



Chapter 5

Europe's Response

I

WE HAVE TRACED EVENTS as they occurred inside France. We must turn now to the European states and see how they reacted when the news came of Napoleon's escape.

In London, Lord Liverpool's Tory government was no longer greatly concerned with foreign or military affairs, for the American war had ended, the worst of the difficulties faced at Vienna during the winter seemed over, and Ireland's restiveness appeared containable. Only a few foreign topics still created any occasional disturbance in Parliament, where the Whig opposition continued to raise questions over the European settlement and the sufferings of the King of Saxony. But in domestic affairs there were real worries arising from calls for tax reductions, and protests over the unpopular new Corn Bill. On 6 March rioters in London attacked seven Cabinet Ministers' houses. The Royal Horse Guards and detachments of Foot Guards, under the command of Lieutenant-General the Earl of Uxbridge, had to patrol the streets until the troubles subsided overnight on 8/9 March, by which time London 'was environed with troops on all sides'.¹

That phrase from the *Annual Register* sounds impressive but in reality there were few troops available. The security of the islands depended primarily on 6,000 regular Militia in England and Scotland, and 10,000 more in perennially troublesome Ireland. In 1814 the Army establishment had been reduced by 47,000 cavalry and infantry (twenty-four 2nd battalions of infantry had been disbanded), and the Royal Artillery by 7,000. Some fifteen regular battalions were in Belgium as part of the peace settlement undertakings, but they and the large contingent of the King's German Legion (KGL), an integral part of the British Army, were all under-strength.² The garrisons in the Mediterranean were weak. The Peninsular army had gone to America, and fourteen battalions were part of the Canadian garrison or



in the northern USA, with another eight at New Orleans. It would be early summer before the bulk of the forces in America could reach Britain. Of the 100 Foot Artillery companies (renamed batteries in 1825) about two-thirds (68) were outside Great Britain and could not easily be moved.³ On 20 February the Prime Minister judged the country, insistent on lower taxes and reduced establishments, to be 'peace mad' and not only unwilling to contemplate any foreign expeditions (such as against King Joachim Murat of Naples) but anxious to withdraw the British contingent in Belgium as soon as the Congress should end. And the unpopularity of this Belgian commitment was a weapon for the Opposition. The 'extreme impolicy' of the government in keeping troops abroad 'and particularly in the Netherlands', was strongly denounced by the Whig Lord Grenville in the Lords, on 21 February 1815.⁴

Partly as a result of the stresses over Poland and Saxony, the Austrians, Russians and Prussians still had sizeable forces on a war footing. But even if some major crisis were to arise in a quite different part of Europe, a crisis that would mean invoking the twenty-year guarantees made at Chaumont and confirmed by the peace treaties, a crisis calling for large armies to be allocated to its containment, the three powers would want to retain significant numbers close to home to hold what they had gained, and to watch their backs lest an ally should move to snatch territory. The three had come to a form of agreement over Saxony and Poland and tempers were cooling slightly, but while Tsar Alexander had obtained most of what he wanted, he could not denude Poland of troops; in Prussia the strains over Saxony had created serious rifts between the King and sections of his army; Austria had plans of its own for Italy – and that would involve fighting, for Metternich wished to settle scores with Murat, King of Naples, and establish Austrian dominance over the rest of the peninsula.

In addition, personal relations – between Alexander, Metternich and Hardenberg in particular – had been very badly damaged.⁵

France had re-emerged as one of the Great Five, thanks largely to Talleyrand. That imperturbable diplomat looked to gain yet further advantages. He had used 'legitimacy' to shelter France's traditional client, Saxony, and in its turn to bolster the Bourbon status in Europe. Legitimacy could be used to undermine and destroy the brothers-in-law of Naples and Elba. He would have to eliminate Murat through slow diplomacy, since Talleyrand regretfully recognised that a French army in Italy would be a provocation to everyone. But once Murat had been dethroned Talleyrand could concentrate on the problem of Elba, and in both cases he knew that he could hope for the support of other powers. Furthermore, he hoped to weaken Austrian predominance in Italy by re-establishing the historic

Bourbon counterpoise to the Habsburgs there; this could be achieved through the restoration of the Sicilian Bourbons in Naples, but only once Murat had gone.

Thus, as March 1815 began, the conclusion of the Saxon arrangements, and thereafter what to do with Murat, were the most prominent considerations in Vienna. If Edward Cooke's remark, that nobody there thought much about Napoleon, was an exaggeration, it did correctly indicate that he was viewed more as a persistent nuisance than an actual menace.

II

On 1 March the British Minister at Florence, Lord Burghersh,⁶ received Campbell's report of Napoleon's disappearance. He immediately despatched the news to Wellington at Vienna, who received it on Tuesday 7 March (the day of the *Rencontre* at Laffrey) and at once informed his colleagues. The scene was preserved in a letter addressed to Castlereagh from one in the British delegation, the Earl of Clancarty:

We were at Court the night of the arrival of Burghersh's despatch, containing the news of Buonaparte's flight; and though there was every attempt to conceal apprehension under the mask of unconcern, it was not difficult to perceive that fear was predominant in all the Imperial and Royal personages there assembled; and however much their principal officers endeavoured to make light of this event, the task of disguise was too heavy for them.⁷

Talleyrand, his mind on Murat, suspected that Italy was Napoleon's destination; Metternich felt sure that it would not be Italy but France. But wherever the destination, it was vital to bring closure to all secondary problems, such as Saxony, and concentrate everything on the new menace.

Saxony and Saxon sensitivities had been irritants that kept resurfacing in the story of the autumn and winter of 1814/15. The new turn of events made it essential to settle matters once and for all. But unfortunately the trouble they continued to cause did not cease until the month of May 1815 and in fact were to affect materially the Allied preparations for the coming summer campaign. (So did Murat, as we shall see in the next section.)

It will be recalled that King Frederick Augustus of Saxony was still endeavouring to maintain his rights against the allied powers' decision to partition his country. After his passage through Vienna on 4 March en route for Pressburg (Bratislava), it had been thought right to disabuse him of his hopes, and Wellington, Metternich and Talleyrand had been selected for

this task. But the escape of Frederick Augustus's former friend Napoleon made it doubly important to conclude the matter before he became impossibly intransigent, and the day after the news had come, the delegation visited him (8 March). He prevaricated, and then refused his consent. Their reply was blunt: they told him that the time for negotiation had passed, and promptly returned to Vienna on 11 March and reported on their mission. The powers thereupon declared the partition of Saxony (Sunday 12 March), with Prussia obtaining half outright and also temporarily administering the residual royal zone. The February inter-Allied agreements thus were unilaterally imposed on Saxony.

However, there was an aftermath. It became apparent that Prussia intended permanently to occupy the residual royal zone, on the grounds that, with Napoleon at large, it was too dangerous to allow the Saxon king anywhere near his lands. What every power had agreed in February and implemented on 12 March was almost immediately in doubt again. The Russian and Austrian monarchs could not accept the Prussian scheme, but deputed to Wellington the invidious task of righting matters. The Duke therefore spoke to the Prussians and, in his own words, 'told them plainly' that if Frederick Augustus were to accept formally the partition agreement, the Prussians likewise must also accept it.⁸ And the King did sign eventually, some weeks later (6 April) – and the matter was resolved as the majority of the powers had wanted. The Prussians, not for the first time, had overplayed their hand and suffered accordingly, but it was unfortunate that it had to be Wellington who trumped them. Throughout his career the Duke, so habitually 'chilly', could be extremely 'plain' in his remarks – he once reduced his Adjutant General, Charles Stewart, to tears; and if it meant that the Prussians were made to face reality, doubtless it also left their high command feeling sore (even if not tearful), just at the time when they and Wellington would be tackling delicate problems together in Belgium.

III

The powers in Vienna had swiftly to decide on their attitude to Napoleon's escape, and they issued a general Declaration on Monday 13 March, stating that he had broken the treaty upon which all his legal rights depended and that he was no longer a head of state but 'outside the law', the enemy and disturber of the peace of the world and to be 'delivered up to public prosecution'.⁹ Unfortunately, that last phrase caused (and still causes) a degree of confusion. '*Il s'est livré à la vindicte publique*' is often thought to mean 'delivered up to public vengeance', an interpretation which, if correct,

might have justified Blücher's later intention to shoot Napoleon out of hand. However, that interpretation is wrong. Larousse defines the key words not as public vengeance but as 'prosecution of a crime in the name of society'. Still, some claimed that it meant Napoleon's assassination, and the somewhat histrionic Whig MP Whitbread, in a Commons debate, accused Wellington of authorising murder by signing the Declaration.¹⁰

The Congress now had to clear away several minor or non-contentious questions still outstanding, and then turn to implementing the Declaration. This meant that Wellington, in addition to his military engagements, had to assist in the final stages of arrangements for Switzerland's status, on the settlement of boundaries between Austria and Bavaria, and on the smaller matters of river navigation rights and so forth. Despite the major catastrophe in France, squabbles over these quite secondary and sometimes minor questions took an unconscionable time to resolve, but once most of them neared a conclusion Wellington handed over to his principal assistant, Lord Clancarty, and left Vienna at daybreak on Wednesday 29 March.

However, during the second half of the month there had been an unwelcome and distracting complication, the attitude and actions of King Joachim Murat of Naples. It was evident that, despite the treaty arrangements between Murat and Austria in 1814, Austria was intent on hegemony in Italy. Britain's Mediterranean interests led London to prefer Austrian dominance in southern Italy to a French-born ruler there.¹¹ All through 1814 and into 1815 Murat played a deep game to keep his throne, suspecting correctly that the powers were secretly maturing plans for his removal. Hence Europe's distraction at Napoleon's escape appeared to give Murat an opportunity to strengthen his hand. Had he joined the other European powers his position would have been almost impregnable, and indeed in early March Murat promised British diplomats that he would not disturb the peace. But then on the 14th (fortuitously the day after Vienna made its formal declaration against Bonaparte) Murat wrote an impassioned letter to Napoleon promising support, then marched north and quickly seized Rome, Florence and Bologna, and reached the River Po. At Rimini on 30 March he called for all Italians to rise against their rulers. This was deemed an outright threat to the system being established at Vienna, and meant full-scale war. But although Murat's behaviour thus adversely complicated the allies' strategic plans, its other effect was to damage Napoleon. Whatever the latter's dreams might initially have been for cajoling the powers to accept his return as a *fait accompli*, and to persuade them to hold their hands, the attack by Murat fatally wrecked those hopes. In Allied eyes these two men would always abet each other in creating trouble.

IV

The later weeks of March saw the powers at Vienna sketching out the contingents that should be provided against Napoleon, the subsidies that would be needed from Great Britain to pay for them, the nomination of the principal commanders and the allocation between those commanders of the small contingents from minor states. (It was accepted that Austria would have to divert resources against Murat in Italy.) The first military dispositions were agreed by 12 March and still remained unchanged when, a week later, Talleyrand informed Louis XVIII of the initial proposals for the campaign: five armies, of which three would take the offensive, with two more in reserve.

The first field army would cover the front from the English Channel to the River Main in Germany, would comprise Netherlands, British, Hanoverian and North German forces and the Prussian Kleist's corps based in Prussia's new Rhineland province, all under Wellington. The second, covering from the Main to the Mediterranean, would comprise Austrian, south German, Swiss and Piedmontese forces under the Austrian Marshal Prince Schwarzenberg. The third field army would assemble in northern Italy, but Talleyrand had no further information about it. Two reserve armies, Prussian and Russian, would form up in Germany and be commanded respectively by Blücher and Barclay de Tolly.

However, on 23 March Talleyrand reported a new arrangement: Blücher's reserve army would now be the fourth field army, and thus include Kleist's formation previously assigned to Wellington. This change, however understandable, had major implications, because manpower allocation proved a matter of 'extreme jealousy regarding the command of the contingents of the small Powers in the North of Germany'.¹² Many of the contingents that in mid-March had been listed as assigned to Wellington's command were small, so that his army was far from strong numerically and very mixed in quality. Losing Kleist's corps made it imperative for the Duke to receive other contingents in their place.¹³

By this time the terms of a new four-power treaty of alliance provided some basic principles for the prosecution of war against Napoleon, and it was signed on Saturday 25 March 1815. The terms of the 1814 Paris peace treaty and the subsequent Vienna agreements were to be sacrosanct, and the Declaration of 13 March should apply to future actions; each Great Power should supply 150,000 troops to implement these terms; the powers would maintain a united front till Bonaparte's final overthrow, and then for a further ten years (as stipulated at Chaumont in 1814); as the treaty was solely to assist France and all countries invaded by Bonaparte, Louis XVIII should

be invited to sign it and to inform the powers of what assistance he might need; other nations were invited to sign, and offer troops.

V

From the beginning the implementation of the terms of the treaty raised questions that soon turned to disputes – over manpower allocations and demands for subsidy. The demands were for precise arrangements, state by state, and as the small states of Germany came forward to sign one by one, so the negotiations became ever more complex. In consequence the outline arrangements of the Declaration signed when Napoleon was as yet thought to be merely a distant threat south of Grenoble, were still unsettled and for negotiation until a month after he had seized Paris and had become an actual menace to Belgium and Germany.

The allocation of manpower between the Prussian army under Blücher on the one hand and Wellington's Anglo-Allied army on the other, was dominated by feelings of national prestige and by money. That meant definition of how much, shared between whom and in what proportions, when to be paid, upon what terms. Providing money and providing men had to go hand-in-hand. And because the subject is so often misunderstood it needs placing in a slightly wider context.

A few of the early historians, especially non-British ones, wrote as though in 1815 Britain was somehow at fault, or unfair, in making stipulations regarding the use of its financial wealth in the Vienna negotiations with its allies, rather implying that the cash should not have had strings attached. One might argue that the history of British subsidies given in the previous twenty-two years showed the need for a little caution and a few strings, but that is beside the point in considering the irruption of 1815. Britain acted at once: it offered a total of £5 million support to Austria and Prussia and Russia to help each to place 150,000 men in the field (a subsidy of just over £11 per head); in addition, and to the extent that Britain could not field 150,000 British soldiers, it undertook to spend a further £2 million in hiring foreign troops to fill its quota. But in paying the piper for these contingents it was not willing to let others call the tune – the subsidy intended for the smaller contingents to join Wellington's force ought not to be allocated according to the demands or at the dictation of the other three powers.

A glance at Britain's public finances, raised by government borrowing, by income tax and by taxes on trade and commerce, may help set the £7 million subsidy in context. In the year 1814, the latest year for which figures were then available, Britain had spent £72 million (or 65 per cent of gross governmental

expenditure) on its army and navy, and over £27 million (25 per cent) went on interest payments on the national debt (that is in servicing the borrowing incurred over the years to finance the war). By contrast the cost of all civil government came to little more than £5 million. In other words, for the new contest that was beginning in 1815, Parliament and the taxpayer were being asked to give subsidies to foreign countries amounting to about 140 per cent of the total cost of Britain's civil government or, put another way, amounting to 50 per cent of all the income tax charged in 1814. And these subsidies were without counting expenditure on Britain's own armed forces, which inevitably would have to be on a scale similar to 1814. It is small wonder if the British voter expected his government to attach a few strings to this astonishingly large monetary assistance to the other powers.¹⁴

The change in military plans between 12 and 23 March meant that Wellington could no longer expect to incorporate Kleist's corps with his other contingents; and this made his need for troops from the minor states more acute, but he felt that this should not prove problematical since their needy rulers would benefit by subsidy at the rate of £11 per soldier. However, after Wellington had left Vienna an unsuccessful attempt was made by Prussia, supported by Austria and Russia, to wheedle Clancarty into agreeing to subject the minor states' monetary apportionment to the decision of the three powers. But though Clancarty lacked Wellington's stature he still was a steady and determined man. He stood firm and it was finally generously conceded that Britain did have some right to choose to whom to dispense the subsidy that it was offering from its own pocket.¹⁵

The negotiations were protracted, perhaps excessively so. We see once more an instance of the old truth that the further a man is from the front line the harder it is for him to judge realities correctly. The field commanders faced the greatest conqueror of their time; they simply wanted more men, and wanted them as soon as possible. Most, but not all, of the trouble over allocations stemmed from the rulers and politicians at Vienna. Secondary considerations interfered with the main priority.

Despite the extinction in 1806 of the ancient Holy Roman Empire and its hundreds of small principalities, ecclesiastical states, and free cities, the present (1814/15) reconfiguration of Germany into fewer than forty sovereign authorities still made it necessary that, in the new troubles, troops of the smaller states should serve under the command of Austrian or Prussian or British generals.¹⁶ Naturally, Austria would interest itself in the contingents of the southern states, Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden and the tiny states around them. As to those of the north, leaving aside Hanover, which was generally recognised as falling within the British sphere of influence, and the

truncated Saxon kingdom ('Royal Saxony'), there were seventeen sovereign states whose troops the statesmen in Vienna were to assign either to the army of Blücher or to that of Wellington.

The process of agreeing and assigning these seventeen, whose promised contingents totalled (at least on paper) some 30,000 troops, took from the middle of March until late April. The haggling seemed endless. Some states had long been within the Prussian sphere of influence or were content to serve under its generals, but many in western Germany had considerable distrust of Prussia and preferred to side with the rich and distant Britain, which had no discernible plans to expand inside Germany. The real military value of these contingents was open to question; for while both the Prussians and the British thought that a large trained force of 14,000 loyal Saxons could be valuable in the battle-line, an individual contribution of merely a couple of Landwehr battalions (or less) from a tiny state would take a disproportionate amount of time and effort to arm, equip, feed, integrate and control.

Unsurprisingly, there were strong Prussian objections to certain states going to Wellington and not to the Prussian army. In particular they wished to keep the ducal Saxon states (Saxe-Weimar, Saxe-Meiningen, Saxe-Coburg, and others). Such objections were to be expected. It was entirely open for the Prussian statesmen to advance their various arguments for this or that contingent, just as by the same token it was in order for the British diplomats to argue for contingents to make up Wellington's required numbers: these things are the everyday stuff of coalition strategy and planning and it would be far-fetched to try to turn them into some Machiavellian intrigue on one side or the other.

It was not the fault of the assembled diplomats but the result of long history that in these debates the British had two advantages and the Prussians one very major hindrance. Just as needy German princes knew that Britain would pay good money for soldiers, so they knew also that Britain had no territorial plans in Germany,¹⁷ whereas they all knew that for generations Prussia had been a military menace to its neighbours, that its polity was not securely under civilian or even royal control, and that it was retaining a sizeable and experienced force on the Elbe instead of sending it west to Belgium.¹⁸ For German princes these were considerations drawn from long and bitter experience, and it may be thought that if German rulers feared placing themselves under Prussian control the blame for this rested nowhere but with Prussia.

In the result Vienna decided that the contributions should be as follows: Nassau should contribute somewhat over 6,000 men, although this figure was subject to certain deductions; then came Mecklenburg-Schwerin (3,800),

Brunswick (3,000), and the Hanseatic cities (3,000); the remaining thirteen states were to contribute a total of 13,700, in packets ranging from 2,200 (say three battalions) to 300 (one or two companies).¹⁹ Prussia had no reason to be dissatisfied by the final allocation agreed at Vienna; it received almost 16,000 North German soldiers. Against that Wellington received under 14,000, but was also promised a further allocation of some 14,000 'Royal Saxons'. It was all rather different from the expectations of mid-March.

Naval operations did not feature prominently during the Hundred Days, but the British dispositions require a mention. Admiral Lord Exmouth was promptly reappointed C-in-C Mediterranean and his squadron was reinforced. Two clashes took place, but both were minor. Admiral Lord Keith was reappointed to command in the Channel and Atlantic on 28 April, with Rear Admiral Hallowell for the Channel squadron; in June Rear Admiral Malcolm was appointed to a squadron that was to co-operate with the British army in Belgium. Meanwhile Rear Admiral Hotham was posted to the French Atlantic coast with 'a double line of cruisers stretching from Ushant to Finisterre [Spain], and so that over thirty ships were under strict orders to search vessels of every type.'²⁰

VI

It is sometimes argued that the powers refused 'to give peace a chance' and that they should have waited for Napoleon to prove his ill intentions before striking at him. The argument is one that has a familiar ring, and that has gained considerable respectability from the disastrous drives to war of recent times. But the experience of 1815 left little room for doubt. Let us grant that the restoration of the old monarchical Europe and the partial (but only partial) return to older principles of government would in the course of the century be challenged and eventually transformed by the growth of liberalism and/or a new nationalism. The men of Vienna were in some (but not all) respects trying to stem a tide that had passed the slack and was on the rise. But what had Napoleon taught Europe?

In the summer of 1813 Napoleon had held a long interview with Metternich at the Marcolini palace in Dresden. Speaking for still-neutral Austria, Metternich spoke of a possible mediation between Napoleon and the Russo-Prussian alliance. According to a much later account written by Metternich, the Emperor summarised the recent Russian disaster with the casual remark that 'a man such as I cares little [Metternich says that a much stronger phrase was used] for the lives of a million men'; that the French had no reason at all to complain of him, for 'to spare them I let Germans and

Poles be killed. In the Moscow campaign I lost 300,000 men, of which not 30,000 were French.²¹

These ghastly and revealing words inevitably lead to a consideration of the cost to France of all this expansion and *gloire*, to the cost to its allies and satellites (whose gains from all the expansion and glory were questionable, at best), and of course to the costs of those who opposed Napoleon's schemes. It is possible to form a rough estimate of the appalling numbers who died in combat or of wounds, but the resultant total is dwarfed by those who died of disease and from sickness in hospital or who fell along the way.

In the period 1792–1802 French armies had suffered perhaps 400,000 casualties in total. To the French people that number might be bearable, given the advantages it had brought to the ever-expanding state, but thereafter the burdens began to increase. And so, from 1806, subject nationalities began to appear in the imperial armies to share in the blood toll, and by 1814 their contribution amounted to around 650,000 men, of whom some 400,000 (over 60 per cent) had become casualties. Napoleon at the Marcolini interview was telling the unvarnished truth. Under the Empire France and the annexed *départements* furnished him with over 2 million soldiers; by the time of Napoleon's abdication almost 1.2 million of those soldiers (well over 55 per cent) had died or disappeared due to war. And in manpower resource terms, the toll of prisoners lost to the enemy was also heavy. The later years of his reign were the worst, with the final fifty months from 1810 onwards costing 550,000 men. True, until the end of 1813 France itself had not been invaded; but there was a growing burden in taxation; about half the annual budget was spent on war, and on war that was intended to benefit France rather than its satellites, for those countries were marched over and mulcted. The French nation itself was no longer united – the Emperor's proclamations and promises of sweeping changes, coupled with the hardships of his economic system, even raised a spectre of a *Jacquerie* to many classes; his mere name signified to all French families more war taxes and more French lives sacrificed in war. War was indeed feeding war.²²

For his European foes the cost was at least as much. Only Great Britain was at war with Napoleon throughout the period, and that cost it about 300,000 men; but in the years when other states took the field, the individual campaigns fought by Austria, Prussia, Russia and Spain were notoriously bloody, so that it is almost certain that, in total, their losses at least equalled or even exceeded those of the French. Additionally, there were the untold civilian deaths due to war, the starvation and disease spread by armies (consider the civilian deaths in just two cities out of so many: Saragossa, or Vilna), so that the cost of Napoleon to Europe was possibly more than



4 million lives.²³ Diplomatic agreements had repeatedly been exposed as ineffective, talks of peace never came to anything and were found to be more a tactical weapon in a military campaign than a genuine attempt to reach a firm settlement – and meanwhile the blood-letting went on endlessly. The drive for French imperial expansion would continue as long as Napoleon ruled. That was the experience to date. That is what Europe had come to expect of Napoleon.

There are of course many admirers of Napoleon who would reject my view as eccentric. So let me close this chapter with the considered opinions of a distinguished political historian of the period, and a strategic historian. This is how Paul Schroeder summed up the matter in the 1990s:

What ensnared him [Napoleon] was not simply opponents he could not destroy or ambitions within himself he could not bridle, but an absence, a vacuum, something missing in his inner and outer worlds, which he could not create or even conceive: an idea and structure of peace.²⁴

More recently there has been published a very fine scholarly edition of Napoleon's own view of the matter, collected from his incidental thoughts and scattered writings on war. It was reviewed by Professor Beatrice Heuser, who concluded from her study of the texts that they demonstrated:

Napoleon's spectacular failure in achieving the one thing which one makes war excusable: namely the establishment of a better, peaceful world *post bellum* ... Napoleon's writings ... do not establish such a link to a greater good making war a lesser, justifiable evil ... Napoleon enjoyed war.²⁵

