than good.

²²Ibid., 256.

²³Ibid., 269.

²⁴Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, 49; Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, *The Foreign Ministers of Alexander I: Political Attitudes and the Conduct of Russian Diplomacy, 1801–1825* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press 1969), 167–8, 180–2; Janet Hartley, *Alexander I* (London: Longman 1994), 74; Scott, *Birth of a Great Power System*, 323–4, 344–5. Alexander had played a similar double game in 1806–07, encouraging Prussian resistance against France all the while negotiating peace terms behind the Prussian king's back.

²⁵On Prussian neutrality see Brendan Simms, *The Impact of Napoleon: Prussian High Politics, Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Executive, 1797–1806* (Cambridge: CUP 1996); and Philip Dwyer, 'The Politics of Prussian Neutrality, 1795–1805', *German History* 12 (1994), 351–73; idem, 'Two Definitions of Neutrality: Prussia, the European States-System and the French Invasion of Hanover in 1803', *International History Review* 19 (1997), 522–40.

As tension on the Continent worsened, King Frederick William III came under tremendous pressure from Austria and especially Russia to join the Third Coalition. At the same time, he came under pressure from Napoleon to enter into a formal alliance with France. It illustrates the dilemma faced by a country like Prussia and the necessity of having to choose between one dominant power and the other, something that always created factions and frictions at court. On this occasion, Frederick William followed his personal inclination and opted for a Russian alliance in November 1805. The Treaty of Potsdam, as it became known, was a bad bet; Prussia's intentions were revealed just as Napoleon defeated the allies at Austerlitz (although it is highly doubtful, despite what one recent historian has argued, that it would have greatly influenced the outcome of the campaign, as can be seen from the Prussian Army's performance in 1806).²⁶

The Prussian emissary to Napoleon's headquarters at the Schönbrunn Palace near Vienna, Foreign Minister Count Christian von Haugwitz, then did an astonishing back flip and offered Napoleon an alliance from 15 December 1805.²⁷ He had little choice if Prussia was not to find itself alone at war against France; the Russian troops were withdrawing from central Europe and Austria was negotiating a separate peace with Napoleon. The French alliance obliged Prussia to occupy the Electorate of Hanover, the German territory of King George III of England, thus forcing it into a war with Britain. It also meant that Prussia was supposed to supply troops in the continuing war against Russia.

In fact, Prussia's behaviour during these months bordered on the schizophrenic. While Haugwitz was genuinely collaborating with France, Frederick William was secretly working with Russia behind his foreign minister's back so that by 1806, Prussia was allied with both France and Russia. The decision to go to war against France in August 1806 was motivated by the rumour, true as it turned out, that Napoleon was considering giving back Hanover to Britain in the negotiations that he had recently undertaken with that country. When Prussia was in turn defeated at Jena-Auerstädt, the third eastern power in under two years, it was, like Austria, virtually forced into client state status.

²⁶On the potential impact of Prussia on the outcome of the Third Coalition see, Kagan, *The End of the Old Order*, 546–7, 654. Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 280, on the other hand, believes that Prussia never had any intention of going to war with Napoleon.

²⁷See Philip Dwyer, 'Prussia during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1786–1815', in Dwyer (ed.), *The Rise of Prussia, 1700–1830* (London: Pearson 2000), 249–50; Simms, *Impact of Napoleon*, 207–8.

After the 1806 humiliation, everything undertaken by the Prussian state at a domestic and a foreign political level, when it was not being cowed by Napoleon, had but one purpose: not revenge as has traditionally been argued, but to increase Prussia's ability to pay the huge war indemnity placed on it by Napoleon, and in the process make itself an attractive ally in the hope of securing for itself more tolerable conditions in a French-dominated Europe. But even that policy was short-lived. After 1810, when Prussia realised that it would never be able to satisfy Napoleon, it once again began secret negotiations with Russia.

The failure of the eastern powers to prevent Napoleonic hegemony in central Europe centres on three wars – 1805, 1806, and 1809 – but they were, in many respects, a repetition of the failings of the first two coalitions against France. That is, if the eastern powers did not bring the combined full weight of their armies to bear against Napoleon it was largely the result of allied impatience, lack of planning, lack of foresight, mutual distrust, and lack of diplomatic and political will.

Past experience meant that, in spite of Napoleon's weakened position and the collapse of the Grande Armée that had invaded Russia in 1812, all three eastern powers (but especially Austria) were extremely reluctant to take on a man that had dominated the battlefields of Europe for the last decade and more. The Russians debated whether they would actually pursue the French into central Europe, that is, about whether a war that had been in defence of the fatherland should be transformed into a campaign to destroy Napoleon.²⁸ Diplomats, such as Count Karl Nesselrode, Count Andrei Razumovskii and Count Charles Pozzo di Borgo, a Corsican in Russian service, as well as young officers who would later be drawn to the Decembrist movement, were keen to push on and eventually overthrow Napoleon. On the other hand, a number of people in Alexander's entourage, including Rumiantsev, Commander-in-Chief Field Marshal Prince Kutuzov, War Minister General Count Alexei Arakcheyev, and the Minister of the Interior, State Secretary Admiral Aleksandr Shishkov, did not want to carry the war into Europe and would have been satisfied with taking a few territorial possessions in the west.²⁹ Not only was the Russian Army in poor shape but generals like Kutuzov, hardly a match for Napoleon in open battle, were extremely wary of having to face him on the German plains, and were worried that the destruction of Napoleon

²⁸Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, 124; Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen*, 128.

²⁹Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, 139–40.

would only benefit Britain.³⁰ There was still a good deal of anti-British sentiment at the Russian court at this time; the two powers had nominally been at war only a few months before and many were still suspicious of British motives.

As for Alexander, it has often been assumed by historians that he was persuaded, reluctantly, to pursue Napoleon by either those in his entourage or by the Prussian minister in his service, Baron Heinrich vom Stein. But these arguments can be discounted.³¹ On the contrary, Alexander, like his young officers, was keen to carry the war into Germany, if not for territorial gains then at least in the role of 'Saviour of Europe'.³²

If Alexander was determined to pursue Napoleon, this was certainly not the case for either Austria or Prussia. At the end of 1812 and the beginning of 1813, Frederick William hesitated about leaving the Napoleonic alliance and joining with Russia in a coalition against France.³³ It was long after Alexander had made the decision to cross the Niemen in pursuit of the remains of the Grande Armée, and more than two months after the commander of the Prussian contingent, Lieutenant General Hans Yorck, signed a convention with the Russians at Tauroggen (30 December 1812) – an action disowned by Frederick William, fearful of French reprisals³⁴ – that Frederick William reluctantly decided to come out publicly against France. The Treaty of Kalisch with Russia (28 February 1813) was followed by a formal declaration of war (17 March), the same day he issued his famous proclamation 'To My People' calling on Prussians to rise up against the

³⁰Rothenburg, *Art of Warfare*, 204. See Kutuzov's remarks to the British liaison officer, Major-General Wilson, in Sir Robert Wilson, *Narrative of Events during the Invasion of Russia by Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Retreat of the French Army 1812* (London: John Murray 1860), 234.

³¹See H. A. Schmitt, '1812: Stein, Alexander I and the Crusade against Napoleon', *Journal of Modern History* 31 (1959), 325–8.

³²There were any number of influential men and women in the Tsar's entourage who saw this as an opportunity to expand Russia's borders to the Vistula and who no doubt brought some influence to bear. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, 141–2. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I, 149, argues that Alexander's 'political preparations from the very outset had anticipated a campaign beyond the Russian frontier'.

³³Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann, *König in Preußens großer Zeit: Friedrich Wilhelm III. Der Melancholiker auf dem Thron* (Berlin: Siedler 1992), 362–4, 366; Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 452–3.

³⁴Indeed, orders were issued for Yorck's arrest and court martial, although this did not prevent him from inciting garrisons in East Prussia to revolt, arguing that he was acting with the King's secret approval (Peter Paret, *Yorck and the Era of the Prussian Reform, 1807–1815* (Princeton UP 1966), 192–5).

French. (The appeal to the people was possible because he now had solid Russian backing.) The fact of the matter is, though, that the King acted because he was being overtaken by events: he had already lost control of two-thirds of his army, as well as the provinces of East and West Prussia. Revolution was something the King obviously feared even more than Napoleon.³⁵

Before all of that happened, however, the Prussian Chancellor, Karl von Hardenberg, attempted to get Metternich to side with Prussia and Russia against France, and when that did not work to create a central European neutral block that would oblige Napoleon and Alexander to come to terms.³⁶ In typical Prussian style, at the same time Frederick William sent an envoy to Paris in January 1813, General Prince Franz Hatzfeldt, to try to come to some agreement in return for his continued loyalty. His demands were quite reasonable under the circumstances: the payment of 90 million francs already owed to Prussia for supplies taken by France, and a few territorial concessions in return for which he would enter into an active alliance against Russia. The alliance was to be sealed with a marriage between a Prussian prince and a Bonaparte. Despite two further alliance proposals made in February 1813, shortly before, it should be noted, Frederick William signed a treaty with Russia, Napoleon's only answer was to continue with requisitions in a manner that was bound to alienate Prussia even further.

This may have been a conscious attempt on the part of Napoleon, possibly still smarting from Yorck's betrayal, to push Prussia into the arms of Russia, so that he would have an excuse to wage war against the Hohenzollerns, defeat them and finally eliminate the monarchy altogether.³⁷ If so, then Napoleon's estimation of his own abilities as a commander does not seem to have been terribly damaged by what had happened in Russia. He no doubt believed that any future campaign against a Russo-Prussian alliance would be a replay of 1806–07, but given the pyrrhic victory of Eylau this was hubris.

Less comprehensible, at first glance, is Napoleon's attitude towards Austria. From late 1812 up to Austria's entry into the war against France in August 1813, Metternich unsuccessfully pursued a peace

³⁵Stamm-Kuhlmann, *König in Preußens großer Zeit*, 365–9, 370–4; Scott, *Birth of a Great Power System*, 350, Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (London: Allen Lane 2006), 362–3.

³⁶Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I. 154–6; Stamm-Kuhlmann, *König in Preußens großer Zeit*, 362–4.

³⁷Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 467.

offensive.³⁸ In the immediate aftermath of the Russian campaign, it would appear that the Austrian Chancellor sincerely wanted to come to an arrangement with the Emperor of the French, and did everything in his power to accommodate him.³⁹ Metternich was much more interested in maintaining close relations with Napoleon and France than in entering into an alliance with either Russia or Prussia which, if past experiences were anything to go by, could potentially bring disaster for little or no profit. On the contrary, Metternich was concerned that if Napoleon were defeated Russia and Prussia would gain territorially to the detriment of Austria.

Russia's attitude certainly aggravated the situation and made Metternich more wary. Rather than negotiate or attempt to persuade the court of Vienna to come over to an anti-French alliance, St Petersburg pressured Vienna, threatened to come to a separate peace with France, and even to support an uprising in the Tyrol if it did not.⁴⁰ Indeed, in the light of Russian and Prussian attitudes towards Austria during the first half of 1813 it is remarkable that Austria decided at all on a partnership with them.

At first it did not. Metternich's initial response was to mediate between Napoleon on the one hand and Russia and Prussia on the other. He was not interested in another war with France out of fear of what another defeat would mean for Austria – possible popular insurrections and almost certain territorial loss. On several occasions, therefore, Metternich proposed helping Napoleon maintain his dynasty and his Empire in return for one concession, an independent, neutral European centre – a Third Germany – between Austria and Russia. Suspicious of Alexander's ambitions, Metternich wanted a powerful France to counter-balance a powerful Russia, with a strong independent central Europe between them.⁴¹ For a while, Metternich hoped to use France as a counterweight to Russian ambitions, but he eventually

³⁸Friedrich Luckwaldt, *Oesterreich und die Anfänge des Befreiungskrieges von 1813* (Berlin: Ebering 1898), 187–230, 249–307, 388–407; Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I, 147–86.

³⁹Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 465.

⁴⁰Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 470. So too did Britain pressure Austria in 1813 to join the alliance, except that it did support local insurrections on Austria's borders (the Tyrol, Italy, Illyria, Switzerland) in the hope of driving Austria into the allied camp.

⁴¹Scott, *Birth of a Great Power System*, 357–8; Paul W. Schroeder, 'Metternich Studies since 1925', *Journal of Modern History* 33 (1961), 242; Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 88, 89, 91, 98, 101; Luckwaldt, *Oesterreich*, 61–78, 153–86; Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars: An International History, 1803–1815* (London: Allen Lane 2007), 497.

came to realise that a lasting peace on the Continent was more important than Austrian dynastic foreign political interests, and that the only way to achieve that lasting peace was to eliminate Napoleon. Admittedly, Metternich did not adopt this way of thinking until quite late in the day. Before that, the allies – Russia and Prussia but also Britain – reacted coolly to Metternich's mediation efforts, fearful that this would only give Napoleon time to regain his grip on Europe, but for the Austrian Chancellor it was a question of ending the war and of coming to a general peace settlement as quickly as possible, to the advantage of all concerned.

Metternich's mediation attempts culminated in a meeting with Napoleon at Dresden, on 26 June 1813, where he presented him with the allies' conditions for a preliminary peace.⁴² Napoleon rejected them despite the fact that Metternich insisted that Austria needed and wanted a durable peace.⁴³ There were three problems, all of them Napoleon's. First, he was convinced that after his spring victories of Lützen and Bautzen that the Russians and Prussians had their backs to the wall. It was an example of Napoleon always making diplomacy subservient to military strategy.⁴⁴ Second, he did not believe Metternich or, rather, he believed Austria wanted to dominate central Europe. Finally, it was Napoleon's habit to procrastinate, to draw out negotiations as long as he could, and he did so even when he had the upper hand (at Amiens in 1802, at Schönbrunn in 1809). At no stage of the Empire did Napoleon ever really know what kind of peace he wanted, and therefore had no precise terms.⁴⁵

The same can be said of the negotiations that took place in 1813. The end result of the Dresden meeting was that it pushed Metternich further into the arms of Napoleon's enemies. On 27 June 1813, one day after having left Napoleon, Metternich concluded an agreement with Russia, Prussia and Britain – the Treaty of Reichenbach – by which he undertook to join them against France if Napoleon did not meet their demands.⁴⁶ This was more than unlikely, but Metternich, both wary of

⁴²Luckwaldt, *Oesterreich*, 308–38; and Metternich's somewhat romanticised account of the meeting in Metternich, *Memoirs*, I, 185–92.

⁴³See the conversation with Metternich in *Correspondance de Napoléon I publiée par ordre de l'empereur Napoléon III*, 32 vols. (Paris: H. Plon 1858–1870), vol. 25, n. 20175 (23 June 1813).

⁴⁴Scott, *Birth of a Great Power System*, 305, 324.

⁴⁵Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I, 92–3.

⁴⁶There were four peace conditions: a partition of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw; the expansion of Prussia; the return of Illyria to Austria; and the restoration of the Hanseatic cities. Russia and Prussia had already agreed on two further conditions: the restoration of Prussia to its pre-1806 borders, and the dissolution of the

the Frenchman's strategic genius and concerned about what an allied victory would mean for Europe, nevertheless kept on trying to come to some sort of arrangement with Napoleon over the coming weeks.⁴⁷ Reichenbach thus proved to be a turning point. The French Emperor now found against him the largest allied coalition that France had ever had to face. For the first time since the beginning of the wars in 1792, not only were *all* the great powers united against France, but they also had a minimum programme of conditions from which they could negotiate a general peace. This did not automatically assure an allied victory, nor did it guarantee allied unity – indeed, Vienna was not even referred to as one of the ‘allied courts’⁴⁸ – but it made it more likely than at any stage in the last 21 years.

Napoleon's attitude had a lot to do with this invigorated allied resolve. It was, in part, a question of the French warlord not being able to recognize the new foreign-political configuration that was aligning itself against him, and hence an inability to adapt to new situations, and in part an unwillingness to admit to himself that he was fallible. In June 1813, he remarked to the diplomat Marquis de Noailles: ‘I would die before I ceded one inch of territory. Your sovereigns born on the throne can be beaten twenty times and still return to their capitals. I cannot do that because I am an upstart soldier. My domination will not be able to survive from the day I cease...to be feared.’⁴⁹ It was a constant source of anxiety for Napoleon, a theme he reverted to whenever he felt the need to justify his actions to someone in his entourage. He is reported to have said to one of his senators, the chemist Jean-Antoine Chaptal:

I can only get them [the monarchs of Europe] used to regarding me as their equal by keeping them in thrall; my empire will be destroyed if I cease being fearsome... Thus I cannot afford to let anyone threaten me without striking out at them. I shall have to maintain this attitude as long as I live, and if my son is not a great

Confederation of the Rhine. Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 471–2; Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 75–6.

⁴⁷Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I, 180–90; Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 47. Some historians, like Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 64, 70, have doubted Metternich's sincerity, arguing that in the months leading to the Austrian declaration of war, he was playing a double game, assuring Russia that he would declare war on France, and Napoleon that he would remain loyal, all the while inching closer to the allied camp.

⁴⁸Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I, 201.

⁴⁹Cited in Esdaile, *The Wars of Napoleon*, 10.

captain – if he is not able to do what I do – then he will fall off the throne where I have placed him [...] ⁵⁰

Or again he complained to the prefect, Count Antoine Thibaudeau, ‘I cannot be likened to these kings-by-the-grace-of-God, who look upon their states as a heritage [...] [My] actions must be dramatic, and for this, war is indispensable.’ ⁵¹

Given the number of assassination attempts against Napoleon – perhaps as many as 30 or more ⁵² – not to mention the number of monarchs in Napoleon’s own lifetime who were murdered, overthrown, or who faced the constant danger of a palace coup, this kind of reasoning is not entirely without justification. However, it also says a good deal about Napoleon’s state of mind. ⁵³ That Napoleon *thought* his power was based on his military triumphs is important to understanding why Napoleon always claimed that he could not make peace after defeat. For the French Emperor, every war was about his very existence as a monarch. ⁵⁴ Even if structurally the regime was relatively secure – despite underlying currents of royalism and Jacobinism, despite the assassination attempts against him and at times some rumblings at court, and despite the Malet affair at Paris in October 1812, Napoleon’s power was never seriously threatened from within – Napoleon eventually managed to estrange the social and political elite.

This is not entirely surprising. Unlike the Directory and indeed other revolutionary regimes, Napoleon may have resolved most of the domestic difficulties threatening political stability, but he had largely negated those gains through constant warring. There seems little doubt that, as a consequence, the French grew tired of him. It is more than likely that Napoleon realised this – the lack of response to conscription in 1813 and 1814 must have been an indicator – and that the dynasty would not outlive him. This realisation may have influenced the

⁵⁰Jean-Antoine Chaptal, *Mes souvenirs sur Napoléon* (Paris: Plon 1893), 217.

⁵¹Cited in Georges Lefebvre, *Napoleon*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1969), I, 169. See also Metternich, *Memoirs*, I, 186.

⁵²Jean Tulard, *Napoléon, jeudi 12 octobre 1809: le jour où Napoléon faillit être assassiné* (Paris: J.-C. Lattès 1993), 34.

⁵³Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 467–8.

⁵⁴There is much to Schroeder’s assessment that Napoleon refused to make peace ‘because he did not want to, chose not to – and also because he could not; could not make peace because he was no good at it, but also because, by this time, he was probably caught too deeply by his own past to carry it off.’ (Schroeder, *The Transformation of Europe*, 469).

manner in which he dealt with the allies over the coming months and years.⁵⁵

But that is not all. Napoleon's position in the spring of 1813 was based upon a mistaken assessment of Austria's resolve to fight – he simply did not believe that it would – and the more correct belief that whatever conditions for peace the allies insisted on would only be the beginnings of a process that would see his position and influence in Germany reduced to nothing. For Napoleon, it was all about maintaining the integrity of his empire, no matter how unrealistic an eventuality that was. Besides, from the spring of 1813 Russia, Prussia and Britain had no intention of negotiating with their enemy. Every time the opportunity presented itself – in Prague in July and August 1813, at Frankfurt in November and December 1813, at Châtillon in February and March 1814 – Russia and Prussia sent representatives that hated, the word is not too strong, Napoleon and France making the likelihood of any serious talks appear negligible.⁵⁶ Besides, the negotiations were effectively scuttled by the allies; they were in no mood for compromise.⁵⁷

What then was so different about the allied approach to coalition warfare in 1813? In some respects it was about change: Napoleon was unable to, whereas the eastern powers adapted, however reluctantly, however acrimoniously, and maintained a semblance of cooperation until their objectives, increasingly defined, had been achieved. Just look at the ways in which the war against Napoleon was prosecuted in 1813 and 1814.

At the risk of simplifying what was an incredibly complex situation, there were two interconnecting elements that had not been present on previous occasions, or at least not to the degree they were present after the French retreat from Russia.

⁵⁵Jean Hanoteau (ed.), *The Memoirs of General de Caulaincourt, Duke of Vicenza* (New York: William Morrow 1935), 290; Adam Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna* (London: HarperCollins 2007), 5.

⁵⁶At Frankfurt, Metternich, with the consent of Alexander (who rightly believed that the negotiations would come to nothing), but without the approval of Frederick William, sent a captured French diplomat, Baron St Aignan, to Napoleon with a suggestion of peace on the basis of the 'natural borders' of France – the revolutionary borders of Campo Formio (1797) and Lunéville (1801). Grimsted, *The Foreign Ministers of Alexander*, 217; Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 490–1; Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I. 223, 250–2, 255–7; Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen*, 141–53.

⁵⁷Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann (ed.), *Karl August von Hardenberg 1750–1822: Tagebücher und autobiographische Aufzeichnungen* (Munich: H. Boldt 2000), 781.

First, there was a determination to create the political conditions necessary to bring peace and stability to Europe, although this seems to have been largely inspired by one man, Metternich. I will come back to this point in greater detail below (and for lack of space I will have to forgo discussion of the role of Britain's Lord Castlereagh, just as important in shaping the coalition as Metternich).

It was coupled with a second element, a renewed, and perhaps never before seen military resolve to defeat Napoleon. Compare the defeats and setbacks in 1813 and 1814 with previous campaigns. In 1805, Austria withdrew from the coalition and signed a separate peace with France (the Treaty of Pressburg) after only two major battles (Ulm and Austerlitz). In 1806, the Prussian Army resigned itself to defeat after the battles of Jena-Auerstädt, despite the fact that it remained largely intact. At the outset of the 1809 campaign, after being mauled at Absensberg and Eckmühl, the Austrian Commander-in-Chief, Archduke Charles, became so despondent that he was prepared to throw in the towel, advising his brother the Emperor to make peace.⁵⁸ In 1813 and 1814, on the other hand, there was no moral collapse after military setbacks. Instead, one can see a determination to defeat Napoleon – one might even say there was an expectation that he would be defeated – that was in part based upon a burning hatred of the French occupier.⁵⁹ And this is where the military strategy of the eastern powers differed to previous campaigns. They were not so much fixated on winning battles as on winning the war, and, this time, the eastern powers were *more* united in purpose.⁶⁰

Not only did the allies, in this instance Prussia and Russia, react to their tactical military losses in ways that they had not done previously, that is, by withdrawing in good order, by regrouping to fight on, and by not suing for peace as they had done on so many occasions before, but they also modified their strategy by deciding not to engage Napoleon in

⁵⁸Rothenberg, *Wagram*, 75–6.

⁵⁹John A. Lynn, 'Nations in Arms', in Geoffrey Parker (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Warfare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2005), 207. See the recent works by Volker Wacker, *Die alliierte Besetzung Frankreichs in den Jahren 1814 bis 1818* (Hamburg: Kovac 2001); and Karen Hagemann, 'Francophobia and Patriotism: Anti-French Images and Sentiments in Prussia and Northern Germany during the Anti-Napoleonic Wars', *French History* 18 (2004), 404–25.

⁶⁰Esdaile, *Wars of Napoleon*, 271. Tim Blanning, 'The French Revolution and German Modernization', *Central European History* 22 (1989), 116, explains the collapse of the Empire through 'overexertion' on the part of Napoleon: 'the demographic base of France was too small to sustain such a large empire, the effort required was correspondingly excessive'. One only needs to compare the population of Britain with that of its Empire to see that the two factors are not necessarily interrelated.

battle (if it could be avoided). Instead, they engaged his subordinates where possible.⁶¹ This strategy, referred to as the Trachenberg Plan (sometimes as the Compact of Trachenberg, after the Silesian castle in which it was devised), was decided at a meeting on 12 July 1813. It was the eastern powers' first attempt at formulating a common strategic doctrine and it proved to be of tremendous importance.

It did not, however, prevent them being trounced by Napoleon at Dresden (26–27 August). That defeat was offset by five smaller allied victories – Marshal Nicolas Oudinot was beaten at Gross-Beeren south of Berlin by General Friedrich von Bülow's Prussians and Prince Bernadotte's Swedes and (23 August); Hagelberg (27 August) south-west of Berlin where Prussians and Cossacks destroyed a French division; Marshal Jacques Macdonald had been forced to retreat from the Katzbach River by General of Cavalry Gebhard Blücher's Army of Silesia (26 August); General Count Dominique Vandamme was surrounded by the combined allied Army of Bohemia and obliged to surrender at Kulm (30 August); and Marshal Michel Ney at Dennewitz by Bülow (6 September).⁶² The Trachenberg Plan, moreover, resulted in the three-day Battle of Leipzig and the final expulsion of Napoleon across the Rhine.⁶³

Leipzig was also the result of a more unified command structure under a competent commander-in-chief prestigious enough to fend off political interference and capable enough of prosecuting the war against Napoleon, a general who had after all an unsurpassed reputation. This duty fell on Field Marshal Karl Philip Prince Schwarzenberg, and his exceptional Chief-of-Staff, Feldmarschall Lieutenant Count Josef Radetsky, perhaps two of the most underrated and forgotten about personalities in the allied effort to defeat Napoleon. Schwarzenberg was also a diplomat capable of harmonising the conflicting interests of the three Eastern European sovereigns (in this respects, he has been likened to General Eisenhower).⁶⁴ While Schwarzenberg imposed a semblance of unity on the allied powers, Radetsky dealt with the strategic dispositions.⁶⁵

They both had their jobs cut out for them. If the Austrian Army had never been immune to political interference this was no less the case in

⁶¹Esdaile, *Wars of Napoleon*, 271; Regele, *Feldmarschall Radetsky*, 121–7.

⁶²Black, *European Warfare*, 187.

⁶³Paret, 'Napoleon as Enemy', 83.

⁶⁴Rothenberg, 'The Habsburg Army', 4; Gordon Craig, 'Problems of Coalition Warfare: The Military Alliance against Napoleon, 1813–14', in idem, *War, Politics and Diplomacy: Selected Essays* (London: Weidenfeld 1966), 28; J. P. Riley, *Napoleon and the World War of 1813: Lessons in Coalition Warfighting* (London: Routledge 2000), 118, 120–1, 441–3.

⁶⁵Rothenberg, 'The Habsburg Army', 4.

1813. Now, however, Schwarzenberg had not only to contend with the meddling of his own emperor, Francis I, but also with interference from Alexander I and Frederick William III, all of whom seemed more prepared to listen to their own courtiers and armchair generals than to the advice of the supreme commander in the field.⁶⁶ Politics and military affairs were so closely intertwined that it was difficult to distinguish between them. The biggest problem facing Schwarzenberg was Alexander who, at times and in Metternich's words, could be 'silly'; he not only challenged Schwarzenberg's position when he arrived in Prague in August 1813, convinced that he should be in overall charge, but the Tsar often issued orders on the battlefield and maintained a correspondence with the Prussian general, Blücher, without the supreme commander's knowledge.⁶⁷ Alexander reserved the right to maintain command over the Russian contingents in one of the armies (the Bohemian) and over the reserve troops.⁶⁸

Apart from that problem, Russian commanders who received orders that they did not agree with would simply ignore them and issue their own orders.⁶⁹ Nor did the nominal command of the armies by Schwarzenberg overcome the bickering that took place between commanders in the field, not only within individual armies, but also between commanders of different nationalities. Radetsky's plans were constantly being challenged, especially by Major General August von Gneisenau.⁷⁰ Frederick William III had enormous difficulty reining in some of his more radical officers like Gneisenau, staff officer Colonel Karl von Grolman and Blücher (who continually disobeyed orders and never saw eye to eye with Gneisenau). Alexander's insistence on appointing Lieutenant General Prince Ludwig von Wittgenstein to replace Kutuzov, who died in April 1813, led to a refusal on the part of some other Russian corps commanders, notably Lieutenant Generals Mikhail Miloradovich and Count Alexander Tormassov, to follow the new commander-in-chief with the result that Alexander split the army into two, one part under his direct orders and a smaller part under Wittgenstein's.⁷¹

⁶⁶Craig, 'Problems of Coalition Warfare', 29–30.

⁶⁷Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*, 94–5; Llewellyn Cook, 'Schwarzenberg at Dresden: Leadership and Command', *Consortium on Revolutionary Europe 1750–1850: Selected Papers* (Tallahassee, FL: University of Florida 1994), 644.

⁶⁸Craig, 'Problems of Coalition Warfare', 30.

⁶⁹Cook, 'Schwarzenberg at Dresden', 644.

⁷⁰Especially over the best manner in which to invade France at the end of 1813. See Michael V. Leggiere, *The Fall of Napoleon: I: The Allied Invasion of France, 1813–1814* (New York: Cambridge UP 2007), 28–40.

⁷¹Gates, *Napoleonic Wars*, 235.

When Wittgenstein resigned after the Battles of Lützen and Bautzen in May, he was replaced by General Mikhail Barclay de Tolly, who immediately fell out with Blücher. While Metternich, Frederick William and Alexander were attempting to come to some sort of political arrangement, the Prussian military were steeped in and largely motivated by fantasies of revenge that took on the form of a crusade. At Blücher's headquarters, for example, one could find the presence of mystical demagogues like the writers Ernst Arndt, Joseph von Görres, and the sports-pioneer Friedrich Jahn for whom this was the final battle in the struggle against the anti-Christ.⁷²

In June 1813, as a result of the drumming it had received over the preceding weeks at the hands of the French, the Russians agreed on a seven-week armistice with France – the Treaty of Plesswitz – without, however, first consulting with their allies. When the Prussians found out they were furious.⁷³ The implication was that if Russia could sign an armistice, then it could also sign a separate peace. The British diplomats at allied headquarters in Germany, Lord Aberdeen (Ambassador Extraordinary to Vienna), General Lord Cathcart (Ambassador to St Petersburg and Military Commissioner to the Russian Army) and Major-General Sir Charles Stewart (Minister to Berlin and Military Superintendent of the Prussian and Swedish armies), did not get on with their Austrian counterparts let alone among each other. Metternich's assistant during these months, Friedrich von Gentz, described the coalition as 'a weak, rotten, poorly designed structure in which hardly two pieces fitted together'.⁷⁴ Aberdeen noted on his arrival at allied headquarters in September 1813 that the three main allied armies were 'full of mutual discontent and recriminations'.⁷⁵

In short, unity was more apparent than real, the key features that defined allied relations between the eastern powers during these months were mistrust and suspicion. The coalition risked falling apart on several occasions, but never more so after a mighty victory, at Leipzig in mid-October 1813, on the question of the treatment of the occupied German territories, and whether or not to push across the Rhine and into France. Francis I as well as Frederick William III and various Austrian and Prussian generals (but not Blücher), were unwilling at this stage to carry the campaign into France, wary of Napoleon's generalship and of the potential for the French people to rise against

⁷²Craig, 'Problems of Coalition Warfare', 43.

⁷³Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*, 69, 72.

⁷⁴Cited in Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*, 75.

⁷⁵Cited in Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen*, 129.

an invading force.⁷⁶ There appeared little to be gained from a prolonged struggle now that Napoleon had been ousted from central Europe.

Alexander, on the other hand, in spite of opposition to invasion from many of his ministers and generals, was determined to do so.⁷⁷ Indeed, between Leipzig and the Treaty of Chaumont in March 1814, that is, for a period of a little over four months, the allies were divided about their objectives and how to achieve them, sometimes to the point of the whole coalition almost dissolving. In the aftermath of Leipzig, Prussian forces were depleted and their commander kept under control with great difficulty; Prince Bernadotte of Sweden was pursuing his own interests, more intent on a campaign against Denmark than Napoleon;⁷⁸ war weariness had set in among the allied troops; and Alexander refused to stipulate what his territorial claims might be, thus creating friction with Metternich and Austria. That the coalition did not fall apart is testimony to Metternich's perseverance and foresight, and to Napoleon's obduracy. As the coalition neared its military objective, centrifugal political forces were pulling it apart.

Metternich, it would appear, was the only statesman with a view of what post-Napoleonic Europe should be like. Admittedly it was one in which Russia and France were more or less excluded from central Europe, but it was more than this. He was doing his best to create a structure that would lead to an enduring peace, at first with Napoleon, and when that proved impossible, then at least with France. That is why Metternich did his best to persuade Napoleon to make peace while he juggled the allies' mistrust of him with assurances of loyalty, intimating that he was duping the French. At the same time, driven by a sense of frustration with Napoleon and the belief that there could be no accommodation with him, the allied powers slowly worked towards a diplomatic and political agreement that would see them united in their resolve to defeat France as they had never been before.

At first, Austria's entry into the war in August 1813 created enormous difficulties. It obliged the other two eastern powers to think outside of central Europe and to include Italy in their thinking, just as the inclusion of Britain obliged them to think of Holland. Whatever national security objectives may have been uppermost in the minds of the allied representatives, they were obliged to modify them in a series

⁷⁶Baron Friedrich Karl von Müffling, *The Memoirs of Baron von Müffling: A Prussian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Greenhill Books 1997, orig. in German 1851), 92–3, 395; Leggiere, *Fall of Napoleon*, 39–40.

⁷⁷Grimsted, *Foreign Ministers of Alexander*, 205, 208–9; Hartley, *Alexander*, 123; Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*, 125–6.

⁷⁸Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen*, 143.

of meetings, congresses and treaties (sometimes successful, sometimes counter-productive) that took place at Kalisch (February 1813), Breslau (March 1813), Reichenbach (June 1813), Teplitz (September 1813), Troyes (February 1814), Châtillon (February 1814), Chaumont (March 1814), and Fontainebleau (April 1814).

There are a few generalisations worth pointing to regarding these negotiations. First, the treaties were negotiated and concluded directly between the eastern European monarchs and their ministers.⁷⁹ It was the first time that sovereigns had taken such a direct and active interest in the course of diplomacy. Second, the path towards a common objective, whatever they decided that was to be, was never smooth. But each time the representatives of the eastern powers met, they alternately came together and moved away in a diplomatic dance that required a willingness to cooperate. Third, the allies rarely if ever mentioned military victory over Napoleon – indeed, France was hardly mentioned at all. They were, however, determined to defeat Napoleon and on that basis negotiate a settlement. That is why, when Napoleon's foreign minister, Hughes Maret, proposed an international peace congress in August 1813, Metternich rejected the proposal.

Finally, they usually involved some sort of territorial arrangement. The Treaty of Kalisch is a case in point; it was about restoring Prussia to its former size, but it did not stipulate where that territorial rounding out was to take place. The assumption was that it would occur in Saxony. With the defeat of Napoleon now almost a foregone conclusion at the end of 1813 and the beginning of 1814, these treaties were also about dividing the spoils of a post-Napoleonic Europe, that is, they were based on specific regional interests as much if not more so than on constructing a general peace settlement that would include France and its former Empire.

Self-interest among the great powers seems to have been the key to understanding what was going on here. If Prussia renounced annexationist aims on Hanover, for example, it was because it needed British subsidies. But it sought territorial compensation elsewhere, in Saxony. If Austria was able to reach agreement with Bavaria (the Treaty of Ried on 8 October 1813) it was in contravention of the Treaty of Teplitz, and against Prussian and Russian interests in Germany. Metternich carried on secret negotiations with the smaller German powers throughout the second half of 1813 so that he could outmanoeuvre Prussia and Russia. If Russia was able to come to an agreement with Prussia over Poland it was largely at Austria's expense. One can see that the allied powers in pursuing particular interests were working *against*

⁷⁹Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*, 250.

each other while at the same time working *towards* a vague common military (not political) goal – the defeat of Napoleon. At this stage of the war, that is, at the end of 1813 and the beginning of 1814, months before the Congress of Vienna, there was not yet any clear idea of specific goals, let alone creating a solid, durable international system, and this even after the allied armies had entered France. Some of the allies were only ‘slightly less afraid of victory than of defeat’.⁸⁰

Even when the allies did meet to come to some sort of consensus on a new European state system, it was often more a question of pursuing individual national interests than of working together, a sentiment that was often expressed by contemporary observers of the proceedings at Vienna.⁸¹ That does not mean that compromise did not occur. It did and frequently, but compromise was born of the realisation that an individual power’s limited aims and objectives could not be achieved without the cooperation of the other powers. Even a Tsar as foolhardy as Alexander could see that Napoleon was perfectly capable of defeating a Russo-Prussian army, but that if all three powers remained committed, this was far less likely to be the case.⁸² On the other hand, Metternich could hardly risk letting Russia and Prussia take all the credit for defeating Napoleon and thus allowing Russia and Prussia undue influence in Germany.

The alliance was, nevertheless, thrown into doubt time and again. There were, for example, bitter disputes about the best way for the coalition to progress, especially between Metternich and Alexander, both of whom profoundly believed they had been put on this earth to save the world.⁸³ The disputes were as much about personal differences as about different conceptions of what a post-Napoleonic Europe should look like: Metternich was attempting to nail down the coalition’s objectives and create a structure in which no one power would be dominant; Alexander, on the other hand, was transforming the coalition into a moral if not a holy crusade.⁸⁴

The plan that Metternich and Schwarzenberg finally decided on was to slowly advance with two allied armies, the Army of Bohemia in the south and the Army of Silesia in the north, in a large pincer movement that would meet in the vicinity of Chaumont, but which would avoid open confrontation with Napoleon. The idea, once again, was to force him to the negotiating table, but these tactics infuriated Alexander, in

⁸⁰Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 104.

⁸¹Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*, 332–3.

⁸²Craig, ‘Problems of Coalition Warfare’, 37–8.

⁸³Kraehe, *Metternich’s German Policy*, I, 257–8. On the Messianic tones in some of Metternich’s correspondence see, Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*, 98, 117, 122.

⁸⁴Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 111–3.

part because the Austrians had violated Swiss neutrality in direct contravention of the Tsar's express orders. He accused Schwarzenberg, as well as the Prussian commanders Blücher and Gneisenau, itching to advance on Paris, of sabotaging the war effort.

Things came to a head at Basel, which the allies reached in January 1814, not over whether to invade France or not, but over Switzerland.⁸⁵ Without wanting to go into the details, from that moment on, Alexander and Prince Metternich were locked in battle. Tensions between the two men came to a head when Alexander started flouting the idea of replacing Napoleon with Bernadotte on the throne of France. Metternich decided to halt the advance into France at the plateau of Langres between 17 and 23 January 1814, and to take stock of the situation: it was important that the allies' political goals and objectives be clearly defined before any further military progress was made. At one stage of the negotiations – the eastern powers were still squabbling over Germany, Saxony, Poland, and whether or not to overthrow Napoleon – Metternich threatened to withdraw Austrian troops from the war, while Alexander threatened to march on Paris with his Prussian ally.⁸⁶

The 'façade of unity' was never more than that.⁸⁷ Russia and Prussia were still busy pursuing their own interests often in the belief that a strong Russia or a strong Prussia would serve the interests of Europe. What the French victories at the beginning of 1814 had shown, however, was that even with Napoleon in a weakened state, he could still defeat the allies piecemeal and that the only effective means of pursuing the coalition was unity of purpose. It was why Chancellor Prince Metternich, on 13 February, threatened to leave the coalition and conclude a separate peace with Napoleon, a threat directed at Russia, unless Alexander agreed to objectives to be outlined in a convention.⁸⁸

What Metternich was looking for, and indeed was attempting to organise, was a combination of powers that could offset the potential preponderance of one or more of the others. All three eastern powers were attempting to find a suitable entente with one other great power (including Britain and France) that would offset any other combination of alliance partners: there was thus the possibility of a union between Russia and a France governed by Bernadotte; between Prussia and Austria (against Russia); between Prussia and Russia (not favoured by Hardenberg but desired by Frederick William); between Austria and France, and so on. In

⁸⁵Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, I, 264–6.

⁸⁶Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*, 148; Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 121–7.

⁸⁷The expression is from Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 118.

⁸⁸August Fournier, *Der Congress von Châtillon. Die Politik im Kriege von 1814* (Vienna: Tempsky 1900), 298–300.

other words, as with previous coalitions, the concept of military victory proved not only to be ambiguous, meaning one thing for Prussia and Russia, and another for Austria, but also divisive.

Once again, it was defeat that brought the allies closer together, even while the recriminations were flying thick and fast. Napoleon's brilliantly conducted campaign in France in February 1814 – four victories in less than a week – obliged the allies to stop quibbling about the objectives of the campaign and, through cooperation, to finally decide on coalition aims. It should be recalled that even after the allies had entered French territory at the beginning of 1814, the eastern powers had been pursuing different foreign political goals, and that there was always the risk, however slight at this stage, of one power signing a separate peace with Napoleon and withdrawing from the coalition. The Treaty of Chaumont, signed on 9 March 1814, changed all that. It proved to be the fire through which allied unity was finally forged and it was Castlereagh, not Metternich, who was at the bellows, keeping the furnace at just the right temperature to build a determined alliance based upon a practical notion of a Europe made of independent sovereign states.⁸⁹

Chaumont brought all the allied powers together in ways they had never been before, that is, for an extended length of time – 20 years – that went well beyond the immediate objectives of peace and defeating Napoleon. Remarkably though, even at this very late stage, that is March 1814, the allies' objective was not to overthrow Napoleon (even if Russia and Prussia had been thinking along those lines), but to force him to negotiate on their terms.

The victory of the eastern powers in 1813–14 was not only military; they had become better at politicking and diplomacy than Napoleon.⁹⁰ One of the reasons why they succeed in 1813–14 when they had failed on previous occasions was that they were now finally able to work together *and* pursue their individual interests at the same time. This does not mean to say that the petty bickering and mistrust that characterised relations between the eastern powers disappeared. As we have seen, it did not and at times the differences appeared to be so strong that the coalition risked falling apart. That it did not can in part be explained by the implicit recognition that individual foreign political objectives could only be achieved through cooperation and compromise, and by allowing each of the partner members to achieve some of

⁸⁹Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 501–4; John M. Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder. British Foreign Aid in the Wars with France, 1793–1815* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard 1969), 315–21; Hartley, *Alexander I*, 124, who states that Chaumont was designed to bring about the 'total defeat of France'.

⁹⁰Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 474.

their territorial goals, as long as they did not impinge on the interests of the other great powers.

A similar scenario can be found at other periods of history: the Allied effort to defeat Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany during World War II, and the attempt on the part of six Western nations to build an economic union in the post-war period are two recent examples of collective goals being achieved while individual partner members pursued their individual interests. In Europe at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, however, the collective mentality of the eastern powers was still largely the same as in 1792, even if it had tentatively evolved towards collaboration in order to construct a European states-system based on a relatively new notion – collective security. Between the defeat of Napoleon in Russia in November 1812 and his abdication in April 1814, and indeed beyond the fall of the French Empire, negotiations between the allied powers were conducted on the move and conflicts and tensions were almost constant.

One can see just how fragile was the understanding between the allies when the alliance almost collapsed over differences of opinion on what to do with central Europe at the Congress of Vienna from 1 November 1814. Relations became so bad that France, Britain and Austria formed a secret alliance directed at Russia and Prussia. This time, however, the allies resolved their differences through diplomacy not war, even if it took Napoleon's return from Elba in March 1815 to remind them why they had united in the first place – to oust Napoleon and create a stable international system.

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