CONQUERING THE NATURAL FRONTIER:
FRENCH EXPANSION TO THE RHINE RIVER DURING THE WAR OF THE FIRST
COALITION, 1792-1797

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After conquering Belgium and the Rhineland in 1794, the French Army of the Sambre and Meuse faced severe logistical, disciplinary, and morale problems that signaled the erosion of its capabilities. The army’s degeneration resulted from a revolution in French foreign policy designed to conquer the natural frontiers, a policy often falsely portrayed as a diplomatic tradition of the French monarchy. In fact, the natural frontiers policy – expansion to the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps – emerged only after the start of the War of the First Coalition in 1792. Moreover, the pursuit of natural frontiers caused more controversy than previously understood. No less a figure than Lazare Carnot – the Organizer of Victory – viewed French expansion to the Rhine as impractical and likely to perpetuate war. While the war of conquest provided the French state with the resources to survive, it entailed numerous unforeseen consequences. Most notably, the Revolutionary armies became isolated from the nation and displayed more loyalty to their commanders than to the civilian authorities. In 1797, the Sambre and Meuse Army became a political tool of General Lazare Hoche, who sought control over the Rhineland by supporting the creation of a Cisrhenan Republic. Ultimately, troops from Hoche’s army removed Carnot from the French Directory in the coup d’état of 18 fructidor, a crucial benchmark in the militarization of French politics two years before Napoleon Bonaparte’s seizure of power. Accordingly, the conquest of the Rhine frontier contributed to the erosion of democratic governance in Revolutionary France.
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Map 1. General Map
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

States fight wars for many reasons, but contests over the possession or control of land and resources ranks as the most common.¹ This dissertation examines a period in which massive amounts of territory, resources, and people changed hands as a result of military conquest. During the French Revolution, the national space of France shifted from the dynastic dominion of the Bourbon monarchy to the sacred patrie of French citizens. Ideological changes in attitudes toward national space held important implications for many parts of Europe because the new citizens possessed notions of territorial boundaries that differed from the traditional rulers and statesmen of the ancien régime. These citizens associated territory with the nation’s essence rather than a symbol of dynastic control, security, and prestige.² Although the revolutionaries in France routinely violated the principle of popular sovereignty, they professed that territorial boundaries should be primarily decided through national self-determination rather than diplomatic negotiations with representatives of monarchical regimes. The clash between traditional and revolutionary views of territorial boundaries and international relations constituted a key factor in European politics after 1789.


² Paul Schroeder in The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 53, argues that “in the new democratic society [of Revolutionary France], the state and the political and social order was to spring from below, from the whole people conceived as a body of free and equal citizens endowed with natural rights; political authority and governmental decisions would rest on the people’s will.” Lynn Hunt in Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1981), 1-2, asserts that “the French people had learned a new political repertoire: ideology appeared as a concept, and competing ideologies challenged the traditional European cosmology of order and harmony.”
While this dissertation examines political and philosophical debates concerning French national space, it also investigates the war that the French waged over these theoretically intractable disputes. Through a fresh reading of archival and published primary sources, it sheds new light on French expansion to the Rhine River during the War of the First Coalition. Claimed by many important figures of the French Revolution as France’s natural frontier, the Rhine could be viewed as a sacred part of the patrie that had been stolen from France by the Germanic forces of the Holy Roman Empire during the Middle Ages. Although the dissertation analyzes the early military events from 1792-1793, it focuses on the less-studied campaigns on the Rhine between 1794 and 1797. In so doing, it rescues from general obscurity the men who conquered the natural frontier on the Rhine in 1794 and struggled to defend it through the rest of the war: the citizen soldiers of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. The experience of the Sambre and Meuse Army as a tool of conquest provides an important new dimension to a historical debate that has traditionally remained the purview of diplomatic, political, and intellectual historians.

Historians remain divided over the extent to which the natural frontiers theory – primarily the “French push to the Rhine” – influenced French Revolutionary foreign policy and military strategy. Albert Sorel stands as the preeminent proponent of the natural frontiers as the primary French objective. Yet the idea of the natural frontiers as the overriding

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3 A major inspiration for this dissertation was Henry Bourdeau’s Les armées du Rhin au début du Directoire (Sambre-et-Meuse – Rhin-et-Moselle): La situation générale. Les effectifs. L’état matériel et moral (Paris: H. Charles-Lavauxelle, 1909). A work of impressive scholarship that anticipated the “New Military History” by one-half century, it was intended by Bourdeau, an officer in the French army, as the first volume of a trilogy. Unfortunately, the First World War prevented Bourdeau from completing his work.

motivation of French foreign policy did not originate with Sorel. As this chapter relates, the cultural and academic representation of the Rhine as a natural frontier between France and Germany existed for centuries before Sorel. Sorel probably inherited the concept from the tradition of nineteenth century French Romanticism which included writers such as Gérard Nerval, Victor Hugo, and Emile Erckmann-Chatrian. The first attribution of the natural frontiers as the key motivation in French foreign policy appears in several of the seventeen manuscripts of the Testament politique du cardinal de Richelieu, the first editions of which appeared in Amsterdam in 1688. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the thesis became prominent in German criticisms of French foreign policy. Frederick the Great, for example, claimed that the French kings strove to acquire the Rhine as the frontier of France. The German historian, Johannes Janssen, although most famous for championing German Catholicism, accused the French of conspiring against the Rhineland in his 1861 work, Frankreich’s Rheingelüste und deutschfeindliche Politik in früheren Jahrhunderten.  

Nonetheless, Sorel merits close attention because he has provided the most substantial evidence to assert that the “French push to the Rhine” constituted a unifying theme in French national history. In his eight-volume magnus opus, L’Europe et la Révolution française, Sorel explores the interrelationship between the French longue durée and the short-term policy decisions of French rulers, statesmen, and diplomats from the ancien régime to Napoleon. Pieter Geyl summarizes the “Sorel Thesis” as “the [perception that the] foreign policy [of the Revolution] formed no breach with the past, that those humanitarian impulses which would have meant such a breach stopped short at words, and that the longing for

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6 According to Richet, Sorel “can claim credit only for having provided an elegant and systematic summary of ideas common to much of nineteenth-century French historiography.” “Natural Borders,” 755.
natural frontiers, which took the place of these impulses, had deep roots in the methods and outlook of the monarchy.” Whereas Alexis de Tocqueville identified continuity between the administrative development of the French state in the ancien régime and the Revolution, Sorel emphasizes the long-term, evolutionary development of French diplomatic practices. He stresses the survival of ancien régime diplomatic traditions after the fall of the French monarchy in the form of the persistent drive toward natural frontiers.

    The continued popularity and relevance of the Sorel Thesis owes much to his literary and scholarly talents. According to the historian Gabriel Monod, Sorel “was the last of the great historical generalizers, storytellers, painters and psychologists of the nineteenth century.” Monod equates Sorel’s legacy to those of such eminent scholars as Augustin Thierry, Adolphe Thiers, Jules Michelet, Ernest Renan, François Guizot, Hippolyte Taine, and the aforementioned Tocqueville. Given his literary, artistic, and even musical backgrounds, Sorel brought a keen and deeply cultivated cultural perception to the study of history. As Geyl explains, Sorel’s philosophy of history “combined a passion for system and synthesis with great powers of plastic expression and creation, he saw forces at work in history other than those of the mind, impersonal forces which cared not for the mind, which indeed used it for its own ends.” Sorel’s first historical work, a groundbreaking study in the local history of his hometown of Honfleur, displays the main characteristics of his scholarly approach. As Monod states, “He searched the past for an explanation of and the origins of the

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9 Ibid.
10 Sorel published his first literary works at the age of eighteen. He wrote two pieces of poetry dedicated to his hometown of Honfleur, a coastal town in Normandy across the Seine estuary from La Havre. In his twenties and thirties, Sorel experimented with a wide variety of cultural medium. He composed several musical scores and wrote two novels before devoting his time to the historical profession.
present; he established a strong base of erudition in his research by the discovery and analysis of original documents.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1866, Sorel accepted a position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and commenced a diplomatic career, which profoundly affected his scholarly pursuits. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 constituted a turning point in his development as it marked the young Honfleurais’s first real experience in affairs of national significance. His two-volume work, \textit{Histoire diplomatique de la guerre franco-allemande}, appeared in 1875; it signaled his growing interest in diplomatic history and brought him great notoriety.\textsuperscript{13} Although invited by Léon Gambetta to lead the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sorel decided instead to pursue an academic career. While he taught diplomatic history at the \textit{École libre des sciences politiques}, he accepted a position as general secretary of the \textit{Présidence du sénat}, where he observed diplomatic affairs and offered advice upon request. These firsthand diplomatic experiences combined with his literary and academic background – not to mention a prodigious work ethic – to mold Sorel into the Third Republic’s leading diplomatic historian.

Occupying a position at the nexus between the French government and academe, Sorel devoted himself to a monumental history of French foreign policy during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Era. Published in eight volumes between 1885 and 1904, \textit{L’Europe et la Révolution française} became Sorel’s lifework. Without question, these tomes stand as the definitive articulation of the natural frontiers thesis. Yet, contrary to the widespread caricature of his thesis, Sorel does not argue that \textit{every} French monarch or statesman pursued the natural frontiers. Nor does he necessarily celebrate or champion French expansion to the Rhine. Instead, he asserts that from the Middle Ages to the Revolution, several French rulers developed and pursued a coherent policy of expansion to

\textsuperscript{12} Monod, “Albert Sorel,” 92.
\textsuperscript{13} Sorel’s history of the Franco-Prussian War was his second work of diplomatic history. His first work, \textit{Le Traité de Paris du 20 novembre 1815}, appeared in 1872.
the natural frontiers, which they based on an interpretation of the laws of geography and
history that had emerged deep in the French past. Most significant, Sorel identifies a
specific class of Frenchman – the légistes or legal theorists – as the leading advocates of the
natural frontiers throughout several centuries of French history.

Although at times ignored and possibly forgotten entirely by generations of French
rulers, the drive toward the natural frontiers, Sorel asserts, became the principal motivation at
key periods of French national development. Most significant, he views Louis XIII’s chief
minister, Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal de Richelieu, as the major proponent of the
natural frontiers policy. Although Sorel considers the lawyers of the French Revolution to
be the heirs of Richelieu’s policy, he claims that their pursuit of these aims without the
restraining wisdom and pragmatism of the ancien régime monarchy fomented two decades of
war that proved disastrous for France and Europe.

Nonetheless, Sorel’s thesis marked a major contribution to French national history. He viewed the national tradition of expansion to the natural frontiers as a metanarrative that
provided a fundamental unity to the French past. Post-nationalist developments in
historiography raised important questions concerning the natural frontiers thesis. Gaston
Zeller remains the most important and cited critic of the Sorel Thesis. Born in Belfort in
1890, Zeller left his native Franche-Comté to study at the Sorbonne, where he received
training in modern historical methodologies focused on the rigorous analysis of archival
sources. The First World War temporarily disrupted his academic pursuits, but he resumed
his career in 1919 when he presented his research at the Concours d’Agrégation d’Histoire et
de Géographie. Zeller’s doctoral thesis examined French expansion toward the Rhine frontier

15 Ibid., 248-53, 265-6, 274-7, 324-5.
16 Ibid., 1:272-80.
in the sixteenth century. Published in 1926 as *La réunion de Metz à la France*, the work established Zeller as a leading French historian during the interwar period.\(^\text{17}\)

Not only did Zeller work in a period less imbued with nationalism, he placed more emphasis on the archive as a source of historical truth. Unlike Sorel, Zeller’s research focused exclusively on the “history of events,” and he based his conclusions on concrete evidence drawn from official documents rather than an analysis of broad impersonal forces. Zeller could not accept the existence of the “French push to the Rhine” as an underlying dimension in French national history because he found little solid evidence of this impulse in the official documents he analyzed. Moreover, he regretted the effect that the natural frontiers theory had on leaders of his own time. A pacifist and self-proclaimed revisionist historian, Zeller argued that French nationalists used the natural frontiers tradition to justify expansionist policies that contributed to Franco-German hostilities.\(^\text{18}\) Although shaped by contemporary political concerns relating to the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles, Zeller’s criticisms of Sorel remain influential among modern historians. In fact, Peter Sahlins claims that historians “owe an unacknowledged debt” to Zeller while Denis Richet states without any qualification that Zeller “demolished” the Sorel Thesis.\(^\text{19}\) The persistence of debate over the main question raised by Sorel indicates that Zeller’s success in challenging the Sorel Thesis is less definitive than these historians suggest.

Whereas Sorel views the “French push to the Rhine” as geographically determined and intrinsically linked to French nation-building, Zeller argues that the concept involved mere “journalism” among propagandists and pamphleteers. He claims that French rulers only embraced the natural frontiers to the extent that it rationalized immediate strategic

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\(^\text{19}\) Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1423; Richet, “Natural Boundaries,” 756.
decisions. In numerous works, Zeller challenges Sorel’s assertion that the policy
represented a continuity between the ancien régime and the Revolution. In La réunion de
Metz à la France, he observes that at no point before 1552 did any French king articulate a
coherent Rhine policy. Moreover, short-term strategic concerns rather than the desire for
natural frontiers drove the annexations of Metz, Toul, and Verdun by Henry II in 1552 and
the conquest of Alsatian territory in the Thirty Years War. He later clarified his position by
asserting that “the desire to expand their kingdom’s frontiers to the Rhine could not be
considered a serious goal of either the Capetians or the Valois.”

A subsequent work argues that Louis XIV’s wars of expansion could not be attributed to the natural frontiers policy; instead the Sun King fought wars for personal glory. Zeller provided a summary of his
interpretation in a 1933 article: “Neither monarchical nor national, the natural frontiers policy
during the ancien régime only existed in a few isolated and chimerical minds.”

Although critical of nationalist historians who championed the natural frontiers
policy, Zeller’s interpretation possesses an equally nationalist strain. He asserts quite strongly
that the natural frontiers policy did not emerge from French legal theorists but that it
constituted a “foreign” intrusion into French political culture. Zeller criticizes Ernest Lavisse
for popularizing the natural frontiers thesis in his popular work, Histoire de France
contemporaine, which portrays the natural frontiers as “an ancient idea” among Frenchmen.

Moreover, he rejects Richelieu’s authorship of the Testament politique du Cardinal de
Richelieu. He maintains that foreign editors included the passages relevant to the natural
frontiers to criticize French policy as expansionist. While Sorel considers the French légistes

21 La réunion de Metz à la France, 1:1-4.
22 “La monarchie d’ancien régime et les frontières naturelles,” 306.
23 La France de Louis XIV (Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1932).
24 “La monarchie d’ancien régime et les frontières naturelles,” 331.
25 Ibid., 330.
as the major proponents of the “French push to the Rhine,” Zeller attributes the ideology most broadly to German intellectuals and more specifically to Francophile Rhinelanders such as Anacharsis Clootz. In this respect, he considers the natural frontiers a “false idea” because it served foreign rather than French national interests.

Zeller maintains that only a “half-dozen writers” and “publicists without warrant or responsibility” promoted the natural frontiers under the ancien régime. He argues that only the commencement of war in 1792 between Revolutionary France and the Austrian and Prussian monarchies brought the Rhine policy to the forefront of French politics. Specifically, Zeller marks the introduction of the natural frontiers into the political mainstream at the moment when Jacques Pierre Brissot accepted the advice of Clootz and the Mainz radical, Georg Förster, to campaign for French annexation of the left bank of the Rhine.26

Resulting from shifting political and academic concerns among modern scholars, the debate between Sorel and Zeller remains fundamentally unresolved. An important article by Peter Sahlins represents the most substantial recent consideration of the dispute. Sahlins revives the notion of the natural frontiers as an important factor for the French monarchy. He views the desire for natural frontiers in terms of a duality between “French foreign policy interests” and “the symbolic construction of French national identity.”27 Updating Sorel’s thesis in modern language, he considers geographical boundaries as an important “model for state-building” and a “constitutive myth of the state” by which various French leaders pursued territorial expansion.28 Clearly, Sahlins draws insight from twentieth century cultural theorists concerned with the link between nationalism and state-building.29 Yet Sahlins does

26 Ibid., 330-3.
28 Ibid.
29 Sahlins is especially influenced by the distinction between “model of” and “model for” development theory as established in Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973); see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (New York: Verso, 1983), for another discussion of nationalism and state-building.
not view the natural frontiers as a coherent foreign policy sustained throughout French history by successive rulers. Instead, he considers it as a phenomenon that developed from a specific context during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Most significant, he claims that the natural frontiers theory emerged as a tool of territorial consolidation under the ancien régime and became firmly entrenched in French political culture as a justification for expansion during the French Revolution.

Nonetheless, Sahlins argues that “statesmen, diplomats, administrators, military officials, historians, and geographers all invoked the idea of natural frontiers as a defining feature of France’s geography and history.”

Moreover, he interprets associations of France and Gaul as relevant to the construction of the natural frontiers. As he asserts, “equating contemporary France with ancient Gaul was not an isolated analogy in the France of Richelieu.” Yet Sahlins disagrees with Sorel that the natural frontiers necessarily constituted a fixed set of geographical objectives. “The uses (and abuses) of the idea,” he notes, “were framed by shifting conceptions of territory, history, and nature as these took shape within French state building since the seventeenth century.” Moreover, while most scholars focus on the “French push to the Rhine,” Sahlins concentrates on French expansion to the Pyrenees frontier. Finally, whereas Sorel emphasizes the légistes and Zeller focuses on foreign pamphleteers, Sahlins views early modern French cartographers, Enlightenment philosophes, and ancien régime diplomats as the major proponents of the natural frontiers – although not necessarily those of Gaul – prior to the Revolution. Thus, a new critical reading of modern specialist literature and major primary sources on French foreign policy during the ancien régime constitutes the basis for a re-evaluation of the natural frontiers debate. In this

31 Ibid., 1425.
32 Ibid., 1424.
manner, this dissertation contributes to a growing historiography on the relationship between foreign policy, warfare, and state-building in pre-Revolutionary France.

Debate over the concept of an early modern “Military Revolution” has also revived interest in warfare and foreign policy among French historians.34 James B. Wood and Mack P. Holt have restored military affairs to the historiography of the French Wars of Religion by asserting that the French state possessed less power than proponents of the Military Revolution Thesis would expect.35 James B. Collins criticizes the notion of a Military Revolution in France and emphasizes the French state’s cooperation with aristocratic elites in the seventeenth century.36 In Richelieu’s Army: War, Government and Society in France, 1624-1642, David Parrot reveals serious bureaucratic gaps in French army administration that forced the state to rely on informal supply mechanisms, a topic he explores in even greater detail in The Business of War: Military Enterprise and Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe. Consequently, Parrot emphasizes the limited ambitions of French foreign policy during the ancien régime.37 John Lynn’s pioneering work on the French army and society during the reign of Louis XIV supports the notion of an incomplete military revolution that forced the Sun King to fight defensive wars through offensive means.38 In From Louis XIV to Napoleon: The Fate of a Great Power, Jeremy Black, a critic of the Military Revolution Thesis, rejects the notion of natural frontiers in ancien régime foreign policy: “No pre-

34 The primary work is Geoffrey Parker, The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), which makes bold claims for warfare, including that it was directly responsible for the formation of the modern state and the rise of European imperialism. See also Clifford J. Rogers, ed. The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe (New York: Westview, 1995).
ordained French foreign policy existed, French foreign relations were unpredictable and fluid, and French interests were varied and episodic. This dissertation argues that the French monarchy possessed limited territorial ambitions and demonstrated genuine concerns for a balance of power.

In addition, the dissertation sides with Zeller in arguing that the natural frontiers emerged as a coherent foreign policy only after the outbreak of the French Revolution. The foreign policy of Revolutionary France constitutes an important area of new and vigorous historiographical debate. Bailey Stone has argued that the French Revolution occurred largely because the Bourbon monarchy failed to maintain France’s standing among the European great powers. In positing that foreign policy debates proved as controversial in Revolutionary France as domestic disputes, Stone calls for greater attention to the link between the French Revolution and international affairs. A growing body of literature concerns the French perception of the international system, the other European powers, and France in the late eighteenth century. In Fraternité universelle et intérêt national, 1713-1795 and Repenser l’ordre européen, 1795-1802, Marc Belissa argues that French Revolutionary foreign policy debates were continuations of Enlightenment debates over new notions of international relations such as popular sovereignty. Thomas Kaiser and Gary Savage place primacy on French relations with Austria to demonstrate that resentment and

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40 Thomas M. Liams in *Peacemaking from Vergennes to Napoleon: French Foreign Relations in the Revolutionary Era, 1774-1814* (New York: Robert E. Kreiger, 1979), 84, states that “the more closely one examines the course of French foreign relations during the Old Regime, the more pragmatic that policy appears.”
fear of the Habsburgs played a prominent role during the French Revolution. In addition, Karl
Roider provides an invaluable examination of Austrian foreign policy.\textsuperscript{45} Breaking with the
literature that exists on the origins of war in 1792, this dissertation emphasizes the
importance of Jacques-Pierre Brissot and the Girondins as the original champions of war and
the attainment of the natural frontiers.\textsuperscript{46} Moreover, it challenges Sahlins’ portrayal of the
natural frontiers as a unifying bond in the Revolution and demonstrates that significant debate
existed in French government circles over expansion to the Rhine. No less important a figure
than Lazare Carnot consistently doubted the wisdom of annexing the left bank of the Rhine –
a point overlooked or misunderstood by historians such as Sorel, Jacques Godechot, Sydney
Seymour Biro, R. R. Palmer, and T. C. W. Blanning.\textsuperscript{47}

Unlike most works of French intellectual, political, and diplomatic history, this
dissertation pays close attention to the Revolution’s military effort. Modern historians have
shed much new light on various aspects of the French military system during the Revolution.
Numerous operational histories appeared in the nineteenth century that contain varying
degrees of detail and factual accuracy on the Revolutionary armies.\textsuperscript{48} Antoine Henri Jomini’s

\textsuperscript{45} Thomas E. Kaiser, “From the Austrian Committee to the Foreign Plot: Marie-Antoinette, Austrophobia, and
Thugut and Austria’s Response to the French Revolution} (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press,
1987).

\textsuperscript{46} The two most important works on the origins of the war are Blanning, \textit{Origins of the French Revolutionary
Wars}, and Frank Attar, \textit{La Révolution française déclare la guerre à l’Europe à la fin du XVIIIe siècle: 1792
(Brussels: Complexe, 1992). A more controversial thesis is presented by Patricia Chastain Howe in \textit{Foreign
Policy and the French Revolution: Charles-François Dumouriez, Pierre Lebrun, and the Belgian Plan, 1789-
1703} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); See chapter 2 for a detailed description of this historiography.

\textsuperscript{47} Sydney Seymour Biro, \textit{The German Policy of Revolutionary France: A Study in French Diplomacy during the
War of the First Coalition, 1792-1797} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), 2 vols; R.
University Press, 1941); Blanning, \textit{The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the

\textsuperscript{48} Antoine Henri Jomini, \textit{Histoire critique et militaire des guerres de la Révolution} (Paris: Anselin et Pochard,
1820-1824), 15 vols; Anon, \textit{Victoires et conquêtes, désastres, revers et guerres civiles des français de 1791
à1815 par une société de militaires et de gens de lettres} (Paris: Panchoucke, 1817-1822), 27 vols; Edmond
Bonal, \textit{Les armées de la République: Opérations et batailles, 1792-1800} (Paris: Delagrange, 1899); E.
Chevalier, \textit{Croquis des opérations militaires de la France de 1789 à nos jours} (Paris: Dupont, 1883); M.
Albert Duruy, \textit{Études d’histoire militaire sous la Révolution et l’empire} (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1889); Quarre de
multi-volume history remains the most exhaustive and intellectually rigorous overview.

French historiography largely abandoned operational history after 1914, leaving that task to Anglophone historians. Ramsay Weston Phipps remains the authority on the operations of the Revolutionary armies. In the twentieth century, French historians focused on the social and cultural history of the Revolutionary armies yet often remained tied to nineteenth century paradigms that emphasize the patriotism and superiority of the citizen soldier. Several Anglophone historians have qualified numerous aspects of the traditional narrative in highly innovative works on the Revolutionary armies and the French state.

This dissertation adds to modern historiography by subverting the academic and popular narrative of French military success and dominance. Although general histories of European warfare often depict the French military as triumphant during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Era, this dissertation highlights several areas of French military weakness. The necessity for the dramatic overhaul of the French military system epitomized by the famous levée en masse of 1793 arose from a near-collapse of the French war effort. French


defeats resulted from the misguided and revolutionary foreign policy of Brissot and the Girondins, who led an ill-prepared France into a war with Austria that rapidly became a general European war. In particular, the dissertation follows a historiographical trend generated by Blanning, Paddy Griffith, Alan Forrest, and Howard Brown that emphasize various limitations in the French Revolutionary way of war.\textsuperscript{52}

The most original aspect of this dissertation is the attention it devotes to the tool of the French state that played the leading role in the conquest of Belgium and the Rhineland: the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. Detailed secondary sources on the Sambre and Meuse Army remain scarce. Peter Wetzler’s *War and Subsistence: The Sambre and Meuse Army in 1794* examines civil-military relations and logistics yet does not investigate the army’s degeneration after 1794.\textsuperscript{53} Nineteenth century histories prove highly biased and nationalistic while lacking significant detail.\textsuperscript{54} The great body of work produced by the French General Staff before the First World War includes numerous volumes on the Sambre and Meuse Army but does not supply a comprehensive history.\textsuperscript{55} A master’s thesis completed in 1998 under the direction of Jean-Paul Bertaud considers the role of desertion in the Sambre and Meuse Army in 1797.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, a comprehensive history of the Sambre and Meuse Army from 1794 to 1797 has yet to be written. While this dissertation does not seek to provide a fully

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\textsuperscript{52} In *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, Griffith argues that French success resulted mainly from the mistakes of the Allies; Forrest in *Soldiers of the French Revolution and Conscripts and Deserters* describes the French state’s incomplete success in mobilizing and organizing the people for military purposes; Brown in *War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State* discusses an incomplete bureaucratic transformation and persisting deficits in French army administration.

\textsuperscript{53} Peter Wetzler, *War and Subsistence: The Sambre and Meuse Army in 1794* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985).


comprehensive operational or campaign history of the Sambre and Meuse Army, it offers a
detailed account of its experience in the conquest and occupation of Belgium and the
Rhineland. In addition, it examines the army’s role in French politics. Finally, it contributes
to the historiography by arguing that the conquest and occupation of Belgium and the
Rhineland in 1794-1797 led to the degeneration of the Sambre and Meuse Army.

The dissertation adds new perspectives on various political regimes and significant
figures of the French Revolution – topics that have never fallen out of historiographic favor.
An ample literature exists on the various Revolutionary governments and political factions in
the period covered by this dissertation. Biographies of major figures provide important
insights. Among the political leaders of the Revolution, this dissertation focuses especially
on Jacques-Pierre Brissot, Lazare Carnot, and Jean-François Reubell. In addition, the
dissertation provides much information on key military figures such as Jean-Baptiste Jourdan,
Jean Victor Marie Moreau, Lazare Hoche, Jean-Baptiste Kléber, and Napoleon Bonaparte.
Another important body of work concerns the state’s civilian agents in the armies.


the French Revolution’s pursuit of natural frontiers often emerges as a topic of consideration, no work has yet linked these various regimes and individuals together in an investigation of the evolution of French foreign policy and military strategy during the War of the First Coalition. In doing so, this study reveals foreign policy as a source of contention in Revolutionary France that ultimately undermined the Revolution’s democratic experiment.

Numerous works examine the impact of the French Revolution on Belgium and the Rhineland.\textsuperscript{60} Curiously, many of these studies provide more detail on the experience of the occupied than the daily role of the occupiers, especially the military forces involved in the occupation. Most of these bottom-up studies represent reactions against the top-down approach of an earlier generation of historians such as Biro and Godechot. Yet in deflecting the perspective away from the history of elites, historians have allowed numerous errors in the traditional histories to persist. This dissertation does not ignore the people most affected by French expansion to the Rhine – the civilians of Belgium and the Rhineland – yet to redress a serious historiographical imbalance while challenging traditional understandings of French Revolutionary foreign policy it focuses on the Army of the Sambre and Meuse and debates among French politicians.

Finally, the dissertation contends that expansion to the Rhine had an enormous impact on domestic politics in France. While outdated theories associated with the “primacy of foreign policy” do not need reviving, François Furet’s claim – supported by Blanning – that

“war conducted the Revolution far more than the Revolution conducted the war” remains convincing.61 Historians already recognize the significant linkages between international and domestic affairs in Revolutionary France yet an under appreciation of the nexus between the political, diplomatic, and military spheres persists. Certainly, the “New Military History” has led historians such as David Bell to consider the role of militarism in French political culture.62 Yet historians such as Charles Walton, Dan Edelstein, and Marissa Linton have rejected war as the primary explanation for the Reign of Terror, referring to it instead as a “circumstantial factor.”63 In general, this interpretation overlooks the significant agency involved in the French decision to declare war and the importance of military figures as key decision-makers throughout the Revolution. Few historians have ever integrated discussions of politics and intellectual thought into a narrative that emphasizes military campaigns and operations. Such an integration is absolutely essential to explain the course of the French Revolution. The Reign of Terror cannot be comprehended without understanding the near-collapse of the French war effort in 1793. Nor can the evolution of the natural frontiers in French policy be conceived without consideration of French success and failure in the war. Finally, the undermining of France’s democratic experiment that commenced in 1797 demands a focus on the military; a truism noted by Howard Brown and Jean-Paul Bertaud, but one that has yet to be fully examined.64

62 Bell, The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).
64 Brown, Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice, and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2006), viii-ix; Bertaud, Army of the French Revolution, 351.
Archival sources constitute the major documentation for this dissertation. The Service historique de l’armée de terre at the Château de Vincennes in Paris, France holds an enormous number of documents concerning the Sambre and Meuse Army. The cartons of the B series constitute the Sambre and Meuse Army’s complete correspondence and represent the most important archival collection. In addition, the unpublished memoirs and correspondence of General Jourdan provide much insight on the topics of army command and civil-military relations. Also, the Service historique holds registers of correspondence for Jourdan’s successors, Generals Pierre de Ruel Beurnonville and Hoche. Vincennes contains a number of documents relevant to the army’s civilian agents such as the correspondence of the Sambre and Meuse Army’s most important representative on mission, Pierre Mathurin Gillet. Diverse sources provide information on the army’s occupation policy and its experience of occupation. Finally, the correspondence of other Revolutionary armies such as the Army of the North and the Army of the Rhine and Moselle constitute important repositories of documentation on the Sambre and Meuse Army’s experience.

In addition to the Service historique, the Archives Nationales at Pierrefitte-sur-Seine houses the unpublished correspondence of General Kléber. Often serving as Jourdan’s second in command, Kléber received responsibility for major operations in each of the army’s campaigns. He became a critic of the government’s war of conquest and grew increasingly disillusioned.

While archival sources shed new light on the Sambre and Meuse Army as a tool of expansion, a variety of published primary sources remain valuable. Collections of correspondence for key participants in the army and the Revolutionary government constitute an important source of documentation. In particular, François-Alphonse Aulard’s collection

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of the correspondence of the Committee of Public Safety and the representatives on mission and Antonin Debidour’s compilation of the Directory’s orders remain invaluable sources. In addition, Lazare Carnot’s correspondence proves useful for his time on the Committee of Public Safety yet unfortunately does not cover his service on the Directory. Although less valuable than correspondence, published memoirs provide additional insight if used cautiously.66 When possible, the dissertation will utilize memoirs to assess the attitudes and memory of the key actors rather than to reconstruct historical events. Other collections shed light on the French war effort from the perspective of the Allies and the populations of the conquered regions.67

The works of several historians proved crucial in the research and writing of this dissertation. Although published in 1915, Eloise Ellery’s biography of Brissot remains the definitive study of this important statesman.68 Ellery provides a comprehensive bibliography of published primary sources written by or on Brissot, which constituted an extremely helpful guide for my research. Similarly, Jean-Pierre Bois’ biography of Dumouriez is an invaluable


source to navigate the complicated career of one of the Revolution’s most enigmatic figures. Jacques Godechot’s remarkable study of the commissars of the Directory supplied a nearly comprehensive guide to the archival correspondence between the Directory and the commissars in 1796. Henry Longy’s study of the 1797 Rhine campaign provided much information on Hoche and Moreau while reprinting archival correspondence at length. Despite his erroneous characterization of Carnot as a “chameleon” who constantly vacillated over the Rhine Question, Biro’s analysis of diplomatic correspondence pertaining to France and the German states remains unsurpassed and altogether enlightening.

As noted, this dissertation argues that the attainment of the natural frontiers emerged as an actual foreign policy only during the French Revolution. Chapter 2 provides a new interpretation of the natural frontiers as a cultural phenomenon but not a coherent foreign policy during the ancien régime. It contends that no French monarch or minister between the Middle Ages and the outbreak of the Revolution viewed the realization of natural frontiers as a serious objective. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Bourbon monarchy had led France to a geopolitical nadir but did not view expansion as a viable path to regeneration. Chapter 3 asserts that the idea of gaining natural frontiers to restore French predominance in Western Europe became the goal of a group of revolutionaries led by Brissot. Yet even the Girondins remained divided over the specific aims and extent of territorial expansion. Moreover, the French confronted a serious contradiction between a desire to spread the Revolution and the demands of sustaining their war effort. Chapter 4 reveals the complete unpreparedness of the French military to achieve the expansionist agenda of the Girondins. The military disasters of 1793 played a primary role in the formation of the Jacobin dictatorship that created the Reign of Terror. Thus, war and conquest drove the Revolution

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toward dictatorship and Terror, largely dismantling the liberal program pursued by the revolutionaries in 1789.

Chapter 5 examines the Jacobin dictatorship that emerged in July 1793 and the challenges of creating a centralized administration capable of mobilizing and organizing the resources of France for the war effort. In the course of the Republic’s war of survival, the Committee of Public Safety discarded the natural frontiers policy to simply exploit the resources of weak neighbors to rejuvenate France. Chapter 6 explores the transformation of this policy after the French victory at the Battle of Second Fleurus on 26 June 1794 and the fall of the Jacobins on 9 thermidor. The Thermidorean Reaction occurred simultaneous to French conquests in Belgium and the Rhineland, which were designed to acquire foreign resources rather than gain natural frontiers. Nonetheless, the patriotic fervor generated by these victories returned the desire for natural frontiers to French politics despite the opposition of leaders such as Carnot. Chapter 7 posits that the French overestimated their military strength after the dramatic conquests of 1794 by examining in unprecedented detail the Sambre and Meuse Army’s degeneration in the Rhineland in 1795. Although the Thermidoreans increasingly demanded the acquisition of the Rhine, the Sambre and Meuse Army encountered numerous logistical and administrative problems in the Rhenish war land that the French state failed to fully comprehend or repair.70

Despite setbacks on the Rhine, the French enjoyed overall victory in the War of the First Coalition. Chapter 8 examines the Directory’s strategy for winning the war in 1796. It contends that making the Rhine the frontier of France became the key foreign policy platform of a faction based around Reubell, who defined his policy as that of a “glorious peace.”

70 Although the Rhineland is often thought of as a “borderland” between France and Germany, the term “war land” best describes an area under military authority after the collapse or overthrow of traditional political structures. For the use of the term war land outside of this dissertation see, Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
Nonetheless, the Directory largely repeated the failures of the Thermidoreans by overestimating French military power in Germany and tasking the Sambre and Meuse Army with an unrealistic mission. Chapter 9 argues that the Sambre and Meuse Army became a useless institution for a period of several months after the disastrous retreat from Germany in 1796. Due to disciplinary breakdown and logistical deficits, the army could not support the Army of the Rhine and Moselle’s campaign to defend important strategic positions along the Rhine. The Austrians reinforced their positions in the region at a time when many Frenchmen remained committed to acquiring the left bank of the Rhine at the end of the war. Chapter 10 explains the Directory’s efforts to restore French strength on the Rhine, although the Directors remained divided over the fate of the Rhine frontier. Hoche received and executed instructions to turn the Rhineland into a dependent republic rather than to prepare it for annexation: a policy he favored because it increased his own power in the region. Ultimately, debates over foreign policy intersected with domestic political tensions in the coup d’état of 18 fructidor, an event that signaled both the erosion of democratic institutions in France and the end of Hoche’s plan for a Cisrhenan Republic. After 18 fructidor, the army played an increasingly prominent role in politics and the French moved steadily toward annexation in the Rhineland. Although the pursuit of natural frontiers established French hegemony in Western Europe, it subverted the Revolutionary ideals of representative government and democracy.
CHAPTER 2
THE NATURAL FRONTIERS DURING THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

On 27 October 1895, the town of Wattignies, a small commune in northern France approximately five-miles south of the Belgian border, adopted the name “Wattignies-la-Victoire” to commemorate the battle that occurred there during the War of the First Coalition. With townspeople gathered around the small square, representatives of the French Third Republic unveiled a monument to memorialize the victory. The former senator from the Nord département, Maxime Lecomte, spoke of the historical significance of “the memorable journées” of 16 and 17 October 1793, which he claimed evoked “the highest and most patriotic of sentiments.” In part, Lecomte’s speech aimed to connect the historical experience of the Revolution with the Third Republic. Lecomte explained to the townspeople the symbolism of the “simple and modest, but nonetheless beautiful monument.” On the plates of the stone obelisk appear the names of republican heroes such as Lazare Carnot, Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, and Florent Joseph Duquesnoy, who, according to Lecomte, invoked in “the memory of our people . . . the heroic courage of the Volunteers, by which France was saved.”

Yet the symbolism on the Wattignies monument evoked French national sentiments beyond republicanism. Perched atop the monument, a rooster – the national symbol of France – defiantly faces the northern frontier. While the iconography suggests that the Battle of Wattignies served the national defense of France, the rooster evokes a crucial double-meaning because it derives its symbolism from the Latin translation gallus, which possesses an obvious linguistic association with Gaul. According to Lecomte: “The name of

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2 Colette Beaune in The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1991), 318, explains that “the medieval source of the coq gaulois came very late to the scene, even though the pun on gallus, Latin for both ‘Gaul’ and ‘cock,’ was widely known.
Wattignies-la-Victoire, on our extreme frontier, resonates like a fanfare. It stirs in our souls the sacred memories of a grandiose past, memories symbolized also by the Gallic cock, in its energy and its strength, spreading its wings and sending into the air its clear and victorious song.\r\n\r
By portraying the rooster as France, the monument symbolizes not just the real France, but an imagined France surrounded by the ancient or natural frontiers of Gaul: the Atlantic and Mediterranean, the Alps and Pyrenees, and the Rhine River. Accordingly, the rooster at Wattignies-la-Victoire not only stands ready to defend France, but looks longingly across the Belgian border toward the Rhine.

The recognition of the natural frontiers in French foreign policy and military symbolism constitutes no groundbreaking discovery. Before the mid-twentieth century many historians considered the pursuit of the natural frontiers – primarily the “French push to the Rhine” – a constant force in French history. Most commonly associated with Sorel, the orthodox view considers the natural frontiers a constant goal of French foreign policy since the Middle Ages. Accordingly, it constitutes an important factor in French national history.

Medieval bestiaries tell us why it took so long for this bird to become the emblem of France, for they associate the cock with the sin of lust – a most unedifying representation for the Most Christian nation. That sinful association began to disappear in the course of the fifteenth century, however, allowing this emblem to take on prominence as the ancestral Gauls displaced the Trojans.\r\n
Lecomte, Paroles, 181.

that erases the divide between monarchical and Revolutionary France. In fact, the orthodox
version of the natural frontiers thesis claims to reveal an underlying continuity between the
foreign policy of the ancien régime and the Revolution.⁵ Although less widely accepted at
present, the thesis remains controversial and of interest to leading historians. For example, in
a popular 2002 textbook, the distinguished historian, James B. Collins, views the natural
frontiers – the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps – as “the general boundaries of France.”⁶ In
an article on the debate published in 1998, Josef Smets promotes the traditional
interpretation, stating that Revolutionary foreign policy “re-enacted that of the old regime.”⁷
Although the modern French and German peoples seem to have discarded any struggle over
the Rhine frontier, the historical debate over the origins of the “French push to the Rhine” – a
historical equivalent of the German “Drang nach Osten” – remains highly combative.⁸

Despite the significance of the “natural frontiers” in French history, Sorel and Zeller
remain the last historians to intensively investigate whether the French monarchy pursued the
Rhine frontier. Sahlins’s innovative article does not fully resolve debates concerning the
monarchy’s contribution to the “French push to the Rhine.” Such a determination must be
made before investigating the French government’s pursuit of the Rhine frontier during the
Revolution. In particular, the extent to which French kings, from the Capetians to the
Bourbons, did or did not pursue the Rhine frontier as a goal of expansion establishes a crucial
context for understanding the Rhine policy of the Revolution. Even if the French crown did

⁵ Sorel, L’Europe et la Révolution française; this view is elaborated in a prominent history of the French
⁶ James B. Collins, From Tribes to Nation: The Making of France, 500-1799 (Toronto, Canada: Wadsworth,
2002), xiii. Although a textbook does not necessarily imply scholarly consensus, it does demonstrate the
prominence of the concept in American university courses.
⁸ For a comparative analysis of these concepts, see Benedykt Zientara, “Zum Problem des geschichtlichen
Terminus “Drang nach Osten,” in Preußen, Deutschland, Polen im Urteil polnischer Historiker, ed. Lothar
not seek to attain the Rhine, it remains necessary to establish where and when the concept emerged in French history.

The idea of a France that corresponds to the boundaries of ancient Gaul remains fundamental to proponents of the natural frontiers. In *The Gallic War*, Julius Caesar defined the boundaries of pre-Roman Gaul as the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps.9 The Ancient world’s most prominent geographer, a Greek scholar named Strabo of Amasia, approved of Caesar’s assertion, solidifying the idea of Gaul’s natural frontiers.10 However, modern research on ancient Gaul suggests that the Rhine served less as a barrier and more as a highway often traversed by various Gallic and Germanic peoples.11 Regardless, the Roman contribution to France include the linguistic roots of the French language, the Christian faith, the wine industry, a basic framework of political administration, and, arguably most important, general territorial boundaries.12

During the Gallic War, the Romans encountered invading Germanic tribes and struggled to preserve stability on the frontier.13 Caesar made two significant attempts to move Roman legions across the Rhine to project power into Germania. He hoped to “strike fear into the Germans” and bring an end to their routine migrations across the frontier. On both occasions, first in 55 B.C. and second in 53 B.C., logistical constraints required the Romans to retreat west of the Rhine. In particular, the Romans discovered insufficient agricultural productivity in the Rhineland to feed their legions while on campaign, an interesting omen

Map 2. Roman Gaul

Source: Biro, *German Policy*, 1:3.
for the ill-fated French expeditions of 1795 and 1796. Subsequently, the Rhine became a
defensive barrier of Roman Gaul maintained by the creation of military camps at various
positions. Although it never completely prevented minor Germanic encroachments, the Rhine
barrier defended the territorial integrity of Roman Gaul successfully until the invasions of the
fourth and fifth centuries.

Attempts to trace the origins of France to ancient or Roman Gaul rely more on
mythical nationalist discourses than actual historical evidence. Nationalist historians often
combined discussions of the French race with the origins of French geography. Although
Jules Michelet distinguished race and geography in the nineteenth century, Ferdinand Lot
continued to promote this fusion in the twentieth. From an ethnical perspective, the
diversity of Gaul’s population fluctuated with several periods of migrations. Like modern

15 Katharine Scherman refers to the Rhine as a “feeble barrier to the continuing stream of barbarian tribes, who
combined a natural disposition to belligerence with a real and pressing need for a new home.” The Birth of
Gaul, 155, concludes that “there must have been a considerable mixing of populations along the frontier regions.
. . . Mixing of Germans and Gauls was a process that continued after the Roman conquest. . . .”
16 The most significant attempt to trace the French race to ancient Gaul remains Ferdinand Lot, La Gaule: les
fondements ethniques, sociaux et politiques de la nation française (Paris: Fayard, 1948). Guizot’s statement that
“Gaul was not occupied by one and the same nation, with the same traditions and the same chiefs,” stood as a
quite radical statement in the nineteenth century compared with many of his contemporaries. Lavisse began his
textbook on French history by noting that “around two thousand years ago, France was called Gaul.” He
observed that “Gaul was inhabited by hundreds of different types of people. Each of them had their own
particular names, and often fought against each other. It was not therefore a nation, because a nation is a
country where all the inhabitants must love one another.” The twentieth century French historian, André
Maurois, completed the deconstruction of the mythical nationalist discourse by rejecting the Gallic origin story:
“It cannot be said that the history of these men belongs to the history France, for nations had not yet taken
shape. . . . There has never been a French race. The area which today goes to make up France, being near the
end of the European continent, was the place where invasions stopped short and invaders settled down.” See
François Guizot, Outlines of the History of France, trans. Gustave Masson (Boston, Massachusetts: Estes and
Lauriat, 1879), 1-2; Lavisse, Histoire de France (New York: D.C. Heath, 1923), 3-4; André Maurois, A History of
17 It should be noted that Michelet did not choose sides in the debate over the origins of the French race. On one
side, scholars such as Augustin Thierry and Henri Martin viewed the Gauls as the ancestors of the modern
French, while other scholars, most notably Gabriel Bonnot de Mably and Henri Boulainvilliers, associated the
French with the Franks. Michelet believed in a mythical fusion of Celtic and Germanic races as the origin of the
French race, yet he stretched the origins of French geography back to ancient Gaul. See Oscar A. Haac, Jules
Michelet (Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne, 1982), 38-9; Arthur Maitzeman, Michelet, Historian: Rebirth and
Romanticism in Nineteenth-Century France (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990); Vivian
Kogan, The ‘I’ of History: Self-Fashioning and National Consciousness in Jules Michelet (Chapel Hill, North
Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 42-3; and Harold A. Ellis, Boulainvilliers and the French
Monarchy: Aristocratic Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century France (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University
France, Gaul possessed a number of different ethnic groups. Over three hundred Gallic tribes constituted the core population of Gaul. After the Roman conquests, a Gallo-Roman population emerged, predominately in the south and in urban centers. By the second century, Roman Gaul’s population probably stood at ten million, with the various Gauls remaining the largest group.\(^\text{18}\) The Gallic myth of France’s origins overlooks the heterogeneous nature of Gaul’s population. As Caesar detailed, the parts of Gaul that bordered the Rhine did not contain ethnic Gauls but rather various Germanic peoples and the Belgae. According to the geographer Strabo, the Belgae shared more ethnic similarities with the Germans than with the Gauls.\(^\text{19}\) Moreover, the group most commonly considered the founders of modern France, the Franks, only arrived on the left bank of the Rhine during the collapse of Gaul as a Roman province. Thus, modern scholarship refutes the direct lineage of France’s ethnic and physical origins to ancient Gaul.

The destruction of Roman Gaul and the creation of the Frankish empire constituted a disruptive turning point in the history of Western Europe rather than a smooth evolution in the development of France. Demonstrating the lack of genuine ethnic connection between the ancient Gauls and the modern French, the barbarian invasions entailed huge migrations of diverse people within, into, and out of Roman Gaul. In place of the Gallic majority came various groups such as the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, the Burgundians, the Alamanni, and the Franks. Each of these migratory groups established control over parts of modern France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland. Unstable living conditions contributed to the outbreak of plague in the fifth and sixth centuries, which reduced the population by approximately seventy-five percent.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^\text{19}\) Duane, *The Geography of Strabo*.
\(^\text{20}\) Latouche, *Caesar to Charlemagne*, 77-89, covers the period of the first Frankish invasions and migrations in detail, referring to this period as “the disastrous third century.” See also Wightman, *Gallia Belgica*, 193-201, for a discussion of the population fluctuations of Roman Gaul.
Originally a Rhenish tribe, the Franks established control over Köln and expanded their territory to form what they called *Francia*, “the land of the Franks,” which originally extended to Cambrai and Tournai.\(^2\) From their base at Köln, the early Franks advanced southwest toward Arras and, within less than one century, the tiny Gallo-Roman city of Paris.\(^2\) A small Celtic settlement, Paris fell under Frankish control during the reign of Clovis. From this point, the Merovingian rulers of the Franks became intensely tied to the Paris region as the base of their empire. Although the Franks remained divided among numerous tribes, contemporary sources refer to Clovis (466-511) as “King of the Franks.” Moreover, the sixth century chronicler, Bishop Gregory of Tours, contends that during the fifth century “a great many people in Gaul were very keen on having the Franks as their rulers.” Yet the bishop misleadingly states that this policy enabled Clovis to “spread his dominion over the whole of Gaul.”\(^2\) In reality, Clovis did not conquer the entirety of Roman Gaul, nor did he establish a territorial structure to emulate the pre-Roman Gallic kingdom according to natural boundaries. Areas ruled by the Burgundians, the Bretons, the Visigoths, the Frisians, and the Alamanni remained outside his control.\(^2\) Moreover, Salian Frankish law required the equal division of Clovis’ empire to his four sons – Theuderic, Chlodomir, Cheldebert, and Lothaire – after his death in 511. After Clovis’s burial at Saint-Denis Cathedral in Paris, his heirs extended their divided domains by defeating the Burgundians and the Visigoths.\(^2\)

\(^{21}\) Bernard S. Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organization, 481-751* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 3, observes that Gallo-Roman power declined rapidly in Gaul after the death of Aetius in 454 and that two groups competed for primacy by the late fifth century: the Visigoths in southwestern Gaul and the Burgundians in the southeast. The Rhineland was divided between the Franks, the Alamanni, and the Thuringians.


\(^{24}\) For the extent of Clovis’s empire, see Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organization*, 10-17; Scherman, *Birth of France*, 133; and Rouche, *Clovis*, 337.

By the eighth century, the Franks constituted the major geo-political force in Western Europe and the area of Frankish domination far surpassed the territory of Roman Gaul. The Merovingian kings did not continue the Roman tradition of maintaining the Rhine as a military barrier. Constituting one of several rivers that ran through their expansive domains, the Rhine lost the symbolic meaning ascribed to it by Caesar; certainly, no one in the Frankish kingdom viewed it as a natural or historical frontier. The Franks viewed the Rhine as one of many important geographical features around which their empire spread both east and west. While subsequent French historians such as Henri Boulainvilliers and Gabriel Bonnot de Mably adopted the Franks as their ancestors, the development of modern France – and the French race – did not follow a linear pattern from either ancient Gaul or the Franks. Collins considers the later Carolingian period an “interlude” in the origins of France because, as he states, these leaders ruled over territories far larger than did their Merovingian predecessors or any subsequent French king, a situation allowing for further population fluctuations and migrations.

The greatest Frankish ruler, Charlemagne, should be viewed primarily as a European figure rather than a French monarch. Charlemagne made the Rhineland the heartland of his European empire, using Aachen as the residential and administrative base on which he built his “universal monarchy.” Charlemagne’s empire expanded far beyond the limits of Roman Gaul and the empire of the Merovingians, occupying territories of modern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Spain. Undeniably,

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26 Ian Wood states that “the relationship between the Merovingians and their eastern neighbors was a crucial aspect of Frankish power and politics. . . . The greatest of the Merovingians had hegemonical influence east of the Rhine: it was neither firmly institutionalized nor constant, depending rather on military prowess and prestige, but it could be very considerable.” *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (New York: Longman, 1994), 164.


28 The extent to which Aachen should be viewed as a modern “capital” is discussed by Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 175-6.
Charlemagne established many precedents later adopted by the kings of France. Imperial iconography and symbolism constituted an important model for the culture of French royalty. Moreover, the concept of a universal monarchy certainly contributed to the ambitions of subsequent French leaders. Yet Charlemagne’s empire did not serve to inspire a coherent natural frontiers policy among subsequent French rulers because it clearly surpassed the limits of ancient Gaul. In fact, the desire for a “universal monarchy” or a European empire constitutes Charlemagne’s greatest contribution to the foreign policy of France.

Controversy caused by the division of Charlemagne’s empire among his descendants proved more significant to the theory of natural frontiers. According to Sorel, “the insoluble litigation of the line of imperial succession” constituted the “starting point of the great trial that occurred throughout all of French history.” The three sons of Charlemagne’s heir, Louis the Pious, warred for supremacy following their father’s death in 840. While the eldest son, Lothair, claimed the entire Carolingian inheritance, his brother, Louis, and half-brother, Charles the Bald, rejected the settlement. Defeated at Fontenay in 841, Lothair agreed to compromise with his younger siblings. Meeting on the Meuse River, the three brothers signed the Treaty of Verdun in 843. The step-brother, Charles, received the territory of “Francia,” the western portion of the Carolingian empire. Louis, known as “the German,” gained the eastern portion of the empire from the right bank of the Rhine to the Elbe River. Finally, Lothair acquired the middle portion, stretching north from Italy through Switzerland to the North Sea Coast. Charles and Louis reduced Lothair’s inheritance in the 870 “Partition of

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31 The Treaty of Verdun established territorial lines that cut across various regional ethnic groupings that developed from the fifth century barbarian invasions through the Carolingian period. For example, West Francia included Brittany, Neustria, Aquitaine, Gascony, Gothia, and Francia, while Burgundy and Austrasia was divided between West Francia, Lotharingia, and East Francia. Lombardy and Provence were the major ethnic regions in the south of Lotharingia, while East Francia was divided mainly between Bavaria in the south and
Map 3. Treaty of Verdun and the Partition of Mersen


Saxony in the north. Dunabin, *The Making of France*, 1-4, notes that “the inhabitants of West Francia hardly saw their common allegiance to one king as creating any sort of bond between them.”
Mersen.” Charles gained parts of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Lorraine, while Louis annexed the remainder, including the left bank of the Rhine. The orthodox interpretation of French foreign policy depicts the Mersen settlement as the catalyst for the natural frontiers policy. According to this argument, by depriving Charles the Bald the full territory of ancient Gaul, the Mersen settlement inspired subsequent generations of rulers to extend French territory to the left bank of the Rhine.

Unfortunately for this interpretation, the Middle Ages provide no examples of French rulers who consciously sought to expand royal territory to the natural frontiers. Certainly, early medieval rulers associated the extent of their territories with dynastic prestige and considered expansion a means of bolstering their image and power. After the Partition of Mersen, Charles the Bald ruled a territory bounded by the Meuse, Saône, and Rhône rivers to the north and east that stretched deep into modern-day Spain as far south as the Ebro River. In his short reign as Holy Roman Emperor from 875-877, Charles fought unsuccessfully to reunite the empire of Charlemagne by conquering the territories ruled by Lothair and Louis.

Yet most of the immediate successors of Charles the Bald did not pursue the reunification of Charlemagne’s empire. In fact, his successors ruled during a period of turbulence that witnessed the drastic reduction of the crown’s territory. Nonetheless, the prevailing notion

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32 Collins, From Tribes to Nation, 20, asserts that “no ninth-century evidence suggests contemporaries viewed these divisions as anything other than temporary arrangements” and that the “Carolingians signed a bewildering variety of agreements throughout the ninth century.”

33 For example, in German Policy, 1:6, Biro argues that the Partition of Mersen was the “root of the problem.”

34 According to Sorel, L’Europe et la Révolution française, 1:244-6, the legacy of Charlemagne inspired subsequent monarchs to expand their territories. Yet the mechanism by which this broad expansionist agenda became focused on the natural frontiers of ancient Gaul remains obscure in Sorel’s analysis.


36 The focus on uniting the empire of Charlemagne constituted a logical policy for Charles the Bald and his immediate successors given their chronological proximity to the great ruler. Yet with less logic it inspired French rulers who dreamed of achieving historical greatness long after the Middle Ages. Sorel refers to the conflicts fought by these subsequent rulers – Charles VIII, Louis XIV, and Napoleon – as “wars of magnificence.” Clearly, these grandiose ambitions countered the notion of a “push toward the Rhine” because they envisioned French expansion far beyond the natural frontiers and into Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany. Sorel, L’Europe et la Révolution française, 1:287-8.

37 According to Dunbabin, The Making of France, 14-5, “Charles’s pursuit of Lotharingia and then of the imperial crown received little support from his magnates. His death in Italy provoked a crisis. His son, Louis the
of French boundaries from the tenth through at least the sixteenth century stressed the role of the “Four Rivers” – the Saône, Rhône, Meuse, and Scheldt – as France’s limits naturelles in the north and east.\textsuperscript{38}

The reign of the Capetians (987-1328) marked an important step toward the development of France. Despite the obvious contrasts between the pursuit of the greater empire of Charlemagne and the natural frontiers of ancient Gaul, Sorel equates Philip Augustus’s desire to “raise France to the height it was at the time of Charlemagne” to advocacy for the natural frontiers.\textsuperscript{39} Yet Hugh Capet and the early Capetians ruled during a period of weak kingship and powerful princes. Accordingly, their efforts focused overwhelmingly on internal centralization and consolidation.\textsuperscript{40} Even the most pro-expansionist rulers during this period pursued territorial aggrandizement within a system of clear limitations. For example, Philip Augustus, who reigned from 1179-1223, focused on territorial consolidation within the traditional Four Rivers frontier. Rather than pursuing expansion toward the Rhine, Philip aimed to destroy the Angevin empire and to consolidate control over Valois, Vermandois, Artois and the Loire region.\textsuperscript{41} The consolidation of royal power remained the primary concern of the most famous Capetian king, Louis IX (1226-1270). The expansion that occurred during the reign of the highly-venerated “Saint Louis” brought Normandy and Languedoc under royal control.\textsuperscript{42} The reign of his successor, Philip

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\textsuperscript{39} Sorel, L’Europe et la Révolution française, 1:247-8.
\textsuperscript{40} See Elizabeth M. Hallam, Capetian France, 987-1328 (New York: Longman, 1980), 64-7.
\end{flushleft}
III (1270-1285), witnessed conflict with England on the Atlantic coast. Moreover, Philip’s campaign south of the Pyrenees against Aragon in 1285 ended in disaster and exhausted the crown’s treasury.\textsuperscript{43} Although the twelfth and thirteenth centuries proved important for French national development, the minor extent of the crown’s territorial expansion reflected the medieval state’s limited ability to conquer and consolidate vast amounts of new territory.\textsuperscript{44}

Regardless, Sorel views the High Middle Ages as a crucial period in the development of French foreign policy traditions. Relying on the work of the nineteenth century historian and literary figure, Ernest Renan, Sorel argues that Philip IV (1285-1314) and his advisor, Pierre Dubois, established the diplomatic tradition of the natural frontiers.\textsuperscript{45} According to Sorel, Philip IV relied on the legalistic arguments of Dubois, whom he portrays as an official royal advisor, to establish claims for possession of territories outside his dynastic control, specifically the Holy Roman Empire. Sorel considers Dubois the leading medieval légiste and the founder of a line of “chevaliers de lois,” among whom he includes important figures such as Francois-Michel le Tellier, Marquis de Louvois, Georges Jacques Danton, and Antoine Christophe Merlin de Thionville as disciples. Sorel states that two key ideas formed the basis of Dubois’s political thought: Gallo-Roman history and the Charlemagne legend. Although Charlemagne’s empire and the boundaries of Roman Gaul did not equate in terms of territory, Dubois purportedly allowed for the fusion of these distinct historical legacies into a mythical formulation of the French past based around the concept of natural frontiers.\textsuperscript{46}

Gareth Evan Gollrad (New York: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), which now stands as the definitive study.

\textsuperscript{43} According to Hallam in \textit{Capetian France}, 277, “the lesson of the campaign was not lost on his son, Philip IV, who turned away from the expensive expeditions to the south.”

\textsuperscript{44} The limited aims and outlook of the medieval French monarchy are documented in Elizabeth A. R. Brown, \textit{Customary Aids and Royal Finance in Capetian France} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, 1992), 1-9.

\textsuperscript{45} Sorel relies on Renan’s \textit{Histoire Littéraire de la France} and his short article on Dubois for his analysis of the légistes. In particular, he cites Renan’s discussion of Du Bois’s work, \textit{Traité de l’abrégement des guerres et des procès}, apparently without consulting the work himself.

\textsuperscript{46} Sorel, \textit{L’Europe et la Révolution française}, 1:248-52, states that Dubois’s “dominant thought was the extension of royal power. He pursued with passion the greatness of France in Europe.” He credits Dubois with
While Sorel contends that Philip and Dubois lived in a period that restricted the achievement of their ambitions, recent scholarship suggests that Philip never desired territorial expansion to the natural frontiers and that Sorel greatly overestimated the significance of Dubois. Although historians often cite Philip’s reign as “the apogee” of medieval France, current scholarship depicts him as an enigmatic and controversial ruler. Medieval accounts criticize Philip for laziness and lack of interest in royal administration. Moreover, the royal princes of the blood – rather than the bourgeois legal theorists – remained the principal influences on the king, centering crown policy on dynastic interests. Conflicts with Gascony and Flanders occupied the majority of Philip’s reign and proved unsolvable in his lifetime. Moreover, Philip’s negotiations with the Holy Roman Emperor demonstrate the lack of desire for expansion to the Rhine. In fact, he consistently referenced the Four Rivers as the natural boundary between France and the Empire. According to modern scholars, Philip the Fair’s significance to French history lies more in his administrative reforms and limited territorial expansion than to an avowed expansionist policy, whether to the Rhine frontier or to reunify Charlemagne’s empire. Moreover, scholarship substantiates the description of Dubois as “a hanger on of the court of Philip the Fair,” whose pamphlet in favor of the Rhine frontier, *The Recovery of the Holy Land*, received little attention among policy makers.

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48 Strayer, *Philip the Fair*, xii, states that “the reign of Philip the Fair marks the culmination of the medieval French monarchy. Royal power reached a point that was not surpassed, and often not equaled, during the rest of the fourteenth century.” Strayer refers to Philip’s power in relation to the feudal system, not his kingdom’s physical extent. In addition, see Hallam, *Capetian France*, 278-83; Duby, *France in the Middle Ages*, 261-3; and Brown, *Customary Aids*, 29.

49 Pounds, “The Idea of Natural Frontiers in France,” 152-3. In addition, Pounds relates that the only evidence that suggests that Philip took Dubois’s proposal seriously comes in the form of an anonymous manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, which purports that the king was considering an assertion of French claims to the left bank of the Rhine. According to Pounds, the handwriting suggests that this document was possibly written by
Although the Hundred Years War obviously kept French rulers focused on territory under threat from the English, Sorel views this period as crucial for the development of the natural frontiers policy. He contends that national sentiment developed around heroes such as Joan of Arc and that the French victory emboldened subsequent rulers to pursue a more expansive foreign policy: “when the war of independence ceased, the war of borders recommenced.” Citing the work of the nineteenth century historian François Guizot, Sorel claims that the French did not lose the tradition established by Philip IV and Dubois. For example, Sorel quotes Philip VI of Valois at the beginning of the Hundred Years War to demonstrate the crown’s expansionist goals: “Let the sea form the border between England and France.” Yet Philip’s quote clearly restricts expansion to the territory of Flanders. A short passage from an obscure Flemish chronicler, Guillebert de Mets, constitutes the second piece of evidence cited by Sorel for his assertion that the end of the Hundred Years War brought a return to a war of expansion to the frontiers. Finally, Sorel alludes to the Debate of the Heralds of 1450 as evidence of French commitment to the Rhine frontier.

Unfortunately for Sorel, this evidence remains highly unconvincing of a “French push to the Rhine” in the Late Middle Ages. The Debate of the Heralds involved French and English diplomats and did not constitute a clear expression of royal policy. Moreover, it merely referenced the glory of Charlemagne and did not encourage French acquisition of the Rhine. Instead, the French herald remarked on the beauty of France’s rivers and cited the Saône River as the boundary between France and Germany. A fifteenth century geographer, Gilles le Bouvier, confirmed that the Rhône and Saône marked the frontiers of France as far

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Dubois. See also Brown, Customary Aids, 29, which concludes that Dubois’s proposals “may have been attractive,” but did not constitute royal policy.


Ibid.

east as the Lorraine border, from where the boundary followed the Meuse to the province of Hainault, where it reached the Scheldt.53 Taken together, the evidence favors the interpretation that the Four Rivers constituted the actual and desired frontiers of France during the Late Middle Ages. Only a small minority of unofficial voices supported French claims to the Rhine.

In the mid-fifteenth century, French foreign policy became especially focused on the conflict with the Duchy of Burgundy. Driven partly by blood feuds and a series of assassinations, the conflict resulted mainly from the growth of the Burgundian domains through a policy of royal marriages. By 1440, the dukes of Burgundy ruled numerous provinces in the Low Countries, Picardy, and Artois. Clearly, the Burgundians needed to consolidate control over Alsace and Lorraine to form a contiguous block of territory. The expedition of the French King, Charles VII (1422-1461), to capture Alsace and Lorraine resulted from defensive concerns regarding the expansion of Burgundy rather than a premeditated plan of expansion to the Rhine. Although the rulers of Burgundy traditionally deferred to their French cousins, Charles the Bold, hoped to establish himself as an independent king and possibly gain the imperial title. Charles VII’s successor, Louis XI (1461-1483), used gold and diplomacy to stymie Charles the Bold’s plans for expansion.54 In 1474, Valois gold funded a Swiss invasion of Franche-Comté while Charles waged war against the dukes of Lorraine. After a failed expedition to Switzerland, Charles returned to Lorraine, where he died in battle at Nancy in 1477.55 The 1482 Treaty of Arras provided a marriage agreement between the Valois and the Habsburgs, which spelled disaster for

54 For example, Louis bribed Emperor Frederick III so that he reneged on a pledge to grant Charles the Bold a kingdom while provoking fears among the Swiss that Charles sought to consolidate their territories into his state. See Frederick J. Baumgartner, Louis XII (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 1-5.
55 Older works on Charles the Bold have been superseded by R.J. Walsh, Charles the Bold and Italy (1467-1477): Politics and Personnel (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005). Joseph Calmette’s The Golden Age of Burgundy: the magnificent dukes and their courts (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), remains significant.
Burgundy as Flanders and Franche-Comté became fiefs of the French crown, thus ending the existence of Burgundy as an independent geopolitical rival. Almost immediately after the eradication of the Burgundian threat, French territorial interests shifted from Lorraine to Italy.  

Yet, while in a geopolitical sense the sixteenth century witnessed a refocusing of French concerns from the north-east frontier to Italy and the south, the same period proved crucial for the rebirth of France’s Gallic heritage. The Renaissance portended not only the strengthening of the monarchy and the centralization of the state in France, it also encouraged the revival of classical learning. Understandably, this inspired in Renaissance France a keen interest in ancient Gaul. French intellectuals such as François Hottman looked beyond Charlemagne and the Frankish legacy for inspiration. In particular, the translation into French of Caesar’s *The Gallic War* and the geography of Strabo introduced into French political culture the notion of frontiers based on historical Gaul.

In addition, humanist geographers such as Bernhardus Varenius, Gerardus Mercator, Nicolas Sanson, and Martin Waldseemüller played an important role in the development of the notion of frontiers derived from historical legacy and natural environment. These geographers based their maps not on the realities of early modern geopolitics but on mapmaking in the ancient world. They paid particularly close attention to geographers such as Ptolemy, who depicted rivers and mountains as natural boundaries between ancient

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59 In “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1431, Sahlins asserts that “in much commercial cartography of the mid-seventeenth century, the portrayal of mountains . . . suggested the ideal of political divisions marked out by nature. . . . Sanson’s cartography of state was not devoid of scientific techniques or contributions to the history of map making. Yet, seduced by the idea of natural limits, and untroubled by a relative ignorance of topography in California as in Africa, he invented mountain ranges forming political boundaries where in fact there were none.”


61 David Buisseret in “Monarchs, Ministers, and Maps in France before the Accession of Louis XIV,” 102, relates that Louis XII acquired the manuscript of Ptolemy’s Geography from a Belgian publisher in 1485 but that he regarded the work “as a fashionable ornament for his library. . . . He surely had no idea of using Ptolemy’s map of Gaul to help him govern France [emphasis added].” In addition, Francis I used maps more systematically but relied on new maps produced by an emerging class of professional cartographers rather than maps from the ancient world. For example, he commissioned a map of the major Alpine passes from France into northern Italy in preparation for a French invasion of Italy in the Habsburg-Valois Wars. He also sponsored geographical study of North America and used maps to prepare for overseas colonization efforts led by Jacques Cartier. Peter Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1428, claims that “for the monarchy, which (beginning under Henri IV) increasingly brought cartographers and military engineers under its patronage, the image of natural frontiers was not terribly useful and less frequently represented on manuscript maps of the frontier provinces. But the stylized depiction of rivers and mountains within a growing commercial cartography provided a language that lent itself to the more general political project of building an idealized representation of the state [emphasis added].”
Charles VIII (1483-1498) – the king whose wars in Italy brought the Renaissance to France – did not orientate French policy toward the Rhine frontier. Instead, Charles VIII’s foreign policy clearly favored French expansion beyond the Alps and into northern Italy. Sorel explains this as a dangerous aberration in traditional French policy and as an example of the misguided “wars of magnificence” that he associated with Louis XIV and Napoleon. Sorel claims that Henry II’s conquest of Metz, Toul, and Verdun in 1552 returned French foreign policy to the natural frontiers, particularly the Rhine. His assertion relies on the memoirs of the prominent French military commander, Gaspard de Saulx, which were written by his son, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, in the early seventeenth century. According to this account, de Saulx reproached Henry II for failing to attain Alsace and Lorraine and asserted: “It would seem that God has placed barriers which he did not wish to be easily crossed; to Spain, the Pyrenees and the sea; to France, the sea, the Pyrenees, the Rhine, and the Alps of Switzerland and Piedmont; to Italy, the sea and the Alps.” De Saulx criticized the Italian policy of Charles VIII and urged Henry II to return to traditional French foreign policy.

In fact, de Saulx’s criticism of Henry II proves that the kings of France did not seek to establish the kingdom’s frontier on the left bank of the Rhine. Certainly, the overriding concern among French rulers in the sixteenth century proved to be the prevention of Habsburg encirclement, epitomized first by the “universal monarchy” of Charles V (1519-1556) and subsequently by the continuance of the Habsburg family alliance between the thrones of Austria and Spain. While this concern focused French attention on the Low Countries, the Rhineland, the Alps, and the Pyrenees, the Valois and Bourbon monarchs relied primarily on alliances, money, and the fortification of existing frontiers as methods of protecting the kingdom from Habsburg encirclement. Despite patriotic appeals from de Saulx

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63 Ibid., 264-5.
and others for forceful conquest as a solution to the Habsburg threat, French territorial expansion proved incremental and restrained, and was mainly designed to bolster strategic defense around an emerging fortress system rather than to acquire vast amounts of new territory that would drain royal treasuries to fortify and defend. Rather than concentrating cartographic efforts to justify expansion to natural frontiers, the French monarchy in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century commissioned maps primarily to increase knowledge of internal French territory and borders between neighboring states, particularly France’s border with the Spanish Netherlands and the Holy Roman Empire.65

Support for the Rhine frontier in this period appeared predominately in polemical works that sought to influence royal policy from an unofficial position. In 1568, the physician, Jean le Bon, a native of Lorraine, wrote a short pamphlet titled The Rhine to the King. Although Henry II’s 1552 conquests in Lorraine inspired le Bon’s desire for French expansion to the Rhine, few contemporaries embraced his proposal.66 For example, during the French Wars of Religion Charles IX’s advisor, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, proposed a well-fortified Meuse frontier in order to protect French territory as far as the Low Countries. In 1585, the author of the memoirs of Marshal François de Vieille-Ville contended that the French should construct a frontier that stretched from Luxembourg toward Brussels, thereby expanding the kingdom into Flanders.67 As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, during the French Revolution expansion to the Meuse became a foreign policy goal associated with critics of the Rhine frontier such as Lazare Carnot.

65 For works that demonstrate that royal cartography in the early modern period focused on internal development and frontier fortification rather than expansion, see Buisseret, “Monarchs, Ministers, and Maps in France before the Accession of Louis XIV,” 103-8; Paul Solon, “Frontiers and Boundaries: French Cartography and the Limitation of Bourbon Ambition in Seventeenth Century France,” in Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History (Lawrence, Kansas: 1984), 94-102.
67 Zeller, “La monarchie et les frontières naturelles,” 309-11, considers the plan for expansion into Flanders a “reasonable design.” Moreover, he argues that “public opinion remained attached to [gaining territory in Flanders] during the last three decades of the ancien régime.” Yet he states that the “program of natural frontiers has up to our own time unfortunately relegated to the background” the idea of expanding into Flanders.
Alongside his chief advisor, Maximilien de Béthune, duke of Sully, Henry IV (1589-1610) healed the wounds inflicted by several decades of religious conflict and placed France on the path to great power status during the seventeenth century. According to Sorel, “with Henry IV the kingdom appears in full possession of its strength and reason. The national tradition is affirmed, specified, and simplified; it is divorced from legends and dreams. It is the reign of policy. The role of the légistes is rising.” Yet Sorel also admits that Sully did not endorse the natural frontiers policy. Although he does reference the natural frontiers of Gaul in several letters, Sully concludes in his Oéconomies Royales that French territory did not demand expansion. Nonetheless, after citing three pamphlets that purportedly revealed Henry’s desire to conquer the Alps and the Pyrenees, Sorel describes the natural frontiers policy as “the tradition of Henry IV.”

Some historians believe that Henry IV concocted a “Grand Design” just before his assassination in 1610 that would have committed France to an all-out war against Austria and Spain. From this perspective, Henry IV’s reign could be seen as the first step toward the natural frontiers policy for the seventeenth century monarchy. Yet the interpretation that Henry IV desired peace more than conflict proves difficult to challenge. According to Robert J. Knecht, Henry’s primary objective throughout his reign remained the consolidation of

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70 David Buisseret and Bernard Barbiche have produced the best version of this work in *Les Oéconomies Royales de Sully* (Paris: Société de l’Histoire de France, 1970). Sorel, *L’Europe et la Révolution française*, 1:269-70, argues that Sully desired for France to lead an international system of alliances based on religious toleration. He asserts that Sully derived the idea for Christian vassal states of France from Pierre Dubois and that he continued the French tradition. Furthermore, Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, pointed out by Sorel among other revolutionaries, purportedly reconfigured this traditional policy by advocating for a system of vassal republics that would allow France to dominate Europe by alliances and the propagation of Revolutionary doctrines.
French territory, the maintenance of political stability, and the repairing of royal finances.\textsuperscript{73} Without question, he did not seek a war with the Habsburgs between the signing of the 1598 Treaty of Vervins and the succession crisis that resulted from the death of Johann Wilhelm, duke of Jülich-Kleve-Berg in 1609.\textsuperscript{74} In light of these considerations, the fact that the two decades following Henry’s death did not witness a major French attack on Habsburg territory should not be seen as a divergence from the tradition of Henry and Sully but rather as a continuation of a foreign policy that favored peace over war.\textsuperscript{75}

The change from a conciliatory to a confrontational policy toward the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs occurred during the era of Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal-Duke of Richelieu and of Fronsac and the rise of the “Good Frenchmen” party in the court of Louis XIII (1610-1643).\textsuperscript{76} More than any of their predecessors, Richelieu and Louis XIII pursued a staunchly anti-Habsburg policy. Accordingly, some historians assert that the Rhine frontier became a French foreign policy objective during Richelieu’s tenure as the king’s minister.\textsuperscript{77} In the traditional interpretation, the natural frontiers policy would allow Richelieu to strengthen France against the Habsburgs and had emerged from an obsession with ancient Gaul. Sorel relies on Richelieu’s memoirs to substantiate this claim. While these memoirs provide a political and economic history of France from 1610 to 1638, they must be viewed

\textsuperscript{74} The controversy caused by Johann Wilhelm’s death arose because his inheritance was claimed by several heirs, including his two sisters: Anna of Prussia, a Protestant, and Anna of Kleve, a Catholic. The War of Jülich Succession broke out between Anna of Prussia’s husband, Elector Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg, and Anna of Kleve’s husband, Duke Wolfgang Wilhelm of Palatinate-Neuberg. Henry IV feared that the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph II, hoped to gain the throne of Jülich-Kleve-Berg for himself. J. Michael Hayden, “Continuity in the France of Henry IV and Louis XIII: French Foreign Policy, 1598-1615,” \textit{The Journal of Modern History} 45, no 1 (1973): 1-23, remains the seminal work on this issue in Anglophone scholarship.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{76} James B. Collins, \textit{The State in Early Modern France}, 28-30. The Good Frenchmen were preceded by the “Devouts,” led by Marie de Medicis and Michel de Marillac. The Devouts urged the king to expel Protestantism from France while pursuing internal reforms. Spain and Austria could become useful allies in the crusade against Protestantism in the Netherlands and Germany, respectively. The Good Frenchmen, in contrast, viewed the Habsburgs as an existential threat to the Bourbon monarchy.
carefully when assessing Richelieu’s thought process because the cardinal most likely did not write them. In addition, Sorel includes the commonly cited passage from Richelieu’s Testament politique: “The goal of my ministry has been to return to Gaul the frontiers that were given to it by nature, to submit all the Gauls to a Gallic king, to combine Gaul with France, and to restore a new Gaul everywhere that ancient Gaul had been.” Based on these statements, Sorel and his supporters interpret French intervention in the Thirty Years War in 1635 and the subsequent expansion into Alsace and Lorraine as the result of the natural frontiers policy – one burst of expansion during a centuries long “French push to the Rhine.”

In terms of both Richelieu’s motives and the extent of his ambitions, this interpretation of the 1635 intervention proves highly exaggerated. To begin, Sorel attempts to portray Richelieu as a successor of Pierre Dubois by emphasizing his authorization of texts by figures such as Chantereau-Lefèvre, Denis Godefroy, and Jacques de Cassan that purport to reveal France’s legitimate claim to the Rhine. Yet Sorel fails to show clear evidence of Richelieu’s support for these writers; overall, historians remain unconvinced of the relevance of these texts to Richelieu’s foreign policy. Unable to demonstrate a clear connection between Richelieu and these pamphleteers, Sorel offers the previously noted Testament

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78 Sorel’s use of Richelieu’s memoirs in L’Europe et la Révolution française, 1:272, proves particularly problematic because he cites a description of Henry IV’s plan of invasion of the Low Countries in 1610 as evidence of Richelieu’s support for the natural frontiers policy. Sorel assumes that Richelieu’s interpretation of Henry’s motives implies support for the policy; furthermore, he accepts without question the authenticity of the account even though it concerns matters not relevant to Richelieu’s formal state papers. For the unreliability of Richelieu’s memoirs, see Louis Batiffol, “Les Faux Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu,” Revue des deux Mondes (1921), which demonstrates that two of Richelieu’s secretaries compiled the memoirs from his papers shortly after his death.


80 Sorel explains that “the work of the publicists of the seventeenth century, descended directly from and legitimated those of the fourteenth century. It should surprise us less to see the légistes of the Convention, like the Merlins [of Douai and of Thionville], the Cambacêres, the Reubells, and the Treilhards, recovering, after just arriving in power, and so easily adapting to new forms of public law the old tradition of royal conquests, when you consider that those who, in the fourteenth century, developed the system and those who furthered it in the seventeenth, came from the same origins, having received the same education, and arose, all animated by the same spirit, from the courtrooms, the surgery rooms, the intendancies, and the archives.” Ibid., 1:274.

81 See H. Weber, “Richelieu et le Rhin,” Revue historique 239 (1968): 265-80; although claiming that the natural frontiers constituted an important part of Richelieu’s foreign policy, Sahlins remains silent on the issue of these pamphlets. “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1430-4.
politique as “a work that reveals better than all the others the extent to which these political
designs were becoming popular under the Cardinal’s government.” Unfortunately for the
Sorel Thesis, the modern consensus considers the portions of the document that concern the
natural frontiers of Gaul to be a forgery. In fact, the most reliable version of the Testament
politique reveals Richelieu’s limited ambitions for territorial expansion and his desire for
France to exist peacefully in the European states-system, which a war for the Gallic frontiers
would have inevitably prevented.

Richelieu probably never contemplated the possibility of the French annexation of the
entirety of the left bank of the Rhine from Rotterdam to Basel. Louis XIII’s letter to the
parlement of Brittany concerning the commencement of war in 1635 took great pains to
explain the defensive nature of the conflict, speaking broadly of his desire to preserve “the
peace of the state” and the “conservation of his good neighbors and allies.” If the natural
frontiers had been a popular desire among Frenchmen then the king would have used the
policy as a means of rallying French support for the war. After the commencement of war
in 1635, Richelieu found French finances stretched to the limit to maintain the war effort. The
campaigns in Flanders, Franche-Comté, and Alsace proved largely indecisive while the
Spanish threat to Paris proved so serious that many members of the royal council desired to
abandon the capital. If anyone in the government seriously contemplated a campaign to
restore the frontiers of Gaul, the intervention in the Thirty Years War proved that Bourbon
France lacked the military power to achieve such grandiose objectives.

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83 For the issue of authenticity, see Louis André, Le Testament politique du Cardinal de Richelieu (Paris: 1947);
84 In particular, Louis XIII addressed Spain’s support for Protestant dissidents in France, the arrest of the
Archbishop of Trier, and Spanish designs on Champagne, Picardy, and Languedoc. See A. Lloyd Moote, Louis
85 See Parrot, Richelieu’s Army, 547-56, which attributes France’s survival in the war to the reliance on
patronage. Also, Paul Sonnino, Mazarin’s Quest: The Congress of Westphalia and the Coming of the Fronde
The diplomatic instructions provided by Richelieu during the Thirty Years War demonstrate that he did not consider the Rhine as a potential frontier for the kingdom of France. Instead, he desired to acquire *passages* over the Rhine to allow the French to project power into Central Europe to support the German princes against Austria, thereby reducing Habsburg influence in the Holy Roman Empire. In particular, between 1638 and 1643, Richelieu viewed the possession of Breisach as essential for French security. Positioned on the right bank of the Rhine in Swabia, Breisach not only stood on the so-called “Spanish Road,” but also constituted a key area on the lines of operation for Austrian troops in the Rhineland. A French garrison at Breisach would permanently expose the Habsburg domains to French attack while also providing for French security in Alsace and Lorraine. Rather than annex all of the Rhine as a natural frontier, Richelieu desired to increase French influence in specific territories between France and the Holy Roman Empire through alliances, financial support, and arrangements for military garrisons and troop passages. In this manner, France would possess both a buffer zone protecting it from Habsburg aggression as well as a staging area for military efforts into the Habsburg heartland, without assuming the primary financial burden of fortifying and defending wide swaths of new possessions.

Following Richelieu’s death in 1642 and Louis XIII’s passing in 1643, the war dragged on indecisively until the 1648 Treaty of Münster, which became part of the broader Westphalian Peace Settlement. One clause of the Münster Treaty solidified French sovereignty over the Three Bishoprics of Lorraine – Metz, Toul, and Verdun – culminating a policy of expansion initiated by Henry II in 1552. An additional aspect of the Münster settlement concerned French expansion in Alsace. The agreement reflected French desire to

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86 As Weber explains, “Richelieu sought to obtain a passage on the Rhine, he did not seek to obtain the Rhine.” “Richelieu et le Rhin,” 268. See also Roland E. Mousnier, *The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy, 1598-1789* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 682.

use the Alsatian Rhine as a “gateway” for the projection of power into the Holy Roman Empire. Sovereignty over the Landgraviate of both Upper and Lower Alsace transferred from the emperor to the king of France, while the French crown also gained sovereignty over ten imperial cities, including Landau, Wissembourg, Rosheim, Obernai, Colmar, and Münster. Yet the Treaty of Münster should not be viewed as a complete abandonment of Alsace by the Holy Roman Emperor. Although two articles established the principle of French sovereignty in Alsace, several Alsatian states remained controlled by the empire. For example, Strasbourg remained an imperial city while the French garrisoned but did not control the Rhine fortresses of Breisach and Philippsburg. In addition, the French surrendered the Breisgau and several other towns that connected Swabia and Switzerland. Most important, the French agreed to end their occupation of Lorraine after the conclusion of a separate peace agreement.88

Clearly, the Westphalian Settlement did not complete the “French push to the Rhine.” Although Sorel remains convinced that Richelieu and his successor, Cardinal Jules Mazarin, dreamed of expanding French territory to the Rhine frontier, he admits that the Westphalian system reflected a crucial tradition in French foreign policy under the ancien régime: “moderation in strength.”89 Moreover, Sorel recognizes that the “classical system” of French diplomacy served the goal of raison d’état, or the pursuit of the state’s interests.90 Richelieu advised this policy in his Testament politique, urging the king to remember that “the public interest ought to be the sole objective of both the prince and his councilors.”91 In addition, Richelieu emphasized the importance of “foresight,” which “alone can easily prevent many evils which can be corrected only with great difficulty if allowed to transpire.” He argued that

89 Sorel, L’Europe et la Révolution Française, 1:280.
90 Ibid., 282.
91 Hill, Political Testament, 76.
states must “profit from everything possible” in matters of diplomacy, including negotiations with hostile nations and the construction of leagues of alliances to combat mutual threats. These policies certainly suggested the expansion of French influence in the Rhineland, yet they did not advise the extension of French territory in the region.92

These statements highlight several concrete characterizations of traditional French foreign policy during the ancien régime that challenge the natural frontiers thesis. Prudent measures designed to strengthen the state’s interests guided policy. Regarding territorial expansion, practicality and feasibility constituted the primary considerations. In this respect, minor adjustments of the frontier served to heighten the kingdom’s security while crusades for massive territorial aggrandizement invited threats from foreign coalitions. Overwhelmingly, the early seventeenth century Bourbons favored territorial expansion into Spanish Flanders to secure the border because of the geographic proximity to Paris and to gain profitable coastline. The acquisition of strategic gateways over the Alsatian Rhine constituted a secondary objective.93 More important than territorial expansion, cultivating influence through alliances with foreign and neighboring powers represented the primary means of challenging geopolitical rivals. For example, the construction of alliances with Protestant rulers in the Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany constituted the most effective means of combatting the Habsburg threat. The 1658 League of the Rhine represents a significant embodiment of this policy under Mazarin. Support for the Ottoman Empire constituted another dimension of the anti-Habsburg policy, which became a French diplomatic tradition as early as Francis I.94 As associated with Richelieu and Mazarin, the classical system of French diplomacy concentrated on utilizing money and alliances,

92 Ibid., 80.
alongside the acquisition of several strategic positions, to reduce the Habsburg threat to France’s borders; it did not countenance a long-term push toward the natural frontiers. 95

Although war with the Austrian Habsburgs ended in 1648, conflict between France and Habsburg Spain continued until the 1659 Peace of the Pyrenees. According to Sahlins, “the Peace of the Pyrenees was unique in the seventeenth century for its explicit invocation of the [natural frontiers] ‘doctrine.’” 96 Sahlins’s evidence includes Article 42 of the treaty, which concerned the French acquisition of Roussillon: “The Pyrenees Mountains which anciently separated the Gauls from the Spains, shall henceforth form the division of the two kingdoms.” Mazarin purportedly added to this statement the remark, “which I suppose will not be useless,” interpreted by Sahlins as a statement “to justify French expansion to the Pyrenees.” 97 Yet the lack of additional evidence from Mazarin in support of the natural frontiers – especially in regards to the Rhine and the Alps – raises doubts concerning the overall significance of these statements, both of which can be viewed simply as observation of fact rather than advocacy of the natural frontiers policy. 98 The desire for peace in 1659 resulted from the exhaustion of both France and Spain, although more so on the part of Spain after France’s recovery from the Fronde revolts. Pressure from the Netherlands and England further contributed to Spain’s decision to offer several territorial concessions to France, including the county of Artois, several fortresses in Flanders and Hainault, territory between the Sambre and the Meuse rivers, and cities further east such as Luxembourg, Thionville, and

95 Geoffrey Treasure, Mazarin: The Crisis of Absolutism in France (New York: Routledge, 1995), 87, 111-2, 258-9; Sonnino, Mazarin’s Quest, 40-1.
96 Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1430.
97 Ibid.
98 According to Treasure, Mazarin, 258, “in the end it was the legal arguments, invoking laws of property, not fanciful, nostalgic ‘laws’ of nature or imperatives of geography, which determined the frontier’s course.” Moreover, Treasure concludes that for the northeastern frontier Mazarin envisioned a defensive frontier “based on fortresses.”
Sedan. In return for these gains, the French agreed to restore sovereignty over Lorraine to Duke Charles IV in accordance with earlier treaties.99

Two years after the Peace of the Pyrenees, Louis XIV’s minority ended and he assumed full powers as king of France. He did so after the arrangement of his marriage to Maria Theresa, the daughter of the Spanish king, Philip IV. Mazarin orchestrated the marriage through the Pyrenees Treaty, which brought Louis a substantial dowry of 500,000 livres. Due to its bankruptcy, the Spanish crown struggled to pay this sum through the 1660s. Louis utilized the grievance over Spain’s failure to pay the dowry as justification for a war of expansion in the Spanish Netherlands in 1667. Following the 1668 Peace of Aachen, France received several towns in Flanders, including Lille, but returned Franche-Comté to Spain. The decline of Spain and the rise of the Netherlands as a political and economic powerhouse shifted Louis’s attention toward the Dutch Republic. Accordingly, he ordered a rapid campaign through the Spanish Netherlands into Dutch territory following the commencement of the Anglo-Dutch War of 1672. Lasting until 1678, the Dutch War included several moments of French martial glory – such as the capture of Maastricht in 1673 – but revealed the state’s limited military power.100 Unable to defeat the Dutch, Louis agreed to a compromise in the Peace of Nijmegen of 1679, which nonetheless represented the single greatest gain of territory by France before 1792. The treaty transformed France’s northeastern boundary into a defensive frontier by awarding the French several cities in Artois, Flanders, the region of the Scheldt and the Sambre rivers, and Franche-Comté. In addition, Louis continued the occupation of Lorraine while his troops garrisoned Kehl and Freiburg on the right bank of the Rhine.101

99 Mousnier, *Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy*, 683; Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 87
Following Louis’s seizure of Strasbourg in 1681 and the conquest of Luxembourg three years later, the 1684 Truce of Regensburg proved to be the apogee of French territorial expansion before the French Revolution. Curiously, Sorel does not consider the natural frontiers as the guiding light behind Louis XIV’s wars but argues that he fought misguided “wars of magnificence.” Although Sorel relates that the king did reference France’s “ancient right” to territory in Belgium and Lorraine, he labels the broader foreign policy of French domination of Europe as Louis’s “dominant thought.” In this respect, Sorel views Louis’s wars as a divergence from traditional French foreign policy in favor of the universal monarchy of Charlemagne. Other historians reject the idea that natural frontiers constituted even a minor fragment of Louis’s foreign policy. Zeller argues that the pursuit of gloire proved the most significant motivation for Louis’s early wars. Similarly, Louis André notes that Louis imprisoned a vocal advocate for the natural frontiers policy, Antoine Aubery, in the Bastille because he feared that foreign rulers would take his petition as a representation of royal policy. Other evidence reveals the lack of support for the early wars of expansion beyond Louis XIV and a small group of advisors that included Marshal Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne Turenne. Based on the experience of Franche-Comté after the Dutch War and the War of Réunions, Louis discovered that new territory could not simply be conquered, and that new lands required an intensive and expensive process of integration into the royal domain.

102 Sorel, L’Europe et la Révolution Française, 1:283-6.
103 Historians remain confused concerning Sorel’s interpretation of Louis XIV’s foreign policy. John Lynn, Wars of Louis XIV, 32, erroneously asserts that Sorel attributed Louis’s wars to single-minded pursuit of the natural frontiers. See Ekberg, The Failure of Louis XIV’s Dutch War, 4, for an effective challenge to Sorel’s assertion that Louis broke with the dynastic traditions of Richelieu and Mazarin to pursue “wars of magnificence.”
Challenging conventional views, John Lynn divides the history of Louis XIV’s wars into three distinct periods. According to Lynn, from 1661 to 1675 the young monarch fought aggressive wars designed to gain glory by conquering new territories. Utilizing insight from “prospect theory,” Lynn asserts that in the second period of war from 1676 to 1697 Louis waged defensive wars through aggressive means. Identifying the Austrian Habsburgs as his main threat, he determined to secure the north and northeastern frontiers through the consolidation of territory. In particular, recognizing his state’s inability to gain a total victory over the Dutch Republic, Louis abandoned his desire for the total conquest of the Spanish Netherlands in favor of partial gains in Flanders and Hainault. Thus, even the Sun King recognized the limits of the dynastic state’s military potential and curbed his ambitions accordingly.

Moreover, during this second phase of Louis XIV’s wars, his minister of war, François-Michel le Tellier de Louvois, and chief fortress engineer, Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, encouraged the construction of a fortified border well south of the Lower and Middle Rhine to defend the realm from foreign aggression. The Vauban fortress system remains controversial in the debates concerning the natural frontiers. An influential essay by Henry Guerlac maintains unequivocally that Vauban desired to gain the Rhine frontier for France. Yet Vauban’s suggestions appear more akin to a traditional defensive posture. For example, he stated after the Nijmegen Treaty that “France has today attained a high degree of elevation that renders her formidable to her neighbors, in a manner that they all interest

110 Lynn, *Wars of Louis XIV*, 35.
111 See Henry Guerlac, “Vauban: The Impact of Science on War,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 89. Guerlac states that “Vauban would not have been a Frenchman and patriot had he not accepted the familiar and tempting principle that France’s natural frontier to the north and east was the Rhine. We know that he held this view and we can suspect that it was already clearly formulated in his mind early in his career. It certainly was later.”
themselves in her ruin, or at least in the diminution of her power.” In order to guarantee the security of French frontiers, Louis pursued a policy of limited expansion to rationalize a line of fortresses in accordance with Vauban’s proposals. Thus, the aggressive seizure of Strasbourg and Luxembourg resulted from a defensive impulse and, in Louis’s mind, did not entail further conquests. Most important, given its limited extent the Vauban pré-carré system inherently contradicted the notion of the Gallic frontiers as natural, relying instead on the power of human engineering to create a frontier defended by fortresses and manpower.

While the Sun King’s wars brought French armies to the Upper Rhine and even to the right bank, evidence suggests that they resulted from contemporary strategic concerns rather than an overarching desire to recreate ancient Gaul. During the third period of war identified by Lynn, Louis’s chief obsession became the defense of his conquests up to 1689 and ultimate victory in the struggle for the Spanish succession. In fact, Lynn considers Louis XIV’s final war his “most profoundly defensive effort.” Despite the defensive nature of Louis XIV’s later wars, both the War of the League of Augsburg and the War of the Spanish Succession proved incredibly frustrating for France. Colin Jones states that “had Louis died at forty-six rather than seventy-six, his reputation in French history would have stood far higher: for from the 1680s to his death, he added virtually nothing to what he had achieved hitherto.” From a financial perspective, the cost of Louis’s wars greatly exceeded the capacity of the royal treasury. The strain required the king to commit to a broad fiscal program that included creating new taxes and raising existing rates, increasing the number of venal offices for sale, selling more annuities, and manipulating the currency. By the end of

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113 Ibid., 37.
114 Chandra Mukerje, *Territorial ambitions and the gardens of Versailles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 259, makes the observation that the pré-carré lines could be seen as “natural,” even as part of God’s creation, because they were based on geometrical lines following geographical features.
the War of Spanish Succession, the kingdom possessed a war debt of over one billion livres. Climatic forces exacerbated the financial crisis. The “mini Ice Age” of the late seventeenth century led to demographic crisis after the famine of 1693-1694 and the great freeze of 1709, which together reduced the French population by approximately two million people.

Understandably, financial and military exhaustion limited the continental ambitions of French monarchs in the early eighteenth century. The 1713 Peace of Utrecht reflected eighteenth century conceptions of compensations and balance of power. France did not suffer a humiliating peace settlement, but instead retained most of the territory in Europe that it held after the 1697 Peace of Ryswick. The 1714 Rastadt agreement established French control over Landau on the left bank of the Rhine, for which the French agreed to remove their garrisons from several fortresses on the opposite bank. Most important, the Bourbons remained on the thrones of France and Spain. In addition, sovereignty over the Spanish Netherlands transferred to the Austrian Habsburgs.

The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed impressive economic recovery from the abyss of 1713. Moreover, relative continental peace characterized the final period of the Bourbon-Habsburg rivalry between 1715 and 1756, with France participating in only two wars: the small-scale War of Polish Succession (1733-1735) and the larger War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748). France’s two leading ministers in this period – Cardinal Guillaume Dubois and Cardinal André-Hercule de Fleury – pursued a rapprochement with Great Britain and Austria, viewing peaceful coexistence within established boundaries during a time of economic recovery as the best means of strengthening the state.

\footnote{Collins, The State in Early Modern France, 163-72.}
\footnote{Ibid., 150-3; M. Lachiver, Les années de misère: La famine au temps du Grand Roi (Paris: Fayard, 1991).}
\footnote{Jules de Clerq, Recueil des traités de la France (Paris: Pedone-Lauriel, 1880), 1:16; Mousnier, Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy, 684-5.}
\footnote{Black, From Louis XIV to Napoleon, 70-95.}
Nonetheless, the realities of geopolitics undermined Fleury’s rapprochement with Austria. Despite pacific desires, France remained committed to its status as protector of the German princes and sought to gain allies within the Empire such as Bavaria and Saxony. In addition, Fleury cultivated an alliance with the kingdom of Sardinia to challenge Habsburg influence in Italy.\textsuperscript{121} Controversy over the Pragmatic Sanction represented the most pressing issue between France and Austria. After Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Spain accepted the Pragmatic Sanction in 1731, France stood alone against Emperor Charles VI’s desire for his daughter, Maria Theresa, to gain the entire Habsburg inheritance. For France, the problem with the Pragmatic Sanction constituted Maria Theresa’s engagement to Duke Francis of Lorraine, who would likely inherit the imperial throne after Charles VI’s death. The possibility of a geopolitical rival occupying territory flush with France’s eastern frontier forced even the dovish Fleury into a belligerent mindset.\textsuperscript{122}

Yet war ensued in 1733 from affairs on the other side of Europe. The death of King Augustus II of Saxony, the regent king of Poland, led to a contest over the Polish Succession between the French candidate, Stanislas Leszczinski, and the Austrian and Russian favorite, Augustus III of Saxony. After a short war, Fleury negotiated a compromise peace that reflected the eighteenth century concern with the balance of power. France agreed to the Pragmatic Sanction while Leszczinski, Louis XV’s father-in-law, received Lorraine in compensation for Augustus III’s ascension to the throne of Poland. While Duke Francis of Lorraine gained territory in Tuscany as well as marriage to Maria Theresa, the French received the guarantee of sovereignty over Lorraine after the death of Leszczinski, which occurred in 1766. Fleury’s magnanimous approach to the negotiations and declarations of his

\textsuperscript{122} Jones, \textit{The Great Nation}, 89.
peaceful intentions toward Austria gained international agreement for the largest territorial acquisition by France since the 1674 attainment of Franche-Comté.\textsuperscript{123}

In 1738, Fleury, a statesman with “repressed ambition, unbounded patience, [and] a keen sense of the limits of the possible,” orchestrated a treaty of alliance with the Austrian Habsburgs.\textsuperscript{124} Unfortunately for France and Europe, events in Central Europe quickly unraveled the system of peace created by the octogenarian minister and allowed a hawkish war party led by Charles Louis August Fouquet de Belle-Isle to gain ascendancy.\textsuperscript{125} The War of Austrian Succession resulted from Frederick II of Prussia’s seizure of Silesia after the death of Charles VI in December 1740. Although France initially remained on the sidelines, Austrian defeats spurred Belle-Isle’s pro-war party, which enticed Louis XV with the prospect of territorial gains in the Austrian Netherlands. As in most wars, reality altered expectations among the belligerents. In 1741, Belle-Isle invaded Bohemia and captured Prague; however, an Austrian counterattack forced him to conduct a costly retreat that ended with Belle-Isle’s capture by the British. In 1743, a combined Austro-British army defeated the French at Dettingen. The War of Austrian Succession turned global in 1744 as the French and British commenced hostilities in North America, which resulted in the French loss of Louisbourg in 1745.\textsuperscript{126}

Despite the setback in North America, French fortunes recovered on the continent due to the success of Marshal Maurice de Saxe in Flanders. Saxe followed his victory over the British at the 1745 Battle of Fontenoy with an impressive siege campaign that captured Ghent, Bruges, Tournai, and Brussels. In 1747, Saxe captured the Dutch border town of Bergen op Zoom, gaining the French control of the Scheldt River. The following year, he

\textsuperscript{123} Black, \textit{From Louis XIV to Napoleon}, 78-81.
\textsuperscript{124} Reed Browning, \textit{The War of the Austrian Succession} (New York: St. Martin’s 1993), 17.
\textsuperscript{125} Wilson, \textit{French Foreign Policy during the Administration of Cardinal Fleury}, 345, states: “The only grievous mistake of his [Fleury’s] administration lay precisely in the fact that he unwittingly surrendered to Belle-Isle a share in determining the policy of France.”
\textsuperscript{126} The Franco-British war in North America is known as King George’s War and lasted from 1744 to 1748.
concluded his string of victories by capturing the dominant fortress of Maastricht on the Meuse, seventy-two miles west of the Rhine frontier at Köln.127 While the territorial gains resulting from Saxe’s conquests could have substantially moved French territory closer to the natural frontier, the peace agreements established mainly by the British and French at the Breda Conference and the 1748 Peace of Aachen demonstrated French preference of colonial affairs over continental expansion. In return for the recovery of territories in North America and the Caribbean, France surrendered all gains in the Austrian Netherlands. The decision reflected three major geopolitical realities: Austrian desire to retain Belgium, British fear of French domination of the Low Countries, and French contentment with its frontiers in Western Europe.128

French nationalist historians find little to admire in mid-eighteenth century French foreign policy. Sorel describes France’s role in the War of the Austrian Succession as “exposing Canada in order to conquer Silesia for the king of Prussia.”129 Yet the years immediately after the Peace of Aachen confirmed the policy’s viability as France experienced an economic boom resulting from increased colonial trade. Overwhelmingly, French officials such as the foreign minister, Antoine Louis Rouillé, viewed the continental situation after 1748 as favorable compared to a continuation of war. However, Anglo-French colonial rivalry fueled the fires of conflict in North America in 1754, creating conditions that led to the outbreak of a general European war two years later. Specifically, Great Britain provided subsidies to Russia while signing an alliance with Frederick II of Prussia. Although designed to promote peace, the British support for two rival powers – Russia greatly feared Prussian

128 De Clerq, Recueil des traités de la France, 1:65-78.
129 Sorel, L’Europe et la Révolution française, 1:291. The phrases “stupid as the peace” and “war for the king of Prussia” become common after the 1748 treaty.
expansion – led to the outbreak of war in Europe. More from necessity than desire, Louis XV agreed to an alliance with Austria in 1756. Although anticipated by Fleury’s rapprochement policy, the so-called “Diplomatic Revolution” resulted primarily from Austrian hatred of Prussia and French colonial rivalry with Great Britain. Moreover, the French viewed Anglo-Prussian relations as a conspiracy against France’s colonial and continental interests.

At first glance, France’s devastating defeat in the Seven Years War appears to substantiate Sorel’s description of the 1756 Franco-Austrian alliance as “the most disastrous for all.” Yet Sorel’s assertion follows a French nationalist tradition of scapegoating Austria for the policy failures of the Bourbon monarchy during and after the Seven Years War. In reality, the outcome of the war revealed serious underlying defects in French military, administrative, and financial institutions rather than diplomatic confusion. After the Anglo-Prussian alliance of January 1756, France possessed few options other than allying with Austria. Moreover, evidence suggests that the French actually viewed the Austrian alliance favorably at the start of the war. Despite the disastrous defeat at the 1757 Battle of Rossbach, the 1763 Peace of Paris maintained the status quo antebellum in Europe and portended no significant damage to France’s continental position in regards to territory.

On the other hand, the peace agreement irrevocably weakened France’s claim to colonial power in the Western Hemisphere. Accordingly, French revenge took the form of intervention in the American War for Independence against the implacable British enemy. Although happy to humiliate the British, the failure of Louis XVI’s intervention to gain concrete rewards for France at the 1783 Peace of Paris in light of the enormous financial

133 De Clerq, *Recueil des traités de la France*, 1:89.
costs of the war proved problematic for the prestige of the Bourbon monarchy. Moreover, Prussia’s acquisition of Silesia in 1741 followed by the 1772 First Partition of Poland by Austria, Prussia, and Russia exacerbated the French failure to accumulate physical rewards from the costly wars it waged from 1741-1783. The continental and colonial expansion of other European powers combined with the Bourbon monarchy’s policy failures provided the initial motivation for a shift in French foreign policy toward expansion in Western Europe.

Nonetheless, even in the twilight of the ancien régime, the push toward the Rhine did not strike royal officials as a viable solution to France’s domestic and international problems. The purchase of Corsica by Louis XV in 1768 constituted the last territorial acquisition of Bourbon France. As René Louis d’Argenson advised Louis XV, “France must be satisfied with its greatness and extension. It is time to start governing, after spending so much time acquiring what to govern.” Louis XVI’s foreign minister, Charles Gravier de Vergennes, adopted a similar policy. While advising the king to pursue colonial ventures such as a mission to Indochina, Vergennes warned of territorial designs in Europe: “France should fear aggrandizements instead of coveting them.” On the eve of the French Revolution, the government even pursued a rapprochement with Great Britain in the form of the 1786 Eden Treaty. Moreover, largely for the lack of alternative options, the monarchy resisted the increasingly vocal demands for the abandonment of the Austrian alliance. Mired in crippling debt and domestic political controversy, the Bourbon monarchy rode out the foreign disputes of the 1780s trying to make use of whatever possibilities that might repair the regime’s international standing: a war for the natural frontiers never entered the discussion.

134 Belissa, Fraternité universelle, 122.
136 Vergennes quoted in Biro, German Policy, 1:23.
137 De Clerq, Recueil des traités de la France, 1:146-64.
Having emerged in the Renaissance with the translations of classical texts, the notion of the natural frontiers of ancient Gaul actually seems to have largely disappeared from French political culture for much of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{139} The rediscovery of the natural frontiers in French political culture in the eighteenth century resulted from two significant developments. First, the Enlightenment stressed the importance of natural forces in social and political organization. Applied to national boundaries, natural barriers rather than historical precedent represented the ideal determinant. Second, efforts by royal authorities to reform and consolidate the French state referenced the earlier idea of \textit{limites naturelles}, albeit in a manner that did not evoke the frontiers of ancient Gaul. Regardless during the eighteenth century “the idea of a state bounded by natural, topographical features reached its most developed expression.”\textsuperscript{140}

Although not an issue that monopolized the attention of Enlightenment philosophes, key figures such as Charles Louis Baron de Montesquieu and David Hume articulated theories that associated \textit{limites} with nature. Most significant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau concretely defined France’s natural boundaries for Enlightenment readers: “It is not to be said that the Alps, Rhine, sea, and Pyrenees are insurmountable obstacles to ambition; but these obstacles are reinforced by others which fortify them, or lead states back to the same bounds when short-lived efforts have resulted in their deviation therefrom.”\textsuperscript{141} Rousseau’s identification of these specific geographical features constitutes a return to the notion of the Gallic frontiers – the Pyrenees, Alps, and Rhine – as postulated by patriotic Frenchmen and enthusiastic foreigners during the fifteenth and sixteenth century Renaissance. Yet Rousseau used nature rather than history as a source of justification. The proponents of the “French

\textsuperscript{139} Pounds asserts that “this controversy had in large measure spent its force by the end of the sixteenth century, though its echoes reverberated into the seventeenth. By the eighteenth century it was dead.” “Idea of Natural Frontiers in France,” 155.
\textsuperscript{140} Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1435.
\textsuperscript{141} Jean Jacques Rousseau, \textit{Extrait du projet de paix perpétuelle de l’Abbé de Saint Pierre} (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1756), 27.
push to the Rhine” during the Revolution typically used both natural and historical arguments – along with new strategic considerations – to justify expansion.

Nonetheless, the presence of the Gallic frontiers in Enlightenment thought did not make natural frontiers a hegemonic idea in French political culture in the late ancien régime. Born in 1753 to a middle-class family in Dijon, Lazare Carnot rose through the ranks of the French military engineers after receiving an education at the Royal School of Engineering at Mézières. Like Napoleon Bonaparte, the young Carnot passionately consumed the literary, scientific, and philosophical works of the Enlightenment.142 Although Carnot’s early published works reveal his Enlightenment influence and contain passionate criticisms of ancien régime society, they also evoke an appreciation for the pragmatic foreign policy of the French monarchy. In the 1784 Éloge de Vauban, Carnot considered the fortified barriers established by Vauban “immortal trophies,” which provided sufficient glory and security to the French state.143 While Carnot accepted the notion that natural features could assist the process of frontier fortification, he believed that engineers should do so considering “local conditions.”144 Most important, Carnot believed that fortifications could not be constructed in a manner that left each position isolated. Rather, he promoted the concept of a general system of frontier defense in which every piece of the complex puzzle would function in a reciprocal relationship to defend the state. Instead of constituting an organic entity protected by God-given or naturally-determined boundaries, Carnot described the state as a “grand fortified place,” protected by the engineering genius of Vauban and his successors.145 In other passages, Carnot praised Vauban’s prudence and understanding of limitations and need for restraint in matters of state.146 Far from prophesizing a new age of revolutionary warfare or

142 Reinhard, Grand Carnot, 1:43-60; Dhombres, Carnot, 133-52.
143 Lazare Carnot, Éloge de M. le maréchal de Vauban: Discours qui a remporté le prix de l’Académie des Sciences, Arts, et Belles-Lettres de Dijon, en 1784 (Dijon: Alexandre Jombert, 1784), 5.
144 Ibid., 21-4.
145 Ibid., 25-33.
146 Ibid., 27-9, 38-9.
foreshadowing the nationalistic ambitions of the Revolution, Carnot’s work epitomizes the rationalization of the state within a foreign policy outlook that valued restrained, prudent growth over unbridled ambition.

While only a small minority of Frenchmen invoked the Gallic frontiers in the late ancien régime, support for French expansion to the left bank of the Rhine emerged beyond the French periphery. Curiously, German intellectuals proved the most vocal supporters of the natural frontiers. Links between the French Enlightenment and the German Aufklärung provided the foundation for the political ties that developed between French revolutionaries and German radicals.147 Well-versed in the works of Rousseau and a significant philosophical mind in his own right, the Prussian Francophile, Anacharsis Clootz, advocated French annexation of the left bank of the Rhine before the collapse of the absolute monarchy in France.148 As a guiding political principle best defined as republicanism, Clootz viewed absolute monarchies as violations of natural forms of human political organization. Moreover, he considered eighteenth century territorial boundaries to be arbitrary impediments to a universal concert of republican states, each of which would be determined by the people within them.

In 1785, the disillusioned Clootz left France because he felt that the Bourbon monarchy could never successfully reform. He vowed to return only after the destruction of the Bastille, more a symbol of ancien régime despotism than a major institution of royal tyranny in the late eighteenth century. He published his seminal essay Voeux d’un Gallophilé ("Prayers of a Francophile") the following year. The essay identified the Rhine as the natural

148 Born in 1755 at Kleve, Clootz came from a noble family of Prussians. He was educated at Paris, where he studied law, philosophy, and geography. Although his father forced him to enter the Prussian military academy of Berlin, he left and became a travelling philosopher. His career during the French Revolution earned him the nicknames “Orator of Mankind” and “Citizen of the World.”
boundary of ancient Gaul and therefore the proper frontier of a regenerated France. After the events of July 1789, Clootz cancelled his vacation to Sicily and returned to Paris shortly after receiving news of the fall of the Bastille. He became a significant foreign actor in Revolutionary politics. The Revolution brought Clootz back to French political life, just like it ultimately introduced the natural frontiers into mainstream French foreign policy.

Thus, despite his work’s impressive scope and literary qualities, Sorel greatly erred in characterizing the drive for natural frontiers on the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps as a foreign policy tradition of the French monarchy. From the Renaissance to the French Revolution, the classical expression of the natural frontiers – the frontiers of ancient Gaul – appear only in public discourse and a small number of documents. It did not come close to achieving the status of an official foreign policy doctrine under the ancien régime. As Sahlins correctly asserts, the monarchy may have utilized the flexible conception of natural frontiers in the process of early modern state-formation, but it did not consider the Rhine frontier from Rotterdam to Basel a realistic goal of French expansion. In this respect, a true revolution occurred in French foreign policy when several leading revolutionaries made the pursuit of the frontiers of ancient Gaul an overarching foreign policy objective. The process by which the Rhine frontier became an important yet contested aspect of French Revolutionary foreign policy remains as poorly understood as its place in ancien régime foreign policy. Yet the major war fought to conquer the Rhine frontier proves to be even more shrouded in historical uncertainty.

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149 François Labbé, *Anacharsis Cloots, le Prussien Francophile. Un philosophe au service de la Révolution française et universelle* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), provides the most authoritative study of Clootz’s life and political thought.
Although never regarded as a serious proposal under the ancien régime, the natural frontiers policy found numerous adherents among the leaders of the French Revolution. The rise of Jacques-Pierre Brissot and the Girondins brought the “French push to the Rhine” into the political mainstream. While a variety of motives led the French to declare war on the “King of Hungary and Bohemia” on 20 April 1792, Brissot’s rise to political prominence in France’s parliament, the Legislative Assembly, played the main role. By positioning himself as the arch-supporter of war and by espousing a form of republican militarism, he attached his fate to the military fortunes of the French army. Although the natural frontiers policy remained vague before the declaration of war, the republican militarism that characterized Brissotin policy provided the foundations on which it ultimately emerged.

Given the various factions that competed for control of foreign policy in this period, the overriding motive of the French war effort remains impossible to identify beyond the level of vague abstractions. For example, many Frenchmen believed that a war against

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1 The interpretation stated here and elaborated below challenges the historiographical orthodoxy that Brissot revived an earlier tradition of the French monarchy. For example, Albert Mathiez asserted that Brissot “was dressing up the old monarchical policy of the natural frontiers in the red cap of revolution.” See Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, 285-6.

2 Although a major historiographical controversy in the nineteenth century, interest in the origins of the war that erupted in 1792 lessened after the First World War. The orthodox view considers the war as the result of an ideological clash between the revolutionaries and the conservative leaders of monarchical Europe. One group of critics of this traditional view assert that the European monarchs remained perfectly content to live with a constitutional monarchy in France but that the war resulted from the radical foreign policy pursued by the Girondins. Another group of historians, influenced considerably by Sorel, postulate that the French reverted to a traditional foreign policy by overturning the Austrian alliance of 1756. Marxist historians posit that the war began because of the French bourgeoisie’s need to rejuvenate the French economy by conquering foreign resources. For an introduction, see Gunther E. Rothenberg, “The Origins, Causes, and Extensions of the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 771-93. Blanning in *Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* argues that both sides pursued war in 1792 for mainly political reasons and because of a series of miscalculations; Frank Attar in *La Revolution Française declare la guerre à l’Europe* asserts that the Girondins caused the war; Schroeder in *The Transformation of European Politics*, contends that ideology did not make the war inevitable but that conflicting interests between France and the other European powers in a highly competitive international system made war extremely likely.
Austria would restore French “greatness” in Europe. Yet major disagreements existed over the means to restore French greatness and the ultimate ends to pursue. The natural frontiers constituted only one part of a much broader policy that aimed for the regeneration of France through the establishment of a republic and possibly a general transformation of Europe through popular insurrection. Moreover, Brissot did not openly advocate French expansion to the Rhine before the French declaration of war in April 1792. For various reasons explained below, only after the downfall of the French monarchy and the victories at Valmy and Jemappes did Brissot fully articulate a policy based on expansion to the natural frontiers.

Although the French Revolution radically expanded French foreign policy ambitions, continuities from the ancien régime system of international relations remained prominent. The war that began on 20 April 1792 did not emerge from an inevitable ideological conflict between the Revolution and the rulers of monarchical Europe. Instead, the exacerbation of traditional rivalries among the great powers constituted a primary cause of the conflict. Most significant, the revolutionaries bemoaned the declining power of France in the eighteenth century and viewed a shift in foreign policy as the best means of righting the ship of state. Hatred of the 1756 Austrian alliance constituted the most visible component of an extreme Austrophobia, which began to emerge in the late ancien régime. Suspicion of an “Austrian plot,” perhaps directed by Marie Antoinette, represented another important component of this view.

French resentment of Great Britain’s economic strength and continental alliances represents another aspect of continuity, but one that demands more analysis. Although British support for Prussia’s invasion of the Netherlands in 1787 fostered much anger among French

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3 As early as October 1789, the French deputy Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, count of Mirabeau dismissed the 1756 alliance by referring to Austria as “hostile.” Godechot, La Grande Nation, 1:69.


patriots, many hawkish revolutionaries considered a rapprochement with Britain – the historical enemy – as necessary for the transformation of continental affairs. Only after the British objected to French expansion in 1793 did the revolutionaries return to the tradition of Anglophobia in a foreign policy context.\textsuperscript{6}

The prominence of these traditional concerns reveals the significant degree of continuity with the foreign policy of the ancien régime. Yet the fact remains that by 1791 many revolutionaries announced and pursued foreign policy goals that clearly surpassed the restrained ambitions of the Bourbon monarchs. As demonstrated below, republican ideology did not simply constitute a revolutionary gloss to ancien régime traditions. Instead, new ways of thinking derived from the Enlightenment and the ideology of republicanism sharpened notions of French geopolitical grandeur, fostering the desire to expand France territorially and to lead a broader European revolutionary movement.\textsuperscript{7}

In general terms, the belief that war constituted a justifiable tool of state policy represents another important continuity with the ancien régime, as demonstrated by the overwhelming support for war among French politicians and journalists in late 1791 and early 1792. In this respect, several revolutionaries took positive views of war a step further. Far from rejecting war as an outdated practice of kings, many revolutionaries came to view war as a means of national and individual salvation and fulfillment.\textsuperscript{8} In doing so, they embraced notions introduced by the Enlightenment. Although philosophe such as Voltaire and Immanuel Kant famously rejected war, other intellectuals viewed war as a positive force against the degeneration of society. Indeed, these thinkers broke with ancien régime


\textsuperscript{8} Michel Vovelle, \textit{La chute de la monarchie}, 279-80.
orthodoxy by criticizing the aristocratic codes that governed eighteenth century limited war in favor of what some historians label “total war.”

The concept of the citizen-soldier as constructed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Joseph Servan, and Jacques Hippolyte de Guibert provided an alternative model to the professional armies of the ancien régime. In both Britain and France, the idea of national armies steadily gained prominence alongside the classical values of the Greeks and Romans. According to theorists, a nation that could harness the power of citizen armies would prove capable of defeating professional armies with ease. In fact, some theorists envisioned the use of national armies to overturn the European states-system which, in their view, preserved the sovereignty of corrupt monarchies. In this conception, the need for restraint and compromise that continually curbed the ambitions of monarchical rulers would no longer restrain the foreign policy of new regimes guided by popular sovereignty.

By the 1780s, desires for an expansionist French foreign policy in Europe emerged from a decidedly anti-ministerial position. Critics of royal ministers rejected the policy of internal consolidation and reform in favor of a more robust foreign policy that would restore French strength in Europe. Most important, French critics of the 1756 Franco-Austrian alliance as well as foreign radicals like Clootz hoped to reduce Habsburg power on the continent. Despite Clootz’s support for territorial expansion and pan-European revolution, it remained highly doubtful that the revolutionaries in France would fulfill his desires. Like the

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9 Russel F. Weigley, in *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 290, asserts that the “thunderbolt of a new kind of war – the total war of nations pitting against each other all their resources and passion” emerged during the French Revolution, specifically with the levée en masse. A more recent trend describes total war as the culmination of discursive practices beginning during the Enlightenment. See Jean-Yves Guiomar, *L’invention de la guerre totale, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 2004); Bell, *The First Total War*. For criticisms of the concept in general, see Michael Broers, “The Concept of ‘Total War’ in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Period,” *War in History* 15, no. 3 (2008):247-68; Roger Chickering, “A Tale of Two Tales: Grand Narratives of War in the Age of Revolution,” in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster eds., *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

ancien régime ministers they replaced, the leaders of the early Revolution viewed internal reform as their primary concern. The abolition of feudalism on 4-5 August 1789 demanded a strenuous legislative effort to institute a new national administration. Initially, foreign policy factored only in relation to the feudal rights of the German princes in Alsace, which the 1648 Münster Treaty protected. Philippe-Antoine Merlin de Douai advocated overturning those rights, declaring that “it is not the treaties of princes which govern the rights of nations.” Merlin de Douai’s oft-quoted speech of 28 October 1790 contains language that seems prophetic to modern proponents of popular sovereignty and democratic peace theory. In reality, the notion that popular sovereignty trumped dynastic treaties and agreements of the previous centuries proved utterly naïve in late eighteenth century Europe. Even Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, count of Mirabeau, who viewed the notion as too radical, led a successful motion in the National Assembly to allow for the compensation of the German princes for the loss of their feudal rights. Nonetheless, the entire debate angered the German princes of the Rhineland and the Prussian king, Frederick William II, thus sowing the seeds of future war.

While Merlin de Douai’s claim that popular will determined the organization of states contained the germs of an inevitable conflict with the European great powers, many delegates in the National Assembly believed that the Revolution would reduce the likelihood of war. Unfortunately, the notion that a democratic and assertive France could live in harmony with monarchical neighbors proved equally naïve. Responding to Spanish appeals for French intervention in the Nootka Sound Crisis, the National Assembly deprived Louis XVI of significant powers in foreign policy. Moreover, the representatives introduced a new

12 *AP*, 20:75-84.
15 Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz*, 293.
era of French international relations: “The French nation renounces the undertaking of any war with a view to making conquests and it will never use its forces against the liberty of any other people.” The National Assembly’s famous “No Conquests” declaration of May 1790 epitomized a general desire for peace.

Yet the debate that culminated in the “No Conquest” decree did not demonstrate a universal rejection of war by the leaders of the Revolution. The thirty-two-year-old lawyer from Arras, Maximilian Robespierre, proposed a more pacifist declaration to the one adopted, stating that the “French nation, content to be free, has no desire to engage in any war, and wishes to live with all nations in the fraternity commanded by nature.” However, Robespierre’s rejection of war as a tool of policy received much criticism. Overwhelmingly, the representatives legitimized war as a means of self-defense. “The French nation will never undertake anything against the rights of any people,” commented Pierre-Marc-Gaston de Lévis, “although it will repel, with all the courage of a free people and all the power of a great nation, any attacks on its rights.” Moreover, the delegates discussed the notion of war as a national rather than dynastic pursuit, with Jacques-François Menou calling for “a national rather than a ministerial war” to be waged with the “courage and power of a truly free nation.”

Significantly, none of these speeches addressed a war of expansion to the natural frontiers. In fact, the aforementioned “No Conquests” decree that emerged from these debates reflected a widespread suspicion among the assembly that monarchs traditionally waged

16 AP, 15:662. Bell, The First Total War, 91-109, provides a stimulating discussion of the National Assembly’s debates on this issue. The Nootka Sound Crisis of 1789-1790 resulted from territorial and trade disputes between Britain and Spain off the west coast of Vancouver Island. Preparations for war commenced in London and Madrid after the Spanish navy seized British vessels conducting fur trade on the disputed sound. After a series of compromises between 1790 and 1794, the Spanish opened parts of the Pacific Northwest to the British but kept their main claims. British trade and commerce in the Pacific expanded considerably as a result of these compromises.
17 AP, 15:517-8. See also McPhee, Robespierre, 81.
18 AP, 15:519
19 Ibid., 15:518.
aggressive wars to strengthen their domestic position vis-à-vis representative assemblies of popular or aristocratic interests.20 Excited by the discussions of war in the National Assembly, Clootz spoke before the deputies in June 1790 accompanied by dozens of foreign supporters of the Revolution. His multinational comité des étrangers sought the French nation’s direct support for foreign revolutionary movements in Belgium, Italy, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and Ireland among other places. The Assembly distanced itself from the foreign revolutionaries by advising them to return to their respective homelands to enact reforms. Despite sympathizing with their cause, it offered no commitment of support, which they feared would potentially antagonize the other powers.21 In addition, the National Assembly established the Diplomatic Committee to maintain oversight of the king’s ministers and diplomats, with the original intention of preventing the adoption of policies that might be interpreted as bellicose.22

Given domestic unrest and continuing financial crisis, foreign affairs remained an area in which the French could not fully assert themselves immediately following the collapse of the ancien régime. Two developments most aptly characterize the system of international affairs in Europe during the early years of the Revolution: the predatory designs of the great powers and the diplomatic isolation and irrelevance of France. As the Anglo-Spanish Nootka Sound Crisis and the Partitions of Poland demonstrate, competition between empires for territory and resources constituted the major focus of European international relations.23 In this respect, the French seizure and retention of the natural frontiers in 1792-1797 represents no significant divergence in principle from standard European practice in the late eighteenth

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22 Ross, Quest for Victory, 17.
23 Foucrier, “Rivalités européennes dans le Pacifique,” 17; Derek Pethick, The Nootka Connection: Europe and the Northwest Coast, 1790-1795 (Vancouver, Canada: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980).
century, although it clearly broke with the tradition of the French monarchy. In addition, it clashed with the interests of the other European powers, especially Britain and Austria.

Nonetheless, the conquest, annexation, and exchange of foreign territory constituted a normal ambition of European monarchs. For example, the Russians and Austrians commenced separate wars with the Ottoman Empire in 1787 with the intention of partitioning large parts of Turkish territory. An important French scholar, Constantin François de Volney, feared that the Turkish Wars would result in a radical overhaul of Europe’s international system, a prospect discussed at length in his 1788 work, *Considérations sur la guerre actuelle des Turcs*. Supported by Britain and Prussia, Sweden attacked Russia in order to gain territory in the Baltic while Denmark subsequently declared war on Sweden. Meanwhile Prussia played a duplicitous game with rebels in Belgium, Hungary, and Poland in order to restrain the Austrians and Russians and maneuver for territorial aggrandizement. British pressure and domestic unrest forced Vienna to resolve the war with the Turks in 1790, although William Pitt the Younger failed to force Catherine the Great of Russia to surrender Ochikov at the end of the Russo-Turkish War. In 1791, Russia and Prussia began scheming for Polish territory as a result of the Polish uprising and founding of a constitutional monarchy. In none of these disputes and territorial adjustments did the other powers seek France’s support nor did they fear the French response. As a result of decades of political and

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financial degeneration, the opinion of the French state on these issues apparently did not matter.28

Nor could the early revolutionaries in France lend support to international revolutions, even if doing so might weaken traditional rivals. Opposition to the centralization and reform policies of Joseph II led to the Belgian and Liège Revolutions of 1789-1790. Crucially, a lack of unity existed between and within these distinct movements, reflecting a variety of ideologies including conservative, aristocratic, catholic, enlightenment, bourgeois, and republican.29 Although members of the National Assembly such as Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette sympathized with the more liberal faction of the Belgian rebels called the Vonckists, the French offered no military support.30 Finally, in the 27 July 1790 Convention of Reichenbach, the Triple Alliance of Britain, Prussia, and the Netherlands authorized the new Austrian ruler, Leopold II, to forcefully restore Austrian authority in Belgium and Liège in return for Vienna’s agreement to end the Turkish war without annexations and to respect Poland’s territorial integrity.31

While clearly incapable of challenging counterrevolution in Europe, the French even appeared too weak to support revolutionary movements within their own territory. In 1790, the National Assembly feared breaking relations with the Catholic Church and denied requests for annexation by revolutionaries and the majority of the population of the papal enclaves of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin. Only after Pope Pius VI officially broke relations with France in March 1791 did the National Assembly approve the annexation of

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30 Howe, *Foreign Policy and the French Revolution*, 25.
31 Sheehan, *German History*, 219-20.
the papal enclaves, providing the first concrete support for the notion of popular sovereignty after the fact.\textsuperscript{32}

The émigré question returned French affairs to international relevance and proved important in the origins of the French Revolutionary Wars. Noble emigration from France began soon after the fall of the Bastille in the summer of 1789, yet reached its height after the aborted flight from Paris of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in June 1791.\textsuperscript{33} Louis XVI’s youngest brother, Charles Philippe, count of Artois, rallied the largest concentration of émigrés at Koblenz, territory ruled by Prince Clemens Wenzeslaus, Elector of Trier, while Louis Joseph de Bourbon, prince of Condé gathered a smaller force at Worms. The émigré forces constituted a hodgepodge of aristocratic rivalries and interests rather than a unified front. Furthermore, they lacked any solid diplomatic connection to the courts of Europe.\textsuperscript{34}

Nonetheless, estimates reached Paris that the émigrés at Koblenz commanded 25,000 troops and that the other powers supported their efforts.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, the fact that the French émigrés recruited troops from the Rhineland convinced many revolutionaries of a foreign conspiracy: imperial law dictated that only princes of the Holy Roman Empire could recruit from imperial lands.\textsuperscript{36}

More than any long-held desire for natural frontiers, the concentration of émigrés at Koblenz and Worms attracted French attention to the Rhineland in 1791. The Rhineland included a long stretch of territory that comprised the western borderland of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire between Alsace-Lorraine, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands. It possessed a population of approximately 1,600,000 people in a territory of 8,200 square

\textsuperscript{32} A major study on this controversy remains to be written, see the collection of documents in Léopold Duhamel, \textit{Documents sur la réunion d’Avignon et du Comtat-Venaissin à la France (1790-1791)} (Paris: A. Picard, 1891).


\textsuperscript{35} Attar, \textit{La Révolution française declare la guerre à l'Europe}, 74-82.

\textsuperscript{36} Biro, \textit{German Policy}, 1:45.
Map 3. The Rhineland in 1792

Source: Rowe, *Reich to State*, ix.
miles, making it one of the most densely populated regions of late eighteenth century
Europe. For centuries, the Rhine functioned as a crucial artery for trade. It did not serve as a
natural frontier but rather as a means of transportation and communication within the Holy
Roman Empire. The tributaries and passages of the Rhine provided avenues for movement
throughout Central and Western Europe. It connected the Palatinate with northern and
southern Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

Although a self-contained region, the Rhineland contained a high degree of
geographic diversity. First, the plain of the Palatinate extended from Alsace-Lorraine to
Bingen, a fertile area that Goethe described as “a paradise . . . vast and well populated.”
Many cities developed on the banks of the Rhine in this region including Speyer, Worms,
Offenburg, Mainz, and Bingen. The region enjoyed a warm climate with dry summers and
fertile soil, which produced an abundance of grains, fruits, and wine. It constituted one of the
most advanced regions of Northern Europe. Second, east of the Middle Rhine valley lies the
mountainous Hunsrück and Eifel, containing cities like Simmern, Kirchberg, Kastellaun, and
Morbach. An often grayish soil composed primarily of slate and prehistoric volcanic ash left
the region unproductive for any crop other than oats. Moreover, the area suffered from cold
winters and torrid summers. Existing roads that linked a sparse and relatively poor population
remained rare and dangerous. Nonetheless, the fact that the Moselle, Nahe, and Ahr Rivers
passed through this land brought some vitality. The small plain east of Neuwied offered the
only area between Bingen and Bonn that allowed for the fluid overland transportation of
goods, people, and armies. The third region began at Bonn, where the Rhine valley widens
exponentially as it enters the great north European plain. From Köln it progresses all the way
to the Netherlands and northern Germany. This region enjoyed productive agriculture,

37 See Étienne Juillard, L’Europe rhénane. Géographie d’un grand espace (Paris: Colin, 1968); Alexander Grab,
38 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Vérité et Poésie (Paris: Hachette, 1862), 413.
although high humidity prohibited the cultivation of grapes. It possessed the highest population density and largest cities of the Rhineland. On the left bank of the Rhine existed cities such as Bonn, Köln, Krefeld, and Kleve while Düsseldorf, Duisburg, and Wesel stood on the right bank. Another line of cities followed the Meuse from Köln to Maastricht and Liège including Düren, Jülich, and Aachen, the central city of Charlemagne’s empire.39

Diversity of land contributed to the diversity of people. Traditionally, the inhabitants of the eighteenth century Rhineland have been divided in two groups: people of the plains and people of the mountains. The more productive agriculture and easier transportation of the plain led to a relatively happier populace that enjoyed better trade, education, and wealth. In the mountains the people remained isolated, poor, and frustrated by an often harsh climate. Yet the northern and southern Rhenish plains should be distinguished as well. The southern plain housed the Catholic, cultured, and better-educated who enjoyed the pleasures of life while the northern Protestants possessed a strong work ethic and strove to live disciplined, productive lives. Regardless, the economic productivity of both plains attracted foreign migrants, mainly Catholic Austrians and French in the south and Protestant Prussians and Dutch in the north.40

Although numerous cities developed on the Rhine, they remained relatively small. The largest, Köln, possessed 38,000 people in 1789 while Aachen housed 27,000 inhabitants, Mainz contained 21,000, and Koblenz only 10,000. None of the Rhenish cities compared to Frankfurt-am-Main or Hamburg, the major commercial centers of the Third Germany. Although Köln once stood as a cultural center, Georg Förster remarked that it possessed a distinctly somber air by the late eighteenth century.41

39 On the Rhineland’s geography, see Michael Rowe, Reich to State, 13-4; Juillard, L’Europe rhénane, 15-24; Smets, Les pays rhénans (1794-1814): le comportement des Rhénans face à l’occupation française (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); 15-7.
41 Förster’s comment comes from Sagnac, Le Rhin, 23. See also Smets, Les pays rhénans, 23-36, and Rowe, From Reich to State, 15-7, for a general overview of the Rhineland’s urban development.
Politically, the Rhineland epitomized the complex decentralization that existed throughout the Holy Roman Empire. The region contained possibly as many as 110 distinct political entities, some nearly as large as a typical French département and others only a few square miles in size. Many of these political bodies existed on both banks of the Rhine, demonstrating that “the river did not divide, it united.” While the principle of absolutism had provided the basis of these governments, the reforming spirit of enlightened despotism progressed throughout the eighteenth century. The extent of reform depended on the individual ruler. Although Elector Max-Franz of Köln enjoyed a decadent court at Bonn, he followed the lead of his brother, Emperor Joseph II, and pursued enlightened reforms during his reign. Archchancellor and Archbishop-Elector Friedrich Karl Joseph zu Erthal of Mainz possessed a vain personality and sought to play a great role in imperial politics, weakening the power of the Habsburgs in favor of states’ rights. Although he founded the University of Mainz and developed the administration of forests, he overlooked matters of defense and allowed the state’s finances to deteriorate owing to the corruption of the ruling oligarchy. Confident in Franco-Austrian peace, he permitted his noble courtiers to transform sections of the fortifications of Mainz into an English garden. Elector Clemens Wenzeslaus of Trier

42 In the north, the Prussian Hohenzollerns ruled the duchies of Kleve and Geldern along with the Lordship of Moers, approximately 130,000 people. South of the Prussian provinces, the brother of Emperor Joseph II, Max Franz, ruled the Electorate of Köln, including the cities of Neuss and Bonn, although Köln itself remained autonomous as an imperial city. The Elector Palatine, Karl Theodor of the Bavarian Wittelsbach dynasty, governed the Duchy of Jülich, which lay west of Köln and possessed 280,000 inhabitants, fertile soil, and a growing industry. On the right bank of the Rhine, the Elector Palatine ruled the Duchy of Berg, with the prosperous city of Düsseldorf. The imperial city of Aachen formed an enclave within the Duchy of Jülich. South of Jülich, the Electorate of Trier, governed by Clemens Wenzeslaus of Saxon origin, stood on the banks of the Moselle and on portions of the Eifel and Hunsrück with approximately 130,000 inhabitants. It contained the castle of Montabaur and the strategically important plain west of Neuwied. Rheinfels, protected by the enormous castle of Saint-Goar, was a small domain of the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, William IX. South of Trier, the Elector Palatine allowed Duke Karl II August to govern Pfalz-Zweibrücken. The Electorate of Mainz, with 300,000 people and 3,200 square miles of territory, contained the rich valley between Bingen and Mainz on the left bank and included right bank territory as far east on the Main River as Aschaffenburg with the imperial city of Frankfurt-am-Main as an enclave. Belonging to Friedrich Karl Joseph zu Erthal, an archbishop-elector and archchancellor of the Holy Roman Empire second in power only to the emperor, the Electorate of Mainz stood as the strongest single political entity in the region. Finally, Köln, Aachen, Speyer, and Worms stood as autonomous imperial cities, owing allegiance only to the Holy Roman Emperor.

43 Sagnac, Le Rhin, 23.
sought to curb the privileges of the nobility and clergy but could never commit to a single plan of reform. Moreover, the Chapter of Trier, a bastion of noble power, prevented his reform efforts. Jülich enjoyed the somewhat laissez-faire policy of the Elector Palatine, Karl Theodor, but the lands of the Palatinate proper remained basically untouched by enlightened reform. Duke Karl II August of Pfalz-Zweibrücken modelled himself after Louis XV and devoted his attention to parties, concerts, and French literature although he took steps to promote education. Constitutional oligarchies governed the imperial cities of Worms, Speyer, Köln, and Aachen. In general, the Rhenish rulers did not allow their territories to waste under absolutism but generally sought to improve their administration and government. Fatally, military affairs proved the one area they collectively ignored.44

The rulers of the Rhineland did not originally fear the French Revolution with many inhabitants, such as the liberal professors at Mainz, viewing it sympathetically. Overall, little concern existed in the summer of 1789 regarding the spread of revolutionary movements into the region. No initial reactionary movement that made war inevitable existed. However, the abolition of feudalism on the night of 4-5 August 1789 laid the groundwork for conflict. As noted, the National Assembly’s demand to extend these policies to Alsace alarmed the Rhenish princes, many of whom, including the rulers of Speyer, Pfalz-Zweibrücken, Trier, and Köln, possessed feudal domains and rights in Alsatian territory that extended back to the 1648 Münster Treaty. The conflict involved more than territory as the German princes “saw that their existence and that of the Empire was at stake. . . . Sweeping away feudalism might be the way to consolidate revolutionary France; it would destroy Germany, and could undermine much of the rest of Europe.”45

44 According to Biro, German Policy, 1:33, “economically and politically, Germany was still in the Dark Ages.” For recent refutations of this perspective, see Rowe, Reich to State, 15 and Blanning, Reform and Revolution in Mainz, 39-45.
45 Schroeder, Transformation of European Politics, 72.
Following the plan of Prussian foreign minister, Count Ewald Friedrich von Hertzberg, Frederick William II of Prussia declared himself the protector of the Rhenish princes. Ultimately, the Prussians desired to end the Franco-Austrian alliance by forcing the emperor to intervene in favor of the princes. To foster conflict with France, Prussian propaganda efforts reminded the princes of Louis XIV’s burning of the Palatinate. During the Diet of Ratisbon, intransigent states like Köln, Trier, Mainz, and Speyer received Prussian support and demanded action against the French while Hanover and Saxony called for conciliation. Viewing war as the worst possible scenario, most rulers looked to Louis XVI and Leopold II to resolve the matter peacefully.\(^46\) In the final analysis, the Alsatian dispute did not lead to war because Leopold resented Prussian agitation and would not use force to settle the matter. Even with Prussian support, the German princes could not act without the emperor’s approval.

Despite the fact that the Revolution essentially held his sister, Marie Antoinette, as a prisoner in the Tuileries Palace, Leopold rejected the Count of Artois’s plan for a joint invasion of France to overthrow the assembly and restore the absolute monarchy. The French royal family’s flight to Varennes on 21 June forced a reluctant emperor to regard affairs in Paris more closely, mainly to defend the prestige of the Habsburg dynasty.\(^47\) In addition, the formal conclusion of the Russo-Turkish and Austro-Turkish Wars settled the eastern conflict and provided an opportunity for the Austrians to concentrate on the situation in France. Although perceived in Paris as a counterrevolutionary manifesto uniting Prussia and Austria against France, the 27 August Declaration of Pillnitz provided a means for the Holy Roman Emperor to save face by appearing to rally Europe in order to defend his sister and the European feudal order. Knowing that the British prime minister, Pitt, and the Russian tsarina,

\(^47\) The Padua Circular of 6 July 1791 constituted Leopold’s first public appeal for a concerted effort by the European monarchs to rescue the French royal family from the Revolution.
Catherine II, would refrain from responding to his call for a unified invasion of France, Leopold made the declaration confident that he would not be compelled to commit Austria to a military effort. Mistakenly viewing the declaration as Vienna’s support for the émigrés, the Count of Artois enthusiastically communicated with Leopold regarding plans for a joint invasion; Leopold responded coldly that no action could be taken by Austria in support of the émigrés unless joined by the other crowned heads of Europe.48

Nonetheless, the fear of a “foreign plot” led by Austria against the Revolution, combined with the controversy concerning the presence of émigré forces in lands governed by Rhenish princes, led to war. In addition, the over-exaggerated fear in France concerning the forces of counterrevolution, best epitomized by the émigrés at Koblenz and Worms, directed the attention of the revolutionaries to the Rhineland. The French viewed this area as particularly threatening because it could serve as a launching pad for a foreign invasion by the émigrés, the Austrians, and the Prussians.49 Although Leopold’s statements at Pillnitz aimed primarily to sustain dynastic prestige and perhaps restrain Prussia’s desire for territorial aggrandizement in the German states, they unintentionally raised French suspicion of foreign duplicity and conspiracy with the émigrés. Moreover, the Pillnitz Declaration clashed with a new vision of international relations that had emerged in France that upheld the sovereignty of people over the rule of European despots.50

On 20 October 1791, the liberal journalist and newly-elected deputy to the Legislative Assembly, Jacques Pierre Brissot, made his first definitive statement in favor of war while addressing the émigré question. Brissot portrayed the forces at Koblenz and Worms as a “grave threat to the Revolution,” and called for a campaign to drive them from their positions on the Rhine. Moreover, he stated that unless the French struck the head of the conspiracy –

48 Schroeder, Transformation of European Politics, 90.
49 Attar, La Revolution française declare la guerre, 74-5.
50 Belissa, Fraternité universelle, 254.
meaning Austria and Prussia – they would find little security against forces fundamentally opposed to the Revolution. Although not necessarily making war inevitable, Brissot’s speech placed France on a path that led to war the following spring. In addition, it directed French attention to the Rhineland and consequently established one of the first justifications for the idea of acquiring the entire left bank Rhine as a natural frontier.51 Yet the desire for natural frontiers did not constitute the primary justification for war. Instead, as the most vocal leader of the pro-war party, Brissot utilized a constellation of arguments in favor of a crusade to restore French greatness in Europe.

Erroneously castigated by Robert Darnton and others as a political pornographer and police spy before the Revolution, Brissot now stands as an important figure linking the late Enlightenment with the political culture of the Revolution.52 Considering his humble background as the son of a restaurant owner in Chartres, Brissot’s rise to political significance depended entirely on the overthrow of the ancien régime. Adding “de Warville” to his name as a young man, Brissot clearly strove to rise above his lower social origins.53 The French Revolution provided that opportunity.

Brissot’s frustrations with the ancien régime found an outlet in the Enlightenment. After studying classics at Chartres, he abandoned his Catholic faith and became a rabid anticlerical. A legal career proved uninspiring to the young man who dreamed of becoming a philosophe like his heroes, Voltaire and Rousseau. As early as 1777, he wrote essays that criticized Christianity and the entire monarchical and aristocratic system of the ancien régime.54 The American Revolution convinced Brissot that change could come and that

54 Ibid., 4-20.
national borders should not restrict his ideological vision. Reviewing Jean de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1784, Brissot wrote: “These letters will inspire or reawaken perhaps in the blasé souls of Europeans the taste for virtue and the simple life. . . . Energetic souls will find in them something more. They will see here a country, a government, where the desires of their hearts have been realized; a land which speaks to them in their own language. The happiness for which they have longed finally does in truth exist.”

A revolutionary before the Revolution, Brissot watched the events of 1789 unfold with optimism, sensing the opportunity to realize his dream of guiding France and Europe in a new direction. Crucially, Brissot thought that France would have to play the leading role in directing the other nations of Europe toward a republican revolution, a perspective suggested by the title of the journal *Le Patriote français*, which he launched in July 1789. For France to assist other nations in overcoming the yoke of monarchy, it first would have to strengthen itself through territorial expansion.

Despite his intellectual activity in the 1780s, a perusal of Brissot’s publications during his career as a struggling ancien régime philosophe reveals little evidence that he would play a dominant role in Revolutionary foreign policy. Most of his pre-Revolutionary writings concerned decidedly non-diplomatic affairs such as the penal code, legal and political theory, literary satires, philosophy, criticisms of Christianity, and even the introduction of new fire safety measures in Paris. Although not a careful student of European diplomacy, Brissot dabbled in the emerging politics of international revolution by supporting the American Revolution, encouraging the democrats in Geneva, and championing the Dutch Republicans in 1787. The controversy between the crown and the *parlements* alerted Brissot’s attention to matters of national significance. Criticizing the reform efforts of Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot and Jacques Necker, Brissot stated his preference for a republic and expressed doubts

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55 Brissot quoted in Doyle, *French Revolution*, 64.
concerning the crown’s ability to repair French finances.\textsuperscript{56} Demonstrating his commitment to the improvement of the human race, he wrote in favor of a Franco-British abolition of black slavery. Finally, he published an essay attacking the theory of papal authority in which he called for the peoples of Europe to outgrow their religious superstitions and to destroy Catholic political power, one of the bedrocks of the ancien régime.\textsuperscript{57}

Although as an enterprising journalist, Brissot possessed sufficient political acumen to refrain from preaching the doctrines of republicanism and international revolution in the period of the constitutional monarchy; his underlying commitment to these ideas remains difficult to dismiss. For example, during the debates on the Nootka Sound crisis Brissot dismissed calls for war as a royal plot and referred to them as “the dreams of the old politics.”\textsuperscript{58} Compared to many of the opinions stated during the month of debate, Brissot actually appears rather pacifist. He stringently criticized the notion that French honor required an intervention in support of Spain: “This honor no longer consists of getting mixed up in every foreign quarrel, in fighting on all sides. It consists of being free, of settling our affairs, of paying our debts, of being fair to all.”\textsuperscript{59} Brissot clearly viewed the king’s interest in a war against Britain with suspicion, epitomizing a level of distrust of royal intentions common to the radical left in this period of the Revolution. Brissot’s mistrust of Louis XVI would survive; his rejection of war as a means of sustaining national honor would not.

After the king’s flight to Varennes, Brissot became thoroughly convinced of the constitutional monarchy’s unsustainability. According to the memoirs of Marie-Jeanne Philippon Roland, better known as Madame Roland, Robespierre warned like-minded leftists that his own fear of internal enemies was growing and validated by the king’s attempted

\textsuperscript{56} See Brissot, \textit{Observations d’un républicain sur les différents systèmes de l’administration provinciale, particulièrement sur ceux de MM. Turgot et Necker, et sur le bien qu’on peut espérer dans les gouvernements monarchiques} (Lausanne, 1788).
\textsuperscript{57} A full list of Brissot’s published works is available in Ellery, \textit{Brissot}, 467-86.
\textsuperscript{58} Brissot quoted in Bell, \textit{First Total War}, 97-8.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
flight. At the same meeting, Brissot purportedly celebrated the event as an opportunity to overthrow the monarchy and to prepare the French people for the creation of a republic. On 25 June, Brissot argued in *Le Patriote français* that “the king had deserted the realm” and that “after such perjury he is not compatible with our constitution.” For Brissot, the stakes of these decisions involved more than the fate of the new French constitution but would determine the very survival of the Revolution. As he noted after calling Louis a traitor, the king’s actions revealed the true risk that the existence of monarchies posed for the Revolution’s security: “Would there not be danger still, that some day when he [Louis] had sufficient force under his control, he might declare that his repentance was forced, and retract it?”

Brissot’s fear of a conspiracy by the king to overthrow the Revolution logically expanded into paranoia involving an international counterrevolution that would perpetually imperil the safety of a future French Republic – a paranoia exacerbated by the émigrés and the Declaration of Pillnitz. Brissot ultimately came to believe that unless the French surrounded themselves with natural frontiers and ideologically conformist neighbors – if not achieving his wildest dreams of destroying forever the monarchies of the ancien régime – they would be perpetually endangered by reactionary enemies. Rather than a return to national traditions in French foreign policy, these immediate concerns, firmly rooted in the ideology and politics of the Revolution, compelled Brissot to adopt the natural frontiers policy in late 1792.

Brissot developed these views when he joined the Legislative Assembly and the Diplomatic Committee in October 1791. More radical than the deputies of the preceding National Assembly, the younger-on-average members of the Legislative Assembly found a

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62 Ibid.
rallying cause in a war of national revenge against the perceived insults perpetrated by the
crowned heads of Europe, in particular Leopold, and the exaggerated threat posed by the
émigrés. In reality, no substantial international crusade to restore absolutism in France
existed. As noted, Leopold genuinely desired peace and offered little concrete support to the
king’s brothers or his own sister. Although William Pitt worried that the collapse of France
would upset the European balance of power, he paid more attention to affairs in Poland,
where the Russians appeared poised to make major gains. For her part, Catherine the Great
of Russia offered moral support to Louis XVI but proved unwilling to provide practical
assistance. Only Gustav III of Sweden and his secret agent, Count Axel von Fersen, actively
conspired to support the counterrevolution before the former’s assassination in March 1792.
Frederick William II of Prussia proved perfectly willing to wage war against France, but the
desire for territorial expansion rather than the promotion of counterrevolution represented his
underlying motive.

Nonetheless, the domestic and international climate post-Varennes and post-Pillnitz
fostered complete paranoia among Brissot and his followers, known as the Brissotins. Not
only did the Legislative Assembly lack sufficient strength to actively prevent royal tyranny,

63 François-Alphonse Aulard, in *The French Revolution: A Political History, 1789-1804* (New York: Scribner’s, 1910), 1:338-9, explains that “the [National] Assembly was the old Estates-General; the image and
representation of the ancien régime. . . . The Legislative Assembly was a body representative of the new
privileged class, the bourgeoisie, who definitely and officially took possession of the powers of the State.” He
elaborates further that as the deputies were nominated after the king’s flight, “a certain number of democrats had
slipped in among them; men who, according to the Cordelier-Jacobin policy, distrusted the king and wished to
hold him in tutelage, almost as a prisoner; and such men easily became republicans.”
64 According to Roider, *Thugut*, 90-1: “When the Revolution first erupted in 1789, Leopold had welcomed it as
a victory for constitutional principles that he had been promoting for most of his political life. The violent events
of 1789 had tempered that positive view, but Leopold insisted on following a policy of noninvolvement despite
complaints from his sister about the treatment that her family was enduring at the hands of the revolutionaries. .
. . Leopold in fact emphasized in public statements that he planned no war and that, if Louis XVI accepted the
new French constitution that was nearing completion, he would regard the whole affair as closed.”
fact, Catherine demonstrated a curious naïveté in the spring of 1792 by suggesting that 10,000 men would
suffice to march across France, crush the Revolution, and restore the king to full power.
67 Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 70.
68 Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 285, notes that “from Berlin’s perspective, the Revolution represented an opportunity,
not a threat. The Prussians were worried above all with diminishing Austrian power and influence in Germany.”
Brissot claimed that “a threat of invasion by foreign powers” existed.\textsuperscript{69} Speaking before the Legislative Assembly on the 20\textsuperscript{th}, Brissot drew French attention to the reality of the foreign threat. In his mind, the émigrés constituted only the first wave of a much larger conspiracy against the Revolution. Brissot viewed the Declaration of Pillnitz as proof of an international movement to restore the king to his full authority and demolish the constitution. Without striking the leaders of the conspiracy – mainly Austria and Prussia – Brissot asserted that France would remain forever imperiled. Yet whereas Brissot the opposition journalist had rejected war in 1790 as necessary to maintain national honor, Brissot the legislator and member of the Diplomatic Committee called on his fellow Frenchmen to “avenge your glory or condemn yourselves to eternal dishonor.”\textsuperscript{70} In addition, Brissot called on France to “establish itself in the rank it must occupy among the great powers.”\textsuperscript{71} In this manner, Brissot clearly envisioned a war that would result in a strengthened France, most likely at the expense of “the little princes of Germany, whose insolence in the previous century, attracted . . . the wrath of despotism of Louis XIV.”\textsuperscript{72}

Thus, Brissot not only played on fears of counterrevolution and foreign plots, he cultivated support for a patriotic war to regenerate France. Moreover, Brissot utilized his alliance with several deputies in the Legislative Assembly who fell under the label of *Girondins* because many of them came from the Gironde département as a means of rallying support for a war to restore French honor.\textsuperscript{73} Brissot never single-handedly controlled the foreign policy of the Revolution. Instead, he provided the intellectual and propaganda elements that led to broad support for war while working through the Diplomatic Committee.

\textsuperscript{69} AP, 34:278.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 34:316.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Syndeham, *The Girondins*, 146-7, asserts that the Girondin party did not actually exist, but that Brissot had only a small group of supporters; Furet and Ozouf, *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 355-6, provides clarification.
to concentrate his efforts on foreign affairs. In 1789, Brissot opined in *Le Patriote français* on the inherent evil of diplomacy considering its use by the ancien régime to preserve a monarchical states-system. Serving as secretary of the Diplomatic Committee in October 1791, he reconciled his hatred of formal diplomacy by deciding to use the opportunity to foster an international crisis that might overturn the corrupt system as a whole. Moreover, he found war advocacy a useful method of accruing political support: his previously discussed speech of 20 October brought loud applause in the Assembly and even gained the praise of the moderate Feuillant deputies. Marie-Antoinette purportedly wrote to Count Fersen that only an immediate armed intervention could stop the rise of the republican war-hawks in the Assembly. In fact, Brissot ultimately desired a monarchical crusade against the Revolution. He remained confident in victory and believed that no other event would more likely consolidate support for a republic in France and possibly even foster an international uprising. In any event, he remained convinced that internal security could be attained only by resolving the situation abroad: “it is beyond the Rhine that we must strike, and not in France.”

Between July and December 1791, Brissot utilized language that not only demonstrates the paranoid reflex inherent in his advocacy of war, but also his belief in the republican discourse of the citizen army that emerged in the late Enlightenment. On 10 July, he encouraged Frenchmen to consider the achievement of the Americans in their fight against British tyranny. Dismissing the danger of provoking the European powers, he declared: “What soldiers of despotism can for any length of time withstand the soldiers of liberty! The soldiers of tyrants are after pay, they have little fidelity, and desert on the first occasion. The

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75 *Le Patriote français*, 16 November 1789, no. 100.
76 Belissa, *Fraternité universelle*, 260. The Feuillant strategy in October called for a general European congress to resolve the dispute.
78 *AP*, 34:316.
soldier of liberty fears neither fatigue, danger, nor hunger – he runs, he flies at the cry of liberty, while despotism is scarcely taking a few tottering steps.”79 In this speech, Brissot not only denigrated professional soldiers, he postulated a theory that republican patriotism constituted the primary requirement for effective soldiering. In this manner, Brissot articulated a form of republican militarism that vaunted the lack of traditional military virtues among French citizen soldiers. “You who doubt the prodigious and supernatural effects which the love of liberty is able to inspire in men, think what the Americans did to gain their independence,” Brissot remarked. He drew attention to Dr. Joseph Warren, who before the battle of Bunker Hill purportedly had “never handled a musket.” Moreover, the troops in America lacked traditional training, being “badly armed and badly disciplined.”80 As Brissot stated in 1791, the lack of military training and discipline constituted an actual advantage that the citizen soldier possessed over ancien régime soldiers, whom revolutionaries began to regard as “slave soldiers.” Brissot’s ideas would fundamentally change in this respect after the disastrous commencement of the war.

While it helped develop the cult of the citizen soldier, Brissot’s speech must be viewed as a polemic that aimed to quell fears among Frenchmen of fomenting a war against the well-organized professional armies of monarchical Europe. Yet the aspersions that it cast on the ancien régime French army highlighted the grandiose objectives thought possible by those who believed in the New Regime’s infallibility. In Brissot’s view, the possibilities for a regenerated nation that possessed a citizen army remained nearly limitless. As he remarked, “Follow George Washington making headway with three or four thousand peasants against thirty thousand Englishmen.”81 Brissot promoted the idea of a state waging war against great odds for great objectives and triumphing because of human will. These conceptions proved

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
significant in the origins of the war and in the foreign policy pursued by the French after 1792. Guibert’s *Essai générale de tactique* made similar pronouncements during the ancien régime: “Imagine that a people will arise in Europe that combines the virtues of austerity and a national militia with a fixed plan for expansion, that it does not lose sight of this system, that, knowing how to make war at little expense and to live off its victories, it would not be forced to put down its arms for reasons of economy.” Thoroughly a man of the enlightened ancien régime, Guibert prophesized that “one would see that people subjugate its neighbors, and overthrow our weak constitutions, just as the fierce north wind bends the slender reeds.”

82 Brissot, a republican revolutionary, believed that France could immediately harness the power of the citizen army to overthrow the monarchical states-system and regenerate itself as a great power. Although Brissot feared a long term conspiracy of monarchical states against the Revolution, he thought that France possessed a window of opportunity during which revolutionary enthusiasm could overthrow counterrevolutionary forces and perhaps foster a general European uprising.

On 9 November, the Legislative Assembly passed a decree ordering all émigrés to return to France; only princes and public functionaries would suffer severe penalties for departing in the first place. The decree would terminate the citizenship of any who did not return. 83 Three days later, Brissot spoke on behalf of the Diplomatic Committee on the role played by foreign powers in supporting the émigrés and Rhenish princes. In fact, a more conservative member of the committee, Christophe-Guillaume Koch, made the formal report and noted that war could be averted only through “firm and immediate action.” 84 Regardless, Louis XVI utilized his veto power to reject the émigré decree, a step that Brissot quickly

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83 For the decree, see the debates in *AP*, 34:699-714.
84 Ibid., 35:71-2; see also Ellery, *Brisson*, 229.
denounced and which marked the major and final split between the king and the Legislative Assembly.\textsuperscript{85}

At this stage, Brissot received major support for war from individuals affiliated with the Jacobin club. On 9 December, the journalist and prominent Jacobin, Jean-Louis Carra, urged the French to launch a preemptive war against Austria by invading Liège, where he expected they would be welcomed by an appreciative population.\textsuperscript{86} A more significant proposition came on 13 December from the radical German Francophile and frequent guest of the Jacobins, Clootz. Finally receiving support from a French legislative body, Clootz appeared before the Legislative Assembly as an \textit{orateur du genre humain} and warned of “several plans of counterrevolution at foreign courts.”

Yet Clootz’s call for war merits consideration for another reason: it marks the first clear utilization of the natural frontiers of Gaul to justify a French declaration of war. Warning that “the infernal conspiracy will cast the numerous Gauls into the irons of a horde of \textit{Sicambri},” Clootz portrayed the foreign threat to France “as a new barbarian invasion.” Accordingly, he proposed to establish the date of 20 January 1792 as the start of a crusade of three French armies to “Brussels, Liège, and Koblenz.” Certain of victory, he claimed that “by 20 February the tricolor and the \textit{ça ira} will delight the twenty peoples that will be delivered. That decisive strike will save France and all humanity.”\textsuperscript{87} Perhaps to entice moderates and those who made policy entirely with French interests in mind, Clootz indicated that the entry of French armies into the Low Countries and the Rhineland would allow for the exportation of French \textit{assignats}, a paper currency based on confiscated church lands that the revolutionaries hoped would salvage French finances. Regardless, Clootz’s

\textsuperscript{85} Biro, \textit{German Policy}, 1:46.
\textsuperscript{86} Belissa, \textit{Fraternité universelle}, 280. Carra served as the editor of the \textit{Annales patriotiques et littéraires}. He became director of the \textit{Bibliothèque nationale} and served in the National Convention before his execution on 31 October 1793.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{AP}, 36:79-80.
speech “is the first to pose the question of war in relation to a project defined by territorial
and economic expansion.”

Benefitting from increasing support, Brissot on 16 December asked the Assembly for
an immediate war in terms that clearly equated to the militaristic view of war as being
beneficial for democratic societies. In this speech, Brissot advocated war in reference to both
the particular grievances against the foreign powers and the general need for war. As he
stated, “for a people who have just acquired their liberty after a dozen centuries of slavery,
war is necessary to establish that liberty on a firm basis, to test it, and to discover whether the
people are worthy of it.” To be sure, Brissot’s speech constituted a polemic designed to gain
votes for war rather than a sophisticated philosophical treatise; yet his view that war
possessed inherently positive traits should not be overlooked. Nor should it be viewed as
shocking considering the positive conceptualization of war that had emerged during the
Enlightenment. As configured by Brissot, war could “purge away the vices of despotism and
get rid of men who are still sources of corruption.” Returning to his idea of a window of
opportunity, Brissot claimed that France possessed sufficient provocation for a declaration of
war and that it risked sacrificing an advantage if it waited any longer.

Finally, Brissot identified the target of the French attack on Europe specifically as
“the criminals” at Koblenz: not a clear expression of the desire for natural frontiers but an
important omen nonetheless. Regardless, he clearly envisioned radical changes to the
territorial map of Europe and perhaps the annihilation of the monarchical state-system. While
Brissot spoke before the Jacobins, his newspaper demanded: “War! War! Such is the cry of
all French patriots, such is the desire of all the friends of liberty scattered all over Europe,

88 Belissa, Fraternité universelle, 281.
89 Quoted in Ellery, Brissot, 233; see also Aulard, Société des Jacobins, 3:289.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
who are only awaiting that happy diversion in order to attack and overthrow their tyrants.”

In the same article, Brissot referred to Clootz as a “saint” whom more than any other figure deserved the title “orator of humanity.” In praising Clootz – the author of a 1786 pamphlet that called for French expansion to the Rhine – Brissot clearly revealed his support for extending the limits of France: it should come as no surprise that he vocally endorsed this policy after the fall of the monarchy in late 1792. Moreover, Brissot’s praise for Clootz epitomizes the distance between his war policy and the foreign policy of both the ancien régime and of the National Assembly. Clootz – the supreme advocate of natural frontiers – fled monarchical France out of frustration while the National Assembly demonstrated little sympathy for his extravagant ideas. Brissot did not cover monarchical policy with Revolutionary dye: he overturned the basic ideas of French foreign policy.

Within the Brissotin crusade for war, an obvious conflict emerged between the aim of strengthening France and the idea of bringing liberty to foreign peoples. On one hand, the recent rebellions in Poland, Belgium, and the Netherlands provided somewhat believable substance to claims that some groups of people might respond to calls for popular uprisings in the name of liberty. Yet these popular movements did not constitute derivatives of Enlightenment republicanism nor did they interpret French actions as friendly. Neither the Liège Revolution of 1789 nor the Belgian uprisings of 1790 occurred as pure republican movements. Nor did the revolt in Poland perfectly conform to the Brissotin model. Moreover, the attitude the French would take toward the liberated peoples after their liberation remained entirely unclear. Specifics of occupation and governing policy remained undetermined and essentially undiscussed. For his part, Brissot would never sacrifice the leading role that he believed the French should take as the catalyst for these uprisings, stating

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92 *Le Patriote français*, 15 December 1791, no. 857.
93 Ibid.
94 The Republic of Liège was created in August 1789. Austrian forces restored the Prince-Bishopric of Liège in 1791.
that France must lead an “expiatory war which is to renew the face of the world and plant the flag of liberty upon the palaces of kings, upon the seraglos of sultans, upon the chateaux of petty feudal tyrants, and upon the temples of popes and muftis.” For Brissot, the question became whether the flag of liberty should automatically bear the blue, white, and red of the French tricolor or if the liberated peoples should define their own terms of liberty.

Despite the importance of Brissot’s statements, he did not speak for France. Indeed, Brissot’s remarks in favor of striking the Rhenish princes in October earned criticism from members of the Legislative Assembly and the various political clubs. Speaking in the generally pro-war Jacobin Club, the military professional Edmond Louis Alexis Dubois-Crancé recognized the regime’s unpreparedness for war and insisted that France faced greater threats internally than on the frontiers. On 9 December, Robespierre attempted to deflate anger in the Jacobin Club by stating that the “foreign powers are more intent to scare us than to attack.”

Further debate followed Louis XVI’s attempt to undercut Brissot’s justification for war by calling on the Elector of Trier to disperse the émigré forces from his territory. Referencing the king’s primary obligation to defend his domains, Louis claimed that the émigrés posed a threat to France. Simultaneously, Louis asked Leopold to continue to work toward the maintenance of peace and tranquility: the exact of opposite of Brissot’s goal: “I have only one fear,” he wrote, “it is that we won’t be betrayed [emphasis added]. We need great treasons, our salvation lies there, because there are still strong doses of poison in France and strong emetics are needed to expel them.” Accordingly, after several weeks passed

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95 Brissot quoted in Ellery, *Brisson*, 233.
99 Louis appealed to Leopold to “interpose his good offices and his authority in order to ensure in all areas of the empire the respect for the rights of man and all laws and treaties, which are guarantees of general peace and tranquility.” See Louis to Leopold, date unknown, in ibid., 1:1013n1. Those who assert that Louis desired war rely on a controversial letter he purportedly wrote to Frederick William II. Regardless, the letter called only for
without a reply from Trier, the Legislative Assembly directed Louis XVI to deliver the following message to the foreign powers: “Tell them that if these German princes continue to favor the preparations against France, the Franks will bring to them not fire and sword, but liberty. . . . Accompany your declaration with a movement of troops.”

On 7 December 1791, Louis appointed the known war advocate, Louis Marie Jacques Amalric, count of Narbonne-Lara, to be minister of war. One week later, in response to reports of Austrian troop concentrations on the Rhine and in Belgium, the French posted three armies on the north-eastern frontier: the Army of the North at Valenciennes, the Army of the Center at Metz, and the Army of the Rhine at Strasbourg. While the king remained in favor of reconciliation, Narbonne believed that France could fight and win a short and limited war to remove the émigrés from the Rhineland and then pursue a peace agreement with the Habsburgs. Commanding the Army of the Center, Lafayette believed that a victorious war under the king’s control would strengthen support for the constitutional monarchy and limit radicalism.

As indicated by his 16 December speech, the new warlike posture of the king’s ministry did not compel Brissot to reconsider the wisdom of fanning the flames of conflict. Yet it finally convinced several revolutionaries already skeptical of the need for war to speak out loudly against what they regarded generously as Brissot’s misguided crusade. In a speech to the Jacobins on 5 December arguing that France could not survive a war against foreign invasion and internal counterrevolution, Jacques Nicolas Billaud-Varenne became the first

an armed conference to mediate the dispute over the émigrés. See John Hardman, Louis XVI (New York: Arnold, 2000), 147.

100 AP, 35:443. The Legislative Assembly’s letter to Louis continued: “If the French, driven from their patrie by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, had assembled in armies on the frontiers and been protected by the German princes, Sire, we ask you: what would have been the response of Louis XIV? . . . Sire, your interest, your dignity, the outraged grandeur of the nation, all compel you to speak in a language different than that of diplomacy. The nation awaits your energetic declarations against the circles forming between the Haut- and Bas-Rhin, the electors of Trier, Mainz and the other German princes.”


102 Aulard, The French Revolution, 1:351; on the formation of the three armies, see Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 1:62-72.
major critic of the war policy.103 Georges Jacques Danton initially opposed war, stating on 14 December his disagreements with “those who take delight in stupid confidence.” He recanted his statement the day after Brissot’s 16 December speech and stated in colorful prose that “the exterminating angel of liberty will tumble these satellites of despotism.”104

On 18 December, Robespierre declared forcefully against Brissot’s push for war. Although no longer a pacifist, he believed Brissot was playing into the hands of the forces of counterrevolution by leading France into a war for which it remained unprepared. Robespierre’s attitude resulted both from philosophic skepticism about Brissot’s militarism and contemporary concerns. Evidence of Mirabeau’s conspiracy with the court raised alerts about the integrity of France’s current political leaders. Moreover, Robespierre recently returned from his hometown of Arras, where he witnessed first-hand the unpreparedness of French troops and the population’s increasing divisions.105 Essentially echoing Billaud-Varenne, Robespierre attempted to redirect attention from Koblenz to France, where he believed the Revolution’s true enemies were preparing to foment a counterrevolutionary insurrection.106 Two days later, the Patriote français responded to the critics of Brissot by asserting that the king’s newly articulated war policy constituted a sham attempt to rally public support and should not be seen as genuine. Moreover, it raised concern regarding the king’s engagement in a conspiracy with the émigrés.107

103 Biro, German Policy, 1:47.
104 “Danton sur la guerre,” 16 December 1791, in Discours de Danton, ed. A. Fribourg (Paris: Librairie Cornély, 1910), 121-3; see also Biro, Germany Policy, 1:48-50.
105 McPhee, Robespierre, 114. This challenges Biro’s assertion in Germany Policy, 1:47, that “Robespierre started as a fervent member of the war party.” Robespierre spoke on Mirabeau’s conspiracy in the Jacobin Club on 5 December, see Journal des Jacobins, no. 314.
106 See “Discours de Maximilien Robespierre,” 18 December 1791, in Oeuvres de Maximilian Robespierre, eds. Marc Bouloiscau, Georges Lefebvre, and Albert Soboul (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), 8:47-64. Robespierre spoke directly to this point: “Does the danger lie at Koblenz? No, Koblenz is not a second Carthage; the seat of evil lies not at Koblenz, it is in our midst, it is in your breast. Before running to Koblenz, at least prepare yourself to wage war.”
107 Le Patriot français, 20 December 1791, no. 862.
In fact, Louis’s concern that émigré agitation in the Rhineland would force him to intervene to maintain royal legitimacy appears sincere. Furthermore, Leopold’s letters to the Elector of Trier demonstrated his true desire to prevent war. On 14 November, Louis XVI’s foreign minister, Claude Antoine de Valdec de Lessart, requested Leopold’s cooperation to work toward a pacification of tensions. The Austrian Chancellor, Wenzel Anton, prince of Kaunitz-Rietberg, wrote to the French ambassador, Emmanuel Marie Louis, marquis de Noailles, on 21 December that the emperor possessed in writing the Prince-Elector of Trier’s promise to remove the émigrés from his territory, as Leopold previously agreed to do with reference to the Austrian Netherlands. Although designed as a conciliatory communication, Kaunitz’s 21 December note enflamed the paranoid suspicions already rising in the Legislative Assembly. Kaunitz emphasized the emperor’s hope to “avert extreme measures” yet indicated that Leopold stood ready to fight should France instigate an unnecessary crisis.

Consequently, the French deputies incorrectly interpreted as an escalation what the Austrians considered to be an effort at reconciliation. Throughout December, the correspondence between the French king and the Holy Roman Emperor clearly and consistently referenced a desire for peace. Alone among the significant players in the war debate of this period, the speeches of the Brissotins reveal an overall desire for war despite increasing inconsistency regarding the threat that France faced. For example, although he alluded to the dangers of a foreign conspiracy, Brissot on 29 December stated with remarkable contradiction that the “concert between the powers is a chimera: their interests are too different, too contrary to another, to cede to the general interest, to the interest of the

108 Klemens Wenzeslaus to Leopold, Koblenz, 18 December 1791; Leopold to Klemens Wenzeslaus, Vienna, 9 January 1792, in Vivenot, Quellen, 1:563-4, 316-8.
110 Kaunitz to de Noailles, Vienna, 21 December 1791 in Hansen, Quellen, 1:1068-70.
111 See Biro, German Policy, 1:51.
cause of kings.”¹¹² Tellingly, Brissot did not use this as an opportunity to calm fears of a foreign conspiracy to avert war, but rather to convince his fellow deputies that France should initiate a war that it could easily win: “we invite everyone to prepare for war; a war that will be truly beneficial; a benefit to the nation: the great calamity that France must avoid is actually not having a war, which would only prolong its desiccation and the languor from which it is exhausted.”¹¹³ In particular, Brissot claimed that war would restore French honor, external security, internal tranquility, finances, and public credit. He asserted that every French citizen would become a soldier and that the courts of Europe would be unable to mobilize sufficient strength to contain France.¹¹⁴

Of equal importance to France’s potential strength, Brissot argued that the peoples of Europe supported the French Revolution despite the negative attitudes of their monarchs. He named the rulers of Trier, Mainz, Sweden, Spain, Russia, and the Papal States as active enemies of France while stating that he did not trust Leopold’s benign declarations. Boldly declaring that “the French Revolution has overturned all diplomacy,” Brissot proposed a motion calling on the Assembly to vote twenty million livres for the war effort, for Louis to demand that the Rhenish princes remove all émigrés from their lands by 15 January, that the emperor guarantee that no counterrevolutionary forces gather in Brabant, and that all French diplomats be recalled from Sweden, Russia, and Rome.¹¹⁵ Subsequent speeches by Marie-Jean Hérault de Séchelles and Marie Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet championed Brissot’s demand for a “war on kings and peace to peoples.”¹¹⁶ While the statesmen of

¹¹² AP, 36:600-12.
¹¹³ Ibid.
¹¹⁴ Ibid.
¹¹⁵ On Brissot’s war speech of 29 December, see also Ellery, Brissot, 235-8; D’Huart, Brissot, 147.
¹¹⁶ AP, 36:613-9. Brissot’s paper praised Condorcet’s speech for evoking “not a war of the French nation against the peoples of Europe, but a war of liberty against the despot that have menaced and outraged France, a war of equality against aristocracy.” Brissot called for the speech to be translated into every tongue and for it to be sent to the armies and départements.
Europe declared their desire for peace, Brissot and his followers repeatedly vocalized their insatiable yearning for war.

At this point, the topic of debate became intensely focused on the relationship between the French nation and the other peoples of Europe. On 30 December, Brissot gave an important speech before the Jacobin Club where he described his foreign policy as a “system of attack” against the German princes and “a crusade of universal liberty.” Speaking before an audience of Jacobins, several of whom already doubted his leadership, Brissot claimed that a few thousand brigands had dishonored a nation of twenty-five million citizens and that foreign plots compromised the safety of the “French empire.” Moreover, he stated that no alliance in Europe could at present stop the French “march to liberty.” In fact, those who raised spurious fears about the ardor of the European despots relative to the strength of French citizens should be suspected of treason. He claimed that deputies and pundits who doubted these truisms misunderstood the essential nature of liberty, the desire for which he believed existed in every human heart.

In his view, a war against the Rhenish princes would quickly lead to a war of the Rhenish peoples against the ancien régime. Following the example of the United States in the western hemisphere, Brissot claimed that France would be “the eternal machine for general liberty” in Europe. The printing press, Brissot claimed, made the existence of tyranny impossible because rulers could not prevent the spread of the Enlightenment’s ideas. The French constitution, which incorporated the “No Conquests” decree, “prohibited the

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117 Aulard, La société des Jacobins, 3:303.
118 Brissot’s speech can be found in Le Patriot françois, 1 January 1792, no. 874. The full text is provided in Second discours de J.P. Brissot, député, sur la nécessité de faire la guerre aux Princes allemands; prononcé à la société, dans la séance du vendredi 30 décembre 1791 (Paris: Imprimerie du Patriote François, 1792), 2.
119 Second discours de Brissot, 3.
120 Ibid., 26.
121 Ibid., 21-4.
spirit of the rapacious warrior,” which alone would turn the peoples of Europe against the liberating armies of France.\(^{122}\)

Brissot’s highly idealistic speech envisioned a war of liberation that would truly “set all of Europe ablaze,” as he later claimed to have desired.\(^{123}\) In response to this speech, Robespierre offered his most famous proclamation against a war that he believed defied reason: “As for the statement that we will find a ready response among the peoples of the countries against which we fight, \textit{it is well to remember that people do not change their customs easily and that no one loves armed missionaries} [emphasis added]; and the first council that nature gives to reason is to repulse them as enemies.”\(^{124}\) In fact, neither one of these predictions came true: the people of Belgium and the Rhineland neither fully embraced the French as liberators nor challenged them as foreign enemies. The situation proved to be a complicated mix of apathy, hopefulness, and desolation anticipated by neither Brissot nor Robespierre. Moreover, neither politician as yet fully understood the exact form that French liberation or occupation would take, although Robespierre knew that a gentle policy would not long last.\(^{125}\)

Regarding the issue of natural frontiers, Brissot’s speeches during this period suggest a greater partiality to a union or congress of individual republics living together in harmony rather than to French territorial expansion. Yet it must be understood that Brissot did not openly announce his true intentions in leading France to war. Most significant, he claimed repeatedly that he did not seek to establish a republic in France but rather to preserve the constitutional monarchy. Thus, it is likely that he concealed his backing for French expansion just as he closeted his republicanism. For his part, Robespierre advised the French to set their

\(^{122}\) Ibid. 18-20.
\(^{123}\) Biro, \textit{German Policy}, 1:51, incorrectly attributes this statement to Brissot in December 1791; in fact it was said in late 1792 in an entirely different context. Biro overlooked the fact that the 1791 constitution rejected a war of conquest.
\(^{125}\) McPhee, \textit{Robespierre}, 114-6.
“own affairs in order” and to achieve their own liberty “before offering it to others.” Other important figures proved equally ambiguous concerning French war aims. For example, Charles François Dumouriez, soon to become the French foreign minister, proposed the creation of an independent Belgian Republic. Considering the fact that the “No Conquests” decree existed as part of the French constitution, it seems probable that declarations in favor of territorial aggrandizement would likely garner accusations of treason. The National Assembly had reiterated in calling for war funds that “the French nation has renounced ever pursuing a war in which the goal would be to make conquests, it will never employ its forces against the liberty of any people.” Brissot’s paper printed this statement with the comment: “This is the text of the constitution; it is a sacred view by which we gain people’s trust.”

Camille Desmoulins, one of Robespierre’s close allies and a popular Jacobin journalist, raised doubts about Brissot’s political allegiances in several highly insulting pamphlets published in January 1792.

Regardless, Brissot’s stated formula of a holy war, a “war against kings and peace to peoples,” remained incredibly popular in the Legislative Assembly. On 31 December 1791, the anti-war minister of foreign affairs, Lessart, read Kaunitz’s 21 December report to the Assembly, intending to demonstrate the general desire for peace that prevailed at Vienna. Yet after learning of Leopold’s agreement to defend Trier in the event of a French attack, the deputies became convinced that the emperor actually desired a conflict, an assumption facilitated by Kaunitz’s questionable rhetoric. Lessart attempted to calm the Assembly by reading two letters from the rulers of Speyer and the Palatinate, both of whom pledged their

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126 “Discours de Maximilien Robespierre sur la guerre,” 8.82.
127 Howe, *Foreign Policy and the French Revolution*, 1-5. Howe takes this argument too far. As shown below, Dumouriez did at least contemplate the extension of French territory into the Low Countries as a result of war. Moreover, it was not Dumouriez’s desire for a Belgian Republic that caused the war but Brissot’s consistent posturing for a French war of aggression against the German princes that led to war.
128 *Le Patriote français*, 31 December 1791, no. 873.
peaceful intentions: the deputies purportedly responded with “ironic laughter.” On 1 January 1792, the moderate deputy, Louis Genty, challenged the prevailing bellicose sentiment by warning of the dangers of an aggressive war policy. He cited the loss of republican liberty under the Roman Empire as an example from antiquity of the potential for the pursuit of conquest to corrupt the human soul. The deputies responded with laughter and murmurs while dismissing the call for prudence and restraint. Despite the conciliatory tones of the reports presented by Lessart, the deputies appeared fully supportive of Brissot’s “system of attack.”

In the next few weeks, the Diplomatic Committee drafted an ultimatum to Leopold demanding that he declare his intention to abide by the 1756 alliance and “undertake no measures against France.” On 25 January, the Legislative Assembly passed the ultimatum and instructed the king to give Leopold until 1 March to respond and to apologize for his past insults to the French nation. On the same day, the commander of the Army of the North and French military hero, Marshal Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, count of Rochambeau, spoke on the military situation of France, after which the Legislative Assembly instructed the king to prepare the French army for an offensive at the first order. In the circumstances orchestrated by Brissot, in which the French nation prepared for war while asking the Holy Roman Emperor to refuse to defend an imperial prince from an obvious aggression, war became practically inevitable. Despite continued appeals by Robespierre and others to abandon an unnecessary conflict and focus on resolving severe domestic problems, the

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130 *AP*, 36:698-710.
131 Ibid., 36:733.
133 The correspondence leading up to the ultimatum can be read in Hansen, *Quellen*, 2:30-34. The text of the ultimatum read that “if [Leopold] desired to live in peace and goodwill with the French nation, he must renounce all treaties and conventions directed against the sovereignty, independence, and security of the nation.”
134 *AP*, 37:655. Rochambeau stated his intention as to “present . . . a report on the difficulties of our military position. . . .”
Legislative Assembly almost unceasingly moved toward war after the revelations of Leopold’s intention to defend Trier.

Numerous examples of domestic anxieties provide a crucial backdrop to the Assembly’s war hysteria. French finances remained in need of repair despite the confiscation of ecclesiastical and noble properties. The introduction of assignats as a form of fluid paper money constituted the main effort at fiscal and economic rejuvenation, yet the assignats ultimately proved more of a headache than an asset.135 More pertinent for the short-term, unrest continued across the country. Not only did local émigrés and refractory priests constitute a domestic threat, but the deputies repeatedly received news of unpatriotic activity within the royal army. In Franche-Comté, a Royalist uprising among the troops of the 22nd Cavalry Regiment stationed at Besançon concerned the deputies.136 On the Pyrenees frontier, soldiers of the 20th Infantry Regiment and the 12th Chasseur Regiment, perhaps inspired by Royalist officers, fought against the local National Guard.137 Even more concerning, the deputies learned that Strasbourg nearly fell to a royalist conspiracy in which French troops attempted to deliver the city to Cardinal Louis René Édouard de Rohan.138 In addition, the desertion of seven troopers from the 4th Cavalry Regiment stationed near the frontier at Sarrebourg convinced many deputies that a conspiracy existed between the émigrés and some disloyal troops – notably officers – in the French army.139 A report on the inadequate state of frontier fortifications such as those at Saarlouis deepened the anxiety regarding French security.140 However, far from reconsidering the wisdom of instigating a conflict, these domestic problems contributed to the popularity of an aggressive war that would take the form of an offensive into the Austrian Netherlands and the Rhenish provinces.

135 Even in 1791 they were an issue of great concern to the Legislative Assembly.
136 AP, 36:44-5, 54.
138 Ibid., 36:162-6, 169.
139 Ibid., 36:394-9, 411, 443.
140 Ibid., 36:76.
By 1792, French politics had become divided between an executive branch that pursued war with regret and a legislative majority that viewed war as increasingly essential. For the last time, Louis XVI attempted to regain control of French policy by asserting on 28 January that the Legislative Assembly’s repeated “instructions” to him overstepped their authority as legislators. Crucially, the king retained the support of a larger number of moderate deputies, as well as a faction based around Lafayette. These moderates remained suspicious of Brissot, who apparently favored a war to establish a republic in violation of the 1791 constitution. Accordingly, although the Assembly’s ultimatum of January clearly made an escalation between France and Austria inevitable, Brissot needed another campaign to persuade moderate votes in favor of a declaration of war, a power that technically rested with the king but required the approval of the legislative branch.141

As noted and discussed above, Brissot utilized a variety of arguments to promote war. He became increasingly assertive that war would strengthen France, most especially in a speech to the Legislative Assembly of 17 January 1792. In this diatribe, Brissot depicted the conflict as one between France and the “hypocrisy of little princes.”142 Brissot asserted that war would allow France to overcome its domestic problems, notably the already declining value of the assignats. Most important, he made great use of nationalist rhetoric and Austrophobia, constantly referencing the humiliations of France as a result of the 1756 alliance. He stressed the superiority of the French citizen soldier, despite the increasing number of reports that indicated a high level of military unpreparedness among the troops. Added to his confidence in French victory, Brissot restated his belief that the war would bring liberty to the peoples of Europe. In this important report, Brissot finally hinted that liberation would take the form of union with France. “Between the Oceans and the Alps,” he stated,

142 AP, 37:464.
“France is bordered by the Holy Roman Empire and by the emperor. The Empire is only a phantom; anterior Austria is not defendable; a free Brabant would bind naturally to France. . .”

These arguments gained the support of the moderate deputies, including Lafayette’s faction, for a war that became focused on French patriotism. On 20 January, Claude Fauchet provided a statement on France’s policy toward its neighbors that by the end of 1792 became the model for the liberationist occupation policy: “We do not desire to conquer; but we will resist. We will assist the cities and lands in our neighborhood, where our attackers are presently camped: we will return those strips when we have entirely vanquished the rebels and then we will be paid for our expense. Mainz, Trier, Koblenz, and Worms, that is enough; one step further and we are beyond the limits of defense.” In addition to openly calling for at least partial conquests in Belgium and the Rhineland, Fauchet proposed that “French armies will capture the neighboring lands on our threatened frontiers, and, if success favors the justice of their cause, the cities of those states that are the closest to our territory.” On numerous occasions, these types of discussions led to what essentially constituted pro-war festivals in the Legislative Assembly. Fauchet’s decree ended with “applause from the galleries and some applause from the assembly.”

“War fever,” a term used by T. C. W. Blanning to describe the psychological climate of the French legislature in early 1792, constitutes the most apt explanation for the exuberant ceremonies in which the deputies declared their intent to defend their liberty or die.

143 Ibid., 37:469.
144 Ibid., 37:515. See also, Belissa, Fraternité universelle, 286.
145 AP, 37:543.
146 Ibid.
147 Blanning, Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars, 113. Blanning quotes Brissot among others: “If there is an attempt to terrorize you into submission to a capitulation unworthy of you, you must implement the oath you have sworn; the Constitution or death!”
Although he strove to prevent war throughout 1792, Leopold understandably felt that he could not retreat in the face of French aggression and still perform his primary function as ruler: maintaining the prestige of the Habsburg monarchy in Europe.\textsuperscript{148} In particular, the continued French antagonism of Trier despite the elector’s agreement to neutralize his territory could not be tolerated. The belligerent rhetoric in the French ultimatum produced the result desired by Brissot: a closer union between Austria and Prussia and a crystal clear counterrevolutionary proclamation from the Holy Roman Emperor. In January, Leopold and his council of state called on the restoration of the rights of German princes in Alsace, for the pope to regain Avignon, and the reconfirmation of monarchical government in France.\textsuperscript{149} On 7 February 1792, Austria and Prussia declared an “alliance of friendship and defense,” providing for aid in defense against an attack by a foreign power as well as the promise of 20,000 troops to be supplied without question. Fearing the potential for international revolution, the two powers agreed to promote stability in each other’s territory while developing the idea of an international concert of powers to monitor affairs in France.\textsuperscript{150} In his correspondence with Lessart, Kaunitz signaled his frustration, referring to the Jacobins as a “pernicious sect” who sought to drive Europe to war despite Leopold’s peaceful intentions.\textsuperscript{151} Vienna’s final decision to take decisive action against the Revolution proved the most useful weapon in Brissot’s arsenal. The failure of Leopold’s policy to maintain tranquility became apparent by mid-February. On 1 March, the emperor died.

The first of March proved a significant date in another respect. Ostensibly the day that the French ultimatum to Leopold came due, it obviously did not retain its significance

\textsuperscript{150} See “Traité d’Amitié et d’Alliance Défensive,” Berlin, 7 February 1792, in Vivenot, \textit{Quellen}, 1:370. \\
\textsuperscript{151} Hansen, \textit{Quellen}, 2:70n1. See also Biro, \textit{German Policy}, 1:55.
following his death. More important, Lessart, ignorant of the emperor’s death, declared before the Legislative Assembly that his next note to Vienna would demand that the Austrians dismiss the idea of a “concert of powers” being convened against France. Through the Diplomatic Committee, Brissot demanded the confiscation all of Lessart’s papers in relation to Austria, absurdly citing national dishonor because the foreign minister asked the Austrians to disperse the concert of powers, a deed that the French should and could do for themselves.153 On 9 March, Louis XVI dismissed Narbonne as war minister after a series of denunciations by a close confidant. Popular among the Brissotins and the Lafayette faction because of his support for war, Narbonne’s dismissal convinced the Legislative Assembly of the need for an entirely new ministry.154 The next day, Brissot claimed that Lessart’s actions since taking office not only represented dereliction of duty, but convinced the Austrians of French weakness. Claiming that on his shoulders rested responsibility for Leopold’s affront to French honor, Brissot accused Lessart of treason.155

War followed shortly after the dismissal of the king’s ministers, which historians label the Feuillants. While the Feuilliant ministry typically balanced interests between the executive and legislative branches, the new ministers proved devoted to the Legislative Assembly, particularly Brissot’s faction.156 The most important figure, the new minister of foreign affairs, Dumouriez, became the key player involved in the French declaration of war. Groomed under the ancien régime and ultimately becoming an infamous traitor of the Revolution, Dumouriez’s reputation remains highly contested.157 Most likely, he played the role of opportunist rather than principled idealist. In early 1792, he saw opportunity in attaching himself to Brissot by passionately decrying the abuses of Austria. Yet he probably

153 Ellery, Brissot, 261.
155 Biro, Germany Policy, 1:55.
157 The best biography is Bois, Dumouriez.
did not share Brissot’s vision of a French republic and international revolution as much as he desired to gain personal benefit and glory from the pursuit of a popular war. An invasion of the Austrian Netherlands and the liberation of Belgium offered the most logical means of assailing the generally hated Austrian foe. Despite the claim made by Patricia Chastain Howe, Dumouriez’s so-called “Belgian Plan,” by which he purportedly desired to rule an independent Belgian Republic, did not cause the outbreak of war in April 1792. As demonstrated above, Brissot’s pursuit of war as a means of ensuring a regenerated France and perhaps promoting an international revolution constituted the main engine of war throughout 1791 and 1792. Thanks to Brissot, war had become nearly inevitable two months before Dumouriez joined the ministry.

Although the attainment of natural frontiers did not constitute a concrete goal in Brissot’s campaign for war, the hysteria of the Legislative Assembly fostered a nationalistic attitude that allowed the “French push to the Rhine” to become part of French foreign policy by the end of 1792. As Marc Belissa observes in describing Brissotin policy: “the warmongering is complicated because it is not monolithic.” Yet Brissot clearly believed that the war would radically transform the map of Europe. Moreover, he suggested repeatedly that France would enjoy the fruits of victory. Accordingly, it seems very likely that he desired the acquisition of the left bank of the Rhine despite his silence on the matter, particularly if the peoples of Belgium and the Rhineland fulfilled Saint Clootz’s prediction by graciously welcoming the French as liberators and asking for a union with France.

France declared war against the “King of Hungary and Bohemia” on 20 April 1792. The Legislative Assembly intended no insult in phrasing the declaration: formal protocol dictated that King Francis, Leopold’s son and successor, would not be crowned Holy Roman

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158 Howe, *Foreign Policy and the French Revolution*, 2.
159 Belissa, *Fraternité universelle*, 286.
Emperor until July. Nonetheless, the declaration of war rang with nationalistic hubris. Dumouriez declared the end of French “enslavement” to the House of Austria. Importantly, the declaration of war referenced the “No Conquest” decree enshrined in the French constitution. Dumouriez himself had claimed repeatedly that the war would not result in French expansion: “our wars will be short, violent, and without public indemnity, which is to say without the transfer or exchange of territory.”  

Later in the day, Louis XVI placed his signature on the declaration while the deputies of the Legislative Assembly watched enthusiastically. “Our Parisians are showing nothing but fight now, they are all aflame, ecstatic, and whosoever can bear arms wants to give battle and die,” ran one report. Not a single Parisian newspaper opposed the war.  

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160 Dumouriez quoted in Bois, Dumouriez, 178.
161 Biro, German Policy, 1:62.
In numerous ways, the war that Brissot desired and received both confirmed and defied his expectations. Within five months of its commencement, the French monarchy collapsed, followed shortly thereafter by the establishment of the First French Republic. Yet this resulted not from the euphoria of victory but from the crisis of war. The French received an ambiguous response from the foreign people they purportedly desired to liberate. Ultimately rejecting a war of liberation, the French pursued a war of expansion predicated on the pursuit of natural frontiers. Most significant, the French discovered the fallacy of their heady confidence in an easy victory against the “slaves” of the ancien régime.

The early months of the war confirmed that France lacked clear diplomatic objectives around which to base a coherent military strategy. Although Brissot justified the French push to war because of the émigré threat in the Rhineland, Dumouriez favored an offensive into Belgium and the lands of Nice and Savoy. The French generals favored the Rhineland because of the relative weakness of the forces available to defend it compared to Belgium. Under Narbonne, the war ministry devised plans to pursue a limited war against the émigrés and the German princes. Nonetheless, Dumouriez possessed great influence over the French war effort because of his relationship with the new Girondin minister of war, General Pierre Marie de Grave. In the words of Dumouriez’s main biographer, the foreign minister “behaved like the true head of the government.” Accordingly, Dumouriez dismissed the notion of a

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1 According to Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*, 100-1, “One can hardly talk of France’s policy at all. Much of what passed for it was the product of confused struggles within the Assembly, the Paris Commune, and the sections, clubs, and streets of Paris. The definable war programs (those of the Girondins, the court, and Dumouriez) all clashed with each other, and none correlated means with ends.”


3 Bois, *Dumouriez*, 206.
restricted war in the Rhineland in favor of a broader campaign against the Austrian
Netherlands.

Realities of war overturned France’s commitment to the No Conquests resolution of
May 1790. Howe’s suggestion that the establishment of an independent Belgian Republic
constituted Dumouriez’s overriding concern rests on a narrow interpretation of the evidence.⁴
Brisson’s ideas retained a significant influence over the war effort. In April 1792, Dumouriez
ordered the French army into Belgium confident in the superiority of the French citizen
soldiers and hoping to be welcomed by the Belgians. Whether the French would establish an
independent republic or claim rights of conquest would be settled later. For Brissot, the
invasion of the Austrian Netherlands constituted the first step in a broader revolutionary
movement and France’s regeneration. As Le Patriot français declared on 21 April, France
embarked on “a war of the human race against its oppressors . . . the most just, the most
glorious war that has ever been known.”⁵ By the end of 1792, the French National
Convention had committed France to a war of conquest and occupation.

Despite the work of the ministry of war and the Legislative Assembly’s comité
militaire to improve military effectiveness, the three French armies on the north-east frontier
remained unprepared for war.⁶ According to Narbonne, the French possessed 240 infantry
battalions and 160 cavalry squadrons between Dunkirk and Besançon. He calculated the
army’s total strength at 200,000 troops, nearly one-third of which constituted the “volunteers
of 1791.”⁷ Defending the Belgian frontier, Rochambeau commanded the Army of the North,
which included an active strength of 34,000 men and 25,500 garrison troops. Guarding

⁴ See Foreign Policy and the French Revolution, 2-3.
⁵ Le Patriot français, 21 April 1792, no. 985.
⁶ Paul Foucart and Jules Finot, La défense nationale dans le nord de 1792 à 1802 (Lille: Imprimerie Lefèvre-
Ducrocq, 1890), 1:18.
⁷ The National Assembly raised the first volunteer battalions in early 1791 as a supplement to the National
Guard. After the flight to Varennes, the legislators decided to transform their status from a reserve force to an
active component of the French army. Considering the deterioration of the regular, or line army and the
supposed greater political loyalty of the volunteers, the Legislative Assembly included both regular and
volunteer battalions in the three principal armies. AP, 37:236.
Alsace, Marshal Nicolas Luckner’s Army of the Rhine consisted of 43,000 troops. In between these armies, General Lafayette commanded the 20,000-man Army of the Center. After attaining leadership of the war effort, Dumouriez formed a fourth army, the Army of the Midi under the command of General Anne-Pierre, marquis de Montesquiou-Fézensac, to threaten Piedmont-Sardinia. Although on paper the combined French armies possessed over 200,000 men, the three armies in the north and east could only muster approximately 95,000 effectives in April 1792. Moreover, continued emigration left the officer corps severely weakened and inexperienced while the newly organized volunteer battalions lacked sufficient training. Narbonne commented on the lack of sufficient organization for the Republic’s horses, both in terms of their mobilization and supply – a problem that perpetually plagued the French war effort. Considering these weaknesses, Rochambeau informed Dumouriez that he could not execute orders for an offensive operation but proposed a defensive posture. The foreign minister dismissed Rochambeau’s pessimism and ordered an advance into Belgium in late April.

In 1792, the boundary between France and Belgium stretched approximately two hundred miles west to east in a sinuous and jagged manner. Various geographical features supported the defense of the French frontier from geopolitical foes, primarily Austria, which ruled Belgium as part of the Austrian Netherlands. In particular, several rivers ran diagonal or perpendicular across the line of demarcation, providing either a shield for a defensive strategy or a base of operations for an offensive. Supporting the forces of nature, the sophisticated triple line of fortresses devised by Vauban in the seventeenth century followed the boundary from the Atlantic Coast to the Meuse River. On 8 July 1791, the assembly reorganized the frontier defenses and identified thirteen principal positions necessary to maintain in prime

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8 Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 25.
9 *AP*, 37:236.
Map 5. Operations in the Low Countries, 1792-1794
condition: Gravelines, Dunkirk, Bergues, Lille, Douai, Cambrai, Bouchain, Valenciennes, Condé, Le Quesnoy, Landrécies, Maubeuge, and Avesnes.\textsuperscript{11}

On the other side of the border, the Austrians possessed fewer quality fortresses to guard against French invasions. Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II had considered the costs to maintain the fortifications too great. Believing that the future portended peaceful relations with France, he ordered the destruction of most of the province’s fortresses in 1781.\textsuperscript{12}

Although not first-class fortresses in 1792, the citadels of Mons and Tournai stood on the main roads leading north to Brussels, the capital of the Austrian Netherlands. Namur, Antwerp, and Luxembourg constituted the only quality fortresses in the area at the start of the war. The acting governor of the provinces, Feldmarschall Albrecht Kasimir, duke of Saxe-Teschen possessed approximately 50,000 troops divided into forty-four battalions and thirty-eight squadrons to defend the 200-mile frontier. Moreover, the Austrian commander, the seventy-nine-year-old Feldmarschall Johann Blasius Columban, baron of Bender devoted approximately 30,000 of these troops to garrison duty at Brussels and Luxembourg. He divided the remainder into three groups: Feldmarschalleutnant Maximilian Anton Karl, count of Baillet de Latour held Gent with thirteen battalions and ten squadrons, Feldmarschalleutnant Johann Peter Beaulieu de Marconnay occupied Mons with approximately nine battalions and four squadrons, and Generalmajor Karl, baron of Biela directed the remainder at Leuze-en-Hainaut.\textsuperscript{13} The Austrians fielded competent, professional troops who the preceding year had crushed the Belgian and Liègeois revolts. For the new Austrian ruler, Holy Roman Emperor Francis II, the defense of the provinces proved crucial

\textsuperscript{11} Foucart and Finot, \textit{La défense nationale}, 1:1-2.

\textsuperscript{12} This decision related to politics with the Dutch Republic as a result of the Barrier Treaties of the eighteenth century, by which Dutch troops garrisoned fortresses between the Netherlands and France. The fortresses razed after Joseph’s decision included Veurne, Ypres, Fort Knokke, Menen, Charleroi, and Namur.

because he took the opportunity provided by the French declaration of war to revive the
traditional Habsburg project whereby Austria would exchange Belgium for Bavaria. Unlike
his uncle Frederick the Great, the Prussian king, Frederick William II, agreed to Austria’s
plans because Berlin hoped to receive compensation in western Germany and Poland.14

While the Austrians and Prussians entered the war thinking of territorial
aggrandizement and dynastic issues, the French thought in terms of Brissotin revolution, a
crucial point often overlooked by historians.15 Considering the weakness of the Austrian
fortresses in the Low Countries and the distance of the defender’s extensive lines of operation
that ran east from Belgium through Luxembourg and Trier to the Rhine, a successful French
offensive combined with a popular uprising might have led to a stunning collapse of Austrian
power in the region. Although technically foreign minister, Dumouriez possessed sufficient
influence over the minister of war to ensure the adoption of his plan.16 Commanding the
Army of the Center, Lafayette eagerly desired to lead an offensive operation. He asked for
substantial reinforcements to allow for an envelopment of the Austrian left flank. In
particular, he aimed toward Liège and Namur to dominate the Sambre and Meuse region.17 In
the plan actually devised, Lafayette possessed inadequate strength – only 12,000 troops – to
execute a major advance from Givet to Namur. Rather than leading a simultaneous offensive
of equal scale, Lafayette received orders to support the Army of the North’s primary
operation further west.18

14 Roider, Thugut, 95-6.
15 For example, Blanning attributes Dumouriez’s insistence for an immediate invasion of Belgium to the
prevailing belief in “a quick and easy victory,” while Lynn simply states that Dumouriez “overruled”
Rochambeau’s objections without explanation. Neither explain that French belief in a Belgian and Liègeois
uprising determined military strategy. See Blanning, The French Revolutionary Wars, 72-3; Lynn, Bayonets of
the Republic, 4. Rothenberg, Napoleon’s Great Adversaries, 44, correctly states that Dumouriez “expected to be
welcomed as a liberator.”
16 Dumouriez, La vie et les mémoires, 2:221-2; Howe, Foreign Policy and the French Revolution, 73-6, outlines
Dumouriez’s influence over the French war effort in April, yet she overstates her case that his Belgian Plan
provided the single objective.
17 Dumouriez, La vie et les mémoires, 2:225.
18 Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 2:12-4.
Dumouriez’s plan called for assaults on Ostend, Tournai, and Mons. After capturing these positions, he thought the French could advance to Brussels and work with the Belgians to oust the Austrian overlords. Inadequate military effectiveness unraveled the foreign minister’s designs. Between 28 and 29 April, the Army of the North executed three separate advances. On the French left, a minor force of 1,500 troops moved from Dunkirk to Furnes, which the Austrians left virtually undefended. In the center, General Théobald Dillon directed 4,000 troops on a fifteen-mile march from Lille to Tournai. Further east, General Armand-Louis de Biron marched 15,000 men from Valenciennes toward Mons. Although the French captured Furnes, the offensive resulted in a general fiasco. Halfway to Tournai, Dillon’s column confronted an advancing Austrian detachment at Lamain. The green troops immediately fled in a disorderly retreat while being harassed by Austrian cavalry and several artillery batteries. Crying treason, the troops executed Dillon while completing their evacuation of the Austrian Netherlands. Although more fortunate than Dillon, Biron also experienced a major setback. His troops panicked and fled before they reached Mons. By 30 April, the Army of the North had reached the safety of French territory.19

Not only did these reverses constitute an immediate shock to Brissotin confidence in the citizen soldier, they weakened faith in a war of liberation. Contrary to Dumouriez’s optimistic expectations, the Belgians welcomed the French not with open arms, but with widespread apathy. While Lafayette received support from the Liègeois legion and three Belgians, his retreat ended the possibility of stirring an uprising at Namur.20 Dumouriez’s promises to the Legislative Assembly that a Belgian revolution would accompany the French invasion earned criticism. Yet the harshest attacks fell on the ultimate warmonger: Brissot.

19 On these early failures, see Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 2:14-6; Anon. Victoires, conquêtes, désastres, revers et guerres civiles des Français de 1792 à 1815 (Paris: Pancoucke, 1817), 1:5-10; Foucart and Finot, La défense nationale, 1:25-31; Paul Verhaegen, La Belgique sous la domination française, 1792-1814 (Paris: Plon, 1921), 86-7.
20 Howe, Foreign Policy and the French Revolution, 76.
As the major proponent of war and foreign uprisings, Brissot logically became the target of Robespierre’s attacks.\textsuperscript{21} Accusing the Girondins of treason, Robespierre complained that they led France to war completely unprepared and with unrealistic goals. The fact that nobles commanded the French armies convinced Robespierre of a conspiracy.\textsuperscript{22}

Undeterred by either the initial failure or Robespierre’s criticisms, Dumouriez ordered a second invasion of Belgium to commence in May. Minister of war Graves criticized the plan because he believed that the Belgians would again reject the French as liberators. Demonstrating the persistence of his influence, Dumouriez forced Graves to resign and appointed Joseph Servan, a prominent Girondin and one of the initiators of the citizen soldier concept during the ancien régime. Supporting Dumouriez, the Brissotins believed that any delay in a second invasion of Belgium would squander an essential opportunity. Accordingly, Servan ordered Lafayette and Luckner to commence the invasion immediately. Angry over Dumouriez’s refusal to follow his advice, Rochambeau resigned. Dumouriez appointed Luckner to command the Army of the North in the belief that he would prove more compliant than Lafayette.\textsuperscript{23} For his part, Lafayette opposed Servan’s appointment to the war ministry and even proposed a truce to the Austrians at Brussels on 16 May. Luckner convened a war council with Lafayette and Rochambeau on 15 May in which they discussed their opposition to Dumouriez’s strategy. The generals agreed to a stalling tactic that would prevent the resumption of the offensive. Informing Dumouriez that his army lacked supplies, equipment, and officers, Luckner requested to postpone his advance.\textsuperscript{24}

The recalcitrance of these generals became the key excuse that the Girondins employed to explain the failure of the war effort in April-May 1792. Within the first month of the war, the need to establish centralized civilian control over the armies became readily

\textsuperscript{21} Aulard, \textit{La société des Jacobins}, 3:290.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 3:542.
\textsuperscript{23} Bois, \textit{Dumouriez}, 208-9.
\textsuperscript{24} Jomini, \textit{Histoire critique et militaire}, 2:119.
apparent. Dumouriez rejected the appeal of the generals for a delay and informed them that their success rested less on their armies’ capability than on the support of the Belgians. Learning of Austro-Prussian agreements to launch a combined invasion of France in the summer, Dumouriez urged them to act rapidly. He hoped the French could invade the Low Countries before the Prussians arrived to support the Austrians. On 29 May, Lafayette responded to Dumouriez that he and Luckner could not ask their poorly equipped troops to endanger themselves on a senseless mission. Moreover, he warned that an administrative error allowed the Austrians to gain consistent intelligence on French plans for a renewed offensive. Luckner informed Servan on 7 June that his army remained poorly supplied and that an offensive into Belgium could not be risked. Servan responded two days later that he would tolerate no further delays.25

In reality, Austrian and Prussian efforts to devise an effective military strategy and to organize their forces provided the French beneficial breathing room. In May, Austrian and Prussian officials met at Potsdam. As noted, the two powers first discussed their potential gains from conducting a successful war. Both Frederick William II and Francis II believed that the French would crumble soon after an invasion. Nonetheless, Kaunitz understood the need for quick, concerted action against France. As he wrote to the Austrian ambassador to Prussia: “That we will win is obvious; we need only a bit of time to gather our strength. But we must do so! We must not give the enemy time to think, we cannot endure many campaigns; the war must end at one time, with convincing, decisive battles. Jealousy and mistrust must be banned from our circles; each must rejoice at the victories of the other; then our united victory is secured.”26 Regardless, instead of rapidly forming their armies to march on Paris, the Austrians and Prussians wasted time negotiating over the spoils of war. More

25 Howe, Foreign Policy and the French Revolution, 77-9, provides the best discussion of this archival correspondence.
26 Kaunitz quoted in Roider, Thugut, 95.
than any other factor, the pursuit of territorial aggrandizements rather than victory ruined the Allied war effort against France.

The Allies chose to avoid the main French fortresses by launching an attack through Champagne. Although Austro-Prussian war planning commenced in May, the results could not be implemented until August. Nonetheless, the main outlines of a plan existed. Of the 56,000 Austrian effective in Belgium, approximately 36,000 troops would defend the frontier from future French attacks while Feldzeugmeister Franz Sebastian Karl Joseph, Count Clerfayt de Croix led 20,000 troops to assist the main invasion force under Charles Wilhelm Ferdinand, duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. Using Luxembourg as a base of operations, Brunswick would lead the main Allied force of 42,000 Prussians, 5,500 Hessians, and 4,500 émigrés through Champagne. As the Allied plan called for coalition forces to avoid the most powerful French fortresses, they would first need to capture Longwy, Montmédy, and Verdun before they crossed the Meuse River and threatened Paris. The Allies could count on an additional 50,000 Austrian troops in the Breisgau to maintain pressure on the French Rhine Army and perhaps assist Brunswick. After the lead Austro-Prussian elements assembled at Koblenz in July 1792, tensions flared over Austria’s failure to meet its troop commitments: Clerfayt only provided 14,000 troops for Brunswick’s invasion force.²⁷

As the French armies delayed their second offensive, Brissot and his allies became the targets of increasingly harsh Jacobin attacks. The Jacobin newspaper, Révolutions de Paris, ran the most direct accusation:

When we were discussing the great question of the war, what did M. Brissot say? What answer did he make to his opponents? He saw only Koblenz, desired to destroy Koblenz, and claimed that if Koblenz were destroyed the Revolution would be accomplished. M. Brissot needed a campaign of only fifteen days to pacify Europe and avenge France; everything was ready, everything prepared for his vast undertaking. It is now a month since the war was declared; we have not taken a step, our armies have remained stationary. . . . An army in frightful

condition, in want of food and munitions, the frontiers undefended, the enemies of the Revolution protected by the courts, the condition of the army not reported by its generals.28

In order to divert criticism, the Girondins accused Lafayette of working to delay the French advance. In addition, Brissot drew attention to the specter of the “Austrian Committee,” a purported cabal of the king’s ministers that conspired to promote royalism by engineering a French defeat. Brissot declared that the committee “opposed the war against the House of Austria after having provoked it.”29 Although Brissot remained unwilling to call for a republic, he strove to restrain the king’s power. The Girondins introduced legislation for the dismissal of the king’s guard, the formation of fédérés in Paris, and the deportation of refractory priests.30 This legislation proved important in the Assembly’s assertion of power in the war.

The need for the Brissotins to protect themselves against Jacobin allegations of treason caused a temporary split between Brissot and Dumouriez. The foreign minister increasingly resented the popularity of the Girondin ministers with the Assembly. Moreover, he grew frustrated with Servan’s failure to compel Luckner and Lafayette to act. After Dumouriez advised the king to dismiss the Girondin ministers including Servan and the minister of interior, Jean-Marie Roland, he became a target of Brissotin suspicion.

Dumouriez’s appointment to lead the war ministry on 12 June seemed to confirm Brissot’s description of him as a “vile intriguer.” Moreover, on 14 June Dumouriez presented a somber report on the state of the armed forces that proved unpopular in the Legislative Assembly. Expressing the army’s lack of arms, uniforms, munitions, horses, and men, Dumouriez called for drastic measures: “All the Nation must be raised to take arms; but even that general levy, if it is not well coordinated or successive, would not increase the strength of the army and

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28 Antoine Tournon, Révolutions de Paris, dédiées à la Nation (Paris: 1792), no. 149.
29 Brissot quoted in Ellery, Brissot, 273.
30 Lefebvre, French Revolution, 1:230-3.
would only throw into great disorder and weakness the troops, who have already been attacked by the forces of despotism. . . .”

Dumouriez called for a restoration of order, discipline, and organization within the armies as an emergency measure. The deputies in the Assembly responded with “murmurs,” and several expressed their disdain for the minister who spoke pessimistically about a war for which he bore much responsibility.

On 15 June, Dumouriez resigned from his position as minister of war and expressed his desire to join the armies on the Franco-Belgian frontier. Dumouriez desired to influence the war by personally taking up the sword. He received an appointment to actually serve under Luckner in the Army of the North. Dumouriez’s journey to the army occurred during a period of great political tension between the king and the Assembly. On 16 June, Lafayette wrote a letter to the Assembly in which he stressed the army’s support for the king and urged Louis to rule with a firmer hand. The king replaced Dumouriez with Feuillants: Pierre August Lajard became minister of war while Victor Scipion Charles Auguste de la Garde de Chambonas assumed control of the ministry of foreign affairs. The Assembly correctly interpreted these moves as the king’s attempt to assert control over the situation during a lull in the war. Louis hoped to pursue negotiations with the Austrians and Prussians that would end the conflict and perhaps gain their support for a movement against the revolutionaries in Paris.

At this critical moment, the Feuillant foreign minister, Chambonas, offered the Legislative Assembly an option to end the war. On 30 June, he reported that France faced “many enemies, few reliable allies, and very few friends.” According to the minister, French negotiations to prevent Prussia from formally entering the war proved doomed to

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31 AP, 45:165-71.
32 AP, 45:485; Bois, Dumouriez, 212.
33 Howe, Foreign Policy and the French Revolution, 84.
34 Dumouriez, La vie et les mémoires, 2:223-6.
35 Howe, Foreign Policy and the French Revolution, 85.
failure. While Sweden and Spain might remain neutral, Sardinia expressed increasing hostility as a result of a French military escalation in the southeast. Chambonas urged the Assembly to pursue a treaty with Britain, the signing of which the French ambassador at London, Bernard-François Chauvelin, considered highly possible if Paris agreed to respect the sovereignty of neutral nations. Finally, Chambonas called for peace negotiations with Austria. Predictably, the report met with further accusations of royal and ministerial treachery and defeatism. On 10 July, all of the Feuillant ministers resigned except for Lajard. The fall of the Feuillant ministry opened a vacuum in terms of control of the war effort, providing an opportunity for the Allies to invade and perhaps overthrow the Revolution. The declaration of la patrie en danger on 11 July aimed to supply the Legislative Assembly with emergency powers and called for a new batch of volunteers.36

Despite his earlier confidence in France’s citizen army, Brissot became concerned that the failure of the campaign in the Low Countries provided the Allies with an opportunity to reach the French interior unchallenged. Accordingly, he viewed a governmental collapse as a disastrous turn that the French needed to avoid at all costs. Although republicanism profoundly shaped Brissot’s political thought, he attempted to save the monarchy in late July. On the 26th, Brissot provided a lengthy discourse that stressed France’s dangerous situation. Refusing to accept blame or question the fundamental beliefs that had led France to war, he attacked the “Austrian Committee.” Regardless, Brissot offered Louis the chance of accepting Brissotin ministers. In return, the king would enjoy their support and possibly regain the Legislative Assembly’s confidence.37 Although a rare act of statesmanship on his part, Brissot’s speech proved poorly timed. The radical left viewed it as a betrayal and evidence of Brissotin hypocrisy, leading them to rally around Danton and Robespierre.

37 Ibid., 47:161-3.
Aware that the Austrians and Prussians neared readiness for the invasion and completely bereft of faith in his ability to restore his own power in France, Louis chose to await foreign assistance rather than shake hands with the notorious Brissot.38

The situation at Koblenz remained precarious as the Allies struggled to organize their forces at Koblenz. The Russian invasion of Poland in April 1792 had left the Austrians and Prussians reluctant to send their best regiments to the west. By July, Austria possessed approximately 56,000 troops in Belgium and 6,000 on the right bank of the Rhine ready for operations while Prussian preparations remained incomplete. Regardless, Allied policy rather than bayonets did more to radicalize French politics than to defeat French armies. Even before the commencement of the war, émigré leaders at Koblenz had worked for a general declaration against the principles of the Revolution. On 25 July, they succeeded in offering Brunswick’s signature to a document that became known as the “Brunswick Manifesto.” Through the manifesto, Brunswick announced his intention to protect French lives and property unless the public threatened the royal family. He pledged to destroy Paris with “an exemplary and unforgettable vengeance” should “the least violence, the least outrage, be done to their majesties.” Espousing rhetoric as extreme as any offered by the most militaristic revolutionaries, Brunswick warned that he would “deliver the city of Paris to military punishment and total destruction.”39 Considering Austro-Prussian unpreparedness for offensive operations, the Brunswick Manifesto constituted an empty threat. Nonetheless, it provided evidence for Brissot’s claims regarding a foreign conspiracy to overturn the Revolution.

Brunswick’s manifesto reached the Parisian press on 1 August. Its arrival corresponded to a growing antimonarchical movement in the capital. On 20 June, a mob

38 D’Huart, Brissot, 167, asserts that “Brissot continued to pursue his goal: the fall of the monarchy.”
invaded the Tuileries Palace and harassed the royal family. Louis XVI had participated in the celebrations of the fall of the Bastille on 14 July. Yet the Jacobins viewed this as a threat and rallied against him. On 15 July, Danton demanded the king’s exile and the election of a new city government. In addition, he urged the dismissal and arrest of Lafayette and all who were responsible for the military setbacks. Before the arrival of the Brunswick Manifesto, over one-half of the forty-eight Paris sections signed an appeal that included these demands: forty-seven of forty-eight sections signed the petition on 3 August. The *sans-culottes* of the Faubourg St. Antoine ordered the Legislative Assembly to dismiss Louis by the 9th or face an urban uprising. Led by Danton, the sections of Paris orchestrated an armed attack on the Tuileries on 10 August that compelled the royal family to seek asylum in the Legislative Assembly. Either convinced that the king and queen were behind the Brunswick Manifesto or fearing the mob, the deputies arrested the royal family and imprisoned them in the Temple.40

The fall of the monarchy proved too radical for Lafayette, who now commanded the Army of the North. On 19 August, he called on the troops to restore the king to full power. Refusing to follow Lafayette’s lead, the troops shouted “*Vive l’Assemblée!*”, forcing the marquis to defect to the Austrians.41

In the aftermath of these tumultuous events, Dumouriez’s invasion of Belgium was temporarily suspended. On 24 August, Brunswick captured the important fortress of Longwy and advanced toward Verdun. Appointed to command the Army of the North, Dumouriez attempted to convince his war council at Sedan of the need to invade Belgium, which he hoped would compel the Austrians to refrain from supporting Brunswick. The restored minister of war, Servan, urged Dumouriez to defend Paris by attacking Brunswick’s army. Yet Dumouriez remained committed to the Belgian plan until learning of the fall of Verdun.

41 Howe, *Foreign Policy and the French Revolution*, 92-3.
Allied pressure forced the French to pursue a defensive strategy, which actually led to their victory over Brunswick at Valmy on 20 September. Dumouriez attempted to negotiate with the Prussians in order to gain their withdrawal from the war and support for an independent Belgium. Frederick William and Brunswick considered Dumouriez’s offer, but political events outpaced their talks.42

Although stopped at Valmy, Brunswick’s invasion did more to radicalize Revolutionary politics than to defeat French armies. News of the fall of Verdun on 2 September had contributed to Parisian paranoia, which culminated in the September Massacres. Enflamed by radical journalists such as Jean-Paul Marat, the mob invaded Paris’s prisons and executed between 1200 to 1400 prisoners, including innocent women and children. The Paris Commune took no action to stop these murders, which lasted until 7 September. The day after Valmy, 21 September, the newly formed National Convention proclaimed the First French Republic. Receiving news of the declaration of a republic, the Prussians discontinued all negotiations with Dumouriez and refused further discussion unless the French restored Louis. Nonetheless, Dumouriez’s control of the French war effort reached its peak: his ally, Pierre Lebrun, already the minister of foreign affairs, became provisional minister of war on 30 September. Consequently, Dumouriez received overall command of the Army of the North, the Army of the Center, and the Army of the Ardennes.43 On 6 October he gained the Provisional Executive Council’s authorization to command an expedition to the Austrian Netherlands, which Brunswick’s capture of Verdun had postponed.44

The National Convention constituted the primary legislative body of the First French Republic. Formed amid the first Allied invasion of France, it adopted extraordinary measures to revive French fortunes. In addition, the National Convention reflected a further

43 Howe, *Foreign Policy and the French Revolution*, 102-3.
44 RACSP, 1:100.
radicalization of the Revolution. Before Valmy, Danton called for “audacity, and more audacity” and for a national uprising to win the war.\textsuperscript{45} Despite the rise of the radical Jacobins and anti-Girondins such as Robespierre in the Convention, Brissot retained a prominent position, elected as one of the first secretaries of the Convention and continuing to be a member of the reorganized Diplomatic Committee. Accordingly, he exercised an important influence over the Republic’s foreign policy. Most important, Brissot withdrew his earlier criticisms of Dumouriez and defended him from Jacobin attacks.\textsuperscript{46} Brissot’s support for Dumouriez reflected a convergence of their objectives: resuming an invasion of the Austrian Netherlands after Valmy in order to transform the map of Western Europe. The restored alliance between Brissot and Dumouriez provided the official foreign policy of the National Convention between October 1792 and March 1793: a crucial period in which France waged war for its natural frontiers.

Rather than regrouping at Luxembourg to resume the offensive, the Austrians and Prussians withdrew to their base of operations. Clerfayt departed Brunswick’s headquarters and retreated to Belgium, which the Austrians believed the French would soon invade. Similarly, Austrian forces under Feldzeugmeister Friedrich William von Hohenlohe-Kirchberg failed to support Brunswick’s left flank and began to evacuate Alsace. Understandably, Brunswick felt unable to face the French alone and sought safety on the Rhine. In fact, by the end of October Brunswick’s army had moved into camps on the right bank.\textsuperscript{47}

The Allied collapse corresponded with a multi-front French counter-offensive initiated by Dumouriez. Although Howe asserts that Dumouriez focused solely on Belgium, his support for a general offensive demonstrates the influence of Brissot’s wider

\textsuperscript{45} “Pour la levée en masse,” 2 September 1792, in Fribourg, \textit{Discours de Danton}, 171-3.
\textsuperscript{46} Ellery, \textit{Brisso\textsuperscript{t}}, 304.
revolutionary war policy. While Dumouriez prepared to invade Belgium, other French armies received orders to extend France’s frontiers. Mainly because of his support of French émigrés, Victor Amadeus III of Piedmont-Sardinia – whose daughter was married to Louis XVI’s brother, the Count of Provence – earned the ire of the National Convention. Accordingly, General Montesquiou invaded Savoy with the Army of the Midi on 21 September. After encountering minor resistance, Montesquiou occupied Chambery while a detachment of the Army of the Midi captured the county of Nice. Closer to Dumouriez’s front, the Army of the Center under General François-Christophe de Kellerman received orders to capture Trier. Seconding Kellerman’s invasion of Trier, General Adam Philippe Custine would lead a detachment of the Rhine Army – called the Army of the Vosges – into the Palatinate. On 10 October, Dumouriez spoke before the National Convention in Paris: “Liberty will triumph everywhere. Guided by philosophy, it will travel the universe, it will sit on all thrones after eradicating despotism, which has crushed the people. . . . This war will be the last.” After giving the speech, Dumouriez returned to Sedan to prepare the Army of Belgium for the invasion.

In mid-October, Dumouriez advanced to Grandpré with approximately 45,000 troops while Kellerman, following Dumouriez’s orders, led the Army of the Center toward Dombasle-sur-Meurthe. General Arthur Dillon – the brother of the unfortunate Théobald Dillon – commanded Dumouriez’s advance guard and approached Verdun. On 24 October, the representatives in the Nord département reported that Dumouriez’s troops “burn with the desire to gain vengeance for the patrie for all the crimes committed by the barbarians on the frontier.” By the end of the month, the Provisional Executive Council of the National

49 Dumouriez quoted in D’Huart, *Brisot*, 179.
50 Representatives to National Convention, Le Quesnoy, 24 October 1792, in *RACSP*, 1:190-1.
Convention granted Dumouriez the title *lieutenant général des armées de la République commandant en chef de l'expédition de la Belgique*.\(^{51}\)

On 6 November, Dumouriez defeated the Austrians near Mons at the battle of Jemappes. After learning of the victory, the Provisional Executive Council insisted that Dumouriez allow the Austrians no relief. On the 16\(^{th}\) it instructed him to ensure all efforts to destroy the Austrian armies in Belgium. The government’s orders focused primarily on strategic issues yet referenced French commitment to foreign civilians. As the council explained to Dumouriez, he must prevent the Austrians from regrouping to launch a new offensive against France. Dumouriez even received the authorization to pursue the Austrians into Dutch territory in the event they retreated to the Netherlands. In so doing, the Provisional Executive Council observed that the prohibition of commerce on the Scheldt River contradicted the natural law that formed the basis of the French war effort. Curiously, the council stated that the Scheldt’s waters belonged to the people around it and that no foreign power could prohibit its use. The Provisional Executive Council made these declarations with an eye toward public opinion in Belgium, stating that the Belgians would benefit from freedom of navigation on the Scheldt. Moreover, all nations of Europe would realize that the French sought to help others in addition to strengthening themselves. Thus, the council ordered Dumouriez to ensure the free navigation of the Scheldt while pursuing the Austrian army.\(^{52}\)

Even as the Provisional Executive Council granted authority to Dumouriez, the National Convention sought to ensure civilian control over the Republic’s armies. Learning from the crisis of the spring and summer that generals could not be trusted to execute government policy, the Convention appointed several of its members to serve as

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., 1:206-7.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 1:239-40.
Map 6. Operations in Germany 1792-1797
“representatives on mission” within the field armies. Originally given the title of “commissars of the Convention,” these politicians became crucial to the French war effort between 1792 and 1795. On 30 November, the Convention appointed Armand-Gaston Camus, Jean-François Delacroix, Constant-Joseph-César-Eugène Gossuin, Jean-Baptiste Treilhard, Pierre-François Joseph Robert, Merlin de Douai, and Danton to the Army of Belgium. The Provisional Executive Council charged them primarily to investigate the condition of Dumouriez’s army.

Ultimately, the commissars of the Convention produced an extensive report that drew attention to serious problems with the army’s condition. On 4 December they reported the worrisome news that many of the volunteers had departed the army for their homes with arms and baggage: “it appears to us inconceivable that the French, the soldiers of liberty, would return in such great numbers to their foyers, before the war has ended.” They attributed the desertion to rumors that the patrie was no longer en danger. As the call for volunteers included the clause “until the time that the patrie is no longer in danger” the volunteers believed they had the right to return home. Clearly, the citizen army of Revolutionary France was not designed for a war of conquest. These problems loomed large as the Provisional Executive Council deliberated over Dumouriez’s proposal for an invasion of Holland. While the council expressed sympathy for the Dutch revolutionaries, it focused on the need to “utilize all the Republic’s forces against the enemies who first attacked us; accordingly, continue to pursue the Austrians: drive them all the way to the Rhine.”

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53 Biard, Missionnaires de la République, 32-40.
54 Le Moniteur, 14:550.
56 Commissars of Belgium to National Convention, 4 December 1792, in RACSP, 1:289-90.
57 Ibid., 1:295-6.
As with the Army of Belgium, Paris took control of the periphery by sending commissars of the Convention to monitor the situation in Alsace. Initially, the Convention sent Charles Antoine Chasset and Claude Ambroise Régnier to the Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin, and Vosges départements. On 1 October, the minister of war, Servan, informed the Provisional Executive Council that the Republic’s armies needed a general reorganization because the theater of war had grown considerably since April. Accordingly, Custine received command of the 14,300 troops that formed the Army of the Vosges. Even before officially receiving command of the Vosges Army, Custine captured Speyer on 30 September 1792. By early October, Custine had taken Worms, Mainz, and Frankfurt as well.

By October, French interest in the Rhineland owed little to the presence of émigrés. The Allied invasion of France revealed the émigrés to be a minimal threat. However, as one of the wealthiest and most productive regions of Europe, the Rhineland offered a seductive target for French expansion. The Rhineland benefitted from generally fertile soil that produced grains, wine, and fruits that met the needs of the local population. Coal mines in the vicinity of Aachen provided another important resource. A growing textile industry at Aachen and its suburbs and a silk industry in Krefeld provided potential resources for export. Although seigneurialism had failed to realize the region’s full potential, the Rhineland enjoyed general economic prosperity during the ancien régime.

Despite the relative economic stability, the French felt confident that they could exploit social divisions within the Rhineland by instituting the new regime. Like most of Europe, Rhenish society was divided into two basic orders: the privileged and the non-privileged estates. The clergy and nobility enjoyed privileges while the bourgeoisie, peasants,

58 Ibid., 1:lv-lvi.
59 Ibid., 1:81-2; Le Moniteur, 14:103-4; Chuquet, L’expédition de Custine (Paris: Cerf, 1892), 52; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:31.
60 Louis Baraguey d’Hilliers, ed. Mémoires du général Custine rédigés par un de ses aides-de-camp (Frankfurt: 1794), 1:33-44.
61 Sagnac, Rhin française, 36-8.
and workers remained deprived of many rights and shouldered the bulk of the tax burden. Clergy remained extremely powerful in the ecclesiastical estates. The nobility lived in numerous castles that dotted the countryside. Most of the high nobility derived from Austrian-stock and enjoyed ownership of the wealthiest domains. For example, the Metternich family held property near Bonn. Yet the Rhineland possessed a growing middle class in urban areas: especially Köln, Aachen, and Mainz. The numerous imperial free cities offered a more independent existence for the middle class. Many areas enjoyed a high degree of municipal freedom that proved attractive to young merchants, lawyers, doctors, and scholars. In regions that possessed good soil, peasant life could be very pleasant though not without complaints; in some regions, especially the Hunsrück, it was very poor. Only in these areas could Rhenish society be characterized by a prevailing malaise. Nonetheless, the Rhineland did not anxiously await liberation in 1792 because “shambolic territorial arrangements and surviving medieval forms did not prevent the Rhineland from experiencing economic recovery in the eighteenth century.”

Despite the region’s economic and social stability, the French thought that the intellectual and philosophic Zeitgeist of the Rhineland would lead to their welcome entry. After taking Speyer, Custine issued a proclamation declaring the inhabitants to be “his brothers and his friends” and “placed a flag of liberty upon his cap.” French optimism could be attributed to the German Aufklärung, which had flourished in the universities along the left bank of the Rhine. While the French disdained Germanic rulers, they initially expected the people of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller to respond favorably to their campaign for universal liberty. Although the University of Köln remained noted for strict Catholicism, the University of Bonn had a reputation for

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62 Rowe, Reich to State, 15.
63 Mémoires du Custine, 1:49.
being liberal. The University of Mainz—possibly the most impressive German university behind the University of Göttingen—constituted the intellectual center of the Rhineland. Several key members of the pro-French Mainz Republic taught at the University of Mainz including Johannes von Müller, Georg Christian Wedekind, Samuel Thomas Sömmering, and Georg Förster. As universities and schools multiplied, the French language spread, as did a love for French literature. Accordingly, the Rhineland boasted a cosmopolitan elite that attempted to reform society. German national sentiment remained weak as the intelligentsia often viewed themselves as citizens of the world without absolute attachment to the Holy Roman Emperor or to their princes. The French believed, with some evidence, that these elites would welcome them as fellow brothers in a universal crusade for liberty. Yet the mass of the population remained fervently religious and tied to tradition.64

The experience of Custine’s invasion demonstrated the naivety inherent in the initial conceptions of the war. Custine’s expedition resulted from the French government’s desire to transform the map of Western Europe by ending imperial control of the Rhineland. Yet France technically remained at peace with the Holy Roman Empire. Most of the Rhenish princes agreed with the ruler of Bavaria that war should be avoided. In fact, the imperial Reichstag did not acknowledge a state of war until 22 March 1793.65 Nonetheless, Custine’s declaration of liberation after occupying Mainz on 21 October 1792 provoked a mass exodus of Rhenish nobles and clergy to the right bank. Although Rhenish peasants took the opportunity to plunder noble estates and plant liberty trees in the presence of French troops, the liberators soon discovered little concrete enthusiasm for revolution.66 Only the small minority of radicals at Mainz demonstrated clear support for the French, although neither side would agree on the future of the Rhineland. The main problem for the French was that the

radicals proved a small minority without widespread support. Moreover, the Army of the Vosges encountered severe supply problems that proved systemic to all French armies during the ensuing war of conquest. Accordingly, Custine led an expedition to Frankfurt on the right bank of the Rhine to gather supplies and money for the army. In addition, he levied requisitions on the local inhabitants. Commenting on the entry of French troops into Mainz, Förster remarked: “The people received them in a kind of gloomy silence, without any vigorous signs of opposition, but without any applause and without any rejoicing.”

Although Custine’s army reached Mainz despite the army’s logistical problems, other French armies proved far less successful. On 1 October, Kellerman’s Army of the Center officially became the Army of the Moselle in a wave of patriotic elation following its victory over the Prussians at Valmy. By the end of October, Brunswick’s withdrawal and the commencement of the invasions of Belgium and the Palatinate by Dumouriez and Custine provided the opportunity for Kellerman to strike through Trier. On 24 October, the Provisional Executive Council ordered him to leave his cantonments and commence an offensive operation to capture Trier and Koblenz. However, Kellerman stated that insufficient supplies left his army unequipped for the Trier expedition. In particular, he warned that he could not prevent desertion, as the volunteers felt that Valmy had brought the war of national defense to an end. Kellerman defied the Provisional Executive Council’s order as well as an appeal from Custine for support.

On 4 November 1792, the new minister of war, Jean-Nicolas Pache, met with the Provisional Executive Council to discuss several dispatches from Custine, Kellerman, and

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67 Rowe, *Reich to State*, 54.
68 According to Jean Louis Camille Gay de Vernon: “Our expedition to the right bank of the Rhine was due entirely to pecuniary considerations. The treasury of the army was empty. . . . Our incursion into a rich and defenseless country was to procure us the money of which we were in such dire need.” *Mémoires sur les opérations militaires des généraux en chef Custine et Houchard* (Paris: 1844), 74.
Biron. In a letter of 30 October, Custine denounced Kellerman before the National Convention, referring to the hero of Valmy as “unworthy of the name of general, more worthy of directing the forces of the Republic.” The Executive Council accepted Custine’s plan and reissued the order for Kellerman to support his operation with an offensive on the Moselle. After Kellerman again refused, the Convention summoned him to Paris and appointed him to command the newly-formed Army of the Alps.

General Pierre de Reul Beurnonville replaced Kellerman as commander of the Moselle Army. Formerly a lieutenant-general under Dumouriez, the forty-year-old Beurnonville submissively executed the Provisional Executive Council’s campaign plan despite agreeing with Kellerman that the army remained unprepared. Beurnonville admitted in private that he considered Custine’s proposed expedition a “geographical dream” that completely ignored the logistical difficulties the army would face in an advance to Trier. After reaching his headquarters on 14 November, Beurnonville prepared for the Trier expedition, which commenced on 4 December amid fierce winter snows. By 15 December, Beurnonville’s 20,000-man Army of the Moselle had failed to make significant progress toward Trier. Confirming Kellerman’s prediction, the soldiers deserted en masse because they lacked adequate boots and clothing. Beurnonville retreated to Saarlouis on the 17th, having lost a total of 4,000 men to desertion during the campaign.

The French invasion of Belgium, Trier, and Mainz occurred before the government finalized a coherent occupation policy. Military operations outpaced government policy and forced the National Convention, the Diplomatic Committee, and the Provisional Executive Council to devise plans amid ongoing debates over France’s relationship with neighboring states. French advances into Belgium, Trier, the Palatinate, and Savoy demonstrated the

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74 *RACSP*, 1:223-4.
75 Chuquet, *Custine*, 161.
76 Ibid., 167, 171.
ambitious goals of Brissotin foreign policy. Moreover, Brissot used the Diplomatic Committee to threaten Geneva with a military intervention. In general, Brissotin policy stated that France must “surround itself with a belt of free peoples, which it must assist and aid, and that nature has marked the borders of its territory.”

The policy of “réunions” provided the logical justification for French expansion. Rather than aiming to conquer foreign peoples, the French would liberate oppressed populations in Belgium, the Rhineland, and Savoy and reattach them to their “natural country.” Although Brissot orchestrated the war partly to corrode Louis XVI’s authority in France, he held larger objectives, which included setting “all Europe ablaze.” As he explained, “If we push back our frontiers to the Rhine, if in the future the Pyrenees divide none but free peoples, our liberty will be firmly established.” Such statements decisively departed from traditional French foreign policy objectives by combining Enlightenment concepts of natural frontiers and republican ideology. The nation would gain security through the universality of its ideals and the defensive barriers established by nature.

Nonetheless, Brissot remained somewhat unclear over the full extent of French territorial expansion. Most likely, he initially preferred an uncommitted posture because the issue remained one of intense controversy in French politics. On one hand, several deputies to the National Convention emerged who radically opposed French conquest. Led by Desmoulins and Georges Couthon, this group claimed that expansion would make the Republic appear monarchist and hypocritical: “We must fear looking like kings by linking Savoy to the Republic,” declared Desmoulins. For his part, Robespierre claimed that supporting foreigners would weaken France. In his view, the Republic should strengthen its own polity and pursue peace as quickly as possible. In addition, Robespierre feared that

77 Belissa, Fraternité universelle, 316.
generals would accumulate substantial political power by ruling foreign territories, a power they could ultimately use against the Republic. Danton represented the opposite extreme: “I say that we have the right to say to the peoples: you will have no more kings. The French cannot allow these people who aspire to liberty to nevertheless give themselves a government contrary to our interests, and that will simply fall to kings, because it would furnish without end more tyrants that we would have to fight.”\textsuperscript{80} In \textit{Le Patriote française}, Brissot supported Danton’s declaration: “We must not allow the peoples to give themselves over to despots.”\textsuperscript{81} As the war of conquest progressed, Brissot became increasingly supportive of the réunions policy, the most important aspect of which remained France’s claim to the Rhine.

Thus, for the first time in French history, the theory of natural frontiers became a prominent idea among figures with real positions of power. Specifically, those who favored the réunions policy often utilized the concept of Gallic frontiers as a justification for expansion. Clootz addressed France’s claim to the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps in his \textit{Adresse aux Savoisiens}, in which he claimed that France’s natural frontiers conformed to those of ancient Gaul. Those frontiers, he argued, “must be repatriated under the safeguard of the rights of man.”\textsuperscript{82} While Clootz advocated for French expansion to natural frontiers mainly because he believed that French rule would improve the lives of the people in those territories, most French patriots depicted the réunions policy as a benefit to French national interests. For example, Jacques Hébert claimed in \textit{Le Père Duchesne} that, unlike the monarchy, the Republic must benefit from its conquests by not returning the territories it gained. Similarly, Brissot argued in his newspaper that the rights of réunion depended on French national interests rather than the desire of the people in the annexed areas. Nonetheless, Brissot viewed ideologically conformist neighbors as the main requirement of

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Le Patriote français}, 30 September 1792, no. 1147.  
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{AP}, 52:232.
French national interests. Later articulations of the natural frontiers policy rested on strategic and economic arguments that owed more to realpolitik than ideology.\footnote{Belissa, \textit{Fraternité universelle}, 321.}

The National Convention’s decrees of November and December 1792 articulated French war aims and occupation policy in the conquered territories. In early November, the National Convention voted to accept appeals from popular assemblies in Savoy for réunion with France. On 10 November, the Convention discussed proposals for réunion from assemblies in Nassau, Zweibrücken, Nassau-Sarrebrück, and Darmstadt. The 19 November decree served to regulate the process by which the National Convention responded to these appeals. Despite its perception by other European powers, it did not declare war against all of Europe and it did not state that France would export the principles of the Revolution throughout the world. Rather, the decree stated that the French nation would offer “fraternity and assistance to all peoples seeking to recover their liberty.” While the specific form of “fraternity and assistance” could vary depending on the circumstances, the Convention charged “the executive power to give orders to the generals necessary to bring assistance to those people.” To ensure local support, the Convention published the decree in the various languages of the people already liberated by French armies.\footnote{\textit{AP}, 53:474-5.} During the debate, Brissot actually recommended postponing the decree’s adoption until the Diplomatic Committee, on which he served as a prominent member, reviewed its statements. Nonetheless, the November decree demonstrates the influence of republican cosmopolitanism and the natural boundary theory on the foreign policy of the Girondins, which became the dominant opinion in the Convention in November. “In the natural order, all men must be considered part of a single family that has been divided by tyrants,” declared one representative.\footnote{Ibid.} These policies
contrasted radically with the National Assembly’s rather cold response to Clootz’s *comité des étrangers* in the early days of the Revolution.

The prevailing idea among the Brissotins aimed for a strengthened France that surrounded itself with a belt of republican neighbors. France would grow stronger by possessing its natural frontiers, which corresponded to those of ancient Gaul. In fact, Brissot thought that France should first strengthen itself before it offered support to others. Accordingly, he broke with Clootz because he viewed Clootz’s support for a universal republic as a system that would overcommit France and lead to anarchy, a situation that would permit the European despots to easily restore their full power. Brissot defined his system as such: “Unity of French départements, extension to the boundaries that we have been given by nature.”

Brissot’s advocacy for the natural frontiers arose alongside an increasingly sophisticated definition of natural frontiers provided by the deputy, L. S. Mercier. According to his treatise, “the secret plan of nature” had traced “geographic circles” that corresponded to the territory of nations. Mercier insisted that France “run all the way to the Rhine and reunite Savoy, and it would be difficult to find on the map of the world an empire more blessed, with a shape more noble and more imposing.” In addition, Brissot indicated that the réunions policy would not entail a system of equality between a federation of republics. He feared that newly freed peoples would lack the discipline required for republican government, increasing the possibility for the reappearance of despotism. France could not tolerate such a threat and therefore would be force to establish a system of tutelage over Belgium, the Rhineland, and Savoy.

Brisso’s concept of natural frontiers clearly entailed French domination over the occupied territories rather than peaceful liberation and integration. The rather vague idealism

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86 *Le Patriote français*, no. 1202.
88 Ibid.
of the 19 November decree failed to supply a practical method to implement this liberationist project. Content with the requisitions policy adopted by Custine in the Rhineland, the Convention sought to apply this approach systematically in all areas occupied by French armies.\footnote{Custine imposed contributions throughout the Rhineland: Speyer was forced to pay 300,000 livres, Worms lost 600,000 livres, and Mainz paid 500,000 livres. On the right bank of the Rhine, Frankfurt was charged for 2,000,000 livres. The French justified these requisitions by citing specific support given by these cities to the Austro-Prussian war effort. See Biro, \textit{German Policy}, 1:102.} Most important, the Convention aimed to make Belgium economically beneficial for France, since many felt that Dumouriez ruled with too lax an administration. The 15 December 1792 decree provided for the abolition of feudalism and the Old Regime in territories occupied by French armies. New regimes based on popular sovereignty replaced the former authorities. However, the Convention recognized that successful liberation demanded a formal occupation in which French generals and administrators assisted with the reconstruction of the society and government. Moreover, the French could not sacrifice their wealth to promote the interests of foreign populations. Thus, the decree instituted policies that forced the liberated peoples to pay for their freedom.\footnote{\textit{AP}, 55:72-3.} The Brissotin policy of réunions – which aimed for French tutelage over Belgium, the Rhineland, and Savoy – proved the motive behind the 15 December decree, which constituted “the first legislative text that marks the conquering drift of the Convention.”\footnote{Belissa, \textit{Fraternité universelle}, 334.}

The deteriorating logistical condition of Custine’s army and the declining support for French occupation constituted an important context for the National Convention’s December decree. On 2 December, the Provisional Executive Council learned from Custine that Prussian forces had retaken Frankfurt, which they attributed to the treasonous actions of the inhabitants who massacred several French soldiers in an uprising.\footnote{\textit{RACSP}, 1:302.} On 9 December, the National Convention thoroughly discussed Custine’s letter and promised revenge against the
Frankfurt traitors at a later point. On 1 January 1793, Custine reported the arrest of deputies from Frankfurt and the receipt of 450,000 livres from Speyer. Although promising revenge against the inhabitants of Frankfurt, the French continued to treat the Allies as normal enemies and respected traditional laws of war. On 28 January, the Executive Council authorized Custine to send commissioners to negotiate prisoner exchanges with the Allies.

By the beginning of 1793, a lack of clear goals and increasing uncertainty characterized French policy in the Rhineland. To regain Frankfurt, Custine proposed a major operation that would require the halt of French offensives in Belgium and Holland. According to this plan, General Francisco de Miranda would take command of the Army of Belgium while Dumouriez besieged Luxembourg. A reinforced Custine would then conquer the Palatinate, Trier, Mainz, Köln, and Berg. Although Custine desired to attack the Prussians on the right bank of the Rhine, his Army of the Vosges received only minor attention at Paris in terms of French strategy. Although Paris had rejected his proposal, the Provisional Executive Council took important measures relative to Custine’s army. Based on its directions, the national treasury would provide extraordinary funds for the upkeep of French troops in the region. The council also decreed the full implementation of the 15 December decree, fixing rules for generals in foreign lands concerning requisitions. In this manner, the Provisional Executive Council exerted central authority over the Rhineland and over the armies that formed the occupation force. Moreover, the Council remained supportive of Custine: on 15 January 1793 it ordered Beurnonville to “execute all the orders given to him by General Custine.” Yet three days later, it allowed Beurnonville to return to Paris to repair his health; General René Charles de Ligniville took command of the Army of

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94 *RACSP*, 1:378.
95 Ibid., 1:365.
97 *RACSP*, 1:452-3.
98 Ibid., 1:473.
the Moselle. On the 20th, the Provisional Executive Council discussed a plan of campaign between Ligniville and Custine but refrained from taking decisive action.99

The National Convention and the Provisional Executive Council utilized commissars to project the state’s authority on the frontiers. On 18 December, the Convention sent three commissars – Jean Francois Reubell, Nicolas Haussmann, and Antoine-Christophe Merlin de Thionville – to the armies commanded by Biron, Custine, and Beurnonville, respectively.100 They would survey the execution of the decrees of 15 December relative to the armies. In addition, these commissars received power to assess the army’s depots, livres, and magazines. They would examine the conduct of all civilian and military agents and could suspend, remove, or replace all agents who threatened public order. Finally, they could make any requisition necessary for the war effort.101 The commissars arrived at Strasbourg on 25 December and reached Mainz on 1 January 1793.

The reports of the commissars to the National Convention suggest a difficult situation for the French in Alsace and the Rhineland. They reported a large party at Strasbourg that supported a former aristocratic mayor, Frederic Dietrich, that was “powerful” and a “force of counterrevolution.”102 Although the commissars described the people of Mainz as “good and very strongly in favor of our principles,” they remained alarmed by the fall of Frankfurt to the Prussians. Accordingly, they supported Custine’s plan for an expedition into the heart of the Third Germany “to sweep clean the surface of the earth.” In addition, the fate of the executed French soldiers at Frankfurt became a popular justification for their support of the king’s trial and execution: “it was in the name of Louis Capet that the tyrants slaughtered our brothers,

99 Ibid., 1:492.
100 Born in Colmar in 1747, Reubell was a lawyer from Alsace and a deputy to the Estates General for the Third Estate. He was a deputy of the Haut-Rhine département in 1792. Haussmann was born in 1766 and worked at Versailles as an art merchant. He was a member of the Seine-et-Oise département and a deputy to both the Legislative Assembly and National Convention. Merlin de Thionville was born in 1762 and was a lawyer at Metz. He was a deputy of the Moselle to the Legislative Assembly and National Convention.
101 RACSP, 1:341-2.
102 Ibid., 1:366-7.
and we learn that Louis Capet still lives!” At Mainz, Merlin de Thionville urged his colleagues at Paris to condemn Louis XVI – whom he mockingly called a “nationicide” – to death, partially inspired by his proximity to “those who defend us against despotism” on the Rhine. Although not a determining factor in the king’s execution on 21 January, such statements demonstrate the close relationship between politics in Paris and events on the Rhine frontier.

On 13 January, the French orchestrated a ceremony at Mainz that involved a celebration with delegates from the Provisional Convention of Mainz, a provisional governing body that they expected to vote in favor of réunion. Also in attendance were several French generals, deputies from the armies, and members of the local patriotic societies. The former elector’s palace served as the venue for the ceremony. Custine commenced the ceremony with a speech that emphasized the bonds between the French and German people. An inhabitant of Mainz praised French égalité and recalled the purported horrors of imperial despotism. The people of Mainz and the French linked arms and sang hymns of liberty, applauding as the troops fired cannon in the direction of the right bank, where the Prussian army in the vicinity could hear the shots. Festivals occurred throughout the day. Nonetheless, the commissars reported that the troop’s uniforms “remain terribly neglected,” a circumstance they attributed to poor administration and sabotage on the part of ci-devant agents. The commissars ensured that the army did not lack food because they inflicted requisitions on local farmers. Finally, the commissars established the Provisional Convention of Mainz. They promised that the army would no longer suffer from aristocratic agents and negligence on the part of military and civilian agents.

103 Ibid., 1:408-9.
104 Ibid., 1:406-7.
106 RACSP, 1:468-9.
After capturing Frankfurt, the Prussians advanced toward Mainz. The commissars communicated serious concerns over logistics to the National Convention’s Committee of General Defense. On 1 February, they warned that the breakdown of Custine’s occupation “would be ruinous for the Republic.”\(^{107}\) The commissars presented a rather bleak portrait of the situation. Forage remained in extremely short supply despite the Rhineland’s potential to produce grain. The deficiency of forage reflected a general decline in the availability of food several months into the French occupation. Yet the commissars remarked that their army remained better equipped than the enemy, noting that they could only hope “that such would continue to be the case.”\(^{108}\) The increased threat from Allied forces compelled the French to place their hope in the loyalty of the local inhabitants: “we will send you a satisfying report on our political operations, despite the threats from enemy powers searching to frighten those of the inhabitants who proclaim their attachment to the principles of our Revolution.”\(^{109}\) Moreover, the presence of enemy troops raised French scrutiny of their own troops, especially the officers. The commissars doubted the reliability of one lieutenant-colonel of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion of the Seine-et-Oise and placed him on suspension.\(^{110}\) These actions prefigured the war policy that emerged later in the year under the representatives on mission and the Committee of Public Safety.

Although the French encountered military and logistical challenges in the Rhineland, the Republic’s expansionist policy was further elaborated. The National Convention formally annexed Savoy on 27 November 1792. The possible annexation of Belgium and large portions of the Rhineland remained undecided through March 1793. Commissar Haussmann returned to Paris at the end of March with delegates from the Provisional Convention of

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 2:43.  
^{108}\) Ibid., 2:46-7.  
^{109}\) Ibid., 2:68-9.  
^{110}\) Ibid., 2:69.
Mainz who appealed for réunion with France.111 Most important, Dumouriez’s intention to invade the Dutch Republic turned the tide of the war. Driven by a desire to protect Belgium from foreign rivals, Dumouriez sought to revolutionize the Netherlands and create a dependent satellite state. He used the authority vested in him by the Provisional Executive Council to prepare for an invasion and to declare the opening of the Scheldt to commerce. While London could tolerate Revolutionary ideology and even the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793, French occupation of the Low Countries constituted an existential threat to Great Britain, both for economic and security reasons.112 After the British expelled the French ambassador, Chauvelin, the French declared war on 1 February, prompting Dumouriez to invade Holland on 16 February before the British could organize to defend the Dutch. Within the next month, Revolutionary confidence drove the National Convention to declare war on nearly every country with which France had experienced conflict or rivalry. The French declared war against Spain on 7 March, while war with the Holy Roman Empire officially commenced on the 22nd. By the end of the year, France added Naples and all of the Italian states except Genoa and Venice to the list of official enemies.113

The multiplication of the Republic’s foreign enemies drove a radicalization of foreign policy aims and an increased emphasis on French national interests. Brissot wrote to Dumouriez in late November 1792 that “there is one idea which is spreading here [in Paris], namely that the French Republic should have no other frontier than the Rhine.”114 On the Rhine, Custine declared his support for the natural frontiers policy: “If the Rhine is not the border of the Republic, it will perish.”115 On the eve of the declaration of war against Britain, the National Convention became an arena for the final debate on the issue of natural frontiers.

111 Blanning, Reform and Revolution, 288.
113 Blanning, French Revolutionary Wars, 94-5.
115 Custine quoted in Godechot, Grande nation, 1:78.
The most vocal critic of the policy remained Robespierre, who viewed a war of expansion as potentially dangerous for France. Pierre Roger Ducos supported Robespierre in a speech of 31 January, stating that enthusiasm caused the Convention to overlook the hazards of expansion.\textsuperscript{116} Danton dramatically rebuffed Ducos’s warning: “I appeal not to your enthusiasm, but to your reason.” Serving as a Commissar of the Convention in occupied Belgium, Danton rejected the notion that expansion weakened France: “The Republic’s boundaries are marked by nature. We must reach the four corners of the horizon: the Rhine, the ocean, and the Alps. Those must be the established boundaries of the Republic.”\textsuperscript{117} The formal annexations of Nice on 31 January, Belgium between 1 and 30 March, and approximately eighty Rhineland communities between 14 and 30 March signaled the victory of the expansionists in the National Convention.\textsuperscript{118}

Amid these annexations, a strong current of opinion moved even more forcefully than Brissot toward a policy that favored French national interests. In particular, the military engineer and politician, Lazare Carnot, presented a report from the National Convention’s Diplomatic Committee on 14 February 1793. Carnot prepared the report on 11 February after the Convention ordered him to examine the complexities involved in the réunion of conquered territories to the Republic.\textsuperscript{119} The Diplomatic Committee approved Carnot’s report on the 13\textsuperscript{th} and he read it aloud to the Convention the following day. Most historians identify the significance of Carnot’s eighteen-page report by quoting two sentences: “The anciettes and natural limits of France are the Rhine, the Alps, and the Pyrenees…The parts that are presently dismembered have reached that status only through usurpation.”\textsuperscript{120} Although Biro

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{AP}, 38:102.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Blanning, \textit{French Revolution in Germany}, 69.
\textsuperscript{119} Diplomatic Committee to Lazare Carnot, Paris, 11 February 1793, in Charavay, 1:360. Charavay provides the definitive collection of Carnot’s correspondence.
\textsuperscript{120} Godechot, in \textit{Grande nation}, 1:79, quotes Carnot at the conclusion of the paragraph that describes the natural frontiers policy of the Girondins. He provides no qualification of Carnot’s statement.
quotes the report in more detail, he agrees with Godechot that it indicates Carnot’s support for the Rhine policy of Brissot.\textsuperscript{121} At face-value, Carnot’s reference of the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps conforms to the Brissotin concept of the natural frontiers. Yet Carnot explained his theory of expansion in terms that differed from standard Brissotin policy.

Opposed to the heady idealism of Girondin expansionism, Carnot’s theory of annexation stressed \textit{raison d’état}. Carnot praised the law of 15 December for ensuring that French honor would protect the liberty of the people they conquered. He considered foreign people who recognized the rights of man to be “natural allies.”\textsuperscript{122} Yet he insisted that the law did not oblige the French to reunite foreign allies to the Republic unless it strongly served the interests of France and contributed to the general security of the Republic. Confronted by demands for réunion from numerous “adjacent countries and enclaves,” Carnot advised the Convention to examine carefully the consequences and demands of each particular case.\textsuperscript{123} He argued that all political matters must be resolved by two considerations: the interests of the French public and the security of \textit{la patrie}. “It would be absurd for a nation to act against its proper interests,” he asserted. “And it would be heinous if [the nation] wounded the interests of others without an essential need for itself.”\textsuperscript{124} Unlike Brissot, Carnot did not view the French war effort as an ideological crusade but as an effort to strengthen France. Accordingly, réunions did not serve to establish tutelage over a newly freed people in order to prepare them for representative government: it served to improve French power and security.

Carnot conceived an international political order in which nations functioned like individuals in a social order. He contended that nations merited certain basic rights including independence, safety from abroad, internal unity, and national honor. The political order

\textsuperscript{121} Biro, in \textit{German Policy}, 1:110, states the Carnot’s opinion “was in consonance therewith” the idea of annexing the left bank of the Rhine as a natural frontier. Like Godechot, he provides no qualification.
\textsuperscript{122} “Report of Carnot on the Reunion of Monaco and Other Countries to the Territory of the Republic,” 14 February 1793, in Charavay, 1:364.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 1:363.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 1: 365.
should function to defend those rights. According to Carnot, two general maxims established the difference between justice and injustice. First, the safety of the state legitimizes all political actions. Second, actions that damage the interests of other states are unjust unless they serve the state’s essential needs. Carnot applied these maxims to the theory of réunions and concluded: “No réunion, augmentation, decrease or change of territory can take place in the boundaries of the Republic without recognizing: 1) that that change is not contrary to the interests of the state; 2) that the communities concerned by those changes have demanded it by a free and formal voice, or that the general security of the Republic renders it indispensable.”

Thus, Carnot argued that France could annex territories even if the people in those areas did not support réunion: safety of the state trumped all other considerations.

Amid the enthusiasm for a war of expansion that reigned in the National Convention, Carnot’s report echoed the speeches of Robespierre and Roger Ducos in drawing attention to the potential dangers of expansion. He provided several examples in which expansion would violate the interests of the state. Moreover, he repeated that the identification of France as the protector of universal liberty did not necessarily indicate support for réunion. The possibility existed for the Republic to refuse a country’s demand for annexation: “If the aggregation of that country, instead of consolidating the mass of our forces, only divides or exhausts them; if instead of defining and rounding out the territory with formidable barriers, the annexation stretches us beyond our limites naturelles…one could reject the voice of the community that demanded its reunion.”

Carnot rejected the notion that the idea of a universal republic demanded French expansion. Rather, he advised setting an example of republican unity in France that foreign peoples with similar desires would be led to imitate independently. “To say that sovereignty

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125 Ibid., 1:363-6.
126 Ibid., 1:366.
resides in the universality of mankind, is to say that France is only a portion of that sovereign,” he remarked.127 Therefore, France possessed no inherent right to force its body of laws on even the smallest country unless it served the public interest. Carnot warned that unrestrained annexations provided the Republic’s “most implacable enemies” the opportunity to voice opposition: “Nothing could impede the rise in a legislative corps of a mass of anti-popular opinion, which would plunge the Republic into chaos and confuse its principles.” Thus, annexations should serve the interests of the Republic by increasing its strength and national prosperity. While Carnot admitted that a powerful nation could gain glory through the incorporation of “a weak people worthy of being dignified by liberty,” his argument in favor of annexation stressed technical military factors like “greater security on the frontiers and a simplified means of defense.”

Carnot provided additional clarification on his second point: that the decision for territorial changes depended on the opinion of the communities in question or the absolute security of the Republic. While he believed that raison d’état trumped any of the Republic’s ideological commitments, he insisted that the process of annexation would ideally occur following a formal and free transaction. He maintained that no country could adjust the laws of another without consent. Carnot’s belief in the security of the state as a first principle provided the single exception to this general rule. While he reaffirmed that France would not arbitrarily impose law on foreign people, he considered the need to prevent any people from imposing law on France itself to be an overriding principle. Carnot stated that it would be better to violate the sovereign right of a foreign country than to sacrifice the means to effectively defend the frontiers of the Republic. Moreover, failure to respect the primacy of national security in all matters would encourage anarchy: “Each section of the Republic

127 Ibid., 1:367.
would claim the right to exercise its individual sovereignty . . . and would refuse all
collection, all assistance to the public good, and all obedience to the general laws of the
state.”

In addition, Carnot regretted that the inconsistent execution of the 15 December
decree that related to contributions and requisitions from foreign countries deprived the
Republic of “all that was promised by the ardor and the intrepidity of our soldiers.” Fearing
that humanistic concerns could undermine national security in the future, Carnot declared that
“war is a state of violence, you must wage it excessively or go home.” Such proto-
Clausewitzian notions of war soon provided the driving energy behind the Republic’s
military effort.

Finally, Carnot proceeded from the theoretical to the practical application of these
principles of annexation. To begin, he addressed the burning question of the day:

The *anciennes* and natural limits of France are the Rhine, the Alps, and the
Pyrenees; the parts that have been dismembered have only reached that state by usurpation; there would therefore be, according to ordinary rules, no injustice in their return; there would be no ambition in recognizing as brothers those who once were, to restore ties that were broken only by ambition itself.

Although Carnot clearly referenced the Rhine as a natural frontier, uncritically equating this
statement to the Rhine policy of Brissot and the Girondins overlooks the context and the
rationalization that he provided. On one hand, Carnot rejected the notion that France
possessed an unconditional right to the territories in question: “The invariable right of each
nation is to live in isolation, if that is what it desires, or to unite with others, if they desire it in
turn, for the general good.” Yet the major theme of Carnot’s report remained *raison d’état*,
which in his view proved far more important than popular sovereignty. Thus, Carnot

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129 Ibid., 1:368.
130 Ibid., 1:369.
131 Ibid., 1:369-70.
132 Ibid., 1:370.

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reminded the National Convention that the main consideration relating to annexations must be whether they would serve French national interests.

Although Carnot accepted the legitimacy of French claims to the natural frontiers, his report does not directly advocate outright annexation of the territories under consideration. Indeed, Carnot complained that the majority of territories that applied for réunion failed to follow the legal procedures outlined by the 15 December decree. He recommended that their claims be ignored until the local assemblies conformed to proper order. In fact, his report only recommended réunion for Monaco and Schomberg. On 1 March 1793, two weeks after Dumouriez’s invasion of the Netherlands, Carnot presented an additional report from the Diplomatic Committee that supported the annexation of Brussels. In this instance, he appeared to have joined the vocal patriots in viewing expansion as crucial for French interests: “I will not examine the many respective interests of the two peoples for the desired réunion. In this moment a single one must concern us: national glory, the commitment that we have taken to assist and defend all the peoples who seek to achieve their liberty.” While Carnot’s support for expansion in early 1793 reflected his acceptance of the war of conquest, understanding his emerging philosophy of raison d’état clarifies his rejection of the Rhine as a natural frontier when he directed the Republic’s war effort the following year. By 1794, Carnot believed that the war of expansion threatened French interests and that France should abandon the pursuit of natural frontiers.

The failure of Dumouriez’s invasion of the Netherlands and the military crisis that France faced in the spring and summer of 1793 partially explains the change in Carnot’s attitude. In February, Beurnonville became minister of war after the former minister, Pache,

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133 Advising the annexation of the former, Carnot emphasized that the small port city would provide the Republic a fortified point at the southern tip of the Alps. He advised the annexation of Schomberg because its inhabitants followed perfectly the procedures outlined by the Assembly. Ibid., 1:370-80.

fell out of favor with the National Convention. While Dumouriez invaded Holland, Beurnonville ordered the observance of an “imposing defensive” from the Atlantic coast to the Rhine River. Instead, the French position collapsed in the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Rhineland. On 1 March, Prince Coburg attacked Miranda’s forces at Aachen, where the inhabitants joined the Austrian troops in expelling the French. Coburg’s assault compelled Dumouriez to terminate his offensive in Holland to protect his lines of operation. On 18 March, Coburg defeated Dumouriez north of Namur at Neerwinden. Dumouriez attempted to defend Louvain but ultimately retreated west to Brussels on the 22nd. In the Rhineland, Brunswick gathered 80,000 troops on the right bank of the Rhine and crossed the river north of Mainz on 17 March. Although Custine launched a counterattack, his outnumbered forces proved no match for the Prussians. Custine left 27,000 troops at Mainz and retreated south to Worms with the bulk of his army. Brunswick posted a contingent to cover Mainz and continued the offensive while an Austrian army crossed the Rhine at Speyer. By the end of March, Custine had evacuated the Rhineland-Palatinate and prepared to defend Alsace. On 2 April, the National Convention received the most stunning news: after failing to lead his troops against the Austrians, Dumouriez attempted to rally them against the Republic and called for a restoration of the monarchy. The refusal of the troops to follow his lead compelled Dumouriez to surrender to the Austrians!135

Repeating the cycle of the previous summer and fall, Allied success radicalized Revolutionary politics. In February 1793, Dubois-Crancé called for a levée of 300,000 troops to reinforce the weakened armies on the frontiers. The National Convention’s appeal for soldiers raised few troops and generated animosity against conscription in certain regions of France. After Dumouriez’s treason, the National Convention took emergency measures to facilitate this legislation. In March, it created eighty-two “representatives on mission” to

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oversee conscription in the provinces and maintain order and subordination in the field armies. On 6 April, Danton gained support for the creation of a Committee of Public Safety, an executive body that became the key instrument of the Reign of Terror yet also proved crucial for the organization of the French war effort.\footnote{Biard, Missionnaires, 42-4; Lefebvre, French Revolution, 2:49.} The former champion of the national frontiers and the Girondin war of expansion quickly moderated his views on foreign policy. Danton recognized that the provocative decrees of November and December 1792 simply emboldened the commitment of the European powers to crush the Republic. While enthusiasm led him to advocate such aggressive policies following Dumouriez’s victories, political sensitivity urged caution in the context of defeat.\footnote{For the transformation of Danton from a hawk to a moderate dove in 1793, see Lawday, Danton, 196. Lawday argues that Danton “lost his head” following Dumouriez’s victories in 1792, but that the defeats in the spring of 1793 “brought a further change of mind. Natural frontiers did not look so compelling now.”} Thus, on 13 April 1793 Danton successfully convinced the National Convention to repeal the entire Girondin foreign policy agenda:

\begin{quote}
In a moment of enthusiasm you passed measures whose motives were without doubt just, in that you assumed the obligation to defend peoples resisting tyrannical oppression. Yet this decree committed you to support even a few patriots who wished to start a revolt in China. Above all we need to preserve our own body politic and lay the foundations for French greatness.\footnote{AP, 62:3.}
\end{quote}

The Convention’s 13 April decree rejected French interference in the domestic affairs of any foreign country. Moreover, it signaled to Europe that the French tolerated no attempt to influence the Republic’s constitution. The French would also not seek peace with any power that disrespected the Republic’s existence: the Convention approved the death penalty for even suggesting peace with a foreign power that sought to overthrow the republican constitution.\footnote{Biro, German Policy, 1:157; Blanning, French Revolution in Germany, 70-1.}

Danton’s decree did not change the outlook of the Allied powers, who agreed at the Antwerp conference of 8-9 April to overturn French conquests and make gains for
themselves. While Britain desired territory in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, it essentially forced Austria to agree to make conquests in northern France. Francis II remained desirous of the Belgium-Bavarian exchange rather than strengthening Austrian power in Belgium yet acceded to British diplomatic leadership. Regardless, none of the Allies viewed the war as an ideological crusade to restore the Bourbons to power. Yet the French viewed Allied cooperation as designed for that essential purpose. In May, the Austrian army under Coburg advanced toward Valenciennes, a key fortress in northern France. Defeating the Army of the North at Famars on 23 May, Coburg reached Valenciennes, where he commenced siege operations on the 30th.

On 2 June, the sections of Paris and a radical faction in the National Convention called the Mountain converged against Brissot’s followers. Dumouriez’s treason had reduced their credibility while a second military crisis under their watch proved fatal for the Girondins. The Convention ordered the arrest of twenty-two Girondin deputies, two ministers, and the Girondin Committee of General Security. Managing to hide in Paris during the initial period of arrests, Brissot escaped to Versailles and fled to his hometown of Chartres, where he received no assistance from his childhood friends. After fleeing to Orléans, Brissot finally surrendered to the authorities and returned to Paris on 22 June. The Revolutionary Tribunal – one of the key institutions formed during the Reign of Terror – ordered Brissot’s execution and he went to the guillotine on 31 October. By that point, the French Republic had passed through the most trying period of the war and the organizational effort that would mobilize France was well under way.

By the summer of 1793 it had become evident that France lacked the administrative apparatus and military power necessary to sustain its war against the forces of the ancien régime. The failure of the levée des 300,000 in February revealed the state’s limited ability to extract troops from the provinces. Moreover, Dumouriez’s treason and the widespread administrative problems in the field armies demonstrated insufficient civilian control over the nation’s military. The ministry of war continued to work as the primary organ in the war effort, although it became increasingly politicized. In March, Jean Baptiste Noël Bouchotte, a Jacobin cavalry officer with strong sans-culottes sympathies and associations, became war minister. During the summer, the National Convention’s newly-formed Committee of Public Safety gained increasing influence over the direction of the war. Ultimately, the Committee assumed near-totalitarian control of France, abolishing the separate ministries and returning to the monarchical policy of administrative centralization. Representatives on mission appointed by the National Convention and subservient to the Committee became the main centralizing agents of the state. They exerted profound powers over the armies, the French départements, and the occupied territories.\footnote{Brown, \textit{War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State}, 65-70; Biard, \textit{Missionnaires de la République}, 16-9.}

Centralization allowed the state to mobilize and exploit the resources of France to survive the Allied invasion of 1793. Coalition strategy focused on securing the fortresses in northern France rather than overthrowing the Revolutionary government in Paris, which meant that Allied forces did not undertake serious operations to penetrate the French interior. Nevertheless, the National Convention in Paris felt besieged and thus waged a war of national defense.\footnote{Schroeder, \textit{Transformation of European Politics}, 128.} The organizational effort involved in mobilizing the nation in 1793 proved crucial.
to French success in 1794. Not only did the French repulse the Allied invasion, but their armies essentially exploded upon the Low Countries and the Rhineland following the victory at Second Fleurus on 26 June 1794. The French then invaded Belgium and the Rhineland in 1794, doing so with radically different motives than those that had influenced Brissot and Dumouriez. Carnot’s concept of *raison d’état* and Robespierre’s doctrine of total war compelled the French to invade neighboring territories to exploit their resources; harnessing foreign materiel and economic strength to regenerate the French nation rather than annexation became the main objective.

As noted in the previous chapter, in a climate of fear and anxiety the National Convention formed the Committee of Public Safety in April 1793. Not only did Allied armies alarm Revolutionary Paris, but the French faced ongoing economic woes, highlighted by the decline in value of the assignat, which in turn led to increased domestic unrest. Moreover, the effort to requisition 300,000 troops in February fostered revolt in western and southern France. In particular, the Vendée region already resented the Revolution’s attack on the Catholic Church. Efforts to extract manpower for military service proved the main catalyst for a revolt that became a quagmire for Revolutionary forces while boosting the morale of the Royalists. Increased insurgent activity led to a gradual concentration of state power to the detriment of the rights of man. On 18 March the National Convention approved the death penalty for émigrés and refractory priests. Indicating a repudiation of the republican cosmopolitanism that predominated the previous year, the Convention implemented harsh policies for the surveillance of foreigners and other “suspects.” These measures received the support of the Parisian sans-culottes and the Mountain. Led by Robespierre, the Mountain

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5 Refractory priests were Catholic priests who refused to take a public oath in accordance with the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. *AP*, 60:298.
6 *AP*, 60:227, 456, 495, 611-3.
favored drastic measures to save France from internal and external enemies. On 6 April, the hesitant support of the more moderate Plain faction led the Convention to create the Committee of Public Safety (CPS), a measure urged by the radical Mountain.7

Although desired by the Mountain as a means of harnessing the power of the state for the purposes of Revolutionary warfare, the initial organization of the CPS did not signal a dramatic turn toward dictatorship. Led by the more moderate Danton and including independent thinkers such as Bertrand Barère, Joseph Cambon, and Jean-Baptiste Robert Lindet, the first CPS represented an amalgame of different ideological and political interests. The National Convention decreed that the CPS could not make arrests and that its powers of surveillance over the ministries would remain limited. Nonetheless, the formation of the Committee marked the final decline of Girondin domination.8

As noted, Danton revoked Brissot’s foreign policy after assuming leadership of the CPS, but he did not oversee a complete volte-face in diplomacy. The Committee approved instructions for the ministry of foreign affairs that stated that the Republic’s diplomats should always emphasize the superiority of free governments and provide “a favorable impression of their nation.”9 Conversely, Danton declared that the Committee would not support efforts for additional annexations in Geneva and even proposed compensations for Piedmont-Sardinia for the loss of Nice and Savoy. After the purge of the Girondins, Danton made serious attempts to end the war with Austria and Great Britain. He succeeded in re-establishing diplomatic relations with traditional French allies such as the Ottoman Empire, Sweden, and Tuscany. However, his efforts did not represent a victory for peacemaking: secret discussions with Prussian and Austrian negotiators in June failed to end hostilities.10 According to the historian Sydney Seymour Biro, “Danton was destined to go down in history as a blot on

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8 Ibid., 2:46-51.
France’s honor because he sought peace at a time when almost everyone – friend and foe alike – wanted the bloodshed to continue.” Yet the dissolution of Danton’s CPS on 10 July 1793 resulted more from continued military defeats and economic crises rather than accusations of defeatism aimed at Danton.

With the Vendée in flames, Allied armies swarming the frontiers, and the persisting economic crisis, the National Convention voted to remove Danton from the CPS. Rumors that General Dillon hoped to lead an uprising to rescue Marie-Antoinette and her children served as the immediate catalyst for the decision. Thus, the “Great Committee of Public Safety” that most students of the Revolution are familiar with took shape between July and September. Barère and Lindet served as a continuity between Danton’s committee and the new one. An initial group of Montagnards – members of the Mountain – including Georges Auguste Couthon, Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, Jean Bon Saint-André, and Pierre Louis Prieur de la Marne received initial appointment to replace Danton and his allies. Robespierre joined the Committee on 27 July while Carnot and Claud Antoine Prier-Duvernois, better known as Prieur de la Côte-d’Or, entered on 14 August. A former-nobleman and Republican moderate, Marie-Jean Hérault de Séchelles joined the Committee to engage in diplomatic functions. Jean Nicolas Billaud-Varenne and Jean-Marie Collot d’Herbois, two radical followers of the firebrand propagandist, Jacques René Hébert, received appointment on 6 September.12

Eventually dominated by Robespierre, the Great Committee of Public Safety resolved the concerns raised by Carnot in February 1793: that humanitarian impulses would undermine the Republic’s security. Billaud-Varenne and Collot d’Herbois steered the more moderate members of the Committee toward waging guerre à outrance against internal and

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11 Biro, German Policy, 1:175.
12 Palmer, Twelve Who Ruled, 22-44.
external foes. According to historian R. R. Palmer, the Hébertists represented “the party of unmitigated violence, of war upon tyrants, war upon Christianity, war upon the starvers of the people.”

While Robespierre viewed war itself as a major threat to the Republic’s safety, he considered the “wicked rulers” of Europe to be incompatible partners in a genuine peace with the Republic until they suffered a true defeat and unless France possessed strong, virtuous, and resolute leadership. Refusing to negotiate with monarchs and their agents, Robespierre broke diplomatic ties with all foreign powers except Switzerland and the United States. Moreover, he welcomed the Convention’s decree that signaled the termination of the era of humanity in French warfare: “The generals of the Republic’s armies . . . will behave toward the enemies of France in the same way that the powers of the coalition have behaved toward them.”

As soon as it took over the war effort, Robespierre’s Committee of Public Safety aimed not at liberation and annexation but rather at the exploitation of foreign territory to ensure that potential enemies lacked the strength to threaten French security in the future. While determined to exploit foreign resources to pay for war, Robespierre rejected a war of national expansion in favor of a regenerative struggle to purge France of internal and external enemies and to create a true Republic of Virtue. As one of Robespierre’s diplomatic advisors, Jean-Louis Girard-Soulavie, recommended: “We must nationalize the Revolution, consider nothing but France – and return to the traditional policy of the nation. Our natural

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13 Ibid., 58.
14 McPhee, Robespierre, 173.
15 RACSP, 8:487-8. The French recalled all ministers and ambassadors from their posts except for those stationed in the Swiss cantons and the United States. Nonetheless, charges d’affaires remained at their posts out of necessity to handle communications while the French corresponded with secret agents throughout Europe. See Palmer, Twelve Who Ruled, 59.
16 AP, 74:231.
enemy is England; our allies, the little powers, – republican for the most part.”¹⁸ Most important, Robespierre embraced Soulavie’s view that France must renounce claims to the natural frontiers: “We must arm, not to expand to the Rhine – that would mean war eternal – but to dictate peace – a peace without conquests.”¹⁹

Soulavie also advocated the expulsion of foreigners, a policy that Robespierre largely embraced. Robespierre’s rejection of Girondin idealism culminated in the extirpative campaign against Brissot and his foreign, cosmopolitan allies. Robespierre and supporters such as Camille Desmoulins associated foreigners with the Girondins. In late 1793, they led a public campaign to remove these suspect citizens from the Convention, the clubs, and society in general. Accused of championing the Universal Republic and the réunions policy to motivate a determined Prussian-led coalition against France, the Prussian Francophile, Clootz, was condemned by Robespierre at the Jacobin Club in December 1793. Desmoulins claimed that Clootz’s linens were soiled with Girondism. Shortly after, the National Convention formally expelled Clootz and the English-American radical, Thomas Paine. On 28 December, the CPS ordered Clootz’s arrest and imprisonment at Saint-Lazare. Prosecuted in the trial of the Hébertists, the Orator of Mankind went to the guillotine in March 1794, two weeks before Robespierre turned on his friend, Desmoulins.²⁰

The period commonly known as the Reign of Terror marked a significant turn in the Revolution’s foreign policy. Although the French refusal to conduct diplomacy with European monarchs signaled a radical shift, it returned to the restrained policy of the ancien régime with regards to expansion. Robespierre viewed the war as a moral struggle between the French people and European tyrants. Yet France could not sacrifice its own interests for

¹⁹ Ibid., 35:387.
those of other peoples, especially when they had purportedly betrayed France as recently as the previous spring. Robespierre considered Belgian and German resistance to the French invasions of 1792-1793 as evidence that they could not be trusted as republican allies. On 17 November and 5 December, he explained to the National Convention that France faced a concerted effort by the monarchical powers and that it must serve as a protector of the smaller states of Europe. Nevertheless, he confirmed that “the French are not afflicted with a mania for rendering any nation happy and free despite itself.”

Under Danton, the first CPS divided administrative responsibilities among its members who exhibited specialized skills. After his appointment, Carnot became the chief military organizer and strategist on the Committee. Unlike Robespierre, Carnot viewed the war less as a moral struggle and more as a major organizational challenge. Carnot possessed a military pedigree from his service in the French engineers. In addition, he benefitted from a scientific mind that compelled him to search for rational solutions rather than emotional or ideological expedients. Perhaps most important, Carnot had served as a commissar of the Convention with the Rhine, Nord, and Pyrenees Armies and possessed a keen understanding of the military situation.

Throughout the summer of 1793, Carnot criticized the inefficiency of government policy, especially the weakness of executive power and the poor organization of the ministries. He viewed a concentration of strength in a strong executive body as absolutely essential to rehabilitate French military power. At the same time, the treason of Lafayette and Dumouriez convinced Carnot that France could not rely on a single generalissimo but that the situation demanded rational military direction from Paris. Carnot’s most important role on the CPS became communicating on a near daily basis with the Republic’s army commanders and

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21 Ibid., 30:317. See also Biro, *German Policy*, 1:190-7.
occasionally monitoring the situation from the front. By 1794, he held predominating influence 
over the development of strategy and worked to coordinate the operations of the Republic’s 
armies.\footnote{Reinhard, \textit{Carnot}, 2:58-9; Dhombres, \textit{Carnot}, 347.}

In the late summer of 1793, France fielded approximately 500,000 troops to confront 
a multiplicity of internal and external threats. According to historian Steven Ross, “France, in 
the summer of 1793, resembled a besieged fortress with its garrison, reduced to squabbling 
 factions, trying to withstand the assaults of many hostile armies.”\footnote{Ross, \textit{Quest for Victory}, 67.} Carnot’s first days on the 
Committee demonstrate that the increased scale of the war caused much confusion. General 
Philippe Casimir de Falk of the Rhine Army complained to Carnot that he received no 
correspondence or orders from the minister of war, Bouchotte. Carnot chided Bouchotte for 
overlooking his communications with what he called the Army of the Upper Rhine. 
Bouchotte retorted that the Republic possessed no Army of the Upper Rhine.\footnote{D’Hombres, \textit{Carnot}, 346.}

Carnot inherited a strategic plan devised by General Philippe Henri de Grimoard, who 
had served on Danton’s Committee. A friend of Dumouriez, Grimoard’s plan called for the 
immediate reconquest of Belgium. Carnot accepted the general outline of this plan yet 
understood that he needed to secure in his own hands the central direction necessary to 
concentrate French strength on this single objective. To concentrate strength, he had to divert 
troops and resources from other theaters. While this measure would gain economy of force at 
the strategic level, it ran the risk of generating animosity and resentment. Carnot first 
implemented this policy by emphasizing Belgium’s proximity to Paris, urging the 
representatives on mission assigned to the Army of the North to exercise “the powers 
invested in you by the National Convention to ensure the safety of \textit{la patrie}.\footnote{Carnot to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 3 September 1793, in \textit{CGC}, 3:78-9.} More 
specifically, he developed plans to relieve the siege of Dunkirk, which British forces under
Prince Frederick, duke of York and Albany had surrounded. Carnot hoped to destroy the British army and remove London from the Coalition, a turn of events that he hoped would completely unravel the Allied position in the Low Countries.\textsuperscript{27}

The effort to mobilize the nation for war constituted the second most important concern for Carnot as a member of the CPS. The \textit{levée en masse} of 23 August 1793 constituted a compromise between the most radical of the Hébertists and the more moderate French nationalists like Carnot. While Hébert and his supporters desired a mass uprising to wage a short people’s war against the foreign invaders, Carnot sought to create an organized and professional army capable of repulsing the Allies. Accordingly, the text of the decree appeared to please the radicals by calling for a mass uprising that involved the entire nation. In addition, the decree abolished exemptions from conscription and established universal military service as an obligation of citizenship.\textsuperscript{28}

Nonetheless, for those who responded to conscription, the \textit{levée en mass} possessed important consequences because the decree stated that they would serve “until the moment when the enemy has been driven from the territory of the Republic.”\textsuperscript{29} Despite this definition of service, the decree created an army of long-serving conscripts that ultimately fought far beyond the 1792 frontiers of France. Conceived as a measure for national defense, the meaning of the \textit{levée en masse} had to be transfigured after 1794 to justify the continuation of service by troops in a war of conquest. Thousands of soldiers drafted in 1793 never accepted this change in the terms of their service and thus abandoned the armies soon after the national emergency appeared to be resolved.

\textsuperscript{27} For the details of Grimoard’s plan, see RACSP, 3:422, 447; Griffith, \textit{Art of War}, 75-6.

\textsuperscript{28} Griffith in \textit{Art of War}, 81, argues that the decree did not mobilize the entire French nation for war and that “the truly total militarization of society would not appear until the far greater wars of the twentieth century.” While approximately 300,000 men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five joined the French army between 1793 and 1794, the state never achieved desired troop strength.

\textsuperscript{29} RACSP, 6:72.
Regardless, by 1794 the French possessed an army of approximately 750,000 troops. Aside from the weight of sheer numerical superiority, they proved capable of fighting with skill and determination. Stating that “all Frenchmen are permanently requisitioned for service in the armies,” the very text of the levée en masse decree emphasized the role of the state in extracting the resources of the nation rather than orchestrating a popular uprising. While the decree emphasized a host of obligations for all citizens of the Republic, it explained in simple terms the most important imposition that the state required: “the young men shall fight.” Accordingly, it only applied to unmarried men and childless widowers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. The formal requisitioning process commenced in early September, as départemental levy agents appointed by the representatives on mission oversaw draft commissions. Each département received a quota pertaining to the number of battalions the state expected it to fill. Despite the prohibition of exemptions and replacements, these did occur in exceptional circumstances when approved by representatives and generals. Most important, the authorities granted exemptions to unmarried men who participated in industry and artisanal services crucial for the war effort.

In addition to the Committee of Public Safety’s fear of a disorganized mass uprising, the Hébertist vision proved unpopular simply because relatively few Frenchmen appeared eager to march to the frontiers to defend the patrie. Draft evasion occurred most frequently in rural areas, especially those relatively unconnected to Paris via communication, trade, and transport networks. Attributed by authorities in Paris to counterrevolutionary activity, most draft evasion probably resulted from peasant apathy for the war and fear of leaving behind one’s family and land. Local officials often resented the central state’s efforts to extend its reach into the provinces in the form of national conscription. Only in a few isolated areas

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
such as the Vendée and the Tarn did draft evasion expand to open revolt against Paris. Yet the contemporary Federalist Revolt centered at Lyon, Toulouse, Bordeaux, and Toulon convinced many Republicans of the existence of a massive counterrevolutionary insurrection.\textsuperscript{33} The state responded with a mixture of coercive and conciliatory measures to arrest the spread of draft evasion. On 21 December 1793, the National Convention imposed the death penalty for even criticizing the draft. \textit{Armées revolutionnaires} composed primarily of sans-culottes hunted draft dodgers and harassed the families of known delinquents.\textsuperscript{34} Meanwhile, popular societies and clubs attempted to explain to all French citizens the importance of the war and the state’s appreciation for the sacrifices of the Republic’s young men.\textsuperscript{35}

Although faced with these difficulties, the levée en masse at least succeeded in its primary goal: raising troops to continue the war. The National Convention desired to form a total of 537 battalions from the levy, which would constitute approximately 483,000 troops. In August, the CPS stated that it sought to extract an even larger number of troops from France, possibly as many as 537,000.\textsuperscript{36} Such expectations proved impossible to realize not only due to the resistance to conscription, but because France lacked the institutional, administrative, and organizational structures necessary to raise such numbers, integrate them into the existing field armies, and sustain them for the duration of the war. The French achievement remained impressive. Despite falling short, by the end of September, the armies started receiving new battalions of conscripts, which usually manned depots and garrisons to

\textsuperscript{33} Forrest, \textit{Conscripts and Deserters}, 32-4, 54. Although sparked by the arrest of the Girondins in June, the Federalist Revolts spread to areas that resented the centralization of the government under the Committee of Public Safety.
\textsuperscript{34} Richard Cobb, \textit{The People’s Armies}, trans. Marianne Elliot (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987). Lists of draft evaders were posted on the doors of municipal offices. Groups of republican militants received rewards for returning evaders. In some cases, the property belonging to the family of draft evaders was confiscated.
\textsuperscript{35} RACSP, 6:348, 354.
\textsuperscript{36} Bertaud, \textit{Army of the French Revolution}, 113-5.
continue their training. Republican mythology proclaimed the creation of an army of one million men. In reality, around 300,000 troops joined the French army as a result of the levée. The fragmentary evidence available suggests that sixteen percent of the conscripts came from urban areas and the remainder from the countryside. While well-off bourgeois served alongside artisans, workers, and sans-culottes, the peasantry supplied the overwhelming majority of conscripts.

Along with increasing manpower through the national requisition, the French government attempted to create a unified army. Thus, the government ordered the formation of demi-brigades. Known as the amalgame, the French system of “embrigadement” combined two conscript battalions with one veteran line battalion. The CPS hoped the amalgame would achieve both political and practical goals. Politically, it sought to terminate the factitious discord within the army between the professional soldiers of the pre-revolutionary army and the new conscripts of the Republic (known by their uniform colors as the blancs and the bleus, respectively). In practical matters, Carnot believed that the line soldiers would instill discipline and professionalism in the raw recruits, who would in turn provide a political model for the veterans to emulate. Nonetheless, he feared that embrigadement might create unnecessary confusion in the middle of a campaign and so authorized its delay until 1794 if the generals commanding in the field viewed it as impractical. Thus the process of amalgamation occurred over a period of thirty months from

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38 Ibid., 132.
39 RACSP, 8:700, 9:46.
40 “Carnot on Embrigadement,” 25 December 1793, in Charnay, Carnot, 141.
1793-1796 as few generals pursued the policy with energy. Consequently, few armies possessed complete demi-brigades of 3,500 men by the end of 1793.

As noted, the mobilization of the French nation for war was greatly facilitated by the CPS and its agents: the representatives on mission. The National Convention dispatched a total of eighty-six “deputies on mission” to the armies and the provinces between 22 September 1792 and 3 March 1793. As noted, on 9 March, the National Convention authorized eighty-two “representatives on mission” to oversee the levée des 300,000 in the départements. Following the treason of Dumouriez, the Convention assigned representatives to the field armies by decrees of 9 and 30 April.

The National Convention’s 30 April 1793 decree represented the culmination of a month-long debate regarding the proper function of the representatives on mission to the Republic’s armies. According to the decree, they would “exercise the most active surveillance on the operations of the agents of the Executive Council, on the conduct of the generals, officers, and soldiers of the army; they would report daily on the state of the magazines, on all matters of supply, food, and munitions; and maintain the most severe surveillance over the operations and the conduct of all the suppliers and entrepreneurs of the armies of the Republic.” The decree also tasked them with accelerating the organization of the armies through the incorporation of recruits into existing cadres. The point of debate involved the 9 April decree’s provision that gave the representatives “unlimited powers.” Two members of the Convention moved to delete the words “unlimited powers” from the decree and another argued to restrict the representatives’ ability to interfere with the

41 Bertaud, Army of the French Revolution, 166-7.
42 For example, until November 1793, continued setbacks and disorganization prevented the Moselle Army from implementing embrigadement. Bouchotte to Hoche, Paris, 28 October 1793, SHAT, B3 152; Chuquet, Wissembourg, 89-91.
43 Biard, Missionnaires de la République, 40.
44 RACSP, 2:298-301.
46 Ibid., 3:171-3.
movements of the armies. The Convention voted to revise the 9 April decree to read “unlimited powers for the exercise of functions that are delegated to them by the present decree.”47 Lastly, the 30 April decree institutionalized these measures by recalling the existing representatives, dividing the Republic’s armies into eleven distinct forces, and assigning new representatives to each.48

The National Convention passed the most important measure relevant to the representatives on mission on 7 May. The plan de travail, originally proposed by Danton’s Committee of Public Safety, provided an outline for the proper behavior of the representatives in relation to the armies and their leadership.49 This decree tasked them with “establishing the most active correspondence between the frontiers and the interior, imprinting on all sections of the Republic, on all its forces, [and] on the navy, a rapid and uniform movement toward its goal and objective.” In addition, it defined specific procedures for the three different types of representatives on mission: those assigned to the armies and the frontier fortresses, those assigned to the coasts and the naval forces, and those assigned to interior départements. Regarding the first type, the Convention decreed that each delegation of representatives to the armies would determine which of its members would oversee the operations of army headquarters while the others managed the situation in individual divisions and cantonments. As the example of the Sambre and Meuse Army demonstrates, this ad hoc division of labor proved a lasting characteristic of the system employed by the representatives in the Republic’s armies. Such a system proved necessary considering the

47 Ibid. The final article of the 30 April decree charged the representatives “to take without delay all necessary measures to uncover, arrest, and render to the Revolutionary Tribunal all soldiers, agents, and other citizens who have helped, consulted, or favored in any manner the treason of Dumouriez or any other plot against the nation’s security, or who is conspiring for the disorganization of armies and the ruin of the Republic.”
48 Ibid., 3:533-44. In addition, the decree ordered the representatives to “distribute to the troops the bulletins, addresses, proclamations, and instructions of the Convention” in order to “maintain the republican spirit.”
49 Biard, Missionnaires de la République, 47-8, 288-306, provides the most complete analysis of this document.
enormous work required of a representative on mission, yet the trend toward diffusion of tasks led to bureaucratic confusion that often became problematic.

While the *plan de travail* followed earlier legislation in authorizing the representatives to remove suspect officers and soldiers through the Revolutionary Tribunal, the decree was far from purely coercive in nature. For example, in the period’s colorful jargon, the *plan de travail* stated:

One of the most essential duties of the representatives of the people is to gain the trust of the generals. The means of conciliation must be great, raised to the level of character in which they are clothed. The generals must not perceive in the surveillance of the representatives of the people motives that would inspire defiance or concern; they must only see in them citizens invested with great means of power to assist them, to sustain their influence, and to increase their public trust.50

Rather than introduce an unnecessarily onerous system of surveillance over the generals, the decree recognized that “it is necessary for a general to be invested with a great trust; he must have a great degree of liberty, a great independence, if he is to conceive of grand designs and effective plans.”51 The *plan de travail* explicitly ordered the representatives to avoid undue coercion that would interfere with the military effectiveness of the armies and the decision-making of the generals.

The representatives gained expanded powers following the *levée en masse* of 23 August 1793.52 Their military responsibilities exceeded wartime recruitment and involved them in embrigadement, military justice, discipline, and army supply and administration; they even gained influence in the military operations of the Republic’s armies. Thus, the representatives on mission were born from the military pressures France faced at the height of the War of the First Coalition. They proved truly decisive to its outcome. Like the

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50 “Plan de travail, de surveillance et de correspondance proposé par le Comité de salut public aux représentants du peuple députés près les armées de la République, imprimé par ordre de la Convention nationale,” 7 May 1793, *RACSP*, 4:43.
51 Ibid.
52 Biard, *Missionnaires de la République*, 63.
commissars of the Convention, the representatives on mission eventually became important agents of the French state in lands occupied by French armies. They constituted the chief figures in the exploitation of foreign resources to sustain the French war effort in Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Rhineland.

In August 1793, the National Convention confronted materiel shortages as well as manpower, organizational, and administrative challenges. Many of the conscript battalions could not become combat units simply because they lacked arms and uniforms. Each of France’s eleven field armies lacked between 10,000-12,000 muskets at the beginning of 1794. As an agrarian society, France did not possess the manufacturing ability to fully arm and clothe an army of 750,000 troops without drastic measures to control the economy. The French had confronted the lack of firearms as early as 1792 yet responded by interpreting the deficit as an advantage and arming many troops with pikes.53

On joining the CPS, Carnot brought firsthand knowledge of these problems to the Republic’s most powerful governing body. During his mission to the Army of the North in July, he noted that nearly one-third of the men lacked muskets. In 1794, he abandoned his earlier obsession with the pike and worked with Prieur de la Côte d’Or to expand the nation’s ability to manufacture firearms, munitions, and uniforms. In this area, the CPS gradually assumed control over functions previously overseen by the war ministry. The levée en masse justified such an assumption of power as it cast a wide net in terms of the state’s requisitions policy: “the public squares will be turned into munitions factories, the earthen floors shall be treated with lye to extract saltpeter. All firearms of suitable caliber shall be turned over to the troops: the interior shall be policed with shotguns and with cold steel.”54

54 RACSP, 6:72-3.
The Committee of Public Safety could not singlehandedly oversee the manufacturing necessary to provide the army with sufficient quantities of arms and munitions. Accordingly, it created the Commission of Arms, Powders, and Mines for that purpose.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, the commission constituted another cog in a bureaucratic machine designed to increase dependence on the CPS and reduce the role of the distinct ministries. A number of similar commissions emerged to ensure the availability of clothing, transport, food, and other supplies.\textsuperscript{56} Regarding the manufacture of arms, the Committee called on the service of savants such as Gaspard Monge, a professor of chemistry at the Collège de France, and Jean Henri Hassenfratz, an expert mine inspector. Monge and Hassenfratz oversaw the manufacture of firearms and artillery at Paris.\textsuperscript{57} Other scientists worked to improve the production and quality of saltpeter. In certain areas, the French achieved a stunning success. The quantity of saltpeter extracted in France quadrupled within one year of the levée en masse. Manufacturers in Paris produced as many as 1,000 muskets in a single day and achieved a total of 150,000 within one year. Moreover, firearm industries that existed under the ancien régime, such as those at Maubeuge, Charleville, and Saint-Étienne, improved considerably. Nearly every city or town in France with any manufacturing capacity produced bayonets for the Republic, which required far less skill than firearms. More important, Paris produced 1,200 cannons between 1793 and 1794, while Douai, Denis, and other manufacturing centers produced a total of 7,000 artillery pieces by the end of 1794.\textsuperscript{58}

Waging war on the scale envisioned by the authors of the levée en masse required the CPS to control the nation’s forests to an unprecedented extent. Wood, a resource that the

\textsuperscript{55} RACSP, 10:8-10, 44-5, 67.
\textsuperscript{56} These included the Public Aid Commission, the Public Works Commission, the Commission for Armies, the Transport Commission, and the Trade and Supply Commission. See Brown, \textit{War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State}, 290-1.
\textsuperscript{57} RACSP, 6:513, 8:686.
French could not import easily because of the British blockade, proved crucial to many aspects of the French war effort. Plentiful firewood was required in the production of pig iron. The French navy demanded large amounts of lumber for ship construction. In fact, most of the forests that came under centralized control were for the purposes of preparing the navy for a proposed expedition either to the British Isles or the West Indies. Less apparent, wood proved to be a crucial component of the logistical system. Armies operating in the field required vast amounts of wood—both finished and raw—for a variety of reasons. The transport of ammunition and supplies required tumbrils and caissons while troops needed to build bridges to move across rivers. Tools, artillery carriages, firearms, and camp fires for tens of thousands of men to cook and stay warm also required immense quantities of wood. While easy to overlook as an obvious requirement of armies, the exploitation of France’s forests for wood proves important for several reasons. First, it demonstrates the strain placed on the nation by the ever-expanding war effort. Second, it strongly suggests that the CPS employed administrative centralization to exploit the resources of France. Finally, it figured prominently in considerations regarding French occupation policies from 1794 onward.

Understandably, the French found exploiting the forests of Belgium and the Rhineland preferable to continued overreliance on the resources of the patrie.

Horses constituted another crucial yet often overlooked aspect of the French mobilization efforts of 1793-1794. The levée en masse addressed the crucial lack of horses in the French army, which would only become much worse as the number of men under arms increased: “All saddle horses shall be seized for the cavalry; all draft horses not employed in cultivation will draw the artillery and supply-wagons.” As the decree indicates, horses

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61 RACSP, 6:73.
served two essential functions in pre-industrial armies: the best horses provided mounts for
cavalry troopers while the less agile and muscular equines filled the transport services. As
noted, the French possessed insufficient cavalry in the campaigns of 1792. Practically every
commander complained over the poor condition of the mounted-arm. The Legislative
Assembly achieved little success in repairing the situation in early 1792 as it dealt with more
pressing issues and was distracted by political turmoil. In 1793, the CPS devoted additional
energy to the matter. Representatives on mission regularly requisitioned horses for military
service after September. On 13 January 1794, the National Convention established fixed
prices for different types of horses: 1,000 livres for heavy cavalry, 900 for the dragoons, and
800 livres for the chasseurs and hussars. Still, the French state could not entirely deprive
farmers of their horses without sacrificing agricultural productivity. Accordingly, the need for
horses became another motivation for the expansionist policy pursued by the CPS in 1794:
the peasants of Belgium and the Rhineland could sacrifice their horses to serve the French
war effort. As the French discovered, even these exploitable resources proved insufficient to
meet the gargantuan logistical needs of the army of the Year II.

Purging aristocratic or unenergetic generals constituted the final significant aspect of
the government’s military policy in 1793. Historian R. R. Palmer perceptively identified the
fundamental problem that faced the Republic because of these purges: military leadership.
“In a world where generalship had been the business of aristocrats,” he asks, “could a régime
that denounced aristocracy conduct a successful war? Could the middle class, which had
replaced the aristocracy in so many other ways, now replace it on the battlefield?” After the
treachery of Lafayette and Dumouriez, the government grew weary of noble vestiges. As

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62 Ibid., 4:343.
63 RACSP, 6: 443; Desbrière, La cavalerie pendant la Révolution, 1:235-44.
64 The Year II refers to the second official year of the French Revolutionary calendar, which was created to
mark the beginning of the First French Republic.
65 Palmer, Twelve Who Ruled, 96.
66 Blanning, French Revolutionary Wars, 125-7.
the Commune of Paris declared to the National Convention on 1 June 1793: “We demand the dismissal of all nobles occupying high rank in the armies of the Republic.”

However, not until August 1793 did the campaign to purge the noble officer corps gain substantial impetus. The war minister, Bouchotte, exhibited radical sans-culottes views and favored generals who represented the political values of the New Regime. Noble officers such as Custine, Alexandre de Beauharnais, and Balthazar Alexis Henri Schauenbourg naturally faced scrutiny from Bouchotte and the representatives on mission. Although not actually a noble, Houchard attracted the government’s mistrust by his association with noble officers. Altogether, the government guillotined seventeen noble generals in 1793 and sixty-three in 1794. During the Reign of Terror, more aristocratic officers died at the hands of the French government than from enemy fire. Through a combination of observation, reporting, and favoritism, government leaders such as Bouchotte and Carnot succeeded in finding non-noble soldiers such as Jean-Baptiste Jourdan and Lazare Hoche to replace the purged aristocratic generals. The Republic’s purges represent a complete social transformation of the French officer corps; nevertheless, in learning to command armies, these middle class, peasant, and working class officers often drew on traditional military principles to achieve victory, fusing old practices with new command styles.

Allied confusion rather than Republican heroics relieved the sense of urgency felt by the French in late 1793. The West Indies became the main focus of London’s war effort because it offered the most opportunities for the British to make gains at France’s expense. While colonial victories would weaken France, they alone would not lead to victory over the French. Thus, British officials recognized the need to contribute to the continental war. Primarily, the British sought for the continental powers to concentrate their forces in the Low

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68 Chuquet, *Wissembourg*, 82-5.
Countries, the Alps, and the Pyrenees. Britain could support its allies with small numbers of troops and large quantities of subsidies, mercenaries, and naval power.\(^{71}\) Already in the war, Austria did not require subsidies to combat France. The strategy drafted at the April 1793 Antwerp Conference compelled the Allies to capture fortresses in northern France. No thought of marching rapidly on Paris to overthrow the Revolutionary government existed. Both Austria and Prussia remained more interested in Poland than the war against France. Spain viewed the diplomacy of its traditional rival, Britain, with suspicion.\(^{72}\) By the end of July, the Austrians commenced the sieges of Condé and Valenciennes. Rather than assisting their allies, the British marched west and, as noted, besieged Dunkirk, which they hoped to exchange at a future peace conference. These decisions epitomized the traditional approach of eighteenth century international politics. That the Allies took such steps while the National Convention mobilized French resources and manpower to an unprecedented level proved disastrous for the First Coalition.

Combined with Allied distraction, Carnot’s ability to organize the national mobilization and coordinate the operations of the Republic’s eleven field armies reversed the course of a war effort that had been so plagued by Brissot’s missionary foreign policy and Dumouriez’s treason. Assuming command of the Army of the North in September 1793, Jourdan proved the most important general that Carnot elevated to command. The rise of Jourdan occurred after the fall of Custine and Houchard. Following Dumouriez’s treason, Custine took command of the Army of the North. A soldier of the Old Regime, Custine clashed with the government during the summer crisis. His inability to cooperate with Paris revolved around his failure to work under the watchful eyes of the representatives on


mission. After the guillotine eliminated Custine, Houchard took command of the North Army. Under Houchard’s leadership, Jourdan became a leading figure in the army. Serving as a general of division, the veteran of the American War of Independence and former haberdasher acquired a prominent reputation among powerful individuals. Beyond gaining Houchard’s admiration, Jourdan impressed Carnot, who, as noted, served as the Committee of Public Safety’s strategic architect. As a general of division, Jourdan exhibited all of the requisite skills of a commander: courage, obedience, determination, and level-headedness. Furthermore, Jourdan’s political loyalties to the Jacobin Club served him well during the first months of the Reign of Terror and made him a favorite of the CPS.

After the victory at the 8 September Battle of Hondschoote, the representatives on mission, and especially Carnot, lauded Jourdan’s performance. However, the CPS recalled Houchard for failing to exploit the army’s success. After being tried before the Revolutionary Tribunal, he followed Custine to the guillotine. The cases of Houchard and Custine demonstrate the Revolutionary government’s paranoid fear of generals after Dumouriez’s treason. This created a command climate that mandated effective performance, political loyalty, and obedience. On 24 September 1793, the thirty-one-year-old Jourdan received news of his appointment to command the Army of the North. Jourdan informed the Committee that he lacked the experience to fill such an important post. Nevertheless, a “decree from the Convention that ordered the arrest of all citizens who refused the employment in which they have been called,” persuaded him to accept the assignment.

Jourdan’s experience in 1793 epitomizes the organizational and administrative challenges faced by commanders amid the transformations of the French army. On reaching
his headquarters at Gavrelle on 26 September, Jourdan lacked detailed knowledge of the army under his command. For instance, he could not ascertain the exact number of troops available or even the names of his subordinate generals. The sack of Houchard caused this chaotic situation as the Committee arrested many members of Houchard’s staff or placed them on temporary leave. Nonetheless, Jourdan soon organized his army with the assistance of his competent chief of staff, General Jean-Augustin Ernouf.

Even with a properly organized force, the situation facing Jourdan appeared bleak. On 29 September 1793, an Allied army of 65,000 men under Coburg crossed the Sambre River from the east and advanced toward the fortress of Maubeuge. Inside the strategically significant fortress, 17,000 French troops remained stranded. Intelligence reports indicated that Austrian sympathizers within the town actively conspired to undermine the morale of the garrison. The Committee considered the relief of Maubeuge to be imperative because its fall would expose Paris to a concerted Allied attack. Jourdan’s army numbered some 175,000 men on paper, but by October 1793 only 50,000 troops were available for field operations. Furthermore, as Jourdan relates in his memoirs: “The entire army was in a pitiable situation: the officers and generals were amateurs who in the space of only a few months had risen to the highest grades, and only possessed zeal and courage.” In addition, Jourdan commented on the logistical weakness of the army: “the troops were lacking proper clothing and equipment, and the arsenals were deprived of arms and munitions; the cavalry suffered from a lack of forage; finally, the old regiments, which had not received recruits for a long time, were reduced by half.”

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79 Ibid.
80 Palmer, *Twelve who Ruled*, 98.
81 SHAT, M1 608, 1.
82 Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 71.
83 SHAT, M1 608, 1.
Coburg divided his forces into two groups. The first, 25,000 men under the Dutch Stadtholder, William V, the Prince of Orange-Nassau, besieged Maubeuge. Meanwhile, a covering force of 20,000 men under Feldzeugmeister Franz Sebastian de Croix von Clerfayt guarded Coburg’s southern flank.84 On the French side, Carnot personally travelled from Paris to Gavrelle to assist the young and relatively inexperienced commander. Jourdan and Carnot decided to strike Clerfayt’s force while the French garrison at Maubeuge sortied and advanced against the Prince of Orange. This would trap Coburg’s army in a pincer movement.85 With 50,000 men, Jourdan should have easily overwhelmed Clerfayt’s 20,000. However, Carnot’s meddling made the situation unduly difficult. On 15 October, he impressed on Jourdan the importance of completely crushing the Austrians in a grand style and ordered a double-envelopment of Clerfayt’s forces. Unfortunately for the French, this measure dispersed Jourdan’s numerically superior army to poor effect.86 On the first day of the ensuing battle of Wattignies, the Austrian army repulsed the Army of the North’s center and forced both wings to withdraw.

Although Carnot’s tactical directive proved ineffective, Jourdan could not safely override the judgment of his political superior. Fortunately for him, Carnot agreed to a new plan on 16 October that called for a concentration on the French right wing, preparatory for a decisive strike against Clerfayt’s left. Interestingly, Jourdan organized an embryonic form of wing-commands for the battle – a concept he later developed with the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. To facilitate command and control, he entrusted General Florent Joseph Duquesnoy to command two divisions (22,000 men) of the right wing while General Jacques Pierre Fromentin directed two divisions on the left totaling 17,000.87 At 9:00 AM, Jourdan transferred his command post to the right wing of the Army of the North. The French

84 Dupuis, La campagne de 1793, 2:153-5.
85 SHAT, M1 608, 1.
86 Ibid.
87 Dupuis, La campagne de 1793, 2:289-90; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 1:255.
launched two attacks, both of which the Austrians repulsed. Jourdan remained in the rear, rallying the men and regrouping the defeated units. Demonstrating determination and resolve, he reorganized his army for a final assault. After a lively engagement, this last attack broke through Clerfayt’s line. Wattignies soon fell and Jourdan’s efforts saved Maubeuge from Coburg’s army.\textsuperscript{88} The Austrians escaped destruction largely because the 17,000 French at Maubeuge failed to break out of the town.

After returning to Paris with news of the victory, Carnot sent Jourdan fresh orders to continue his offensive by crossing the Sambre River and cutting Coburg’s lines of communication.\textsuperscript{89} The Committee conceived these orders not only with strategic considerations in mind, but also with reference to the new foreign policy vision of Robespierre and Carnot. In his orders to Jourdan, Carnot emphasized the need to spread terror in Belgium: “Spare only humble village dwellings. Do not forget to destroy the mills, and to take a great number of hostages.”\textsuperscript{90}

While Carnot viewed an invasion of Belgium as essential to gain supplies and resources, the effort at Wattignies had severely weakened Jourdan’s army. Several weeks passed until the army recovered and resumed the campaign. By that time, November, the French found the Sambre in flood and thus impassable. Moreover, Coburg had established a solid position along the east bank of the river and appeared unlikely to allow Jourdan to cross unmolested.\textsuperscript{91} Therefore, Jourdan informed the CPS that if it persisted on an advance, he would resign: “I cannot stand the heart-breaking spectacle of an army destroyed without fighting. I give justice to the brave soldiers who compose it: not the least murmur has come from them, although they are half-naked and without shoes, exposed to all the effects of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[88] SHAT, M1 608, 1.
\item[89] Ibid.
\item[90] Carnot to Jourdan, Paris, 23 October 1793, in CGC, 3:384.
\item[91] Phipps, \textit{Armies of the First French Republic}, 1:269.
\end{footnotes}
weather, as it has been impossible to move the wagons.” 92 While military historians usually emphasize the aggressiveness of French Revolutionary generals, Jourdan’s refusal to cross the Sambre reveals his understanding of his army’s limitations. Nevertheless, the CPS punished Jourdan for this snub. On 10 January, it recalled him to Paris and presented a document written by Carnot that called for his dismissal and arrest. 93 By chance occurrence, the intervention of Representative Ernest Joseph Duquesnoy, who just happened to be in Paris and vouched for Jourdan’s loyalty, saved him from the guillotine. 94 Although it retained the right to call on his services in the future, the CPS dismissed Jourdan, who quietly returned to his haberdashery at Limoges.

While Jourdan was leading the North Army to victory in the key theater of the war, the CPS brought the Moselle and Rhine Armies under its control. A gifted soldier of the Old Regime, General Schauenbourg sought to reestablish order and discipline within the Army of the Moselle after the failure to relieve Mainz. Stationed along the Saar River, the army underwent an intense process of training and conditioning while the Allies lacked the strength to pursue an immediate offensive. According to the drill book written by Schauenbourg for the Moselle Army, the recruits received instruction according to the Regulations of 1791. These regulations provided for the effective employment of both column and line formations in maneuver and in combat. 95 From February to August 1793, the recruits that entered the Army of the Moselle practiced marching in column and deploying into line, while also changing from closed to open order formations. Yet if Schauenbourg excelled as an instructor, he failed to assimilate into the new political and command culture of Revolutionary France. In September 1793, an offensive by Brunswick compelled the Army of the Moselle to retreat to the left bank of the Saar after being defeated at Pirmasens. General

92 Jourdan to Ministry of War, 4 November 1793, SHAT, M1 608, 1:34.
94 Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 1:272-3.
95 SHAT, B² 154.
René Moreaux, who commanded the Corps of the Vosges, replaced the aristocratic
Schauenbourg as commander of the Moselle Army. After Moreaux received a wound and
refused his promotion, General Jacques Charles René Delaunay replaced him in provisional
command of the army.96

Supporting the Moselle Army, General Charles Hyacinthe Leclerc de Landremont led
the Army of the Rhine in a failed crossing of the Rhine in late August. Repulsed by
Feldmarschalleutnant Dagobert Sigmund von Wurmser, Landremont’s Army of the Rhine
retreated to Wissembourg and then withdrew thirty miles south to Strasbourg. General
Antoine Guillame Delmas temporarily replaced the ruined Landremont on 29 September, but
Paris recognized the perilous situation facing its weakened armies in the German theater. In
response, the Committee sent two representatives on mission, Saint-Just and Le Bas, to
Alsace with the stated objectives of saving the armies in the Rhineland, preventing the fall of
Strasbourg, and forcing the Allies to withdraw from French territory before the onset of
winter.97 The mission of Saint-Just and Le Bas to Alsace lasted from 17 October to 30
December 1793 and accomplished nearly all of its goals. The two representatives purged the
Moselle and Rhine Armies of noble officers who they no longer trusted.98 Furthermore, they
reestablished discipline in both armies. Saint-Just in particular applied his own military
ideals. Desiring to create a “school of virtue” in the armies, he emphasized the superiority of
the civil government over military authority in promoting a democratic, national, and
republican army. Thus, Saint-Just promoted political education within the armies, attempting
to instill republican values throughout the ranks. To enforce the new discipline, he
strengthened the power of the military courts. He also recognized the severe morale

96 Clerget, Tableaux historique, 18.
98 Palmer, Twelve Who Ruled, 177-9.
problems resulting from poor supply. Therefore, he requisitioned from the surrounding area and lobbied Paris for supplies and reinforcements.99

On 29 October 1793, the young and ambitious General Lazare Hoche received command of the Army of the Moselle. A former private soldier in the Gardes françaises, a royal household unit disbanded in 1789, Hoche received an officer’s commission for his part in the defense of Thionville in 1792. Perceived by the Committee as the model republican officer, Hoche rose to the rank of general in 1793 and made a resounding first impression on Saint-Just. Prior to reaching his army, Hoche wrote to the soldiers, informing them that “on all fronts our armies are triumphant; we are the last to be victorious, but victors we shall be.”100 Despite Saint-Just’s efforts to provide for the troops, the supply situation remained an ongoing struggle in October and November 1793. After observing the condition of his men, Hoche responded to the Committee’s inquiries, frankly stating that, “the Army of the Moselle, dispersed along a line of around twenty-five leagues [75 miles], is without force or consistency and it has very poorly organized dispositions.”101 Consequently, Hoche determined to reorganize the Army of the Moselle prior to commencing any operation.102

After addressing the problems of the Army of the Moselle, Hoche commenced operations toward the middle of November. With the Allies besieging French forces at Landau, the CPS ordered Hoche to deliver the garrison by striking the enemy siege force. General Jean-Charles Pichegru took command of the Rhine Army, which remained further south around Strasbourg in a position that offered Hoche little help. Hoche informed Pichegru that he needed the Army of the Rhine’s full assistance in an offensive against Landau, or at

100 Hoche to the Soldiers of the Moselle Army, 23 October 1793, in Ernest Cuneo d’Orano, Hoche: sa vie, sa correspondance (Paris: 1892), 17.
102 Ibid., 62, provides the order of battle for the Army of the Moselle after Hoche’s assumption of command. See also Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:97-8, for Hoche’s efforts to organize the army.
least significant reinforcements to bolster his army’s effective strength. Pichegru observed that his army’s weaknesses precluded immediate cooperation in an offensive. Rather than directly participate, he sent Hoche 10,000 reinforcements. In mid-November 1793, Hoche divided the Moselle Army into three groups commanded by Generals Alexandre Camille Taponier, Rémy Vincent, and Jean-Jacques Ambert to assault Brunswick. After failing to preemptively take Bitche on 15 November, Brunswick retreated and placed his Prussian-Saxon army in a defensive position east of the Lauter stream at Kaiserslautern.

Hoche’s first campaign with the Moselle Army demonstrates the overconfidence that permeated much of the French army in 1793. Perceiving Brunswick’s retreat as an admission of weakness, Hoche advanced his army in a dispersed and reckless manner. Brunswick positioned his 50,000-man army behind fortified lines occupying high ground and awaited the French offensive. Ignoring the obvious advantages of the Prussian position, Hoche informed Bouchotte on the 27th that “tomorrow we shall strike the grand coup.” On the morning of the 28th, Hoche ordered his army to assail the heights of Otterberg, initiating the Battle of Kaiserslautern. Lasting three days (28-30 November 1793), the contest marked a major failure of French Revolutionary warfare. According to Revolutionary propaganda, the advantages the French held in motivated troops and mass tactics should have allowed them to crush the “horde of slaves” in Brunswick’s Old Regime army. Nonetheless, Brunswick’s numerical superiority and impressive defensive position should have cooled Hoche’s optimism. His blind faith in the bayonet and the revolutionary enthusiasm of his troops, coupled with strong urgings to attack from the representatives on mission, compelled Hoche to launch the inadvisable assault. In three days of fierce fighting, the Prussians suffered the

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103 D’Orano, Hoche, 87-90.  
104 Moreaux, René Moreaux, 68-9.  
105 D’Orano, Hoche, 96.  
106 Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:86.  
107 Hoche to the War Ministry, 27 November 1794, in D’Orano, Hoche, 32-3.  
108 Hoche assured the CPS that “our bayonets” would overrun “the enemy’s strong position.” Ibid.
loss of 44 officers and 785 soldiers killed, wounded, or captured while the French lost approximately 2,000 men killed and wounded and 700 prisoners.109

After retreating to Zweibrücken, Hoche agreed to execute the Committee’s original plan by moving southeast through the Vosges Mountains to link with Pichegru’s Army of the Rhine for a concerted offensive against the Austrians commanded by Wurmser. Fortunately for Hoche, the CPS demonstrated a rare instance of sympathy for a general. Writing to the disheartened Hoche, it declared: “A reverse is not a crime, as long as every effort was made to merit victory.”110 Prior to commencing the new offensive, Hoche reorganized the army while Saint-Just purged the officers. The Army of the Moselle received 10,000 reinforcements from the Ardennes Army on 5 December. After repairing the strength and condition of his army, Hoche executed the operational plan that Carnot devised.111 To relieve Landau, which the Allies still besieged, Carnot desired an offensive against Coalition forces in Alsace. On 23 November, Hoche sent one division under General Philippe Joseph Jacob to link with Pichegru at Niederbronn. Hoche and Pichegru met on 8 December at Niederbronn and agreed to an effective plan of operations.112

While Hoche and Pichegru coordinated their operations, Wurmser and Brunswick proved unable to engineer a coordinated defense.113 Forcing Wurmser to retreat, Hoche and Pichegru united their forces on 23 December. Hoche became generalissimo of the Moselle and Rhine Armies on the 25th, after a rather tense struggle with Pichegru that proved crucial

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109 Chuquet, Hoche, 89, 91.
110 D’Orano, Hoche, 105.
111 After Kaiserslautern, Carnot wrote to both Saint-Just and Hoche to advocate combining the strength of the Army of the Moselle with that of the Rhine Army and advancing against Wurmser; Reinhard, Le Grand Carnot, 2:120-1.
112 D’Orano, Hoche, 111-2; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:96-7; Chuquet, Hoche, 138-43.
113 Chuquet, Hoche, 146-7. On 14 December, Wurmser moved his main body northwest to bar the Moselle Army’s passage through the Vosges. Four days later, he attacked French forces between Niederbronn and Froeschwiller. Hoche counterattacked at Reichshoffen, forcing Wurmser to reposition his force at Woerth. Meanwhile, Pichegru constantly harassed Wurmser’s covering force to the south near Hagenau, thus depriving Wurmser the ability to concentrate superior strength against one of the French armies. Outnumbered and fearing Pichegru’s threat to his rear, Wurmser saw no option but to cede the line of the Moder and retreat north to the Lauter River, not to be confused with the previously mentioned Lauter stream.
to the fates of both. Hoche immediately continued the offensive against Wurmser, who considered his position so precarious that he convinced an Austrian council of war held on 24 December to continue the retreat to the Rhine. Against Wurmser’s dispersed and largely demoralized forces, Hoche concentrated the bulk of his army to assail the decisive point of his enemy’s line. Defeated at the 26 December Battle of Wissembourg, Wurmser retreated safely across the Lauter to repair his shattered forces. Hoche’s main body bivouacked on the ground they gained during the day’s fighting. Although the victory pleased Hoche, the enemy’s escape disappointed the representatives on mission. In order to assuage potential criticism levied against his leadership, Hoche shifted the representative’s vicious condemnation onto General of Brigade Jean Donadieu, who had hesitated to execute Hoche’s orders to pursue Wurmser with four cavalry regiments. As a result, Donadieu joined the numerous other generals who mounted the scaffold for failing to exhibit an adequate degree of offensive zeal.

Hoche triumphantly entered Wissembourg the morning after the battle while Wurmser and Brunswick continued their retreat to the Rhine. Despite his proclivity for offensive campaigns, Hoche failed to pursue the Allies energetically. Nevertheless, the CPS desired Hoche to commence an expedition deep into the Rhineland in January. The Committee’s orders reveal the intention to increase French influence in the Rhineland. Yet unlike in 1792, the French entered the Rhineland with no goal of liberating the population. Instead, the Committee directed Hoche to “sweep clean” the region, explaining that he must destroy all roads and communications while summoning the Austrian garrison at Mannheim to

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115 Hoche to Leveneur, 28 December 1794, in D’Orano, *Hoche*, 40.
116 Just before Hoche opened the attack, the troops received word of the relief of Toulon. Inspired by the victory, the men in the ranks reportedly declared to their general: “Our brave comrades have saved Toulon, just like we shall save Landau!” Chuquet, *Hoche*, 155.
surrender. Together with troops from the Army of the Ardennes, Hoche’s force would prepare for a siege operation against Mainz, which the Committee regarded as essential for ensuring French security in the Rhineland. Importantly, the Committee did not reference the natural frontiers in these orders. Instead, Carnot hoped to attract Allied attention toward Mainz and away from an invasion of France or a concentration in Belgium. In addition, the CPS proposed that Hoche lead a diversion to capture Trier, to plunder Allied magazines, and impose a contribution. Should Hoche take Trier with ease, the Committee suggested that he could fortify the city without great difficulty. However, it recommended that he withdraw behind the French frontier in the event that Allied forces appeared in strength. To support Hoche and promote the Committee’s plan to exploit foreign resources, the Army of the Rhine received instructions to guard the passages of the Rhine between Hüningen and Germersheim in addition to capturing Kehl. The Committee suggested that it could send 5,000 troops to raise a contribution on the right bank.119

Given the bone-chilling weather and poor supply, Hoche preferred to halt the advance until the end of winter. However, the Committee’s further urgings forced him to pursue Brunswick’s Prussians toward Mainz. Bouchotte endorsed Carnot’s plan and urged Hoche to commence the expedition to Trier. The war minister explained to Hoche the importance of preventing a counterattack by Brunswick, and that he could restore his army’s condition by exploiting the resources of Trier. In addition, Bouchotte commented on the need to plunder wood and other resources from the Palatinate.120 Consequently, Hoche marched over the recently-bloodied ground at Kaiserslautern and pursued Brunswick with light troops as far as the southern outskirts of Mainz. Soon after, he realized his inability to sustain the invasion. On 7 February, the Committee permitted him to enter winter quarters between Bitche and

120 Bouchotte to Hoche, Paris, 17 January 1794, SHAT, B2 156.
Longwy.\textsuperscript{121} Hoche agreed to continue preparations for the advance to Trier during the upcoming spring, yet these plans proved equally futile.

At the end of February 1794, the CPS transferred Hoche to Toulon, ostensibly to command an expeditionary force bound for Oneglia. At Toulon, the commander of the Army of Italy, General Pierre Jadart Dumerbion, arrested Hoche in compliance with the Committee’s orders. Apparently, the government grew increasingly fearful of Hoche’s fame with the troops and his refusal to execute its orders. As Pichegru grew more popular with the CPS (soon receiving command of the Army of the North), he was able to denounce Hoche and have his rival removed.\textsuperscript{122} Although Pichegru’s prominence outshone Hoche’s in 1794, Hoche had his revenge three years later when he helped orchestrate the coup d’état of 18\textit{fructidor}, partly in order to ruin Pichegru’s political career.

Paradoxically, military victory occurred simultaneously with a radicalization of the Terror in December 1793. As noted, Houchard’s victory at Hondschoote ended the British threat to Dunkirk while Jourdan’s victory at Wattignies repulsed Coburg’s attack from Belgium. Despite their rivalry, Hoche and Pichegru restored French security in Alsace and Lorraine and threatened the Rhineland and the Breisgau with invasion. In other theaters, the war took a similar turn. The Vendée civil war became most urgent in July 1793, when the Royal and Catholic Army numbered approximately 100,000 troops. Yet the failure of the rebels to capture Nantes and establish a supply link with the British navy set the scene for decisive republican victories in the fall. On 23 December, French forces defeated the Royal and Catholic Army of the Vendée at the Battle of Savenay, in which two future commanders in the Sambre and Meuse Army, Jean-Baptiste Kléber and François-Séverin Marceau, made an important contribution. Representatives Prieur de la Marne and Jean Bon Saint-André

\textsuperscript{121} CPS to Hoche, Paris, 7 February 1794, RACSP, 11:389.
restored the situation at Brest, where a naval mutiny led to a temporary crisis in September. Similarly, December marked the culmination of a successful republican campaign against the Federalist Revolt. Bordeaux submitted to the Revolutionary government in July, Marseilles surrendered to General Jean François Carteaux in August, and Lyons fell to Representative Couthon in October. Defended by the British, Toulon resisted republican attacks until 18 December, when a brilliant operation planned and led by Captain Napoleon Bonaparte forced British Admiral Samuel Hood to withdraw.123

While the seriousness of the external and internal threats to France had receded by December 1793, the Revolutionary government proved unwilling to surrender its powers. On 5 September, at the height of the military crisis, the National Convention stated that “terror is the order of the day.” In the ensuing weeks, the CPS oversaw the arrest of suspected foreigners in France and the confiscation of property. On 17 September, it passed the Law of Suspects, which gave the revolutionary committees near-totalitarian powers in identifying suspects and making arrests. On 10 October 1793, Saint-Just gained the National Convention’s support for a proclamation that established the concept of Revolutionary government by declaring that “the provisional government of France is revolutionary until the peace.”124 In this configuration, Robespierre’s CPS could legitimately retain power as long as France remained at war. On 4 December, the Revolutionary government took its most concrete form with a declaration initiated by the radical Jacobin Billaud-Varenne. The law condemned all measures contrary to the Revolutionary government’s will, ended communication between local governments and the popular societies, and banned political delegations other than those approved by the CPS.125

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125 Ibid., 78.
Managing the French economy for military purposes during a period of national requisitions proved one of the chief features of the Revolutionary government. Although many members of the National Convention favored laissez-faire economics, the CPS recognized the need for price controls to manage inflation against requisitions and massive government spending. On 26 July 1793, the Convention approved the death penalty for hoarders of grain and other essential commodities. In August, it prohibited the exportation of capital and many products. On 11 September, the government took the final step by instituting uniform price controls on grain and fodder, culminating with the Law of the Maximum on the 29th. These policies aimed overwhelmingly to support the war effort rather than to please the radical sans-culottes. As Lefebvre explains: “It was becoming obvious that the Committee, having adopted the controlled economy, intended to reserve principal benefits therefrom for the army and public services, and that it was not preoccupied with popular consumption except to insure bread, the essential food.”

Given the trend of French victory after July 1793, bitter factionalism and paranoia proved to be the main reasons for the radicalization of the Terror. The campaign against the Girondins signaled the first step in the Montagnard effort to purge France of potential enemies. Jean-Paul Marat’s assassination on 13 July 1793 by a Girondin supporter, Charlotte Corday, lent credence to paranoid fears of violent reprisals for the elimination of Brissot and his followers. The execution of noble army officers served as one element of a larger policy to eradicate all potential sympathizers of the Old Regime. Marie-Antoinette went to the guillotine on 16 October while the Convention authorized the desecration of the graves of the French royals at Saint-Denis Cathedral. More important, factionalism within the Jacobin clique posed a major threat to political stability. Even ardent Republicans such as Reubell and

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Merlin de Thionville fell under suspicion for their role in the fall of Mainz, for which they bore some responsibility as representatives on mission. The Revolutionary Tribunal significantly increased executions between September and December 1793. Of the 395 persons tried by the Parisian tribunal in this period, 177 received the death penalty – a higher percentage of executions than the preceding two months.\footnote{Ibid., 2:70. Between July and August, the percentage of executions was twenty-six percent while the percent executed between September and December was forty-five.}

While the CPS successfully purged enemies on the right and in the center, it faced additional attacks from a less expected group: the radical left. Commonly grouped together as the Enragés, the radical left represented the interests of the sans-culottes and were supported by the municipalities (sections) of Paris.\footnote{See R. B. Rose, Enragés: Socialists of the French Revolution? (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1965).} Divided over economic and social policy, the CPS and the radical left split most starkly on the issue of de-Christianization. The Convention adopted the secular calendar of the Revolution on 24 October 1793 as a means of signaling the New Regime’s symbolic power. More controversial, the Paris sections and Commune closed every church in the city and launched attacks against church property. Viewed by Hébert and other members of the left as the natural progression of republicanism, de-Christianization stoked Robespierre’s suspicion of internal counterrevolutionary conspiracy. He viewed attacks on Catholicism as likely to provoke further unrest and suspected that the loudest voices in favor of secularism might possess sinister motives. On 6 December, the CPS gained the Convention’s support for an affirmation of freedom of worship while noting that sectarian violence only undermined the Republic’s security and unity.\footnote{Lefebvre, French Revolution, 2:76-81; McPhee, Robespierre, 174-8, 182, 186.} Robespierre’s denunciation of de-Christianization marked an important turn in the Revolution when the alliance between the CPS and the radical left irreparably cracked: an ominous development in the Jacobin dictatorship that culminated in further oppressive measures against Robespierre’s former allies in the spring and summer of 1794. In addition, Robespierre’s opposition to de-
Christianization proved significant for French occupation policy: the Committee declared that foreigners could keep their religions as long as they sacrificed their treasure.

Although the victories of December 1793 alleviated the immediate threat of invasion and greatly reduced the threat of internal counterrevolution, they did not come close to ending the war. Frustration over the lack of decisiveness found expression in Revolutionary proposals for a new type of war to be waged in the following campaign. Radical members of the CPS such as Billaud-Varenne and Collot d’Herbois demanded the application of Revolutionary doctrines of mass and shock to the art of war. Carnot, however, descended from the tradition of French engineers, which emphasized a scientific approach to military operations, relying heavily on fortresses and siege warfare. As a young engineer officer and aspiring mathematician, Carnot produced an essay titled Éloge de Vauban, which praised the titular subject’s efforts to ring France with a line of fortresses to ensure internal security.\footnote{Carnot, Éloge de Vauban.} However, in the fall of 1793 the CPS rejected this traditional notion of warfare and declared “it is now time to think of striking the decisive blow, and for that we must act in mass.”\footnote{Dhombres, Lazare Carnot, 373.} Possibly in consideration of the political context, Carnot incorporated the Revolutionary doctrines of mass and shock in his plans and orders for the approaching campaign. Yet he never overlooked the risks posed by unrestrained aggression and understood the limitations of French military power. In early 1794, he proposed that full-scale offensives could not occur in every theater, “but [instead] we must search for a superiority where victory will be guaranteed.”\footnote{Ibid.} Carnot’s reasoned vision for a concentration of military strength in one decisive theater clashed with the Hébertist desire to unleash republican troops on every front – fortunately for the French, Carnot’s will prevailed.
Carnot outlined his general system of military operations in his report of 2 February 1794. While his plans evolved throughout the campaign, the report provides the most comprehensive account of his military policy in Year II of the Revolution. Security concerns designated the Low Countries as the theater in which the French would concentrate overwhelming force to achieve a decisive victory. Carnot defined *decisive* in clear terms: “to ensure that the enemy is unfit to resume the war the following year.” Rather than exhausting the Republic’s armies in a general assault, he decided to limit major offensives to one or two fronts. Harkening back to his notion of *raison d’état*, Carnot warned that unrestrained aggression would “spread too thin the forces on the border . . . while the Republic’s resources would be completely drained.” He presented numerous reasons to concentrate the main attack in the north: “The point where all the world senses that we must deliver the great blow is in the north, because that is where the enemy already masters a portion of our territory, where he directs most of his forces; that is where he is most capable of menacing Paris and threatening the livelihood of our citizens.” Finally, Carnot suggested that the open nature of the country in northern France and Belgium offered the opportunity for a conclusive attack and possessed the resources to support French armies.

Carnot named the Army of the North and the Army of the Ardennes as the principal forces involved in the main offensive. While the former numbered slightly less than 200,000 men on paper, it mustered only 131,000 troops. The Army of the Ardennes contained 21,000 men in the spring of 1794. Thus, Carnot urged the two armies to cooperate in the upcoming operation. Yet he cautioned that in the moment of execution “command should fall into the

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135 According to Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 76-7, Robespierre and the CPS viewed Great Britain and Austria as implacable enemies. They believed that Prussia could be easily persuaded to abandon the Coalition. Thus, the Committee viewed the assault in the Low Countries as most detrimental to the real enemies of France, while relative tranquility on the Rhine would potentially encourage the Prussians.
hands of a single individual.” As for strategic support, Carnot intelligently insisted that the Army of the Moselle and the Army of the Rhine play key roles in the approaching campaign: “By observing the enemy, they can keep him in check and prevent him from advancing all his forces to the North.”

Carnot determined that the Moselle Army would position 20,000 men at Arlon to advance rapidly either east toward Trier and Luxembourg or northwest to Liège and Namur. At Arlon, the Army of the Moselle threatened the hinge that connected the Coalition’s forces in the Low Countries to those on the Upper Rhine. Carnot considered an Allied operation across the Upper Rhine between Basel and Germersheim unlikely in view of the advantages that the Vosges Mountains provided to defenders. The same rationale convinced him to prohibit the Army of the Rhine from attacking Allied forces on the right bank of the Rhine, where the enemy’s ability to contest the crossing would be strengthened by the Black Mountains.

Carnot’s desire to concentrate on Belgium led him to restrict French goals in other theaters. In the Alps, he warned that great offensives would be impossible considering the focus on the Low Countries. Instead, he limited the objectives in that theater to attaining the Petit Saint-Bernard and the Mont Cenis Passes. A possible attack on Piedmont by the Army of the Italy could effectively target Oneille. Similarly, Carnot proposed minor objectives for the Army of the Eastern Pyrenees while urging the Army of the Western Pyrenees to achieve more success. The Army of the Coast of Brest and the Army of Cherbourg would pursue three goals: “1) end the war in the Vendée; 2) guard the coastline; and 3) prepare for a descent on the coast of England.” In reference to the last objective, Carnot stated: “It should

137 By 1795 these two distinct field armies had been combined into the Army of the Rhine and Moselle.
138 Apparently, if the Army of the North repulsed the Allies from Belgium Carnot desired the Moselle Army to advance through Trier to threaten their line of retreat to the Rhine. Should the two French armies in the north fail to deliver decisive results, portions of the Moselle Army could advance to Liège or Namur to assail the Allies’ exposed left flank and capture their magazines on the Meuse.
139 The terrain alone would not deter offensives in this area, but rather the mutual need to shift forces from other theaters to ensure a preponderance of force before the attack in the Low Countries.
be noted, with regard to the raid [on England], that although it cannot be attempted this year, the preparations alone will hold in check all British naval forces during the campaign and prevent them from attempting anything of significance elsewhere.” Thus, Carnot believed that operations along the Channel coast could contribute to the achievement of his plans for the Low Countries: “They will force the British to maintain a considerable army at home, which will place their constitution in great danger, exhaust their finances, and prevent relief efforts in the Netherlands. It is therefore essential to push preparations ahead with all possible strength and to stand ready to take advantage of the first opportunity to execute the raid.”

The report concludes with Carnot’s proposals for anticipated operations in the minor theaters and a summary of the general rules that would guide the actions of every army commander. These instructions conformed to the Revolutionary concepts of mass and shock rather than reality: “always act in mass and offensively.” As the French discovered, their armies could not march in mass because the regions of campaign possessed insufficient resources. Yet Carnot’s report did not entirely break with reality: earlier notions that patriotic soldiers would march to battle willingly and succeed through élan rescinded to the sobering Jacobin insistence on discipline. Moreover, Carnot advised the generals to regularly rotate the location of headquarters to avoid “the links that will inevitably develop by too long a stay in the same place.” Not only should the soldiers avoid fraternization with civilian populations, but the orders instructed them to ravage the enemy’s territory and raise contributions – ideas in perfect accordance with the foreign policy of the CPS. The general rules of engagement encouraged combat with the bayonet and urged commanders to “constantly pursue the enemy until his complete destruction.” Carnot emphasized that eliminating only half of the Coalition’s forces through partial operations would not deprive the enemy of the ability to resume the war the following year: “such an outcome would only extend our present state of

140 Ibid.
violence. Thus, we desire a more aggressive campaign, more vigorous, and that is recommended to all generals and especially those of the Army of the North, which must strike the decisive blows.” Emerging from the demands of a survival strategy, Carnot’s general system of military operations for 1794 proposed a bold offensive in the northern theater, culminating in a “grand bataille” to secure an overwhelming strategic victory.¹⁴¹

While Carnot devised a military policy that clearly favored an invasion of Belgium, others played a more important role in defining Revolutionary foreign policy. Faced with suspicion for his supervision of the French surrender of Mainz, Representative Merlin de Thionville gave a speech on 8 January 1794 that addressed the issue of expansion and proves quite curious in light of his subsequent orientation. Rejecting the universalism of Clootz, Merlin proclaimed: “I love my country exclusively. Let it be happy before we occupy ourselves with the politics of others.” Specifically referencing the problems encountered by Custine’s army at Mainz, he warned: “Do not deceive yourselves, my colleagues. Accustomed to the yoke, the inhabitants of Germany prefer their chains and apathy to liberty; the calm of servitude to the storms of liberty.” Merlin adopted a form of nationalist isolationism that advised the French to “be happy at home. That is the means of revolutionizing other peoples – by causing them to envy our lot.” While abandoning liberationist policies, his speech also emphasized the exploitation motive inherent in the Committee’s foreign policy: “Let us collect whatever our enemies can use. . . . Horses, cattle, iron, gold, silver, food supplies, and ammunition, all that enables us to take the citadels of our enemies. . . . The inhabitants will complain. Well, let them cast out their kings.” Finally, Merlin’s speech constituted an attack on the concept of natural frontiers: he urged Frenchman to abandon the Rhine frontier, which he depicted as a source of eternal war.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Ibid.
¹⁴² Merlin de Thionville’s speech is available in Le Moniteur, 19:162; see also Biro, German Policy, 1:207-8.
The turn against foreigners in Revolutionary policy mirrored the radicalization of the Revolution itself in the spring of 1794. The Hébertists were arrested on the night of 13-14 March after a failed plot to purge the National Convention of moderates. Convinced that their actions would destabilize France and incensed by their de-Christianization program, Robespierre took the opportunity to arrest them. Saint-Just claimed that the actions of the Hébertists constituted a larger conspiracy in which foreigners sought to destroy the Republic by starvation. Between 21 and 24 March, the Hébertists stood before the Revolutionary Tribunal. As noted, seen as a foreign conspirator, Clootz faced arrest and trial alongside them. To condemn Clootz, Robespierre referenced a claim by a Prussian deserter that he personally saw three letters in Clootz’s hand addressed to the Duke of Brunswick. Yet the execution of the Hébertists and Clootz did not stabilize politics. On 16 March, the CPS announced a conspiracy orchestrated by Danton. According to the accusations, Danton had communicated with Dumouriez and the surviving Girondins to overthrow the CPS. The Marxist interpretation often attributes Robespierre’s persecution of Danton to the fact that Robespierre represented the sans-culottes while Danton embodied the bourgeoise. Regardless, Robespierre viewed Danton’s desire to moderate or possibly even end the Revolution as counterrevolution itself – a fact that made his arrest and execution inevitable.

Robespierre’s desire to negotiate peace with several European powers constituted another reason why he persecuted leftist radicals and political rivals in the spring of 1794. Although skeptical regarding the wisdom of making agreements with monarchs, Robespierre viewed war as destabilizing and sought to establish the foundations for peace. He designed the Cult of the Supreme Being partly to obtain for France “peace and happiness through

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143 Doyle, *French Revolution*, 270.
144 For an example of the Marxist interpretation, which was initiated by Jean Jaurès and Albert Mathiez, see Lefebvre, *French Revolution*, 2:89-91.
Robespierre believed that France needed to convince the other powers of its strength and unity before it could consider peacemaking. The Incorruptible thought that he alone possessed the Virtue necessary to provide the leadership and that he needed to cloak himself in the legitimacy of religion. On 7 May, Robespierre spoke to the National Convention on the theme of “Relation between Moral and Religious Ideas and Republican Principles.” At the same time, he purportedly sent a secret agent, Jean Gabriel Maurice Rocques, Count of Montgaillard, to Belgium with peace propositions. Captured by an Austrian patrol who suspected him of espionage, Montgaillard managed to gain the trust of the Austrian diplomat, Florimond Claude de Mercy-Argenteau, and even received an audience with Emperor Francis at Brussels. The details of these propositions and Montgaillard’s mission remain obscure. Nonetheless, the Prussian diplomat, Karl August von Hardenburg, claimed that they demanded French annexation of Belgium but otherwise agreed to a status quo. Montgaillard supposedly stated that Robespierre “dreaded war and the ambition of generals.” In June, Robespierre brought all of these peace plans together in the Festival of the Supreme Being. While he restored a civil religion to France, Robespierre recognized that he could not achieve peace without a change in the war, the outcome of which hinged on the military situation in Belgium.

Although the Revolutionary government produced an extremely powerful military system in the Year II, the campaign failed to achieve Carnot’s grandiose objective of preventing the Coalition from waging further war. In the Low Countries, the Allies defended a fortified line running east from Ostend through Valenciennes and Tournai to Namur on the Meuse River. Weak Austrian detachments linked this line of defense to Trier. The Allies possessed some 150,000 British, Dutch, and Austrian troops to defend this approximately

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145 Biro, German Policy, 1:223.
146 Ibid., 1:228.
147 Anon. Mémoires tirés des papiers d’un homme d’État sur les causes secrètes qui ont déterminé la politique des cabinets dans les guerres de la Révolution (Paris: 1830), 3:12; see also Biro, German Policy, 1:231.
200-mile stretch of territory. Combined, the two French armies in Belgium – the Army of the North and the Army of the Ardennes – enjoyed a slight numerical advantage over the Allies. From March to May, the major combats occurred in Flanders. Coburg directed the main Allied army against Le Cateau and Landrécies to preempt the French offensive desired by Carnot. Pichegru counterattacked with the North Army in April but the Austrians captured Landrécies on the 30th. Coburg assailed Pichegru’s troops at Tourcoing on 17 May and forced the French to retreat. Yet Pichegru’s army outflanked the Austrians the following day in an impressive victory.\(^{148}\) Unfortunately for the French, these accomplishments lacked the resolution desired by Carnot. Pichegru’s failed assault on Tournai on 22 May cost the Allies 4,000 casualties at the expense of 6,500 French, demonstrating the fallibility of French tactics.\(^{149}\)

Further east, three divisions of the Army of the North supported the Army of the Ardennes in the assault on Charleroi. Saint-Just attempted to transform this disorganized force into a cohesive army but an Austro-Dutch offensive drove the French south of the Sambre River on 13 May. Similar fighting occurred on the 20th. Despite suffering 8,000 casualties in the first combats on the Sambre, Saint-Just ordered three additional operations north of the river between 26 May and 3 June, each of which the Allies successfully repulsed.\(^{150}\) Regardless, the French benefitted from these costly attacks because they distracted Coburg from Flanders and forced him to direct reinforcements to the Sambre, which assisted Pichegru’s efforts further west. Nonetheless, the course of the campaign from April to early June revealed the essential parity between French and Allied military

\(^{148}\) Ross, *Quest for Victory*, 77.
\(^{149}\) Ibid., 77-8.
capabilities at the tactical level and boded poorly for the achievement of Carnot’s grand ambitions.

The crucial factor that provided the French a major strategic advantage came in early June. Finding little evidence of his supposed treason and desperate for capable commanders, the CPS recalled Jourdan from his haberdashery at Limoges and gave him command of the Army of the Moselle. Carnot’s 2 February 1794 report had called for 20,000 men to advance from Arlon toward the Sambre, but he granted Jourdan authority to direct twice that number in late April.151 While executing the Committee’s orders to advance toward Namur, Jourdan sought specific instructions regarding his objectives on 24 May. In particular, he asked Carnot if he should besiege Namur or remain southeast of the Meuse.152 On the 27th, Carnot instructed him to cross the Meuse to assist the Army of the Ardennes and the Army of the North at Charleroi. Following the capture of Charleroi, Jourdan would advance northwest toward Brussels while the army prepared for the siege of Namur. Although Carnot’s orders focused Jourdan’s mind on geographic objectives, he reminded the commander to seek opportunities to engage the enemy in decisive battles – only grandes batailles could end the war.153 The strengthening of the French position on Coburg’s left flank forced the Allies to reduce their manpower in Flanders. Pichegru profited from these circumstances and besieged Ypres on 1 June. After repulsing two Allied relief efforts, the French gained the fortress on the 17th.154

The Moselle Army confronted the challenges of occupying foreign territory during the march to the Meuse between April and June.155 Jourdan left detailed instructions outlining the responsibilities of General Jacques Maurice Hatry, the commander of the lead division.

151 CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 30 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:38.
152 Jourdan to CPS, Arlon, 24 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:49.
153 CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 27 May 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:55.
154 Ross, Quest for Victory, 79.
155 Dupuis, Bataille de Fleurus, 26.
Jourdan reaffirmed the need to fully sever communication between Luxembourg and Namur and ordered Hatry to keep the troops constantly active, “harassing the enemy daily with strong thrusts on different points.” Hatry should impede the Coalition’s ability to move troops into Belgium, which the CPS viewed as the decisive theater in the upcoming campaign. Most important, Jourdan instructed Hatry to “search for the occasion of giving battle to the enemy, to cut his supply convoys, and to capture or burn his magazines.” Jourdan urged Hatry to “live off the enemy’s supplies as much as possible,” and “conserve his communication with Longwy, giving me and, when necessary, the Committee of Public Safety and the War Ministry, your opinion on all enemy movements.” Finally, Jourdan demanded that Hatry “maintain order and discipline” among the troops, and “firmly oppose all kinds of pillage.”

The latter directive served two goals. Principally, it aimed to prevent the erosion of discipline among the poorly supplied soldiers, which often occurred during the chaos of pillage and plunder. In addition, Jourdan sought to prevent an anti-French insurgency from emerging among the peasant populations of Belgium and Luxembourg.

Jourdan’s fear of a peasant uprising arose from evidence of Francophobic sentiment and insurgent activity throughout Luxembourg and the Rhineland. Over 400 armed Luxembourg peasants prevented a troop reinforcement at Arlon in mid-April, which signaled the danger of enflaming the population. General Moreaux offered Jourdan more troubling news after his scouts discovered a large body of partisans around Pirmasens. Alarmed, Jourdan and Representative on Mission Pierre Mathurin Gillet sought precise instructions from Paris regarding the government’s policy for managing relations with civilian populations. Gillet perceptively articulated his position in a report to the CPS on 19 April: “When we take the war to another country, it is without doubt not to hunt the inhabitants; that

156 Jourdan to Hatry, 18 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:31.
157 SHAT, M1 608, 2.
158 Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus*, 27.
159 Gillet to CPS, 21 April 1794, in ibid., 401-402.
would only nationalize the war and reduce them to the extreme of joining the armies of the tyrants whom we are fighting.”\footnote{Gillet, quoted in ibid., 28.} Fearing that depleted supplies would compel Moreaux to pillage villages in the Rhineland, Jourdan urged him to “guard against nationalizing the war; which will serve our enemies.”\footnote{Jourdan to Moreaux, 9 April 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:24.} Despite these humanitarian statements, dire necessity mandated that certain actions occur to procure supplies from conquered areas. For instance, Hatry’s force requisitioned one day’s worth of forage from seven villages between Arlon and Post after adequate supplies failed to arrive from Longwy. Stirred by Austrian declarations and propaganda, the local population of Luxembourg and Belgium seemed to anticipate and fear French pillaging. Prior to Hatry’s capture of Arlon, the inhabitants fled the city “with their effects.”\footnote{Gillet to CPS, 19 April 1794, in Dupuis, Bataille de Fleurus, 400.} On entering the city, the tired and nearly famished French soldiers found almost every house bare of food and water.

Although these initial encounters prophesized more serious problems to come, they did not inhibit French military success. Jourdan arrived south of the Sambre on 3 June just after the French suffered a fifth consecutive defeat against the Austrians at Charleroi. In addition to the 40,000 troops from the Moselle Army, the representatives on mission authorized Jourdan to command the forces from the Army of the North and the Army of the Ardennes. On 16 June, the Allies defeated the French at the Battle of First Fleurus, forcing Jourdan to withdraw south of the Sambre. Reorganizing in the aftermath of defeat, Jourdan obstinately crossed the Sambre again on the 18th, forcing the Dutch stadtholder, William V, to retreat to Mons. Coburg viewed the Sambre as a crucial region on his lines of operation and decided to attack. On the 25th, Jourdan captured the fortress of Charleroi – the key objective for both sides. Ignorant of Charleroi’s fall, Coburg attacked Jourdan on the 26th in what became the obstinate Battle of Second Fleurus. Coburg’s army fought valiantly against the
French, launching repeated attacks in column against entrenched citizen soldiers. Only reports that Austrian forces no longer held Charleroi convinced Coburg to halt his attack rather than risk further losses. Jourdan’s troops proved too exhausted to pursue Coburg, who retreated north to Mont St. Jean, with portions of his army camped at the small village of Waterloo. Coburg’s decision proved decisive for two reasons. First, it concluded the French war of survival in what the revolutionaries depicted as an overwhelming victory. Second, it immediately exposed Belgium to French occupation and exploitation and set the stage for the French invasions of the Netherlands and the Rhineland. Second Fleurus culminated the organizational effort of the Committee of Public Safety and marked the point at which the French ceased to rely on their own resources for war and began to primarily utilize those of their highly unfortunate neighbors.

The French recovered from the military crisis of 1793 through a vast organizational effort characterized by an unprecedented level of state centralization. Rather than forming a veritable citizen army, the levée en masse generated a conscript army of soldiers fighting primarily because the government demanded their service. Although the state failed to create a 1,000,000-man army by a significant deficit, the 750,000 troops who served in 1794 constituted a formidable tool for the French war effort. Beyond troops, the levée en masse mobilized the resources of France for military purposes. After Second Fleurus, the French could envision a new campaign in Belgium and the Rhineland to conquer foreign peoples and resources, which would rejuvenate France. The concept of natural frontiers largely disappeared during the period of crisis and recovery between 1793 and 1794. As the next chapter explains, the natural frontiers remained absent from the state’s foreign policy during

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163 While the French demonstrated impressive resolve and professional acumen in the battle, the victory did not result in the destruction of the Allied army. In fact, several observers believed that if Coburg continued his attack at 5:00 PM his troops would have broken through the French line. The Sambre and Meuse Army’s inability to pursue and the need for two days of recuperation attests to the battle’s vicious nature. For Second Fleurus, see Dupuis, *Bataille de Fleurus* and Allain Bernède, *Aux avant-postes de Charleroi: Fleurus, 1794* (Le Mans: Éditions Cénomane, 1994).
the initial drive toward the Rhine but was resurrected by several prominent politicians amid
the patriotic elations of victory.
CHAPTER 6
THE CONQUEST OF BELGIUM AND THE RHINELAND, JULY-NOVEMBER 1794

Second Fleurus marked a significant turning point in the War of the First Coalition. Representing the last concerted effort of the Allies to gain the initiative in the Low Countries, it transformed the strategic and diplomatic calculus of all powers involved. At the end of the year, Prussia and Spain contemplated negotiations with France, the Netherlands suffered invasion and occupation, and the French achieved virtual domination over Belgium and the Rhineland. Exploiting the resources of these territories constituted the primary French war aim. Although the events of 9 thermidor – which occurred during the middle of the campaign – ended Robespierre’s Committee of Public Safety, Carnot provided continuity between the Jacobin and Thermidorean Repubblics. He remained committed to the French pursuit of self-interest rather than a reversion to the republican cosmopolitanism of the Brissotins. Rejecting the natural frontiers as a misguided policy of the past, Carnot formulated a more complicated project to expand Vauban’s pre-carré lines to the Meuse. The unexpected extent of French success in 1794 doomed Carnot’s plans for limited expansion, as the Sambre and Meuse Army took winter quarters on the Rhine and enflamed the passions of many deputies in the Thermidorean National Convention. The resurrection of the natural frontiers policy occurred from the enthusiasm of victory following the Sambre and Meuse Army’s achievements. In addition, many Frenchmen wanted their nation to benefit from the costly war that they believed the European powers had forced them to fight: the acquisition of natural frontiers appeared to be the most tangible and nourishing of fruits.

The victory at Second Fleurus occurred during the climax of the Reign of Terror. As noted, Robespierre utilized the death of Danton to declare a Republic of Virtue. The CPS continued the process of centralization that proved crucial in mobilizing the nation for war and exploiting resources and people for the state. Yet Robespierre took this policy too far,
inspiring greater resentment than loyalty within the National Convention. On 1 April, the CPS abolished all separate ministries, making itself the preeminent administrative and executive organ. In mid-April, the Revolutionary Tribunal at Paris received the exclusive right to hear conspiracy cases while the law of 22 prairial (10 June) deprived accused individuals of legal rights and made death the sole penalty for the guilty. After the passage of the unpopular law, Robespierre’s public reputation diminished substantially. In defiance of the CPS, the National Convention increasingly allowed criticism of the regime. Rumors of new purges raised fear among moderates that the Committee sought only bloodshed. Moreover, the victory at Second Fleurus logically convinced many deputies that the Terror no longer remained necessary. Many viewed Robespierre’s Cult of the Supreme Bring and the law of 22 prairial as the makings of a personal dictatorship.¹ Most important, key members of the Committee no longer supported Robespierre: Carnot, Lindet, Prieur de la Côte d’Or, and Barère held moderate sympathies and claimed to have only supported Robespierre because of the military crisis. Suffering from failing health, Robespierre ceased to attend Committee meetings or speak before the National Convention. His absence allowed Carnot and the moderates to gain control of the CPS while members of the Plain mobilized against the Montagnards in the Convention. Accordingly, Carnot virtually dictated the Committee’s policy in the first three weeks of July – a period of momentous importance in the War of the First Coalition.²

Three days after Second Fleurus, Jourdan reported to Carnot his intention to work alongside Pichegru to “force the enemy to evacuate Belgium.”³ Despite the victory on the Sambre, Carnot expressed doubts regarding the military situation. Allied forces retained

¹ Doyle, French Revolution, 275-7. A total of 1,515 of the 2,639 people who died by the Paris guillotine between March 1793 and August 1794 perished in the period between June and July 1794, making this the bloodiest period of the Terror.
² Dhombres, Carnot, 395-400; McPhee, Robespierre, 205-13.
³ Jourdan to CPS, Marchienne-au-Pont, 29 June 1794, SHAT, B34.
possession of four key positions in French territory: Landrécies, Le Quesnoy, Condé, and Valenciennes. Should the Allies renew their offensive at an unexpected point, they could regain the initiative and threaten Paris. Carnot advised Jourdan to “avoid setbacks that often follow from excessive enthusiasm and overconfidence.”⁴ While exhorting the armies to pursue the enemy’s complete and utter annihilation, Carnot’s orders following Second Fleurus suggest that the difficulty of achieving a decisive victory in battle tempered his commitment to a pure guerre à outrance. Thus, he formulated plans to allow the French to defend limited gains and to ensure the Republic’s safety in the event of prolonged war.

Following Second Fleurus, Jourdan could not immediately pursue Coburg. His army suffered between 4,000-5,000 losses during the battle and required one full day of rest. The French entrenched themselves on the right bank of the Sambre and dared the Allies to counterattack. French cavalry under General Alexis Dubois attempted to pursue but did not possess sufficient strength to confront the Austrian hussar regiments, which covered Coburg’s retreat.⁵ Moreover, the French feared that the Austrians might seek to outflank them by a maneuver at Namur. Marceau informed Jourdan on the 27th that he expected an attack at any point. French air patrols, benefitting from the newly-invented observation balloon, warned Jourdan that massed enemy troops stood on his eastern flank. In addition, Jourdan’s army continued to be plagued by logistical deficits that made a rapid pursuit unfeasible.⁶ Instead of attempting to annihilate the enemy army, the French took two days to reorganize. On the 29th, Jourdan and the representatives on mission met and agreed to create a new formation from the forces under his command: the Army of the Sambre and Meuse.⁷

On 29 June, Carnot provided Jourdan updated guidelines for the Sambre and Meuse Army’s conduct in Belgium. The report articulated the Committee’s vision for the political

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⁴ CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 29 June 1794, in CGC, 4:450.
⁵ SHAT, M1 608, 2; Dupuis, Fleurus, 371-2.
⁶ Marceau to Jourdan, Lambusart, 27 June 1794, SHAT, B¹ 34; Wetzler, War and Subsistence, 41.
⁷ Gillet to CPS, Charleroi, 29 June 1794, SHAT, B¹ 34.
and military occupation of foreign territory. While Carnot congratulated Jourdan for the
victory at Second Fleurus, he impressed on the commander the need for discipline as the
armies “advance into enemy territory. With the combination of justice and firm conduct we
will succeed and force the conquered countries to contribute.”

At this time, the French continued to develop the system of military justice. According to Ian Germani, “justice was
more severe in the Army of the Sambre and Meuse” than in the other armies. The tribunal of
the Army of the Sambre and Meuse commenced operations on 5 June, the date that Jourdan
took command and the forces on the Meuse were united. Overwhelmingly, the authorities
punished troops most harshly for the crimes of pillage and insubordination. Relatively few
soldiers received punishments for political crimes, although this did occur. François Asquin,
for example, received the death penalty for the crime of espionage while a soldier name
Marlier suffered the same fate after the discovery that he had emigrated to Brussels in 1790
and returned to France with 1,740 livres, which the army confiscated.

The Committee stressed the need to punish pillage severely because its members
feared that such wantonness would lead to a degeneration of the discipline they strove to
impress on France’s armies. While the massive French armies could only survive off the
enemy’s lands, contributions had to be conducted professionally and conform to the regime’s
social and political values: “contributions should fall only on the wealthy and the enemies of
France; the people will support us if we respect their morals, livelihoods, and cottages; but
the rest must be completely disarmed and made incapable of harming us: spare nothing in this
regard.” Carnot suggested specific measures to ensure an effective occupation. He
authorized Jourdan to take hostages for ransom; to confiscate provisions, horses, and other

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8 CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 29 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34.
9 Germani, “Terror in the Armies,” 754.
10 SHAT, B1 311.
11 Ibid.
12 On the regime’s contributions policy, see CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 29 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34; and Wetzlar,
War and Subsistence.
supplies that would be useful to the army; to force the population to accept French assignats; and, finally, to force the local governing authorities in Belgium to meet French demands.\textsuperscript{13} Commanding an army of over 100,000 troops, Jourdan understood that his force required a significant resource base for its existence. Estimates claimed that the Sambre and Meuse Army alone required 210,000 pounds of bread and 70,000 pounds of meat per day while the horses needed a regular supply of 400,000 pounds of fodder. The French had no choice but to prioritize exploitation of foreign resources because “by the time the tide of war was beginning to change in June 1794, it was apparent that French agriculture could not meet these large-scale needs.”\textsuperscript{14}

Carnot instructed Jourdan to “profit from the terror in the enemy army and push excessively on Brussels,” yet cautioned that he must ensure the safety of his rear. He advised Jourdan to divide the Army of the Sambre and Meuse into four groups. The first would spearhead the drive to Brussels by marching north from Charleroi. To protect this group’s right flank, a second force would serve as a corps d’observation at Namur. Similarly, a third group would advance west toward Mons to sever Allied communication between Brussels and the interior fortresses in France. Finally, a fourth group would hold Charleroi and prepare to march to the assistance of either of the three groups in the event of an Allied attack.\textsuperscript{15} Jourdan executed Carnot’s designs by forming his army into wing-commands. General Marceau received command of the right wing, which consisted of his division and that of General Jean Adam Mayer. Jourdan commanded the center, which included the divisions of Generals François Joseph Lefebvre, Jean Étienne Vachier Championnet, Antoine Morlot, and Hatry as well as Dubois’s cavalry reserve. Kléber directed the left wing, comprising his division and those of Generals Anne Charles Basset Montaigu and François Muller as well as

\textsuperscript{13} CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 29 June 1794, SHAT, B1 34; see also Palmer, \textit{Twelve Who Ruled}, 357-9, for the political context of these measures.
\textsuperscript{14} Wetzler, \textit{War and Subsistence}, 95.
\textsuperscript{15} CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 29 June 1794, in Charavay, 4:452.
Charles Daurier’s reserve brigade. The Army of the North would assist Jourdan’s army with approximately 85,000 men.16

On 1 July Jourdan drove the small Dutch army from Mons, precipitating a general Allied retreat toward Brussels.17 Although the representatives on mission depicted Mons as another decisive victory, they alerted Carnot that Coburg appeared to be concentrating his troops for a renewed attack while the French extended their forces from Mons to Namur.18 Jourdan expressed his desire to strike a “great blow,” yet warned Carnot that he “remained ignorant as to where the enemy is positioned.”19 Carnot reiterated to Jourdan the need to pursue the enemy and to profit from the fear that reigned in his army: “it is necessary to exterminate him to that last, if possible.”20 Hoping for a decisive victory, Carnot advised the representatives on mission to maintain an effective reserve to exploit any breakthrough in a future battle.21 Following Carnot’s exhortations, Jourdan advanced the Sambre and Meuse Army on the 6th and 7th. These attacks finally compelled the Allies to surrender Brussels and retreat east toward Malines and Louvain but Carnot’s battle of annihilation remained elusive. Nonetheless, Jourdan’s army entered Brussels alongside Pichegru’s Army of the North on the 10th in a jovial victory parade.22

The French conquest of Brussels signaled the conclusion of the Republic’s war of survival that began in the early summer of 1793. Yet the war continued because the prospects of peace appeared minimal following the capture of Brussels. Of the major powers involved, Prussia appeared to be the most likely candidate to negotiate a peace. Inspired by Thaddeus Kosciusko’s victory against the Russians at Raclawice, the Polish population in Warsaw

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16 For the dispositions of Jourdan’s army following Second Fleurus, see Jourdan’s discussion in SHAT, M1 608, 2; and Jouan, La conquête de la Belgique, 258-9.
17 Jourdan to CPS, Marchienne-au-Pont, 2 July 1794; Kléber to Jourdan, Mons, 2 July 1794, SHAT, B1 35. For the Allied perspective, see Coburg to Francis, Mont St. Jean, 4 July 1794, in Vivenot, Quellen, 4:320-3.
18 Representatives on Mission to CPS, Marchienne-au-Pont, 2 July 1794, in RACSP, 14:665-6.
19 Jourdan to CPS, Marchienne-au-Pont, 2 July 1794, SHAT, B1 35.
22 Jouan, La conquête de la Belgique, 268-90, provides the most thorough treatment of these operations.
repulsed the city’s Russian garrison on 16 April 1794. Frederick William II sent 50,000 troops to capture Warsaw and secure his gains from the Second Partition of Poland. The British subsidized 62,000 Prussian troops for the war against France, yet the Prussian king refused to employ a single soldier to defend Austrian Belgium. After Prussian forces suffered defeats at Johanniskreuz and Trippstadt near Kaiserslautern in July, Frederick William postponed operations to relieve Trier.23

Regardless of this decision, the British could not allow the French to conquer Belgium and Holland. In fact, the threat to these areas had caused William Pitt the Younger to raise war funds and bring the British into the war in early 1793. Divisions within the First Coalition perpetually frustrated British efforts to coordinate military operations. Moreover, London remained skeptical of the Allied commitment to defend the Low Countries. Nonetheless, the British would unlikely contemplate peace with France as long as the Republic held part of the Low Countries.24 In regard to Austria, the British believed that Vienna issued secret orders for its generals to preserve the army by surrendering the Austrian Netherlands without a fight.25 Although this rumor caused an uproar in London, no documentary evidence exists to provide verification. In fact, Francis repeatedly urged Coburg to resume the offensive after Second Fleurus, stating that he had no intention of losing Belgium.26 A minor figure in the Coalition, the Dutch stadtholder feared that an Allied retreat from Belgium would spell doom for his regime because the French could potentially support

24 Jeremy Black, *British Foreign Policy in An Age of Revolution, 1783-1793* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 406-71, provides an effective and detailed summary of the British road to war; Mori in *William Pitt and the French Revolution*, 206, states that in 1794 Pitt “was determined to pursue total war against Revolutionary France.”
25 These orders apparently rested on one of two goals. First, Vienna possibly had a secret agreement with the French National Convention whereby Austria would cede France Belgium in return for French support of Austrian compensations in Poland and Bavaria. Second, Francis desired to cut his losses in Belgium and shift forces east to gain territory in Poland; see Rothenberg, *Napoleon’s Great Adversary*, 53, for a discussion of these theories.
the Dutch Patriots or, worse, invade.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, except for Prussia, the Republic’s enemies remained determined to reverse the course of the war and eject the French from the Low Countries. In all probability, the war would continue into 1795 if the armies could not achieve Carnot’s dream of an annihilation battle.

Concerning the issue of managing the civilians living under French occupation, Carnot’s 29 June instructions suggested that his approach remained unevenly divided between the regime’s humanitarian impulses and the harsh realities of war.\textsuperscript{28} As the November and December decrees of 1792 demonstrated, the materiel needs and security concerns of the occupying power – regardless of the level of ideological motivation involved – generally outweighed compassion for the well-being of conquered civilians.\textsuperscript{29} In May 1794, the CPS prepared for a breakthrough into Belgium by ordering the Commerce Commission to prepare “Agencies of Evacuation.”\textsuperscript{30} These bodies would ensure that the French extracted supplies and resources from the conquered territories, the most important of which proved to be grain. Initially, two Agencies of Evacuation formed with one headquartered at Sedan and the other at Lille, before both moved to Brussels after the French captured the capital. Utilizing these organizations and the power of the representatives on mission, the French turned Belgium into an administrative grid to facilitate efficient exploitation.

On 18 July 1794, the CPS issued instructions to the Agencies of Evacuation to raise requisitions and contributions in the occupied Belgian lands.\textsuperscript{31} The instructions evinced Carnot’s notion of raison d’état and provided the rationale behind the French exploitation of foreign territories. The text of the report effectively captures the spirit: “The object of your

\textsuperscript{28} CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 29 June 1794, in \textit{CGC}, 4:450-2
\textsuperscript{29} Blanning, \textit{French Revolution in Germany}, 64-7.
mission is to rescue France from the ailments that afflict her.” While the British “closed the seas,” the Austrians and Prussians had “rushed upon” France’s borders. In response, France, having “showed the world a great example of courage,” plunged into war without sufficient resources, arms, munition, or supplies. Its severe economic crisis resulted from the lack of foreign commerce. The CPS stated that the suffering would end only by refilling its magazines and arsenals, “rendering them independent of events and seasons.” The report indicated that the fertile lands of Belgium would provide for the Republic’s needs and rejuvenate the economy.

After explaining the economic rationale for exploitation, the 18 June instructions returned to the humanitarian theme: “The unfortunates who lowered their head under the yoke of tyrants and their satellites have nothing to fear from the Republic. The laborer who works his field, the artisan, the man of work, will not be deprived of his salary and compensation.” Although such statements overcame potential moral misgivings, the safety of civilians depended on their passive acceptance of French exploitation: “You will leave to the laborer the horses, cattle, and provisions necessary for his family and his needs. You will purchase products in the markets; you will exercise the right of preference that recognizes justice.” The Committee stipulated that the agents should inflict levels of requisition that would not threaten the profession of artisans. Only the “lazy man, the enemies of liberty and equality, the oppressors of his brothers” would feel the “weight of national justice.”

Most significant, the instructions informed the agents that efficient exploitation rather than cultural conversion remained the primary goal of the Agencies of Evacuation. Encouraging them to accept church bells and metal relics as payment of military contributions, the Committee cautioned them to “remember that the Belgians are attached to their habits.” Rather than disabuse the Belgians of their religious beliefs, the French should

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32 Ibid., 4:507.
refrain from religious discussions and not reveal the intended function of the sacred metals. Finally, instead of insisting on ideological conversion, the instructions warned that “too much eagerness to teach others results only in bitterness and anger.”\textsuperscript{33} Clearly, this seemingly tolerant approach to occupation emerged from fears of unrest and revolt rather than genuine respect for the beliefs of the conquered peoples. The 18 July instructions laid the groundwork for the French exploitation of Belgium rather than its annexation. Carnot’s directives stated nothing about preparing the inhabitants of Belgium for annexation but instead the representatives on mission should avoid unnecessarily antagonizing the population. Such policies allowed for a flexible approach to the question of future annexations while ensuring that foreign territories served France’s immediate military and economic needs.

Carnot addressed the strategic questions raised by the French conquest of Brussels in a report dated 16 July 1794. Like his speech to the National Convention on 14 February 1793, Carnot’s 16 July proposal remains poorly understood by historians. Although Palmer correctly demonstrates that the exploitation policies began under the Jacobin Committee of Public Safety and not the often-scorned Thermidorean Republic, he fails to comprehend the significance of Carnot’s report. In fact, after dismissively referring to it as “a kind of minimum program,” Palmer states that “the Committee never acted upon these recommendations, for domestic politics in mid-July were reaching a crisis. . . .”\textsuperscript{34} Unable to reconcile this report with his mistaken belief that Carnot desired French expansion to the Rhine, Biro – without quoting or summarizing the document – boldly states that it “sounds very much like the report of one Maximilien Robespierre.”\textsuperscript{35} The simple fact that the report appeared during Robespierre’s famous and well-documented sojourn from the CPS, at a time when Carnot openly criticized the Incorruptible’s efforts to create a personal dictatorship,

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Palmer, \textit{Twelve Who Ruled}, 358-9.
\textsuperscript{35} Biro, \textit{German Policy}, 1:238.
reveals the absurdity of Biro’s assertion. Like Biro, Godechot struggles to explain Carnot’s transformation from an apparent champion of Girondan expansionism in 1793 to a critic of the natural frontiers in 1794. Yet he reaches a shockingly different conclusion: “Without doubt, his [Carnot] evolution toward the right, which hoped for a quick peace and the most rapid reestablishment of order, certainly counting on a prompt Restoration, explains the change in his point of view.” Thus, while Biro attributes Carnot’s 16 July report to Robespierre, Godechot alleges that Carnot embraced royalism and sought a return to France’s 1789 borders. Blanning, who does not mention the report, asserts that Carnot rejected the natural frontiers in favor of the anciennes limites of France, which misrepresents his actual position – the proposals clearly provided room for expansion.

The wildly divergent representations of Carnot’s 16 July 1794 report attest to its significance. Surprisingly, the most recent and otherwise thorough biography of Carnot does not discuss the report. Although previous historians failed to determine the meaning of Carnot’s proposals, situating them in the context of his already established conceptions of raison d’état and conditional annexations make them accessible at last. Rather than constituting a quickly discarded minimalist program or the manifestation of a secret ideological agenda, Carnot’s 16 July report provided the strategic parameters that directed the

36 Unfortunately, the problems with Biro go even further. He cites the report from Charavay on the correct page and volume numbers but mistakenly dates it from 15 July. Moreover, he reaches the bogus conclusion that the report “had convinced that body (the Committee of Public Safety) that victory was not of itself a goal.” Nowhere in the report does Carnot make this argument. Apparently, Biro could not conceive of victory unless the French held the Rhine. As it occurs on the same page in the preceding paragraph, it should noted that Biro also states that the French “were able to hold off the Allies” at Second Fleurus “by superior intelligence,” which he attributes to their use of an observation balloon. See ibid., 1:237-8. In reality, smoke from the artillery made it impossible for the balloonists to observe the battle effectively. Jourdan, SHAT, M1 608, 2, claims that their reports did more harm than good.
38 Godechot overlooks that Carnot was a regicide and, accordingly, it is very unlikely that he desired the return of the Bourbons.
39 Blanning, French Revolution in Germany, 75.
40 The document is not mentioned in the relevant chapter of Dhombres, Carnot, 395-420.
Republic’s armies in the months after 9 thermidor and, paradoxically, brought the Army of the Sambre and Meuse to the Rhine by the end of 1794.

On 16 July 1794, Carnot headed the daily meeting of the CPS. News recently arrived that the French armies in the north had captured Brussels. Carnot took the opportunity to address his colleagues regarding his view of the Republic’s war aims. As the key individual in charge of the state’s military efforts since August 1793, his opinion demanded attention. “It is not enough that the armies of the Republic are everywhere triumphant,” began Carnot. “Their victories must serve a useful purpose and their results should not be abandoned to hazard or enthusiasm.” Like his warnings to Jourdan against the dangers of overconfidence after Second Fleurus, Carnot stressed to his colleagues the urgent need to establish in advance the objectives to be achieved by future operations, “lest we lose in an instant the fruits of our labor and heroism.” Next, Carnot provided his main argument:

The speed of our military successes and the courage of the soldiers of the Republic would no doubt permit us, if we so desired, to plant the tree of liberty on the banks of the Rhine in the approaching campaign, and unite to France all the territory of Ancient Gaul. But, as seducing as that system is, one finds it wise to renounce and to acknowledge that France would only be weakened and forced to prepare for a perpetual war by an aggrandizement of that nature.

While his 14 February 1793 report situated Carnot as a proponent of conditional annexations, his 16 July 1794 proposals positioned him as a clear opponent of French expansion to the Rhine. Nevertheless, the reports share the same underlying concerns.

Carnot rejected French annexation of the Rhine by referencing the apprehensions he raised in his 1793 report to the National Convention. Although he agreed that the Rhine provided a “formidable barrier,” he argued that it would “profoundly extend the length of our

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41 Apparently, Biro, in German Policy, 1:238, took this sentence to mean that Carnot did not seek victory. Clearly, Carnot is speaking of victory in a limited tactical sense rather than the larger political concept of victory. Carnot did not view tactical victories as a primary goal unless they secured significant political results.

Map 7. Carnot’s Plan of Expansion, 16 July 1794
border, and result in an extreme dispersal of the forces required to defend it.” Such an expansion clearly violated the principle of simplifying and consolidating the Republic’s means of defense that he established in his Diplomatic Committee report. Moreover, Carnot expressed concern over the effects of such a long-term occupation. “It would require an enormous number of troops and the most constant vigilance to prevent merely a weak enemy from achieving surprise on several passages.” The consequence would be to threaten the rear of the occupying army and to force the French to abandon their conquests: “we would inevitably return to our anciennes limites after suffering immense losses.” Should France resume Girondin expansion, Carnot advised that the French must resolve to prolong the state of war, to continue to maintain a large military force, and “expose themselves to new alternatives of victory and defeat, which would no longer permit hope for an end to the political crises.”

The 16 July proposal further articulated Carnot’s theory of annexations, one that clearly differed from the policies of Brissot. According to Carnot’s 14 February report, annexations should occur only after the free and positive vote of the populations involved or if the security of the state made it an imperative. On 16 July, he explained to the Committee that “the system has the further drawback of thwarting the principle by which France rejected the spirit of conquest.” Yet if he opposed unrestrained expansion to the Rhine, his concept of raison d’état demanded limited gains to serve the Republic’s security – regardless of the wishes of the relevant foreign populations: “It seems, in effect, that according to those principles, we must reject all aggrandizements that are not commanded by the necessity of ensuring our proper possessions.”

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43 Ibid., 4:496-7.
44 Ibid., 497.
The essential consistency in Carnot’s thought belies the notion proffered by Biro and Godechot – albeit for wildly different reasons – that Carnot’s 16 July report represents a significant shift or aberration in his military and foreign policy. As in his 14 February 1793 report, Carnot proposed limited objectives in 1794 that sought to establish territorial security. He offered Ypres and Nieuport as prime examples: “without these it is impossible to effectively defend Dunkirk and all the Nord département from the sea to the Lys.” Another aspect of consistency appears in relation to Carnot’s concern over the spirit of the people who would enter the Republic following the Rhine’s annexation. Carnot considered the majority of those people “not ripe for our Revolution; the factions that would form in the interior of the country would join the external enemies, rendering us victims of our own success.” Finally, he argued that expansion to the Rhine would extend the Republic’s powers too far from the base of government. Indeed, “by approaching the centers of action of foreign governments,” we would “weaken our own drive” to victory. He predicted that, by threatening their territory, a French war of conquest would “present an immediate and intense shock to the enemy, which would provide them with an immense advantage” in motivation.46 Carnot anticipated the significant challenges of directing a war on the Rhine frontier from Paris. In 1795 and 1796, he would discover even greater obstacles to conducting campaigns east of the Rhine while maintaining central authority.47

Carnot’s 16 July report depicted the Rhine as an un-natural frontier and proposed an alternative vision of French territorial expansion. “It appears, therefore, to be more sagacious to restrain our projects of aggrandizement to that which is purely necessary to provide the maximum security of our proper lands, to crush the coalition, to assure our commerce, and to reduce our enemies’ ability to attack us with any chance of success.”48 Carnot applied these

46 Ibid.
47 Brown in War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State, 1-11, 124-49, discusses these problems in detail.
48 “Views Proposed to the Committee of Public Safety on the Results that Must be Drawn from the Current Campaign in the North,” Paris, 16 July 1794, in CGC, 4:497.
principles to the new barriers on the northern frontier that he proposed to his colleagues. According to his report, the first line of defense for the northern frontier of France would be established between Antwerp and Namur. Although the proposed areas of expansion contained valuable economic and strategic territories, the small-scale of the annexations proposed by Carnot challenges conventional notions of the Revolutionary government’s expansionist designs. Carnot’s proposal would have formed France’s western boundary at the mouth of the Scheldt and extend to Antwerp. From Antwerp, the border would follow the Scheldt thirty miles southwest to Gent, where it would continue to run along the Scheldt until reaching Tournai. From there it would proceed to Condé and follow the Haine River fifty miles east through Mons to Charleroi. The line would follow the Sambre River twenty-five miles northeast from Charleroi to Namur. From Namur, the border would follow the Meuse fifteen miles directly south of Namur to Dinant. Thus, the boundary would rely on the Scheldt, Haine, Sambre, and Meuse Rivers for defense, supported by the fortresses of Antwerp, Ghent, Oudenarde, Tournai, Mons, Charleroi, Namur, and Dinant. Carnot designed these limited annexations to maximize the security of France’s *anciennes limites*: “The first cordon of defense, by its circular form, embraces Brabant, and prevents one from penetrating our territory without exposing himself to the risk of being enveloped by our troops . . . .”

Expansion to Antwerp and Namur provided two outer bastions to bolster the circular defensive frontier in the north. Both West Flanders and Dutch Flanders would be secured by the squared border formed by the Ostend-Antwerp-Gent line. Similarly, the Sambre and Meuse region would be squared by the Charleroi-Namur-Dinant system. Carnot maintained that “a significant expansion from this side would extend us beyond our natural limits, which are the Sambre and the Meuse, and we would be thrown into a country without natural defenses and strongholds.” In addition to providing increased defensive capabilities to France.

than the region between Brussels and the Rhine, Carnot argued that leaving the open country in enemy hands offered France opportunities in future military campaigns: “They will be unable to prevent us from entering into their open country and living at their expense whenever they want to make war on us; they will have no place to establish their magazines and will be vulnerable from all sides at the opening of a campaign.” He postulated that the bleak prospects an enemy would face in such a war would promote “a strong and durable peace.” Moreover, these boundaries “would demonstrate to them that we have no desire to enlarge ourselves, but only to achieve the borders to ensure our possessions.”  

In addition to outlining the parameters of the northern frontier, Carnot’s proposal established a crucial principle that challenged the decrees of November and December 1792: French armies could wage campaigns beyond the frontier without engaging in a war of liberation or annexation. Most significant, Carnot argued that the Republic must not annex the majority of Belgian territory. Rather, the armies would “put it to good use,” by “extracting everything possible, both in cash and commodities.” He asserted that while the “people will be spared,” Belgium would be left powerless to support enemy armies. According to his plan, all remaining fortifications in Belgium would be destroyed, roads broken, canals and locks rendered unserviceable, and horses and carts removed.

In 1794, Carnot implemented most facets of the proposal, although he could not execute every aspect. For example, his report cautioned the CPS against pursuing the conquest of Holland. Instead, he emphasized the need to capture Antwerp and Walcheren Island to compel the Dutch to withdraw from the Coalition. He suggested that British trade in the North Sea and the Indian Ocean would be curtailed by forcing them to maintain naval forces in the English Channel, and that the resulting collapse of subsidies to Prussia would

50 Ibid., 4:498.
encourage Frederick William to seek peace. Instead of wrecking the Dutch economy in an exploitative campaign, Carnot recommended a program to transform the stadtholder into a beneficial ally. Although circumstances prevented Carnot from actualizing this part of the plan, his orders following 9 thermidor disprove Palmer’s assertion that the CPS never implemented the 16 July proposal.52

The correspondence between Carnot and the military and political leaders of the Republic’s armies reveal the application of his 16 July proposals. Shortly after reading his remarks to the CPS, Carnot received several reports suggesting that his plans could be effectively executed. Representative Gillet wrote from the headquarters of the Sambre and Meuse Army at Genappe that the enemy-held French fortress of Landrécies appeared to be on the verge of surrender to General Barthélemy Louis Joseph Schérer’s detached siege force. Gillet expressed several opinions on the siege of Namur and informed Carnot that he expected that a battle near Rocroi would drive the Austrians east toward the Meuse.53 Landrécies indeed fell to the French on 16 July and Schérer directed the siege force to Le Quesnoy; Gillet assured Carnot that the army would “purge the soil of Liberty of the slaves of tyrants.”54 Moreover, Gillet reported on the impressive number of supplies and equipment that the French gained from Landrécies.55 The siege of Le Quesnoy commenced on the 17th, and two days later Gillet informed Carnot that in French hands Namur and Charleroi would prove to be “impregnable positions.”56

52 Ibid.
53 Gillet to CPS, Genappe, 15 July 1794, in RACSP, 15:195; SHAT B1 133.
54 Gillet to CPS, Landrécies, 16 July 1794, in RACSP 15:224; on the siege of Landrécies, see Schérer to CPS, Landrécies, 16 July 1794, SHAT B1 36.
55 In addition to the flags of the Austrian garrison, Gillet’s list included 91 cannon, a bountiful supply of munitions, 150 to 200 horses (which Gillet sent directly to the Sambre and Meuse Army), 493 barrels of flour, and 600 sacks of oats, see Gillet to CPS, Landrécies, 17 July 1794, in RACSP, 15:250-1; and the reports in SHAT, B1 36, especially the official report on the siege by General Armand-Samuel Marescot.
56 Gillet to CPS, Landrécies, 19 July 1794, in RACSP, 15:289; SHAT B1 133; and Schérer to CPS, Le Quesnoy, 17 July 1794, SHAT, B1 36.
Meanwhile, Representatives Louis-Bernard Guyton de Morveau and Jean Laurent, although officially assigned to the Army of the Sambre and Meuse and the Army of the North respectively, established headquarters at Brussels to coordinate the exploitation of Belgium. On 18 July, Laurent journeyed to Malines and Louvain to impose a combined 3.5 million livres contribution. Laurent provided Carnot with three reports on the resources of Belgium and remarked that he had authorized the requisition of grain, oats, hay, straw, oxen, and cows. In addition, he notified Carnot that he took two hostages from the University of Louvain and shipped them to a prisoner of war camp at Maubeuge. He awaited news of the capture of four more hostages at Malines. Representative Joseph Étienne Richard joined Laurent and Guyton at Brussels on the 19th to implement Carnot’s orders to devise an effective administrative policy for the occupied territories. The representatives accepted the Committee’s rationale for an efficient exploitation policy, stating that “it is necessary to overcome delays, obstacles, and any kind of resistance to achieve the recovery of a considerable sum.” The despoliation of Belgium entailed not only economic resources, supplies, and weaponry, but also works of culture. Guyton organized a commission of four well-known artists to research and transmit to the depots “precious pieces of painting and sculpture, under the surveillance of the representatives at Brussels.”

The representatives to the other armies executed Carnot’s occupation policies and strategic vision. During his conference at Brussels, Richard issued a report to the CPS that explained the operations of the Army of the North and the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. He informed Carnot that the latter army’s anticipated capture of Namur along with the North

57 Guyton and Laurent to CPS, Brussels, 16 July 1794, in RACSP, 15:225; the representatives sent Carnot General Kléber’s report on the battle, see Kléber to Jourdan, Louvain, 16 July 1794, SHAT, B1 36.
58 Laurent to CPS, Brussels, 19 July 1794, in RACSP, 15:293-4; Carnot formalized several prisoner of war camps in the northern départements in July 1794, see RACSP, 15:241-6.
60 Guyton assured the Committee of the existence of rare books and manuscripts, rare scientific instruments, and other items desired by the Académie Française, see Guyton to CPS, Givet, 23 July 1794, in ibid., 15:384; see also Representatives on Mission to CPS, Brussels, 19 July 1794, SHAT, B1 36.
Army’s capture of Malines would provide “a new degree of solidity to the armies’ combined movements.” He expected major resistance to the army’s assault on Antwerp, but made preparations. Most significant, Richard commented on the problems confronted by the occupation of Belgium. He noted that agitators and hoarders from the border towns confronted their armies from the moment they entered the country. The chaos caused by those who sought to take advantage of the army’s advance by entering French territory or raiding French supplies caused Richard to prohibit the entry of genuine Belgian refugees onto French soil: “more occupied with their own interests than those of the Republic, they see our territory as a means to serve both their greed and revenge.” Three days later, Richard returned to the North Army’s headquarters at Vilvoorde and commented that the North Army took several hostages in accordance with the Committee’s orders. Faced with the massive administrative task of exploiting Belgium while observing the army’s military operations, Richard requested the dispatch of several more representatives on mission charged exclusively with civil administration, contributions, and requisitions.

The representatives to the Rhine and Moselle Armies reported similar circumstances in their region. Representatives Alexandre Goujon and Hentz announced that the Prussian retreat from Kaiserslautern opened “the rich Palatinate harvests to the Army of the Rhine.” Preparing to execute Carnot’s orders to invade the Archbishopric of Trier, the representatives indicated their intention to exploit the region and force the population to accept French assignats. They also stated their desire to besiege the fortress of Mannheim on the Rhine, but indicated that this objective remained secondary to the invasion of Trier. The recovery and occupation of the Upper and Lower Rhine Départements as well as preparations to defend the

61 Namur fell to the French on 19 July, see “Capitulation of Namur,” 19 July 1794, in ibid.
63 Richard to CPS, Vilvoorde, 22 July 1794, in ibid., 15:360-2.
area around Landau before the advance on Trier frustrated the representatives on mission:
“we were painfully struck by the sad state that reigns in these parts of the Republic.” In the
Upper and Lower Rhine Départements, the representatives complained of the stupidity,
ignorance, and superstition of the inhabitants, who remained “alien to our Revolution, even
calling us foreigners.” The inhabitants of the Palatinate evinced characteristic “German
servility,” and remained trapped under “the aristocracy of wealth.” The representatives
remarked that fortunately the citizens of Strasbourg offered a counter-example to the others.
Nevertheless, they asked Carnot for further assistance from the National Convention.66 Such
a pessimistic attitude even toward French citizens in the Upper and Lower Rhine
Départements seems to confirm Carnot’s reservations regarding a massive extension of
French territory into the Rhineland.

Carnot’s orders reveal the implementation of his 16 July proposal later that month and
into early August 1794. On 20 July, he utilized the reception of the keys to Namur to
officially unveil his mission for the northern frontier to the representatives on mission
attached to the Army of the North and the Army of the Sambre and Meuse.67 The
unconfirmed news of the fall of Nieuport allowed Carnot to instruct the armies to place both
it and Namur “in the best state of defense” by repairing the fortifications. Conforming to his
16 July proposal, Carnot ordered the North Army to completely destroy Ostend, which would
allow the French to consolidate and strengthen Dunkirk and to remove a potential target from
the Republic’s extended coastline. He stated that this solution favored expediency and
national interests. The same orders applied to the sectors of the fortifications at Namur,
Dinant, and Charleroi that faced the Sambre and Meuse region. To bolster this first line of
defense between the Sambre and the Meuse, Carnot ordered that Philippeville (or “Vedette-

66 Representatives on Mission to CPS, Strasbourg, 22 July 1794, in ibid., 15:368.
67 On these operations, see Jourdan, SHAT, M1 608, 2; and the relevant reports in SHAT, B1 36.
Républicaine”) and Beaumont be prepared to resist a siege. He directed the army to transport all of the cannon and artillery supplies located at Namur, Charleroi, and Dinant to the rear for distribution. Following these pronouncements, Carnot encouraged the representatives “to rapidly bring to France all the wealth of Belgium.”

Regarding the fate of Belgium, Carnot desired “to keep only the portions that could secure our proper frontier.” He defined those areas as all of West Flanders and Dutch Flanders on the left flank of the new French frontier. On the right, the French would annex the regions between the Sambre and the Meuse. In line with his 16 July proposal, the region between these two extremities would extend to the Scheldt and the Haine Rivers. “Antwerp and Namur will serve as the two points of support and the frontier will become an entrenched circle covered effectively by rivers, into which the enemy could not penetrate without finding himself surrounded at the same time.” The newly acquired territories and the regions beyond must be forced to pay a contribution. Carnot applied the 16 July proposal to the current situation by stating that either the Army of the North or the Army of the Sambre and Meuse would cross the Meuse if the enemy evacuated Liège. As his proposals stated, the extension of offensive operations beyond France’s boundaries would not entail further annexations. Yet he warned the representatives and Jourdan to observe the Austrians carefully, unless they attempted to launch a counter-attack, in which case the French would defend Brussels and Namur. Returning to guerre à outrance, Carnot instructed the army to “remain always in mass and in action, so that the enthusiasm of our troops and the confusion of the enemies do not diminish.” To conclude his 20 July letter to the representatives on mission, Carnot instructed them to expedite the sieges of Le Quesnoy, Valenciennes, and Condé – his expanded northern frontier remained vulnerable while the Coalition retained

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69 Ibid., 4:513.
70 Ibid.
possession of French territory. Finally, they should prepare the attack on Walcheren Island and Antwerp.\textsuperscript{71} These orders perfectly conformed to Carnot’s 16 July proposal and established the Antwerp-Namur line as the northern frontier of France.

Two additional reports in July confirm that the CPS implemented Carnot’s 16 July proposal before the events of 9 \textit{thermidor}. On the 21\textsuperscript{st}, Carnot issued orders to the Sambre and Meuse Army regarding Namur: “The château of Namur, dear colleagues, is one of the points of such great importance that it must absolutely never return to the control of our enemies.” Carnot considered two potential courses of action for Namur: “the first is to make the place impenetrable, the second is diametrically opposite: to completely destroy it.”

Considering the short-term threat posed by the Austrian army on the Meuse, Carnot considered the first option impractical. Moreover, he stated that France lacked the resources to ensure its complete defense. The second option offered the advantage of guaranteeing that the enemy would never possess the strategically vital position: “supposing that if it was impenetrable, it could still be surrendered to the enemy through treason.”\textsuperscript{72} Moreover, the fortresses of Givet, Philippeville, Maubeuge, and the fortified camp at Saint-Gérard sufficiently guarded the Sambre and Meuse region. Thus, Namur could be destroyed to ensure French security on the Sambre and the Meuse without sacrificing Carnot’s northeastern frontier in Belgium. He assured the representatives that the project should not be rushed and that the enemy’s retreat left them secure enough on the Sambre to “launch a vigorous attack” in the direction of Neerwinden. Yet concern that the Austrians might assail the Sambre and Meuse region before the French converted it to a defendable frontier compelled Carnot to order a feint against Maastricht. Although he did not yet order the army

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 4:514.
\textsuperscript{72} CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 21 July 1794, in ibid., 4:515-17. In the hands of Austrian troops, Namur would link their line of posts on the Meuse to Maastricht, “leaving them masters of a major portion of the lands of the Sambre and Meuse.” In contrast, Namur actually provided the French little benefit because its weak side faced the enemy. See Jourdan’s comments on “the good condition” of Namur in Jourdan to CPS, St. Martin, 20 July 1794, SHAT, B1 36.
to capture the fortress, he implored Jourdan to “take dispositions that indicate your intention to besiege it; spread the rumor.”

The second report outlined Carnot’s vision for the Army of the Rhine and the Army of the Moselle. Following his desire to achieve a decisive victory against the Coalition, Carnot exhorted them to “always act offensively, attack every day, and harass the enemy without end . . . .” Carnot’s previous orders to invade Trier suggested further operations into the Rhineland. Yet, he insisted that “our intention is not to make great conquests on that section of the frontier, considering the little utility that they would bring and the difficulty required to defend them.” Rather than extending French territory across the left bank of the Rhine, Carnot reiterated his intention to capture the land between the Saar and the Moselle. The armies would plunder the magazines at Trier, requisition the harvest in the Palatinate, and extend the web of French contributions as far north as possible. While Carnot authorized the armies to cross the Rhine if the opportunity arose, he refuted the idea of establishing permanent territory east of the Rhine. In fact, he announced the primary aim of all operations in the theater: “To amass the grain that must exist there in abundance; in general, it is for subsistence, horses, [and] provisions of all kind that we must wage war on the frontiers of the Rhine and the Moselle.”

Moreover, Carnot’s orders directed the Rhine and Moselle Armies away from rather than toward the Rhine. He reminded the commanders that their operations should principally support the armies in the north. Carnot declared that if the Austrians sought safety in Luxembourg, the Rhine and Moselle Armies should repulse them “so that they have nowhere left to rest their heads.” The armies should capture the fortress of

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73 CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 21 July 1794, in CGC, 4:515-17; see Jourdan’s discussion of the campaign for the Meuse in SHAT, M1 608, 2.
75 Ibid., 4:508.
76 Ibid.
Luxembourg and gain “an important success that would conclude the war on that frontier in a very glorious manner.”

These reports reveal the inaccuracy of Palmer’s assertion that the “Great Committee of Public Safety” did not implement or take seriously Carnot’s proposal of 16 July. The failure of historians to comprehend that Carnot anticipated limited expansion on the northern frontier receives further discredit by the fact that he continued to develop these plans after the fall of Robespierre and during the first months of the Thermidorean Republic. While previously depicted by historians as a spurious plan, the proposals of 16 July are clearly seen in these orders, which prove that Carnot implemented this strategy. From establishing the borders of the Republic between the extremes of the natural frontiers and the borders of 1789, Carnot provided a real alternative. He proposed a policy of limited expansion into Belgium predicated on the strengthening of French power. The subsequent development and ultimate repudiation of Carnot’s plan require explanation.

Paradoxically, the overthrow of Robespierre and Saint-Just in the coup of 9 thermidor ultimately prohibited the realization of Carnot’s master plan. On 26 July, Robespierre entered the National Convention and claimed that a faction had conspired against him to assist the enemies of the Republic. In order to defend France, he called for national unity. The speech received an ovation with calls to publish it in every tongue. However, when the deputies asked for specific names, Robespierre wavered, claiming that he did not seek to instigate a bloodbath. The moderates who now controlled the National Convention managed to revoke the decree that authorized the printing of the speech. Accompanied by Saint-Just, Robespierre returned to the Convention the following day but the moderates refused to allow either to speak. After gaining control of the National Guard, the moderates arrested René-François Dumas, the president of the Revolutionary Tribunal. In the afternoon, they ordered the arrest

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77 Ibid., 4:509.
of Robespierre, Saint-Just, and Couthon. While the Paris Commune attempted to instigate a revolt in support of Robespierre, the National Guard suppressed any potential uprising. Before his arrest at the Hôtel de Ville, Robespierre tried to commit suicide but succeeded only in blowing off his chin with a pistol. On 29 July – 11 thermidor by the Revolutionary calendar – the Incorruptible was guillotined along with Saint-Just, Couthon, and nineteen others. Over the next two days, the Thermidoreans guillotined a total of eighty-three Jacobins, Montagnards, and suspected terroristes at the Place de la Révolution.78

Following 9 thermidor, France passed through a period often called the White Terror. Jacobins and former terroristes received the brunt of moderate revenge for a year’s worth of Revolutionary persecution and coercion. Often depicted as the triumph of the bourgeoisie, the Thermidoreans abolished most of the Terror’s economic controls and social democracy.79

The National Convention reasserted legislative prerogative in the nation’s affairs. Barère attempted unsuccessfully to limit the effect of Robespierre’s fall to “a palace coup” that would maintain the Revolutionary government and the Committee of Public Safety’s dictatorial powers.80 On 28 July, with Robespierre and his supporters approaching the guillotine, Carnot issued orders to the representatives on mission announcing the coup. Instructing the representatives and generals to “redouble vigilance to prevent any failure by emboldening the malicious,” he expressed his confidence in the soldiers of the Republic: “the enthusiasm of the troops is more and more exalted; discipline, by which they are not less admired than for their courage, must be maintained with exactitude; the enemies must be pursued without end and exterminated to the last. However, the prudence of the commanders must preside over all movements.” Lastly, Carnot celebrated the events of 9 thermidor as the victory of “freedom, universal joy, and national prosperity.”81

79 This is the interpretation of Lefebvre, in *French Revolution*, 2:131-7.
81 CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 28 July 1794, in *CGC*, 4:522-3; see the full letter in SHAT, B³ 36.
Prior to the fall of Robespierre, Carnot had attempted to wrest control of the hearts and minds of the soldiers from the radical left through the publication of *La soirée du camp*, a propaganda piece that challenged the Jacobin influence in the ranks.\(^8^2\) Revolutionaires had been utilizing periodicals to influence the spirit of the army as early as 1792. Hébert designed his journal, *Père Duchesne*, partly to imbue the armies with sans-culottes sentiments. The Jacobins utilized the *Bulletin de la Convention* to communicate values such as republicanism and discipline to the troops. Other journals served primarily military purposes. For example, the *Journal militaire* contained information on all matters of military organization while specialized army journals such as the *Bulletin des Côtes-de-Brest* included specialized information for troops in certain armies. Carnot’s *La soirée du camp* followed the tradition of the military journals. Beginning on 20 July, his imagined character, a veteran named Va-de-Bon-Coeur, expressed soldierly opinion to the troops that explicitly denunciated Hébert. As 9 thermidor approached, Carnot took greater freedoms in his journal, claiming three days before Robespierre’s fall that: “Friends, the order of the day for you is always victory. There are scoundrels here for whom the order of the day is lying and deception, but they are known and they are true cowards . . . The old friends of the Brissots, the Dantons, and the Héberts . . . frightened by their own crimes and fearing vengeance, do all they can to obstruct the national justice and block the march of government.”\(^8^3\) After the death of Robespierre, Carnot postponed announcing the coup to the troops until 14 thermidor, determined to consolidate the government’s control over the armies. His fears that the politicized troops might mutiny proved exaggerated: Gillet reported that the army celebrated the fall of Robespierre’s Committee and the end of the Terror.\(^8^4\)


\(^8^4\) Gillet to CPS, Brussels, 4 August 1794, SHAT, B137.
While the centralization of power under the “Great Committee of Public Safety” provided Carnot near-supreme authority over the Republic’s armies, the Law of 7 fructidor (24 August 1794) decentralized the CPS and signaled the end of his primacy. The law created sixteen distinct committees and specified exact functions and procedures for each. The CPS survived as a war committee with limited powers and subject to more legislative oversight. To ensure that no individual could develop dictatorial control of the committees, the Convention decreed that the members of each committee would be renewed every month in groups of four. The Convention would nominate new members; exiting members of the CPS could not join the Committee of General Security, or vice versa.

Nonetheless, the Thermidorean Reaction did not immediately reorient French military policy. Carnot’s orders to the armies in Belgium and the Rhineland executed his 16 July proposals before the implementation of the 24 August decree. These orders placed the Army of the Sambre and Meuse on the path that led it to the Rhine River by the end of 1794. On 28 July, Carnot urged the Army of the North to place Antwerp, which the French entered on 24 July, in “the best state of defense” while the Army of the Sambre and Meuse bolstered its position at Namur. Both armies should “despoil the land” and “exterminate the enemies.” He asserted the Committee’s desire to master Dutch Flanders. To achieve that objective, he ordered the Army of the North to prepare for the siege of Bergen op Zoom. After gaining that position, the army could take Walcheren Island with greater ease. Carnot concluded his report by emphasizing the Committee’s impatience with the sieges of Valenciennes, Condé and Le

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85 Dhombres, *Carnot*, 414-5.
86 In particular, the Committee would continue to raise and organize land and naval forces; enforce military discipline; develop campaign plans and oversee their execution; supervise colonial, coastal, and frontier defense; secure military depots, industries, foundries, mines, arsenals, and magazines; organize the development of maps and plans from the military archives; and ensure the administration of military transports, hospitals, subsistence, uniforms, and equipment.
Quesnoy. The continued presence of Austrian forces on French territory rendered vulnerable his proposed northern frontier.  

Three days later, Carnot reiterated his support for the Antwerp-Namur frontier and informed the representatives on mission that Schérer must capture the interior fortresses before the Army of the North and the Army of the Sambre and Meuse advanced. Nonetheless, preparations for the sieges of Bergen op Zoom and Maastricht progressed and Carnot insisted that Antwerp be made “impenetrable.” According to his plan, Maastricht would provide resources for French armies and would secure the Sambre and Meuse region while the field forces strengthened the frontier’s defenses. He clarified the Committee’s occupation policy. While the French would treat the area within the Antwerp-Namur line with “a certain caution,” he ordered the armies to “despoil Brabant and all the means that exist there of making war against us in the future.” The implementation of these policies would secure the northern frontier while the armies advanced to destroy the divided forces of the Coalition.

Carnot continued to promote his northern frontier project in August 1794 amid dramatic changes in the Revolutionary government. He ordered the two armies in Belgium to maintain a defensive posture until the interior fortresses fell to Schérer. To the Army of the North, he reiterated the Committee’s desire for the Walcheren Island operation. He encouraged Representative Richard to repair the fortifications at Hulot and Sas-de-Gand within the Antwerp-Namur line. Carnot also outlined the Committee’s plan for the defense of the Belgian coastline. While Ostend would be destroyed, the French would increase Nieuport’s defensive abilities to secure the approaches to Dunkirk, which could serve as the commercial center of the Franco-Belgian coast. In Carnot’s calculations, the destruction of

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Ostend would make the merchant and commercial classes of Dutch and West Flanders dependent on the French and supportive of annexation.90

According to Carnot, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse served two purposes. First, the army would harass Austrian forces on the Meuse with skirmishers to keep Coburg’s attention focused on that sector. Second, the army would strengthen the Charleroi-Namur-Dinant defensive system by repairing Dinant and Huy. Moreover, from this position the army could monitor the Austrians to prevent them from launching an offensive through the Ardennes to relieve their garrisons in the interior fortresses.91 Subsequent orders to the Sambre and Meuse Army indicated the Committee’s desire for the French to either besiege Maastricht or repulse the Austrians from the Meuse to ensure the security of the Sambre and Meuse region. Nevertheless, Carnot refused to authorize either operation until the completion of Schérer’s siege campaign.92

Following the capture of Trier on 9 August, Carnot ordered the Army of the Moselle to master the territory between the Saar and the Moselle Rivers. The army would also prepare for an attack on the valuable fortress of Luxembourg. Carnot authorized the Moselle Army to attack Coburg’s lines of operation to the Rhine and to strike his southern flank and rear if the Army of the Sambre and Meuse drove him east from the Meuse. While the Army of the Rhine besieged the bridgehead at Mannheim, the Moselle Army could coordinate its attack with the Sambre and Meuse Army to deliver a decisive victory that would “break the enemy’s means of continuing the war the next year.”93

Carnot continued to regard the armies as tools of exploitation rather than liberation.

On 3 August, the CPS responded to questions from the representatives on mission regarding

90 CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 4 August 1794, in ibid., 4:539-40.
92 CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 13 August 1794, in ibid., 4:572-4; for the army’s execution of these orders see SHAT, B1 36-37.
their role in Belgium. The Committee stated that their orders remained consistent with earlier
instructions. They emphasized six points:

As we have stated: 1) treat the country as conquered land, do not allow
fraternization, do not create municipalities, do not allow meetings; 2) completely disarm the inhabitants and take measures to prevent their gatherings;
3) overwhelm the rich and take hostages, but respect the people, their cottages
and their prejudices; 4) despoil Belgium of its supplies, horses, leather, cloth,
and everything that could be useful to our enemies, and all that could favor our
enemy’s return; 5) circulate the assignats, establish contributions, raise all the
money possible; 6) finally, treat Brabant much more severely than Upper
Flanders, the country of Liège, and that [region] between the Sambre and
Meuse.94

Carnot ordered the Army of the Moselle to profit from the capture of Trier by returning all of
its supplies to France immediately.95 Authorizing the Army of the North to enact harsh
policies in Belgium, he justified these methods in reference to the failures of the Girondin
expansionist efforts: “We invite you to take the most severe measures to ensure that we do
not squander through a lack of caution and carefulness all the fruits of our victories and return
to the same situation we were in during the time of Dumouriez. It requires, dear colleagues,
all of your vigilance and energy to prevent a similar mishap.”96 This passage clearly
demonstrates that Carnot had learned from the recent past: in August 1794 the Committee
avoided the liberationist efforts pursued by the Girondins in 1792 and 1793.

Although Carnot expressed concern that the sieges of the interior fortresses could take
several months, the operation proceeded quickly relative to the norms of eighteenth century
warfare. On 4 July, the National Convention had passed a decree that demanded “all troops of
the Coalition tyrants on French territory on the northern frontier who do not surrender
unconditionally twenty-four hours after the summation . . . will not be granted any surrender
terms but will be put to the sword.”97 Ultimately, this decree pleased Revolutionary fervor but

96 Ibid.
97 SHAT, B1 35.
proved impractical on the ground. French generals and representatives on mission understood that honor dictated at least the appearance of resistance in traditional siege warfare. Carnot accepted the decree because he received an intercepted Austrian letter indicating that Coburg lacked confidence in his ability to relieve the garrisons and advised that they surrender. Carnot concluded that logic would convince the garrison commanders to submit. General Schérer commanded the 40,000-man siege force and Representative Duquesnoy received orders to provide assistance. Jourdan and Gillet furnished Schérer and Duquesnoy with detailed instructions on a regular basis, urging them to expedite their operations so the siege force could rejoin the field army. Schérer besieged Landrécies on 13 July, indicating to Jourdan his great reluctance to carry out the 4 July decree. He commenced a barrage against Landrécies on the 16th and the garrison surrendered unconditionally. The representatives on mission approved his conduct and did not insist on the execution of the garrison. After it became clear that the garrisons would not surrender at the initial summons and that circumstances did not require a strict adherence to the 4 July decree, the Thermidorean CPS modified the orders to allow Schérer to grant the garrisons full honors of war if they capitulated quickly. On 12 August, Carnot authorized the French to accept surrender beyond the twenty-four hour deadline as long as the enemy agreed to French terms. After a three-week siege, Schérer captured Le Quesnoy on 15 August. The Committee displayed their dissatisfaction with the slow pace of Schérer’s operations by accusing him of insubordination and calling for the removal of Duquesnoy. Nonetheless, Schérer stood firm in refusing to apply the decree under any conditions. Success rewarded his moderation: Valenciennes fell on the 20th and the Condé garrison surrendered ten days later.

99 Schérer to Jourdan, Landrécies, 13 July 1794, SHAT, B1 35.
100 CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 4 August 1794, in CGC, 4:539-40; see also, “Relation of the Siege of Le Quesnoy,” 16 August 1794; CPS to Schérer, 11 August 1794; Schérer to CPS, Valenciennes, 23 August 1794, SHAT B1 38; Schérer to CPS, Condé, 1 September 1794, SHAT, B1 39.
Schérer’s siege force returned to Jourdan’s Army of the Sambre and Meuse to assist in the anticipated offensive along the Meuse River. On 4 September, the army’s divisions conducted a festival to celebrate the removal of enemy forces from the territory of the Republic, “the land of Liberty.” Artillery fired salvos to mark the occasion while the infantry and cavalry completed parade ground maneuvers. According to the agenda for the festival, it concluded with cries of “Long live the Republic and may all of its enemies perish!” By September 1794, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse numbered 205,000 men on paper with an effective strength of approximately 140,000. Responding to the increasing size of their armies, the French employed the higher-level organization of wing-commands, which they now termed ‘corps d’armée’. Kléber retained command of the 35,000-man left wing, while Schérer replaced Marceau as chief of the 30,000-man right wing. Jourdan personally led the army’s centre of approximately 50,000 men.

Even with the reorganization of the CPS on 24 August, Carnot continued to direct the Army of the Sambre and Meuse through 1794. Two days before the Convention reorganized the Committee, he had instructed the Sambre and Meuse Army to prepare an operation to cross the Meuse at Liège while maintaining a force to besiege Maastricht. Carnot warned that while the army concentrated at Liège the Austrians could assemble at Maastricht, from where they would be in a position to launch an offensive against the Army of the North’s right flank. Consequently, he ordered Jourdan to convince the Allies that he intended to besiege Maastricht so that they would maintain their forces in that vicinity and refrain from any offensive measures. Finally, Carnot indicated his belief that the Austrian army on the

101 “Order of March of the army under the orders of General of Division Schérer,” Condé, 4 September 1794; Jourdan to CPS, Tongres, 12 September 1794, SHAT, B1 39.
102 “Project of the festival of 18 fructidor l’an 2,” 3 September 1794, SHAT, B1 39.
103 “Situation report,” 22 September 1794, SHAT, B1 255.
105 Carnot remained on the CPS until 5 March 1795; see Woronoff, Thermidorean Regime and the Directory, 25-7.
banks of the Meuse would be suffering from insufficient supplies because the Moselle Army’s campaign had cut its line of operation running through Luxembourg.\footnote{Carnot feared that the absence of a force at Maastricht would allow the Austrians to follow the French crossing at Liège with an offensive across the Meuse designed to strike the Army of the North’s right flank, see CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 22 August 1794, in CGC, 4:609-10.}

On 4 September 1794, he informed the representatives on mission with the army over the demolition efforts at Namur and Charleroi.\footnote{Carnot to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 4 September, SHAT, B1 39.} Following his decision to destroy the fortress of Namur in July, Carnot argued that the Austrians would no longer hope to reestablish control over the Sambre and Meuse region if the French demolished the fortress. He believed that Namur should be converted into a strong redoubt at the confluence of the Sambre and the Meuse Rivers, which Carnot thought would be “nearly impenetrable.” As he explained, only the Allies would regret the destruction of a position they designed to use as a base for offensive operations against France. Similarly, Carnot ordered that the French transform Charleroi – renamed Libre-sur-Sambre after 25 June – into a bridgehead by destroying the sluices, stoneworks, parapets, and earthworks. The walls would continue to defend the city but it could not be used against the French should the Allies recover it during the next campaign.\footnote{Ibid.} The Committee assumed that the Austrians planned to drive the Moselle Army from Trier and Luxembourg before marching west and behind the two French armies in Belgium. Carnot warned the representatives on mission that the Moselle Army could not face the Austrians alone. Thus, the Committee authorized the Sambre and Meuse Army to “attack the enemy in battle and defeat him completely, and to besiege Maastricht immediately after.” Carnot urged the representatives to ensure that the “immense provisions that have been found at Valenciennes and Condé” be utilized to facilitate the army’s offensive. In addition, they should find horses in Belgium to repair the weak cavalry of the Moselle Army.\footnote{CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 4 September 1794, in CGC, 4:639-40.}
Meanwhile, Carnot ordered the Army of the North to continue preparations for an expedition to Walcheren Island while the Army of the Moselle concerted with Jourdan to defend the frontier from Trier to Luxembourg. Informing Representative Pierre Bourbotte that Jourdan would aid the Moselle Army with reinforcements and cavalry at Trier, the Committee called for an active collaboration between the two armies. Carnot expressed concern over the extreme extension of the Moselle Army’s front and advised that it make diversionary movements to keep the enemy from attacking. In addition, Moreaux should concentrate his strength in his field army and only hold minimal forces in his rear while acting in concert with the Rhine Army under General Claude Michaud. Carnot’s report indicated that the French desired a decisive battle to precede their capture of Trier and Luxembourg, two positions that could greatly assist in the rehabilitation of the army’s materiel condition.110

Jourdan organized the Sambre and Meuse Army after receiving Carnot’s orders.111 Although the general dispersed his army across a broad front, he devised an effective operational plan that exploited deception and surprise. After surveying the Austrian position, Jourdan saw an opportunity to turn the enemy’s left flank by driving the bulk of his army southeast along the Ourthe River.112 He believed this assault would force the new Austrian commander, Clerfayt, to surrender his line and enable the French to cross the Meuse at Liège. The key to Jourdan’s operation involved a diversionary attack by Kléber against the Austrian right wing and centre on 17 September.113 While Kléber would lead the feint attack against

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110 For Carnot’s orders to the Army of the North, see CPS to Representatives on Mission, 7 September 1794, in CGC, 4:644-5; for those to the Army of the Moselle, see CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 5 September 1794, in CGC, 4:641-2.
111 See SHAT, M1 608, 2 for Jourdan’s account of this campaign; see also, Ernouf to Jourdan, Tongres, 16 September 1794, SHAT, B1 40, for the detailed movements of each division.
112 As early as 12 September, he planned to “chase the enemy from the banks of the Ourthe and Aywaille” after sending a “corps of 6,000 men from the army’s left wing to disturb the enemy on the lower Meuse.” Jourdan to CPS, 12 September 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:109.
113 On the 16th, Kléber informed Duhesme of Jourdan’s plans for “a grand attack on the other side of the Meuse, and that the General-in-Chief has ordered me to conduct a secondary attack on this side to cause a diversion.”
Clerfayt’s right, the divisions in the center would demonstrate against the enemy at Liège to conceal the right wing’s concentration further south.\textsuperscript{114} At 7:00 AM on the 17\textsuperscript{th}, Kléber executed the diversion. Clerfayt took the bait and sent several thousand reinforcements from his left flank at Sprimont north to Maastricht.\textsuperscript{115}

Commanding Clerfayt’s left wing, *Feldmarschalleutnant* Maximilian Anton Karl Baillet de Latour remained “full of confidence in the excellence of his position” between Sprimont and Esneux.\textsuperscript{116} With the knowledge available to him, Latour had little reason to be worried about an attack on 18 September.\textsuperscript{117} Unfortunately for the Austrians, Latour expected to face less than 30,000 troops.\textsuperscript{118} However, Jourdan amassed around 40,000 men to attack the 25,000 Austrians dispersed along the Ourthe and the Amblève on the 18\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{119} Jourdan and Schérer determined to launch four attacks across the rivers, with light infantry leading the crossing followed by the infantry and cavalry.\textsuperscript{120} Once across, the right wing would attempt to encircle Latour’s outnumbered troops.\textsuperscript{121}

In this instance, numerical superiority played a key role in achieving victory at the decisive point of attack. At 6:00 AM on 18 September, French artillery bombarded Latour’s positions to cover the advance of their light troops. Rather than sending their entire force over the Amblève in a massive wave, the French devised a methodical scheme to facilitate the crossing. After the first wave of skirmishers secured the crossing-points, the French advanced their infantry in disciplined march columns. With the limited troops available, Latour ordered a counter-attack against the French at Sougnés. The Austrians ejected Hacquin from Sougnés...
The Battle of the Ourthe
18 September 1794

Map 8. The Ourthe

The French left wing executes a diversionary attack toward Maastricht on 17 September.

The French center holds the line in the vicinity of Liège and crosses the Meuse after Latour’s retreat.

The French right wing makes the main attack against the Austrian left at Sprimont on 18 September.
and forced his division to retire to the left bank of the Amblève.\textsuperscript{122} Despite Hacquin’s setback, Marceau’s infantry finally overcame the Austrian defenders north of the Amblève after a two-hour engagement. Mayer’s infantry advanced in open order toward Sprimont, exploiting the advantages provided by the broken terrain.\textsuperscript{123} Rather than another frontal assault on Sougnés, Hacquin moved the bulk of his division along the curve of the river toward Noncéveux, overrunning a weak Austrian post to gain the heights on the right bank of the Amblève. Marching rapidly on Louveigné, Hacquin’s division threatened the flank and rear of Latour’s position.\textsuperscript{124} By combining the attack on the right bank of the Amblève with General Joseph Antoine Bonnet’s crossing at Esneux, Schérer threatened to encircle Latour’s wing with superior numbers.\textsuperscript{125} Accordingly, Latour hastily ordered the retreat. After Jourdan threatened to envelop his left flank at Sprimont, Clerfayt ordered his army to withdraw east toward Aachen, thus abandoning the Meuse-Ourthe line to the French.\textsuperscript{126} Although the Austrian garrison remained at Maastricht, Jourdan’s army captured key positions on the Meuse and ensured the security of Carnot’s Antwerp-Namur frontier.

Following the victory at the Ourthe, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse pursued the Austrians east toward the Roer River.\textsuperscript{127} After ceding the Ourthe against his government’s orders, Clerfayt dispersed his army along a defensive line stretching nearly fifty miles from Roermond to Düren. Conforming to the Committee’s orders, Jourdan detached 15,000 men under General Philibert Guillaume Duhesme to besiege the Austrian garrison at Maastricht.\textsuperscript{128} Representative Gillet reported the army’s movements to Carnot on 21 September. Schérer directed the right wing toward Limburg. Divisions from the center advanced toward Aachen,

\textsuperscript{122} Clerfayt to Aulic Council, Latour to Aulic Council, in Thiry, \textit{Après Fleurus}, 115-7.
\textsuperscript{123} Schérer to Jourdan, 20 September 1794, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 40.
\textsuperscript{124} Latour to Aulic Council, in Thiry, \textit{Après Fleurus}, 120.
\textsuperscript{125} Report of Schérer, ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{126} For the Austrians at the Ourthe, the best source is Thiry, \textit{Après Fleurus}.
\textsuperscript{127} Jourdan to CPS, Liège, 19 September 1794, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 40.
\textsuperscript{128} CPS to Jourdan, 23 September 1794, SHAT, M\textsuperscript{1} 608, 2:115.
where they encountered minor resistance from an Austrian rear-guard that eventually retreated. While Gillet expected that as many as 30,000 troops would participate in the siege of Maastricht, he reported that nearly 100,000 French were pursuing the Austrians. Gillet explained the disparity of forces: “As it is dangerous to conduct the siege before having chased the enemy to the Rhine, we have left only one corps of approximately 30,000 men [at Maastricht], and we will continue our march, either to force the Austrians to give battle or to retreat into Germany.” Gillet suggested that the Committee order the Moselle Army to leave a covering force at Luxembourg and direct 60,000 men toward Clerfayt’s rear. He thought that such an operation would threaten the Austrian line of retreat and possibly facilitate a decisive battle. Specifically, Gillet wanted the Moselle Army to march east of the Roer River, where he expected Clerfayt to make a final stand.129

Gillet elaborated on his proposed plan of operations the following day. He informed the Committee that all Austrian troops had evacuated their posts at Aachen as soon as the French fired a few artillery salvos. Kléber directed the left wing toward Roermond, maintaining contact with the right wing of the North Army. Gillet warned of the difficult nature of the terrain, which appeared to be even worse because the French lacked adequate maps. Quite boldly, he proposed that the Committee rescind its plans for the Army of the North to invade the Netherlands. He stated that the advanced season would inhibit such an operation and doubted that the Dutch would surrender without resistance. Instead, the North Army should assume the siege of Maastricht. In this event, Gillet proposed that the entire Army of the Sambre and Meuse march toward the Rhine alongside the Army of the Moselle. Jourdan could lead his 120,000-man army toward the left bank of the Rhine and capture key cities such as Düsseldorf, Koblenz, and Köln. As soon as the French held these positions, the Army of the Rhine could drive the Prussians from Mainz. After the French reached the

129 Gillet to CPS, Liège, 21 September 1794, SHAT, B1 40.
Map 9. Gillet’s Proposed Operation, Fall 1794
Middle and Upper Rhine, the Army of the North would be able to invade Holland with ease the following year. According to Gillet, Jourdan approved the plan and only awaited Carnot’s decision. He attested to the army’s materiel shortages, especially with regard to bread and shoes, asserting that a decisive campaign toward the Rhine would allow the army to secure winter quarters with safety so that it could recuperate. The representative concluded the proposal with a final effort at persuasion: “The plan is vast, but I think it infallible; I submit it for your consideration.” 130

On 22 September, Carnot applauded the Army of the Sambre and Meuse’s success at the Ourthe. He hoped that the victory would prove decisive and that the army would rapidly pursue the Austrians “with a strong body of troops” to “disperse them completely and to seize the majority of their artillery and baggage.” Reports indicated that Clerfayt intended to retire to Köln on the Rhine. Carnot authorized the army to follow the Austrians to the Rhine in order to “burn the enemy’s magazines that must be found there.” After driving the enemy to the Rhine, Carnot noted that the Sambre and Meuse Army could besiege Maastricht without the threat of an Allied offensive. 131

Four days later, Carnot responded to Gillet’s proposal for the rest of the campaign. He indicated that the representative’s plans “partially correspond to the views of the Committee; but we cannot resolve definitively on that point without knowing the result of the pursuit by the Army of the North and the Army of the Sambre and Meuse against the enemy.” Carnot demanded that the siege of Maastricht begin as soon as possible. 132 Moreover, he rejected Gillet’s recommendation to delay the invasion of Holland in favor of a strong march east to the Rhine. He stated that the British would utilize the postponement of a French operation against Holland to redirect forces for an invasion of Brittany. While explaining that the

130 Gillet to CPS, Herve, 22 September 1794, SHAT, B1 40; Jourdan provides no corroboration of his support for this plan in SHAT, M1 608, 2.
offensive against the Netherlands needed to proceed, Carnot also informed the representative that the demands of rear-security invalidated his proposal for the conquest of the left bank of the Rhine with 120,000 troops. In fact, Carnot viewed the defense of the Rhine as a secondary objective that demanded minimal forces. He stated that the Sambre and Meuse Army should first provide sufficient manpower to “control the inhabitants of Brabant and West Flanders, which are always disposed to an uprising.” Carnot authorized Jourdan to guard the Rhine with a maximum of 50,000 men, while the remaining troops – three-quarters of the army – “remained for the siege of Maastricht, the expedition to Holland, and the defense of Belgium and West Flanders.” After the capture of Maastricht, Carnot proposed that Jourdan reinforce the Army of the Moselle at Trier to defend that frontier while the Army of the Rhine besieged either Mainz or Mannheim.133

Jourdan directed the Army of the Sambre and Meuse to commence its drive toward the Roer River on 2 October. The approximately 100,000-man force attacked across a front of nearly sixty miles from Roermond to Düren. According to Jourdan’s plan, Kléber’s left wing would assault Ratheim while Schérer moved the right wing against Düren. Meanwhile, the center would capture Aldenhoven and Jülich.134 The Austrians had prepared defensive entrenchments along both banks of the Roer.135 General Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte’s division of Kléber’s wing advanced against Ratheim at 5:00 AM on the 2nd. As the light infantry reached the bank of the Roer, they encountered heavy artillery and musket fire from the enemy’s batteries. After the French regular infantry advanced, they formed line and unleashed a fusillade against the enemy’s positions, forcing Werneck’s light troops to retire behind entrenchments. Bernadotte crossed the Roer just south of Ratheim with the 71st Demi-Brigade and four companies of grenadiers. A young Michel Ney led one cavalry regiment in

133 Ibid.
134 Jourdan to Ernouf, 26 September 1794, SHAT, B1 41.
135 Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:184.
Map 10. The Roer

The Battle of the Roer
2 October 1794

Maastricht
Sittard
Aachen
Maase River
Roer River
Dusseldorf
Elbe River

Jourdan 100,000
Cherisy 78,000
Left Wing
Right Wing

Kléber
Rehorn
Haelen
Liempde
Leboucq
Marselisberg
Sers dof
Mierlo
Maastricht
Sittard
Dusseldorf
Elbe River

XXX
Left Wing
Maastricht

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a charge on the right bank. Meanwhile, Kléber moved his artillery forward to support this advance, and Werneck eventually withdrew across the Roer. Despite the impressive performance of Bernadotte’s cohort, the bulk of Kléber’s wing could not follow and did not cross the Roer until the following day.

On the French right, Schérer attacked Austrian forces commanded by Latour at Düren, nearly thirty-seven miles southeast of Ratheim, but failed to inflict a decisive defeat on them. At 4:00 AM, Schérer ordered the divisions of Marceau, Mayer, and Hacquin to march from their camps at Eschweiler and Gürzenich, west of Düren. Marceau’s division made effective progress against Düren through a combination of artillery fire and infantry charges, but could not continue the advance without further support from Hacquin and Mayer, both of whom stalled their approach. At 6:00 PM, Mayer joined Marceau, advanced to the plateau of Düren, and received a terrible cannonade from a concealed artillery battery. Marceau’s troops momentarily panicked, but the general successfully recomposed his men. Hacquin’s delayed arrival from the Bergheim wood at 7:00 PM made little contribution to the French attack on Düren. Having failed to attain a complete victory, Schérer ordered his troops to bivouac on the field and fully expected to engage the enemy at daybreak.

The French achieved the most success in the center, where Jourdan oversaw the operations against Linnich and Aldenhoven. Lefebvre led the advance guard against Austrian forces positioned at Linnich. The French approached the town with their skirmishers leading, followed by infantry arrayed in a line of battalion columns. Lefebvre’s division captured Linnich and drove the enemy to Genevich on the right bank. Although unable to cross the Roer, Lefebvre established a bridge and crossed the following morning. Further south, the

137 Kléber to Jourdan, 2 October 1794, SHAT, B1 41; Bernadotte to Kléber, 2 October 1794, SHAT, B1 140.
139Schérer to Jourdan, 2 October 1794, SHAT, B1 41.
140 SHAT, B1 140.
141 Lefebvre to Jourdan, 2 October 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:126.
divisions of Championnet, Morlot, and Hatry struck the town of Aldenhoven alongside Dubois’s cavalry reserve. Over the broken terrain west of Aldenhoven and Siersdorf, Championnet advanced his infantry in columns. Supported by light artillery, he rapidly assaulted the enemy’s line. After two hours of combat, the French mastered the redoubts situated in front of the town. The Austrian defenders retired to Jülich, where they camped for the night.

Clerfayt’s vastly outnumbered troops offered resistance yet retreated across the Rhine. On 6 October, he personally led the Austrians to the portion of Köln that stood on the right bank. French troops approached and, according to Kléber, the soldiers of his advance guard danced the carmagnole on the left bank of the Rhine. The French entered Köln the same day that the Austrians abandoned the part of the city situated on the left bank. Between 8-9 October, French forces entered Bonn and Krefeld while Kleve fell to them on the 18th. On 17 October, Marceau captured Koblenz with the aid of the Moselle Army, which advanced from Luxembourg to support the general offensive. The Austrian garrison at Düsseldorf resisted the French summons to surrender and departed only after a massive bombardment on the 23rd. Countering the notion that the French began the fall campaign of 1794 in order to conquer the Rhine River as a natural frontier, Carnot informed Gillet on the day of the battle of the Roer that he expected Jourdan’s army to occupy positions between Jülich and Köln but that “topographic maps of the country that is now the theater of war of the Sambre and Meuse Army are very rare. Our colleague Calon is working actively to get a copy by hand and send

142 Championnet, Souvenirs, 79-81.
143 SHAT, M1 608, 2:60.
144 For the battle of the Roer, see Schérer to CPS, Düren, 2 October 1794; Kléber to Jourdan, Lucheberg, 2 October 1794, SHAT, B1 41; Hatry to Jourdan, Lucheberg, 2 October 1794, SHAT, B1 40; Jourdan’s account in SHAT, M1 608, 2; and Bernadotte to Kléber, 2 October 1794, SHAT, B1 142; for the most thorough Anglophone account, see Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:184-7.
145 Kléber to Jourdan, 5 October 1794, AN, 196, AP.
it to you.” If the French had planned the absorption of the Rhineland well in advance, logic dictates that they would have drawn detailed and extensive maps of the region.

As a result of military success, the French implemented their system of resource exploitation in Belgium and the Rhineland. These regions would furnish French armies and the French population with much needed food and supplies. Yet the system evolved as the French armies conquered rather than resulting from a preconceived and detailed plan. In early July, concerns that the Allies would counterattack had compelled the Committee to emphasize the need to “despoil” Belgium to make it unprofitable for France’s enemies. As the French progressed and the likelihood of an Allied counterattack decreased, the Committee adopted a more rational policy that viewed Belgium as conquered land that must be made useful for France. Before 9 thermidor, Saint-Just contributed to this policy by demanding contributions of fifty-million livres from Brussels and ten-million from Tournai while the French apprehended over 600 hostages to ensure payment. The previously mentioned decree of 18 July established the broad parameters of the French system of exploitation in Belgium; French officials replaced the Austrians as the administrative and governing authorities. Belgium became a veritable war land whose fate would be decided by military contingency and the demands of the French and Allied war machines. Representatives on mission held supreme authority over all other officials while the army maintained public order. Agents of French bureaucratic commissions assisted the representatives and the army supply officers with the massive project. As noted, the French avoided antagonizing the peasants of Belgium and upheld local customs and beliefs, as well as many feudal dues. Unlike 1792, the French in 1794 aimed for efficient exploitation rather than political transformation.

146 CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 2 October 1794, in CGC, 4:678-80.
147 Gross, Saint-Just, 528.
148 Wetzler, War and Subsistence, 98-9.
In the first months of French occupation, the representatives repeatedly complained that exploitation efforts achieved less success than desired because of the interference of local officials. Rejecting the possibility of outright annexation as a solution, the Committee and representatives established a provisional administration on 7 September.\(^{149}\) The restructuring divided Belgium into new districts based at Brussels, Antwerp, Brabant-Wallon, Louvain, Tirlemon, Malines, West Flanders, Dutch Flanders, Namur, and Liège. Hainaut became the provisional département of Jemappes and adopted the model of a French département. The representatives abolished the old administrative grid of Belgium and instituted a new organization not to prepare for annexation, but so that they could appoint officials as district leaders. In addition, the representatives partially removed the Commerce Commission from the exploitation of Belgian agriculture because the work of the multiple commissions led to much confusion and inefficiency. On 16 November, the provisional administration shifted to a central administration of eight districts for Brabant, East Flanders, West Flanders, Tournai, Namur, Hainaut, Luxembourg and Liège. Eighteen members composed the central administration at Brussels with the mission of overseeing the district administrations.\(^{150}\) Nevertheless, the 16 November decree did not mark a dramatic shift in French occupation policy. As before, the central administrations “were envisioned as intermediary organs that were supposed to assure that on the local level the directives of the representatives on mission and their authorized agents were carried out, normal civil government functions carried on, and requisition quotas met.”\(^{151}\)

The French did not address the administrative organization of the Rhineland until 14 November. Between September and October, the armies plundered resources without an

\(^{149}\) RACSP, 16:560-6.


\(^{151}\) Wetzler, War and Subsistence, 179-80.
efficient system of exploitation. Representatives Nicolas Haussmann, Augustine Lucie Frécine, and Louis Joubert sought to rationalize the administration to establish a smoother occupation, especially as it became clear that the Rhineland would become an area where the French would take winter quarters. The representatives patterned the administration on the Belgian system, with the exception that they did not create any intermediary provisional regime that might pave the way for annexation. Instead, they created a Central Administration at Aachen for the government of the region between the Meuse, Rhine, and Moselle. As in Belgium, the French continued to respect local laws and customs except those that undermined the representatives on mission. French armies assumed all police duties and maintained public order. Aachen became the base for a revolutionary tribunal to adjudicate crimes involving counterrevolution and anti-French agitation. A decree of 16 November established seven district administrations: Maastricht, Gelderland, Jülich, Köln, Blankenheim, Limburg, and Franchimont. Each district would provide an inventory of resources to the supply commissaries in a “prompt and just” manner. The representatives oversaw the immense process of requisitions, which unlike Belgium mainly went to furnish the French armies. During the period of conquest, the Rhineland south of the Moselle remained under the military government of the Moselle and Rhine Armies.

On 12 October, Carnot signaled that the rapid approach of winter demanded the immediate capture of Maastricht before the army moved into winter quarters.\footnote{CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 12 October 1794, in CGC, 4:685-6; see Jourdan to Gillet, 12 October 1794, SHAT, B1 41.} Two weeks later, while Kléber besieged the critical fortress, Carnot initiated the Army of the North’s invasion of Holland and ordered the Sambre and Meuse Army to guard Pichegru’s right flank on the Rhine and its rear in Belgium. The Army of the North would destroy the fortresses of Dutch Flanders, conserving only those that guarded the French “places on the Scheldt.”\footnote{CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 12 October 1794, in CGC, 4:686. The Army of the North’s invasion of Holland actually began in late September. Pichegru captured Bois-le-Duc on 10 October and}
While the North Army invaded the Netherlands, the Sambre and Meuse Army encircled Maastricht. Carnot celebrated the capture of Maastricht in a communique to the representatives on mission dated 13 November.\textsuperscript{154} He reiterated the need for the Army of the Sambre and Meuse to guard the North Army’s rear in the invasion of Holland. In none of these reports did Carnot emphasize the need for the Sambre and Meuse Army to defend the Rhine as a primary concern. His attention centered on the Netherlands. Although on 13 November he stated that it would be a “tragedy” to “prolong the state of bloody war” by authorizing the Sambre and Meuse Army to take winter quarters, Carnot agreed to do so on the 25\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{155} The victorious troops of the Sambre and Meuse Army received a well-deserved rest. Unfortunately for them, winter unleashed more devastation than the Austrian army had in the preceding campaign.

As demonstrated, the concept of natural frontiers did not compel Carnot to order the Sambre and Meuse Army to invade Belgium and the Rhineland in 1794. The decision to reach the Rhine and take winter quarters on its banks resulted from strategic and economic concerns, directed principally by Carnot. He remained committed to strengthening France by all means necessary, but did not view the permanent acquisition of the natural frontiers as likely to contribute to French strength. Nevertheless, he considered the exploitation of those areas as being demanded and justifiable by the circumstances. Despite Carnot’s intention, the fall of 1794 witnessed the resurgence of natural frontiers in French foreign policy. A theme abandoned by Robespierre’s CPS, it became a source of patriotism for many Frenchmen after

\textsuperscript{154} He stated that “the immense quantity of artillery, powder, munitions, and supplies are the precious fruits of our victory; but the consternation that the victory must give to the Stadholder is another decisive step.”

\textsuperscript{155} “It is not from the actions of men that we have need of rest, but against the elements of nature itself.” CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 25 November 1794, in CGC, 4:719-21.
9 thermidor. Military victory in Belgium and the Rhineland contributed to this resurgence – a crucial factor often overlooked by political and intellectual historians. Only after the French repulsed the Allies and actually conquered the Rhineland could French politicians seriously discuss the natural frontiers.

In August, Barère reported on the results to be drawn from French victories in the north and east, as well as those along the Franco-Spanish frontier, where the French Army of the Western Pyrenees under General Bon Adrien Jeannot de Moncey succeeded in taking San Sebastian and Tolosa. Barère noted that the events of 9 thermidor brought victory on two fronts: “in one month, at the National Convention’s signal, the dangerous creatures of tyranny and the hypocritical allies of kings have perished, and French territory has expanded: to the north into Belgium and West Flanders; to the banks of the Rhine and to the Palatinate; [and] to the midi into parts of Piedmont.” Furthermore, Barère returned to the theme of geographical limits, clearly evoking the Enlightenment concept of republican statehood. Barère’s reference to the natural frontiers shifted the discussion from expanding France to win the war to gaining frontiers that would allow the Republic to establish a secure peace. In this view, the natural frontiers ceased to exist as a strategic measure for revolutionizing Europe and became a means of peacemaking. On 31 October, the National Convention deputy, A. G. J. Ducher, addressed this shift in an article published in Le Moniteur. Calling for a “regenerated diplomacy,” Ducher argued that natural frontiers offered the best hope for political stabilization, which he optimistically believed all European nations desired. Unable to destroy Austria and Prussia, France, according to Ducher, must construct between itself “and the kings [of Europe] the strongest of barriers: those that are the works of nature.”

156 Le Moniteur, 21:461.
157 Ibid., 22:40.
Demands for natural frontiers became more frequent and from more prominent voices in the following months.

Largely owing to the victories of the Sambre and Meuse Army during the 1794 campaign, such expressions of support for the natural frontiers grew common during the Thermidorean Republic. Yet as enthusiasm for annexation rose in the National Convention, French military effectiveness declined as a result of logistical and administrative confusion. The gap between French ambitions and the regime’s hard power widened, fostering numerous points of contention that proved significant to French politics and to the soldiers on the Rhine, whose victories ended the Terror in France but turned Belgium and the Rhineland into a destitute war land.
CHAPTER 7
WAR ON THE RHINE DURING THE THERMIDOREAN REPUBLIC, NOVEMBER 1794-OCTOBER 1795

During the fourteen months of the Thermidorean Republic, the idea of attaining France’s natural frontiers shifted from a discarded foreign policy to one of the most popular of French war aims. Specifically, few agreed with the statements of Merlin de Thionville and Carnot that their acquisition constituted an imprudence likely to weaken France. Concerns over ensuring perpetual war by extensive conquests diminished as both sides suffered from exhaustion in 1795, and even more importantly as Prussia and Spain concluded peace agreements with the French at Basel. At the same time, the Thermidorean CPS never possessed the overwhelming powers of Robespierre’s Committee. Although it remained influential in matters of war and diplomacy, it ceased to be highly involved in domestic affairs. The National Convention asserted power over executive bodies and contributed to a decentralization of state power. These policies restrained government excess but reduced the efficiency of army administration – a major problem considering the size of the French army, which Reinhard describes as “a monster.” While numerous politicians in Paris celebrated the attainment of the natural frontiers, French soldiers in foreign territories suffered from increasing logistical problems and declining materiel. The Thermidorean Republic marks the period in which the issue of the natural frontiers became contentious in French politics and foreign policy while the strength of the armies withered. Consequently, the 1795 Rhine Campaign eroded the bonds between army and state.

Despite foreign policy pronouncements between August and November 1794, the Thermidoreans did not attempt to reach a clear consensus until December. These efforts

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1 Reinhard, L’Armée et la révolution pendant la convention (Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1957), 2; Brown, War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State, 150-79; Woronoff, République bourgeoise, 46-54.
resulted mainly from the increasing French view of peace as an attainable and desirable objective. No longer viewing war as a force for national regeneration, the French loathed the strain of the military effort and sought to conclude hostilities.² Yet peace could not be accepted unless France gained the fruits of victory. Moreover, France continued to suffer from economic, financial, and agricultural problems. The winter of 1794/1795 proved the harshest in French memory, earning fame as “The Great Cold” and association with the horrible winter of 1709. Merlin de Thionville informed the CPS that a desire for peace permeated the armies on the Rhine, a situation that the Committee viewed with great concern.³ Secret negotiations with the Austrians and Prussians convinced those in power that a real agreement could be reached.⁴

Securing the natural frontiers gained support among many Thermidoreans as rumors circulated concerning peace negotiations between France and various European powers. Skeptics believed that French conquests up to that point proved too minimal to accept peace. They assumed that the victories of 1794 would ensure territorial aggrandizement in Belgium but not necessarily guarantee the acquisition of the natural frontiers. Prompted by peace discussions, Committee-member Merlin de Douai on 4 December provided the National Convention an outline of Thermidorean foreign policy. The author of the famous 1790 declaration to abolish feudal rights in Alsace, Merlin de Douai continued to emphasize the notion of popular sovereignty. His 4 December speech reveals increasing concern over the sovereignty of the French people over all other considerations. In order to feel secure in agreements with monarchical states, Merlin de Douai asserted that any peace agreement must

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² Paul Schroeder states that “France and Prussia by late 1794 shared the desire for a separate peace.” In contrast, Ross observes a lack of coherence in French interests in late 1794, stating that “French policy was ill-defined, for the various factions in the Convention had their own special policies for the disposition of the nation’s conquests and for negotiations with foreign powers.” Schroeder, Transformation of Europe Politics, 151; Ross, European Diplomatic History, 110.

³ Merlin de Thionville to CPS, 12 December 1794, in RACSP, 18:668.

⁴ Biro, German Policy, 1:262.
leave the French safe from their enemies. In his opinion, timing proved ill for negotiations. Until the French “proved by new efforts and new triumphs that we desire a peace worthy of our intrepid defenders,” they must resist the urge to negotiate despite their intense exhaustion and strain. A moderate Thermidorean, André Dumont motioned for Merlin de Douai’s speech to be translated into every tongue and dispatched to the troops. Dumont called for “a durable and glorious peace.” In January 1795, the National Convention cheered the Girondin sympathizer, François Antoine de Boissy d’Anglas, when he declared that only the natural frontiers could defend France from “all invasion . . . for a long series of centuries.” Léonard Bourdon, a National Convention deputy, agreed with Boissy d’Anglas and depicted the natural frontiers as a minimal peace program that demonstrated that the French fought only to defend their liberty by confining themselves “within the limits that Nature has prescribed.” Accordingly, Thermidorean politicians demanded that the Republican armies wage another campaign for additional conquests before the French could contemplate a general peace settlement.

Even with these declarations, support for the natural frontiers did not prove universal. Attempting to maintain the morale of the troops on the frontier, Carnot referenced the concept of natural frontiers on 14 November. Viewed by Biro as an example of Carnot’s wavering over the issue of expansion, Carnot’s letter must be understood in the context of the military and political situation, especially because he wrote in name of the Committee of Public Safety: “Let it not be said, dear colleagues, that you suffer the enemy to keep a foot of our territory, for we regard all that is on this side of the Rhine as such. Victory . . . gives us the deed to it.” Carnot left the CPS in March 1795 and once again became a critic of French expansion to the Rhine, raising doubt about the validity of his 14 November letter as an

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6 Biro, *German Policy*, 1:263.
expression of his true foreign policy views. Regardless, the Committee’s statement must not be interpreted as equivalent to the prevailing Thermidorean concept of the natural frontier. As he stated, victory – not history or nature – handed the French the deed to the Rhineland. Thus, at most the statement suggests that Carnot believed that victory and military superiority justified French expansion for reasons of state. He subsequently reiterated this argument but insisted that prudence and rationality advised the French to limit their expansion to the Meuse.

In addition to Carnot’s ambiguity over the issue, the National Convention did not universally endorse or legislate French expansion to the Rhine. On 8 December, the deputies approved the return of several former Girondins to the National Convention. A superficial interpretation might attach great significance to the return of the Girondins regarding the controversy. Yet the restored deputies renounced territorial aggrandizement and called for an immediate end to the war they had helped start. On the 13th, an Alsatian deputy, Rühl, who had played an important role in support of Brissot in 1792-1793, argued that the French must officially determine their natural frontiers, which he viewed as the Pyrenees, the Alps, and the Rhine. According to Le Moniteur, Rühl’s appeal met with murmurs from the Convention while some deputies shouted “You do not seek peace!” The motion did not pass and the CPS offered no comment.

While the victories of 1794 created an optimistic climate that led many to advocate for natural frontiers, the idea did not receive universal support. Moreover, the military situation on the Rhine did not assure French domination and security. Following the Austrian retreat to the right bank of the Rhine on 6 October and the fall of Maastricht on 4 November

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9 Aulard, Histoire politique, 524; Biro, German Policy, 1:259; Homan, Reubell, 85. Several of the twenty-three returned deputies participated in the Federalist Revolt and became influenced by Royalism. Accordingly, the president of the National Convention, Reubell, initially refused to ratify their return. In March, the decree that allowed their reconciliation passed without much controversy, but the issue of natural frontiers remained contentious.

10 Le Moniteur, 23:684.
1794, the French pursued three key geographic positions that remained under Allied control: Luxembourg, Mannheim, and Mainz. Isolated after the Austrian evacuation of Belgium and the Rhineland, Luxembourg could be surrounded by French forces and guarded against a relief effort. Yet it remained a target for the Allies and bolstered their resolve. On the Rhine, Mannheim posed a unique challenge for a potential besieging force because while the fortress occupied the right bank it possessed a tête-de-pont on the left that provided further protection. Finally, Mainz represented a major strategic asset on the left bank of the Rhine. Situated on the hinge of the French line, the strong fortress could be utilized by the Austrians to launch a renewed offensive.\textsuperscript{11} As Phipps observes, “the history of the long struggle on the Rhine is really also that for the possession of Mainz.”\textsuperscript{12}

On 26 November, the representative on mission, Merlin de Thionville, divided the Moselle and Rhine Armies into three distinct forces to achieve these geographic objectives: the Army of Luxembourg, the Army of Mannheim, and the Army of Mainz. According to the decree, several divisions from the Sambre and Meuse Army would support troops from the Moselle Army to gain Luxembourg. The bulk of the Rhine Army would constitute the Army of Mannheim while the left wing of the Rhine Army and the right wing of the Moselle Army would form the Army of Mainz.\textsuperscript{13} General Moreaux assumed command of the Army of Luxembourg while General Michaud directed the attack against Mannheim. The command of the Army of Mainz fell to a general of the Sambre and Meuse Army: Kléber.\textsuperscript{14}

Citing poor health and insufficient means, Kléber accepted his assignment with a lack of enthusiasm that quickly grew into serious skepticism concerning the viability of an attack

\textsuperscript{12} Phipps, \textit{Armies of the First French Republic}, 2:201.
\textsuperscript{13} Merlin de Thionville to CPS, Guntersblum, 26 November 1794, in Reynaud, \textit{Merlin de Thionville}, 120-2; see the Committee’s response in Merlin de Douai to Merlin de Thionville, Paris, 3 December 1794, in \textit{RACSP}, 18:490-1.
\textsuperscript{14} Pajol, \textit{Kléber}, 129-133; Brégeon, \textit{Kléber}, 133-136; Phipps, \textit{Armies of the First French Republic}, 2:198.
on Mainz. He remarked to Jourdan on 23 November of the “pain I felt at receiving the order to leave the victorious army you command. . . . I wept like a child at it.” Despite his emotions, Kléber recognized that his appointment rested on the “local knowledge” he had acquired during the 1793 siege of Mainz, when lack of supplies and relief forced him to accept the surrender terms offered by the Allies. In November 1794, the Austrians garrisoned Mainz with 22,000 men. As the French did not hold a position on the right bank of the Rhine, the Austrians could easily resupply and reinforce the garrison. Kléber reached his headquarters at Ingelheim on 1 December and assumed command of five divisions totaling 44,150 troops. After his initial reconnaissance, he reported that “it is not a garrison that we are attacking: it is an army entrenched behind a fortress, and troops that are always fresh.”

On 29 December, Kléber communicated his growing doubts to Jourdan. He asked for his thoughts on the operation against Mainz and expressed his certainty that the general “would agree on the impossibility of continuing the siege in the current situation and winter season.”

In addition, Kléber forwarded to Jourdan a 24 December memorandum on the siege of Mainz that he composed for the CPS and Representative Merlin de Thionville. The general’s memorandum emphasized the significant strategic, operational, and logistical problems that confronted the force besieging Mainz. Strategically, the capture of Mainz would significantly impede the Allies from resuming offensive operations across the Rhine. Yet Kléber argued that “all soldiers who reflect on the siege of Mainz will understand that the success of the enterprise is predicated on operations across the Rhine.” As he explained, “when the enemy is repulsed from the right bank of the Rhine the armies could make an

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15 Kléber to Jourdan, Köln, 23 November 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 2:143; Chuquet, Wissembourg, 42-61.
16 Kléber to Saint-Cyr, Ingelheim, 1 December 1794, AN, 196 AP.
17 Kléber to Michaud, Ingelheim, 5 December 1794, in ibid.
18 Kléber to Jourdan, Ingelheim, 29 December 1794, SHAT, M1 608, 3:1.
19 “Reflections of Kléber on the Siege of Mainz,” SHAT, M1 608, 31; the letter is reprinted and dated 24 December in Reynaud, Merlin de Thionville, 144-8.
attack from different positions on that river. After repulsing the enemy, the army would become the *corps d’observation* of Mainz and the siege could progress as normal.”

Kléber’s memorandum provided the strategic and operational plan for the capture of Mainz but it raised a number of concerns regarding logistics that demanded the government’s immediate attention. The general informed the CPS that at Mainz, the Austrians enjoyed numerous advantages: “well supplied, good fortifications, numerous batteries, and a large garrison.” In addition, the Allies utilized the resources of the right bank to resupply Mainz. Kléber contrasted the situation of the Allies with that of the French: “poor administration, poor supply, lack of food, lack of forage, the daily loss of a large number of horses.” Also, he commented on the lack of siege equipment and artillery in the Army of Mainz as well as the army’s inadequate transport system. While the French established supply magazines connecting to the Moselle River, the depots did not extend to Mainz, necessitating a system of transport carts pulled by horses. Kléber estimated that the Army of the Moselle required 25,000 horses but did not possess enough fodder to feed the majority of them. He considered these deficiencies alongside “the excessive rigor of the season in which the land would be frozen to make the work extremely difficult” and concluded that the siege of Mainz must be postponed until they could attempt an expedition across the Rhine in the next campaign season. Kléber reflected that “the French regard this operation as one to crown the brilliant campaign that is concluding.” Moreover, he understood that the members of the CPS were “accustomed to seeing the valor of their soldiers triumph over all obstacles.” Nonetheless, he warned that “enthusiasm can have little influence in maintaining on the field an enterprise of this importance unless the circumstances in which we are found permit the hope of success.” Kléber believed the risks of proceeding with operations outweighed the chance of victory: “If

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20 “Reflections of Kléber on the Siege of Mainz,” SHAT, M1 608, 3:1. Kléber postulated that the French could station 16,000-18,000 troops to contain the garrison on the left bank while the bulk of their forces surrounded the fortress on the right bank.
we continue the operation now, the army employed will be out of condition to continue the campaign in the approaching year.”

Jourdan agreed with Kléber’s assessment, commenting in his memoirs that it was “not in his [Kléber’s] powers to surmount the obstacles he was presented with” before Mainz.

The Committee ignored Kléber’s recommendations and insisted that the siege of Mainz continue. Merlin de Thionville reported on 12 December that “the troops are in good spirit. . . . Despite all, the advanced season and the devil, Mainz must fall before your colleague.”

The siege of Mainz reveals a growing disconnect between the French generals and the civilian authorities. The optimism of the representatives on mission contrasted starkly with the army’s increasing pessimism. General Laurent de Gouvion Saint-Cyr remarked on the winter’s devastating effect on the troops at Mainz: one company purportedly withered to a single man.

Kléber eventually extricated himself from the unwelcome assignment. On 13 February 1795, he obtained sick leave for a skin disease that required him to receive treatment at Strasbourg. Although he returned to the Army of Mainz as a provisional commander in March, Kléber rejoined the Sambre and Meuse Army on 18 May.

Yet his much desired homecoming did not mollify his frustrations.

During the winter, the administration of the Rhineland shifted from the Agencies of Evacuation to a provisional military government. As noted, the French preserved laws and customs that did not conflict with the orders of the representatives on mission. In addition, decrees established French assignats as the sole currency for public treasuries and in commercial transactions, while imposing the Maximum. These policies benefitted French...

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21 Ibid.
22 SHAT, M1 608, 3.
24 Saint-Cyr, in *Mémoires*, 2:153-4, states that the winter of 1794/1795 was colder than the Russian winter of 1812.
armies and citizens to the detriment of the Germans. On 20 December, the French officially installed the new central government at Aachen alongside a temple to the Supreme Being.²⁶

Initially, the southern Rhineland remained under military control and did not submit to the civilian government at Aachen. French officials abolished the Agency of Evacuation at Trier in January 1795 because of complaints from the population and the dangers of overexploitation. Already, French officials complained of the lack of food and resources in the Palatinate. On 27 January, they established a General Direction of National Domains designed to create an inventory of confiscated properties, mines, smelters, and factories. In addition, it would assist the efforts of the representatives to attain requisitions. By March, officials on the ground realized that the dual civilian and military administration of the Rhineland had created a bureaucratic nightmare. Accordingly, the General Direction of Trier, an existing administrative body, ceded power to the Central Administration of Aachen, in which Trier became the center of a district administration. Responding to complaints from German civilians concerning French domination, the National Convention decreed that three-quarters of government positions in the Rhineland must be held by native civilians. The employment of Rhinelanders in these positions marks an important shift away from the xenophobic policy of Robespierre’s Committee.²⁷ Nonetheless, demands on the Rhineland for requisitions did not diminish. In fact, the French viewed local Rhineland officials as intermediaries who would rationalize their exploitation to the unfortunate inhabitants.

Owing to exhaustion from the 1794 campaign and the harsh winter of 1794/1795, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse stood in a condition similar to the Army of Mainz. According to Wetzler’s analysis, “no general famine occurred, but the supply situation constantly remained bleak.”²⁸ Examining the correspondence of the Meuse-Rhine Central

²⁶ Biro, German Policy, 1:301-2.
²⁷ Ibid., 1:303.
²⁸ Wetzler, War and Subsistence, 214.
Administration from January to March 1795, he concluded that the requisitions of 1794 had exhausted the region’s grain. Unfortunately for the French, shipments of grain from the Netherlands would not arrive until May. Consequently, the troops suffered from food shortages and inconsistent nourishment for a six-month period between December 1794 and May 1795. Examples of the army’s plight abound. On 20 February 1795, General Bernadotte reported that his troops suffered from poor quality bread and that the hospitals overflowed with the sick. He reported to the army’s chief of staff, Ernouf, on 11 February that illness proved to be an exponential problem because contagion spread to the medical officers. Moreover, he warned that “the lack of local supplies will present a host of the most unfortunate and disastrous consequences.” General Louis Friant reported similar deprivations to General Hatry on 10 February. He complained of the “bad situation of the troops living in cantonments in villages that are at the moment inundated; many have fallen sick, while the season is rigorous.” He concluded that many troops “feel abandoned and possess no hope for relief.” The situation did not improve with the arrival of spring. Bernadotte reported on 8 May that his division remained “in the most deplorable state” and that the “lack of nourishment since the preceding winter” boded ill for the survival of countless soldiers and horses.

Explanations for the suffering of the army centered on several factors. All sources comment on the unusually cold winter that began prematurely in October 1794 and lasted through early March 1795. Natural forces such as rain and ice challenged existing systems of supply and transport. For example, the historian of the 132nd Demi-Brigade, General Bonneau du Martray, describes the damage caused by unusually heavy November rains, which turned

29 Ibid., 215, 239.
30 Bernadotte to Commissaire Ordonnateur, Köln, 20 February 1795, SHAT, B\(^1\) 152.
31 Bernadotte to Ernouf, Köln, 11 February 1795, ibid.
32 Friant to Hatry, place unknown, 10 February 1795, SHAT, B\(^1\) 303.
33 Bernadotte to Commissaire Ordonnateur, Metternick, 8 May 1795, B\(^1\) 152.
the local roads into “a veritable lake of mud which soon became a frozen glacier. The roads became so bad that it was impossible to make the most urgent transports.” Lack of transport quickly impeded efforts to supply the men with sufficient food. “For eight consecutive days,” Martray continues, “the bread lacked, and the soldiers lived principally on turnips that were unearthed by thawing the ground with fire, which was then used to cook a morsel of bad meat, when by chance it could be procured.”

While weather played its role, the army’s administration received much blame for the particularly harsh conditions. General Championnet states that he saw “the saddest effects of the bad administration under which we had moaned for so long, in that season, already so rigorous.” Describing the condition of his division, he relates that he “was forced to travel three leagues in search of turnips, which were nearly the only nourishment; several men succumbed to the excessive privations.” Championnet expressed his frustration at his inability to remedy the misfortune: “I knocked on all doors, I wrote daily on the subject, to the general in chief, to the commissaire ordonnateur général; the one attached his complaints to mine and offered me nothing but useless regrets; the other promised and gave nothing.”

The situation applied not just to the Sambre and Meuse Army, but to all the French armies in the Rhineland. Kléber complained to Jourdan in April 1795 that the newly-formed Army of the Rhine and Moselle had been “wrecked through ineptitude.”

Whether caused by forces of nature, resource exhaustion, or human error, the inadequate materiel situation contributed to the attrition of the Sambre and Meuse Army. Estimates for the army’s size in 1794 vary but a situation extract from September 1794 lists the army’s effective strength at 172,220 troops. The French suffered few combat losses from October 1794 to the spring of 1795. For example, the largest engagement of the period,

34 Martray, 132e Demi-Brigade, 69.
35 Championnet, Souvenirs, 91.
36 Kléber to Jourdan, Alzey, 7 April 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:8.
37 Situation of 15 September 1794, SHAT B1 255.
the 2 October Battle of the Roer, cost the French a maximum of 1,500 casualties.\textsuperscript{38} A report from 8 October states that the army possessed 195,652 effectives with 137,002 present and under arms.\textsuperscript{39} The strength remained stable through November and December but began to decline after the army took winter quarters. In December, a report listed 139,993 troops present and under arms – a slight gain from November – stating that 42,797 troops remained unavailable for service. By February, however, the army stood at 129,550 present and under arms after receiving approximately 10,000 reinforcements from the Moselle Army. Some 110,000 troops remained available for operations. A situation report form March 1795 reports only 95,939 men available for operations with 123,719 present and under arms.\textsuperscript{40} Although many troops remained under arms, the consistent decline of army strength during a period of rest and recovery corroborates contemporary reports of an inadequate supply system.\textsuperscript{41} Attrition only worsened as the year progressed.

Explanations for attrition include not only normal casualties and the sick and malnourished, but also desertion. In his memoirs, Jourdan states that many of the “men called to the defense of la patrie by the law of August 1793 remained in the interior; those who had obeyed the voice of honor were enticed to desert by their families under the pretext that they had only taken up arms to drive the enemy from the territory of the Republic.” While the soldiers experienced the jubilations of victory in 1794, Jourdan commented that in early 1795 they found themselves isolated “on the frontiers, reduced to despair by famine and misery.” Consequently, many “abandoned their flags and no longer submitted to the severe discipline by which the army was admired in the preceding campaign.” Jourdan regretted that the soldiers who stayed “were raised to pillage and insubordination…. It was not possible to open

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Jourdan to CPS, place unknown, 3 October 1794, SHAT, M\textsuperscript{1} 608, 2:120; Jomini, \textit{Histoire critique et militaire}, 6:41; Phipps, \textit{Armies of the First French Republic}, 2:183-7.}
\footnote{Situation of 8 October 1794, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 255.}
\footnote{Situation of 15 December 1794, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 258; situation of 13 February; situation of 15 March, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 263.}
\footnote{SHAT, M\textsuperscript{1} 608, 3.}
\end{footnotes}
the campaign under such unfavorable auspices." As a result of this vast array of problems, the Sambre and Meuse Army remained essentially passive well after the arrival of spring. Refraining from operations, the army did not preserve the *corps d’armée* system but reverted to divisional organization.43

Stalled by operational stalemate, the French possessed abundant time for additional articulations of their foreign policy platform. Ongoing negotiations with Prussia prompted a renewed debate in February 1795. According to Biro, “prudence, poverty, Polish territory, and perhaps also the hope that peace would prove more disastrous to the Republic than war induced the Prussian king to commence unvarnished overtures for peace with France.”44 On 8 December 1794, Frederick William II had commissioned the diplomat, Count August von der Goltz, to enter Swiss territory and seek negotiations with any official French representatives he could find. In January 1795, the French sent François-Marie Barthélemy to Basel to commence negotiations with Goltz. After the Prussian diplomat’s inopportune death on 5 February, his secretary, Heinrich von Harnier, assumed the position as lead Prussian negotiator until the arrival of the Prussian foreign minister, Hardenberg.45

42 Jourdan to Pichegru, Koblenz, 2 May 1795, ibid., 3:12.
43 Situation of 15 March 1795, SHAT B1 263. Protecting the North Army’s right flank in the Netherlands, General Lefebvre’s division consisted of 17,798 troops and 2,711 horses and camped in the vicinity of Lichtenvoorde. General Morlot’s division stood southwest of Lefebvre’s and included 13,946 troops and 1,887 horses while Montaigu’s division of 13,221 troops and 2,319 horses occupied Kleve. General Jean-Antoine Chapsal’s division held Koblenz with 14,981 troops and 1,817 horses. One of the divisions charged with the defense of the left bank and supporting the left flank of the Rhine and Moselle Army, Marceau’s camped between Andernach and Brühl with 16,231 men and 1,928 horses. Hatry’s division of 15,381 troops and 1,672 horses was north of Marceau’s, securing the left bank east of Geldern. Championnet’s division defended Rheinberg with 15,270 men and 2,390 horses while Grenier’s division of 11,729 troops and 1,601 horses held Moers. The army’s artillery park contained 866 men and 841 horses. While these troops guarded the 140-mile line of the Rhine from Bingen to Nierst, the French reserved approximately 10,000 troops to garrison Liège and Maastricht along with preparing a force of 24,600 men to assist in the siege of Luxembourg. In addition, Bernadotte’s division was north of Maastricht with 14,178 troops and 1,427 horses. Defending Aachen, General Poncet’s division included 16,769 troops and 1,721 horses. Dubois directed the cavalry reserve between Maastricht and Roermond. Although he possessed 2,817 troops, his force included only 2,228 mounts. A reserve cavalry brigade at Jemappes under General Jean Louis Brigitte Espagne contained 3,516 troopers and only 2,321 mounts.
Initial French responses proved unwelcoming, as members of the political left believed that any peace with Prussia would eventually lead the French to accept peace without victory. In contrast, moderates on the CPS led by Merlin de Douai desired peace with Prussia as long as Berlin agreed to French expansion to the Rhine. The Committee’s policy ran consistent with the dominant opinion in the Convention that favored a peace to reestablish France in the European balance of power by gaining the frontiers provided by nature. The legislator and diplomat, Jean Jacques Régis de Cambacérès, claimed that only French possession of the Rhine frontier would prevent war. As long as France possessed weak frontiers, Cambacérès argued, the Republic would appear to be easy prey for the European Great Powers.46 Although uncertainty remained over ultimate French intentions, the Committee’s instructions to Barthélemy listed Prussian acceptance of French annexation of the left bank as a requirement.47

A countervailing opinion warned the French from returning to the pursuit of natural frontiers. In February 1795, General Miranda praised France’s traditional line of frontier fortresses and noted the problems of fortifying the Rhine boundary. Moreover, he struck a nationalist chord by renouncing the inclusion of foreigners in the Republic.48 Living at Hamburg, the exiled Dumouriez contributed to the debate, asserting that Belgium must be joined to France but that the German Rhineland could not be incorporated. He rejected the identification of Caesar’s Gaul with contemporary France by insisting that the Romans had ruled the various people of Gaul only by the sword.49 An emerging peace party in Paris indicated that the French did not universally view the annexation of the Rhine’s left bank as a mandate. Rather, a general peace could only occur if the French surrendered portions of their

46 Belissa, Fraternité universelle, 413–4.
48 Miranda, Les frontières de la France considérées sous un point de vue politique et militaire; ouvrage dédié à la Convention nationale (Paris: 1795).
49 Biro, German Policy, 1:307.
conquests. Departing the CPS in March, Carnot continued to view the insistence on annexing the Rhineland as unworkable. He became a chief promoter of exchanging the left bank of the Rhine in order to attain Austrian acceptance of French gains in Belgium.\footnote{Dhombres, Carnot, 417-20; Reinhard, Carnot, 2:160-2.}

The diplomatic situation following the Franco-Prussian Treaty of Basel of 5 April 1795 somewhat offset the danger resulting from the army’s poor materiel condition. Amid the negotiations, Jourdan received several letters from his Prussian equivalent on the right bank of the Rhine, Field Marshal Wichard von Möllendorf. On 16 March, Möllendorf informed Jourdan that he would station his army on the right bank of the Ems River to demonstrate his intention to only defend Prussian territory. He urged that neither side make any move that might threaten the ongoing negotiations at Basel.\footnote{Möllendorf to Jourdan, Tecklenburg, 16 March 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:4.} Two days later, Möllendorf sent a second letter that addressed the most important resolution of the Basel Treaty for the 1795 campaign. While he informed Jourdan that the Prussian troops rejoiced after they received news of the negotiations, he stated that he would utilize his army to protect Prussian lands from foreign encroachments and to defend the line of neutrality “that has already been agreed upon at Basel.”\footnote{Möllendorf to Jourdan, Lippstadt, 18 March 1795, ibid., 3:5.}

The line of neutrality constituted one of several secret articles of the Treaty of Basel.\footnote{The line of neutrality followed the Ems River to Münster, where it turned west and stretched fifty-six miles to Isselburg. From there, the line reached the Rhine at Emmerich and headed south through Wesel to the Ruhr River, stopping just north of Duisburg before turning east to Werden. The line followed the Wipper River south from the direction of Werden to Homburg, north of the Sieg River. From Homburg, the line crossed the Sieg and passed through Altenkirchen on the way to Frankfurt on the Main River. From Frankfurt, it went through Dornheim to Eberbach on the Neckar River, which it followed to Wimpfen before turning slightly east to run through Lowenstein, Murrhardt, Hohenstadt, and Nordlingen. After reaching Holzkirchen further east, the line followed the borders of Bavaria, the Upper Palatinate, and Bohemia until reaching Silesia; see Biro, German Policy, 348-52.} Although the treaty removed one of the major Allied contingents from the war, the line of neutrality proved a major factor in the Sambre and Meuse Army’s operations in 1795. On one hand, it made the available area of operations on the right bank of the Rhine exceedingly

\[\text{\footnotemark} \]
Map 11. 1795 Line of Prussian Neutrality

narrow.\textsuperscript{54} More important, it severely restricted the potential space that the French could exploit to rehabilitate their supply situation. Nonetheless, the removal of Prussia from the Coalition favored French plans for offensive operations on the right bank of the Rhine in 1795.\textsuperscript{55} In another secret article, the Prussian king agreed not to threaten the United Provinces or any territory occupied by French troops. The most important secret article gained tentative Prussian support for French annexation of the left bank territories conditional on the conclusion of a general Franco-Imperial peace.\textsuperscript{56}

The major obstacle to French operations across the Rhine after the Treaty of Basel remained the Austrian army. Following Prussia’s withdrawal, the Austrians and their imperial contingents bore sole responsibility for the defense of the right bank of the Rhine. The Austrians directed just under 200,000 troops across the nearly 400-mile cordon. Their commander, Clerfayt, received overall control of the entire force in the region, but personally oversaw approximately 100,000 troops stationed on the Lower Rhine from the Ruhr to the Neckar. Meanwhile, Wurmser led approximately 80,000 troops from Mannheim to Basel. Nonetheless, because Clerfayt stationed the bulk of his force between the Lahn and the Neckar, only some 34,000 troops guarded the area immediately facing the Sambre and Meuse Army on the right bank of the Rhine from the Ruhr to the Lahn.\textsuperscript{57} Austrian strategy in 1795 initially called for Wurmser to maintain a defensive posture on the Upper Rhine while Clerfayt conducted the main attack across the Lower Rhine to relieve the sieges of Luxembourg and Mainz.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{54} The original agreement completely neutralized the area from Altenkirchen to Bendorf, preventing the French from advancing on the right bank from Dusseldorf to Frankfurt. Modifications on 17 May established several passages through this zone. According to the original agreement, the line offered an area of only thirty-to-forty miles in most places, for example from Neuwied to Limburg.

\textsuperscript{55} For the line of neutrality, see Philip G. Dwyer, “The Politics of Prussian Neutrality, 1795-1805,” \textit{German History} 12, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 353-358; Schroeder, \textit{The Transformation of European Politics}, 150-2; Bailleu, \textit{Preussen und Frankreich}, 1:x-xxii.

\textsuperscript{56} Belissa, \textit{Repenser l’ordre Européen}, 69.

\textsuperscript{57} Rothenberg, \textit{Napoleon’s Great Adversaries}, 55; Phipps, \textit{Armies of the First French Republic}, 2:212.

\textsuperscript{58} Roider, \textit{Thugut}, 190; Michael Hochdullinger, “Who’s Afraid of the French Revolution? Austrian Foreign Policy and the European Crisis, 1787-1797,” \textit{German History} 21, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 308-11
On 20 April, Clerfayt reported that the Franco-Prussian peace treaty made his operation against Luxembourg “exposed to too much hazard, unless he received new instructions.” The Austrian monarch and Holy Roman Emperor, Francis II, dismissed Clerfayt’s concerns and demanded that he relieve the Austrian garrison at Luxembourg: “You must pay no attention to anything the Prussians say regarding neutrality, lines of demarcation, projects of pacification, and other affairs of this kind. You must not even enter discussions with them about these points.” Despite Francis’s demands, Clerfayt did not advance against Luxembourg. As a result of his obstinate caution and Jourdan’s lack of resources, a virtual armistice ensued along the Rhine. The stalemate would not end until September 1795, when the French finally mustered sufficient strength to attempt their operation on the right bank.

In the spring and summer of 1795, the siege of Luxembourg constituted the only significant operation conducted by the Sambre and Meuse Army. Commanded by Bender, the Austrian garrison vigorously resisted the French siege, hoping that relief would soon arrive. In March 1795, the Moselle Army’s divisions departed Luxembourg to join the force at Mainz; three divisions under Hatry from the Sambre and Meuse Army took their place. Two months after assuming command of the siege, Hatry received Bender’s negotiators on 1 June. With his men starving and fearing that relief would not arrive, Bender accepted Hatry’s terms on 7 June. In the ensuing capitulation, the French gained a substantial amount of weaponry from the fortress including 244 bronze and 115 iron cannon, 277 mortars, and

59 Clerfayt to Francis, Bockenheim, 20 April 1795, in Vivenot, Thugut, Clerfayt, and Wurmser, 109; Clerfayt warned that the Prussians might join with the French and assail the army’s line of operation after it crossed the Rhine while Prussian disclosure of the final agreement of the neutrality line convinced Clerfayt that Berlin could not be trusted. He even believed that the neutrality agreement prohibited him from executing all operations along the Lower Rhine north of Mainz and Frankfurt; see Clerfayt to Francis, Bockenheim, and Gross-Gerau, 24 April and 15 May 1795, in ibid., 113-5, 131.

60 Francis to Clerfayt, Hetzendorf, 21 May 1795, in Vivenot, Thugut, Clerfayt und Wurmser, 133-5; Roider in Thugut, 191, attributes this response to Thugut, who he claims spoke through Francis.

61 Jourdan to Hatry, Koblenz, 18 April 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:10.

62 Hatry believed that Bender’s officers desperately desired to leave Luxembourg because the French observed them sitting on the fortress’s glacis while they anxiously awaited the return of the negotiators.

63 Hatry to Jourdan, Itrig, 2 June 1795; “Articles of Capitulation,” Luxembourg, 7 June 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:26-7.
16 howitzers; thousands of bullets, bombs, and grenades; 14,991 infantry muskets, 398
cavalry muskets, 393 rifles, and 458 pistols. Accordingly, they did not suffer from lack of
artillery in the 1795 campaign. Yet the effective use of artillery on campaign requires the
means to transport it.

Although the fall of Luxembourg provided the French with an abundance of artillery
and deprived the Austrians of a target for their offensive operations, the campaign itself
represented one minor aspect of French military strategy in 1795. Much confusion exists
concerning the formulation of strategy in this year. According to Phipps, the plans that
shaped the campaign resembled “the nightmare of a professor of strategy.” More damning,
Phipps insists that “the plans of the [Committee of Public Safety] degenerated into sheer
farce.” Contributing more blame to confusion, Ross states that Carnot “played a major role
in devising the strategy” in 1795 despite the fact that he left the CPS in March. He asserts that
Carnot’s success in 1794 through “hammering at his enemies’ flanks” convinced him “to
pursue a similar policy in 1795.” Despite the criticisms of Phipps and Ross, strategic
planning for the 1795 campaign followed a fairly logical sequence and occurred as much on
the Rhine as it did in Paris. The correspondence reveals the predominate role played by
Jourdan as well as Pichegru, who took command of the newly-combined Rhine and Moselle

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64 “Extract of cannon and munitions found in Luxembourg,” ibid., 3:28.
65 In Armies of the First French Republic, 2:212, Phipps explains that “at the end of April 1795, whilst
Luxembourg still detained a large part of Jourdan’s army, the Committee proposed that Pichegru with the Rhine
and Moselle should cross the Rhine either at two points near Kehl or else above at Breisach, or below at
Oppenheim and then march on Mannheim. That place taken, Jourdan with the Sambre and Meuse was to cross
at Rheinfels and St. Goar, and to land where the Nassau Mountains would have left him no room to debouch.”
66 Ross in Quest for Victory, 91, notes that “Carnot continued to exercise his influence through a friend who
took his place on the Committee.” Apparently this was Étienne François Le Tourneur, whom Phipps in Armies
of the First French Republic, 2:213, also mentions. According to Ross, “the government . . . ordered Jourdan to
lead his 91,000-man Sambre-Meuse Army across the Rhine. He was to take Düsseldorf and lay siege to Mainz.
Pichegru was to lead the Rhine and Moselle Army. His missions were to assist in the attack on Mainz and
advance with the bulk of his 96,000-man army on Mannheim and Heidelberg.” Thus, while Phipps alleges that
the CPS originally envisioned an attack near the center of the Allied line, Ross asserts that it originally planned
for a broad attack against both of the Allied flanks.
Army on 16 April 1795. Jourdan and Pichegru maintained a routine correspondence and worked alongside an ever-changing cast of representatives on mission.

On 30 April, Jourdan conferred with Representative Gillet at Ingelheim on matters of strategy. Pichegru failed to attend the conference due to slowness of travel and requested Jourdan’s notes on the meeting; Jourdan complied on 2 May.\(^67\) Apparently content with a defensive posture, he requested that Pichegru inform him of his intended line of retreat should the Austrians attempt to relieve Luxembourg and Mainz.\(^68\) On 6 May, Pichegru forwarded Jourdan a plan of operations that he purportedly received from the CPS. According to this document, the Rhine and Moselle Army would cross the Rhine to capture Mannheim while Jourdan crossed the Rhine with the Sambre and Meuse Army near Rheinfels to advance to Frankfurt. After achieving these objectives, the two armies would surround Mainz.\(^69\)

Jourdan vehemently rejected the plan outlined by Pichegru. On 8 May, he asserted that no offensive across the Rhine could be conducted before the French captured Luxembourg. He stated that the siege provided time to prepare for the offensive, which “if now attempted and defeated, would leave us unable to prevent the enemy from attaining Luxembourg.”\(^70\) Pichegru agreed with Jourdan’s assessment, complimenting his reflections as “infinitely just.” He observed that the members of the CPS believed that the French would find an abundance of resources on the right bank of the Rhine; such a belief, he maintained, convinced them to order an offensive before securing Luxembourg. To demonstrate the Committee’s perspective to Jourdan, Pichegru quoted a purported letter from Paris, which stated: “All must now be directed toward a passage on the Upper Rhine to penetrate Breisach and Baden: that diversion will force the Austrians to run to the defense of their possessions

\(^{67}\) Pichegru to Jourdan, Ingelheim, 1 May 1795, SHAT, M¹ 608, 3:11.  
\(^{68}\) Jourdan to Pichegru, Koblenz, 2 May 1795, ibid., 3:12.  
\(^{69}\) Pichegru to Jourdan, Guntersblum, 6 May 1795, ibid., 3:14. Clearly, Pichegru’s letter contains the strategic blueprint that Phipps refers to as the authoritative plan in his account of the campaign quoted above.  
\(^{70}\) Jourdan to Pichegru, Andernach, 8 May 1795, ibid., 3:13.
and will be decisive in the success of the campaign; then the fall of Luxembourg will be inevitable and the Austrians will be unable to cross the Rhine to relieve that place.” Pichegru affirmed his agreement with Jourdan’s reservations, yet cited the report to reveal the government’s apparent hostility to their opinion.71

Utterly confused by these reports, Jourdan sought information from his friend and colleague, Gillet, who recently departed the Sambre and Meuse Army to serve on the CPS.72 He stated that he hoped Gillet would keep the contents of the letter to himself because he did not “possess the vanity” to communicate unrequested reflections to the government. Jourdan attributed the plan for a crossing at Rheinfels to the poor maps that the government provided for military planning.73 Gillet responded on 19 May that Jourdan’s views “perfectly accord with the idea that I formed on the campaign.” The representative advised Jourdan to expedite the siege of Luxembourg because his colleagues wanted the campaign to commence without delay. Yet he casually dismissed the proposed crossing at Rheinfels: “I have heard no mention of the crossing at Rheinfels, and if it has been discussed, it must have been done so by men who know nothing of the land.”74 Four members of the Committee — Cambacérès, Treilhard, Merlin de Douai, and Gillet — urged the passage of the Rhine in a report on 11 May but did not mention Rheinfels as a specific point of crossing.75

The Committee’s first proposal called for the Sambre and Meuse Army to cross the Lower Rhine nearly eighty miles north of Rheinfels. Concerned that the advanced season had

71 Pichegru to Jourdan, Guntersblum, 11 May 1795, ibid., 3:15.
72 Jourdan states in his memoirs that the “execution of the plan presented a number of exceptional difficulties.” Ibid.
73 Jourdan to Gillet, Koblenz, 11 May 1795, ibid., 3:16. Rheinfels proved problematic for two reasons. First, the Nassau and Taunus Mountains stood on the right bank of the Rhine opposite Rheinfels and provided the Austrians an effective position to oppose the crossing. Second, the mountainous Hunsrück dominated the triangular area formed on the left bank of the Rhine between the Moselle River to the north and the Nahe River to the south. Jourdan asserted that attempting to move bridge equipage through the Hunsrück would prove exceedingly difficult “if not impossible.”
75 CPS to Merlin de Thionville, 11 May 1795, in Reynaud, Merlin de Thionville, 181. Thus, the plan that Phipps refers to concerning Rheinfels constituted a rumor rather than an actual strategy.
provided the Austrians with sufficient time to prepare for an attack on the left bank at Mainz, the CPS declared on 18 May that “the moment to prepare the opening of the campaign on the Rhine has arrived.” According to this plan, the Rhine and Moselle Army would cross the Upper Rhine over one hundred miles south of Mainz between Hüningen and Breisach while the Sambre and Meuse Army crossed the Lower Rhine one hundred miles north of Mainz between Wesel and Düsseldorf. The Sambre and Meuse Army would occupy the Duchy of Berg on the right bank of the Rhine and capture Düsseldorf with two divisions of the left wing supported by reinforcements from the Army of the North. Next, the army’s center would cross the Rhine south of Düsseldorf to clear the right bank of enemy forces. After occupying Düsseldorf and containing the Austrian garrison at Ehrenbreitstein, the bulk of the army would march south to the Main River to surround Mainz from the right bank. Meanwhile, a portion of the army would defend the line of the Main River for twenty miles to Frankfurt, where Prussian forces guarded the line of neutrality.

Despite these orders, Jourdan repeatedly stated the major problem with the French government’s strategy for 1795: the Sambre and Meuse Army’s insufficient logistics. Jourdan’s correspondence focused on three major logistical problems that undermined French military effectiveness. First, he informed Pichegru on 2 May that the army did not possess the bridging materiel required to cross the Rhine. Moreover, he indicated that he could not guarantee the means to gather the pontoons and boats in the immediate future. Second, Jourdan observed that the Sambre and Meuse Army lacked horses for transport and supply services. The equine crisis prohibited the French from rapidly transporting food and

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76 After crossing, the troops of the left wing and center would scour the region for boats and bridging materiel to establish secure passages from the left to right banks at Düsseldorf, Köln, Bonn, and Neuwied. After the army established these positions, the right wing would cross from the left bank fifty miles south of Düsseldorf at Koblenz, leaving a small force to contain the Austrian garrison at the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, which overlooks the city from the right bank.
77 CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 18 May 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:18.
78 Jourdan to Pichegru, 2 May 1795, ibid., 3:12.
79 Jourdan to Gillet, 11 May 1795, ibid., 3:16.
materiel to the troops and considerably slowed the efforts of the engineers to bridge the Rhine. Finally, Jourdan warned his colleagues that he feared famine would result from the insufficient transport of food and the troops would pillage against the orders of their commanders. Jourdan insisted that the lack of discipline would undermine the army’s effectiveness in the approaching campaign. Unfortunately for the French, events affirmed Jourdan’s prediction.

After confirming that the Sambre and Meuse Army’s first attack would occur between Wesel and Düsseldorf rather than between St. Goar and Rheinfels, the CPS addressed the issue of the army’s bridging equipment. The representatives stated that the Army of the North would gather boats from the Netherlands and float them up the Rhine “to establish a bridge in the most favorable place between the Roer and Düsseldorf.” The Committee identified a number of boats used in the construction of a bridge at Emmerich – sixty-four miles north of Düsseldorf – as “a guaranteed resource.” Admittedly, the letter declared that the CPS did not “know the number of draft horses that both armies lack.” Regardless, they ordered the contractor responsible for military wagons to complete his services.

Despite the Committee’s assurance, the boats at Emmerich did not prove to be a “guaranteed resource” for Jourdan and the Sambre and Meuse Army. In his 11 May letter to Gillet, Jourdan reported that he did not know where or if he could find bridging materiel. He informed Gillet that the new representative on mission assigned to the Sambre and Meuse Army, Michel Louis Talot, negotiated a contract with his colleagues in the Netherlands to provide equipment for one bridge but “at an exorbitant price.” Moreover, they expected the Sambre and Meuse Army to furnish the horses to transport the bridge equipage to its

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81 Jourdan to Gillet, Koblenz, 11 May 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:16; Jourdan informed Gillet that “the lack of forage proves difficult for transport, occasioning pillage and brigandage which pains my heart. I desire to end it soon.”
destination. Ironically, the representative on mission with the Army of the North, Richard, made no mention of bridging materiel at Emmerich in his reports to the CPS. On 28 May, after he received the Committee’s 18 May plan of operations, Richard reported that he could provide materiel from the Netherlands for one bridge. On 1 June, the representative met with Jourdan and Talot at Kleve, which faces Emmerich on the left bank of the Rhine. Despite his proximity to Jourdan and Talot, Richard did not respond to the Committee’s question regarding boats at Emmerich. Instead, he “communicated to the Military Committee of the Estates General the need that we have for a bridge equipage.” Richard reported that the Estates General, a provisional government body in the conquered Netherlands, “took great interest in the matter” and hoped that it “would soon have through those means all that is needed.” Yet the representative predicted that the French would not possess the necessary bridges for at least one additional month.

On 20 June, after one month of reading frustrating reports from the Netherlands, the CPS directly addressed to Jourdan the question of the boats at Emmerich. According to the Committee’s records, the French had constructed a bridge at Emmerich in the spring. They wondered “by what fate had the boats and rigging disappeared?” Jourdan resolved the issue on the 27th. He reported that the Sambre and Meuse Army had constructed a bridge at Emmerich when it briefly occupied the city during the spring of 1795. However, the Army of the North replaced the Sambre and Meuse Army at Emmerich and simply “sent the boats away.” Regardless, Jourdan indicated that bridges existed at Arnhem and Duisburg, “which makes me think that we will promptly receive help from Holland, by pressing the Estates General and making financial sacrifices if that becomes necessary.”

83 Jourdan to Gillet, Koblenz, 11 May 1795, ibid., 3:16.
84 Richard to CPS, La Haye, 28 May 1795, in RACSP, 23:645-6. In addition, the Committee tasked the Army of the North to reinforce the Sambre and Meuse Army with 20,000-25,000 troops.
86 CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 20 June 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:35.
87 Jourdan to CPS, Koblenz, 27 June 1795, ibid., 3:36.
The difficulty of gathering bridging materiel in the Netherlands surpassed the expectations of everyone involved. Part of the explanation involves the disposition of the civilians in the French zone of occupation. Richard indicated to the CPS on 18 May that the generals of the Army of the North constantly reported “the most unbridled brigandage” in Holland and that the inhabitants of Rotterdam and Zeeland “are publically disposed against” them. Even more bluntly, the representative on mission at Amsterdam, Reubell, reported that “the French regime is detested in this country. Rogues and schemers are everywhere dominant. All the operations conducted up to the present have been disastrous and we have attracted universal curses from all the middle class inhabitants.”

On 28 May, Talot alerted Gillet to the frustrations resulting from the attempt “to fabricate the bridge equipage that we still lack.” Talot complained that he could not procure the bridging materiel on the frontiers because he lacked the legal power and feared acting contrary to the government’s dispositions. Moreover, he possessed “insufficient coinage.”

After discovering the difficulties in the Netherlands, Jourdan initiated measures to procure bridge equipment from another region: the area between the Moselle and Saar Rivers. Angry with the slowness of operations in Holland and concerned that a single bridge would not suffice for the entire Sambre and Meuse Army, Jourdan authorized Talot on 28 May to assemble materiel for a second bridge on the Moselle. According to this plan, the French would float the materiel down the river toward Koblenz. Talot felt unable to effectuate Jourdan’s request without the Committee’s approval, which he received two weeks later on 10 June. Nonetheless, the correspondence reveals that Jourdan initiated this measure even

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88 Richard to CPS, La Haye, 18 May 1795, in R4CSP, 23:302-3.
89 Reubell to CPS, Amsterdam, 22 May 1795, in ibid., 23:439-40.
90 Jourdan to Talot, place unknown, 28 May 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:18. Talot even asked whether, in light of the Peace of Basel, “the bridge equipage is absolutely necessary?” Talot proved especially sceptical of the operation on 28 May after a conference with Jourdan, in which the two apparently received letters from their colleagues in Holland that “provided little satisfaction” for their plans for a Rhine campaign.
91 The Committee granted Talot the authorization on 2 June, but Talot did not receive the communiqué until the 10th, at which point he forwarded it to Jourdan. See Jourdan to Talot, Andernach, 28 May 1795, ibid., 3:19; “Order of the CPS,” Paris, 2 June 1795, ibid., 3:22.
before introducing the concept to Talot. In fact, the general commenced preparations for a bridge as early as 6 April. In this case, Jourdan utilized the Convention’s Commission for Arms, Powder, and the Exploitation of Mines to obtain authorization for an artillery officer, General Ennemond Bonnard, to prepare two bridges across the Rhine. Bonnard engaged in negotiations with Richard and the commander of the Army of the North, General Jean-Victor Moreau, for the materiel in the Netherlands, yet he paid special attention to the Moselle-Saar region. Following Jourdan’s advice, Bonnard employed a twenty-three year-old artillery officer and future general of division, Louis Tirlet, to investigate the available resources of the region as far as Metz and Saarlouis. Fortunately for the French, the young officer spread his net wide and found boats and materiel at St. Mihiel, Pont-à-Mousson, Longwy, Thionville, and Strasbourg. He concluded that “it is possible to procure the necessary boats for the construction of a bridge over the Rhine” and calculated that the operation required “eighty to eighty-three boats.” Yet, as Bonnard informed Jourdan on 27 May, despite his authorization from the Commission of Arms, Powder, and the Exploitation of Mines, Tirlet could not actualize his plans to requisition the materiel without approval from the CPS.

Thus, the French lost over one month of the campaign season to simply establish the legal power to requisition materiel for the bridges from the Netherlands, Belgium, the Rhineland, and northeastern France. Jourdan’s struggle reveals a second reason for the difficulty the French encountered in the seemingly routine task of constructing a bridge: the unclear delineation of the respective powers possessed by civil and military authorities.

92 Jourdan to Talot, 28 June 1795, ibid., 3:19; the Commission for Arms, Powder, and the Exploitation of Mines assumed powers of several other committees after 9 thermidor, see Brown, War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State, 167-8.
93 Bonnard to Jourdan, Andernach, 27 May 1795, ibid., 3:20. Tirlet thoroughly scoured the area for boats, rigging, wooden planks, and rods for the bridge equipages. He reported that Saarlouis possessed a shipyard that contained two arsenals of boats and that could construct two more within an eight day period. Moreover, Tirlet commissioned the artillery commandant to construct two bridge equipages at Metz, where all materiel would be sent. Regardless, he reported that the commandant lacked “all the means that he needed for it,” in particular workers.
94 Tirlet to Jourdan, Metz, 22 May 1795, ibid., 3:21.
95 Bonnard to Jourdan, Andernach, 27 May 1795, ibid., 3:20.
Following the 9 thermidor coup of 1794, the National Convention weakened the power of the central executive and strengthened its own legislative role. For the purposes of army administration, the Convention expanded the powers of the Trade and Supply Commission and circumvented the representatives on mission. In particular, the Convention’s decrees restricted their ability to enact requisitions, appoint agents for requisitioning, conclude supply contracts, and allocate money for supply expenditures without the approval of the CPS. In addition, Jourdan noted that “since the end of the last campaign the Committee has ceased to send me its orders directly, but instead always addresses them to the representatives of the people with the army.” Jourdan reported that he only received the Committee’s 18 May plan of operations on 25 May owing to this inconvenience. Moreover, he explained to the Committee on 15 July that despite the promise of Moreau and Richard to supply him with the bridging materiel, they could not immediately order the requisition without the Committee’s approval.

Although the Committee’s 18 May order for the Army of the North to supply the Army of the Sambre and Meuse with a bridge equipage seemingly provided that authorization, the bureaucratic imbroglio that existed after 9 thermidor made confusion and uncertainty the order of the day and severely limited the efficiency of French logistical preparations for the 1795 campaign. In his report to the CPS on 15 July that explained his efforts to construct the bridges, Jourdan did not disclose that he initiated Tirlet’s mission in April. It seems plausible that the legislative and bureaucratic conflicts of the period made Jourdan concerned that he might be reprimanded by the CPS for taking such initiative.

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96 The Convention passed these reforms in stages on 9 November 1794 and 25 February and 8 May 1795; see Brown, *War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State*, 160; Antoine Picq, *La législation militaire de l’époque révolutionnaire: introduction à l’étude de la législation militaire actuelle* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1931), 16-45, provides the most cogent description of the legislation concerning the public power of the National Convention and the Committee of Public Safety in relation to the armies.

97 Jourdan to CPS, Andernach, 15 July 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:38.

98 Ibid.
Regardless, authorization did not guarantee immediate supply. It took even longer to actually gather, organize, and form the materiel into two effective bridges across the Rhine.

On 10 June, Jourdan notified Tirlet that the CPS had authorized him to make the necessary requisitions for the bridge equipage. He demanded that the young officer send reports on the difficulties he encountered and to keep him updated on his progress. Yet on 27 June he reported to the Committee that he could not provide information on Tirlet’s mission because he possessed no reports from him. In fact, it took Tirlet six weeks to complete his mission from the day that Jourdan informed him of the Committee’s authorization. Finally, Jourdan reported on 24 July that the bridge equipage from the Moselle had arrived near Koblenz and that the engineers would complete its construction in a few days. As he stated, the additional delay resulted from the need to carry the materiel on horse-pulled drays part of the way because some areas of the Moselle proved unnavigable. From start to finish, it took the army nearly four months from April to July to construct a bridge at Koblenz. Despite this progress, the bridge equipage from the Netherlands remained incomplete.

Throughout the 1795 campaign, the Sambre and Meuse Army’s transport services proved incredibly slow. The correspondence between Jourdan and Pichegru in May reveal that the lack of draft horses stalled their efforts to gather bridging materiel. A dearth of horses became a systemic problem within the French logistical system. Gillet alerted the CPS to the emerging crisis as early as 27 November 1794, commenting on the “ruined state” of the army’s mounts. General Championnet explained that the large-scale loss of horses reached a pandemic-level because of insufficient nourishment: “I was forced to authorize the chiefs of

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99 Jourdan to Tirlet, place unknown, 10 June 1795, ibid., 3:23.
100 Jourdan to CPS, place unknown, 27 June 1795, ibid., 3:36.
102 Pichegru to Jourdan, Guntersblum, 6 May 1795, ibid., 3:14.
103 Gillet to CPS, 27 November 1794, in RACSP, 18:369-70.
the cavalry and artillery to make requisitions for hay, straw, and oats: if I had not taken that
measure I soon would have been without horses.” Gillet warned on 12 February 1795 that
the army “absolutely lacks forage. . . . Our horses are reduced in many places to only ten
pounds of straw without oats or hay. In addition, the dead are increasing with a frightening
rapidity.” The representative feared that the cavalry “would be pained to enter into campaign”
in this condition, but even more ominously he warned of the artillery and transport services:
“the horses of which are nearly all dead and we have no more means of transport.” Gillet
attributed this calamity primarily to the lack of a magazine system to supply a regular stream
of forage: “voilà the cause of our constant distress and the irreparable loss that we have
sustained in horses.”

While a major factor in the French nation’s severe equine deficit, lack of forage alone
does not explain the situation. Contracted by the government in November 1795 to
investigate the continuing depletion of effective horses, Representative Jean Adam Pflieger
concluded that “the annihilation and the loss of our horses has an infinity of causes that all
result from ignorance and indiscipline.” In particular, Pflieger asserted that poor quality
officers failed to ensure the proper care of their mounts; he proposed measures to reform the
mode of promotion among the cavalry. Organizational problems also contributed to
substandard administration. Thus, he advised that the government regularize the number of
squadrons for each type of cavalry as well as for depot squadrons. Moreover, he proposed
that the French incorporate squadrons into a set number of higher formations: twenty heavy
cavalry regiments, eighteen dragoon regiments, seven chasseur regiments, and eight hussar
regiments.

104 Championnet, Souvenirs, 94.
105 Gillet to CPS, 12 February 1795, SHAT, B1 133.
107 Ibid., 8:11-2.
Inadequate veterinary care provides another explanation for the equine disaster. On 1 August 1795, the Committee of Public Safety employed the French chemist and pharmacist, Antoine-Alexis Cadet-de-Vaux, to investigate an infectious disease that killed thousands of horses: glanders. The Transport Commission provided Cadet-de-Vaux and a veterinarian with two horses suffering from glanders along with all the necessary tools to investigate the disease in an isolated stable at Franconville-la-Garenne. Spread primarily through feeding troughs and nuzzling, a glanders epidemic indicates a failure to separate sick horses from well horses. On 1 September 1795, the CPS passed measures to ensure that veterinarians tested newly requisitioned horses for disease and instituted means to discern cases in which the cause of death could be attributed to “negligence.” Although intelligent responses to a major crisis, these measures came too late in 1795 to strengthen France’s armies.

As with the troops, lack of forage and poor administration led to serious attrition in the number of serviceable horses possessed by the French. According to a situation report from August 1794, the French cavalry as a whole numbered 100,000 effectives. Yet a similar report from 29 January 1795 revealed an actual strength of 80,000 troopers and only 60,000 horses. On 10 March 1795, the Sambre and Meuse Army contained 15,214 cavalry. By 5 August, attrition had reduced that force to 12,000 troopers. Overall, the French cavalry lacked over one half of the horses it needed in 1795.

Although the lack of cavalry mounts reduced the army’s combat effectiveness, insufficient draft horses proved to be an even greater problem. As noted, Kléber had already

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112 “Situation of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse,” 10 March 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:1; situation of 5 August 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:30.
113 Desbrière, *La cavalerie pendant la Révolution*, 86.
encountered the difficulties concerning too few horses for the transport services during the December 1794 siege of Mainz.\(^{114}\) Jourdan reported to Pichegru on 8 May that he lacked sufficient horses to transport the army’s artillery, which rendered bridging operations on the left bank of the Rhine vulnerable to Austrian fire from the right bank.\(^{115}\) On 11 June, the CPS asked Jourdan for an update concerning the state of the army’s logistics.\(^{116}\) He responded on the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) by reiterating that the army lacked “an exorbitant number of horses.”\(^{117}\) Yet the CPS learned the full extent of the army’s dearth only on 15 July. Responding to the Committee’s inquiries, Jourdan reported that the army lacked a total of 34,820 horses for transport services and 8,000 horses for the artillery.\(^{118}\) In August 1794, Commissar Ordonnateur Vaillant stated that the Sambre and Meuse Army alone required approximately 40,000 horses for transport and supply.\(^{119}\) As Jourdan’s 15 July report reveals, the army possessed only one-sixth of the necessary transport horses on the eve of the 1795 campaign.

The French possibly could have resolved the lack of bridging equipment and horses if these deficits had constituted isolated problems. Instead, they represented the effects of a systemic crisis of French logistics in Belgium and the Rhineland. Insufficient food, resources, and money – combined with bureaucratic irregularity – made it virtually impossible to repair the Sambre and Meuse Army’s supply services before the opening of the campaign. After the successful conquests of 1794, the French intended to feed their troops largely through requisitions imposed on the conquered territories of Belgium and the Rhineland. Yet they consistently overestimated the ability of these regions to provide food for their armies. For example, in late January 1795, the representatives on mission expected the Meuse-Rhine to furnish grain for the Sambre and Meuse Army for a two-month period. In reality, it

\(^{114}\) Kléber to Jourdan, Ingelheim, 29 December 1794, SHAT, M\(^{1}\) 608, 3:1.
\(^{115}\) Jourdan to Pichegru, Andernach, 8 May 1795, ibid., 3:13.
\(^{116}\) CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 11 June 1795, ibid., 3:33.
\(^{117}\) Jourdan to CPS, place unknown, 20 June 1795, ibid., 3:34.
\(^{118}\) Jourdan to CPS, place unknown, 15 July 1795, ibid., 3:38.
\(^{119}\) Wetzler, War and Subsistence, 94.
provided the army with only 15,000 quintals of grain – enough for a mere fifteen days. The representatives on mission usually explained starvation among troops and horses as the result of lackadaisical administration by supply agents. Gillet reported on 12 April the suspension of a *commissaire ordonnateur en chef*, Charles-Alexis Alexandre, “not for his talents or his conduct,” but because “the army lacks everything, and he knows of no additional resources.” Gillet indicated that instead of the mandated twenty-eight ounces of bread per day, the soldiers received only sixteen ounces while the supply of meat completely ceased in several divisions and in the military hospitals. These comments suggest that poor administration exacerbated the much larger structural problem concerning the limited food supply of the occupied regions.

Although the Sambre and Meuse Army received several hundred thousand quintals of grain and other food items from the Netherlands after April, this arrangement failed to furnish all of the army’s needs. The demand to requisition grain directly from Belgium and the Rhineland persisted and in late April and early May the representatives authorized a requisition of 130,000 quintals of grain from the region surrounding Brussels, which the French would transport from Louvain on canals. The representatives on mission warned that “it will be difficult to snatch other subsistence, because the country, as fertile as it is, is not inexhaustible.” On 15 July, Jourdan reported that the army lacked proper stores of food and that supplies promised from Holland did not arrive in sufficient quantity or time. Two weeks later, he asked the CPS if he could requisition food and supplies from territories east of the Prussian-enforced line of neutrality along the right bank of the Rhine during the campaign “if my convoys do not arrive as planned because of the lack of resources in our magazines.

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120 Ibid., 215.
121 Gillet to CPS, Bonn, 12 April 1795, in *RACSP*, 22:20-2.
122 Jean Le Febvre de Nantes to CPS, Brussels, 28 April 1795, in ibid., 22:515-7.
123 Jourdan to CPS, 15 July 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:38.
and the lack of means of transport.”\textsuperscript{124} Thus, the lack of food in Belgium and the Rhineland proved so concerning that Jourdan considered violating Prussian neutrality to provide for the army’s most fundamental needs.

Insufficient food in the region presented a structural problem that the French could not overcome without importing food from other regions. While the Army of the North provided some subsistence from Holland, French territory could not supply the armies on the frontiers. Indeed, the government redirected Belgian resources from the armies in order to feed the city of Paris and northern France.\textsuperscript{125} Moreover, the Rhineland could not furnish the needs of both the Sambre and Meuse and the Rhine and Moselle Armies, which combined numbered approximately 187,000 troops. The number of camp followers and army personnel remains unknown but probably totaled more than half of each army’s troop strength, which could bring the total French presence in the Rhineland to more than one-quarter million hungry mouths in 1795.\textsuperscript{126} Estimations for the total population of the Rhineland in the 1790s number approximately 1,600,000.\textsuperscript{127} Based on these figures, the most authoritative modern study of the Rhineland during the Revolutionary era considers the French presence “a colossal burden,” exacerbated by the treatment of the population “as an exploitable enemy.”\textsuperscript{128} While other parts of Europe faced French occupation during the Revolution, T. C. W. Blanning correctly argues that the Rhineland “could lay claim to one unenviable distinction in any competition for the status of most-exploited territory: duration.”\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{124} Jourdan to CPS, Koblenz, 27 July 1795, ibid., 3:42.
\textsuperscript{125} Forrest, “The Logistics of War in Revolutionary France,” 182-3.
\textsuperscript{126} For camp followers in the Revolutionary armies, see Bertaud, \textit{La vie quotidienne}, 149-170; Cardoza, \textit{Intrepid Women}, 30-58; more broadly, see John A. Lynn, \textit{Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
\textsuperscript{127} For these figures, see Sagnac, \textit{Le Rhin français}, 18; Blanning, \textit{French Revolution in Germany}, 84; Rowe, \textit{From Reich to State}, 55. Blanning points out that this would be equivalent to a 1,250,000-man army occupying the region today.
\textsuperscript{128} Rowe, \textit{From Reich to State}, 55.
\textsuperscript{129} In \textit{French Revolution in Germany}, 129, Blanning explains that “every time the French looked like seizing a decisive, permanent advantage in this theater – October 1792, October 1794, September 1795, July 1796, March 1799 – the Austrians delivered one more example of that astonishing resilience which in the long (very long)
and insufficient resources to meet the demands of French contributions and requisitions proved the common theme of letters from Rhineland officials to French representatives in 1794-1795.130

French finances further deepened the logistical crisis that confronted the Sambre and Meuse Army in 1795. The assignats of the Revolution no longer constituted a viable currency after the official abolition of price controls in December 1794. Although inflation began before 9 thermidor, the government’s decision to abolish the notorious maximum led to a dramatic acceleration and by February 1795 the assignat – a currency originally based on the value of confiscated church lands but now simply used as paper money – totaled only seventeen percent of its face value. By April 1795, the value dropped to approximately eight percent and did not improve: by October the practically worthless assignats totaled less than one percent of their face value and never recovered.131 As in France, inflation and currency depreciation encouraged hoarding in the frontier zones. Representatives on mission continually reported the unwillingness of local inhabitants and cities to accept payment in assignats for supplies and resources. The Committee provided Jourdan with a fund of 300,000 assignats in the spring of 1795 for the immediate needs of the campaign – a dubious aid at best. Jourdan repeatedly requested additional funds en numéraire because “we are in a land where they do not want our assignats.”132

Systemic problems such as the lack of food, resources, and money contributed to the misery of the troops in the Sambre and Meuse Army. These difficulties also undermined the government’s military strategy and severely weakened the army’s operational effectiveness.

run was to bring them victory. So there could be no respite for the wretched Rhinelanders from military pressure until Marengo and Hohenlinden brought a peace which settled the Rhine frontier, at least for the time being.”

130 For examples, see Dumont to Frécine, Köln, 17 January 1795; “Declaration of the Magistrate of Köln,” 18 January 1795; Dörsch to Ludwigs, Aachen, 21 January 1795; in Hansen, Quellen, 3:355-6; 357-9; 362-3.


132 Jourdan to CPS, 24 July 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:39.
After declaring on 18 May that the time to open the campaign had arrived, the CPS expressed displeasure over the continued stalemate on the Rhine as early as 11 June. In this report, it urged Jourdan to cross the Rhine near Düsseldorf and to continue the offensive until the Austrians “have been forced to the Danube; you will hold the country between the Main, the Danube, and the Rhine, which will cover the siege of the places that are on the later river.”

On 20 June, Jourdan indicated the continued lack of a bridge and a severe shortage of horses, food, and supplies. Despite these problems, he planned to form a corps d’armée under Kléber from the army’s left wing to facilitate a crossing in the vicinity of Krefeld at Uerdingen while Championnet captured Düsseldorf ten miles further south before crossing the Rhine with his own division. Kléber would direct the advance up the Rhine, facilitating the rest of the army’s passage at Köln, Neuwied, and Koblenz. Jourdan commented that the Rhine could sustain the army’s transport as far as Koblenz, yet the mountainous terrain on the right bank between the Lahn and the Main would impede the transport of supplies between Koblenz and Frankfurt. Finally, he acknowledged the importance of timing and warned that reports indicated Clerfayt’s knowledge of the preparations to establish bridges on the Rhine.

While the delay provided the Austrians with the possibility of making defensive preparations, it also reduced the length of the campaign season and increased the chance that natural forces might hamper French operations. On 6 July, the CPS announced its “great impatience to see the realization of the grand project to cross the Rhine, discussed and ordered for more than three months.” Accordingly, the CPS attached to their letter a

133 CPS to Jourdan, 11 June 1795, Paris, ibid., 3:33. The government urged Jourdan to quickly execute the necessary preparations and to report on the status of his operations, “distinguishing the materiel that you have from those that you lack.” Finally, the Committee sought to know when he anticipated to open the operation, reiterating that it must commence as soon as possible.
134 Jourdan to CPS, Koblenz, 20 June 1795, ibid., 3:34.
135 CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 6 July 1795, ibid., 3:37. The CPS utilized a number of tactics to inspire Jourdan to action. “It is to your courage, your soldierly talents, and your enlightenment that we entrust this beautiful and significant performance,” it wrote. In addition, the CPS assured Jourdan that if he provided vigilance they would furnish “all the secondary means [of operation], without which all would be powerless.” Unfortunately, the CPS addressed this letter to the General in Chief of the Army of the North, Moreau, who received it and forwarded it to Jourdan on 13 July.
questionnaire concerning the army’s supply situation which Jourdan should answer and return by courier. Jourdan responded on 15 June that the army still lacked the means to open the offensive. “I have done all that I could since I possessed knowledge of the plan of campaign to accelerate its execution, but as the precaution was not taken to construct in advance the pontoons, boats, and rafts necessary for transport, it has not been in my power to overcome the difficulties that I have encountered,” he wrote. Moreover, he provided the troubling news that the bridge from the Netherlands would not be ready until 12 August.

After he informed the CPS of an additional one month delay, Jourdan reiterated that lack of horses impeded efforts at transport. Finally, the questionnaire asked if the army could live off the land on the right bank of the Rhine. Jourdan reported that Austrian prisoners indicated “that the land is ruined: the Austrian troops stationed there and the inhabitants suffer horribly.”

Although Tirlet’s mission to gather materiel in the Moselle and Saar region allowed the army to establish a bridge at Koblenz in late July, natural forces delayed the transportation of the bridge equipage from the Netherlands. On 24 July, Jourdan reported that bridging materiel from Nijmegen would arrive above Wesel on 2 August but could only reach the vicinity of Düsseldorf between 12 and 17 August. He hoped to utilize available boats and pontoons from Venlo to cross the Rhine at Düsseldorf and Neuwied as early as 7 August; however, lack of funds prohibited the transport of materiel from the Roer to the Rhine. In addition, Jourdan reported on 27 July that continual rains had raised the water levels of the Rhine and flooded the region’s roads. Nearly two weeks later, he complained that the rains continued. He hoped to cross the Rhine at Uerdingen and Neuwied on 7 August but “incessant rain makes the Rhine overflow to the point that navigation is impossible.”

136 Jourdan to CPS, Krefeld, 15 July 1795, ibid., 3:38.
137 Jourdan to CPS, Krefeld, 24 July 1795, ibid., 3:39.
138 Jourdan to CPS, Krefeld, 27 July 1795, ibid., 3:42.
reported that the rough waters of the Rhine arrested the approach of the bridge equipage from the Netherlands. Jourdan regretfully informed the CPS that he had little choice but to await the lowering of the water and act only “when were are in measure of doing so.”

Mired in confusion and hesitancy like the French, the Austrian army remained largely passive on the right bank of the Rhine throughout the summer of 1795. In May, Baron Thugut’s personal investigator and friend, Count Franz von Dietrichstein, observed Clerfayt’s headquarters and reported to Thugut over the gross inadequacies of the army’s officer corps. The fall of Luxembourg to the Sambre and Meuse Army in June finally convinced Francis to modify the situation on the Rhine. On 30 July, he called for “a more active war” and divided Clerfayt’s army into two forces. Clerfayt retained command of the principal Austrian army along with the troops of the Holy Roman Empire while Wurmser gained command of 75,000 hand-picked Austrians on the Upper Rhine. According to Francis’s orders, Clerfayt would maintain a defensive posture on the right bank of the Lower Rhine with his force of 96,000 men. Meanwhile, Wurmser would launch a major offensive into Alsace from Freiburg. Offended by the emperor’s changes, Clerfayt offered his resignation on 12 August, which Francis rejected on the 20th.

In contrast, Wurmser assumed his new command and commenced preparations for the offensive with great energy. On 26 August, he informed Thugut that he possessed “a large

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139 Jourdan to CPS, Krefeld, 6 August, 1795, ibid., 3:43.
140 Roider, Thugut, 191, which states that “although clearly inferior to the generals of Maria Theresa’s time, Clerfayt was better than any of the other senior commanders the monarchy now had.”
141 Francis to Clerfayt, 30 July 1795, in Vivenot, Thugut, Clerfayt, und Wurmser, 173-7. The emperor did not believe that Clerfayt would encounter much difficulty because reports indicated “that at the moment the enemy has been considerably weakened on the Lower Rhine.” Indeed, he advised Clerfayt to reinforce his left wing at l’Eltz with troops from the right wing.
142 Clerfayt to Francis, 12 August 1795, in ibid., 183-6; Francis to Clerfayt, 20 August 1795, in ibid., 187-9; Clerfayt tried again on 21 August, citing reasons of health, see Clerfayt to Francis, 21 August 1795, in ibid., 190-1.
143 Francis to Wurmser, Schönbrunn, 7 September 1795, in ibid., 203-4. The emperor explained the purpose of Wurmser’s offensive: “My intention is that you will soon take up the enterprise because it will have the good effect of occupying the enemy, upsetting in consequence the projects of invasion, which he might have formed on his side, and preventing him from striking with considerable forces . . . against Italy in general, and finally to favor the expeditions that the British will make on the coast and in the interior [of France].”
army of brave troops,” which would succeed if properly prepared and led. Interestingly, he noted that bridges constituted the most necessary requirement. Although he originally worried that these might be lacking, he reported that through “unceasing work I will be able to form two complete passages from my 150 pontoons.” Yet a report from a staff officer, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Duka von Kádár, tasked with examining different crossing points on the Rhine, discovered numerous unanticipated difficulties of terrain. In addition, Wurmser warned that “our movements have alarmed the enemy.” Nonetheless, he expressed few concerns regarding a potential French offensive: “We will attack in a lively manner once [the enemy] is on that bank. . . .”

Returning to the French, Jourdan admitted his frustration to the Committee on 15 August regarding the ruinous floods, which “interrupted the preparations for our passage of the Rhine.” Although the general ordered the work to recommence as soon as the weather and conditions allowed, he warned that “the enemy has gained knowledge of our preparations, and has descended many troops from the side of Mainz; since yesterday, more than 20,000 men have been camped in the small plain in front of Neuwied, where I had proposed to cross with the army’s right wing.” In addition, the commander of the left wing, Kléber, reported that the Austrians simultaneously reinforced the troops defending the right bank across from Düsseldorf. Jourdan concluded that the Austrian camp at Neuwied rendered the crossing of the right wing impossible.

Three days later, he reported the arrival of Austrian reinforcements at Bonn and Mülheim. He complained that insufficient draft horses slowed the construction of the bridge at Uerdingen where the left wing would cross, “giving the enemy the means of penetrating our designs and opposing them.” Accordingly, Jourdan

144 Wurmser to Thugut, Freiburg, 26 August 1795, in ibid., 191-3.
145 Wurmser to Thugut, Freiburg, 31 August 1795, in ibid., 193-5. Arriving from Uerdingen, the Austrian general, Karl Funck, regarded “as inevitable that the enemy will cross the Rhine, because he has a formidable artillery in proportion to that which we have to oppose him.”
146 Jourdan to CPS, 15 August 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:44.
147 Jourdan to CPS, 18 August 1795, ibid., 3:45.

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modified his orders to take account of the new situation. On 22 August, he instructed Hatry to
make several demonstrations at Neuwied, “causing the greatest publicity” but “assuming a
certain mysterious air . . . to confuse the enemy of our true intentions.”148 Much like his feint
on Maastricht before the 18 September 1794 battle of the Ourthe, Jourdan’s orders to Hatry
formed the first part of a diversionary operation to facilitate the crossing of the Rhine at
Uerdingen and Düsseldorf.

Despite the delays and problems that resulted from poor logistics and weather, the
French proved remarkably determined to execute the crossing of the Rhine. The CPS
remained committed to the mission and never wavered from demanding offensive operations.
Gillet, the former representative on mission who now served on the CPS, provided Merlin de
Thionville with the prevailing political rationale in a letter dated 6 July. Referring to
proposals to remain on the defensive in the Rhineland while pursuing offensive operations in
Italy, Gillet remarked, “I see clearly in that project the return to our ancien [pre-1789] limits.
If we do not cross the Rhine, if we reduce our strength in that theater, the enemy will cross,
and our proper country will risk becoming a theater of war. . . .”149 Gillet’s comments reflect
a broader ideological acceptance of the concept of the natural frontiers in the Thermidorean
Republic. Although one government faction that included Carnot rejected French annexation
of the left bank of the Rhine in 1794, it would lose a major foreign policy debate by the
following summer.

The National Convention sponsored an essay contest in June 1795 that addressed the
prompt: “Should the Rhine become the Frontier of the Republic?” The Convention offered
4,000 and 2,000 francs for the two best essays on the theme. Out of fifty-six essays, not a

149 Gillet to Merlin de Thionville, Paris, 6 July 1794, in RACSP, 25:193-4. Moreover, Gillet believed that only
offensive operations could secure peace: “The defensive system is absolutely contrary to our system of war. What is our goal? Peace; prompt and glorious. And that can only be achieved by victories. Remaining on the
defensive, our armies will melt, and we will end up beaten.”
single one accepted for publication responded in an unqualified negative. Moreover, the
organizer of the contest, the Mainz Jacobin Georges-Guillaume Boehmer, did not hide his
bias in favor of French annexation of the Rhine. The Moniteur published the announcement
for the contest with a caption that stated: “it would be morally impossible to prove to honest
and enlightened judges . . . that it is in the interest of the Republic to let escape this opportune
moment to retake its ancient boundaries, drawn by nature herself!”150

The winners of two first prizes were both foreigners: Théremin was a Prussian of
Huguenot descent who viewed the Revolution in a favorable light while Tainturier was a
Liégeois republican. Most of the essays based their affirmation on economic interests,
particularly the agricultural resources of the left bank of the Rhine. The numerous mineral
resources of Belgium and the Rhineland could also contribute to French wealth and industry.
Rather than seeking to improve the commerce and trade of the Rhineland, the essays claimed
that the French could benefit from controlling an already profitable system. From a financial
perspective, the essays claimed that the French could use the church property of the
Rhineland to restore value to assignats. Incorporating nearly two million additional
inhabitants would decrease the weight of taxation and military service on Frenchmen. Finally,
the essays addressed security concerns, generally depicting the annexation of the left bank as
indispensable for French safety. One essay challenged the idea that a massive army would be
needed to defend the Rhine, claiming that the distance from the French heartland would allow
time for the French to gather sufficient strength and still meet an enemy army on the ancient
frontier. Moreover, the argument that if the French possessed their natural frontiers, the
likelihood of future war would significantly decrease, became a major theme of all the essays.

150 Georges-Guillaume Boehmer, ed., La Rive gauche du Rhin: Limite de la République française, ou Recueil de
plusieurs dissertations, jugées dignes des prix propose par un negociant de la rive gauche du Rhin (Paris:
1795); for more on this point, see Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1443-6; Andrew Jainchill,
Reimagining Politics after The Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism (Ithaca, New York:
Cornell University Press, 2008), 154.
Only one essay added to these economic, political, financial, and strategic arguments the concept of the Rhine as the frontier of Ancient Gaul. Nonetheless, the frontispiece of the published essays showed two classical figures approaching a river above a caption that read: “The descendants of the Gauls reclaiming their ancient limits.”

Convinced of the advantages to be gained by offensive operations across the Rhine, the CPS sent Gillet back to the Sambre and Meuse Army as a representative on mission on 11 July. Instead of proceeding directly to the army’s headquarters at Krefeld, Gillet directed his route through Arnhem, where he investigated the situation concerning the bridge equipment. He anticipated that the bridge could be established at Uerdingen within a few days but the rains soon dampened his optimism. The Committee could not congratulate Gillet for establishing the means to cross the Rhine until 7 August, and they encouraged that he “push constantly the operations of the crossing without delay. . . .” Gillet tasked Kléber to oversee the creation of companies of workers, some comprising carpenters and others formed by pontonniers, to facilitate the bridging operation. Authorized by the Committee to make requisitions, Gillet informed the central administration of the Meuse-Rhine region on 15 August of his need for 200,000 livres *en numéraire*, which would be gained partially through contributions imposed on the population between those rivers. The representative sent a similar letter to the central administration of Aachen.

Despite his progress, even Gillet encountered difficulties in his efforts to accelerate preparations. For example, while attempting to purchase ammunition and weapons from a local forge he discovered that they would not accept *assignats*. He admitted the full extent  

153 Gillet to CPS, Krefeld, 28 July 1794, SHAT, B1 133.  
154 CPS to Gillet, Paris, 7 August 1795, in *RACSP*, 26:262.  
155 “Order of Gillet,” 7 August 1795, SHAT, B1 133.  
156 Gillet to Central Administration of the Meuse-Rhine, Krefeld, 15 August 1795, ibid.  
157 Gillet to Central Administration of Aachen, Krefeld, 15 August 1795, ibid.  
158 Gillet to CPS, 17 August 1795, ibid.
of the army’s crisis only on 22 August. He reported to the CPS that “if we do not stop promptly the daily weakening of the different bodies of the army, we can count on it no longer existing in a few months.” He explained that “for two years it has not received new recruits, it suffered great losses in the last campaign, where it delivered seven battles and captured eight fortified places.” In addition, Gillet warned of the army’s insufficient transport services and reasserted the urgency of the situation on the Rhine: “if you do not issue orders very promptly, in very little time you will not have an army and you will await the most unfortunate reverses.”159

Jourdan seconded Gillet’s pessimism before the opening of the campaign. In late July he issued orders to prepare the left wing for the operation at Uerdingen and Düsseldorf. The general provided extremely detailed instructions that demonstrate his high-level of involvement in the operation.160 As noted, Austrian movements on the right bank convinced Jourdan to transform Hatry’s attack at Neuwied into a diversion to provide Kléber’s operation with a greater chance of success. Informing the CPS on 26 August of the nearly complete preparations, he celebrated that “good will and courage” had overcome “all imaginable difficulties” as well as “nature itself.”161 On 1 September, he wrote from Koblenz, where he monitored Austrian activity and oversaw diversionary movements at Neuwied. The French artillery bombarded the Austrian camp on the right bank while the infantry repeatedly fired their muskets, hoping to keep additional reinforcements south of Düsseldorf and Uerdingen. Jourdan believed he could cross the Rhine at Uerdingen on the night of 4/5 September. Nonetheless, three days before the anticipated commencement of the campaign, he drafted the following declaration to the CPS, which perfectly captures the systemic logistical problems that plagued the Sambre and Meuse Army:

159 Gillet to CPS, 22 August 1795, ibid.
161 Jourdan to CPS, Krefeld, 26 August 1795, ibid., 3:PI, no. 50.
It is my duty to inform you that the army lacks subsistence. The right wing has only received one livre of bread per day for a long time, and the bread is so bad that a number of soldiers have been attacked by dysentery. Such administration excites the most violent murmurs among the troops, who disband and want to pillage, with their generals powerless to arrest this disorder. However, when the soldiers receive their regular food, I will reestablish order and discipline. The few horses employed for transport are without forage and oats; they suffer from famine; the cavalry alone receives regular distributions; finally, the service of the army is such that, when it is marching, I do not know how it will survive.\textsuperscript{162}

Clearly, such misgivings boded ill for the success of offensive operations across the Rhine. Yet political considerations prohibited any last minute strategic re-evaluation. Instead, the operation commenced in early September 1795: four months after the Committee initially ordered the opening of the campaign. On 4 September, the representatives on mission distributed a proclamation to the troops that depicted the upcoming campaign as a crusade to establish a glorious peace. Reminding the French troops that they fought for the Republic, the representatives proclaimed the importance of their participation in the upcoming campaign in highly political terms. Referring the newly drafted Constitution of the Year III – which would shortly become the constitution of the new French government, the Directory – they stated that the troops must view the constitution as “the property that is your duty to defend.” With the constitution in one hand and the bayonet in the other, the French would purportedly “overcome all of the obstacles that nature imposes . . . to achieve the laurels of victory, preceded by the olive branch of peace.”\textsuperscript{163}

Meanwhile, the army’s leaders attended to final measures to establish secure means of passage at Uerdingen, Düsseldorf, and Neuwied. Jourdan’s chief of staff, Ernouf, informed the CPS on 1 September that the crossing point at Uerdingen neared completion as the French concentrated bridging materiel from three locations: the Netherlands, the Meuse, and the Roer. Moreover, he noted that Hatry’s division would occupy an island in the Rhine near

\textsuperscript{162} Jourdan to CPS, Koblenz, 1 September 1795, ibid., 3:PJ, no. 51.
\textsuperscript{163} “Proclamation of the Representatives of the People on Mission in the Country between the Meuse and the Rhine and with the Army of the Sambre and Meuse,” Bonn, 4 September 1794, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 60.
Neuwied, utilizing boats gathered as a result of Tirlet’s mission to the Meuse. Hatry’s attack would distract the approximately 50,000 Austrians currently stationed on the right bank of the Rhine between Düsseldorf and Mainz. Despite these preparations, delays continued. On 2 September, Gillet noted that lack of transport prompted an additional postponement of at least several days. Kléber explained to Jourdan on the 3rd that the operation could not commence as planned on the night of 4/5 September because insufficient transport prevented the arrival of the boats coming overland from the Roer.

Although the Austrians learned of French preparations for an offensive, Hatry’s well-timed diversion at Neuwied prevented Clerfayt from allocating sufficient forces to challenge Kléber’s operation at Uerdingen and Düsseldorf. The Austrian commander, Feldmarschall-Leutnant Johann Karl, count of Erbach directed only 11,000 troops between Düsseldorf and Duisburg. On the night of 5/6 September, Kléber initiated the operation with approximately 40,000 men of the left wing including the divisions of Lefebvre, Championnet, Jacques Tilly, and Paul Grenier. To overwhelm the outnumbered Austrians, the French made three attacks at Eichelskamp, Uerdingen, and Düsseldorf. On the extreme French left, Lefebvre’s division embarked on boats at 9:00 PM to cross to the right bank at Eichelskamp. By noon on the 6th, Lefebvre’s troops held the line from Angermund to

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164 Ernouf to CPS, Bonn, 1 September 1795, SHAT, B1 60; Feldmarschalleutnant Johann Karl Erbach commanded 11,090 troops between Duisburg and Düsseldorf, Friedrich Eugen, duke of Wurtemberg directed 9,136 troops from the Wipper River to the Sieg River, Feldmarschalleutnant William Ludwig von Wartensleben commanded 14,000 men between the Sieg and the Lahn Rivers while 7,751 troops under various commanders guarded the Rhine between the Lahn and the Main Rivers. The Austrian garrison at Ehrenbreitstein numbered 2,594 men; see the chart in Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 2:181.

165 Gillet to CPS, Krefeld, 2 September 1795, SHAT, B1 60.

166 Kléber to Jourdan, Krefeld, 3 September 1795, AN, 196 A/2; see also Kléber’s extremely detailed plan of operations, dated 3 September 1795, in SHAT, B1 60.

167 Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 7:150; Archduke Charles, Feldzug von 1794 und 1795 (Vienna: 1872), 72-3; Desbrière, La cavalerie pendant la Révolution, 2:155-6; Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 2:181. In addition to the troops north of the Lahn River, Clerfayt held 15,472 troops in garrison at Mainz, 18,612 troops between the Main and Neckar Rivers, 1,549 troops at Mannheim, 7,331 men from the Neckar to Graben, 1,200 troops at Philippsburg, and 8,049 troops at Altenheim. Erbach’s troops constituted less than one-eighth of Clerfayt’s total force.

168 Ernouf to CPS, 6 September 1795, SHAT, B1 60; Jourdan to CPS, 7 September 1795, SHAT, B1 60.

169 Lefebvre’s advance technically violated the Prussian line of demarcation, yet Jourdan and the representatives on mission authorized the attack in advance. A small Prussian outpost guarded Eichelskamp but retreated to the
Wittlaer while Tilly’s troops occupied Spick.170 Following the bend of the Rhine six miles southwest of Eichelskamp to Uerdingen, Grenier’s division attempted to cross simultaneously with Lefebvre on the night of the 5th, but Austrian artillery prevented the French from moving across the river at Uerdingen until 9:00 the following morning.171 Constituting Kléber’s right wing, Championnet’s division assaulted Düsseldorf. Palatinate troops defended the fortress but opened the doors to the French at 7:00 AM on the 6th.172

Encountering minor Austrian resistance, the French advance continued smoothly following a brief respite from 7-8 September. By 15 September, Jourdan had succeeded in crossing the Rhine and positioning nearly 70,000 troops on the right bank.173 The Austrians possessed approximately 35,000 troops north of the Lahn but the French encountered only minor resistance and suffered few losses in skirmishes against a retreating enemy. From 16-20 September, Jourdan extended his front from Neuwied to the edge of the line of neutrality, where Lefebvre’s division occupied Wetzlar on the Lahn River. The rest of the army held positions along the Lahn from Wetzlar to Nassau: a distance of approximately forty-five miles.174

woods of Duisburg in the face of Lefebvre’s approach. Meanwhile, Lefebvre’s advance guard marched one mile south of Eichelskamp to Spick, where the French repulsed an Austrian force after a short firefight. After Erbach retreated southeast toward Eberfeld, Lefebvre safely crossed the rest of his division, followed by that of General Tilly.

170 See Lefebvre’s full report from 8 September 1795 in SHAT, B1 60; for the violation of Prussian neutrality, see “Order of Representatives on Mission Gillet and Dubois,” 19 August 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:52.

171 Ernouf to CPS, 8 September 1795, SHAT B1 60; Pajol, Kléber, 179-81. By noon, Grenier’s troops camped at Mündelheim and connected with Lefebvre’s division.

172 Championnet to Kléber, Düsseldorf, 6 September 1795; “Capitulation of Düsseldorf,” 6 September 1795, SHAT, B1 60; Championnet, Souvenirs, 109-16. Championnet’s division crossed to Hamm on the night of the 5th and encountered Austrian resistance. Regardless, Championnet’s troops reached Düsseldorf after sustaining few losses.

173 Kléber directed the left wing south on the 9th and crossed the Wupper River the following day. In three days, the French marched twenty miles south and crossed the Sieg River on the 13th, arriving opposite Neuwied on the 14th and allowing for Hatry to direct the remainder of the Sambre and Meuse Army – the divisions of Marceau, Bernadotte, and Poncet - across the Rhine.

174 For these operations see, “Military Memoirs of Marshal Jourdan,” SHAT, M1 608, 3; Jourdan to CPS, 10 September 1795, ibid., 3:56; Jourdan to CPS, 14 September 1795, ibid., 3:59; Jourdan to CPS, 21 September 1795, ibid., 3:63; “Journal de marche du général Godinot,” SHAT, B1 302; Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 7:152-3; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:215-7; Championnet, Souvenirs, 117-9; Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 2:180-90.
Although the French successfully crossed the Rhine and established an effective force on the right bank, celebratory adulations such as those the Committee of Public Safety issued to Jourdan on 12 September overlooked serious problems.\textsuperscript{175} Even before the army crossed the Rhine, numerous reports arrived concerning the deficiency of bread and meat rations among the troops. While Kléber complained that the left wing lacked proper means of transport before the operations on 5/6 September, reports of insufficient food from 1-9 September came mainly from the divisions of the army’s center and right wing. On 5 September, General André Poncet protested the poverty of his division to the \textit{commissaire ordonnateur en chef}, Jacques Pigeon, complaining that the army suffered from poor administration.\textsuperscript{176} Hatry wrote a similar letter on the 6\textsuperscript{th}, explaining to Pigeon that the failure of the supply services to regularly distribute bread raised “murmurs among the soldiers.”\textsuperscript{177} On the 9\textsuperscript{th}, Marceau congratulated Jourdan on the success of the left wing but reported that his division possessed no bread or meat and that the \textit{commissaire ordonnateur en chef} could offer no relief.\textsuperscript{178}

Explanations for the food crisis still centered on inadequate transport and the army’s dearth of horses, yet few means of improving the situation appeared. Adjutant General Joseph Coulange complained of the persistence of disease among the army’s draft horses and warned that no means of transport existed to supply the army with bread.\textsuperscript{179} Pigeon explained to Jourdan on 1 September that he could not guarantee the supply of food without proper means of transport.\textsuperscript{180} On the 12\textsuperscript{th}, with over one-half of the army already on the right bank of the Rhine, Gillet learned that the few horses the army possessed suffered from disease; on the

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\textsuperscript{175} “You have executed, general, one of the most brilliant military operations which the history of men will remember,” see CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 12 September 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:55.
\textsuperscript{176} Poncet to Pigeon, Bonn, 5 September 1795, SHAT, B1 60.
\textsuperscript{177} Hatry to Pigeon, Neuwied, 6 September 1795, ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Marceau to Jourdan, Koblenz, 9 September 1795; Marceau to Pigeon, Koblenz, 9 September 1795, ibid.
\textsuperscript{179} Coulange to CPS, Bonn, 1 September 1795, ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} Pigeon to Jourdan, Koblenz, 1 September 1795, ibid.
\end{flushleft}
14th, he alerted the CPS that the army faced a serious transport crisis. The French ordered new requisitions of horses throughout the occupied regions but this could not fully remedy the situation in time. Requisitions for horses in the land surrounding Luxembourg simply compelled the local peasants to “revolt” against French occupation by pillaging French supplies.182

Finally unleashed from their miserable quarters on the Rhine and facing continued starvation, the French troops unsurprisingly released their frustrations on the inhabitants of the right bank of the Rhine. After announcing the army’s successful crossing at Düsseldorf, Jourdan reported the outbreak of widespread pillaging to the Committee on 7 September:

It is with great displeasure for me to be forced to tell you that the same soldiers who covered themselves in glory yesterday have today committed a truly horrific excess. The troops have disbanded, they plunder, murder, and strike terror into all the inhabitants; their chiefs are ignored, and if the enemy would profit from this disorder to attack us, I could not guarantee the safety of the army; these disorders prove that military law is only proper to an army on campaign where the punishment occurs near the crime; I send to you letters from Kléber and Lefebvre for you to see that the chiefs and generals offer their resignations because of these disorders; I ask you to take great consideration on this subject; I will do my all to stop these disturbances, but I fear that I lack the power to do so if no change is made to the military law.183

Three days later, Jourdan complained that previous changes in military law now imperiled the army because he could no longer punish violations; instead, an elaborate system of military justice required him to send the accused to Aachen, where the military tribunal operated. He viewed this system as impracticable because “if I were to punish all those guilty of the crime of pillage since we crossed the Rhine, one third of the army would be sent to Aachen, where the tribunal resides, and another third would be sent to escort the guilty.” As he explained, “There must be in the army a system of law so that culprits are punished severely and on the field; by those means a small number of punishments will render the

181 Miguel to Gillet, 12 September 1795; Gillet to Letourner, Krefeld, 14 September 1795, ibid.
182 Espagne to Friant, Luxembourg, 3 September 1795, ibid.
183 Jourdan to CPS, 7 September 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:57.
multitude obedient. . . . Without that, the army’s safety will be compromised and it will be dishonored.” Jourdan warned the CPS that he would not serve for much longer if the “pillage, murder, and insubordination” continued and if the Committee did not give him the means to repair the disorders.184

Even before the army crossed the Rhine, General Poncet informed one of his brigade commanders, General Jean de Dieu Soult, that the soldiers marauded among the local peasants.185 The French military musician, Philippe-René Girault, described a scene of pillaging that occurred outside of Düsseldorf:

At daybreak we found ourselves, my comrades and myself, near a great farm that had been abandoned. We entered. The beds were still warm; there was a table set in the kitchen with a great bowl of soup with milk: everything was available to us. But we were not looters and we left the house content with two small jars of jam with which we prepared for ourselves a lunch. Several minutes later we saw the farm invaded by a troop of grenadiers who, less scrupulous than us, smashed the cabinets and pillaged everything. Everything was taken, including precious objects and coinage, for more than 10,000 francs. We became a little downhearted at not having taken our share of the spoilage, but it was not our place.186

On 10 September, a soldier of the 2nd Company of the 3rd Battalion of the 34th Demi-Brigade, Delbrel-Cassé, wrote a personal letter to Gillet to express his indignation over the “horrors committed since the crossing of the Rhine.” Delbrel-Cassé reported the “most abominable crimes,” and said that “humanity called upon him to use all of his means to stop the course of brigandage,” which “compromised the safety of the entire army.” The soldier attributed these crimes to the irregular distribution of supplies and the indulgence of current military law.187

The French took measures to counter the wave of pillaging that occurred on the right bank of the Rhine, but fully restoring order to the army during the campaign proved

184 Jourdan to CPS, 10 September 1795, ibid., 3:58; see also Picq, *La législation militaire*, 260-4; Germani, “Terror in the Army,” 733-68.
185 Poncet to Soult, 2 September 1795, SHAT, B1 60.
187 Delbrel-Cassé to Gillet, Mülheim, 10 September 1792, SHAT, B1 60.
impossible. On one hand, they attempted to alleviate the problems that caused the soldiers to
pillage in the first place. On 9 September, Gillet issued orders to rationalize the procedures
for the distribution of food. 188 Representative on Mission Richard received 100,000 livres en
numéraire in order to rehabilitate the army’s condition and prevent desertions. 189 The need
for money compelled the French to make enormous demands on the inhabitants of the right
bank. For example, on 13 September the commissaire ordonnateur en chef executed a
contribution of 800,000 livres on the Grand Duchy of Berg. 190

Yet if the French could not hope to completely furnish the materiel needs of the
troops, coercive measures would become necessary. Accordingly, Gillet’s 9 September order
regarding supply coincided with additional directives against all forms of pillage. 191 On 12
September, the CPS responded to reports concerning the deterioration of discipline on the
right bank of the Rhine. It authorized the representatives on mission and the generals in chief
of the army to “take all vigorous measures to repress pillage and disorder.” In particular, it
granted them the authority to form military tribunals in the field, accepting the logic that “if
the generals punish the first violations, they will not be repeated.” 192 The Committee
explained to Jourdan that he must “strike vigorously against all acts of insubordination … to
create and maintain true military discipline.” 193 On the 14th, the representative on mission,
Louis Joubert, arrived at Bonn to assist his colleagues “in reprimanding the disorders.” 194

Although aware of these problems, the Committee demanded that the army continue
the offensive. On 12 September it restated the campaign’s principal goals to Jourdan. First,

188 Gillet to CPS, Krefeld, 9 September 1795, ibid.
189 CPS to Richard, Paris, 9 September 1795, ibid.
190 Blanchard to Gillet, Bonn, 13 September 1795, ibid.
191 “Order of Representative on Mission Gillet,” Krefeld, 9 September 1795, ibid.
192 CPS to Representatives on Mission, Paris, 12 September 1795, SHAT, B1 60.
193 CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 12 September 1795, ibid.
194 Joubert to CPS, Bonn, 14 September 1795, in RACSP, 27:408. Joubert observed that these infractions
“appear to take their source from the idea, which has been suggested to the soldiers, that we should have no
consideration for a country that will always be foreign to us, and could also result from the insufficiency of
military law, especially in times of war.”
the CPS instructed him to “force the enemy to evacuate the Duchy of Berg and the region between the Main, the Rhine, and the line of neutrality: that is our goal, which will render us masters of Ehrenbreitstein and Mainz.” More specifically, the CPS directed Jourdan to destroy the parts of the fortifications at Düsseldorf that could be used against the French in the future. He should leave one division to cover the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein while the rest of the army advanced rapidly on the Lahn and drove the enemy to the Main. After Jourdan’s army occupied positions along the Main, he should commence the siege of Mainz. In addition, the CPS reassured him that Pichegru’s Rhine and Moselle Army would soon cross the Rhine at Mannheim and Oppenheim to prevent the Austrians from crossing the Main to attack the Sambre and Meuse Army. The CPS hoped that after Pichegru reached the right bank, Jourdan would cross the Main to force the Austrians to retreat across the line of neutrality. Finally, it advised him to secure the army’s means of retreat to the left bank of the Rhine: “without doubt your army will not be forced to execute an operation of that nature; but prudence compels one to prepare for the impossible. In that instance, your bridges will be necessary to ensure the prompt arrival of all types of means.”

Following the Committee’s directives, Jourdan reorganized the Sambre and Meuse Army before he ordered an advance south from the Lahn to the Main. General Claude Colaud received command of one division stationed at Düsseldorf while Marceau directed the division that blockaded Ehrenbreitstein. From 20-21 September, the main army occupied various positions on the Lahn from Nassau to Wetzlar. Clerfayt responded to Jourdan’s advance by attempting to defend the Lahn, but he arrived too late to offer significant resistance. Clerfayt abandoned the Main on the night of 22/23 September. On the morning of the 23rd, Jourdan’s army crossed the Lahn in five columns and advanced south toward the

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195 CPS to Jourdan, Paris, 12 September, SHAT, M 1 608, 3:55. The Committee acknowledged that “the project is vast in light of present circumstance and with the means at your disposal,” but it maintained that “with generals and soldiers like those that comprise the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, one can indulge in great projects and look forward to a crowning success.”
Main. The general tasked Kléber to advance with the army’s right wing and center—the divisions of Bernadotte, Poncet, Championnet, and Grenier—in the direction of Mainz-Kastel. Hatry received command of the divisions of Lefebvre and Tilly, which formed the left wing and marched south from Wetzlar toward Frankfurt and Höchst. By 29 September, Kléber’s corps d’armée besieged Mainz from the right bank of the Rhine while the left wing of the Rhine and Moselle Army maintained the siege from the left bank. The rest of the army occupied positions along the Main River as far east as Höchst on the western outskirts of Frankfurt.196

Thus, in thirteen days Jourdan’s army advanced from Düsseldorf to Mainz on the Main River: a distance of 135 miles. The army accomplished this march without proper means of supply or discipline and across difficult mountainous terrain in some locations. Nonetheless, the speed of the French march should not be exaggerated. The journal de marche of one general in Lefebvre’s division, Nicholas Godinot, reveals that the French march speed during the campaign averaged approximately thirteen miles per day. Moreover, the French tended to march in bursts followed by periods of rest.197 The most impressive marches occurred from 13-19 September, when the army covered ninety-six miles while advancing through Mülheim, Siegburg, Hennef, Hachenburg, and Herborn to Wetzlar on the Lahn.198 Although not beyond the range of march speeds for eighteenth century armies, the

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196 Frankfurt stood within the Prussian line of neutrality and received protection from a Prussian garrison. For these operations, see Jourdan to CPS, 22 September 1795, SHAT, ibid., 3:63; Jourdan to CPS, 27 September 1795, ibid., 3:64; Jourdan to CPS, 1 October 1795, ibid., 3:69; “Mémoires militaires du maréchal Jourdan,” ibid., 3; Pajol, Kléber, 234-40; Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 7:152-8; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:217-9; Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 2:190-201; Soult, Mémoires, 1:248-51.
197 This number has been reached by averaging the distances covered and including only the days of marching and not the days of rest. From 5-25 September, the army marched for fifteen days with six days of rest. From 5-7 September, the division advanced sixteen miles from Eichelskamp to Gerresheim and rested on the 8th. Similarly, from 9-10 September, it advanced twenty miles from Gerresheim to Opladen and rested on the 11th and 12th.
198 Rather than marching at a consistent rate for the entire week, the division marched for fifteen to twenty miles one day and only five to ten miles the next. Thus, on 13 September the division covered sixteen miles but only marched five miles the following day. On 15 September it advanced nineteen miles but only gained nine miles on the 16th. On the 17th, one brigade covered eight miles while light troops possibly advanced as far as twenty-five miles on the road to Herborn. On the 18th, the division advanced only eight miles on the Herborn-Wetzlar road, but reached Wetzlar the following day after a sixteen-mile march. Reaching Wetzlar on the 19th, it rested

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ability to sustain these marches without depots and means of transport demonstrates the
determination of the French commanders. Moreover, by dispersing the army in five columns
for the march to the Lahn and the Main, Jourdan allowed each division a separate axis of
advance from which to draw local supplies. In addition, part of the army’s success must be
attributed to the lack of resistance offered by the outnumbered Austrians.199

Although the Sambre and Meuse Army maintained an impressive march speed
through September 1795, the campaign inflicted a heavy toll on the rank and file. On 17
September, Jourdan reported that the troops continued to march without receiving the regular
distribution of food and supplies. The men routinely opened the march in the early morning
without bread. Considering the lack of subsistence and means of transport, only pillaging
could keep them alive. After Jourdan demanded answers from Pigeon, the commissaire
ordonnateur en chef informed him that he could no longer answer for the service of supplies
owing to a general absence of resources.200 On the 20th, the army captured six bags of corn,
twenty-two tons of flour, 10,000 rations of bread, and 6,000 rations of fodder at Mülheim.
Regardless, pillage continued everyday as the army advanced from the Lahn to the Main.

“The cities and villages are devastated, the inhabitants mutilated: the excesses are like those
committed in the bailliages of the Kingdom of Prussia,” Jourdan remarked. In order to
control the disorder, the representatives on mission “resorted to cutting the hair of and
hunting the soldiers accused of pillage.” Nonetheless, Jourdan complained that officers failed
to systematically persecute abusers and that the ad hoc military tribunals suffered from

199 Referring to Old Regime armies, Duffy states in Military Experience in the Age of Reason, 160: “When an
army was in no particular hurry it progressed at a rate of six or eight miles a day, and this leisurely pace
permitted the baggage and heavy guns to keep up with no great difficulty. During urgent phases of a campaign
the rate might be increased to a dozen miles, and sustained at this speed for up to a fortnight. Lightly equipped
raiding forces moved at between fifteen and twenty miles a day.” Rothenberg, in Napoleon’s Great
Adversary, 41, attributes the slowness of Austrian marches to the excessive baggage of the officers.
200 Jourdan to CPS, 17 September 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:61.
leniency. “Tell me if an army can have discipline according to these principles,” he protested?201

After the army reached the Main, the CPS directed Jourdan to assume a defensive posture and to pursue the siege of Mainz while Pichegru advanced the Rhine and Moselle Army to the right bank of the Rhine.202 On 28 September, the CPS urged the commanders to avoid giving battle south of the Main. Instead, Jourdan and Pichegru would exhaust the Austrians in an attrition campaign between the Main, the Rhine, and the line of neutrality.203 Although Pichegru’s army captured Mannheim on 20 September, he failed to exploit the advantage this position offered by rapidly advancing to Heidelberg, where the Austrians maintained a massive supply depot.204 On 1 October, Jourdan requested that Pichegru meet him and the representatives on mission at Ingelheim on the left bank of the Rhine to coordinate operations.205 The conference occurred on the 4th but did not result in a renewal of the offensive by the Rhine and Moselle Army.206

Without a major advance by the Army of the Rhine and Moselle, the Sambre and Meuse Army could not risk driving south of the Main, especially in light of its logistical deficits. While on paper it appeared possible for Jourdan to marshal sufficient strength to cross the Main and confront Clerfayt, such a view overlooks the reality of the situation. On 6 October, Jourdan informed the CPS that “it is impossible for us to advance any further

201 Jourdan to CPS, 20 September 1795, ibid., 3:63.
204 A major attack by Pichegru on 21 or 22 September might have achieved great success because it would have timed perfectly with Clerfayt’s aborted operation north of the Main. Instead, Pichegru ordered only a weak attack with two divisions, which the Austrians repulsed on the 24th, forcing Pichegru back to Mannheim; see Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:219-23; Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 7:190-5; Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 2:190-4.
205 Jourdan to CPS, 1 October 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:69.
206 Pichegru and the representatives on mission would not consider a second offensive on the right bank until Mainz fell to the French. Jourdan demanded and received complete command over the siege force at Mainz. According to the overall campaign plan, the Sambre and Meuse Army would cross the Main only after the capture of Mainz and Ehrenbreitstein; see “Military Memoirs of Marshal Jourdan,” ibid.; Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 7:195-7; Pajol, Kléber, 101-2; Soult, Mémoires, 1:252-4.
without exposing the army.” More fundamentally, he notified the Committee that the army could not physically cross the Main because it lacked horses to pull the pontoons overland from the Lahn to the Main. “I am without the means to cross the Main,” Jourdan concluded.²⁰⁷ Possibly experiencing déjá vu, Kléber found himself once again directing the siege of Mainz with insufficient resources. On 10 October, he informed Jourdan that only his affection for him compelled him to accept the “pitiable command” that had been thrust upon him.²⁰⁸ Championnet provided Jourdan with a visceral depiction of the suffering among the troops of his division at Hocheim:

> It pains me very much, my dear general, to tell you of the misery and the famine that pursues the troops that I command. For two days I have had no bread and I have no hope of having any today; as the chief of the army you must make the administration furnish the troops with their necessities. It is cruel to see the brave men who have stricken terror among the Germans reduced to the most horrible misery; without potatoes you will see those whom you have so often led to victory die from starvation and misery. You know my position, you know that I am under arms nearly every night; if nourishment lacks, you will witness the sad sight of the most courageous defenders of la patrie perish from fatigue and misery; in the name of humanity and the obligation that is placed on the general commissar: bread, bread, bread!²⁰⁹

> It remains a matter of pure speculation if the Sambre and Meuse Army could have surmounted these difficulties to cross the Main had Pichegru acted more aggressively with the Rhine and Moselle. Regardless, critics should consider the logistical situation of the Rhine and Moselle Army as well as that of the Sambre and Meuse. Saint-Cyr, who commanded a division in the Rhine and Moselle Army during the siege of Mainz, recalled in his memoirs that “compared with ours, the troops of the [Sambre and Meuse] Army were superb; they spent the better part of ten months in the best cantonments on the left bank of the Rhine. . . . Their march to the Main had been nothing but a series of triumphs.”²¹⁰

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²⁰⁷ Jourdan to CPS, 6 October 1795, SHAT, M¹ 608, 3:74.
²⁰⁸ Kléber to Jourdan, Mainz, 10 October 1795, AN, 196 AP/2.
²⁰⁹ Championnet to Jourdan, Hocheim, 10 October 1795, SHAT, M¹ 608, 3:77.
²¹⁰ Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 2:198.
On 10 October, the usually cautious Clerfayt made the most daring and commendable decision of his military career and crossed the Main River at Seligenstadt and Offenbach, threatening to outflank Jourdan’s left wing at Höchst.\textsuperscript{211} Although it violated the line of neutrality, Clerfayt’s attack halted the Sambre and Meuse Army’s triumphs and compelled Jourdan to face the reality of the situation. As noted, he had already notified the CPS that in light of the army’s lack of subsistence and poor discipline he could not guarantee its safety in the event of an Austrian attack. On the 9\textsuperscript{th}, he informed the CPS that soldiers of the 66\textsuperscript{th} Demi-Brigade had revolted against their officers over the lack of food; he warned of the impossibility of maintaining order and discipline if privation continued.\textsuperscript{212} Commanding an army on the verge of collapse, Jourdan could not contemplate a grand maneuver to counter Clerfayt’s movement: he immediately ordered the army’s retreat. “You will sense that I could not remain on the Main after the enemy’s maneuver without exposing myself to envelopment between the Rhine, the Main, and the Lahn,” Jourdan explained. “The army is always without food and without the means of transport; our artillery, munitions, and bridge equipages are without horses and would be compromised in an instant; our troops lack shoes. The army is brave and possesses a good will, but it is clearly suffering in a sad state.”\textsuperscript{213} After Clerfayt advanced toward the Lahn at Weilburg, Jourdan finalized orders for the wholesale withdrawal from the right bank of the Rhine. By 21 October, the entire army camped on the left bank except for Lefebvre’s division, which occupied Düsseldorf.\textsuperscript{214}

In the last week of October 1795, the Thermidorean Committee of Public Safety prepared to vacate power to the newly created Executive Directory. The new government

\textsuperscript{211} Roider, \textit{Thugut}, 193-4; Rothenberg, \textit{Napoleon’s Great Adversaries}, 55; Phipps, \textit{Armies of the First French Republic}, 2:231.
\textsuperscript{212} Jourdan to CPS, 9 October 1795, SHAT, M\textsuperscript{1} 608, 3:78.
\textsuperscript{213} Jourdan to CPS, 13 October 1795, ibid., 3:79.
\textsuperscript{214} For the army’s retreat, see SHAT, M\textsuperscript{1} 608, 3; Pajol, \textit{Kléber}, 184-7; Jomini, \textit{Histoire critique et militaire}, 7:199-204; Phipps, \textit{Armies of the First French Republic}, 2:231-3; Soult, \textit{Mémoires}, 1:259-60; Championnet, \textit{Souvenirs}, 125-31.
inherited the disastrous situation on the Rhine, which resulted in no small measure from Thermidorean insistence on preparing the Rhineland for annexations without actually formulating coherent policies to achieve that objective. After reaching the Rhine in October 1794, the Sambre and Meuse Army suffered from a substantial degeneration caused by logistical and administrative problems. Although Jourdan worked alongside the representatives on mission, he could not adequately prepare his army for operations. Instead of the bold offensives proposed by the CPS, the French experienced stalemate on the Rhine. The failed campaign revealed the army’s serious decline after 1794. Moreover, it demonstrated the state’s unrealistic expectations for war on the Rhine. The soldiers of the Sambre and Meuse Army hoped that the Directory would introduce measures to alleviate their suffering while concluding peace with the Austrians. As discussed in the next chapter, the army received continual promises of aid yet gained little tangible support. Meanwhile, the suffering of French troops and German civilians continued in the war land on the Rhine.
CHAPTER 8
THE DIRECTORY’S WAR, NOVEMBER 1795-AUGUST 1796

In one important respect, the transition from September to October 1795 marked an end of an era for the Sambre and Meuse Army: Gillet left the army for good. Sadly – or perhaps mercifully – the representative never saw the outcome of his laborious efforts to prepare the army to wage war east of the Rhine. Illness forced his return to Paris in late September; by November, he was dead.1 His final letter to the CPS illustrates his complete devotion to the French Republic and the Sambre and Meuse Army. On 27 September, Gillet informed the Committee that “my health is so deplorable that I have been forced, with great regret, to take leave of the army, being unable to mount a horse or conduct other affairs. . . . I am in a very sad state; my trip has exacerbated my illness, and I have no hope of getting back to business within a year. Also I propose to offer my resignation, happily if a repose and absence from work can save a man who has been entirely devoted, since 1788, to the service of his country.” Despite his poor condition, Gillet diligently reported the army’s position on the right bank of the Rhine. He even offered to provide the Committee an oral report the following afternoon; yet, sounding more like an old man than a thirty-three-year-old, he requested that they send a carriage, “because I cannot walk, my legs are swollen, and I can no longer wear boots.”2 Gillet’s physical deterioration mirrored the decline of the army he worked so exhaustingly to sustain.

October marked a turning point in another crucial respect: it witnessed the transition from the Thermidorean Republic to the Directory. Although the Directory took power on 2 November, the National Convention’s functions ended by legislative decree on 26 October. The CPS continued to meet until the Directory assumed executive responsibility. In addition,

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1 Biard, Missionnaires de la République, 514.
2 Gillet to CPS, Paris, 27 September 1795, in RACSP, 28:35.
many representatives on mission continued their assignments. At various times, they assumed
the titles of Commissars of the Directory, even before the new government officially created
that position.3 The Constitution of 1795, approved by the National Convention on 22 August,
constituted the work of moderate deputies who had become increasingly predominant after
the radical insurrection of 20 May 1795, which raised fears among Parisians of a return of the
Reign of Terror.4 Under the new constitution, France possessed a bicameral legislature: the
Council of Five Hundred, which proposed and discussed law, and the Council of Ancients,
which discussed and voted on law. The Five Hundred would nominate a list of potential
Directors from whom the 250 Ancients would select five. The Directory possessed executive
power. Citizens consisted of all taxpaying males over twenty-one. They possessed voting
rights that allowed them to vote for members of electoral colleges which in turn elected
deputies to the Councils. Elections occurred annually and included one-third of the deputies
each year on a rotational basis. One Director would retire each year by lot and be replaced by
a selection made by the Council of Ancients. Finally, to ensure a degree of continuity, the
constitution included the two-thirds decree, which stated that two-thirds of the original
Councils must come from the ranks of the National Convention.5

The new constitution failed to calm the political instability that reigned in Paris. For
many French, the two-thirds provision appeared to violate Revolutionary ideals. Continuing
economic unrest left the French public unhappy with national representatives who seemed
more interested in maintaining their power rather than restoring the food supply and reducing
inflation. Although the voting public accepted the Constitution by an official count of

3 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:10.
4 In the Insurrection of 1 Prairial Year III, insurgents rallied under the slogan “Bread and the Constitution of
1793.” A mob surrounded and invaded the National Convention and were driven out by the National Guard.
One deputy, Jean Bertrand Féraud, was killed by a pistol shot and later beheaded. The mob moved to barricades
in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and stood firm until 20,000 troops advanced against them. They surrendered to
the troops before bloodshed occurred.
5 Doyle, French Revolution, 319; Aulard, Histoire politique, 574.
1,057,000 in favor to 49,000 against, the two-thirds decree received only 200,000 votes in favor and 114,000 against. On the left, radicals viewed the two-thirds decree as an overreach by moderates and conservatives. In contrast, a growing conservative and constitutional monarchist faction perceived the decree as an attack in the opposite direction. After the announcement of the results on 23 September, both conservative and radical agitators began organizing riots and insurrections in Paris and the provinces. On 5 October 1795, 25,000 monarchist insurgents marched on the Convention from the left bank of the Seine River. The prominent deputy, Paul Barras, tasked a 26-year-old artillery general, Napoleon Bonaparte, to repress the insurrection with force. Superior firepower allowed the 6,000 troops under Bonaparte’s command to stop the monarchists and pacify the capital. The day of bloodshed, 13 Vendémiaire Year IV according to the new French calendar, ended with over 100 civilian casualties and constituted an important turning point in the Revolution. Although General Bonaparte said nothing about a “whiff of grapeshot,” the revolt marked the last time that the Parisians attempted to intimidate the national government and the first use of the army to repress the mob since 1789.6

Thus, the new regime that took power on 27 October achieved legitimacy partially through popular vote but principally by force. The 500 members of the National Convention who took seats in the new Councils continued the policies of the Thermidorean Republic despite widespread public antipathy toward them. Similarly, the Councils chose distinguished Thermidorean figures to fill the original five seats of the Directory. Barras utilized his prominent role in suppressing the October uprisings to gain his seat. Louis Marie de La Révellièrè-Lépeaux, Jean-François Reubell, and Charles-Louis François Letourner entered because each possessed ties with important members of the Councils. Finally, Carnot received the final seat on the Directory on 4 November after several rounds of voting. In

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6 Doyle, *French Revolution*, 320-1. This does not include actions by the National Guard to repress the mob.
terms of personnel, the Directory marked no dramatic break from the Thermidorean Republic because each of the original Directors occupied prominent positions either in the National Convention or the CPS.7 Like the members of the CPS, the Directors split tasks to ensure efficiency and benefit from specialization. Barras oversaw interior affairs and Letourner ran the French navy while La Révellière-Lépeaux directed industry and education. Crucially, the Directors divided the tasks of war and foreign policy. Carnot gained responsibility for the direction of war while Reubell assumed control of diplomacy as well as finance and justice. In matters of domestic politics, the Directors and the majority in the Councils remained united around several political goals: the suppression of radicalism, the protection of private property, the success of the assignats, and the restoration of the economy.8

Foreign policy, however, proved the major area of disagreement among the Directors. Carnot had made his opinions quite clear in an 8 October report to the National Convention on the Belgium Question. Consequently, the convention voted to include the annexation of Belgium in the Directory’s constitution. Carnot favored the motion and stated that the French must acquire Belgium and make the Meuse the frontier of the Republic. He based his reasoning on the question of whether “after the reunion [of Belgium], the new frontier would be stronger or less strong than the current frontier.”9 Thus, Carnot employed the same logic of raison d’état for the annexation of Belgium as he used in previous statements on expansion, demonstrating the philosophical consistency of his perspective. Carnot advocated for the French acquisition of Luxembourg on the right bank of the Meuse as necessary to deprive the Austrians of a bridgehead for future operations against France. Moreover, he argued for the maintenance of the Vauban lines in order to benefit from two major frontier defenses in the north: the old frontier fortresses and the newly acquired Meuse fortresses. As

7 Lefebvre, The Directory (New York: Vintage, 1967), 3, states: “Thermidoreans and Directorials were all one: the same men, the same ends, and the same means.”
8 Woronoff, Thermidorean Regime and the Directory, 35-7.
9 Carnot to the National Convention, Paris, 8 October 1795, in Charnay, Carnot, 332.
he explained, the French would gain not only the river but the imposing fortresses of Maastricht, Luxembourg, and Venlo. The 1795 treaty with the Batavian Republic had secured the Netherland’s agreement that Dutch troops would garrison and defend the fortresses of Grave, Bois-le-Duc, and Bergen op Zoom. Carnot believed this system would provide the French with maximum security without overstretching the Republic’s borders and resources. He explained that France would acquire “land full of material resources and land that can furnish a great number of new brave defenders of the patrie.” In addition, he insisted that the French would gain economic benefits to the detriment of Britain and territorial advantages over Austria, which he considered the Republic’s two mortal enemies. On that basis, Carnot argued that Paris could end the war victoriously and in a manner that would provide for future security. As he advised: “If you want the cock to sleep peacefully, cut the claws from the leopard [and] cut off at least one of the heads of the eagle.”

While Carnot evinced philosophical consistency by constantly emphasizing raison d’État, other politicians shifted positions between 1792 and 1796. The Eure-et-Loir deputy to the National Convention and former Girondin supporter, Denis-Toussaint Lesage, changed opinion drastically. Although a Brissot acolyte in 1792, he became a moderate and echoed Carnot’s support for limiting French expansion in 1795 by warning that: “Ambition has destroyed nations and reversed empires. Athens was happy and free until she wanted to govern all of Greece. . . . All the philosophers agree that Rome’s triumphs were the sign of its defeat, and that its own size was a stronger foe than the courage and the fury of the barbarians.” Lesage’s opinion reflects a broader concern among moderates and conservatives that war and expansion threatened French stability and the constitution. Boissy d’Anglas, the former Girondin who coauthored the 1795 constitution, experienced a similar

10 Ibid., 333.
11 Ibid., 334.
12 Le Moniteur, 26:95; see Jainchill, Reimagining Politics, 157, for further discussion of Lesage.
transformation and emerged as a conservative leader who favored limited territorial gains. Crucially, Carnot never changed his opinion along party lines. Rather, many Girondins reversed their foreign policy views after the disastrous results of their leadership in 1793. Becoming conservatives during the Directory, they found themselves in agreement with Carnot.

While Carnot and other conservatives viewed the article incorporating Belgium into France as a limit to French expansion and the basis for a prompt peace, many Thermidorean moderates considered it as a first step to further French expansion. The aforementioned secret articles of the Treaty of Basel included a Franco-Prussian agreement that the French could annex part or all of the left bank of the Rhine as part of a general peace agreement. Accordingly, the Thermidorean majority pushed for French annexation of Belgium as part of the constitution but ultimately chose to refrain from antagonizing neutral Prussia by demanding the left bank of the Rhine. On 1 October 1796, the *Moniteur* published a speech by the former Committee-member and moderate expansionist, Merlin de Douai, that called for French annexation of Belgium by referencing “the courage and bravery of the Armies of the North and of the Sambre and Meuse” and the Belgians’ own “demand for annexation.” He noted that only the convention with Prussia restrained French expansion to the left bank until the signing of a general peace. Similarly, Sieyès expressed hope that “the peace of Western Europe should lead to a system based on the Rhine barrier between France and Germany.” As a vocal supporter of the November 1792 “Liberty and Fraternity” decree, the Girondin sympathizer and original Director, La Révellière-Lépeaux, favored French aid to foreigners as a prerequisite for “achieving peace in Europe.” These declarations confirmed the idea of the Rhine frontier – or at least predominant French influence within the Rhineland

as the peace program accepted by the majority of French politicians under the
Thermidorean Republic and the Directory.

Most important, the Director in charge of foreign affairs, Reubell, proved an ardent
champion of the natural frontiers policy. A deputy to the Estates-General in 1789 and a
champion of Jewish rights in Alsace, Reubell embraced the humanitarian cosmopolitanism of
Clootz and Brissot and had served alongside the latter on the Diplomatic Committee. As
noted, Reubell took part in the first attempt to spread the Revolution to the Rhineland in late
1792 as a representative of the National Convention. Fortune did not favor the representative
in 1793, as he participated in the French surrender of Mainz and nearly received a guilty
verdict for treason from the National Convention. Sent to the Vendée, Reubell bid his time
before returning to Paris after the fall of Robespierre. He assumed the role of persecuted hero
and became a favorite among the Thermidoreans, serving on the CPS. Reubell played an
important role in the negotiations at Basel and insisted on the secret article concerning the left
bank.\(^\text{17}\) As a member of the Directory, Reubell held sway over foreign affairs and maintained
contact with Rhineland radicals centered at Mainz. He even took advantage of his control of
finances to provide money to Francophiles in the Rhineland.\(^\text{18}\) The core of Reubell’s support
for the natural frontiers probably rested on his belief that his native Alsace remained
threatened unless France possessed the entire left bank of the Rhine. In addition, he
referenced the territorial expansion of the Eastern Powers in Poland and the British in the
West Indies as a justification for French compensation to restore “the equilibrium on which
[French] security depends.”\(^\text{19}\) He accused the advocates of *ancien limites* of supporting,
consciously or not, the interests of Austria and Britain. Accordingly, he relied on trusted


partners to manage foreign affairs, appointing Charles Delacroix – the father of the famous painter, Eugène Delacroix – as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Believing that Liberty had led the French to the Rhineland, Delacroix referenced the concept of natural frontiers in a statement that encapsulates the orthodox interpretation of their role in French history: “France seems to have eternal limits: the Alps, the Ocean, the Pyrenees, and the Rhine. By an irresistible tendency, she tries to reach them.” Thus, it became the unwavering policy of Reubell and Delacroix, and accordingly of the Directory, to ensure that the war ended with the French acquisition of the Rhine’s left bank.

The adoption of the constitution and the transition of government occurred during a period in which French politicians on both the right and left anticipated victories on the Rhine. If Barras, La Révellière-Lépeaux, and Letourner held opinions somewhere between those of Carnot and Reubell, they at least expected that France would enjoy the opportunity to decide the issue of annexations after the conclusion of a victorious campaign. Accordingly, on 27 November, the Directory authorized the diplomat and adventurer, the Marquis Pierre-Claude de Poteratz, to travel to Vienna to recommence negotiations with Holy Roman Emperor Francis. Reubell and Delacroix hoped to achieve a separate peace with the Austrians from a position of strength. While the French agreed that the Austrians would make territorial gains at the expense of German states such as Bavaria, they demanded Austrian recognition of the French acquisition of the entire left bank of the Rhine. Claiming to speak for the Directory, Reubell stated: “Its [the Directory’s] will is inflexible on this point. It . . . desires no further German territory.”

Immediately after assuming power, however, the Directory learned of the perilous developments on the Rhine. Reubell based his authorization of Poteratz’s mission on an

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unrealistic understanding of the military situation. Disconnect between the goals of French diplomacy and the circumstances of the war resulted from the division of diplomacy and military affairs among separate Directors. In addition, the fact that the two individuals in charge of foreign policy and war – Reubell and Carnot, respectively – possessed radically different agendas deepened the divide. Regardless, Clerfayt’s victories on the Rhine emboldened the Austrians. Thugut eventually informed Poteratz that in his opinion Francis’s commitment to the war effort had grown stronger as a result of Austrian success and as a result no separate peace could be made regardless of the terms.22

While the 1795 campaign on the Middle and Upper Rhine increased Austrian resolve to continue the war, it shook French self-confidence and inspired a search for improvement. As noted, Gillet’s final letter to the Committee of Public Safety indicated the setbacks experienced by the Sambre and Meuse Army. Reports from Jourdan revealed the army’s incapacity to sustain offensive operations on the right bank and raised concerns over the security of the left bank.23 On 1 November, Representatives on Mission Joubert and Garrau reported the fall of Neuwied to the Austrians, leaving Düsseldorf as the sole remaining position to bolster French defenses on the right bank and slow the enemy offensive. Moreover, the right wing of the Sambre and Meuse Army retreated west toward the valley of the Nahe River after raising the siege of Mainz, which the French considered to be the key to the Rhineland. The representatives viewed the security of Luxembourg as tenuous in light of the increasingly difficult circumstances and issued orders for the fortress to be placed in a state of defense. Finally, Garrau and Joubert warned that low morale infected the army, an alarming situation considering the flagging spirit of the officers at the end of the offensive.24

In a private letter to “his friend,” Garrau informed Carnot, whom he apparently expected

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22 Ibid., 2:518.
23 SHAT, M1 608, 3.
24 Joubert and Garrau to CPS, Koblenz, 1 November 1795, SHAT, B 1 64; for a brief overview of the end of the 1795 Rhine campaign, see Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 7:160-7.
would receive a seat on the Directory, that Royalist administrators in the army should bear responsibility for its unfortunate suffering. He asserted that the Directory needed to energetically repair the army’s administrative problems or face disaster. The reestablishment of discipline and the prevention of desertion – problems that had become prominent in the French army by the 1795 Rhine campaign – highlighted Garrau’s complaints.25

Jourdan attempted to regain the initiative even before receiving orders from the Directory. After the retreat in late October, the majority of the Sambre and Meuse Army rested on the left bank. The divisions of Marceau, Bernadotte, and Championnet camped west of Neuwied while Grenier and Poncet held Bonn and Tilley occupied Köln. Only Lefebvre – defending Düsseldorf – remained on the right bank. On 3 November, Jourdan issued orders for a renewed offensive. Yet the systemic problem of insufficient means of transport contributed to predictable delays. Jourdan faced a desperate situation: discipline had almost totally collapsed as the troops retreated from Mainz, Neuwied, and Düsseldorf to the left bank in a state described by the generals as complete disorder, spreading “horror and suffering everywhere they go.”26 Jourdan managed to direct attacks on 6 and 8 November with Lefebvre’s division and the cavalry reserve against Clerfayt’s forces on the Sieg River, which so alarmed Clerfayt that he refrained from pressing his offensive with energy. Nonetheless, Jourdan and his subordinates remained demoralized and highly frustrated with the decline in their fortunes and the government’s seeming inability to rectify the administrative situation. Jourdan indicated that he could not remain with the army during the winter months while Kléber requested leave to improve his declining health.27 Even Representative Joubert demanded a break from the rigors of campaigning and returned to Paris with an illness.

25 Garrau to Carnot, Koblenz, 1 November 1795, SHAT, B1 64.
26 General Orders, 3 November 1795; Garrau to CPS, Bonn, 7 November 1795, SHAT, B1 64.
27 SHAT, M1 608, 3; Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 2:570; Godechot, Commissaires, 1:70.
temporarily leaving Garrau alone with unenthusiastic generals to somehow revitalize the army and oversee the French occupation of the left bank.\textsuperscript{28}

For Carnot, the situation within the German war land did not offer reason for an optimistic reappraisal of his desire to limit territorial expansion. In fact, the French retreated into a land whose people seemed to increasingly loathe their presence. Viewing Luxembourg as a last line of defense, the French became extremely alarmed by news from General Friant that the city’s inhabitants had cheered the news of Austrian success.\textsuperscript{29} Reports indicated that the peasants and townspeople on the left bank of the Rhine refused to pay the money required by French contributions. At Trier, armed peasants assassinated several French troops and pillaged the magazines. Other reports revealed that local peasants harbored French deserters.\textsuperscript{30} On 8 November, Garrau explained to Carnot that French reverses had emboldened the inhabitants to rebel against an admittedly onerous occupation. The representative commented sarcastically: “Now we have seen how people who are constantly depicted as friends of the French nation would act after their réunion with the Republic.” As a political agent at the front, Garrau viewed a policy of annexations as flawed because “the people here sincerely detest us; they love only their priests, their princes, and their Emperor.” Referring to the Rhinelanders, Garrau proposed that the French “treat them as one would treat a defeated enemy and not to overlook the dangers that come from foolish generosity.” He made his views perfectly clear: “How would France benefit from the réunion of this land? I am in perfect agreement with your opinion on that point. As for everything else, we must finally contemplate peace. . . .” The exhausted and isolated representative concluded his letter by requesting three months of leave to attend to his health and domestic affairs.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} Garrau to CPS, Koblenz, 8 November 1795, SHAT, B1 64.
\textsuperscript{29} Friant to Garrau, Luxembourg, 5 November 1795, SHAT, B1 64.
\textsuperscript{31} Garrau to Carnot, Bonn, 8 November 1794, SHAT, B1 64; Godechot, \textit{Commissaires}, 70, provides further insight on Garrau’s mission.
Between November and December, the Directory attempted to revitalize the situation on the Rhine frontier. First, on 13 November 1795 it ordered Garrau to remain attached to the Sambre and Meuse Army. Specifically, he received the task of encouraging Jourdan to renew the offensive and seek every means of overcoming the transport problem, establishing discipline, and preventing desertion and pillage. Second, the military situation required immediate attention. With the Sambre and Meuse Army on the left bank and retreating from Mainz, the opportunity existed for the Austrians to launch an offensive on the right bank toward Luxembourg. To add to Jourdan’s anxiety, the Rhine and Moselle Army retreated toward Kaiserslautern, leaving Marceau’s division exposed to an Austrian attack between the Nahe and the Moselle. Yet, after receiving 7,000 reinforcements from the Army of the North per the Directory’s orders, Jourdan managed to concentrate a force ten-miles west of the Rhine at Simmern, where he took advantage of mountainous terrain to create a strong defensive position. The Sambre and Meuse Army then succeeded in establishing a defensible line along the left bank from Düsseldorf to Koblenz. Despite this progress, the lack of money, transport, food, and hospital staff persisted almost daily, prompting Garrau to bombard the Directory with complaints. On 20 November, the Directory, on Carnot’s urging, authorized the generals to “use all items of materiel that the land, which is conquered and not réunited, can provide.” Concern over the army’s morale problems prompted the Directory to insist that the generals counter desertion and promote measures to raise the spirit of the soldiers. Concrete methods or suggestions for executing these orders did not accompany such hectoring.

Returning to the front after a brief absence, Joubert – now possessing the title of Commissar of the Directory rather than Representative on Mission – wrote an extensive

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32 Directory to Garrau, Paris, 13 November 1795, SHAT, B1 64.
33 SHAT, M1 608, 3.
34 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:71.
report on 21 November that fully explained the army’s situation. He viewed the depreciation of the assignat and the lack of transport as the main causes for the decline in the army’s services and the resulting suffering of the troops. According to his brief, the “terrible confusion” that reigned in the administration would “expose the army to a complete dissolution” if not repaired. Although competent personnel staffed the army, it still suffered from poor administration, which especially angered the officers. Joubert also announced the total collapse of the normal means of supply and stated that the “troops live only by requisitions.” The army remained in need of at least 30,000 additional draft horses while the entire cavalry lacked adequate mounts. Joubert praised the hospital staffs, but warned that they did not possess horses for ambulance services, meaning that many wounded soldiers remained abandoned on the right bank where they probably suffered horrendous reprisals from furious civilians. With winter on the immediate horizon, Joubert possessed no hope of finding adequate clothing and footgear for the thousands of soldiers who lacked proper uniforms and marched without shoes. He attested to disgruntlement among the high command and commented that “the frustrated officers . . . wanted to send deputies to the Convention to explain the horrible situation of the army.”

Marceau complained that:

Obstacles 100 times more terrible than the enemy oppose us: I have neither bread nor shoes and the roads are such that the soldiers sink in mire up to the knees. . . . It is with pain that I must confess to you the low and scandalous manner in which the troops are driven, you must know that the spirit of pillage and insubordination is at its height; the most revolting propositions and the most dishonorable actions are the only recourse available.

Despite the Directory’s efforts, little improvement could be seen in the army’s situation by December. The surrender of Mannheim – a strategically vital fortress in the Rhine and Moselle Army’s sector on the Lower Rhine between Mainz and Strasbourg – on 23 November constituted a further shock to French confidence and morale. Rather than

36 Joubert to Directory, Bonn, 21 November 1795, SHAT, B1 65.
37 SHAT, M1 608, 3.
38 Marceau to Jourdan, 1 December 1795, SHAT, B1 66.
attempt to support the Rhine and Moselle Army in a risky operation, Jourdan and Joubert decided to entrench the Sambre and Meuse Army along the Nahe. Logistical concerns likely made an operation against Mannheim impossible, especially in light of the weak support Pichegru had provided during the preceding campaign on the right bank. Joubert authorized the taking of hostages to raise 150,000 livres from the Nahe region. He succeeded in obtaining approximately 200 horses from the inhabitants, but did not view this as a great victory considering the army’s exorbitant needs. Moreover, he noted that the Rhinelanders enthusiastically awaited the Austrians. By December, Joubert indicated that the inhabitants could not be trusted: several grain convoys floating down the Rhine never arrived because armed peasants intercepted them. In addition, insurgents pillaged French munitions at Morbach and occupied Birkenfeld. On 13 December, Garrau left the army for Paris, where he revealed all of the problems that he and Joubert had encountered.

Meanwhile, Jourdan and Joubert contemplated signing an armistice with the Austrians to gain a reprieve from the desperate situation. On 18 December, the Directory devised new orders for the French based on the information provided by Garrau. Fearing that the Austrians would capture Jourdan’s artillery park, they authorized him to withdraw it from Düren without “causing great alarm.” Meanwhile, the army could provision Luxembourg in preparation for a siege; the Directory promised to repair the army’s condition for the next campaign season. Although Jourdan usually strove to follow the orders of the civilian government, he utilized his own initiative to accept an armistice proposal from Clerfayt before receiving the Directory’s orders because he viewed a cessation of hostilities as essential to rehabilitate his army.
Unfortunately for the French, the 1795 Rhine campaign had inflicted irreparable damage on the Sambre and Meuse Army. Although the entire French army suffered from severe attrition in 1795, the most drastic diminution of troops occurred during periods of campaigning. The operations on the right bank of the Rhine proved especially costly. On 5 August 1795, army situation reports indicate that Jourdan possessed a paper strength of 144,369 troops with 98,628 effectives. A report from late December reduces these numbers to 119,070 men with only 74,276 effectives. One estimate of the army’s total loss of effectives during the seven-week campaign that saw little combat numbers approximately 27,000 troops.\(^\text{43}\) Although attrition could produce the positive result of cleansing the ranks of poor troops, Jourdan complained that desertion took a negative toll on the quantity and quality of his remaining effectives.\(^\text{44}\) Championnet painted a bleak portrait of the “sad state” of the Sambre and Meuse Army after the campaign:

Let us examine the position of our army: after re-crossing the Rhine, discipline was annihilated; the soldiers were discouraged, poorly clothed, overwhelmed by exhaustion; our means of transport, both for the artillery and for the food convoys, suffered on the other side of the Rhine; no great magazines were formed, either by the carelessness of the leaders of the administration, or by the government’s insufficient means.\(^\text{45}\)

Based on this perspective, Jourdan considered Clerfayt’s armistice proposal a truly miraculous turn of events. On 19 December, with his army holding a defensive perimeter in the Hunsrück, he reported that “the enemy is present at all the points we occupy and I think he is stronger than us, which convinces me that we will be attacked.”\(^\text{46}\) Accordingly, he signed the armistice before receiving permission from the Directory, stating: “I am fully convinced that the situation of the army does not permit any enterprise against the enemy.”\(^\text{47}\)

\(^{43}\) Bourdeau, *Les armées sur le Rhin*, 138. For comparable figures, the Army of the Rhine and Moselle lost approximately 29,000 effectives during the same period.

\(^{44}\) Jourdan to Directory, Simmern, 23 November 1795, SHAT, B1 66.

\(^{45}\) Championnet, *Souvenirs*, 135.

\(^{46}\) Jourdan to Directory, 19 December 1795, SHAT, M1 608, 3:121.

\(^{47}\) Jourdan to Directory, 19 December 1795, ibid., 3:122.
On 22 December, Jourdan formally affixed his signature to the document, later commenting that “it is the only means I possess to remedy the poor condition of this army. . . . The soldiers celebrated the news with an indescribable joy.”

Paris received news of the armistice on 28 December with predictable negativity because domestic insecurity had led the Directory to seek victory in foreign affairs. As soon as it took power, the moderate Directory faced vocal criticism from both the left and the right. Jacobins declared a state of emergency and motioned for a stronger government policy while an increasingly vocal faction of conservatives advocated for a return to some form of monarchy and immediate peace. Moreover, the Directory correctly viewed Jourdan’s actions as a violation of Articles 330 and 331 of the new constitution. According to these articles, only the Directory or its commissars could sign treaties with foreign powers: Joubert had not applied his signature to the document although he did state his approval. The Directory reprimanded Jourdan for this overstep while acknowledging the unfavorable conditions that confronted him. In addition, it called for an immediate resumption of offensive operations to drive the Austrians from the left bank. As the Directory stated, Clerfayt’s armistice provided clear evidence of Austrian weakness which should have emboldened Jourdan to act. In encouraging its generals, the Directory referenced domestic political concerns rather than specific foreign policy objectives: “You must restore the public spirit which has been stricken a worrisome blow by the lack of success of our two Republican armies on the Rhine.” It followed this statement with a declaration that annulled the armistice and reasserted the powers of the commissars over the generals in matters of diplomacy. After learning that Pichegru had also signed the armistice, the Directory furiously informed the commissar of the Rhine and Moselle Army, François Rivaud, that he must restore the constitutional regime in

48 Jourdan to Directory, Kirchberg, 23 December 1795, in ibid., 3:123.
49 Joubert to Directory, Kirchberg, 23 December 1795, SHAT, B1 67; Godechot, Commissaires, 1:74.
the Republic’s armies. Although the constitution demanded the military’s subordination to the civilian government, the rising resentment of soldiers toward civilians made the armies dangerously loyal to politically ambitious generals who claimed to defend republicanism by dismantling democratic governance.

Reports from Joubert and Rivaud concerning support for the armistice in the armies compelled the Directory to change course in early January. While the Directory remained critical of the generals for overstepping their bounds, it authorized the commissars to negotiate a new armistice with the Austrians. According to the finalized terms, the armistice could be broken only ten days after one side announced its intention to resume the war. As the Directory explained to Rivaud, it could not ignore the original armistice because that would convince the Austrians of French duplicity while “it could produce a troublesome and disorganizing effect on the Republican armies.” Regardless, the Directory lamented that the armistice had been signed. According to the optimistic manner in which the Directors appraised the situation, the Austrians would have abandoned the left bank of the Rhine except for Mainz following the onset of winter had the French resisted. Such a situation would have allowed the French to resume offensive operations or they could have negotiated a neutral buffer zone between the two armies. Instead, French and Austrian forces remained in close contact: a situation that not only allowed for potential conflict but worried the French because Austrian and émigré propaganda contributed to the spike in French desertions. At the same time, the Directory stressed the urgent need to prepare the armies for the resumption of the campaign and defend French-occupied territory.

Godechot, Commissaires, 1:82-4. Pichegru responded sarcastically to the Directory’s reprimands, stating that he thought he had read in the constitution that generals possessed the power to sign treaties. He postulated that he must have read it in an earlier version. In contrast, Jourdan apologized profusely for his error but stated that he did not have the constitution in front of him when he signed the armistice in desperation to preserve his army. Joubert seconded Jourdan’s thoughts and spoke on behalf of the general’s intentions.

RAD, 1:356.

Quote in Godechot, Commissaires, 1:83.

Ibid.
Like Garrau, Joubert’s experience with the Sambre and Meuse Army convinced him that the annexation of the Rhineland did not serve French interests. In mid-December, he received official authorization to enforce contributions on the Rhineland, powers that fell under the normal duties of the Directory’s commissars. Joubert blamed the decline in the army’s materiel condition partly on the poor management of the occupied territories. In his view, insufficient administrative oversight left French officials without clear authority. He desired to transition the Rhineland from a war land into a more rationally organized area conforming to constitutional government. Indeed, Joubert sought to “familiarize the inhabitants with our [French] methods of government.” Force and coercion alone could not make the areas profitable for France; without the trust of local administrators, order could not be instilled.\textsuperscript{56} Under Joubert’s regime, the Central Administration of Aachen retained significant administrative powers between the Meuse and the Rhine. In October and December, Trier and Jülich were formally attached to the Aachen administration. French and German officials staffed local departmental administrations while local judges presided over tribunals.\textsuperscript{57} Nonetheless, Joubert complained that the administration proved too confusing to fulfill its primary function: supplying the French army.\textsuperscript{58} While the commissar favored imposing a new governing model on the Rhineland, he did not support réunion. Instead, he believed that the region required more military control through his own central authority. In February 1796, he posited to the Directory that the Austrians might agree to cede the left bank to France in return for acquisitions in Germany. Echoing Carnot, Joubert stated that France should not accept these terms because the Rhine provided France with few strategic advantages.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} Sagnac, \textit{Rhin française}, 107.
\textsuperscript{58} Joubert to Directory, Wittlich, 31 December 1795, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 67.
\textsuperscript{59} Joubert to Directory, Bonn, 17 February 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 69.
A more centralized French administration arose in the Rhineland based on the reforms proposed by Joubert. The commissar suggested that the French abolish the Central Administration of Aachen and its dependent territories, replacing it with a commission composed of three French representatives. Joubert complained that previous representatives were only “imbeciles and intriguers” and insisted that the new appointees possess substantial knowledge of the country. Intermediary agents would assist the central commission in each district. Joubert thought that this approach would reduce popular resentment against the French invaders.60 Regardless, after the Central Administration of Aachen proved divided over these reforms, Joubert advised the Directory to overlook Rhenish opinion by implementing policies designed to serve French needs.

The officials at Aachen responded by referring to the French occupation as a despotism leading to popular unrest and called for Joubert’s dismissal.61 On 8 February, the Directory received a report from the Rhineland that declared: “Under the ancien regime, the Rhineland was governed by civil authorities. It has known the French nation only by contributions and the scourge of war, by the cruel vexations of military agents. Why would we regret the return of our ancient masters?”62 The Directory blamed such sentiments on the overreach of corrupt officials within the Central Administration. Accordingly, it hoped to ameliorate the declining situation by reforming the Rhenish administration. Specifically, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which fell under Reubell’s influence, sought to minimize Joubert’s influence and prepare the region for assimilation and annexation. Delacroix attempted to gain the Directory’s support for the appointment of Haussmann – an ardent champion of natural frontiers – as overall commissar in charge of the Rhineland.63 Like

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60 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:111.
61 Joubert to Directory, Bonn, 22 January 1796, SHAT, B1 68.
63 Haussmann became a commissar of the Rhine and Moselle Army. Godechot, Commissaires, 1:113; Biro, German Policy, 2:545.
Joubert, these officials hoped to rationalize and centralize French authority in the region; yet while Joubert pursued centralization to secure the army’s interests, they desired to prepare the Rhineland for annexation.

Thus, the Directory’s first official policy decision regarding the natural frontiers emerged in February 1796 as a means to resolve the conflict between various officials in the Rhineland. In this case, Joubert managed to gain the Directory’s support. Probably influenced by Carnot, the Directory on 3 February dissolved the Central Administration at Aachen and simplified the management of the region in line with Joubert’s proposals. Such reforms would “assure the means of raising contributions on the land and procuring for the brave defenders of the Republic the help that the fertile country must in this circumstance supply.” Three Frenchmen would serve on a central commission, working alongside French-appointed intermediary agents. An agent of the national treasury would oversee all contributions under Joubert’s authority.\(^{64}\) Joubert accepted the Directory’s orders and promised to improve the exploitation of the region to benefit the army. He proposed a list of candidates for the central commission, selecting those who could be trusted and who possessed knowledge of both the area and the needs of the army.\(^{65}\) The Central Administration of Aachen protested Joubert’s appointment but to no avail. On 26 March 1796, he authorized Gauthier to confiscate and examine all of the Central Administration’s papers after suspending its functions. Nonetheless, the changes did not occur immediately. As late as 13 April the Central Administration continued to meet at Aachen despite ceasing to oversee significant tasks.\(^{66}\)

These reforms centralized French power and significantly expanded demands on the Rhineland. Yet, as Joubert’s example demonstrates, they did not result from the desire to

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\(^{64}\) Order of the Directory, 3 February 1796, in *RAD*, 1:535.


\(^{66}\) Smets, *Les pays rhénans*, 175.
attain the natural frontiers but from the dire need to feed the army. Only later did the advocates of annexation become more influential. On 23 April 1796, the Directory rejected Joubert’s initial candidates for the new commission because they mainly included military officials. He countered by proposing five civilian agents, of whom the Directory selected three. Regardless, delays ensued during the administrative reorganization so that Joubert did not officially pronounce the dissolution of the Central Administration until 10 June. At the same time that Joubert worked to establish his administration, the Directory superimposed a general authority over all French-occupied Rhenish territory, which the government divided into two parts: the area occupied by the Sambre and Meuse Army between the Meuse and the Rhine and the area to the south between the Moselle and the Rhine occupied by the Rhine and Moselle Army. A director-general would oversee contributions in each. On 5 July, the Directory passed this reform, essentially undermining Joubert’s efforts yet supporting his larger goal of bringing the Rhineland under firmer French dominion and exploitation. Joubert remained the main French civil authority in the Meuse-Rhine region until 19 August, when the first director-general, Pruneau, arrived to replace him.

The French would not allow the confusion that accompanied the administrative reorganization of the Rhineland to decrease the exploitation of resources necessary for the rejuvenation of the war effort. During the Thermidorean Republic, the Committee of Public Safety had imposed well over 20,000,000 livres in contributions on the territory between the Meuse and the Rhine. By the time the Directory came to power, only Trier had come close to paying two-thirds of its contribution, which totaled 4,000,000 livres alone. Joubert and Garrau sought to increase the revenue from contributions as soon as they received their

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69 Godechot, *Commissaires*, 1:122, claims that Trier’s contribution was 3,000,000. In Blanning states 4,000,000 livres for Trier; 25,000,000 livres on the territory between the Meuse and the Rhine, which was later reduced to 8,000,000; and 22,000,000 livres along the entire left bank, later reduced to 10,000,000.
appointments. On 3 November 1795, they began by demanding full payment of all contributions within eight days. They purportedly succeeded in raising 1,000,000 in coin within forty-eight hours. To gather these funds, the French resorted to hostage taking, imposing taxes, forcing loans, and threatening towns with occupation. While the French demanded exceptionally high contributions, they struggled to extract moderate funds from the Rhenish people, who viewed the absence of traditional authorities as an escape from taxation. Clearly contradicting their ideological predilections, the French decided to maintain a semblance of traditional customs barriers to increase revenue. Finally, Joubert authorized the imposition of forced loans without delay: a practice that alienated the Rhenish population but somewhat revived French finances.70

At the same time that the French reformed the Rhenish administration, they redoubled efforts to create a requisitions regime to supply their armies with vital resources. The army’s agents desired to include Belgium within the web of French requisitions but met serious resistance in some Belgian départements after the annexation became official. Accordingly, considerable requisitions fell on the Rhineland after October 1795 because, unlike Belgium, it remained a war land whose poorly defined relationship with the French Republic allowed for greater exploitation. Popular unrest in Belgium convinced the French that requisitions could not be raised successfully. In his memoirs, Jourdan states that wisdom should have compelled the French to postpone the annexation of Belgium until after the war because the army suffered from intense privations as a result of being confined to a limited territory from which resources could be extracted.71 Most important, the 1795 Rhine campaign had displayed the urgent need for horses and cattle. In October 1795 Joubert had demanded 600 horses from the Duchy of Berg while on 7 November Jourdan had authorized the requisition of one-tenth of

70 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:128-30.
71 SHAT, M1 608, 4.
every bovine from each village within the army’s administration. On 29 January 1796, the Directory dismissed complaints from the Central Administration of Aachen concerning the requisitions of animals by informing Joubert that “the army’s need to eat surpasses all other considerations.” Other items that the French requisitioned included postal and draft horses, food, paper, feathers, ink, and wood.

French generals also ordered requisitions not only to feed their troops but to create increasingly lavish headquarters. According to Blanning, “of all the forms of military exploitation, none aroused more bitterness than the obligation to feed French generals in a manner befitting their elevated rank.” The future Napoleonic marshal, Soult, purportedly lived in splendor at Bonn, where he and his adjutants demanded twelve livres worth of beef, one sheep, and one-half calf per day along with various quantities and types of vegetables, white bread, fish, deserts, coffee, and sugar. Still, the resources consumed by generals provided only a symbol of French excess. Although “the temptation to indulge themselves at the expense of the Germans proved too strong for men relaxing after or preparing for battle,” the army’s actual materiel needs and the unavoidable demands this placed on the region constituted the main reason for the Rhineland’s suffering.

While French requisitions during the winter of 1795/1796 aimed mainly to ensure the army’s survival, the system of exploitation increased with preparations for the approaching spring campaign. As with the Belgians, the Rhenish population did not submit to French demands without complaint or in some cases violence. Local administration served as the main institutionalized method for expressing opposition to the requisitions. The localities

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72 Joubert’s instructions are in SHAT, B1 231.
73 Directory to Joubert, 29 January 1796, in Debidour, RAD, 1:508.
74 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:132.
75 Blanning, French Revolution in Germany, 118.
77 Blanning, French Revolution in Germany, 119.
bombarded the Directory with complaints concerning Joubert’s conduct, with the commissar emerging as a hated symbol of the French occupation. One agent assigned to the commune of Bonn reported that “the peasants cease to pay and the administrative operations cease because of lack of funds. . . . Discontent is pushed to the extreme. . . . The public spirit is entirely gutted by the arbitrary extractions.”78 Jourdan relates in his memoirs that peasants conscripted into National Guard formations could not be trusted; several reports indicated that they often cried “Vive l’Empereur” to protest French impositions.79 Prussian and Austrian propaganda attempted to stoke the flames of rebellion in regions along the left bank of the Rhine. At Kleve, a “Provincial Deputation” covertly sought to organize royalist and peasant resistance. The French dissolved the organization on 7 March 1796 after an official investigation yet the episode provided reason for concern. With these considerations in mind, Joubert advised the Directory against viewing the Rhineland as a secure source of supplies. Although the commissar warned that both Belgium and the Rhineland remained in a perpetual “state of war,” he urged Paris to maintain the system of requisitions in Belgium.80

Somewhat paradoxically, Rhenish popular criticism of the French occupation often ended with calls for réunion with France. Responsible for the majority of requisitions and an open opponent of réunion, Joubert logically became the target of such criticism. Those who criticized his measures often viewed annexation as a desirable alternative to the requisitions regime. These opinions became more significant after the publication of a 15 April 1796 pamphlet authored by Dominque Fabris, either a Belgian radical who opposed French requisitions or a pseudonym for several delegates in the Central Administration of Aachen.81 According to the pamphlet, Joubert’s exorbitant demands in Belgium and the Rhineland did

79 SHAT, M1 608, 4.
80 Joubert to Directory, 12 April 1796, SHAT, B1 72.
81 Joubert challenged the authenticity of this document in a letter to the Directory on 15 April. If a pseudonym, the authors assumed the identity of a Belgian radical both to show widespread opposition to French occupation and to conceal their true identity.
not actually serve to repair the materiel condition of the armies. Instead, waste and corruption led to an insufficient allocation of resources, which left the French soldiers starving and naked while the occupied populations suffered from exploitation. The pamphlet depicted Joubert as a brutal and corrupt tyrant who filled his pockets with excess coin while constantly complaining about insufficient funds *en numéraire* for the armies. The author, or authors, of the pamphlet called for Joubert’s dismissal and the installation of a new regime. Most important, the pamphlet concluded by stating that the “conquered lands would forever thank God for their réunion with France.”

Charges that Joubert’s administration did not actually serve the interests of the Sambre and Meuse Army do not withstand scrutiny. In reality, the requisitions provided for the army’s essential needs to wage war even if the amounts extracted did not fully meet expectations. Nonetheless, the French found it impossible to simultaneously manage the Rhineland with success and adequately prepare for the spring offensive. Jourdan noted that poor supply and the demands of occupation required him to disperse his 89,000-man army along the left bank as well as at Düsseldorf and on the island at Neuwied, both of which the French had turned into entrenched camps. The general cited occupation duties as one reason for the delayed opening of the campaign. Maintaining the army in adequate supply continued to be challenging because of insufficient transport. Viewed by the French as the target of a potential Austrian offensive, Luxembourg demanded supplies in the event of a siege. To overcome the concerns raised by the lack of horses and carts, Joubert attempted to utilize the Moselle and the Meuse for river transport. However, the Moselle already served

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83 SHAT, M1 608, 4. A pontoon bridge ensured communication with the troops on the island at Neuwied. In addition, the French constructed field works on the banks of the Moselle to defend bridges at Mülheim (Moselle), Traben-Trarbach, Treis-Karden, and Alken. The heights before Koblenz, Traben-Trarbach, and Trier were similarly entrenched. The 78,000 troops of the Rhine and Moselle Army were dispersed in Alsace and around Zweibrücken. Meanwhile, the Army of the North, comprising approximately 40,000 troops, occupied Belgium and the Batavian Republic.
the Rhine and Moselle Army as a conduit for the movement of resources from Lorraine; its commanders challenged Joubert’s efforts, fearing that too much traffic would cause extreme confusion. Nonetheless, in February the Directory authorized Joubert to use the Moselle for the shipment of supplies. In addition, the Directory allowed the Sambre and Meuse Army to draw supplies from the Batavian Republic. In April, Joubert travelled to Paris to explain in person the awful materiel condition of the army. Although Jourdan supported Joubert’s efforts, he claims in his memoirs that this mission achieved only minimal results.84

Through a variety of means the French managed to revitalize their armies to the extent that they could at least resume operations in 1796. Toward the middle of May, the Sambre and Meuse Army received the cash and food from the Netherlands that the Directory had promised.85 Meanwhile, the Directors appointed the army’s former commissaire ordinateur en chef, Alexandre, as a commissar in Belgium, authorizing him to institute new requisitions while maintaining public order. Joubert and Alexandre planned to declare Belgium and the Rhineland territories in an official “state of war” to justify total exploitation. The Directory viewed this initiative as excessive and advised that they refrain from utilizing such impolitic language in the future.86 In the end, regardless of how the French chose to describe the Rhineland, the region remained an exploited war land at the mercy of the French army.

In addition to requisitions, the Directory revived the ancien régime practice of supply contractors, which the Committee of Public Safety had abolished in 1793. In July 1794, the French state assumed complete responsibility for the supply of the Republic’s armies. As the failures of 1795 demonstrated, the state lacked the ability to ensure proper provisions even when the French relied predominately on foreign wealth and resources. The new system that emerged in January 1796 created a network of approximately eighteen companies to supply

84 SHAT, M1 608, 4.
85 Joubert to Directory, Köln, 13 May 1796, SHAT B1 71.
86 Joubert to Directory, Köln, 27 May 1796, ibid.; for the Directory’s response, see Godechot, Commissaires, 1:144.
the five active French armies with grain, fodder, and meat in addition to essential equipment. For the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, the Fockedey Company supplied grain, the Lamotze Company provided fodder, and the Bodin and Bidet Company sold meat. Constituting “an essential cog in the war machine,” the supply contractors achieved less than stellar success. Lack of reliable currency meant that contract supply could not occur seamlessly. In addition, the supplies provided by contract companies often proved to be of poor quality. Generals and commissars complained regularly of rotten meat and cardboard shoe soles. While the French constantly searched for scapegoats to explain the suffering of the troops and the lack of abundant resources, they confronted problems of basic math and economics. Supply contractors did not alleviate the burden of war on foreign populations: they relied predominately on foreign resources. Moreover, lack of viable currency resulted in unusual forms of payment including rights to remove trees from Rhenish forests and the right to levy taxes on conquered territory.

Jourdan noted on the eve of the 1796 campaign that the army lacked “10,000 horses for the artillery service” and that the army’s condition did not inspire hope. The materiel deterioration within all French armies continued to drive attrition, suggesting that many troops lost sufficient faith in the war effort to endure the persistent discomforts of starvation, poor clothing, and unfriendly conquered peoples. For French citizen soldiers and conscripts, foreign conquest provided a weaker motivational tool than national defense. In December 1795, a volunteer from the 173rd Demi-Brigade named Lespoir wrote to the Councils that: “Part of the army is composed of volunteers who left their families, their effects, and their commerce only for the purpose of protecting their homes and driving the enemy from the

87 The five active armies – or more accurately army groups – were the Northern Army, the Rhine and Moselle Army, the Sambre and Meuse Army, the Armies of Italy and the Alps, and the Armies of the West.
88 Brown, War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State, 211.
89 Woronoff, Thermidorean Regime and the Directory, 66.
90 SHAT, M1 608, 4.
frontiers; but they have done more, they have made conquests; to continue with that, take heed that you do not lose them all.” Based on these types of statements, the French government continued to depict the war as a form of defense against counterrevolution and foreign conspiracy.

Like the representatives on mission previously, the commissars of the Directory possessed responsibility for monitoring the political opinions within the army. In the Sambre and Meuse Army, this task proved especially critical considering the widespread knowledge that Royalist sympathies pervaded the neighboring Rhine and Moselle Army. While Pichegru became a scapegoat in the Sambre and Meuse Army for the defeat of 1795, he left the army and eventually joined the French legislature, where he became a Royalist conspirator. In contrast, Jourdan possessed the reputation as a Jacobin and staunch republican. On 21 January 1796, the Sambre and Meuse Army participated in a festival to celebrate the execution of Louis XVI. Troops gathered together to sing *La Marseillaise* while Joubert issued a proclamation that stated: “Three years ago from this day the French people gave to the universe a grand example of justice and courage. . . . Dear comrades, celebrate that memorable day against a Europe that has been defeated by your valor. We are more and more united around the flag of Liberty and the Republican constitution, and the hatred of kings.” Ernouf ordered artillery salvos to mark the anniversary, which compelled Joubert to remark: “Their blasts are carried by echoes through the mountains that border the Rhine, where they will confirm to the soldiers of Austria the unshakeable resolution of the French people to sustain the form of government which it has been given.” Thus, hatred of kings and the defense of the Republic remained the main themes of Revolutionary propaganda. Given the horrible situation in the Rhenish war land and the animosities arising between French soldiers

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and foreign civilians, the French could not depend on the concept of the natural frontiers as a motivating tool.

In addition, the regime responded to the left-wing Babouviste Plot by increasing political supervision over the armies and strengthening existing disciplinary systems. Orchestrated by the radical journalist, François-Noël Babeuf, more commonly known by his nickname, Gracchus Babeuf, the plot occurred during the spring of 1796 and aimed to overthrow the bourgeois Directory with a government loyal to the working-class. Uncovering evidence of Babeuf’s plot – which became popularly known as the “Conspiracy of Equals” – the Directory ordered his arrest on 10 May and quickly implemented a severe crackdown throughout Paris as well as the provinces that were prone to radicalism. In the armies, the commissars and generals took great pains to repress radical sentiments among the ranks. Jourdan sought to guarantee that the Constitution of 1795 remained the army’s guiding light. Joubert reported that the Directory’s victory in eradicating Babeuf and his companions inspired applause and celebration among the troops. Carnot introduced a new military journal, *Journal des défenseurs de la patrie*, to communicate the Directory’s moderate and republican political views to the troops. The Directory even praised the generals for helping deprive the radical left of support within the armies.

At the same time that the regime feared the radical left, Jourdan alerted the Directory to Royalist and émigré propaganda, which he supposed came primarily from the Rhine and Moselle Army. Royalist pamphlets encouraged soldiers to desert or take up arms against the Republic. Generals of division often allowed their soldiers to fraternize with Austrian posts during the armistice – lenient practices that the commissars repeatedly criticized because they

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93 Babeuf was guillotined on 27 May 1797. Regarding the plot, the most controversial work is R. B. Rose’s *Gracchus Babeuf: The First Revolutionary Communist* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978). A more balanced account is Ian H. Birchall’s *The Spectre of Babeuf* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

94 Joubert to Directory, Köln, 16 May 1796, SHAT, B1 72.

95 Carnot’s journal first appeared in April 1796 when operations resumed against Austrian forces in the Italian theater. See *Journal des défenseurs de la patrie*, 17 April 1796, no. 1.
feared the spread of Royalist ideas. Moreover, Joubert complained that Royalist agents had infiltrated the military administration. It remains difficult to determine if the Royalist administrators constituted a phantom menace concocted by Joubert to explain ongoing materiel deficits or if they actually existed. Joubert replaced Commissar Boncourt for royalist associations yet few examples of similar reprisals surfaced. Regardless, the Directory celebrated the army’s pursuit of Royalists as much as it did their persecution of Babouviste radicals. In particular, Reubell viewed Royalist propaganda in the same light as Dumouriez’s writings from Germany, which called on the French to end the Revolution and renounce conquests for the sake of peace. Justified by circumstance or not, appeals by the Directory for political action by army commanders “seemed to call the generals to eventual political operations.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, a military coup in 1797 purged the same Directory that invited the army’s involvement in politics in 1796.

Nonetheless, the intervention of the generals as a force in national politics did not occur for another year. At the opening of the 1796 campaign, Joubert announced that the army possessed “an excellent spirit” while the “soldiers were all above suspicion.” Despite Joubert’s assurances, the army’s discipline left much to desire. The failure of the 1795 Rhine campaign corresponded with a general breakdown of army discipline, in which French troops engaged in rampant pillaging and the officers lacked the ability to restore discipline during and after the campaign. Continuing logistical problems meant that every effort to instill discipline only achieved minimal results even during the breathing space afforded by winter. The French simply could not overcome the inability to provide bread and pay on a regular

96 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:149.
97 Joubert to Directory, Köln, 26 March 1796, SHAT, B1 70.
98 For example, see Dumouriez’s 1796 work De la République. Suite du Coup d’œil politique sur l’Avenir de la France (Hamburg: B.G. Hoffmann, 1796).
99 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:149.
100 Joubert to Directory, Köln, 19 May 1796, quoted in ibid., 1:151.
Facing financial constraints, the Directory decided on 5 April to cancel pay in coinage, which they originally introduced to compensate for the declining value of the assignats. In response, several units of the Sambre and Meuse Army revolted, forcing the Directory to institute a policy that at least provided the troops with a fraction of their allotted pay. Although these measures proved adequate to hold a large portion of the army together, Jourdan constantly complained that the failure to ensure regular payment in metal constituted the main cause for indiscipline and desertion.

Restoring discipline and improving morale could not revive operational capability unless the French possessed sufficient numbers of troops and the means to steadily provide them with food. Although the high desertion rate of 1795 and the army’s poor condition during that campaign remained significant sources of concern, at least the French leaders recognized the primary culprit: inadequate transport. As desertion increased, the situation further deteriorated: sufficient personnel for the transport service could not be found because the French possessed few surplus troops. Out of desperation, they called for volunteers among the Rhenish public but worried that many of these employees would become insurgents and steal French wagons and supplies. Accordingly, they relied primarily on Belgian volunteers for the transport services although the Rhineland-based Lanchère Company provided horses after the Directory signed a contract with its representatives.

101 In *Les armées du Rhin*, 295, Bourdeau reflects a French nationalistic bias in his coverage of the army in this period: “Despite the desperate situation in which they were often found, never did the troops prove more perseverant in their efforts and more firmly in the hands of their commanders.”

102 SHAT, M1 608, 4.

103 Joubert to the Directory, 1 April 1796, SHAT, B1 71. In *War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State*, 168-9, Brown explains that the Directory abolished the Agency for Military Transport and resorted to contract supply as a money-saving device; however, the French gained little financial relief from this measure because the Lanchère Company’s contract proved costly: “Privation did nothing to improve matters. Internal company strife, financial chaos, and an acute transportation shortage crippled the service.” Stuart Woolf in *Napoleon’s Integration of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1991), 196-7, argues that the Revolutionary conquests “created new opportunities as well as imposing new burdens.” Woolf refers to the Directory as the “golden period” for “army provisioners and bankers.” He states that “Napoleon bitterly resented his dependence on such civilian contractors, who regained importance at every campaign, despite the existence of a ministry for war administration.”
Ernouf informed Joubert that the impressment of Belgians for the French transport service had angered the population to the point of insurrection. Yet Ernouf stated with great concern that the army needed 10,000 drivers while the Directory’s requisition only aimed to supply 2,000. Conceding to popular agitation, the Directory advised Joubert to refrain from imposing unpopular requisitions in the lands that had been recently reunited to France.

In addition to drivers for the transport service, the French needed more infantry. The lack of institutionalized conscription left them poorly prepared to recover from the considerable attrition of the 1795 campaign. By the summer of 1796, the 750,000-man army that had been created in 1794 numbered approximately 400,000. Accordingly, the French called for Belgian volunteers to augment the Sambre and Meuse and Rhine and Moselle Armies. Aware of the misery experienced by French troops, few Belgian men responded to these appeals despite their recent “liberation.” The Directory even authorized Joubert to group foreign deserters and vagabonds into French units to reinforce the Sambre and Meuse Army. Joubert finally called for 3,000 troops from the newly incorporated Belgian départements, yet the Sambre and Meuse Army proved too weak to coerce the population into meeting volunteer quotas. The Directory sent Commissar Alexandre to Belgium to raise troops but he too achieved little success.

Lacking sufficient stocks of provisions as well as effective transport, and possessing too few and altogether poorly disciplined troops, the Sambre and Meuse Army remained unprepared to fulfill the Directory’s strategy in 1796. Nonetheless, detailed instructions for a renewed offensive arrived on 29 March. Carnot remained the primary architect of French strategy. In 1796, he worked through a new administrative organ called the Topographic

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104 Directory to Joubert, Paris, 5 April 1796; Joubert to Directory, Köln, 7 April 1796, ibid.
106 Figures for the overall strength are difficult to judge. The standard numbers come from the annual War Ministry reports, cited in Bertaud, Army of the French Revolution, 272.
107 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:156.
Bureau, which fell under the direction of Napoleon’s future minister of war, Henri Clarke.

The Topographic Bureau allowed Carnot to issue specific instructions to Jourdan and Moreau shortly after learning of Austrian intentions to terminate the armistice. To steal the initiative from the Austrians, Carnot favored a peremptory French attack. For the Sambre and Meuse Army, this strategy involved crossing the Rhine at Düsseldorf and Neuwied before marching south to the Lahn – a repetition of the previous year’s campaign. Anticipating Jourdan’s probable concerns, the Directory assured him that he would receive Moreau’s support. In addition, it authorized Jourdan to form a 25,000-man corps d’observation to guard his right flank in the Hunsrück. Carnot stated that a bold offensive would force the Austrians to abandon encampments on the left bank of the Rhine that stretched from Mainz as far west as Kaiserslautern and Kirn, interrupting their preparations to invade Alsace and hopefully exposing them to a decisive defeat.108

Regardless, war did not await the completion of French preparations: on 15 April French scouts perceived movement in the Austrian camps that appeared to indicate their intention to rupture the armistice before the French could launch their peremptory strike.109 Beyond the German theater, military operations commenced in Italy on 10 April, with Austro-Sardinian forces under Feldmarschalleutnant Johann Peter Beaulieu and General Michelangelo Alessandro Colli-Marchi planning an offensive against the French Army of Italy under Bonaparte’s command.110 Archduke Charles, the most talented Austrian commander, led the 131,912 Austrian troops on the Rhine and ordered his regiments to prepare for combat.111 For thirty days between mid-April and mid-May, the situation on the

108 Directory to Jourdan, Paris, 29 March 1796, SHAT, M1 608, 4; in the same collection, see Directory to Moreau, Paris, 10 April 1796.
109 Joubert to Directory, Köln, 1 April 1796, SHAT, B1 72.
111 Austrian forces were divided into two armies, both of which remained under Charles’s overall command. The archduke personally led the Army of the Lower Rhine, which contained 71,076 infantry divided into 82 battalions of line infantry and 19 battalions of light infantry as well as 20,702 cavalry formed into 28 squadrons of carabiniers and cuirassiers, 24 squadrons of dragoons, 26 squadrons of light cavalry and chasseurs à cheval, and 61 squadrons of hussars and uhlans. The Army of the Lower Rhine camped between the Sieg and the Lahn.
Rhine became perilous for the French. Joubert worried that Prussia might violate the Basel Treaty and join Austria, having observed an increase of Prussian troop movements in Westphalia. While the Austrians made preparations for the campaign, Joubert informed the Directory that lack of funds and transport inhibited the Sambre and Meuse Army’s ability to commence operations. On 23 April, Jourdan warned that he could not concentrate his army because of the shortage of transports. The army could not be concentrated without losing the ability to forage.

In addition to highlighting the army’s internal problems, Jourdan expressed his frustration at the uncertainty of Charles’s intentions to break the armistice. Jourdan and Moreau convened at Trier on 7 May to coordinate plans and strategy. In addition, they implored the Directory to tolerate delays because both of their armies remained in a pitiable state. On 19 May, Jourdan informed Joubert that he could not take the initiative against Charles. As he stated: “I do not need to explain to you the misery of the troops and the inhabitants that are between the Rhine and Moselle, and on the left bank of the Moselle; you have known for so long our situation.” Joubert again travelled to Paris to personally report the army’s condition to the Directory.

Providing worrisome clarification for Jourdan, Charles announced his intention to rupture the armistice on 21 May. Hostilities officially recommenced ten days later. The Sambre and Meuse Army remained unprepared for operations after a second long winter of

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Würmser commanded the Army of the Upper Rhine in the Black Forest region, which included 60,839 infantry organized into 67 battalions of line infantry and 11 battalions of light infantry. In addition, Würmser led 21,940 cavalry divided into 40 squadrons of cuirassiers, 14 squadrons of dragoons, 27 squadrons of light cavalry, 44 squadrons of hussars, and 9 squadrons of French émigré cavalry. Charles, Principes de stratégie, 2:10-1.

112 Joubert to Directory, Köln, 1 April 1796, SHAT, B1 71.
113 This followed a series of letters in which Jourdan propounded on the myriad of logistical problems that continued to hamper preparations: Jourdan to the Directory, Köln, 7 and 23 April 1796, SHAT, B1 71; for a discussion of the administrative challenges, see Godechot, Commissaires, 1:157.
114 Jourdan and Moreau to Directory, Trier, 7 May 1796, SHAT, M1 608, 4.
115 Jourdan to Joubert, Köln, 9 May 1796, SHAT, B1 224.
116 Joubert to Directory, Muenster, 30 May 1796, SHAT, B1 72.
117 See SHAT, M1 608, 4; Charles, Principes de stratégie, 2:24.
material plight on the left bank of the Rhine. Yet facing an Austrian offensive to capture Luxembourg and Trier, the Directory ordered Jourdan and Moreau to counter by pursuing their own offensives. According to Godechot, the French should have assumed the defensive and awaited resources from Belgium, which Commissar Alexandre desperately attempted to gather. Instead, the need to defend the left bank with offensive operations on the right combined with misplaced confidence in French capabilities to compel an aggressive strategy.\textsuperscript{118} On 30 May, Kléber led the left wing of the Sambre and Meuse army from Düsseldorf toward the Sieg River, a right tributary of the Rhine. Provisions from Holland facilitated Kléber’s advance.\textsuperscript{119} However, the army’s right wing still lacked the necessary resources because of the inadequacy of slow-moving and easily disrupted river transports from the Meuse and the Moselle. For three days, the troops of the right wing received no food and so remained idle.\textsuperscript{120} On 1 June, four battalions of Marceau’s division did not receive any food.\textsuperscript{121} As Joubert complained, the troops lived day to day without any certainty of receiving a meal. Already at the beginning of the campaign, Joubert predicted that the first reverse would result in the same situation as the preceding campaign: a complete breakdown of discipline and morale.\textsuperscript{122}

Ignoring the pessimism that pervaded the army at the start of the campaign, the Directory wrote congratulatory letters concerning Kléber’s advance without commenting on the myriad of problems that faced the army.\textsuperscript{123} Jourdan noted that Kléber’s troops obtained subsistence by capturing Austrian magazines at Altenkirchen and Uckerath yet noted that “the inhabitants fled to the rear with their carts and beasts, and the army’s wagons were insufficient; thus, despite the presence of abundant [resources], the French troops continue to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Godechot, \textit{Commissaires}, 1:158.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Kléber to Jourdan, place unknown, 1 June 1796, AN, AP 196.
\item \textsuperscript{120} SHAT, M‘ 608, 4,
\item \textsuperscript{121} Marceau to Jourdan, Birkenfeld, 1 June 1796, SHAT, B‘ 73.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Joubert to Directory, place unknown, 2 June 1796, SHAT, B‘ 73.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Godechot, \textit{Commissars}, 1:158-9.
\end{itemize}
suffer from great privations.”124 After withdrawing to the Main, the Austrians countered Kléber’s advance with an offensive designed to drive him back toward Düsseldorf and prevent the junction of the Sambre and Meuse Army with the Rhine and Moselle Army. Unfortunately for the French, the destitution of the land prevented the bulk of the Sambre and Meuse Army from acting to counter the Austrian offensive. In addition, although Moreau prepared to cross the Upper Rhine, he stalled long enough for Charles to attack Jourdan with superior numbers. By 12 June, Jourdan had reached the Lahn with the divisions of Bernadotte, Championnet, Grenier, Colaud, and Lefebvre, which comprised approximately 48,000 troops. Charles approached the Lahn with 64,000 troops and made clear his intention to attack. On 15 June, Jourdan ordered a withdrawal toward the Sieg, stating that giving battle in unfavorable circumstances would constitute an unnecessary imprudence.125

As the French recommenced operations, the Directory provided Joubert with greater authority over requisitions. Consequently, on 25 April he imposed new requisitions on Kleve in the form of 90,000 quintals of diverse cereals and 10,000 pounds of meat. Kleve protested to the Directory, stating that Joubert demanded more than necessary. Regardless, the Directory authorized Joubert to continue his requisitions policy with “all power and energy to ensure that provisions are taken principally from the conquered lands. Saving the army is the first law of the war.”126 In addition, the Directory urged Joubert to confiscate all horses from the conquered lands to guarantee the army’s transport services during the approaching campaign. After the campaign commenced, the Directory drastically expanded the requisitions: on 28 June, Joubert tasked the Meuse-Rhine region with supplying 30,000 pairs of shoes – an item that French troops lacked in great numbers. Every city, town, and village in the French war land suffered from similar requisitions. Aachen, for example, supplied the

124 SHAT, M1 608, 4.
125 General Orders of Jourdan, place unknown, 15 June 1796, SHAT, B1 73.
following resources over a period of six months: 1,873 carts, 13,210 quintals of meat, 28,756 quintals of wheat and rye, 58,319 quintals of fodder, 54,500 livres of coal, 3,000 livres of iron, 500 horned beasts, 12 cords of wood, and 350 coachmen.  

With the Army of the Rhine and Moselle, Commissar Haussmann worked alongside Moreau to prepare for the offensive. A devout republican and an ardent proponent of the natural frontiers, Haussmann’s experience contrasts with that of Joubert. The Directory instructed Haussmann to ensure constant surveillance over the left bank to prevent an Austrian invasion of Alsace while maintaining Bitche, Landau, and Strasbourg in a state of defense. Accordingly, the Directory authorized him to requisition from the left bank. Haussmann managed to provide the Rhine and Moselle Army with adequate amounts of grain, meat, and fodder. The reason for Haussmann’s success rested primarily on his utilization of supply contractors to a greater extent than did Joubert. Instead of imposing unrealistic requisitions on the population, Haussmann used contractors to purchase supplies from the public at reasonable prices. Although Haussmann failed to provide the army with the quality of horses it desired, he at least succeeded in finding the 7,000 horses that it needed to ensure proper transport. Despite his success, lack of money prevented Haussmann from providing the Rhine and Moselle Army with sufficient wood and clothing; soldier’s pay had to be cancelled altogether. Finally, Haussmann worked to restore discipline and destroy Royalism in the army. In April, the garrison at Landau rose in insurrection and several thousand troops deserted to the Prince of Condé’s émigré army on the right bank of the Rhine, taking up arms for Louis XVIII and the *fleur des lis*. The Directory attributed these
events to indiscipline, lack of food, and Royalism. Regardless, these events cast significant
doubt on the likelihood of success in the upcoming campaign.\textsuperscript{130}

Like Jourdan, the Directory constantly pressed Moreau to expedite preparations for an
offensive on the right bank. A French diplomatic agent, Poteratz, informed the Directory of
widespread Revolutionary sentiment in South Germany.\textsuperscript{131} The Directory ordered Haussmann
to encourage German patriots by attacking the Austrians as quickly as possible. After the
Austrians took the initiative and renounced the armistice on 21 May, Haussmann noted that
the army’s magazines proved sufficiently supplied to commence operations. Feinting with
Desaix’s division at Mannheim, Moreau successfully concentrated forces further south at
Strasbourg to cross the Rhine by early June yet, as noted, not in time to fully support Jourdan.
The ever-cautious Moreau feared an Austrian attack in the vicinity of Pirmasens and
Zweibrücken but this did not materialize. Despite the relative success of Haussmann’s
mission to repair the Rhine and Moselle Army, Moreau argued that the army remained unfit
for an offensive and even demanded approval from the Directory to assume a defensive
posture. General Reynier informed Haussmann that the advance guard lacked food and the
artillery remained critically short on munitions.\textsuperscript{132} In mid-June, Haussmann informed Moreau
that one million in coin arrived from Italy, where Bonaparte’s victories established French
control over Piedmont-Sardinia and Lombardy. Although the one million in Italian coinage
only partially filled the army’s magazines, the Directory encouraged the armies on the Rhine
to emulate Bonaparte.\textsuperscript{133}

Unfortunately for the French, the armies in Germany operated in radically different
conditions compared to those in Italy. As Bonaparte led the Army of Italy into the lush plains
of Lombardy, Commissar Antoine Christophe Saliceti – one of Napoleon’s early patrons –

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{RAD}, 2:316n6.
\textsuperscript{133} This was done repeatedly through Carnot’s journal \textit{Défenseurs de la Patrie}.  

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imposed formal requisitions on the resource-rich region.\textsuperscript{134} In contrast, the French encountered a largely exhausted territory on the right bank of the Rhine, which the Austrians had utilized for their own food and supplies. As in the previous campaign, the French found their strategic opportunities limited by the lack of logistical security. This meant that any potential for defeat had to be avoided because of the concern that a setback would degenerate into a rout. On 19 June, Jourdan defined preventing Austrian penetration of the left bank of the Rhine as the principal goal of the operation. Accordingly, he ordered the army’s right wing to advance from the Nahe toward Kaiserslautern to ensure the security of that area.\textsuperscript{135} Joubert demanded that Moreau conduct an immediate offensive on the Upper Rhine to assist Jourdan.\textsuperscript{136} Despite this commitment to offensive operations, the previously noted Austrian counterattack toward Düsseldorf upset French plans. By 21 June, the entire Sambre and Meuse Army had recrossed to the left bank of the Rhine, bringing the first phase of the 1796 campaign to an inglorious conclusion. Luckily for the French, the army’s retreat did not bring complete dissolution. Jourdan praised Bernadotte’s troops for their firm discipline during the crossing at Neuwied. Yet the setback did further degenerate army discipline and morale. Jourdan attributed his failure to the lack of reinforcements from the Army of the North under Beurnonville and the slowness of Moreau’s offensive.\textsuperscript{137}

Fearing a repeat of the 1795 Rhine campaign’s poor results, the Directory expressed its frustration with Jourdan’s setback. Accordingly, it issued detailed orders for him to “retake the offensive and shift the entire theater of the war to the right bank of the Rhine.” Refusing to accept any delays, the Directory insisted that “success depends on the speed and audacity with which General Jourdan executes the plan that we have outlined.” In addition,

\textsuperscript{134} Dwyer, \textit{Napoleon}, 181-3.
\textsuperscript{135} Jourdan to Kléber; Jourdan to Beurnonville, Koblenz, 19 June 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 74. Jourdan expressed to Kléber his “concern for the left wing. In the event of attack by superior forces, you must retire into the entrenched camp of Düsseldorf.”
\textsuperscript{136} Joubert to Directory, Koblenz, 19 June 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 74.
\textsuperscript{137} SHAT, M\textsuperscript{1} 608, 4. Jourdan to Directory, Koblenz, 21 June 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 74.
the Directory assured Jourdan that Moreau would quickly cross the Rhine at Strasbourg to support the overall effort. However, it did not allow Jourdan to await news of Moreau’s expedition before he proceeded against “the Duchy of Berg and Weteravie with the greatest vigor and haste.” Moreover, Jourdan could not postpone his offensive until reinforcements arrived from Beurnonville’s Army of the North. The Directory ordered Joubert to ensure that Jourdan followed its orders precisely. Yet unlike Robespierre’s CPS, the Directory chose tact rather than coercion to influence the generals: “The Directory sees with great concern that the retreat of the left wing of the Sambre and Meuse Army has demoralized the general. You know, citizen commissar, how important it is to destroy those sorts of impressions, which can have a devastating effect. Devote yourself most especially to reinvigorating Jourdan and the other generals with confidence.” The Directory understood that the 1795 Rhine campaign ended with a French decision to evacuate the right bank of the Rhine rather than confront the Austrian army. It refused to accept a similar occurrence in 1796 regardless of the armies’ material plight: “We are in a situation where excess prudence would produce the worst results.”

While Jourdan and Joubert struggled to maintain the Sambre and Meuse Army in a state of offensive capability, Moreau and Haussmann worked to get the Rhine and Moselle Army moving. In response to Jourdan’s offensive, the Austrians largely evacuated the Palatinate to defend the right bank of the Rhine south of Düsseldorf. Moreau occupied the Palatinate on 9 June without contest, taking Kaiserslautern, Neustadt, and Speyer more quickly than had Custine in 1792. The opportunity to march north and link with Jourdan now presented itself to Moreau. Instead, the Directory emphasized the need for the Rhine and Moselle Army to invade Swabia and Bavaria in order to expand the French web of

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140 Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 3:21-4.
exploitation. According to the Directory’s strategy, Moreau and Jourdan would only unite after they reached the Danube River in South Germany. Therefore, the Directory ordered Haussmann and Moreau to set their sights on Regensburg. On 12 June, Haussmann informed the Directory that it would require one month before the army could cross the Rhine at Strasbourg.

Moreau actually resumed the offensive sooner than anticipated. Leaving a detachment of 25,000 troops in the Palatinate to deceive the Austrians, he secretly concentrated his main force at Strasbourg. On 18 June, he made deceptive maneuvers at Mannheim to confuse the enemy while ordering a false attack on Mainz. While these moves attracted Austrian attention, Moreau continued to mass his forces at Strasbourg. On the night of 23/24 June, the main body of the army crossed the Rhine at Strasbourg, driving a Swabian garrison from Kehl and occupying a ten-mile line along the right bank. To accelerate the army’s crossing, Moreau’s troops threw a pontoon bridge across the Rhine between Strasbourg and Kehl. The Directory congratulated Moreau and ordered him to unite his forces. A body of troops under Marceau would observe Imperial garrisons at Mainz and Mannheim, alleviating Moreau’s concerns about threats to his rear and allowing him to pursue the enemy. On 28 June, Moreau defeated 10,000 Austrians ten miles west of Strasbourg at Renchen. Joined by Saint-Cyr’s division coming from the Palatinate, Moreau advanced west through Baden-Württemberg. On 9 July, he marched toward Pforzheim after driving Archduke Charles from Rastatt. Invigorated by the reports of victory, the Directory optimistically encouraged Moreau to march on Vienna. After surmounting the Black Forest, Moreau met little resistance. The Rhine and Moselle Army occupied Stuttgart, Gmünd, and Aalen. While the French felt confident of their success, the Rhine and Moselle Army had

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142 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:339.
143 Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 3:34-43.
144 Ibid., 3:45-67.
encountered only minor Austrian resistance because Archduke Charles remained concerned with the Sambre and Meuse Army, which Jourdan led back across the Rhine to support Moreau’s offensive in accordance with the Directory’s orders and his own determination to repair previous disappointments through renewed success.145

On 28 June, the Sambre and Meuse Army crossed the Rhine at Neuwied, north of Koblenz. The army moved four divisions – those of Kléber, Lefebvre, Colaud, and Grenier – and the cavalry reserve to the right bank, advancing toward the Lahn and the Main.146 After observing the passage of his lead divisions, Jourdan himself crossed the Rhine on 2 July escorted by the divisions of Bernadotte, Championnet, and Poncet.147 In his immediate front, Jourdan faced the troops of Wartensleben, divided into four principal bodies: the main force at Neukirchen; the advance guard under Kray holding the Kalteiche Heights near Wilgersdorf; a detachment of 8,000 men across from Neuwied; and the reserve under Feldmarschalleutnant Werneck around Idstein. Jourdan notes in his memoirs that insufficient intelligence left him ignorant of Wartensleben’s dispersed forces. Assuming that Wartensleben had already massed his forces on the left bank of the Lahn at Limburg, Jourdan made a critical error by taking no action to prevent the Austrians from concentrating their forces.148

Initially, Jourdan planned to maintain the army on the right bank of the Rhine and to seek a decisive battle with the Austrian army. However, the Directory ordered him to march at the front of his army and proceed on the right bank of the Rhine “with all the impetuosity and audacity of the French.” Carnot and his fellow Directors insisted that he lead his troops in such a manner that they remained “confident of success which is the source of their

146 Kléber commanded the left wing, which consisted of the divisions of Lefebvre, Colaud, and Grenier as well as the reserve cavalry. Its movements are detailed in SHAT, M1 608, 4.
147 Jourdan to Directory, Neuwied, 2 July 1796, SHAT, B176.
148 SHAT, M1 608, 4.
courage." On 6 July, the Directory provided Jourdan and Joubert with a revised campaign plan. According to this letter, the Sambre and Meuse Army would make a junction with the Rhine and Moselle Army in the region between Ingolstadt and Regensburg. From there, the two forces would advance along the Danube to Vienna. Joubert received instructions to ensure that poor administration did not hinder the execution of the plan. According to the Directory, the administrators would “have to answer to all of France” in the event that the campaign failed due to “their lack of attention or exactitude.”

Despite perpetual rain, the Sambre and Meuse Army advanced rapidly, which gave the Directory a false sense of imminent success. On 14 July, the French reached the outskirts of Frankfurt and captured the rich city three days later. Jourdan introduced a new round of requisitions and contributions, including six million en numéraire, 150,000 articles of clothing, numerous supplies, equipment, and artillery munitions. The bulk of the army – the divisions of Lefebvre, Colaud, Grenier, and Bernadotte – advanced fifty miles southeast toward Würzburg, which the French gained on the 27th. Enthusiastic over the army’s success, the Directory suggested that while the army advanced toward Vienna Joubert should attempt to devastate the Austrian monarchy by “revolutionizing Bohemia and Hungary.”

Joubert’s instructions tasked him with dispersing:

Throughout Bohemia and Hungary a proclamation in the languages that are native there that will invite the people to profit from the opportunity now being offered to them: the return of the ancient rights that have been successively stolen from them by the court of Vienna; you will inform them of the formidable support that the victorious armies of the Republic could give to legitimize their insurrection.

150 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:309.
151 Ernouf to Clarke, Frankfurt, 22 July 1796; Commissar Ordonnateur en Chef Dubreton to the Inhabitants of Frankfurt, 25 July 1796, SHAT, B 76.
152 Jourdan to Directory, place unknown, 27 July 1796, SHAT, B 76.
As the Directory contemplated an amazing victory and the revolutionary overthrow of the Habsburg Monarchy, Jourdan’s offensive stalled and suffered a crippling reverse. On 4 August, the army’s vanguard reached Bamberg. Located approximately 150 miles east of Mainz, Bamberg constituted the extreme limit of the Sambre and Meuse Army’s secure line of advance into Germany. As two French armies approached his flanks, Charles deftly decided to allow Wartensleben to contain Jourdan in the north while he repulsed Moreau further south. On 11 August, the archduke attacked Moreau at Neresheim, where General Duquesme retreated in a great disorder, convincing many that the Rhine and Moselle Army suffered a severe defeat. The victory at Neresheim gave Charles the confidence to turn against Jourdan. With the pressure off, Moreau resumed his advance and captured Augsburg on 21 August, crossing the Lech River on the 24th. Defeats further north, however, rendered Moreau’s gains pyrrhic.

After halting in the vicinity of Frankfurt and Würzburg for approximately two weeks to recuperate and restore his army’s ability to continue the offensive, Jourdan advanced toward Amberg in pursuit of Wartensleben. On the 23rd, superior Austrian forces attacked his advance guard. To his horror, Jourdan discovered that he faced both Wartensleben and Charles. He immediately ordered the army to retreat twenty-five miles northwest to Forchheim. These actions presaged the general French evacuation from Germany, which undermined the war effort envisaged by the Directory for 1796.

In addition to Charles’s masterful utilization of central position in a defensive manner, numerous causes account for the failure of the 1796 French invasion of Germany. To begin, the French operated under a flawed strategy and without tactical dominance over the

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154 Ernouf to Directory, Bamberg, 5 August 1796, SHAT, B1 77.
157 Jourdan to Directory, Amberg, 23 August 1796, SHAT, B1 78.
Austrians. They never devised a sufficient system for the exploitation of the regions in which their armies operated, leaving the troops poorly equipped and increasingly demoralized. As in the previous campaign, the French state relied on war lands to furnish its armies, combining a mixed approach of formal requisitions, coercion, and outright thievery.

Lack of coherence in foreign policy left the status of French occupied lands uncertain. According to Biro, the Directory announced its support for annexation of the left bank of the Rhine in a speech delivered by Carnot on 29 May 1796 to mark the Festival of Gratitude at the Champ de Mars. The Directory’s oration declares: “What a spectacle for the nations, and what a terrible lesson for the enemies of liberty! A new-born republic arms its children to defend its independence. Nothing can restrain their impetuosity. . . . A host of victories have thrust our boundaries back to the barriers Nature has given us.” Although sometimes depicted as evidence of unity among the Directors for expansion to the Rhine, this speech illustrates continued disagreement on fundamental objectives: if the Directors agreed on the Rhine frontier surely they would have mentioned the Rhine as the specific frontier established by nature, as had been done in previous statements of support for the natural frontiers. Convinced that Carnot supported the annexation of the left bank of the Rhine, Biro assumes too much from this speech, even though he observes that “the Rhineland was not mentioned.” In his view, the speech marks the point at which “the government came out publicly in favor of the annexation of the left bank – and then only by implication. . . .”

Rather than constituting the Directory’s official statement on foreign policy, the 29 May speech constitutes its effort to show a public visage of patriotic unity at the resumption of hostilities on the Rhine, without clearly stating the specific frontiers the Republic would gain.

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158 Historians have yet to produce a study of the tactics and strategy used by the French and Austrians during this campaign; see Ross, Quest for Victory, 94-97, for a solid overview.
159 Le Moniteur, 29 May 1796, 28:298.
160 Biro, Germany Policy, 2:504.
at the end of the war. Based on the text of the speech and the context of previous statements by Carnot and other Directors, a contemporary observer could assume that he meant either the Meuse or the Rhine as the natural frontier.

While the Directory remained officially uncommitted on the Rhine Question, it explored a variety of options for German territory east of the river. Inspired by reports from Poteratz, the Directory on 23 April declared its support for the peoples of Baden, the Breisgau, “and any other region of Germany that desires to obtain its independence.”161 Yet because the French reorganized the lands of the left bank of the Rhine without having a clear objective for its future status, they relied predominately on the right bank of the Rhine to furnish their troops with food and supplies – territory considered foreign, hostile, and easily exploitable.162 Obviously, the decision to exploit these areas inhibited the vague plans for a German sister republic on the right bank. Insufficient numbers of troops due to the previous year’s attrition prevented the French from effectively exploiting the right bank. Accordingly, the French did not create the highly centralized and formal requisitions regime on the right bank of the Rhine as they had done previously in Belgium, the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent on the left bank. Instead, the occupation proved more chaotic and hardly capable of furnishing the needs of the French army. In July, the Directory decided to abandon the Swabian Patriot Party that Poteratz had encouraged in favor of signing armistices with the South German states of Württemberg, Baden, and the Swabian Circle.163 After the failure of

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161 As Biro relates, “the spirit of the Decree of November 19, 1792, risen from the dead.” See ibid., 2:527.
162 Blanning, French Revolution in Germany, 134. In From Reich to State, 40, 54, Rowe argues that these attitudes emerged from Rhenish hostility to the French in 1792. In fact, he posits that the previously discussed action by Frankfurt civilians against the French in December 1792 was “as important as Valmy.” As Rowe explains: “Valmy exploded the myth that revolutionary France would collapse in the face of events; events in Frankfurt disillusioned the French of the notion that they would be welcomed as liberators.”
163 The French received indemnities from each state. Württemberg signed on 17 July, Baden on 25 July, and the Swabian Circle on 27 July. The Swabian Circle was one of ten Imperial Circles of the Holy Roman Empire. In return for a degree of autonomy in political affairs, the Imperial Circles owed financial and military obligations to the emperor only. The Swabian Circle included the Duchy of Württemberg, the Bishopric of Augsburg, and the Margraviate of Baden among eighty-eight other territories.
Poteratz’s mission to revolutionize the Germans on the right bank of the Rhine, the Directory shifted course and placed the shadowy agent under arrest.\textsuperscript{164}

As a result of the inability of the French state and economy to pay for war, combined with the insurmountable challenges of organizing conquered territories for that purpose, the Sambre and Meuse Army lacked sufficient resources throughout the 1796 campaign. The Austrian decision to violate the armistice proved astute in light of French unpreparedness to conduct offensive operations. The land between the Sieg and the Lahn lacked the capacity to furnish the army’s immediate needs because for three years it suffered considerably from Austrian requisitions.\textsuperscript{165} Accordingly, the left bank of the Rhine received the highest demand for contributions in the opening months of the campaign despite the Directory’s stated intention of making the enemy on the right bank pay for war. At the start of the campaign, Joubert expressed his concerns regarding the disorganized administration of the left bank. The Directory responded by providing him with the necessary authority to prevent abuses that could prove detrimental to the army. It encouraged him to urge Jourdan to make haste so that the French could exploit Franconia – a region possessing a robust economy and agriculture – in addition to Luxembourg and Metz. Joubert informed the Directory that these solutions provided some relief but little guarantee of success. He noted that the artillery could barely move due to the lack of horses, a situation that the Directory – despite the lesson of the previous year’s campaign – did not anticipate and could not explain.\textsuperscript{166} Given these problems, the Directory established new policies to extract money and supplies from Belgium and the Netherlands, areas more fully under French control. General Beurnonville received orders to form mobile columns to maintain public order while French agents imposed new requisitions

\textsuperscript{164} Biro, \textit{Germany Policy}, 2:579. Poteratz gained his freedom after an interrogation and retired to a country estate in Loiret.
\textsuperscript{165} Blanning, \textit{French Revolution in Germany}, 129-34.
\textsuperscript{166} Godechot, \textit{Commissaires}, 1:310-1.
and contributions. A Dutch general, Herman Willem Daendels, informed Joubert that anti-French sentiment had increased in the Batavian Republic to such an extent that any news of the defeat of the Sambre and Meuse Army in Germany would inspire a general Dutch uprising. Although Jourdan’s army received large quantities of grain shipped up the Rhine from the Netherlands, it remained difficult for the French to transport this subsistence to the troops because of the inadequate number of horses.

As the Sambre and Meuse Army lacked horses, it possessed no option but to live off the land while it advanced deeper into Germany in the summer of 1796. Joubert repeatedly stressed to the Directory the danger facing the poorly supplied army in the event of a defeat. Insufficient transport meant that administrators could never guarantee the supply of munitions. Meanwhile, the troops would more likely abandon their artillery and caissons in a defeat because lack of horses left many soldiers with only their feet as a means of escape. Yet instead of admitting the logistical deficiencies and taking concrete steps to improve the situation or revise military strategy accordingly, the Directory constantly reiterated that Bonaparte managed to achieve victories despite the Army of Italy’s logistical weaknesses; orders from Paris consistently urged the commissars to inspire similar determination in Jourdan and Moreau. The Directory authorized Jourdan to have his men live off the land and to capture Austrian magazines. Unrealistically, it ordered him to transport confiscated supplies to the army’s rear. Without horses, this proved impossible. The army captured Austrian magazines at Frankfurt, Bamberg, and Forchheim. Lacking horses, they relied on the Main River to transport these supplies. Unfortunately for the French, heavy rains caused flooding that left the Main unreliable as a means of transport. Moreover, the Austrians

168 Daendels to Joubert, Kleve, 28 June 1796, SHAT, B1 74; see Godechot, Commissaires, 1:312, for more information on problems in the Batavian Republic.
169 For example, see Directory to Joubert, Paris, 23 June 1796, in RAD, 2:702-3, in which the Directors revive the favorite slogan of Danton and called on Joubert to instill “audacity” in Jourdan.
170 Directory to Jourdan, Paris 11 June, SHAT, M1 608, 4.
destroyed many of their magazines to prevent them from falling into French hands while Franconian peasants pillaged many others for their own sustenance. On 12 July, Joubert instituted a system of requisitions in the newly-conquered lands on the right bank. Yet the lack of transport made these requisitions largely irrelevant as the French repeatedly confronted the challenge of moving supplies from the front to the rear and then distributing them to the troops.\textsuperscript{171} Out of desperation, soldiers plundered nearly every village they encountered. The generals detested this practice because it contributed to widespread indiscipline. However, as in 1795, the army administration was forced to tolerate pillaging out of absolute necessity.\textsuperscript{172}

The Directory took few positive actions to repair the Sambre and Meuse Army’s logistical deficits. It simply instructed the Ministry of War to address the numerous issues raised by Joubert and others. Instead of directly guaranteeing the army’s supply, the Directory desired for the Sambre and Meuse Army to rejuvenate the French economy by returning luxury goods and valuable items to France. Following Bonaparte’s success in Italy, the French received many prized artworks and antiques.\textsuperscript{173} The Directory desired the same wealth from Germany and tasked the already overworked Joubert with this mission. Rare books and manuscripts proved especially appealing to the Directory. In addition, the French desired arms and munitions for national defense. While potentially profitable for the war effort, many of the items taken by the French served more usefully in a museum than on a battlefield. For example, the French discovered at Würzburg a fifteenth century cannon that proved unusable. Jourdan desired to concentrate the serviceable pieces at Mainz and Ehrenbreitstein, where the Austrians remained in control. The Directory instructed Joubert to

\textsuperscript{171} Godechot, Commissaires, 1:313-4.
\textsuperscript{172} Germani, “Military Justice under the Directory,” 62-3.
\textsuperscript{173} Dwyer, Napoleon, 234-8, links Bonaparte’s plundering to earlier Revolutionary practice.
expedite the sieges of those places so that they could furnish the needs of the starving and exhausted troops.\textsuperscript{174}

In consequence of logistical weakness, the French possessed insufficient numbers of disciplined troops at the beginning of the 1796 campaign. The strategic consumption made inevitable by the attempt to maintain a line of operation that stretched two hundred miles from Neuwied to Amberg caused damaging attrition in 1796.\textsuperscript{175} Understanding the bleak situation, the Directory promised Jourdan reinforcements to sustain his advance. As in other areas, the Directory simply failed to follow through. On 24 June 1796, Joubert demanded 6,000 troops, which he said Jourdan needed to continue any effective movement. The commissar only obtained five squadrons and six battalions from Beurnonville, whose Army of the North occupied Belgium and the Netherlands. Yet these troops did not arrive in time to impact the campaign. Instead, they garrisoned Düsseldorf.\textsuperscript{176} In addition, the demands of rear-security forced Jourdan to detach troops from his field army to serve as garrisons.\textsuperscript{177} Not only did the French suffer from insufficient troop numbers, few of those who remained under arms exhibited the necessary discipline. Although the first passage of the Rhine seemed to bode well for the army, the immediate retreat led to a disciplinary crisis. Joubert reported on 6 July that “great disorder” reigned in the Sambre and Meuse Army.\textsuperscript{178} While Jourdan ordered severe punishments for troops who engaged in pillaging, the army possessed too few gendarmes to actually oversee punishments and military justice. Accordingly, the French system of military justice became extremely lenient and failed to revive discipline.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{174} Joubert to the Directory, Würzburg, 3 August 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 77; Directory to Joubert, Paris, 30 August 1796, in \textit{RAD}, 3:503; for a fuller description of Joubert’s role in plundering Germany, see Godechot, \textit{Commissaires}, 1:316-7.
\textsuperscript{175} Archduke Charles ranked the long French lines of operation as one of the most critical factors in the outcome of the campaign, see Charles, \textit{Principes de la Stratège}, 1:17-29.
\textsuperscript{176} Carnot to Jourdan, Paris, 23 June 1796, SHAT, M\textsuperscript{1} 608, 4; Directory to Joubert, Paris, 23 June 1796, in \textit{RAD}, 2:702-3.
\textsuperscript{177} Godechot, \textit{Commissaires}, 1:324.
\textsuperscript{178} Joubert to Directory, place unknown, 6 June 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 76.
\textsuperscript{179} SHAT, M\textsuperscript{1} 608, 4; Godechot, \textit{Commissaires}, 1:322-5.
Repeating the failures of the Thermidorean Committee of Public Safety, the Directory could not solve the myriad of problems that the French encountered on the Rhine. Instead, it resorted to dramatic rhetoric that offered few practical solutions. On 31 July, Joubert noted that Jourdan could not command the army because of severe abdominal pain, which he attributed to stress and fatigue caused by his inability to repair the army’s morale.  

One soldier violently attacked General Ennemond Bonnard. Fearing that troops who lost faith in their generals would undermine the French war effort, the Directory authorized Joubert to act with all severity to improve discipline. It reiterated that Joubert possessed their supreme trust and confidence and instructed him to denounce the guilty to the Directory so it could ensure justice. However, as a commissar of the Directory, Joubert did not possess the same powers as a Representative on Mission and could not punish individuals in the field. Instead, the commissars worked through a complicated structure built around the conseils militaires, established in September 1795. The conseils militaires included three officers, three NCOs, and three soldiers. Convictions required a majority vote except for capital cases, which required a two-thirds majority. The bureaucratic system of military justice sought to provide greater legal protections for the Republic’s defenders than the draconian tribunals of the Year II; yet the Thermidorean structure that the Directory inherited without significant modifications failed to reestablish discipline in the army.

Accordingly, the army’s morale and confidence plummeted even before the defeat at Amberg on 23 August, which constituted the culmination of a doomed offensive rather than a significant turning point. On 8 August, the Directory expressed its grave concern regarding “the scandalous abuse” of pillage to General Kléber, who temporarily served as provisional general during Jourdan’s illness. According to the Directory, almost daily reports indicated

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180 Joubert to Directory, Schweinfurt, 31 July 1796, SHAT, B1 76.
181 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:326, relates the details of this incident.
that the Sambre and Meuse Army engaged in “general brigandage on the right bank of the Rhine.” It instructed Kléber that these actions “dishonored true French Republicans” and that they portended “the most grievous of consequences.” The Directory demanded that a firm and severe individual establish discipline to prevent pillage and plunder, and “treat the guilty like the enemy.” Discipline proved of utmost importance to the Directory not out of concern for the well-being of the Germans, but because without discipline the armies could not achieve success. As the Directors explained to Kléber, “General Bonaparte has achieved remarkable success by vigorously maintaining discipline in his army to prevent excesses; the same effort will bring you the same results.”

Rumors of Jourdan’s illness spread throughout the ranks, leaving many troops without confidence in army or civilian leadership. Some soldiers blamed the Directory for continuing the war because it desired conquest: an eventuality that met with little enthusiasm within the ranks. An anonymous pamphlet attributed to a few soldiers called for a peace sans conquest and a return to France’s pre-1792 borders. One document mocked the Directory’s supposed ambition to annex the left bank of the Rhine: “That which has been fought over for 2,000 years: that ambition will not be achieved. . . .” Consequently, the French troops did not develop any kindred relationships with the German civilians. Instead, they routinely pillaged their cities and villages and robbed all who came before them. For many, the experience with French troops proved even worse, as even French generals admitted to rape and murder. At Sulzbach, French troops burned and pillaged a monastery while at Nuremberg they gained entry by claiming to bring only liberty but engaged in outright pillage throughout

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183 Directory to Kléber, Paris, 8 August 1796, SHAT, B1 77.
184 Forrest in *Napoleon’s Men*, 183, paints an even bleaker picture of the attitude of French soldiers to military service: “The troops all shared the same heartfelt goal of getting out of the war and returning home.” In *Conscripts and Deserters*, 19, he observes that desertion rates and antipathy toward military service rose during periods of conquest.
185 The document is a report dated 18 September 1796 from Chef de Division Caselli of the Police-General of the Meuse-Rhine General Direction and can be found in SHAT, B1 79.
the city after the civilians opened the gates. German opposition and insurrection resulted from French brigandage. While many peasants fled their farms for the safety of the woods, many took up arms against the French, engaging in forms of petite-guerre that the French had only encountered on a larger scale in the Vendée. Although often depicted as a conventional war fought between two professional armies, the 1796 German campaign hinged on French failure to control space and people for the utility of their armies. The war land on the Rhine became completely inhospitable for a weakened French army, leading directly to French military defeat and the continuation of war. Although Bonaparte’s victories in Italy promised to end the War of the First Coalition in France’ favor, the Directory’s war in Germany represented a complete failure and proved of imminent significance for the future of the French Republic.

A period of intense crisis on the Rhine provided the backdrop for the ratification of the Constitution of 1795 that had ushered the Directory into power. Nearly one year into the Directory’s tenure, the situation in that theater proved even more severe. Resulting from the regime’s insistence on a separation of powers among the different branches of government and the division of tasks among the individuals of the executive branch, the Directory did not embrace a single foreign policy around which military strategy could be based. Concerning the Rhine, a division existed between pro- and anti-annexationists from the very beginning. While Reubell directed French diplomacy toward the annexation of the Rhine frontier, Carnot devised military strategy to end the Franco-Austrian War as expeditiously as possible, offering limited French expansion to the Meuse as the basis for a durable peace. Two years into an unpleasant occupation, members of the Sambre and Meuse Army became important advocates for a position closer to Carnot’s. As commissar, Joubert viewed annexation as

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186 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:328.
187 Broers, Napoleon’s Other War: Bandits, Rebels, and Their Pursuers in the Age of Revolutions (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).
impracticable. Instead, he favored a centralized military administration to better exploit foreign conquests to serve the army’s needs. For the generals, preparations for annexation proved a distraction from their focus on defeating the enemy army. Moreover, hostility between French troops and German civilians seemed to stifle any momentum toward annexation. In August 1796, the French armies in Germany reached the peak of their summer offensive. The defeat at Amberg revealed the significant problems facing the Sambre and Meuse Army. Not only did it lack tactical superiority over the Austrians, it did not possess the logistical strength or discipline to maintain itself on campaign, especially in a hostile country. As August turned to September, the army faced a real crisis brought on by the Directory’s unrealistic demands for offensive operations and the continued occupation of German territory.
CHAPTER 9
A SHATTERED ARMY, AUGUST 1796-JANUARY 1797

After the defeat at Amberg, the Sambre and Meuse Army retreated five miles northwest toward Sulzbach before continuing the more difficult twenty-five-mile march west to Forchheim. The French troops marched through the difficult mountainous terrain that comprised the German Mittelgebirge. To save its artillery, the army abandoned most of its baggage. Accordingly, it continued to face substantial supply problems.¹ Charged with covering the army’s withdrawal, Ney held Weißenhoe with the cavalry of Colaud’s division and the 23rd Infantry Regiment. The Austrians surrounded the French infantry with cavalry and commenced an artillery assault. Ney attempted to save his isolated unit through a bold but poorly conceived cavalry charge that resulted in heavy losses and failed to rescue the 23rd Regiment. An attack by Feldmarschalleutnant Werneck destroyed the French infantry. In total, the combat cost the French approximately 2,000 casualties.²

With discipline deteriorating, the army continued the retreat to Forchheim, which it reached on 28 August, four days after the battle of Amberg. Lack of bridges and boats prevented Jourdan from crossing the Regnitz River south of Bamberg and forced him to send Bernadotte’s division north to cross the river at Bamberg. Bernadotte encountered an Austrian force at Burgebrach, which Jourdan decided to attack with the entire army. After a reconnaissance on the 29th indicated the arrival of Austrian reinforcements, Jourdan cancelled his plans for the assault and directed the army to follow Bernadotte northwest to cross the Main twenty-miles west of Bamberg at Schweinfurt.³ On the 31st, the Sambre and Meuse Army reached Schweinfurt in great disorder. Phipps asserts that even at this point Jourdan

¹ Joubert to Directory, Velden, 25 August 1796, SHAT, B1 77.
² Jourdan to Directory, place unknown, 26 August 1796, SHAT, B1 77; SHAT, M1 608, 4.
³ Bernadotte to Jourdan, SHAT, B1 77; SHAT, M1 608, 4.
remained committed to “conduct bolder than his strength warranted.” In reality, neither the army nor its commander possessed admirable morale at this stage of the campaign: on 1 September Jourdan asked the Directory to replace him with Kléber. Only Joubert’s urging convinced Jourdan to stay in command. Although retaining command, Jourdan did not reconsider the necessity of retreat. On 1 September, he commenced the army’s fifteen-mile march southwest to Würzburg.

While Jomini attributes Jourdan’s movement to his determination to defeat the Austrian army and support Moreau, the decision resulted from Jourdan’s belief that the Würzburg road provided a better line of retreat for his army. Regardless, Jourdan underestimated Austrian strength in the vicinity of Würzburg. Logistical weakness left him unable to concentrate his entire army for a decisive battle. On 2 September, Jourdan led only two divisions and the reserve cavalry to the dangerously isolated position. The French commander issued orders for Grenier to move his division from Schweinfurt to Würzburg to provide more security for the main army but lack of supplies forced Lefebvre’s division to remain at Schweinfurt. Moreover, Grenier did not arrive until early morning on the 3rd, bringing French strength to approximately 30,000 troops. At 7:00 AM, the French discovered Wartensleben’s 30,000-man army before them with Archduke Charles present. The Austrian cavalry significantly outnumbered the French and after Austrian light cavalry defeated Jourdan’s entire cavalry reserve, he saw no option other than a retreat, which commenced around noon. The French defeat at Würzburg constituted a devastating blow to the Sambre and Meuse Army. Austrian superiority in cavalry represented the most significant reason for the French reverse while Jourdan’s inability to concentrate his entire army played an

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5 Jourdan to Directory, Schweinfurt, 1 September 1796, SHAT, B1 77.
6 Joubert to Directory, Schweinfurt, 1 September 1796, SHAT, B1 77; for Joubert’s importance in convincing Jourdan to remain in command, see Godechot, *Commissaires*, 1:330.
7 For Jomini’s view see *Histoire critique et militaire*, 9:26-8, SHAT, M1 608, 4.
important role. The French conducted a disorderly retreat ten-miles north to Arnstein, allowing the Austrians to capture their magazines at Würzburg and one million in coinage in the army’s treasury: the lost fruit of French contributions and requisitions. In addition, the French abandoned numerous artillery pieces, their observation balloon, and 1,000 prisoners.⁹

The retreat of the Sambre and Meuse Army corresponded with a leadership crisis that left it nearly headless. As noted, Jourdan requested his dismissal while Kléber proved none too eager to assume command, as he expressed in a letter to Jourdan on 1 September.¹⁰ Joubert suggested to the Directory the need for a general reorganization of the army to salvage some semblance of order on the Rhine. He informed the Directory that “the complete collapse of discipline” represented the main cause of the army’s defeat and he indicated his belief in the necessity of reforms to the military justice system to reintroduce discipline. Highlighting conflicts with German civilians, the commissar noted that French pillaging infuriated local peasants, who took up arms and constantly intercepted communications. Nonetheless, Joubert noted that a hardened core of troops proved resilient and he hoped that their valor could sustain the Sambre and Meuse Army.¹¹ Despite these efforts to repair the situation, the army simply could not survive a second consecutive failed campaign, especially when both resulted from logistical weaknesses that undermined the courage and endurance of the troops. The Directory attempted to respond to Joubert’s suggestions yet achieved little immediate success. For several months, the Council of 500 refused to discuss legislation pertaining to military justice, which would have allowed the generals to implement punishments in the field for the crimes of pillage in foreign lands.¹²

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⁹ Jourdan to Beurnonville, Hammelburg, 4 September 1796, SHAT, B¹ 79; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:352-3.
¹⁰ Kléber to Jourdan, Lauingen, 1 September 1796, SHAT, B¹ 79.
¹¹ Joubert to Directory, place unknown, SHAT, B¹ 79.
¹² The Directory sought the Council’s support for legislation allowing the generals to regulate the method of judgements in conquered lands. See Godechot, Commissaires, 1:331, for Joubert’s support for this legislation.
The Directory’s intentions to improve the system of military justice did not repair relations with Jourdan, who resubmitted his resignation after the defeat at Würzburg.\(^\text{13}\) On 9 September, the Directory decided to radically change course with the Sambre and Meuse Army and accepted Jourdan’s resignation. The Directory viewed Jourdan’s retreat after Würzburg as a violation of his orders to support Moreau. Furthermore, it believed, correctly, that successive defeats eroded the general’s spirit. To replace Jourdan, the Directory chose the commander of the Army of the North, Beurnonville. They ordered Jourdan to remain in provisional command until Beurnonville’s arrival.\(^\text{14}\) The Directors recalled Joubert to Paris ostensibly to report on the army’s condition. On his arrival, they dismissed him; Commissar Alexandre replaced Joubert on the Rhine.\(^\text{15}\)

During the period of provisional command in mid-September, the deteriorating situation on the right bank of the Rhine demanded strong leadership. The Austrians under Wartensleben besieged Frankfurt while the Sambre and Meuse Army withdrew from the Main to the Lahn to defend the right bank of the Rhine. Abandoning Frankfurt completely, the French prepared to protect the forces besieging Mainz and Ehrenbreitstein, which had made little progress due to insufficient artillery.\(^\text{16}\) Although ready to leave the army, Jourdan made one last effort to secure the line of the Lahn while covering the most important French positions on the Rhine: Neuwied and Düsseldorf.\(^\text{17}\) Understanding that the defense of the Lahn constituted the Sambre and Meuse Army’s final opportunity to turn the tide of the 1796 campaign, Bernadotte asserted that French audacity could still revive their fortunes and proposed that they assail Frankfurt to avert an Austrian offensive across the Rhine. In the event that the Austrians marched toward the Lahn, Bernadotte suggested that the French

\(^{13}\) SHAT, M1 608, 4; Barras, *Mémoires*, 2:205; Phipps, *Armies of the First French Republic*, 2, 354.

\(^{14}\) Directory to Jourdan, Paris, 9 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.

\(^{15}\) Directory to Joubert, Paris, 9 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.

\(^{16}\) Joubert to Directory, Wetzlar, 10 September 1796; Report of Caselli, place unknown, 18 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79; Godechot, *Commissaires*, 1:332.

\(^{17}\) SHAT, M1 608, 4.
should attack their front. Unlike the representatives on mission, the commissars of the Directory lacked the power to intervene in operational affairs. Therefore, Joubert, who remained on the Rhine until Alexandre’s arrival, overstepped his authority in criticizing Jourdan’s defensive plan while championing Bernadotte’s counter-offensive. The commissar asked Jourdan to call a special council of war to discuss strategy as well as measures to repair discipline. While Jourdan awaited Beurnonville’s arrival, the army’s divisional generals bickered over the proper course of action. Two frustrating years after the victorious campaigns of 1794, the head of the Sambre and Meuse Army suffered from a degenerative rot that threatened its weakened body with dissolution.

On 11 September, the leaders of the Sambre and Meuse Army held Joubert’s proposed council of war at Wetzlar. Alongside Jourdan and Joubert sat Generals Lefebvre, Charles Siffrein d’Anselme Duvignot, Championnet, Dominque Louis Antoine Klein, Marceau, Soult, d’Hautpoul, Bernadotte, Jacques Lefranc, Ernouf, and François Étienne Damas. A long deliberation resulted in no significant alteration of strategy or military justice. Instead, the council passed a proclamation to the troops and an address to the government. The address criticized the law of 18 September 1795, which deprived representatives and commissars the right to punish on the field and established the much-hated conseils militaires. The generals noted that the inability to properly discipline the soldiers left them unable to prohibit the crime of pillage, which poor supply encouraged. In this state, the “peasants of Germany are driven to take up arms against the soldiers of the Republic,” a reality that the generals viewed as fatal to the French war effort.

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18 Bernadotte to Jourdan, Wetzlar, 10 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
19 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:332.
20 Joubert to Jourdan, Wetzlar, 10 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
21 Phipps, in Armies of the First French Republic, 2:358-9, does not mention this council of war, despite the significance of Bernadotte’s challenge to Jourdan. See Joubert to Directory, Wetzlar, 11 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79, for details as well as Godechot, Commissaires, 1:333.
operational perspective, the 11 September council of war maintained Jourdan’s defensive strategy. Yet the army’s disorder had become so great that Chief of Staff Ernouf abandoned his colleagues.23

In the climactic battle for the Lahn, the Sambre and Meuse Army proved utterly incapable of resisting the Austrian attack. Jourdan defended the poor performance in letters to Moreau and the Directory, claiming that the losses at Würzburg rendered his army unable to accept battle without risking complete defeat.24 Jourdan’s lack of resolve infected the entire high command. Kléber again offered his resignation on 14 September, citing the need to reestablish his health.25 General Jean Castelbert evacuated Diez on the Lahn after a weak Austrian attack, thus commencing the army’s wholesale retreat west from the Lahn to Koblenz on the Rhine. The Austrians moved around Jourdan’s right wing and forced him to retreat northwest from Wetzlar toward Hachenburg to form a ten-mile line between the Wied River and the Sieg. On 19 September, the lead elements of the Sambre and Meuse Army completed the withdrawal to the left bank of the Rhine. Lefebvre and Poncet remained on the right bank east of Köln to defend Düsseldorf while Grenier crossed the Rhine at Bonn. Within twenty days of the battle of Amberg, the French had retreated approximately 200 miles.26

Combined with the high command’s lack of resolve, the continued breakdown of discipline caused the retreat. Joubert notified Jourdan that nearly every element of the army had deteriorated to a level of brigandage.27 Grenier reported that his division lacked all means of subsistence and that Austrian hussars working with German peasants had attacked a

23 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:334, states that Ernouf left without authorization; in fact, Ernouf requested health leave from the minister of war, see Ernouf to Clarke, Wetzlar, 12 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
24 See Jourdan to Moreau, Wetzlar, 9 September 1796; Jourdan to Directory, Wetzlar, 10 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
25 Kléber to Directory, place unknown, 14 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
26 Joubert to Directory, Koblenz, 18 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79; SHAT, M1 608, 4; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:358-9; Godechot, Commissaires, 1:334.
27 Joubert to Jourdan, Wetzlar, 10 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
detachment of the 6th Chasseurs Regiment. On 10 September, Jourdan issued a
proclamation to the army denouncing brigandage. The general warned the troops that the
guilty would be punished on the field without appeal to the *conseils militaires*. Nonetheless,
with his own morale plummeting, his troops acting like brigands, and Germans peasants
arming against them, Jourdan possessed no real expectation of regaining a strong position on
the right bank of the Rhine.

The formal transition of the army’s high command occurred just after the French
evacuated the right bank of the Rhine. Beurnonville and Alexandre arrived at Köln on 21
September. Three days later, Jourdan officially transferred command to Beurnonville.
Joubert met with Alexandre to discuss the army’s condition and the new commissar attributed
Jourdan’s performance to either ineptness or to the general having “lost his head.” Joubert
responded that far from being inept, Jourdan had suffered significant loss of morale from
repeated failures. Jourdan justified himself by stating that his reverses resulted entirely from
his execution of the Directory’s orders and lack of support from Moreau. Viewing Jourdan’s
reference to his orders as a personal slight, Carnot commented that Jourdan, as a “Jacobin
general,” could not be trusted – a bewildering statement considering the fact that Jourdan’s
rise had depended on the support of the former member of the CPS. Joubert’s testimony,
which discredited Jourdan by announcing the general’s loss of heart, did not reverse the
Directory’s decision to also dismiss the commissar. At Paris on 2 October, Joubert addressed
the Directory and blamed Jourdan for the army’s reverses. After his speech, the Directors
relieved Joubert of his duties as commissar with the Sambre and Meuse Army.

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28 Grenier to Jourdan, Ortzbach, 10 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
29 Proclamation of Jourdan, 10 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
30 Beurnonville to Directory, place unknown, 21 September 1796, SHAT, B1 76.
31 Alexandre to Clarke, Köln, 24 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
32 The quote comes from Clarke to Alexandre, Paris, 9 October 1796, SHAT, B1 81.
33 Godechot, *Commissaires*, 1:335-7. Joubert did not receive a new post immediately. On 22 April 1797 the
Directory officially removed him from the list of commissars of war. Paradoxically, Jourdan – who returned to
his hometown of Limoges and gained a seat in the legislature – intervened in Joubert’s favor in November 1797
and gained him appointment as a supply commissar. Joubert died in the 1812 Russian Campaign.
As Beurnonville and Alexandre took command of the Sambre and Meuse Army, the situation facing Moreau with the Rhine and Moselle Army became ever bleaker. Moreau’s army suffered from the same indiscipline that left Jourdan’s in a shattered state. Although the Directory authorized Moreau and Haussmann to restore discipline with severity, the Rhine and Moselle Army faced grave insubordination in the 1796 campaign. As Moreau complained: “The enemy retreat has commenced and yet the French continue to devastate the abandoned houses that they encounter. Our misery is excessive, and the officers can only survive by depriving their men of what they need.” Moreau signaled the lack of sympathy for the French among the Germans: “When we speak about the great desire the people here have for us, it is an error, because these people only love the Austrians, and in several cantons, the peasants arm themselves at Austrian instigation.”

Unfortunately for Moreau, he could describe the crisis more effectively than develop solutions to fix the problems. He attempted to restore discipline by reprimanding disorganized demi-brigades and censuring several generals. None of these policies improved French military effectiveness in the Rhineland because they failed to resolve the basic problems of occupation.

Like the Sambre and Meuse Army, the Rhine and Moselle Army struggled to control the space and population under its control. Insufficient resources and means of transport forced the army to exploit the right bank. In addition, it drew supplies from the Moselle-Rhine region. After conquering the Palatinate in July, Moreau and Haussmann instituted new contributions. Unfortunately for the French, these contributions did not satisfy the army’s immediate needs during the offensive because they lacked the horses to transport supplies and resources to the front. More important for the French, they concluded armistices with

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34 Moreau to Directory, 17 July 1796, SHAT, B3 164.
35 Moreau to 109th Demi-Brigade, 16 July 1796, SHAT, B3 164. The demi-brigade was assigned to garrison duty at Landau for insubordination.
36 Godechot, *Commissaires*, 338-44, states that: “The Palatinate only provided mediocre assistance to the Rhine and Moselle Army.”
the states of South Germany that included agreements for contributions of certain high
demand items. For example, the Württembergers signed an armistice with the French on the
condition of paying 4,000,000 francs in coinage and providing 4,200 horses, 100,000 quintals
of grain, 50,000 sacks of flour, and 100,000 pairs of shoes. The Margrave of Baden signed a
similar armistice for 3,000,000 francs in contributions.37 On 5 September, a Bavarian
diplomat reached Pfaffenhofen to negotiate with Haussmann. The commissar demanded an
armistice that would have cost the Bavarians 17,000,000 francs, including the French
confiscation of valuable artworks. Additionally, he recommended French annexation of
Breisach, a strong position on the right bank of the Upper Rhine. Although Moreau and
Bavarian deputies signed provisional terms on 7 September, the subsequent victories of
Archduke Charles against the Rhine and Moselle Army inspired Bavarian Elector Karl
Theodor to resume war. Nonetheless, Haussmann strengthened the French position by
creating a French director-general to govern the right bank of the Rhine and oversee the
exploitation of resources.38

Unfortunately for the French, military reverses upset Haussmann’s plans to
thoroughly administer and exploit the right bank. Following the inconclusive 11 August
Battle of Neresheim, Duhesme’s division retreated in disorder southwest on Königsbronn.39
Moreau recovered and continued the advance from Heidenheim toward Augsburg, which he
captured on 21 August. On the 24th, he crossed the Lech River and received orders from the
Directory to march to the Tyrol to link with Bonaparte’s Army of Italy.40 Complying with the
Directory’s intentions, Moreau sent his right wing under General Pierre Ferino toward
Munich but an Austrian detachment surprised him ten-miles north of Munich at Dachau. On

38 Moreau to Haussmann, place known, 5 September 1796, SHAT, B2 164; for Haussmann’s role, see Godechot,
39 Moreau to Jourdan, place unknown, 13 August 1796, SHAT, B3 164; Phipps, *Armies of the First French
40 Directory to Moreau, Paris, 23 August 1796, SHAT, B3 162.
22 September, Moreau learned of Jourdan’s evacuation of the right bank of the Rhine and the Austrian invasion of the Breisgau. Fearing a threat to his flank and rear, Moreau ordered the Rhine and Moselle Army to retreat south toward Lake Constance.\textsuperscript{41} Indiscipline constituted the primary explanation for these setbacks. Consequently, the Directory tasked Haussmann with reestablishing discipline in the Rhine and Moselle Army. It demanded that any soldier caught pillaging be punished as an enemy combatant. In addition, the Directory insisted that the Rhine and Moselle Army support Beurnonville by pursuing Archduke Charles. Learning that armed German peasants held Stockach and Kehl to prohibit French movement, the Directory authorized Moreau to repress peasant revolts with severity.\textsuperscript{42}

Meanwhile, the army’s retreat continued and teetered on becoming a rout. The French encountered increased desertion, which became more problematic because soldiers often left with their arms and supplies. Raising further alarm by threatening Moreau’s line of retreat, Charles sent 12,000 troops through the Black Forest while a detachment occupied the passages of the Rhine at Waldshut. Large portions of French garrisons withdrew from Kehl, Alt-Breisach, and Lorrach to Strasbourg, Neuf-Breisach, and Hüningen.\textsuperscript{43} With the bulk of his army on the left bank, Moreau managed to rally the soldiers and launch a counterattack on 2 October at Biberach. Although outnumbering Charles by a margin of 39,000 men to 26,000, Moreau achieved only indecisive results. Yet on the next day he defeated the Austrians at Bad Buchau near Lake Feder, forcing them to temporarily evacuate Baden.\textsuperscript{44} The Directory hoped that the victory would inspire further French aggression and urged Moreau to march north to assist the Sambre and Meuse Army. To his credit, Moreau assented to these orders and accepted battle with Archduke Charles on 19 October at Emmendingen. Despite

\textsuperscript{43} Moreau to Beurnonville, Bugau, 2 October 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 162; Charles, \textit{Principes de la Stratégie}, 2:209-11.
concentrating 38,000 troops against approximately 24,000 Austrians, he sustained another
defeat at the hands of the Austrian archduke. After this setback, Moreau evacuated the right
bank and crossed the Rhine at Breisach.45

Similar to the situation in the Sambre and Meuse Army, Moreau’s officers
complained that the Directory placed an expansionist foreign policy above the army’s safety.
During the evacuation, pillaging reached an unprecedented scale and signaled a crisis.
Moreau warned Ferino that the Austrians had armed the peasants against them to undermine
their occupation.46 Moreau informed the Directory that the retreat involved “long marches”
that left the troops “exhausted” and “in a state of misery.”47 In these circumstances, discipline
collapsed and the troops reverted to atavistic impulses. At Fribourg, the French killed a
thirteen-year-old boy while General Duhesme personally pillaged a mansion. Haussmann
warned the Directors that the chaos reigning on the right bank would soon spread to France
unless they provided for the needs of an army posted in Germany. The commissar advocated
a continuation of the French occupation of German territory “to prevent the territory of the
Republic from being invaded by unregulated troops, which would result in the devastation of
our country.”48

Returning to the Sambre and Meuse Army, Alexandre’s and Beurnonville’s
replacement of Joubert and Jourdan marked a significant turning point in civil-military
relations. On 9 September, the Directory issued instructions for the new commissar and
general. As the Directory stated, Alexandre faced a difficult mission that he could accomplish
only through “strength and intelligence.” After reaching Köln, the commissar updated the

45 Directory to Moreau, Paris, 12 October 1796, SHAT, B2 162; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic,
2:373-83.
46 Moreau to Ferino, Bugau, 2 October 1796, SHAT, B2 164.
47 Moreau to Directory, Fribourg, 2 October 1796, SHAT, B2 164.
48 Haussmann quoted in Godechot, Commissaires, 1:370.
Directory on the army’s poor condition and noted that it would require at least three months before he and Beurnonville could repair the situation.49

The appointment of Alexandre provided Reubell greater influence in military affairs because they shared similar political convictions. Both had supported the Jacobins before 1793 but became disillusioned with Robespierre’s regime and so evolved into patriotic moderates. Reubell viewed the Directory’s commissars as his only way to influence military policy and saw Alexandre as an ally.50 Most important, Reubell and Alexandre championed French possession of the Rhine. Based on reports from Joubert and other army generals, Reubell considered the Sambre and Meuse Army a threat to his foreign policy goals. Influenced by Reubell, the Directory informed Alexandre on 25 October that “a weakness exists in the army that must be addressed and extirpated with much vigilance: it is under the influence of the faction that supports the ancient limits. The enemies of the Republic will use it as a tool to destroy all lines of discipline and to excite insurrections against the authority of the state.” The Directory’s primary concern remained the maintenance of army discipline. Accordingly, it viewed any cause of indiscipline as a serious threat that must be eradicated. Referring to the idea of ancient limits, the Directory informed Alexandre that: “It is your responsibility to find the generals that instigate this powerful lie.” Although the Directory did not necessarily implore Alexandre to cultivate broad support for natural frontiers in the army, it did insist that he “take action to ensure that the intentions of those in charge are most conducive to the interests of the patrie.”51 On 5 November, Alexandre responded: “we, Beurnonville and myself, will ensure that no misfortune arises from the faction of ancient limits; but it will be a great and difficult sickness to cure.”52

49 RAD, 3:579; Alexandre to Directory, Köln, 21 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79; Godechot, Commissaires, 1:575.
50 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:575; Homan, Reubell, 132.
52 Alexandre to Directory, Köln, 5 November 1796, SHAT, B1 82.
Alexandre confronted numerous challenges while attempting to counter the faction of
ancient limits in the Sambre and Meuse Army. Officers such as the engineer captain, Pierre-
Laurent-Marie Théviotte, manifested discontent toward Alexandre and the Directory’s
expansionist propaganda.53 As early as the summer of 1796, the Sambre and Meuse Army
had produced pamphlets that expressed displeasure with the war of conquest.54 While the
Directory congratulated Alexandre for his success, he never succeeded in gaining support
within the army. The troops remembered Alexandre as the failed supply commissar that the
highly regarded representative on mission, Gillet, relieved after the “Great Cold” of
1794/1795. Army officers suspected that Alexandre desired revenge. Alexandre’s actions
somewhat justified these concerns as he quickly condemned many individuals such as
Generals Morlot and Dumeny, Adjutant General Mutelé, Colonel Dubois-Crancé, and Supply
Commissar Dubreton.55 Epitomizing the high command’s antipathy for the commissar,
Championnet referred to Alexandre as an “atrocious man.”56 Alexandre understood the
hostile attitude with which the army regarded him. Only the directors-general of the left bank
of the Rhine, Pruneau and Belle – both allies of Reubell –, expressed satisfaction at
Alexandre’s arrival.57 Despite his unpopularity, Alexandre assumed his post at Köln
alongside Beurnonville on 21 September.

In his first report to the Directory, Beurnonville compared Jourdan to Pichegru and
commented on their mutual lack of dedication to the Republic. Completely ignorant of the
situation faced by the French in the preceding campaign, he attributed the failures of 1795
and 1796 to the poor motivation and untrustworthiness of the generals. These easy scapegoats
allowed the Directory to avoid being blamed for the army’s dismal performance. Moreover,

53 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:576.
54 Réponse de l’Armée de Sambre-et-Meuse (6 June 1796). This document was a reaction to Carnot’s Défenseurs
de la Patrie, in which the Directory challenged the Sambre and Meuse Army to emulate the Army of Italy.
57 Alexandre to Directory, Köln, 24 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79; Godechot, Commissaires, 1:578.
the new commander curried favor with the political leaders but evaded difficult questions concerning the army’s current situation. According to Beurnonville, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse had been the “most sclerotic of armies.”58 The new general apparently forgot or ignored the 1794 Belgian and Rhineland campaigns, when proper supply and organization allowed the army to achieve major victories in a sweeping offensive. Refraining from commenting on Jourdan’s dedication to the Republic, the Directory encouraged Beurnonville and Alexandre to reestablish discipline, gather supplies and clothing, and to prepare the army to resume the offensive before the arrival of winter.59 Again, the Directory provided much encouragement but few practical suggestions to assist the army’s leaders in completing these missions.

While many soldiers on the Rhine expressed extreme pessimism concerning the continuation of the war, Paris remained confident that additional effort would be rewarded with success and a “glorious peace.” The Directory assumed that 150,000 French troops could repulse an estimated 100,000 Austrians to maintain a strong position on the right bank of the Rhine. Accordingly, the Directors insisted that Beurnonville cross the Rhine as soon as possible, preferably before year’s end.60 As with Beurnonville, the Directory ordered Moreau to resume an offensive expeditiously.61 Both commanders resisted the Directory’s pressure, citing the poor condition of their armies.62

Before Beurnonville and Moreau could launch an offensive, the Austrians attacked the French bridge at Neuwied on 20 and 21 October. After learning of these attacks, the Directory repeated that a renewed offensive constituted the best defense against Austrian aggression. It optimistically informed Beurnonville that with sufficient exertion, the army

58 Beurnonville to Directory, Köln, 24 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79.
59 Directory to Beurnonville, Paris, 1 October 1796, SHAT, B1 81.
60 Directory to Alexandre, Paris, 7 October 1796, in RAD, 4:5.
62 Moreau to Directory, Bugau, 27 October 1796, SHAT, B2 164; Beurnonville to Directory, 14 October 1796, SHAT, B1 81.
could reach Regnitz by 10 November. The Directory hoped that Beurnonville would rescue the overwhelmed Moreau and allow the French to take winter quarters along the Main and the Neckar, where they could live at the enemy’s expense. Moreover, the Directory viewed Bonaparte’s position in Venetia as critical until he captured Mantua. It hoped that renewed French aggression on the Rhine would prevent the Austrians from sending a strong relief effort to save Mantua and perhaps overturn Bonaparte’s success in Italy.63

The diplomatic situation suggested to the Directory the possibility of a negotiated peace, which it favored under the right circumstances. Directorial diplomacy took many dimensions in this period. As noted, the French agreed to armistices with the German states. Following Moreau’s initiative, Jourdan and Joubert had also concluded agreements with the Franconian Circle and Baden. Yet these armistices did more to provide the French armies with subsistence than to conclude the war.64 Reubell and the French minister of foreign affairs, Delacroix, worked diligently on a more significant aspect of Directorial diplomacy: maintaining Prussian neutrality. On 5 August 1796, Prussia consented to a new peace treaty that modified the line of North German neutrality and reiterated Prussian refusal to support either side in the conflict. In addition, the treaty contained secret provisions that detailed Prussian compensation in the event that France gained the left bank of the Rhine.65

Yet Reubell and Delacroix viewed maintaining Prussian neutrality as only one component of a broader program to establish a “glorious peace.” Negotiations with Great Britain and Austria emerged as the primary focus of this diplomacy. On 27 October, the Directory ordered Moreau to prepare the Rhine and Moselle Army for a new offensive before the onset of winter. Combined with the military and strategic situation, the Directory noted

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64 See Biro, German Policy, 2:630-49. The Franconian Circle contained twenty-five territories including the Bishopric of Bamberg, the Margraviate of Ansbach, the imperial city of Nuremberg, and the Bishopric of Würzburg.
65 De Clerq, Traité, 6:56-8.
Map 12. Modified Line of Prussian Neutrality, 1796

that new negotiations with the British demanded at least the appearance of French strength in all theaters. Previous peace overtures from the British had failed because of London’s insistence that the French return Belgium to Austria. In August, the British used the Danish minister in Paris to propose negotiations to Delacroix. On 16 October, James Harris, 1st Earl of Malmesbury, better known as Lord Malmesbury, left Britain with credentials to negotiate with the French foreign minister. Malmesbury essentially offered a repeat of the 1748 Aachen Treaty in which Great Britain would return French colonies if the French surrendered all territory belonging to Austria. During the course of these complicated negotiations, Malmesbury made clear that the British would never tolerate French possession of the entire left bank of the Rhine. However, the British diplomat did concede that London would consider allowing the French to acquire territory on the right bank of the Rhine for the security of Alsace. Delacroix terminated the negotiations by stating what he viewed as the obvious dilemma: France could not surrender Belgium because the Directorial Constitution included the annexation of Belgium. Delacroix portrayed the natural frontiers policy as synonymous with ancien régime practice, stating that French expansion would restore the European balance of power by providing compensation for the Polish Partitions and British colonial conquests. Malmesbury replied by quoting a previous statement made by Delacroix: “We are no longer in the decrepitude of monarchical France, but in all the force of an adolescent republic.”  

The negotiations eventually ended on 19 December with both sides viewing a separate peace as impossible.

As for Austria, the Directory sent Henri Clarke to negotiate with Thugut on terms that included Austria’s cession of Belgium and the entire German left bank of the Rhine for compensations in Italy. While these negotiations remained ongoing through January 1797, 

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66 “Public Papers,” Britain’s Annual Register (1796), 139-148; Biro, German Policy, 2:669-74; Schroeder, Transformation of European Politics, 163-5; Guyot, Le Directoire, 280-7.
67 Schroeder, Transformation of European Politics, 166; Roider, Baron Thugut, 241-3.
the Directory insisted on a resurrection of French fortunes in Germany. It feared correctly that Austrian success on the Rhine would embolden Vienna to continue the war despite the losses in Italy. Most important, it noted that the French armies would benefit from taking winter quarters on the Main and the Neckar rather than the materially exhausted left bank of the Rhine. Unlike previous campaigns, the Directory allowed for the possibility of a negotiated armistice but only after a renewed and successful effort to establish a secure position on the right bank:

As soon as we are able to establish ourselves and prevent enemy action, we will authorize you, along with the general of the Sambre and Meuse Army, to suspend hostilities; but in the current circumstances an armistice would simply sacrifice the fruits of the campaign; we must defend the frontier before an enemy whose forces on the Rhine are evidently inferior in number to ours, and who suffers from numerous deficits. Another consideration is no less important: that of Italy. That conquest, which is the most certain guarantee of peace and the conservation of that which we have gained only through great sacrifice, will be ensured by the fall of Mantua. We must therefore prevent the Archduke [Charles] from sending troops to the aid of Mantua by occupying him seriously in Germany. That is, citizen general, the formal will of the government, founded on the greatest interests of the Republic. Conquests and victories will gain national recognition only to the extent that they ensure a glorious peace, and as that time approaches, if the steps of the enemy toward peace are sincere, we must redouble our energy and activity to profit from the decisive circumstances.68

At this late stage in the year, the Directory did not envisage a new offensive to capture Vienna. Instead, it simply wanted the armies in Germany to occupy the right bank of the Rhine; but even that modest goal proved too ambitious for the French. Moreau received the Directory’s instructions after completing his retreat to the left bank and informed the Directory of his army’s exhaustion.69 Beurnonville and Alexandre replied to Paris that the Sambre and Meuse Army remained completely incapable of new operations.70

The Directory appraised French military strength on the Rhine in a positive light because intelligence reports indicated Austrian weakness. Yet by 1 November, Hüningen,
Kehl, Neuwied, and Düsseldorf constituted the only strongly-held French positions on the right bank of the Rhine. Both French armies suffered from attrition. The Rhine and Moselle Army began the campaign with 79,500 active troops but consisted of approximately 62,000 troops present under arms by November. Receiving reinforcements from the Army of the North, the Sambre and Meuse Army totaled 81,200 men camped between Neustadt, Kaiserslautern, and Düsseldorf. Thus, although the Sambre and Meuse Army appeared strong on paper, the subtraction of reinforcements reveals significant attrition from the 1796 campaign: only 62,200 of the 89,000 troops assigned to the Army of the Sambre and Meuse at the beginning of the campaign remained present under arms by the end of October.

Nonetheless, the French stood in strength against the Austrians: by October, Archduke Charles fielded no more than 100,000 troops, with 32,000 men under Wartensleben confronting Beurnonville and the remainder serving in garrisons or converging on Hüningen and Kehl to defend the right bank against Moreau.

The Directory expressed shock at Moreau’s retreat to Alsace yet did not reprimand him like it did Jourdan. Moreau blamed his retreat on the inaction of the Sambre and Meuse Army and stated that his own army’s survival made the retreat necessary. While he confirmed his intention to resume offensive operations against Archduke Charles, he stated that his first task involved driving the Austrians from the vicinity of Kehl and Hüningen. The Directory

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71 Ferino commanded 19,000 troops between Hüningen and Kehl to defend Hüningen as a bridgehead on the right bank. Saint-Cyr’s 15,500 men stretched from Kembs to Strasbourg while Desaix held Kehl and several villages surrounding Strasbourg with 23,500 troops. General François Antoine Louis Boursier’s weakened cavalry reserve of 1,530 troopers camped northwest of Strasbourg while the French light cavalry of 1800 men occupied Wissembourg. Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 3:116.

72 Longy, La campagne de 1797, 5-6. Lefebvre commanded the advance guard of 12,193 troops east of Köln on the right bank of the Rhine at Bensberg and Osteheim. Poncet’s troops formed the extreme right flank at Neustadt, Trippstadt, and Kaiserslautern while Ligniville led 20,000 troops at Kreuznach and Bingen, defending the mountainous Hunsrück. Bernadotte, Championnet, and Grenier led the divisions of the center consisting of 23,900 troops on the left bank of the Rhine from Boppard to Bonn. Arriving from the army of the North, Desjardin’s 8,830-man division extended from Deutz to Düsseldorf on the right bank. Meanwhile, Macdonald’s 10,350-man division from the Army of the North held Mülheim and Bucheim east of Köln.

73 Charles, Principes de la Stratégie, 3:298, states that he provided Latour 29,000 infantry and 5,900 cavalry to capture Kehl.
supported Moreau’s determination yet repeated its desire for operations on the right bank if practical.  

On the left bank, Moreau encountered major logistical problems that compelled him to inform Paris that offensive operations would not occur anytime soon: “When the chaos that we face becomes more manageable, I will inform you that it will be possible to resume that enterprise.” Unfortunately for the French, Moreau discovered that the Sambre and Meuse Army also could not conduct operations. Even a minor diversionary march toward Mannheim appeared inconceivable to Beurnonville. Moreau requested that Beurnonville send him 30,000 troops to assist with the defense of Alsace against Archduke Charles. On 12 November, he explained his plans and expressed his desperation to Beurnonville: “If I can resist the attacks on Kehl and Hüningen, I will cross the Rhine and direct my advance toward Bruschal and then to Stuttgart: I can only survive with great difficulty in the [French] départements of the Rhine.” Thus, logistical weakness tempted Moreau to initiate offensive operations in accordance with the Directory’s plans. He hoped that Beurnonville could conduct feints to deceive Charles into reinforcing Werneck around Düsseldorf and Neuwied. Furthermore, Moreau would support him by advancing toward the Lahn or even dispatching 25,000 troops to provide Beurnonville with numerical superiority over Charles, but only if Beurnonville invaded; Moreau believed that Beurnonville could contain Werneck with as few as 48,000 men. To Kléber, Moreau explained the urgency of renewing the offensive because “it is too disagreeable to wage war at home.” While Moreau talked boldly of resuming the offensive, he awaited the decision at Kehl.

In an almost bewildering turn, the Directory reversed course and restrained Moreau from risking offensive operations. Beurnonville’s fears over the state of the Sambre and

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75 Moreau to Directory, Hüningen, 27 October 1796, SHAT, B2 164.
76 Moreau to Beurnonville, Strasbourg, 12 November 1796, SHAT, B2 164.
77 Moreau to Kléber, Strasbourg, 2 November 1796, SHAT, B2 164.
Meuse Army, which Alexandre confirmed in reports to the Directory, convinced the government that the armies could not operate effectively without great risk. Accordingly, the Directory refused to grant Moreau the desired 30,000 troops from Beurnonville’s command, stating that “the difficulties you have disclosed concerning subsistence and the advanced season prevent us from accepting that recommendation.” In addition, it declared that the troops needed time to rest and recuperate. Thus, instead of an offensive, the French would “defend until the last extreme the bridgeheads of Hüningen and Kehl, and establish a third at Breisach.” In addition, the Directory insisted that Beurnonville and Moreau cooperate to fix Austrian attention on the Rhine to prevent Charles from sending reinforcements to the Italian theater.

Unsurprisingly, Moreau’s commitment to the offensive diminished even before he received the Directory’s new orders. Beurnonville continuously expressed his inability to support Moreau’s operations. Furthermore, he accused Moreau of working against him to assist a general that he considered to be his greatest rival: Kléber. Incorrectly viewing Kléber as a challenger for command of the Sambre and Meuse Army, Beurnonville took offense to the close relationship between Kléber and Moreau. Understandably, Moreau became distrustful of the spiteful Beurnonville and considered combined operations between their armies as impracticable. Accordingly, he stated his intention to defend Kehl and Hüningen and requested only that Beurnonville maintain stability in the Palatinate to protect his army’s left wing at Speyerbach. Moreau’s subordinates such as Saint-Cyr viewed an offensive to the right bank as unrealistic considering the army’s logistical condition. Saint-Cyr recommended that the offensive to the right bank only resume if the Austrians transferred

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79 Directory to Moreau, 6 November 1796, SHAT, B2 161.
80 Barras claims that he developed this defensive strategy to transfer troops from the armies on the Rhine to Bonaparte in Italy. Longy, *La campagne de 1797*, 11.
81 Moreau to Beurnonville, 7 November 1796, SHAT, B2 164; on distrust between Beurnonville and Kléber, see Godechot, *Commissaires*, 1:582.
Further reinforcements from Germany to Italy.\textsuperscript{82} Receipt of the Directory’s orders completely focused Moreau’s attention on the single objective of defending Kehl. Consequently, he lost interest in an offensive even if such an effort would distract Austrian attention from Italy.

The Austrian siege of Kehl commenced on 9 October during Moreau’s retreat. Latour received command of 35,000 troops to conduct the siege. On the French side, Desaix led forty infantry battalions. In theory, the fortress of Kehl constituted a strongly fortified defensive position on the right bank of the Rhine east of Strasbourg. Yet the surrounding field works lacked strength due to poor maintenance: Moreau inspected the fortifications and reported on their “deplorable state,” observing that “extraordinary means” would be “required to repair them. The troops, bareback, without shoes, and without blankets, are not supported, either for active service or for labor.”\textsuperscript{83} While the French struggled to prepare defenses, the Austrians established lines of contravallation. Drawing supplies from established magazines connected to the Danube, the Austrians worked rapidly and wasted no effort in senseless attacks against the French defenses. On the other hand, Moreau contemplated giving battle as his only hope of saving Kehl. In the end, he viewed battle as too risky considering the state of his army. Unfortunately for the French, he made absolutely no effort to impede the Austrian siege but instead pursued a passive defense. Fearing that any fire issuing from the French side might induce an Austrian attack that he remained woefully unprepared to counter, Moreau forbids his troops to harass the enemy besiegers.\textsuperscript{84}

Ultimately, Moreau acted far too late to relieve Kehl. General Desaix’s encouragement for a vigorous action eventually emboldened Moreau. On 22 November, the French sortied against the Austrian lines. Although Moreau committed 27,000 troops to the attack, the French lacked the numbers to execute a successful assault. After a bloody combat

\textsuperscript{82} Longy, \textit{Campagne de 1797}, 14.
\textsuperscript{83} Moreau to Directory, Strasbourg, 12 November 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 164; Longy, \textit{La Campagne de 1797}, 16.
\textsuperscript{84} Moreau to Beurnonville, 14 November 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 164, Longy, \textit{La campagne de 1797}, 17-8; Phipps, \textit{Armies of the First French Republic}, 2:383, 393.
against Latour’s troops that cost the French 3,000 casualties, Moreau recalled his forces. Following this defeat, Moreau reverted back to his passive defense of Kehl and he avoided the temptation to pursue another offensive. The full-scale Austrian bombardment of Kehl commenced on the 28th. Although Moreau contemplated an expedition from Strasbourg to outflank the Austrian siege lines, the risks of sustaining another defeat compelled him to remain cautious. He informed the Directory that only the arrival of reinforcements from the Sambre and Meuse Army would allow another relief effort.

Moreau did not expect aid from Beurnonville: the Army of the Sambre and Meuse remained incapable of conducting significant operations. At the beginning of November, Beurnonville requested the Directory’s permission to conclude an armistice with the Austrians. This request represented the further deterioration of the army between September and October. On taking command on 22 September, Beurnonville confronted a nearly broken army that he never managed to rejuvenate in condition or spirit. In their first letter to the Directory, Beurnonville and Alexandre warned Paris that chaos reigned on the left bank of the Rhine. Beurnonville reported that the troops consumed the supplies that they pillaged on the right bank of the Rhine without any semblance of order. Consequently, the army suffered from an unnecessary degree of wastage. Lack of horses disorganized the army’s communications, slowing down the transmission of orders by as many as seventeen days. Accordingly, Beurnonville urged Alexandre to extirpate pillage and restore order. On 23 September, Alexandre issued a circular demanding that all carts, caissons, and supplies be returned to the authorities immediately and instituted punishments for soldiers found with

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86 Moreau to Directory, 29 November 1796, SHAT, B1 164.
87 Beurnonville to Moreau, Kreuznach, 2 November 1796; Beurnonville to Directory, Köln, 2 November 1796, SHAT, B1 82.
88 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:580-1.
stolen items. A cavalry detachment would scour Düsseldorf to search for insubordinate soldiers and deserters.  

In addition to these disorders, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse suffered from a continuing command crisis. As noted, Ernouf followed Jourdan in resigning from the army. In fact, he left Köln for Brussels, where Alexandre attempted to have him arrested for corruption. Kléber remained recalcitrant, sustained primarily by his popularity among the troops. Beurnonville met Kléber for an interview on 13 September before taking command. Kléber initially refused to serve under Beurnonville – whom he resented for refusing to send sufficient reinforcements and supplies from the Northern Army to assist the Sambre and Meuse Army in 1796. He again offered his resignation to the Directory. However, the general framed his resignation in terms of principle rather than personality conflict:

As a soldier of the Revolution, I took arms only for the defense of liberty, and to repulse the enemies from our frontiers. Liberty has been defended, the enemy has been removed from our frontiers: the patrie has been satisfied. I have no more contract with it. I do not seek to be, I will never be, the passive instrument of a system of conquest that could deter the gratification of our fellow citizens.

Possibly from Carnot’s influence, the Directory suggested that Kléber take command of the Sambre and Meuse Army. Alexandre, despite supporting the project of natural frontiers, issued the orders, but Kléber refused the offer. Many other generals challenged the new regime implemented by Beurnonville and Alexandre because the new leaders attempted to restrain and punish corrupt practices that had developed during the preceding campaign. The Directory requested “notes on the morality, the conduct of the generals, on their aides de camp, their adjutants, and the principal employees of the military administration.” On 12 October, Alexandre listed Marceau, Morlot, Duvignot, Poncet, and

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89 Alexandre to Pruneau, Köln, 23 September 1796, SHAT, B1 79; Godechot, Commissaires, 1:580.
90 Godechot, Commissaires, 1:581. In 1798, Alexandre challenged him to a duel but Ernouf joined Jourdan’s Army of the Danube.
91 Kléber to Beurnonville, Andernach, 28 September 1796, AN, AP 196.
92 See Directory to Kléber, Paris, 2 November 1796, SHAT, B1 82.
93 RAD, 3:680.
Lefebvre as generals guilty of corruption. On the 25\textsuperscript{th}, the Directory fired Morlot, Poncet, and Duvignot. Alexandre accused Dubreton of brutality and corruption during the 1796 campaign and gained his dismissal.\textsuperscript{94}

These accusation resulted from the widespread occurrence of illegal requisitions, theft, and extortion by French officers in Germany. Unfortunately for the Directory, the prosecution of the guilty among the high command did little to revive discipline, which could only return after the troops received steady, adequate provisions. On 20 September, the Directory ordered Alexandre to make the rapid establishment of subsistence his primary mission. Beurnonville informed the troops that Alexandre would work diligently to guarantee supply and blamed past suffering on the failures of corrupt administrators and generals.\textsuperscript{95} Yet Beurnonville set unrealistic expectations. Alexandre reported the army’s gross wastage: in three months the army utilized supplies that should have lasted for one year. He demanded new funds from the impoverished Directory to replenish the 3,500,000 francs already expended from the army’s treasury. In addition, he sought to impose new contributions on the conquered lands. As a result, the Directory authorized a new round of exceptional contributions on the left bank of the Rhine yet remained unable to send the army substantial cash.\textsuperscript{96}

Despite the new round of French exploitation, logistics continued to hamper the Sambre and Meuse Army. The retreat from Germany left it practically devoid of means of transport. To remedy this problem, the Directory ordered the Ministry of War to ensure that the army received carts and drivers. It suggested that Alexandre purchase new means of transport from the various supply contractors. Alexandre requisitioned horses from the left bank but received few of the 2,400 he desired. Moreover, many of the horses subsequently

\textsuperscript{94} Alexandre listed Marceau even though the general was killed in battle on 21 September 1796. Godechot, Commissaires, 1:584-5.
\textsuperscript{95} Directory to Alexandre, Paris, 20 September 1796, inRAD, 3:651; Godechot, Commissaires, 1:590.
\textsuperscript{96} Alexandre to Directory, Köln, 8 October 1796, SHAT, B1 81.
perished due to lack of fodder. On 23 November, French officers at Aachen noted that 1,500 horses stationed there had not eaten in two days and that many died from starvation. They warned that all would soon die without food. Alexandre purchased as much grain and oats as possible from the surrounding area and even received 18,000 quintals of hay and 100 buckets of oats from Belgium and the Batavian Republic. Yet the French reported from Köln at the end of November that “an enormous quantity of horses are dying here everyday.”

Based on the above, Beurnonville’s failure to support Moreau during the siege of Kehl comes as no surprise. Nevertheless, both the Directory and the War Ministry continually urged Beurnonville to resume the offensive. “It would be disastrous,” wrote the Directory on 7 October to Alexandre, “to wait any longer before retaking the offensive. Our eyes view with great concern the operations of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse… we are reminded that it was with a great lack of supplies that the Armies of Italy and of the Rhine and Moselle opened the campaign in a manner both glorious and profitable. . . . It is up to you to overcome all that impedes General Beurnonville from acting. . . . Even a one-hour delay is a public calamity.” Yet Beurnonville lacked the will power to overcome the enormous materiel deficits facing him. On 4 October, he admitted to Kléber that he could not contemplate an offensive. Six days later, Werneck attacked the French positions on the Nahe; Beurnonville appeared ready to counterattack and ordered Alexandre to prepare several days of provisions for the troops but the French subsequently retreated to avoid a confrontation. As noted, Beurnonville remained completely noncommittal toward Moreau throughout the month of November as the Austrians surrounded Kehl.

Both French armies lost their operational effectiveness in the inhospitable war land on the Rhine. Moreau reported on 20 November that his troops displayed great courage despite

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98 Directory to Alexandre, Paris, 7 October 1796, in *RAD*, 4:5.
their suffering: “They conducted themselves much better than expected or hoped after the campaign in which they had degenerated into their present state.” Nonetheless, courage and hope could not supply the army’s basic materiel needs. Those needs became especially severe during the siege of Kehl. The troops simply lacked the supplies necessary to sustain a long defense: most did not possess wood for the camp fires so essential for survival with winter approaching. The men complained over the irregular distribution of meat and wine. Desertions continued at an alarming rate: situation reports from the first week of December suggest that 4,000 troops deserted from the Rhine and Moselle Army alone. On 7 December, Moreau informed the Directory that the Austrians suffered from similar strains but that they had concentrated their forces at Kehl and kept their troops motivated through positive, offensive action. The Directory, in contrast, centered Moreau’s focus on defending Kehl and Hüningen rather than pursuing an offensive. In reality, neither option – maintaining the defensive or commencing a bold offensive – appeared likely to rejuvenate Moreau’s army, which possessed just slightly more operational capacity than that of Beurnonville.

On 1 December, the Austrians appeared in force east of the bridgehead of Hüningen. The likely fall of both this position and Kehl suggested that the Directory expected too much from Moreau’s army. As the Directory explained to Moreau: “The fruit of the campaign and the ultimate objective of our operations is attached to the conservation of those two essential points [Kehl and Hüningen].” Rejecting an offensive, the Directory claimed that circumstances dictated a defensive posture because “we prize above all else the passages over the Rhine that we now possess, by which we will return to Germany in reasonable time and cause the enemy great concern while they are contemplating sending reinforcements to Italy.

100 Moreau to Directory, Kehl, 20 November 1796, SHAT, B² 164.
101 Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 3:83; Longy, La campagne de 1797, 24.
102 Moreau to Directory, Schiltigheim, 7 December 1796, SHAT, B² 164.
103 Directory to Moreau, Paris, 2 December 1796, SHAT, B² 161.
The government works to create favorable circumstances for the establishment of peace, and it has decided, in consequence, to propose an armistice to the [Holy Roman] Emperor.” At the same time, the Directory insisted that “our intention is not to engage in a general affair on the right bank of the Rhine at this time. Any success achieved would not be worth the costs and sacrifices sustained; you must preserve your main force to triumph over the enemy at Kehl and Hüningen.”

As indicated, Reubell’s desire to negotiate a general peace with Austria that gained the Rhine for France constituted the primary factor that shaped the Directory’s military strategy in late 1796. The sieges of Kehl and Hüningen occurred simultaneously with Clarke’s mission to Vienna, which proved a source of conflict among the members of the Directory. Carnot favored the mission because he sought to end the war as soon as possible. He personally selected Clarke as the Directory’s envoy because the two shared a close friendship. In contrast, Reubell and La Révellière-Lépeaux feared that seeking negotiations during a period of French success in Italy and setbacks in Germany might lead to an agreement that forced France to drop its claims to the entire left bank of the Rhine. The conflict among the Directors probably led to the lack of clarity in Clarke’s instructions. On 15 November, he received orders to insist that in the event of an armistice “no cession should take place in Germany or in Italy of positions won by Republican valor.” However, the Directory on 18 November allowed Clarke to obtain the terms that Vienna would accept for a separate peace.

Until receiving word from Clarke, the Directory did not desire an armistice on the Rhine. On 8 December, it instructed Moreau that negotiations with the Archduke would disturb Clarke’s mission. Nonetheless, it gave Moreau and Beurnonville authority to

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106 Biro, *Germany Policy*, 2:708, reprints the archival documents that include Clarke’s instructions.
negotiate a suspension of hostilities under terms that guaranteed the status quo. The Directory hoped to retain control of Kehl and Hüningen to allow the French to resume an offensive and to demonstrate French strength on the Rhine. On 9 December, Beurnonville and Kray signed an armistice at Neuwied in which the French agreed to withdraw all artillery from Neuwied to the left bank, leaving only a small garrison to hold the fortress. Hostilities could resume only after a notice of three days. The armistice between Kray and Beurnonville reduced the pressure on the Sambre and Meuse Army but allowed the Austrians to send thirteen battalions to reinforce those besieging Kehl. By December, Beurnonville understood that he could not achieve operational success with his weakened army. Like Jourdan in September, Beurnonville demonstrated no enthusiasm for his post: on 12 December he requested that the Directory appoint Moreau to command the Sambre and Meuse Army and send him back to the Army of the North.

While the French feared that Archduke Charles possessed the strength to capture Kehl and Hüningen and then cross to the left bank, he desired an armistice as much as Beurnonville and Moreau. Cautious by nature, Charles considered his army too weak to risk a bold attack on the fortresses. More important, the Rhine ceased to be the primary theater of war as a result of Bonaparte’s success in Italy. In November, the Army of Italy repulsed a relief expedition under the Magyar commander, Feldzeugmeister József Alvinczi de Borberek, at the Battle of Arcola. Fearing a further deterioration of the Austrian position in Italy, Charles hoped to shift forces from the Rhine to stop Bonaparte. An armistice with Moreau served that goal and possibly would allow the archduke to confront Bonaparte personally. Accordingly, Charles believed that the armistice would serve Austrian rather than French interests.

108 Directory to Moreau, Paris, 8 December 1796, SHAT, B 164.
110 Beurnonville to Directory, Koblenz, 12 December 1796, SHAT, B 83.
Moreau kept his and the Directory’s intentions secret during the initial correspondence with Charles. On 16 December, he received the archduke’s offer to sign an armistice in return for a French surrender of Kehl. Moreau responded that this demand was inconceivable. Charles replied on 20 December that Moreau should reconsider because he did not believe Kehl could resist an attack. On the 23rd, Moreau contemplated abandoning Kehl for several reasons. He hoped to conserve the army by avoiding a long defense. In addition, he thought that the archduke might refrain from taking Hüningen if the French traded Kehl.112 During this tense period, Moreau allowed logistical and organizational problems to overcome his good judgement. Desertion continued at an alarming rate with lack of pay constituting the primary reason cited by captured deserters. Although the newly-appointed commissar, François Joseph Rudler, attempted to gather sufficient funds to rectify the crisis and improve materiel, he reported that the army “absolutely lacks the vigor necessary for an operation like the defense of Kehl.”113 For that reason, Moreau highly desired to accept the archduke’s proposal regardless of the Directory’s orders.

After receiving the pessimistic reports from Moreau and Rudler, the Directory again vacillated but ultimately demanded an offensive. Complaints over the armistice negotiations from Bonaparte reminded the Directory that calm on the Rhine could ruin French fortunes in Venetia. Bonaparte implored the Directory to ignite the armies in Germany to neutralize the Austrians in Mantua, which he feared the Austrians could use as a base of operations for an offensive into Lombardy and beyond. On the other hand, Bonaparte emphasized the importance of capturing Mantua to entice at least some members of the Directory: “If we are masters of Mantua, they [the Austrians] will be happy to give us the Rhine boundary.”114 Accordingly, the Directory refused to allow logistical deficits to undermine the war’s

strategic direction, which demanded constant pressure on the Austrians. On 21 December, the Directory forwarded plans to Bonaparte for the next year’s campaign. The Directory’s strategy concentrated on the twin sieges of Mantua and Kehl. To Bonaparte, the Directory insisted on the conquest of Mantua and the pursuit of an offensive toward Vienna. Assigning Bonaparte the primary mission, the Directory agreed to provide him with 30,000 reinforcements from the armies on the Rhine, which remained larger than those of Austria.115

At this point, the Directory became convinced that unity of command was essential for restoring the French position on the Rhine. On 25 December, it informed Moreau that it intended to “end the divided commands that exist between the armies of the Sambre and Meuse and of the Rhine and Moselle.” Radically departing from previous policy, the Directory explained to Moreau: “Destined to act in the same theater of war and to combine their movements, those two armies must be under the same chief. The Directory has chosen you to provisionally occupy that important function.”116 After alerting Moreau to the change of command, the Directory informed him of the overall campaign plan, including its intention to send reinforcements from Germany to Italy. “The conquest of Italy is of extreme importance,” it stated, “and it offers us the greatest means of striking a terrible blow at the Emperor. We have decided that we must weaken ourselves on the Rhine, from where the enemy will be forced to retire troops to counter the progress of Bonaparte in the Tyrol. From there, we will return to the Danube and you can live at the enemy’s expense, an essential advantage for continuing the war with success.” Based on these new orders, the Directory viewed “the conservation of the fortress of Kehl as the greatest importance. The conservation of the works that we possess on the right bank of the Rhine and of the passages that cover them becomes more indispensable every day.”117

115 Longy, La campagne de 1797, 36-7.
117 Ibid.
At Kehl, persistent rains slowed the Austrian siege while French morale improved somewhat as a result of relieved pressure. Adjutant General François-Xavier Donzelot notified Moreau on 27 December that the French could defend Kehl with a diversionary march on the right bank.\footnote{Longy, \textit{La campagne de 1797}, 41.} For his part, Moreau hoped to safeguard the fortress by extending the preliminary armistice discussions. On the 30\textsuperscript{th}, he requested a meeting with Charles to further discuss terms. Moreau’s overture proved significant in light of the archduke’s previous refusal to negotiate unless the French evacuated Kehl. Although he implied to Charles that he desired to surrender the fortress, Moreau’s actions did not actually contravene the Directory’s orders. The next day, he informed the Directory that he had resumed negotiations with Charles but that he did not propose to evacuate the fortress of Kehl.\footnote{Moreau to Directory, Schiltigheim, 31 December 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 164.} In any event, Charles did not attend the conference. On 29 December, the Directory reminded Moreau that they viewed the defense of Kehl to be of extreme importance.\footnote{Directory to Moreau, Paris, 29 December 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 161.} Characteristically, Moreau did not pursue an active defense but remained passive in light of the exhaustion of his troops. On 2 January, he explained his rationale: “The goal of continuing the negotiations up to the point where I would have evacuated Kehl is to preserve Hüningen, which depends on it, and if we lose it [Kehl] without an armistice, it would be nearly impossible to conserve the other [Hüningen].”\footnote{Moreau to Directory, Schiltigheim, 2 January 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 164.}

In addition to basically ignoring the Directory’s orders concerning Kehl and negotiations with the Austrians, Moreau viewed the transfer of even 20,000 troops from the Sambre and Meuse Army to Bonaparte’s Army of Italy as unfeasible. He insisted that those troops remain under his command for the defense of Kehl. Moreover, he explained that the loss of those troops would endanger the French in the event of an armistice because it might leave them outnumbered after hostilities resumed. He cited the disorganization of
Beurnonville’s forces as another reason to challenge the Directory’s orders.\textsuperscript{122} On 2 January, he reported that he would send the troops to Italy as soon as the Austrians shifted reinforcements to that theater. Until that point, he viewed any diminution of French strength in Germany as potentially disastrous. Two days later, he stated the impracticality of attempting a passage at Kehl: “we have no boats or bridges.”\textsuperscript{123}

Accordingly, the French refrained from any significant action on the Rhine between December and January. The Army of the Rhine and Moselle possessed approximately 63,000 troops, 18,000 of whom held Kehl and Hüningen. A total of 45,000 troops remained inactive in Alsace during the first months of winter. Instead of utilizing these troops for diversionary movements, Moreau allowed them to rest and recuperate. On the other side of the Rhine, Charles besieged Kehl with 40,000 men and Hüningen with 15,000.\textsuperscript{124} Moreau conceived of an operation to establish French troops on the island of Kintzig to ensure the safety of Kehl. Yet Saint-Cyr viewed the movement as unpractical and refused to execute Moreau’s orders.\textsuperscript{125} As for the Directory’s instructions to send troops to Italy, Moreau avoided dispatching reinforcements for as long as possible. To justify his delays, he cited the need for the reinforcements to be transported secretly. The Directory responded to Moreau’s dithering by insisting on speed. On 7 January 1797 the minister of war, Petiet, demanded that Moreau dispatch the reinforcements immediately so Bonaparte could execute the Directory’s orders. Intercepted communications between Alvintzi and Wurmser indicated that the Austrians would soon launch a new effort to relieve Mantua.\textsuperscript{126} Based on these orders, Moreau issued orders for troop movements on 14 January.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{123} Moreau to Directory, Schiltigheim, 4 January 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 164; Longy, \textit{La campagne de 1797}, 43.  
\textsuperscript{125} Saint-Cyr, \textit{Mémoires}, 3:82.  
\textsuperscript{126} Longy, \textit{La campagne de 1797}, 47-9.  
\textsuperscript{127} Moreau to Directory, Schiltigheim, 14 January 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 164.
By that point, the issue of defending Kehl no longer mattered. On 6 January, the Directory acknowledged its understanding of the problems that Moreau confronted. Yet it insisted that the general apply all effort to defending Kehl. The Directory hoped that rain would raise the Rhine to levels that would impede the Austrian siege works. In that event, Moreau should strive to improve the fortress’s defenses while preparing for an offensive: “A crossing of the Rhine executed at Hüningen and then at another point closer to enemy lines, with a force of 20,000-25,000 troops, seems to us to be the most useful operation for disrupting the siege. It seems infallible to us, if the crossing is well conducted and if the attack, which would be on the enemy’s lines of contravallation, is rapid and energetic.”128 At this stage, the Directory viewed an offensive as the last means of defending the main crossing-points on the Rhine and to prevent an Austrian offensive on the left bank. The Directory recommended “the most audacious means” to repair French strength in the region.129

Events on the ground raised even more concern for the strategy of maintaining the status quo at Kehl. On 6 January, French troops evacuated the island of Ehrlen-Rhein, which provided the Austrians with another angle for their bombardment. Moreau viewed this development as detrimental for the defense of Kehl and decided to evacuate the fortress. The general convened a war council to discuss the momentous decision. On 7 January, Moreau’s council of war met near Kehl and unanimously agreed on the impossibility of defending the fortress. According to the minutes of the council, the generals confirmed that the army lacked the logistics to cross the Rhine to divert Austrian attention from Kehl. Moreover, “until the means exist for a crossing, the operation would be too hazardous with exhausted troops, who are without pay and devoid of clothing, such as those who are employed at Kehl, and

129 Ibid.
especially against a superior army.” While the Sambre and Meuse Army might plausibly support the Rhine and Moselle, the council believed that “the largest number of troops from that army are too dispersed to arrive soon enough to relieve Kehl. Two demi-brigades from that army, which arrived for service at Kehl, have been reduced to 1,300 troops – too weak for that reinforcement to have any effect.”130 Considering the impracticality of defending Kehl and the likelihood of sustaining losses in a withdrawal, the generals viewed a formal evacuation and armistice as the best option.131

Moreau drafted a final letter to Archduke Charles on 7 January, which stated that while Kehl could resist a continued siege, he sought to prevent unnecessary bloodshed. The next day, Charles responded that he lacked orders to conclude an armistice but that Moreau could send two officers to negotiate terms if he “truly desired to prevent bloodshed.” On 9 January, Desaix met two Austrian generals, Latour and Bellegarde, on a raft in the Rhine. Desaix obtained Austrian recognition for the French to retain Hüningen if the Austrians took Kehl by 4:00 PM on 10 January. Content with these terms, the French immediately commenced the evacuation. Citizens from Strasbourg assisted the troops in removing supplies. Moreau did not receive the Directory’s 6 January orders to pursue an offensive at Kehl until the 10th. He responded that he lacked the means of crossing the Rhine at Kehl because he could not locate adequate bridges or boats. As it turned out, the Directory actually issued authorization for the evacuation of Kehl on 9 January, somewhat legitimizing Moreau’s actions.132

Returning to the Sambre and Meuse Army, the Directory’s 25 December orders placed Moreau in overall command. While the Directory’s recognition of the importance of unity of command proved correct in light of the failures of 1795 and 1796, the decision rested

130 These minutes are reprinted in Longy, La campagne de 1797, 52-3.
131 Saint-Cyr, Mémoires, 284-6.
132 Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:393-4.
on more immediate concerns. Most important, the Directory awarded Moreau command with
the intention of expediting his preparations to defend Kehl. Beurnonville and his chief of
staff, General Jacques Louis François de Tilly, bombarded Moreau with reports detailing the
inadequacies of the Sambre and Meuse Army, convincing the senior general that it could not
usefully assist in the defense of Kehl. Lacking details over the internal states of the Sambre
and Meuse Army, Moreau relied on Beurnonville’s reports.\textsuperscript{133}

Beurnonville did not grossly exaggerate the poor condition of the Sambre and Meuse
Army. By January 1797, near-total anarchy reigned. The war land on the left bank continued
to lack abundant resources. In addition, the army’s administration remained inadequate.
Beurnonville accused a “triumvirate” of administrators – Supply Commissar Luuyt,
Commissar of the Directory Boutier de Catus, and, most shockingly, Commissar Alexandre –
for the calamitous situation. According to the general’s accusations, each of these officials
speculated on the profits of the Mülheim transport company. He viewed greed among
officials as the chief reason for the on-going logistical crisis. Beurnonville regretted the
influence of corruption while “Kehl is bombarded and while the Sambre and Meuse Army,
which Alexandre pretends to have rescued from misery, dies from hunger and cold.”\textsuperscript{134} As
noted, the Directory authorized Beurnonville on 9 December to negotiate a special armistice
with the Austrians on the Lower Rhine. Having seen its plans for a rejuvenation of the
Sambre and Meuse Army fail completely, the Directory decided in mid-December to appoint
Moreau as generalissimo on the Rhine.

On receiving the Directory’s orders to take command of the Sambre and Meuse
Army, Moreau responded unenthusiastically and with characteristic modesty: “The increase
of power that you have given me forces me to inform you that I think I lack the strength and

\textsuperscript{133} Beurnonville to Moreau, Bonn, 29 December 1796; Tilly to Moreau, Köln, 31 December 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 83.
\textsuperscript{134} Beurnonville to Minister of War, Bonn, 29 December 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 83. See Godechot, \textit{Commissaires},
620-6.
talent necessary for a command of such importance.” Nonetheless, Moreau looked forward to working alongside several generals from the Sambre and Meuse Army whom he deeply respected. In particular, he praised Kléber as “an excellent officer.” Yet Moreau quickly discovered that the Sambre and Meuse Army no longer possessed the strength it had displayed at Fleurus, the Ourthe, and the Roer. Kléber hoped to escape the Rhineland as soon as the Directory accepted his resignation. Bernadotte would leave the theater as commander of the reinforcements sent to Italy. Lefebvre returned to Paris on sick leave and sought a position with the Army of the West. Beurnonville took command of the Army of the North to suppress a small yet concerning rebellion in Belgium led by Jean-Joseph de la Mer, Baron Moorsel.

In reality, Moreau assumed command of a demoralized army that hampered his already weak Army of the Rhine and Moselle. On 9 January, Beurnonville provided a full report to Moreau on the Sambre and Meuse Army’s condition. He cited the Belgian revolt, the corruption of the commissars and other administrators, and the lack of devotion of the generals and officers. Beurnonville himself hoped to return to the Netherlands after suppressing the revolt in Belgium. Kléber wrote to Moreau on 7 January that he would not accept any provisional command because he already offered his resignation to the Directory, which the government finally accepted.

Moreau could not depart the Upper Rhine in January to oversee the reorganization of the Sambre and Meuse Army. Although he surrendered Kehl, the Directory urged him to defend Hüningen to the last extreme. At the same time, he had to prepare for the upcoming spring campaign, which the Directory desired to open with decisive action on the Rhine: “A

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135 Moreau to Directory, Schiltigheim, 29 December 1796, SHAT, B2 164.
136 Pajol, Kléber, 260.
137 Rouget, Mémoires, 1:341.
138 Beurnonville to Moreau, Bonn, 9 January 1796, SHAT, B1 84.
139 Kléber to Moreau, Köln, 7 January 1796, AN, AP 196.
new invasion of Germany will allow us to concentrate our forces and to live at the enemy’s expense, which is the best way to overcome our penury.”¹⁴⁰ In these circumstances, Moreau could not divert attention from the defense of Hüningen. He tasked Desaix to defend the position, the fall of which portended an Austrian invasion of Alsace. On 14 January, Moreau informed the Directory that he would attend to the Sambre and Meuse Army as soon as Desaix felt confident in his ability to defend Hüningen. Moreau cited Kléber’s departure as a “great loss: his talents, his courage, and his strength have gained him the trust of the army.” At the same time, Moreau deeply regretted the loss of Bernadotte: “an excellent officer.”¹⁴¹ Consequently, the War Ministry authorized Bernadotte to return to the Sambre and Meuse Army if he desired. Bernadotte stated his intention to join Bonaparte and the Directory ordered him to continue to Italy.¹⁴² On 15 January, Moreau expressed concern that the departure of the army’s generals of division would spark unrest in the Sambre and Meuse Army over his appointment to command.¹⁴³

Moreau did not demonstrate the necessary initiative and skill to be the French generalissimo on the Rhine, especially after he failed to defend Hüningen. Although Desaix attempted to repulse the Austrians, the French evacuated the fortress with arms and baggage on 5 February 1797: a devastating blow that convinced the Directory to again reorganize the armies on the Rhine.¹⁴⁴ Reverting back to divided commands, the Directory searched for a competent general to replace Moreau and assume independent command of the Sambre and Meuse Army. On 24 January, Barras nominated the former commander of the Moselle Army, General Lazare Hoche.¹⁴⁵ Although dismissed and arrested by Robespierre’s CPS in 1794, Hoche restored his reputation in 1795 as the pacifier of the Vendée. In addition, he displayed

¹⁴¹ Moreau to Directory, place unknown, 14 January 1796, SHAT, B² 164.
¹⁴² Directory to Bernadotte, Paris, 3 February 1796, SHAT, B¹ 85.
¹⁴³ Moreau to Directory, Schiltigheim, 15 January 1796, SHAT, B³ 165.
¹⁴⁴ Longy, La campagne de 1797, 88; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:394-5.
¹⁴⁵ Barras, Mémoires, 2:288; La Révellière-Lépeaux, Mémoires, 2:180-1.
skill in 1796 by preparing an expedition to invade Ireland. Barras informed Moreau that the
Directory intended “to conserve the distinction that exists between the armies on the Rhine.
The provisional command with which you have been confided allows us to direct their
movements through you; but we do not think that you can command them as one in the
immediate future.” Barras went further: “Based on our understanding of the situation of the
Sambre and Meuse Army, the shortages have been exaggerated; we desire from you a
veritable situation report. Ensure active instruction, exact discipline . . . and nourish the hope
among the troops of a new success: they will gain the fruits of their effort at the opening of
the next campaign.”

Informing Moreau of Hoche’s appointment on 1 February, the Directory insisted that
the two armies prepare to operate together during the approaching campaign. The Directory
remained concerned over the deleterious effects of rivalry between the two Rhine armies. Yet
such concerns did not override the Directory’s belief that Moreau could not serve effectively
as the French generalissimo in the region. The Directory probably doubted that either Moreau
or Hoche possessed the necessary skills to serve as generalissimo in such a complicated
theater: neither proved Bonaparte’s equal as a military commander.

The increasingly independent and provocative role assumed by Bonaparte in Italy
alerted the government to the dangers of political generals. Tensions between Bonaparte and
the Directory grew after the French entered Milan in May 1796 and he established himself in
kingly fashion at the Château of Mombello. The general hoped to spread revolutionary fervor
across Italy while most members of the Directory viewed Italian conquests as bargaining
chips to be exchanged at a future peace conference. In the end, the Directory found itself
unable and unwilling to restrain Bonaparte because the general plundered Italy on their

behest to restore French finances. An attempt by the Directory to divide Bonaparte’s command with General Kellerman prompted the Corsican upstart to offer his resignation. The executives capitulated, admitting their lack of leverage over France’s most successful general. In the fall of 1796, Bonaparte pursued his policy of revolutionary state-building. On 16 October, he created the Cispadane Republic out of Modena and the Papal Legations; the Transpadane Republic followed on the 29th, which included Lombardy. Most controversial, Bonaparte ignored the presence of the Directory’s commissar, Garrau, and appointed one of his generals, Baraguey d’Hilliers, as the new state’s principal administrator. In 1797, Bonaparte converted the Cispadane and Transpadane Republics into the Cisalpine Republic while transforming Genoa into the Ligurian Republic. Thus, Bonaparte’s state-building replaced the Directory’s authority over conquered territory with military control. Bonaparte’s army benefitted tremendously from this policy because he proved far more successful at exploiting Italian resources to feed and pay his men than did the Directory’s minions. Fearing that other generals might find the Bonapartist model imitable, the Directory refused to appoint either Hoche or Moreau as the ranking general in the German theater.¹⁴⁸

The transition of the French high command in Germany occurred rapidly. Before departing the Sambre and Meuse Army, Beurnonville issued a 27 January proclamation to the troops:

> When I took provisional command of the Sambre and Meuse Army, my brave comrades, I counted on the means of resuming the offensive and I demanded from you your patience and perseverance. I have only admiration for your heroism; I assure you, in return, my sincere attachment to you. If I have not made your situation better, it is only because I have not had the chance. Indiscreet and foolish figures have accused you of having done too little to damage the enemy; I respond to these critics that you have remained impregnable on these majestic lines, which you have conserved and defended; that you have relieved Landau, cleared the Hunsrück, the Palatinate, and the Lower Rhine; that you have remained masters of your two debouches at Düsseldorf and the bridgehead of Neuwied; that you still occupy portions of the right bank of the Rhine and that you are masters of the left bank; that you have

forced the enemy to retreat and that you are tranquil in your positions, and all the good and true soldiers agree with you that you have in these circumstances waged a prudent war of maneuver.149

Meanwhile, Moreau arrived at Köln on 5 February and met with Championnet to discuss the Sambre and Meuse Army’s provisions. Despite Beurnonville’s statements, Moreau reported on 9 February that the army stood “in an excellent condition, full of goodwill; the artillery is in the best state, but the army is horribly administered.”150 Moreau accused Beurnonville and Alexandre of lies concerning the army’s strength: “I found the personnel of the army in the best condition. The officers who remain are full of ardor and the desire to fight the enemies of the Republic. But I must state that the conduct of your commissar, Alexandre, has rendered their service much weaker. It is to him that you must attribute the retreat of General Kléber.” Nonetheless, Moreau provided a negative view of the Rhineland: “Everyone here complains of the military administration.”151 To Reynier, Moreau spoke more freely, even criticizing the previous commander: “Beurnonville is covered with ridicule here.” Moreau argued that the officers sought to march toward the Main during the Austrian siege of Kehl but that Beurnonville did not authorize the operation “out of fear.”152

Moreau’s accusations served to defend his own conduct in surrendering Kehl and Hüningen. He subsequently admitted that the army remained poorly supplied and that it possessed insufficient means of transport. Originally desiring to extract resources from the Sambre and Meuse Army, Moreau found few supplies available to plunder.153 As provisional commander, he remained ignorant of the Directory’s intentions because he did not receive any news concerning on the issue of command until at least 17 February, when he responded that the government “can be assured that the army of the Rhine and Moselle will provide all

149 Beurnonville to Army of the Sambre and Meuse, Köln, 27 January 1797, SHAT, B 1 84.
150 Moreau quoted in Longy, *La campagne de 1797*, 95.
151 Moreau to Directory, Koblenz, 5 February 1797, SHAT, B 2 164.
152 Moreau to Reynier, Koblenz, 9 February 1797, SHAT, B 1 85; Longy, *La campagne de 1797*, 99.
153 Longy, *La campagne de 1797*, 100.
efforts to assist the army that Hoche will command.” From mid-February, Moreau abandoned any hopes of utilizing the Sambre and Meuse Army to revive his own force and simply desired to return to the Upper Rhine. Either because of his army’s condition or because he remained furious at the Sambre and Meuse Army’s passivity in the previous campaign, he informed the Directory and Hoche on 17 February that he did not view an offensive as practical until at least April, even if the Sambre and Meuse Army crossed the Rhine with 80,000 troops. On 19 February, preparing to depart Köln for Strasbourg, Moreau stated to Championnet: “Although my journey gave me the pleasure of knowing you and your estimable colleagues, I regret having travelled more than 200 leagues without purpose.” The entire experience of Moreau as a provisional generalissimo did little to improve relations between the French armies on the Rhine, which declined precipitously in 1795 and 1796 as the French armies languished in the inhospitable Rhineland.

As the war of the First Coalition concluded, both sides suffered from exhaustion in the German theater. The French possessed just enough strength to establish themselves on the left bank of the Rhine, a position from which they could exert hegemonic power on Western Europe. Yet the French achieved this position at the cost of significant military strength. The degeneration of two French armies – the Sambre and Meuse and the Rhine and Moselle – resulted directly from the war of expansion to the natural frontiers. By the fall of 1796, the Sambre and Meuse Army was a shattered force that could not contribute in any way to the defense of Kehl and Hüningen. The army’s decline resulted from an inability to draw sufficient materiel from Germany, which forced the troops to pillage and led to a crisis in discipline. No commander or commissar proved able to reverse this trend before the onset of winter. Moreau’s Rhine and Moselle Army proved slightly more capable than the Sambre and

154 Moreau to the Directory, Köln, 17 February 1797, SHAT, B² 164.
155 Ibid.
156 Moreau to Championnet, 19 February 1797, SHAT, B¹ 85.
Meuse yet also suffered a great deal. The surrender of Kehl and Hüningen threatened to upset the Directory’s plans to force the Austrians to accept a “glorious peace” that – at least for Reubell, La Révellière-Lépeaux, and Barras – included French annexation of the entire left bank of the Rhine. Accordingly, it would require at least one more substantial effort by the armies in Germany to repair the French position on the Rhine before an acceptable peace could be signed. That task fell to General Hoche.
CHAPTER 10
HOCHE, THE CISRHENAN REPUBLIC, AND 18 FRUCTIDOR, JANUARY-OCTOBER 1797

Domestic political developments considerably impacted Hoche’s tenure as commander of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse. Hoche stood on the political left, having embodied the idea of a true republican general in 1793. More recently, he reconciled the Catholic and somewhat royalist Vendeans with the Republic after a year-long process of pacification, earning him much fame and gratitude. Hoche recovered from a significant embarrassment in 1796 after the Ireland Expedition failed in humiliating fashion when several ships crashed off Bantry Bay. In January 1797, he met with the Directory and discussed military and political matters with several important figures. On the 21st, Hoche joined General Lefebvre in a meeting with Minister of War Petiet and the Directory. Lefebvre informed the audience that the Sambre and Meuse Army suffered from low morale because it was isolated on the frontier without any support from Paris. The angry general stated that even Feldmarschalleutnant Kray had lauded the virtues of the French soldiers during the most recent armistice negotiations while the officials from Paris had remained silent. Accordingly, Hoche departed Paris to join the army fully aware of its flailing morale. In addition, his time at Paris alerted him to the increasing influence of Royalist and conservative factions in French politics. As early as January, he spoke openly to Barras of using his sword to crush the Royalists.

The resurgence of the conservatives resulted from a variety of factors. The ongoing war and economic stagnation stimulated a popular desire for peace, which sparked a wave of anti-governmental opposition that restored conservatives to political relevance. Most

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3 Ibid., 2:297-8.
important, the Directory’s repression of the radical left in 1796 opened room on the political spectrum for the return of a legitimate right-of-center party. The conservatives assumed the title of Clichyites because the “Clichy Club” met at a monastery on the Rue de Clichy. Along with General Pichegru, the former deputy to the Convention and coauthor of the 1795 Constitution, Boissy d’Anglas, constituted the two most prominent Clichyites.

Opposition to the Directory united the Clichyites who otherwise did not possess a uniform platform. Instead, they comprised several groups that included moderates, conservatives, Royalists, and constitutional monarchists. Moderate conservatives such as Admiral Louis-Thomas Villaret de Joyeuse favored a reduction in what they viewed as the excesses of the Revolution. They sought to remove restrictions on the Catholic Church and to restore the rights of émigrés. Constitutional monarchists advocated these measures along with the return of limited monarchy to France, most likely in the form of the Orléans dynasty.

Actual Royalists – such as Pichegru – used their minority influence in the Clichyite faction as the only possible means to support the return of absolute monarchy. While the Royalists did not secure major support among the conservative faction, their presence in the press caused the center-left Directory to fear a conspiracy within the legislative chambers to restore the Bourbons. Based on these concerns, the elections of Year V in April 1797 fostered great paranoia in Revolutionary politics as only 11 out 216 legislators who stood for reelection retained their seats. Even more alarming, the majority of newly-elected deputies sided with the conservatives and, drawing support from his military record, the Royalist Pichegru received enough votes to become President of the Council of 500.

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4 Woloch, Jacobin Revival, 65.
5 Lyons, France under the Directory, 48.
The conservative revival held important implications for the composition and outlook of the Directory. Reubell served as president of the Directory from February to May 1797, a position that allowed him to assert himself as defender of the Republic against Royalist conspirators. The Alsatian Republican proved to be the most vocal critic of the Elections of Year V. He used the uncovering of a British-funded plot led by Royalist agitators André-Charles Brottier and Charles Hippolyte Berthelot de La Villeurnoy in January 1797 as evidence of a broader conspiracy that threatened the legislature. Two months later the trial against Brottier provided Reubell with the opportunity to urge true Republicans to be vigilant against traitors. Barras and La Révellière-Lépeaux concurred with Reubell that the Republic faced an existential threat from Royalism. Based on his subsequent statements, Carnot did not believe in the Royalist plot but viewed Reubell’s reaction as paranoia: he commented that Reubell kept copious notes on every suspected Royalist deputy. Moreover, Carnot supported the election of the fifth Director, the former diplomat Barthélemy, against the opposition of Barras, La Révellière-Lépeaux, and Reubell. Reubell had first encountered Barthélemy in 1795, when the latter served as the principal negotiator at Basel. At the time he suspected him of Royalism and considered him “cowardly and weak.” Most interesting, Reubell stated that Barthélemy did not support his foreign policy, especially the idea of French annexation of the Rhineland. Instead, Barthélemy belonged to the faction that favored a return to France’s ancient borders.

Barthélemy’s election to the Directory demonstrated the power of the conservatives and unveiled lingering disagreement among the French public on the issue of foreign policy.

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7 Homan, Reubell, 118.
8 Barras, Mémoires, 2:494-5.
10 Barthélemy, Mémoires, 179-82. Barthélemy does not possess a great reputation. He did not prove a strong opposition to Reubell on the Directory. In fact, he rarely attended meetings and did not seem politically engaged during his abbreviated tenure. See Homan, Reubell, 119; Lefebvre, The Directory, 66.
Carnot and Barthélemy united in support of a policy favored by the conservative faction: offering substantial concessions to Great Britain and Austria in order to make peace and finally bring stability to France. Reubell recognized the opposition to his idea of a “glorious peace” and took active measures to suppress the influence of it and other parties.

While Reubell encountered obstruction from Royalists who favored a peace without territorial aggrandizement, he discovered a new conflict in the form of Bonaparte’s revolutionary state-building in Italy. Reubell did not oppose the concept of spreading the Revolution. However, he feared that the unrestrained exportation of Revolutionary ideals could prevent France from gaining territory closer to home. In this case, he expressed concern that Bonaparte’s meddling in Italy might jeopardize his plans for a “glorious peace” in which the Austrians agreed to French annexation of Belgium and the Rhineland. In the summer of 1796, rumors circulated in Paris that Reubell would remove Bonaparte from command in Italy and replace him with Hoche. Around the same time, Delacroix – Reubell’s voice in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – warned that revolutionary state-building would lead to indefinite war.

In February 1797, Reubell openly opposed Bonaparte’s policy in a speech that portrayed the creation of sister-republics in Italy as misguided. He quoted Brissot in stating that they would form “patties that will be fattened at France’s expense.” Adding another level of complexity, Carnot lent conditional support to Bonaparte’s revolutionary state-building in Italy because he thought that it might provide the French with greater leverage in negotiations with Austria. In addition, the French could be persuaded to concede the Rhine if the new Italian republics gained international recognition.

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12 Guyot, Le directoire 330-1.
13 Homan, Reubell, 135.
14 Reinhard, Carnot, 2:212-3. Carnot did not support the autonomy displayed by Bonaparte in negotiations leading to the establishment of these states.
Thus, Hoche joined the Sambre and Meuse Army at a time in which debates over domestic politics and foreign policy converged. For personal and political reasons, he favored the republican faction growing around Reubell. Hoche’s dismissal and arrest in 1794 left him with a profound hatred for anyone attached to the Committee of Public Safety of Year II, which forever soured his view of Carnot.\textsuperscript{15} Yet he arrived at the Sambre and Meuse Army’s headquarters at Köln without any instructions from Reubell and more under the influence of Carnot. In fact, Carnot provided him with a campaign plan based on an outline sketched in a 21 December 1796 letter to Bonaparte. Primarily, Carnot conceived of a general offensive toward Vienna. According to the basic principles of this plan, the French forces in Germany would advance east through the Danube valley while Bonaparte’s Army of Italy crossed the Julian Alps by way of the Predil Pass. Specifically, Bonaparte would leave a detachment to cover the Tyrol and advance northeast through the Frioul and into the Habsburg hereditary lands north of Tarvisio. Based on this early draft, Carnot envisioned both French armies in Germany crossing the Rhine and advancing down the Danube. Ideally, all three French armies would conclude the campaign by encircling Vienna. Above all, Carnot prioritized the Army of the Italy’s role, informing Bonaparte that he would receive 30,000 troops from the Rhine theater by March. Carnot viewed the Rhine armies as support for Bonaparte’s main offensive and hoped that the French could implement this plan in February or early March after two months of preparation.\textsuperscript{16}

Of the French generals, only Bonaparte proved capable of executing the Directory’s plan based on the two-month timetable. On 14 January, he defeated Alvintzi at Rivoli and conquered Mantua on 2 February. Bonaparte benefitted from these victories by imposing contributions on the Papal States. Characteristically, he took little time to recover and

\textsuperscript{15} D’Orano, \textit{Hoche}, 125.  
\textsuperscript{16} Directory to Bonaparte, Paris, 21 December 1796, in \textit{RAD}, 4:496. Reubell and La Révelliére-Lépeaux signed the letter in addition to Carnot.
resumed the offensive against Austrian forces on 10 March.\textsuperscript{17} In contrast, Moreau proved unable to launch an offensive, citing the losses of Kehl and Hüningen as major obstacles.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, Hoche remained at Paris through the month of January instead of speedily joining the army to implement the Directory’s orders. After Hoche assumed command of the Sambre and Meuse Army, the persistence of independent commands in the German theater impeded a unified advance on Vienna. While Bonaparte vigorously advanced from the Adige River like a lightning bolt aimed at Vienna, Hoche leisurely travelled from Paris to Köln. Moreau eagerly left Koblenz for Strasbourg and requested the Directory’s approval for a one-month leave to recover his health at Paris.\textsuperscript{19}

In addition to the relative passivity of the generals in the German theater, uncertainty over the intentions of Archduke Charles prevented the French from pursuing active operations on the Rhine. As noted, after capturing Kehl Charles reinforced the siege force at Hüningen, indicating to the French that he might remain in the German theater. The fall of Hüningen increased French concerns of an Austrian offensive on the left bank of the Rhine. Causing further alarm, the archduke reinforced Werneck on the Lower Rhine. Regardless, the Austrians confronted an existential threat from Bonaparte’s Army of Italy, which forced them to consider an overall strategy that looked beyond the Rhineland. Based on Austrian logic, victory on the Rhine would not matter if Bonaparte captured Vienna. On 25 January 1797, Francis appointed Archduke Charles overall commander of Habsburg forces.\textsuperscript{20} After learning that the French had reinforced Bonaparte’s army, Charles decided to concentrate his strength to defend Vienna and to personally command in that theater. Before reaching his

\textsuperscript{17} Boycott-Brown, \textit{Road to Rivoli}, 521-2.
\textsuperscript{18} Moreau to War Ministry, place unknown, 26 January 1796, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{2} 164.
\textsuperscript{19} Longy, in \textit{La campagne de 1797}, 181 concludes that: “That measure [maintaining divided commands] made a simultaneous advance on Vienna impossible because it required unity of action from all our forces in Germany, a unity on which Bonaparte had relied upon in all of his movements.”
headquarters at Udine, Charles stopped at Vienna to urge his brother to make a separate peace with France. To his credit, Francis refused. Thugut argued that Bonaparte would encounter serious logistical problems in the Austrian heartlands while noting that the poor condition of the French armies on the Rhine would not allow offensive operations. He claimed that an attrition strategy would further weaken French military power and perhaps even change the political situation in France. Regardless, he convinced Francis that Austria possessed sufficient strength to continue the war with a modicum of confidence. Although Archduke Charles left Vienna to command in Italy, the Austrians kept significant albeit weakened forces on the right bank of the Rhine: 93,000 troops under Latour.

While the Austrians did not cower before the Republic’s armies, the French generals probably exaggerated the threat they faced on the Rhine, fearing that the Austrians planned to invade the Palatinate from either the Düsseldorf-Neuwied or Mainz-Mannheim sectors. In reality, the Austrians would not countenance a renewed offensive on the Rhine unless Charles successfully repulsed Bonaparte’s drive toward Vienna. Based on inflated estimates of Austrian military capability, the French made defensive preparations. On 24 January, the Directory authorized Moreau to strengthen the left wing of the Rhine and Moselle Army in the Palatinate to ensure a “powerful defensive.” Hoche expressed great concern for the French position on the Rhine and proposed that the Directory send reinforcements from the

21 In Thugut, 233, Roiider states that “Thugut’s analysis was certainly reasonable; indeed, Bonaparte himself echoed it later. When he [Bonaparte] concluded the preliminary peace at Leoben in mid-April 1797, he justified his action to the Directory by explaining that his strategic situation was becoming increasingly perilous as he approached Vienna, and he admitted that he could not have attacked the city itself without risking the total destruction of his army.”

22 Werneck commanded 28,841 troops between the Lahn and the Sieg while Kray camped opposite of Neuwied with 8,052 men. Further south, 29,000 troops were stationed at Mannheim under Feldmarschalleutnant Joseph Heinrich Staader von Adelsheim. A 5,000-man reserve under Generalmajor Joseph Anton von Simbschen camped on the Main at Rüsselsheim. Feldmarschalleutnant Anton Sztáray de Nagy-Mihály commanded 35,252 troops on the Austrian right between the Murg River and Basel. In addition, the Austrians held the important positions of Ehrenbreitstein, Mainz, Mannheim, and Philippsburg with garrisons totaling 20,000 men. Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:420; Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 10:71.

23 Roiider, Thugut, 233-4.

Army of the West to compensate for the loss of Bernadotte and the approximately 30,000 experienced troops who had departed for Italy. In addition, he requested the recall of Bernadotte in light of Bonaparte’s success at Rivoli. The Directory refused both requests and informed Hoche that the archduke’s movements toward Mainz and Mannheim constituted an operation aimed only at deception. Explaining that Charles had left the Rhine for Italy with the best Austrian regiments, the Directory alerted Hoche to the vulnerability of the enemy’s forces that remained on the right bank of the Rhine. Nonetheless, the serious question remained: could the French recover from logistical and administrative weakness and exploit this opportunity for military operations across the Rhine?

For its part, the Directory wavered over French strategy. In letters to Bonaparte, it described offensive operations across the Rhine as indispensable to assist his efforts to invade the Austrian heartland. On 18 January, the government pressured Bonaparte to continue his offensive as a “powerful diversion in favor of the ulterior operations on the Rhine,” which it viewed as essential in light of the fall of Kehl. Yet on 3 February, it employed the arguments of Hoche and Moreau to express concern that Archduke Charles desired to recover from defeats in Italy by achieving victory on the Rhine: “It is important that we soon resume the offensive on that part of our line of operation, both to prevent the enemy from pursuing advantages on the bridgeheads that remain on the Rhine, and to prevent him from accumulating forces against the Army of Italy.” Despite the plan of December to drive toward Vienna with all possible strength, the Directory did not send firm orders to Moreau and Hoche demanding the immediate resumption of the offensive. It merely informed Bonaparte that he should anticipate support from the German theater: “we will order Moreau to cross the Rhine and combine his movements with yours. General Hoche, at the head of the

25 Hoche to Directory, Hoche to War Ministry, Paris, 26 January 1797, SHAT, B 1 84.
26 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 4 February 1797, SHAT, B 1 84.
28 Directory to Bonaparte, 3 February 1797, in ibid., 4:787.
Sambre and Meuse Army, occupies a part of the enemy in Franconia and will besiege the places on the Rhine.”29 Thus, the Directory emphasized the importance of recovering geographic objectives on the Rhine rather than defeating the enemy army or capturing Vienna. Understandably, Bonaparte viewed these measures as unsatisfactory. Based on his understanding of war, the two armies on the Rhine should form a single army of 120,000 troops to overwhelm all Austrian resistance and then march on Vienna. Instead, the Directory’s evolving plans meant that he could only expect 60,000 French troops to march from the Rhine to the Danube to support his offensive.30

Even before he departed Paris for his headquarters, Hoche wrote to the Directory on 2 February to request a concrete plan of operations as well as its insight on other vital considerations:

It is very important that I know, in a positive manner, how I should conduct myself toward the German princes whether allied, neutral, or enemy; for what price must I conclude a suspension of hostilities with the latter; the precise line of demarcation I must observe; what contributions can be raised on the other side of the Rhine; and finally, what are the intentions of the government concerning the opening of the campaign and the nature of operations.31

While promising Bonaparte support from the Rhine, the Directory failed to properly inform Hoche of its intentions, allowing the general to view the fall of Mantua as an opportunity to allow the troops on the Rhine to continue to rest, recover, and prepare for a future offensive.32

On 13 February, the Directory responded to Hoche’s 2 February request for information. They tasked him with restoring discipline and professionalism in the Sambre and Meuse Army by repairing the administrative problems and improving instruction and

29 Directory to Bonaparte, Paris, 12 February 1797, quoted in Longy, La campagne de 1797, 186.
30 Ibid., 187.
31 Hoche to Directory, Paris, 2 February 1797, SHAT, B1 84.
32 Longy, La campagne de 1797, 188; Phipps, in Armies of the First French Republic, 2:417, comments that “it is very uncertain what plan, if any the Directory had adopted for the coming campaign. Bonaparte believed that the three armies . . . were to march simultaneously on Vienna. It was important to press the Austrians before they could send troops from the Rhine to Italy. . . . The Directory, however, had no idea of supporting him at once, and put no pressure on Moreau [or Hoche], who did not intend to move till he considered his army was ready.”
training. Instead of urging an immediate offensive, the Directory advised Hoche and Moreau to “establish dispositions for the defensive until the moment to cross the Rhine has arrived.” While the Directory ordered both generals to expedite preparations, it left the timetable open. Nonetheless, based on the departure of Archduke Charles for Italy, it did not anticipate serious resistance on the Rhine: “the passage of that river, which can now be made much easier, must be executed within this epoch.” As a possible plan of operations, the Directory abandoned the idea of a three-army advance toward Vienna and proposed that Moreau – not Hoche – command 70,000 troops in a march down the Danube to combine operations with the Army of Italy. Meanwhile, Hoche would distract the Austrians on the Lower Rhine and force them to leave garrisons in the Rhine fortresses, which the Sambre and Meuse Army would besiege while providing rear-security for Moreau.33

The Directory’s failure to establish firm starting dates for operations unraveled this campaign plan. Although tasked by the Directory with the primary advance from Germany, Moreau never prepared for offensive operations and viewed them as untenable for the Rhine and Moselle Army. In contrast, he believed that the Sambre and Meuse Army, which had been inactive since September 1796, should be the primary offensive force.34 On 17 February, he reported on the condition of that army and remarked on the bravery of its troops, even commenting on their satisfactory material condition: “The Army of the Sambre and Meuse, standing at 50,000 troops, is in a good state; it is well disciplined, has profound courage, and is commanded by experienced chefs who are trusted by the men. Its personnel leaves nothing to be desired. The artillery is in the best state.” Moreau believed that reinforcements from the Army of the North could raise the army to 80,000 men for the campaign: “I regard its success as certain,” he stated. “It will have to bear the effort of the

33 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 13 February 1797, SHAT, B1 84.
34 Longy, *La campagne de 1797*, 190-191
campaign, if the Army of the Rhine and Moselle does not cross the Rhine.” Moreau did not think he could resume operations for at least two months: “We lack horses for the artillery and I do not think I can form a battery of more than 50 cannon. We must possess the means of crossing the Rhine before we can open the campaign.”35 Finally, Moreau commented on the need for a new administration of the lands occupied by the Sambre and Meuse Army. Writing to Hoche, he guaranteed the army’s success in offensive operations as long as administrative issues did not interfere.36

Like Jourdan in previous campaigns, Moreau referenced logistical weakness as the primary reason for his army’s inability to participate in offensive operations. On 25 February, he wrote an extensive report that compared the two armies on the Rhine. He stated that Reynier and Desaix commented almost daily on the poor condition of the Rhine and Moselle Army: “no means exist to concentrate the army; the soldiers are not paid; the funds for establishing our bridges and artillery equipment do not exist, making it impossible for us to act.” Moreau understood that both French armies needed to cross the Rhine to gain maximum benefit: “The Sambre and Meuse Army can do nothing of interest if we do not cross the Rhine; but also, when we cross the Rhine, we will draw the enemy against us; the experience of the two previous campaigns should convince you of that.” Thus, he did not favor an offensive with his own army. He noted that the Sambre and Meuse Army could possess as many as 80,000 troops while he could field 50,000 at most. The need to besiege Mainz and Ehrenbreitstein would leave the Sambre and Meuse Army with 50,000 troops for offensive operations while he would only possess a 40,000-man field army after garrisoning Landau and Strasbourg and leaving a force to cover Mannheim and Philippsburg. “It is up to you, citizen Directors, to judge if the Army of the Rhine and Moselle can bear the effort of the

35 Moreau to Directory, Köln, 13 February 1797, SHAT, B2 164.
36 Moreau to Hoche, Köln, 13 February 1797, SHAT, B2 164.
enemy with those forces. . . . Do not doubt that when we cross the Rhine, the enemy will leave minimal forces on the Main to prevent us from entering Swabia.”

On the same day that Moreau penned these thoughts for the Directory, Hoche arrived at Koblenz and met with him and Championnet for an interview. Based on first impressions, Hoche found Moreau “enchanting” while he knew Championnet as a friend from the Army of the Moselle in 1793. Unlike Moreau, Hoche believed that the French must soon commence operations on the Rhine. In his view, Bonaparte would suffer a “crushing defeat” if they remained passive in the German theater. Hoche argued that a combined offensive would force Vienna to accept “a solid and prompt peace.”

On 27 February, the Directory finally issued orders for Hoche and Moreau that established a clear timetable and instructed Moreau to commence operations with the Rhine and Moselle Army by late March or early April – nearly a one-month delay from Carnot’s original plan. To Hoche, the Directory stressed the need to cross the Rhine in mid-March with his left-wing and center at Düsseldorf and Neuwied, respectively. His right wing would maintain security in the Hunsrück. After defeating the Austrian defenders in a battle on the right bank, the Directory sought for Hoche to advance toward the Lahn, drawing the enemy’s attention from the Upper Rhine to facilitate Moreau’s advance. The Directory optimistically concluded that “it is at that moment that you must employ all of the art of war to coordinate with General Moreau to achieve a decisive battle and to establish secure communication between the Army of the Sambre and Meuse and the Army of the Rhine and Moselle.”

At this point, the Directory’s desire to control space on the Rhine rather than defeat the main Austrian army or capture Vienna became clear. As it explained to Hoche: “Once the Lahn and the Neckar are free and you have won the campaign, you must pursue the sieges of

38 Hoche to Minister of War, Koblenz, 26 February 1797, SHAT, B1 84.
40 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 27 February 1797, SHAT, B1 84.
Ehrenbreitstein, Mainz, and Mannheim, the taking of which will be confided to you, while General Moreau will continue to act offensively, depending on circumstances and the success of the Army of Italy.” Thus, the Directory abandoned the idea of two massive armies advancing through the German theater toward Vienna. Instead, it chose Hoche’s army to remain behind to increase French control of the Rhine fortresses, which would bolster the French position in the event of an eventual peace conference.41

Neither Hoche nor Moreau proved able to operate according to the Directory’s timetable. Hoche received the Directory’s 27 February orders and immediately expressed lingering doubts to Moreau. Moreau related to the Directory on 5 March that both he and Hoche desired to execute their orders promptly yet numerous obstacles prevented them from opening operations by 20 March. In fact, Moreau stated that Hoche could not start the offensive until 4 April at the earliest. Moreau did not believe that the Rhine and Moselle Army could cross the Rhine even by that date, noting that “we must assemble our bridges or our operations on the Rhine will be entirely destroyed.” Attempting to mask his reservations, Moreau concluded his 5 March letter by reassuring the Directory that both he and Hoche sought to wage a “happily successful campaign” based on cooperation and coordination of operations – traits that sorely lacked in the preceding campaigns on the Rhine.42 After stressing the inadequacies of his army, he subsequently received the Directory’s authorization to return to Paris to gather supplies and money. Accordingly, the Rhine and Moselle Army stood without its commander during the most important preparations for the campaign. More important, Moreau’s absence afforded Hoche the most prominent position on the Rhine, despite the fact that the Directory intended for Moreau to conduct the main offensive toward Vienna.

41 Ibid. For another perspective on this correspondence, see Longy, *La campagne de 1797*, 191-4.
42 Moreau to the Directory, Köln, 5 March 1797, SHAT, B3 164.
Ambitious by nature, Hoche viewed the situation as an opportunity to achieve fame such as that attained by General Bonaparte. The Directory intentionally cultivated rivalries between armies and generals in order to inspire superior performance. Demonstrating his assumption of power, Hoche insisted on the transfer of two divisions from the Army of the North to his command. After the commander of one of the divisions, General Tilly, demanded the approval of the provisional army commander, General Pierre Dejean, Hoche bluntly informed the Directory that he did not need such authorization and viewed the resistance as detrimental to his mission. In addition, Hoche understood his need to control both banks of the Rhine to rejuvenate his army. As he wrote to the Directory, “it is up to me to procure the money, the horses, and the other objects of which the army has such a great need.” Hoche emphasized his role in gathering these supplies because he questioned the efficiency of the previous year’s system. In fact, he informed the Directory that his army’s penury resulted entirely from dishonest administrators and suppliers. He blamed these agents for the delay in the opening of operations and regretfully informed the Directory that he could not cross the Rhine until sometime between 30 March and 5 April.

As Hoche’s 7 March report explained, the continued poor administration and lack of clarity in occupation policy contributed to difficulties in preparing the Sambre and Meuse Army for the campaign. On 23 January 1797, the Directory replaced Pruneau as Director-General of the Moselle-Rhine territory with J. B. Holtz. The new director-general attributed the suffering of French troops to the wretched administration. Holtz did not view a successful French administration as possible and suggested to the Directory that it consider appointing Germans. After Hoche received command of the Sambre and Meuse Army, Reubell

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43 Hoche to the Directory, Köln, 5 March 1797, SHAT, B1 85. Subsequently, the Directory revoked this order after a misunderstanding arose concerning Hoche’s intention to use the force to defend the Hunsrück. After Hoche clarified that the troops would defend Düsseldorf, the Directory and Dejean consented to their utilization by Hoche.
44 Hoche to the Directory, Köln, 7 March 1797, SHAT, B1 85.
45 Hansen, Quellen, 3:878.
contemplated appointing him as the chief administrator of the region. General Lefebvre
denunciated the former-commissar Alexandre and stated that only the army could furnish the
needs of the troops through military exploitation. Hoche informed the war minister, Petiet,
on 28 February that the director-generals only caused “misfortune for the armies and the
inhabitants.” The general did not accuse the previous administrators of treason or corruption
but complained of the bureaucratic impediments to efficient exploitation. To streamline the
army’s supply, he revived Holtz’s suggestion that the Directory utilize German
administrators. Hoche thought that his army’s supply commissar could communicate directly
with native administrators in matters relating to provisions and money. He would monitor the
process and ensure that his army benefitted from the region’s resources and wealth. Hoche
alerted the Directory that he would strive to personally ensure that the wealth of the
Rhineland – which he compared to the Spanish mines of Potosi – would not be wasted while
“the defenders of the country go barefoot, lack articles of prime necessity in the hospitals,
and die for want of bouillon or herb tea.”

 Apparently, the Directory genuinely considered Hoche’s proposals and even returned
to the idea of making him responsible for the entire civil administration of the Rhineland. On
15 February, it informed Commissar François Joseph Rudler of the Rhine and Moselle Army
that it sought to eradicate corruption among French administrators by restoring the former
authorities. On 24 February Reubell’s influence led to Hoche receiving overall charge for
the administration of the left bank of the Rhine on both sides of the Moselle. Moreau viewed
Hoche’s powers as a threat because he believed that he should control the region south of the

46 Barras, Mémoires, 2:275; Hansen, Quellen, 3:876.
47 Hoche to Petiet, Köln, 28 February 1797, SHAT, B 1 84.
48 Hoche to Directory, Paris, 2 February 17997, ibid.
49 Hoche to Directory, Köln, 4 March 1797 in Hansen, Quellen, 3:898.
50 Biro, Germany Policy, 2:839.
Moselle. On 23 March, Moreau protested to the Directory and claimed that he would not
abide by Hoche’s direction in his district.51

Given Moreau’s recalcitrance, Hoche never gained substantial power over the left
bank of the Rhine south of the Moselle. Other factors limited his absolute power in the
northern region. The French financial agent, Duramel, informed him that no changes to the
taxation system of the Prussian left bank would be allowed and that he must respect religious
liberty, protect the Hohenzollern administration, and refrain from extracting timber from
those regions. On the other hand, Hoche had nearly complete freedom over the rest of the left
bank.52 Hoche expressed his acceptance of these restrictions and stated that he would make
the conquered territories profitable: “Until now the collections have hardly defrayed the costs
of administration.” In addition, Hoche thought that his administration would improve life for
the Rhenish inhabitants, who would no longer be “so pitilessly pillaged.”53 In March, Hoche
established an Intermediary Commission for the non-Prussian left bank to oversee his
administration. He terminated all currently-existing requisitions and restored prewar tax rates,
which would be paid to French agents with no toleration of privileged exemptions. Finally,
Hoche agreed to allow monks and nuns to fully administer their own properties.54 Hoche
informed Duramel on 20 March that nearly every inhabitant of the Rhineland welcomed these
reforms and that they would allow for the improvement of his army and France in general.55

Yet Hoche did not escape the contradictory impulses encountered by nearly every
French agent sent to the Rhineland during the conquest and occupation: those of improving
the lives of foreigners and furnishing French soldiers. Hoche sincerely sought to reduce the

51 Moreau to Directory, 23 March 1797, SHAT, B2 164.
52 Duramel to Hoche, Paris, 26 February 1797, in Hansen, Quellen, 3:889-91.
53 Hoche to Directory, Köln, 8 March 1797, in ibid., 3:898. Provisional regulations for the Prussian territories
were drafted on 12 March. These regulations would have restored former taxes, laws, customs, magistrates,
chambers of justice, and chambers of finance. In addition, they would have protected the property of clergy.
54 Ibid., 3:901-2.
55 Hoche to Duramel, 20 March 1797, in ibid., 3:915.
weight of French occupation and displayed sensitivity to foreign perceptions of the French: “French commissioners, whose customs, tastes, and usages differ from those of the inhabitants on the banks of the Rhine, disgust the later, by their excesses and false principles, with the French Revolution and republican government.”

Although he initially sympathized with Reubell, Hoche’s experience on the Rhine disabused him of the notion of annexation. On 16 March, he expressed his developing vision to the Intermediary Commission: “Without attempting to make this country a separate republic or new, annexed départements, we should foster the spirit of liberty by all the means in our power.” Hoche believed that a desire for liberty was spreading at Köln and Aachen, where he ordered the disbursement of publications encouraging republican ideas. Still, as Hoche well understood, his army could not survive without being fed by the same population. Not only did he impose a series of new requisitions to replace the ones he abolished, he instituted a system of timber extraction from the protected forests of the German princes to “indemnify the Republic for the expenses of such a long war.” Furthermore, Hoche confiscated émigré property and insisted that Rhenish tax revenue fund his army.

Rhenish public opinion reflected the contradictory nature of French occupation. According to a member of the Mainz Republican Club, Mathias Metternich, who was captured by the Austrians in 1796, no individual in the Rhineland had viewed French soldiers positively even before the start of war in 1792. Certainly, the experience of conquest and occupation only hardened negative perceptions of the French. While economic and political differences loomed largest of all, the Rhenish public distrusted the French in large measure because of religious differences. Coupled with a desire to defend their farms and gain the pay of the Austrians, fear of de-Christianization constituted a significant motivation for peasant
insurrection against French occupation.\textsuperscript{59} Although many Rhinelanders favored Hoche’s new administration, they expressed discontent with his imposition of new requisitions, which they viewed as contradictions of his previous commitments. In addition, three years of occupation turned the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the left bank against annexation. Because many also feared a return to the Holy Roman Empire, the idea of establishing an independent, Cisrhenan Republic became increasingly popular. Two members of the Intermediary Commission, J. J. Vossen and J. Bouget, ventured to Paris to make an appeal before the Directory in which they advocated for an independent republic. They delivered a confidential note in which they related that the majority of Rhinelanders did not favor annexation to France but desired a separate Cisrhenan Republic.\textsuperscript{60} Support for the Cisrhenan Republic provides concrete evidence for the “emergence of what must certainly be called national consciousness, if not nationalism.”\textsuperscript{61}

The climate of uncertainty in the Rhineland resulted partially from the lack of clarity in the government’s occupation policy, which derived from the disagreement among French politicians concerning the Rhine. In April, Hoche asked for an explanation of the Directory’s intentions with respect to the left bank so he could implement the wisest policy measures. Hoche commented on several possibilities such as a sister republic or annexation and proposed the first option because the people desired it over annexation.\textsuperscript{62} The Directory’s response on 13 April signaled the temporary victory of Carnot over Reubell: “We are satisfied with the direction toward liberty that you have given to the minds of the people. . . . But at this moment they do not appear capable of becoming French by the annexation of their

\textsuperscript{59} Blanning, \textit{French Revolution in Germany}, 207, 223, 247. Blanning states that “apart from Rome itself, there was no part of Europe more profoundly permeated by Catholicism than the Catholic regions of the Rhineland.” In addition, he notes that: “For Catholic and Protestant Rhinelanders alike, religious faith supplied both the occasion and the justification for opposition to the French.”

\textsuperscript{60} Biro, \textit{German Policy}, 2:851-2; Hansen, \textit{Quellen}, 3:1017.

\textsuperscript{61} Blanning, \textit{French Revolution in Germany}, 247. Blanning elaborates: “For while there was no call for a unified [German] nation state, there was plenty of strident opposition to the French deriving from a sense of separate national identity.”

\textsuperscript{62} Hoche to Directory, Köln, 6 April 1797, SHAT, B\textsuperscript{1} 85.
territory to that of the Republic. It is better that they form a separate republic, and it is along these lines that their aspirations toward a new order should be guided.” Signed by Carnot, Barras, and La Révellière-Lépeaux, this letter suggests that Reubell’s influence did not gain complete ascendancy in matters of foreign policy. Yet part of the explanation for the Directory’s 13 April letter includes Napoleon’s preliminary discussion with the Austrians at Leoben. Most likely, the Directors feared disrupting these negotiations by stating full support for annexation. In fact, the letter bought the French time: “Moreover, we do not think that they can form an independent republic for some time.” In addition, they authorized Hoche to introduce “the internal government system of France” but not deprive himself of “the right of conquest” – meaning that requisitions should continue. The Directory cautioned Hoche against granting the Rhinelanders legislative powers because the Rhenish legislators might suffer dire consequences “in case – in the event of peace, whose conditions cannot be foreseen – they should be returned under [Imperial] rule.”

Returning to Hoche’s preparations for the campaign, news of Bonaparte’s renewed offensive against Charles gave the Directory incentive to urge Hoche to operate with speed “to contain in Germany the forces that the enemy might direct toward Italy.” At the same time, the Directory allowed Hoche great authority by confirming his command of the two divisions from the Army of the North that Dejean initially disputed. On 14 March, Hoche ordered that “the army be made ready to resume the course of its glorious work. It is specifically recommend to the officers of all grades to make haste in preparations for the entry into the campaign.” Thus, Bonaparte’s bold advance into Austria spurred Hoche to action. Marching through Frioul into the Austrian heartland, Bonaparte grew increasingly concerned by the lack of news from Paris confirming an offensive across the Rhine. On 17

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63 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 13 April 1797, ibid.; Biro, German Policy, 2:856.
64 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 10 March 1797, SHAT, B1 85.
65 General Order of Sambre and Meuse Army, 14 March 1797, SHAT, B1 301.
March, he stated: “As I advance into Germany, I am found facing more and more of the enemy. You must order the passage of the Rhine, because it is impossible that I can face all enemy forces with only 50,000 men.” Moreover, Bonaparte viewed a dramatic thrust over the Rhine as likely to achieve a major success: “If the armies of the Rhine promptly cross, the emperor is lost. The last campaign ruined his resources. . . . Order the armies on the Rhine to cross and the peace is ours.”\(^66\) Comfortably ensconced at Paris, Moreau repeated his refusal to act until he found his army adequately prepared with supplies and funds: “I have no horses, artillery, bridges, food, ambulances, or money. . . . I have decided I will not fire a musket until I possess at least the chance of success.”\(^67\) Hoping they commanded a bolder servant in Hoche, the Directory on 21 March described Bonaparte’s success as “giving to the other armies of the Republic the sign of victory.” The Directory informed Hoche that even if Moreau could not advance he could singularly throw 60,000 troops from the Sambre and Meuse Army on the right bank of the Rhine to prevent the Austrians from reinforcing the Tyrol and Frioul.\(^68\)

Despite wavering over specifics, during the entire period of preparation the Directory’s fundamental strategy for the armies on the Rhine never changed. Primarily, it aimed to use operations in Germany to keep Austria from sending reinforcements to Italy. As a secondary objective, the French hoped to expand their power over the Rhine strongholds—mainly Mainz, Mannheim, and Ehrenbreitstein— to gain leverage at the peace table. Even if the French captured Vienna, they would struggle to attain Austrian acceptance of French possession of the left bank unless they controlled these positions. On 4 April, the Directory expressed these thoughts to Hoche. Desperate for some movement on the Rhine and tired of delays, the Directory again urged a “commencement of operations, which will convince the

\(^{66}\) Bonaparte to Directory, Valvasone, 17 March 1797, in CG, no. 1455.  
\(^{67}\) Quoted in Longy, *La campagne de 1797*, 85.  
\(^{68}\) Directory to Hoche, Paris, 21 March 1797, SHAT, B1 85.
enemy that our intention is not to remain in a defensive state on the Rhine.”

Probably exaggerating, Bonaparte warned the Directory that he would be forced to withdraw to Italy “if the armies on the Rhine delay the resumption of the offensive.” In the eyes of the Directory and Bonaparte, the successful conclusion of the Franco-Austrian war and the signing of a glorious and lasting peace depended on the Rhine armies at least making a display of force if not actually achieving a decisive victory.

Hoche attributed his delays to ongoing problems of army organization, specifically the controversy with Dejean over the two divisions from the Army of the North. In addition, he noted that a clothing convoy shipped up the Rhine failed to arrive on time. Nonetheless, he informed the Directory that he could probably commence operations between 11 and 13 April. He requested that the executives shift to his command the divisions of the Rhine and Moselle Army’s left wing, which he would utilize to defend the Hunsrück. That move would allow Hoche to advance with considerable forces. After besieging Ehrenbreitstein and Mainz with the Army of the North’s divisions, Hoche could continue the offensive while Moreau would hopefully cross the Rhine with boats that Hoche agreed to construct for him from Belgian timber. Usurping Moreau’s role, he stated that he would personally “lead the army to the Danube.” In this manner, Hoche reversed the Directory’s plan for him to besiege the Rhine fortresses while Moreau advanced toward Vienna – a streak of initiative that rivalled General Bonaparte’s famous penchant for writing his own orders.

Based on the need for action on the Rhine, the Directory did not hesitate in supporting Hoche’s new plan despite the fact that doing so legitimized the general’s distortion of civil-military relations. Amid the rapid development of events, the Directory could not passively reflect on the unintended and unforeseen consequences of these actions. On 25 March,

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69 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 4 April 1797, SHAT, B 1 85.
70 Bonaparte to Carnot, Goritz, 25 March 1797, in CG, no. 1475.
71 Hoche to the Directory, Köln, 9 April 1797, SHAT, B 1 85.
Bonaparte wrote that he had “no doubt that the majority of the emperor’s forces on the Rhine have already turned against us.” Accordingly, the Directory told Hoche on 8 April, before receiving his 9 April letter, that:

The general movement arising from the enemy does not permit us, Citizen General, to remain any longer in a state of inaction on the Rhine. The interest of the Army of Italy and that of the campaign that it must render decisive at all cost are evidently at risk from a rapid and formidable eruption on the right bank of the river. Our intention is that since you are in command in the field you will launch the operation. Your success is certain with the means at your disposal, and your goal, based on the nature of your advantages, is to strike directly on the Danube, and to establish communication with General Bonaparte and to act in concert with him.

The Directory believed that Hoche would face only 50,000 Austrians on the right bank and that he could direct as many as 60,000 troops against them. Although Moreau remained at Paris, the Directory ordered Desaix to have troops from the Rhine and Moselle Army to defend Hoche’s right flank in the Hunsrück. The government devised these new orders based on illusionary fears of an Austrian assault on the left bank of the Rhine: “The security of our frontier départements demands precaution and must not be compromised to avoid the most disastrous effects.” Similarly, the Directory emphasized the importance of capturing Ehrenbreitstein, Mainz, and Mannheim as quickly as possible to preempt an Austrian offensive, which it still considered possible this late into the war. Demonstrating a complete inability to learn the fundamental lesson of the previous Rhine campaigns, the Directory expected that the French could “live at the enemy’s expense” by establishing a new theater of war on the right bank.

The unravelling of this plan reflects the growing rivalry between French generals and armies at the end of the War of the First Coalition. The Directory’s 8 April plan tasked Hoche with the primary duty in the upcoming campaign. Still at Paris, Moreau received reports from

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72 Bonaparte to Carnot, Goritz, 25 March 1797, in CG, no. 1475.
73 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 8 April 1797, SHAT, B1 85.
74 Ibid.
the Directory indicating that Hoche’s army would lead an offensive over the Rhine since his own army remained incapacitated. Holding provisional command of the Rhine and Moselle Army and striving to rehabilitate his force to execute the Directory’s orders, Desaix became furious on receiving new orders relegating him to a secondary mission. In his view, Hoche’s triumph would be an embarrassment for the “brave Army of the Rhine.” Desaix and Reynier called on Moreau to take command of the army to reverse the Directory’s decision. Both generals informed Moreau that they thought an offensive would be possible “with a great effort.” On 12 April, Moreau, apparently moved by his subordinate’s confidence in him, informed the Directory that he would return to Strasbourg and that he hoped to cross the Rhine immediately after his arrival. The next day, the Directory informed Hoche of Moreau’s return and cancelled the 8 April orders. Based on the new plan, Moreau would cross the Rhine no later than 20 April in an operation designed to “approach by his [Moreau’s] right the left of General Bonaparte and favor the operations of the Army of Italy.” Instead of advancing toward the Danube, Hoche would simply cover the Main while besieging the Rhine fortresses.

Ultimately, Bonaparte’s success spurred Hoche to action in a manner that left Moreau in a position of secondary importance. On 13 April, Hoche received a note from Latour that announced the beginning of armistice negotiations between Bonaparte and Archduke Charles. Although Bonaparte constantly complained about the dangers he faced resulting from the stalemate on the Rhine and his own army’s strategic consumption, his bold spring offensive placed the Austrians in an equally unenviable position. The partial collapse of Archduke Charles’s forces seemed likely to end the campaign – and possibly the war – on Bonaparte’s terms and without any support from either of the Rhine armies. Resenting the passivity of

75 Longy, La campagne de 1797, 226-30.
76 Moreau to Directory, Paris, 12 April 1797, SHAT, B² 164.
77 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 13 April 1797, SHAT, B¹ 85.
Hoche and Moreau, Bonaparte proposed an armistice to Archduke Charles on 31 March after defeating him at the 29 March Battle of Neumark.\textsuperscript{78} On 6 April, Austrian delegates arrived at Bonaparte’s Leoben headquarters – only seventy-five miles from Vienna – to discuss terms.\textsuperscript{79}

Bonaparte resorted to negotiations because he believed that no support would be forthcoming from the Rhine despite the Directory’s repeated assurances. On 16 April, he expressed his frustration over Hoche and Moreau: “When a campaign begins with good will, nothing can defeat it, and never, in the history of our military operations, has a river been a real obstacle.”\textsuperscript{80} Yet the Directory truly intended to justify their assurances to Bonaparte and instructed Hoche on 17 April to advance east as far as Rednitz and Donauwörth, where he could threaten Bavaria and even approach the Bohemian frontier if necessary. Moreover, it urged him to capture Ehrenbreitstein and Mainz while plundering the abandoned Austrian magazines. As Hoche possessed a larger army than Moreau, the Directory ordered him to send the latter 12,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry as soon as the Rhine and Moselle Army entered Bavaria.\textsuperscript{81}

While the French prepared for the Rhine campaign after Bonaparte’s offensive and negotiations made victory over Austria appear certain, the Austrians attempted to impede French success on the Rhine to salvage some of their negotiating power. The Austrians knew of Hoche’s preparations to assail their right flank on the Rhine. Commanding Austrian forces at Neuwied, Kray tried to delay Hoche’s attack through further armistice discussions. Kray’s written appeals followed a 24 March interview in which he implored his French counterpart to prevent needless bloodshed. The French and Austrians on the Rhine, Kray argued, should allow events in Italy to unfold before sacrificing themselves over petty concerns.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{78} Bonaparte to Charles, Klagenfurt, 31 March 1797, in CG, no. 1484.
\textsuperscript{79} Bonaparte to Directory, Judenburg, 8 April 1797, in CG, no. 1495; Dwyer, Napoleon, 283-5.
\textsuperscript{80} Bonaparte to Directory, Leoben, 16 April 1797, in CG, no.1512; Longy, La campagne de 1797, 265.
\textsuperscript{81} Directory to Hoche, Paris, 17 April, SHAT, B1 85.
\textsuperscript{82} Longy, La campagne de 1797, 266-7.
April, Kray offered to neutralize the city of Neuwied to spare the population from the horrors of war. Nine days later, Kray received news of Bonaparte’s negotiations with Charles, which prompted him to propose that French and Austrian officers vow to refuse to fight one another.\textsuperscript{83} Hoche agreed to meet with Kray on 18 April to discuss a line of demarcation between their armies but imposed an unacceptable condition: that the French would occupy all the land between the Lahn and the Sieg and that the Austrians would immediately surrender Ehrenbreitstein.\textsuperscript{84}

Hoche insisted on these conditions because he had already implemented orders to commence hostilities. On 15 April, he issued secret instructions for the Sambre and Meuse Army to “march against the enemy on the morning of 17 April.” Hoche’s orders ringed with justifiable optimism considering that he led 70,000 troops against Kray’s mere 30,000 poorly-motivated Austrians, whom he had dispersed in the immediate vicinity of Neuwied. Hoche determined to force the reluctant Austrians to fight a battle on the right bank, not because the war or the fate of the Rhine necessarily depended on it but because he could not allow Bonaparte to conclude terms without gaining his own victory.\textsuperscript{85}

The campaign that followed proved Austria’s weakness on the Rhine more than France’s strength. Hoche used the brief campaign to bolster his reputation. Between 15 and 17 April, the Sambre and Meuse Army made preparatory movements that succeeded in gaining the desired positions on the right bank of the Rhine. By the 18\textsuperscript{th}, Hoche possessed a

\textsuperscript{83} Copies of Kray’s correspondence are in SHAT, B’ 85.
\textsuperscript{84} Longy, \textit{La campagne de 1797}, 268.
\textsuperscript{85} General Orders, 17 April 1797, SHAT, B’ 85. Championnet would direct elements of the army’s left wing across the Wupper River at 3:00 AM on the 17\textsuperscript{th} and then proceed fifteen-miles south toward the Sieg. The rest of Championnet’s forces would advance on the 18\textsuperscript{th}, crossing the Sieg at Meindorf and proceeding five-miles southeast to Uckerath. To support Championnet, Legrand would advance northeast on Uckerath from Andernach. Simultaneously on the 18\textsuperscript{th}, Hoche would direct five divisions across the Rhine at Neuwied. Lefebvre would lead the right wing five-miles west from Neuwied to Bendorf and Montabaur. He would then advance seven-miles southwest to Limburg and cross the Lahn at Runkel. General François Watrin would lead his division five-miles south from Neuwied to Vallendar. After attacking the Austrians “with great vigor,” Watrin would surround Ehrenbreitstein. Grenier’s division would constitute Hoche’s center and cross the Rhine ten-miles north of Neuwied at Bad Breisig by the 20\textsuperscript{th}, heading ten-miles west toward Dierdorf.
Map 13. Neuwied Campaign
field army of approximately 50,000 troops divided into three divisions and several cavalry units. Kray abandoned Neuwied to join Werneck’s main force but left approximately 8,052 troops to guard the position. On Werneck’s orders, Kray returned to Neuwied at 6:00 AM on the 18th with fewer than 15,000 troops. Two hours later, Hoche decided to attack the incredibly outnumbered Austrians. The French won the Battle of Neuwied with little difficulty. Although suffering as many as 5,000 casualties, Kray managed to withdrew north toward Dierdorf. Hoche received an opportunity to close the line of retreat for all Austrian forces north of the Lahn by supporting Lefebvre’s march south toward Montabaur. Instead, he used Lefebvre as a pivot and moved the bulk of his army east. While a stronger march south might have captured the Austrian army and the valuable magazine at Frankfurt, Hoche’s operation simply drove the Austrians south on their line of retreat. On 21 April, Werneck reached the safety of the Lahn’s southern bank, having eluded Hoche’s minimal attempt to snare him, which resulted in the capture of General Ney. On the 22nd, Hoche received official French reports that detailed Bonaparte’s signing of the Preliminary Peace of Leoben on the 18th – the same day as the Battle of Neuwied. Consequently, Hoche and Werneck signed an armistice that ended hostilities on the Rhine. The Sambre and Meuse Army observed the Austrians and monitored Mainz and Ehrenbreitstein while assuming the primary role as an occupation force.

Meanwhile, the Directory struggled to actually direct the peace negotiations that would conclude the War of the First Coalition. As noted, Bonaparte assumed the primary role as negotiator at Leoben. Consequently, the terms of the truce reflected his objective to pursue

86 Bulletin historique, April 1797, SHAT, B1 85; Longy, La campagne de 1797, 270-92.
87 Jomini, Histoire critique et militaire, 10:99-100; Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:426.
88 Leading the army’s hussars, Ney pursued Werneck across the Lahn to Steinberg, where Werneck brought forward artillery and cavalry to repulse the French. During the struggle for Steinberg, Ney’s horse fell into a ditch. The unfortunate general was dragged away by the Austrians before his own men even knew of his misfortune. Ney was returned on parole on 6 May, which became formal after the Directory released Generalmajor O’Reilly. See Ney, Memoirs, 222-6.
89 Phipps, Armies of the First French Republic, 2:437.
revolutionary state-building in Italy. Most significant, Bonaparte forced the Austrians to surrender Belgium and their own territories on the left bank of the Rhine but he did not demand that Vienna officially recognize French possession of the entire left bank. Instead, Bonaparte and the Austrians negotiators, Maximilian Friedrich von Merveldt and Marzio Mastrilli, Marquis of Gallo, agreed that a subsequent congress at Rastatt would resolve the Rhine dispute between France and the Holy Roman Empire. Bonaparte gained Austria’s agreement to surrender Lombardy and to recognize the Cisalpine Republic while he compensated Vienna with the Republic of Venetia. Bonaparte’s program exacerbated divisions within the Directory. Although upset by Bonaparte’s willingness to ignore the Directory’s orders, Carnot generally approved of Leoben because he thought the Austrians received sufficient compensation to accept the increase of French territory and strength. Yet the Leoben agreement completely upset Reubell’s plans, which consisted primarily of dictating a “glorious peace” that included French annexation of the entire left bank of the Rhine. The other four Directors outvoted Reubell to accept the truce after Bonaparte stressed the provisional nature of the agreement. On Reubell’s urging, the Directory issued instructions to strengthen the French position to include the acquisition of the entire left bank, the complete Austrian evacuation of the right bank, and the permanent French occupation of Mainz.

Nonetheless, the Preliminary Peace of Leoben achieved one of the French government’s main foreign policy goals: the complete isolation of Britain. In the summer of 1797, the British confronted the reality that their basic continental policy had failed. The

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90 The text of the treaty is printed in De Clercq, Traité, 1:319-22; for background details, see Schroeder, Transformation of European Politics, 166; Guyot, Le Directoire, 312-7; Biro, German Policy, 2:704-29; Roider, Thugut, 229-48.
91 Reinhard, Carnot, 2:221.
92 In Reubell, 136, Homan states that he “opposed the treaty because Austria had not agreed to the transfer of the Rhineland to France.” For further corroboration of Reubell’s opposition to the treaty, see Barras, Mémoires, 2:485; La Révellière-Lépeaux, Mémoires, 2:67-8.
93 Biro, German Policy, 2:727-8.
94 Schroeder, Transformation of European Politics, 168.
death of Catherine the Great and the rise of Tsar Paul I meant that Russia could not be expected to join the war against France at present because the new ruler initially hoped to avoid involvement in foreign conflicts. The Franco-Austrian peace signed at Leoben removed Britain’s most important continental ally from the war. Although Britain had gained French and Dutch colonies in the West Indies, British forces suffered high casualties due to tropical diseases and faced a series of naval mutinies. In addition, war took a domestic toll in the form of economic instability, radical agitation, and unrest in Ireland. Accordingly, Pitt attempted a second round of peace negotiations at Lille that commenced in June with Malmesbury’s return to France. The new French foreign minister, Talleyrand, genuinely desired peace with Britain but could not ignore the demands of the Directory. Initially, the French insisted that the British return all colonial conquests in addition to recognizing French territorial gains in Europe. These demands nearly forced the British to withdraw from negotiations. Talleyrand intervened and convinced Malmesbury that he would strive for moderated terms. In general, Talleyrand’s failure to moderate French terms demonstrated the power of Reubell and the advocates of a glorious peace. Furthermore, the breakup of the Second Lille Conference illustrates that France and Britain found no real reason to make peace: “Britain’s current problems, serious though not crippling, made many Britons want to end this particular war, but not the long-term struggle with France. . . . The [French] government was winning the war, not losing it, and internal troubles pushed it more toward war than peace.”

Returning to Hoche, the conclusion of hostilities allowed him to reconsider the situation on the left bank of the Rhine. With the war ending, Hoche played a key role in

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determining the fate of the Rhineland. Although he supported Bouget’s plan to petition the
Directory to create a Cisrhenan Republic, several factors caused tension between Hoche and
the inhabitants. Most important, Hoche imposed a contribution of 12,000,000 francs on the
lands under his administration to be paid in the form of indirect taxes within one month of 14
April. The regency council of Bonn, a municipal body of local governing authorities,
immediately protested, along with Köln and Aachen, and informed the Intermediary
Commission that the region could not be expected to pay because of its exhaustion.98 On 13
May, Hoche authorized harsh action against the cities and towns that refused to pay the
allotments of the contribution.99 The merchants of Köln, whose wealth declined as a result of
suspended river commerce, stated bluntly that they would not pay the French and pleaded
directly to Hoche for relief. Hoche explained that he could not in fairness reduce Köln’s
allotment without lowering that of others.100 On 1 June, Hoche travelled to Bonn to “effect
improvements in the administration of the conquered territory and to observe what is going
on around me.”101 He watched French soldiers forcibly enter the homes of local officials to
induce inhabitants to pay the contributions.102 These actions bothered him because he
remained committed to the establishment of an independent republic, and informed the
Directory that he would “be little surprised to see a political movement in favor of liberty
appear.”103 To support this process, Hoche established a fund for the Intermediary
Commission to allow it to finance groups and newspapers that favored a republican
government.104

98 Hoche to Intermediary Commission, Koblenz, 14 April 1797, in Hansen, Quellen, 3:947.
99 Hansen, Quellen, 3:990.
100 Biro, German Policy, 2:848.
101 Hoche to Directory, Bonn, 4 June 1797, SHAT, B1 86.
102 Hansen, Quellen, 3:996-7; Biro, German Policy, 2:854.
103 Hoche to Directory, Bonn, 4 June 1797, SHAT, B1 86.
104 Hansen, Quellen, 3:999.
While supporting the Cisrhenan Republic, Hoche sought to control the movement and
attempted to restrain Rhinelanders who displayed abundant initiative. Thus, he did not
courage Bouget to actually present the proposal to the Directory in person. Instead, Hoche
met with authorities from the regency council at Bonn on 10 June. He accused them of
having written to Paris to criticize him for corruption in his capacity as civil administrator.
After threatening to send them to Paris for imprisonment, Hoche requested the details of
Bouget’s plan to speak before the Directory. He terminated the meeting angrily after learning
that Bouget – whom he had never met – was not present. Although taking a hard approach at
the 10 June meeting, Hoche subsequently overturned the system of indirect taxation, stating
that the imposition “was very onerous for the country and for the public treasury.” Hoche’s
new plan increased the total contribution to 12,000,000 francs, but allowed local officials to
collect the funds, the burden of which would be distributed in a fair manner. In addition,
Hoche personally met with local officials to make further agreements. At Köln, he consented
to reducing the 847,220 franc allotment for the city to three payments of 240,000 francs and
guaranteeing that the inhabitants would not be required to provide French troops with
additional provisions.105

Hoche’s efforts to create a Cisrhenan Republic became extremely complicated
because the Rhineland republicans did not agree over this course of action. While he
primarily interacted with individuals at Bonn such as Bouget who favored a separate state,
two significant groups formed to advocate for annexation. Republicans at Koblenz feared that
the Preliminaries of Leoben signaled a movement to restore the Holy Roman Empire in its
entirety. Led by Johann Joseph von Görres, this group revived the arguments of Clootz and
other natural frontier theorists. Görres asserted that Nature had awarded the Rhine boundary
to France, which wanted to transform the map of Europe from a system of monarchy to a

105 Hansen, Quellen, 3:1003, 1007-8; Biro, German Policy, 2:858, 861.
constellation of republics. Further south on the Rhine, a group of Mainz radicals led by the philosopher, Andreas Joseph Hofmann, contacted Delacroix and Reubell to express their desire for annexation. In June, Merlin de Thionville introduced a delegation from Mainz to Reubell, who advised them to collect signatures on a petition in favor of annexation. The deputation returned and immediately deployed agents to collect signatures. For its part, the Intermediary Commission supported the Bonn movement to establish a dependent Cisrhenan Republic.

At this point, Hoche became distracted by matters of larger significance that proved relevant to developments in the Rhineland. On 20 May, he had met with an Irish rebel, Edward Joseph Lewines, who sought the general’s support for a new expedition to liberate Ireland. Hoche informed the Directory of Lewines’ visit and proposition, which initially drew a favorable response. In reality, the negotiations with the British at Lille left the Directory uncommitted to launching another Ireland Expedition. Yet Reubell viewed Hoche’s proposal as a useful opportunity to orchestrate a political scheme. On 29 June, he met with Barras and La Révelliére-Lépeaux and agreed to form an official “triumvirate” to rescue the Republic from Royalist conspirators. The triumvirs decided to use the army to purge the legislature of Royalists and chose Hoche as a general more controllable than Bonaparte. Hoche received orders to march around 10,000 troops from the Sambre and Meuse Army to Paris, from where they would purportedly depart for Brest to prepare for the Ireland Expedition. The general selected the division of General Louis Lemoine and the chasseurs

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106 Hansen, *Quellen*, 3:963-5. Görres was editor of *Das Rothe Blatt* and regularly complained about the extent of French exploitation of the Rhineland. Nonetheless, Görres viewed the prospect of French annexation as a better alternative to continued military occupation and exploitation. As a republican, Görres became disillusioned with the French after Napoleon’s seizure of power. See Blanning, *French Revolution in Germany*, 105.
109 Directory to Hoche, Paris, 9 June 1797, SHAT, B1 86.
of General Antoine Richepanse for the “expedition” and issued orders for their departure on 1 July.\footnote{General Orders, 1 July 1797, SHAT, B1 87.} Carnot attempted to subvert this movement by denouncing the triumvirs before the Council of 500 and calling on Pichegru to take command of all forces in Paris. On 17 July, Barras brought forward secretly withheld evidence of Pichegru’s treasonous activities during the 1795 campaign, which undercut Carnot’s attack.\footnote{Reinhard, Carnot, 2:233-6.} The triumvirs removed Petiet as minister of war and replaced him with Hoche, but not before the outgoing minister informed Paris of Hoche’s orders to send troops to the capital. On 18 July, the Council of 500 learned that the troops had already made camp within sixty miles of the capital in violation of a constitutional provision that forbade troops within that distance.\footnote{Le Moniteur, 22 July 1797, 28:747.}

As it turned out, this first tentative coup attempt occurred in an amateur fashion. On 20 July, Hoche, who had just celebrated his twenty-ninth birthday, admitted that he could not become minister of war because of his insufficient age.\footnote{Born on 24 June 1768, Hoche was fourteen months older than Napoleon.} Barras cowered at the last minute and claimed that Hoche had sent the troops within the constitutional perimeters of Paris on his own initiative.\footnote{D’Orano, Hoche, 327-8.} Moreover, the Council of 500 uncovered evidence that Hoche had brought with him approximately 600,000 francs from the Sambre and Meuse Army’s treasury to support the conspiracy, a fact that Barras subsequently confirmed.\footnote{Barras, Mémoires, 2:497-8.} Disgusted by the treatment he received at the hands of French politicians, Hoche left Paris and returned to the Rhine, while his troops remained in the vicinity of the capital. Barras and the other triumvirs then communicated their intentions to Bonaparte, who had remained in Italy after the signing of the Peace of Leoben. Bonaparte promptly dispatched General Charles-Pierre Augereau to Paris to ensure that his interests were represented. Augereau reached the French capital on 8

\begin{footnotes}
\item[112] General Orders, 1 July 1797, SHAT, B1 87.
\item[113] Reinhard, Carnot, 2:233-6.
\item[114] Le Moniteur, 22 July 1797, 28:747.
\item[115] Born on 24 June 1768, Hoche was fourteen months older than Napoleon.
\item[116] D’Orano, Hoche, 327-8.
\item[117] Barras, Mémoires, 2:497-8.
\end{footnotes}
August; Barras handed him command of the military division of Paris as well as the 10,000 troops from the Sambre and Meuse Army.\textsuperscript{118}

After returning to the Rhine, Hoche responded to the aborted coup attempt by increasing his control over the army and the Rhineland, stating that he “refused to play Don Quixote on the seas for the pleasure of some who would like to see me at the bottom.”\textsuperscript{119} To bolster his position, he assumed full jurisdiction over the Rhineland’s financial administration. Although the finance ministry mandated that Hoche cede all collected sums to the army supply commissar and paymaster-general, the general refused to comply and used the money as a personal account. After the paymaster-general complained to the Intermediary Commission, Hoche declared himself chief civil administrator and the only person responsible for issuing orders on finances or any other matter.\textsuperscript{120} In addition, Hoche coopted the drive to collect signatures on a petition that called for either a separate Cisrhenan Republic or annexation by France. The text of Metternich’s “Summons to the Inhabitants of the Left Bank of the Rhine” left the option to the Rhenish public: “There is no other way to free yourselves from all present and future hardships, perhaps and even probably from the present contributions, than to join with the French nation, either to be united therewith or to form a separate republic.”\textsuperscript{121} After reading a French translation of this document at Wetzlar, Hoche instructed the Intermediary Commission to “urge the author to continue to explain to his fellow citizens their veritable interests. . . . There is no military authority in the army which will not support you.” Yet Hoche clearly favored the concept of a Cisrhenan Republic over annexation: “Make for us a glorious and worthy republic which cleanses us of the princes of Germany and diminishes their power to the extent that it increases our own.”\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{118} Lefebvre, \textit{The Directory}, 98.
\textsuperscript{119} Hoche to Shée, 4 August 1797, in Hansen \textit{Quellen}, 3:1090.
\textsuperscript{120} Hansen, \textit{Quellen}, 3:1054; Biro, \textit{German Policy}, 2:871.
\textsuperscript{121} Hansen, \textit{Quellen}, 3:1084.
\textsuperscript{122} Hoche to Shée, Wetzlar, 6 August 1797, in ibid., 3:1089-90.
While concentrating his power over the Rhineland, Hoche sought to ensure his firm control over the Sambre and Meuse Army, which now constituted an occupation rather than a combat force. As his general orders from 1797 make abundantly clear, Hoche demanded a form of professionalism characterized by discipline, subordination, and rationalization. Hoche’s insistence on professionalism marked no dramatic break with the past but his general orders in 1797 stand out as particularly assertive regarding the need for order, discipline, and competency among officers and troops. As Hoche explained in a circular to his divisional commanders: “Instruction and discipline are the bonds of an army; you must work without cease to perfect the one and the other.” Before the Neuwied campaign, Hoche had provided detailed regulations for the use of infantry, artillery, and cavalry in combat. He demanded that officers instruct their soldiers according to these regulations and that they apply them in battle. For example, his regulations recommended that the cavalry never charge in column. Demonstrating that Hoche took regulations seriously, he publically berated the commander of the 16th Dragoon Regiment after he had ordered a charge in column at the Battle of Neuwied and suffered severe losses. On the other hand, Hoche routinely praised and rewarded soldiers who performed effectively in combat. As he stated in a general order: “The general intends that great actions receive the compensations of honor and advancement that they are owed.” Hoche’s orders emphasized professionalism almost exclusively. For example, Colonel François Xavier Roussel of the 60th Demi-Brigade was made General of Brigade after a combat at Herborn for the “brave and distinguished manner” in which he led his troops.123

Not only did Hoche’s insistence on professionalism apply to combat, but he sought to turn the Sambre and Meuse Army into an effective occupation force. To reduce the likelihood of pillage, Hoche personally assumed responsibility for ensuring that resources found their

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123 For the above, see general orders of the Sambre and Meuse Army from 21, 27, and 29 April 1797, SHAT, B 1 301.
way to the troops, taking over a duty formerly executed by civilian administrators. In addition, Hoche reinstated regular pay for the soldiers from coinage requisitioned in the Rhineland. While these measures improved the materiel condition of the troops, Hoche demanded compliance with orders and disciplinary codes in return. Hoche understood that pillaging required troops to leave their units and issued orders to keep soldiers and officers at their posts: “the generals of the army must execute the present order very strictly . . . those who are not present with their units or division will be punished.” To improve standards of food distribution, he mandated that officers always supervise the process. If meat could not be distributed properly, Hoche ordered that troops be compensated with cash. A bureaucratic process emerged for the management of Rhineland forests in which colonels would send lists to the Intermediary Commission that included the names of competent but aging soldiers who could serve as gardes forestiers to inspect and defend forests in the conquered lands. Most important, Hoche personally oversaw the army’s military justice system to a greater extent than previous generals. Soldiers accused of stealing from local inhabitants or from army depots received severe punishments: Guillet of the 92nd Demi-Brigade received three years in irons for the crime of stealing coats. More unfortunate, Montoy and Bouilly, apparently the orchestrators of the coat theft, received fifteen years in irons. At the same time, Hoche created professional standards for hospital administration, ordering that all sick and injured be transferred to new hospitals on the left bank of the Rhine.\footnote{See general orders of the Sambre and Meuse Army for 5, 9, 19, 26 April and 7 May 1797, ibid.} In all of these measures, Hoche sought to improve relations between the army and the Rhenish public – even as he maintained contributions and requisitions – to reduce the suffering of his troops by turning a hostile war land into a grateful republic.

Thus, Hoche viewed professionalism as the predominant mindset to inspire among the troops. Historians typically contrast the “Republican” Sambre and Meuse Army with the
“Royalist” Rhine and Moselle Army to explain the different responses of these forces to events in the fall of 1797. Denis Woronoff uses this dichotomy to explain why the triumvirs believed that they could use the Sambre and Meuse Army in a coup against the Royalist legislature.125 The most prominent Anglophone historian of the Revolutionary armies, Phipps, asserts that the Sambre and Meuse Army and the Army of Italy “were bawling their love for the Republic and were devoting themselves to politics” at the time of the coup of 18 fructidor.126 Similarly, Jean-Paul Bertaud interprets addresses from the Sambre and Meuse Army to the Directory as reflections of a general attitude in the army of “constant concern to link the fate of the army with that of the people; they held that Royalists attacking the constitution were attacking the citizens as a whole.”127 The fête of 10 August 1797 – which celebrated the anniversary of the overthrow of constitutional monarchy in France – serves as the principal evidence for this interpretation. Designed by Hoche as an attempt to fuse the Rhenish public’s desire for a Cisrhenan Republic with Revolutionary France’s historical mission to spread republicanism, the festival involved celebrations on the left bank of the Rhine attended by German civilians and the French military. Hoche delivered a speech that praised the army “alone for having enlarged the territory of the Republic and for helping foreign peoples throw off the yoke under which they labored.” In addition, he warned the Sambre and Meuse Army of the dangers posed by “fanatics and rebels” to “republican laws.”128 Whether these proclamations actually spread republican values in the army remains less important than Hoche’s primary intent: achieving greater control over both the Rhineland and the army to strengthen his own power.

125 Woronoff, Thermidorean Regime and the Directory, 59.
127 Bertaud, Army of the French Revolution, 337.
128 Address to the Sambre and Meuse Army, Köln, 10 August 1797, in Hansen, Quellen, 3:1101; see also, Le Moniteur, 23 August 1797, 28:179.
For the Rhineland, Hoche cemented his control over the movement for a Cisrhenan Republic in August. Fearing that the disunited inhabitants – some of whom supported a separate republic and some of whom supported annexation – would upset his plans, Hoche met with leaders from Bonn, Koblenz, and Köln to discuss “matters about your country and means of promoting the good fortune of its inhabitants.” At this meeting, Hoche united the groups from Bonn and Koblenz into a single party favoring the Cisrhenan Republic, effectively silencing Köln’s proponents of annexation. Subsequently, he and the Intermediary Commission took further steps to establish the republic. On 14 August, they approved freedom of the press in the Rhineland. Two weeks later, a Koblenz deputation requested permission to form a Cisrhenan National Guard with its own uniforms and national flag. Hoche supported the proposal and guaranteed to protect the Rhenish republicans from any attempts to subvert their cause. In contrast to T. C. W. Blanning’s assertion that “a campaign for the foundation of an ‘independent’ Republic in the Rhineland was duly underway [by August 1797]” but that “within a month it had been killed off,” the measures taken by Hoche in August represented the culmination of a mission undertaken since April 1797 to create a dependent Cisrhenan Republic. Hoche had commenced this mission with the Directory’s support, although the complexity of Revolutionary politics undercut that support after Carnot permanently broke from the triumvirs in July and lost a prominent voice in the Directory. Accordingly, while Hoche gained control over the Rhineland, he entered a veritable No Man’s Land in Revolutionary politics.

In a similarly paradoxical fashion, as Hoche took greater control over the Sambre and Meuse Army on the left bank of the Rhine, the small portion of the army still around Paris

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129 Ibid., 3:1104.
130 Biro, German Policy, 2:872.
131 Hansen, Quellen, 3:1115.
132 Ibid., 3:1147.
133 Blanning, French Revolution in Germany, 78.
fell under Augereau’s command and became part of a nefarious process that ultimately
discombobulated Hoche’s plans and led to the coup of 18 fructidor. On 24 August, La
Révellière-Lépeaux became president of the Directory – a position reduced largely to
irrelevance after Carnot had assumed the presidency in May without the support of the
triumvirs. However, La Révellière-Lépeaux planned to utilize the position to support the
triumvirs’ plot to overturn the elections of the Year V. Unlike in July, the triumvirs
orchestrated a methodical coup to occur on the night of 3-4 September, or 17-18 fructidor on
the Revolutionary calendar. By late August, the concentration of troops in violation of the
constitutional perimeter alerted everyone to the imminence of drastic action. Accordingly,
Royalist forces began planning their own coup and the legislative councils attempted to
defend themselves from the Directory by forming a Garde Législatif. On 3 September, the
Directory ordered the troops in the northern outskirts of Paris – including the 10,000 soldiers
from the Sambre and Meuse Army – to march south toward Montrouge for a military
exercise. After meeting with the triumvirs at the Luxembourg Palace, Augereau intercepted
these troops, took command, and led them into the city. The death knell for democratic
governance in Revolutionary France rang on the morning of 4 September 1797 as Augereau’s
troops invaded the homes of elected legislators and arrested those who failed to escape Paris,
including Pichegru. The triumvirs used the troops to purge Barthélemy and Carnot.
Barthélemy was arrested while Carnot fled to Switzerland.

The troops who participated in the coup of 18 fructidor justified their actions by
stating that the purged legislators and Directors threatened the constitution – a threat that they
viewed as intolerable considering the “suffering and fatigue” experienced by soldiers to

134 Le Moniteur, 24 August 1797, 28:775.
135 Le Moniteur, 1 September 1797, 28:788
136 Pierre, 18 fructidor, 48.
137 Dhombres, Carnot, 462-4.
create and defend the republican government. Curiously, the chief evidence for the persistence of republicanism in the Sambre and Meuse Army provided by historians remains the army’s participation in the coup of 18 fructidor even though it eroded legitimate republican institutions. In fact, the behavior of the troops that participated in the coup can be explained as much by the professional ethos that developed in the army as genuine republicanism. The growing distance between the army and the state, which resulted both from the state’s repeated failures to meet the army’s logistical needs and from the expansion of war to foreign territory, allowed a less ideological mindset to emerge in which soldiers followed the direction of their commanders. Generals and officers expressed republican sentiments during the lead up to the coup to legitimize their involvement in politics while the soldiers simply followed the lead of their superiors.

In fact, only after the coup of 18 fructidor did the state’s strenuous efforts to republicanize the troops reemerge in the portions of the Sambre and Meuse Army stationed on the Rhine. The Directory sent orders to Hoche that required him to organize festivals within each division to commemorate the anniversary of the foundation of the Republic. Most interestingly, these festivals marked a return to the Jacobin obsession with political uniformity: “All officers found without a cockade will be deposed on the field. It is expressly forbidden to wear feathers of which the strongest portions are white.” Royalists became the Directory’s preferred scapegoat for the previous suffering of the troops on the Rhine. A press campaign followed Pichegru’s arrest on 18 fructidor that explained his treasonous communications with the Austrians and British in 1795. In the Directory’s new interpretation, all of the setbacks experienced by the armies in Germany resulted from Royalist traitors and

141 General Order of the Sambre and Meuse Army, 13 September 1797, SHAT, B¹ 301.
administrators – a useful narrative based on substantive accusations that nevertheless ignored the serious logistical problems and the Directory’s own failure to overcome them.¹⁴²

Not only did the coup of 18 fructidor lead to an erosion of democratic government, it held enormous yet generally underappreciated implications for French foreign policy. Reubell gained his ascendancy in this area and, freed from Carnot’s restraining influence, immediately dominated the other Directors. After the Directory recalled Carnot’s friend, Clarke, from Vienna, Bonaparte received the Directory’s support in negotiating with Austria. On 8 September, Barras insisted that Bonaparte seek the following terms: “Bring the peace to a conclusion, but an honorable peace, which will give the Rhine boundary to us, Mantua to the Cisalpine Republic, but not Venice to Austria. This is the wish of the purified Directory, and of all Republicans; this is the interest of France and of your immortal army.”¹⁴³ In a meeting of 12 September, Reubell accused Carnot and Barthélemy of having worked with the Austrians to surrender French territorial gains and resolved to ensure that the peace would be “honorable to France.” Reubell believed that he could entice Prussia to support his plan in return for compensations on the right bank of the Rhine at Austria’s expense.¹⁴⁴

The coup proved devastating to Hoche’s plans for a Cisrhenan Republic, which he continued to develop in the weeks after 18 fructidor. On 5 September, Görres issued an appeal from Koblenz titled “The Friends of the People and of Freedom to the Inhabitants of the Left Bank of the Rhine” that encouraged the Rhenish public to display their devotion to the Cisrhenan Republic to “no longer be considered conquered territory.”¹⁴⁵ One week later, Hoche informed the Intermediary Commission to encourage these efforts “with all our means.”¹⁴⁶ Hoche wrote to the purged Directory on 13 September to position himself as a

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¹⁴² See Caudrillier, La trahison de Pichegru, xxi-xxiv, for a discussion of these pamphlets.
¹⁴³ Biro, Germany Policy, 2:884.
¹⁴⁴ Homan, Reubell, 134-7.
¹⁴⁵ Hansen, Quellen, 3:1210-1211.
¹⁴⁶ Hoche to Intermediary Commission, 12 September 1797, in ibid., 3:1131.
supporter of the triumvirs while simultaneously attempting to gain their consent to his mission: “While unworthy Frenchmen were asking for their shackles again, an entire people was recovering its liberty. The inhabitants of the left bank of the Rhine are loudly proclaiming the Rights of Man, and already the entire canton of Rheinbach has declared itself independent, and has taken the name ‘Cisrhenan Republic.’” Hoche seemed concerned that the changed political situation might reverse his plans: “Soon, if you so desire, there will appear from Landau to Düsseldorf, between our constitutional frontiers and the Rhine, a republic friendly to the French. It is for you, Citizen Directors, to judge the possible utility of a free people between the [Holy Roman] Empire and ourselves.”

The following day, French troops observed as the citizens of Koblenz planted a tree of liberty and proclaimed “Long live the Republic!”

On 16 September, the Directory voted to reverse Hoche’s orders to create the Cisrhenan Republic. It informed the general that “the Executive Directory has seen with satisfaction the flight toward liberty of the inhabitants on the left bank of the Rhine. But it is important that you direct this flight, and that you bring it, not to seek to form itself into a separate republic – which would not be able to stand by itself and would be a source of embarrassment for France – but rather to solicit its prompt union with the French Republic.” More than likely, Hoche never knew that the Directory decided to reverse course and ruin his plans for a Cisrhenan Republic: he took sick leave on 15 September and died four days later. The inhabitants of Köln officially established the Cisrhenan Republic on 17 September. Fearing that the movement would soon advance to an irreversible point, the Directory appointed Augereau to command a new Army of Germany, which consisted of the amalgamated Rhine and Moselle and Sambre and Meuse Armies. The Directory also...

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147 Hoche to Directory, 13 September 1797, in ibid., 3:1212.
148 Directory to Hoche, 16 September 1797, in ibid., 3:1213.
149 Despite the complete absence of evidence, rumors persist that he was poisoned. Most likely, he died from tuberculosis.
entrusted Augereau with the civil administration of the Rhineland and instructed him that “no emblem other than the French national cockade should be used to rally the Rhinelanders.” On 29 October, Augereau announced at a festival in celebration of the French Republic and the coup of 18 fructidor that the Rhineland could soon anticipate annexation to France.

Yet Reubell did not succeed in fully achieving his vision of a glorious peace based on French acquisition of the entire left bank of the Rhine. The 17 October 1797 Treaty of Campo Formio constituted a compromise between the aims of Bonaparte and the triumvirs of fructidor. Instead of choosing to demand Austrian recognition of French expansion of territory and influence in either Germany or Italy, the treaty did both. France received Belgium and two-thirds of the Rhineland by the terms of Campo Formio. Austria recognized territorial changes in Italy and received Venetia, Istria, and Dalmatia as compensation. While public opinion widely favored the treaty because of a general desire for peace, Reubell remained sour over the provisions concerning the Rhineland. Although the treaty provided for subsequent negotiations over Germany, it did not ensure that France would possess the entire left bank. In fact, the treaty did not mention French control of Prussia’s left bank territories. Reubell moderated his opposition in light of the treaty’s widespread popularity, commenting that “the triumph and glory of Bonaparte had subjugated and compromised all opinions.” After 18 fructidor, Reubell simply possessed no means of subduing Bonaparte. The Alsatian director had relied on the army to purge the Directory and the legislature of his rivals: in so doing he ushered in the return of militarism to French politics, which boded poorly for his own power and the future of French democracy.

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150 Biro, *German Policy*, 902.
Map 14. Treaty of Campo Formio

The end of the War of the First Coalition did not provide beneficial relief to the First French Republic. Instead, it served as the backdrop for the culmination of several political controversies that ultimately threw the Republic off its course of democratic development. The coup d’état of 18 fructidor occurred for a variety of reasons. In terms of domestic politics, it resulted from heightened tension between the center-left Directory and an increasingly center-right legislature. Neither faction achieved the complete ideological unity of its base, causing each sub-faction to feel incredible anxiety concerning its relative position in power. A climate of fear driven by political realities and recent historical memory bred widespread conspiratorial thinking that inhibited political reconciliation.

Less widely understood, debates over the Republic’s foreign policy intersected domestic political controversies in important ways. The conclusion of hostilities and ongoing peace negotiations through the spring, summer, and fall of 1797 intensified debates between conservatives and liberals tremendously. Meanwhile, officers and soldiers in the long-suffering armies viewed domestic political development through a lens that emphasized resentment against politicians who engaged in bickering and name-calling rather than providing for the basic needs of the troops. Rather than any specific ideological outlook, hostility toward civil authorities and fear of political conspiracies that might deprive the nation of the fruits of the army’s service made the French military a likely tool in a coup d’état. Although often attributed to the army’s strong republicanism, the Army of the Sambre and Meuse became the sword of the Fructidoreans because of the political maneuvering and ambition of Hoche, a rival of Bonaparte who possessed equal ambition but not enough skill or luck in politics. While Bonaparte later outplayed his fellow conspirators on 18 brumaire to establish the Consulate, the triumvirs of fructidor quickly discarded Hoche and his policy of satellite republics. Plans for a Cisrhenan Republic collapsed due to Reubell’s insistence on
annexation and the attainment of the natural frontier, a movement that was largely unimpeded in domestic politics after the triumvirs purged Carnot from the Directory.
Albert Sorel depicts Napoleon as a statesman trapped by circumstances determined by the Revolution. He contends that a lasting peace between France and Europe was impossible as early as 1795, when the natural frontiers became an unquestionable article of faith among Frenchmen. In Sorel’s interpretation, French possession of the natural frontiers constituted the major problem in European international politics, being responsible for the wars that erupted between 1798 and 1815. Sorel states that Great Britain “associated the idea of peace [in Europe] with the establishment of a tempered monarchy in a France reduced to its ancient frontiers, and the French associated their national independence, the safety of the Revolution and the triumph of the Republic, with the conquest of the left bank of the Rhine.” Furthermore, Sorel quotes Napoleon in 1814: “The Allies have always wanted to reduce France to its ancient limits. That system is inseparable from the return of the Bourbons, because they alone could offer a guarantee of maintaining that system. . . . Never would I sign such a treaty. . . . I have always tried to maintain the integrity of the Republic. . . . What would France make of me if I signed its humiliation? What would I say to the republicans when they came to me demanding their Rhine barrier?”

In his *Le Mémorial de Sainte Hélène*, written with Emmanuel-Augustine-Dieudonné-Joseph, count of Las Cases during his exile on the South Atlantic island of Saint-Helena, Napoleon constantly portrays his wars as defensive responses to the refusal of Europe to accept both his reign and France’s territorial expansion to the natural frontiers. Sorel largely accepts this aspect of the Napoleonic Legend and argues that Napoleon’s expansion beyond the natural frontiers served only to provide defensive buffers to protect the vulnerable

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territorial gains of the Revolution. Moreover, both Sorel and Napoleon describe this foreign policy as dictated by circumstances: French public opinion, they assert, would accept no peace without the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps because they constituted an aspect of the Revolution’s legacy that was of equal importance to Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité.²

As this dissertation argues, the Revolution produced the natural frontiers policy. Modern scholarship reveals the paucity of evidence for Sorel’s view that the pursuit of natural frontiers constituted a goal of ancien régime rulers that the revolutionaries inherited and expanded. No French king between the 843 Treaty of Verdun and the Revolution ever advocated for French possession of the entire left bank of the Rhine based on historic or geographic claims. The cultural association of France and Gaul as a congruent territorial space only emerged with the French translation of Caesar’s Gallic War in the fifteenth century. The few sixteenth and seventeenth century promoters of France’s claim to the Rhine did not receive royal or ministerial affirmation. Claims that Richelieu expressed support for the natural frontiers policy rely on questionable evidence while an analysis of his actual foreign policy reveals limitations and restraint. In his early wars, Louis XIV aimed far beyond the natural frontiers, emulating the universal monarchy of Charlemagne. Nonetheless, the Sun King restricted his ambitions after 1690. Louis XV and Louis XVI did not pursue territorial expansion in Europe through military force. The acquisition of Lorraine resulted from careful diplomacy and constituted what French statesmen referred to as the apogee of their territorial ambitions. By the 1780s, the French crown’s bankruptcy made an expensive war of conquest inconceivable, a fact recognized by the early leaders of the Revolution.

The natural frontiers constituted a perversion of original revolutionary intent. Neither the shift from absolute to constitutional monarchy nor the eradication of feudalism freed the French to pursue long-restrained expansionism. Rather, the obsession with natural frontiers

² Geyl, Napoleon, 23-31.
emerged from the interconnected processes of war and revolutionary paranoia. The example of Brissot demonstrates the transformational capacity of war and paranoia quite remarkably. Although he spoke critically of war and expansion in 1789, Brissot gradually evolved from embracing preemptive defensive war to revolutionary state-building in Europe, and, ultimately, to expanding to the natural frontiers. Brissot and the Girondins pursued a doomed foreign policy, a fact recognized both by Louis XVI, the other rulers of Europe, and Robespierre. Not only did they lead France into a general European war that it did not possess sufficient military strength to win, they failed to recognize or anticipate the unresolvable contradiction between spreading liberty and conquering territory. The apathy that welcomed the French into the Rhineland in 1793 – followed shortly thereafter by outward hostility – was superseded only by the speed with which the Austrians and Prussians repulsed the French from their conquests. By the summer of 1793, the French faced invasion by a coalition of European powers who desired to overturn the Revolution. Although the First Coalition did not prove effective, the reality of the military threat France faced in 1793 proved serious enough to ruin the Girondins and inaugurate the Terror. Only the radical overhaul of France’s military system, which required a level of centralization and coercion unprecedented during the ancien régime, allowed the Revolution to survive. The French might still have lost even after the levée en masse if the powers of the First Coalition had made fewer mistakes and not allowed self-interest to distract them from their common objective of defeating France.

Some of the Revolution’s leaders recognized France’s vulnerability after the declaration of war in 1792. A vocal critic of Brissot’s war policy, Robespierre continually represented France as under siege. Joining Robespierre on the CPS, Carnot considered France’s position in the fall of 1793 as desperate. Although the French rebounded in 1794, these leaders heeded the lessons of the Republic’s first attempt to spread the Revolution...
through military conquest in 1792. Carnot became a critic of expansion along any line other than raison d’état. In his view, France should make territorial gains only when it would clearly become stronger by doing so. Neither obligations to foreigners nor historic claims appeared to Carnot as viable justification for expansion to natural frontiers. The creation of the Army of the Sambre and Meuse resulted directly from Carnot’s direction of military strategy. He sought to concentrate overwhelming numbers in the decisive theater of the war, which he identified as Belgium in 1794. After the victory at Second Fleurus, Carnot utilized the Sambre and Meuse Army to achieve his foreign policy goals. Most important, the army would repulse the Allied threat to France’s historic borders and gain conquered lands that the French would exploit to furnish their war effort. Carnot did not discard all expansion, but conceived of a limited system that explicitly rejected France’s claim to the Rhine. Rhenish inhabitants might have benefitted more from the natural frontiers policy because in Carnot’s program the Rhineland existed only as an exploitable resource. The motivation for sending the Sambre and Meuse Army to the left bank of the Rhine was based on strategic thinking unrelated to the policy of natural frontiers. Nonetheless, the army’s success awakened patriotic sentiment in Paris and resurrected the briefly discarded natural frontiers policy. The pursuit of the natural frontiers became a logical and popular goal of many politicians during the Thermidorean Republic.

Paradoxically, the increasing ambition of French foreign policy coincided with a degeneration of French military power on the Rhine, which the Sambre and Meuse Army’s failed campaign in 1795 clearly demonstrated. The enormous size of the French armies proved too much even for the resource-rich regions of Belgium and the Rhineland. While the centralizing process of 1794 effectively exploited foreign resources for the French war effort, the full-extent of exploitation left the conquered lands exhausted. At a time when the French economy and agriculture could not sustain the armies, the lack of foreign resources
constituted an existential crisis. French soldiers and civilians in Belgium and the Rhineland suffered the most from this situation, which was brought on by the expansionist policies of the French government. Instead of viewing the Rhineland as a stolen fragment of the French patrie that they strove to recover, the French soldiers – from the generals to the rank and file – considered it a terrible war land that they longed to escape.

The attainment of natural frontiers did not constitute a universally accepted aspect of the Revolution’s heritage. Although Sorel depicts the Directory as the peak of the Revolution’s obsession with the left bank of the Rhine, the opposite proves true. The natural frontiers became the most controversial aspect of the Revolution’s foreign policy and peacemaking efforts during the Directory. Until 1797, the majority of the Directory did not support France’s claim to the Rhine, largely because its members viewed the Rhine frontier as a source of inevitable conflict between France and the European powers. Desiring peace, Carnot accepted the Meuse River as the limit of French expansion and hoped to strengthen the French position on the Rhine only so the Directory could sacrifice it as a bargaining chip at the peace table. Gradually, opinion turned against Carnot as Reubell mobilized support for a “glorious peace.” The nexus of foreign and domestic politics largely explains Reubell’s success in forming a triumvirate that favored both the eradication of the Royalist and conservative legislative factions and the purging of the anti-annexationist Directors. Yet the Directory’s neglect and misuse of the Republic’s armies amid these disputes led to unintended consequences. In Italy, General Bonaparte demonstrated the potential for a talented commander to gain autonomy from the French state and pursue an independent policy. The creation of sister republics challenged the Directory’s control of foreign policy and gained Bonaparte enormous prestige and power. Hoche attempted to emulate Bonaparte but met with considerably less success. Nonetheless, the effort to create the Cisrhenan Republic revealed Hoche’s desire for autonomy in the Rhineland. His involvement in the
abortive coup d'état of July 1797 set a precedent of militarism in French politics followed by Augereau on 18 fructidor Year V and Bonaparte himself on 18 brumaire Year VIII. The French attempt to spread liberty to the Rhineland undermined their own democratic experiment.

After 18 fructidor and the Treaty of Campo Formio, Reubell took steps to ensure that France would retain the entire left bank of the Rhine. The period immediately following Campo Formio constituted a remarkable improvement for the Rhenish inhabitants because Reubell’s vision for a fully integrated Rhineland could be realized at the conclusion of war. Most important, Reubell replaced the military administration with a civil government under the direction of the former commissar and Alsatian-born republican, Rudler. During his tenure as commissioner of the Rhineland, Rudler initiated a comprehensive reform program that eliminated much of the ancien régime and introduced French administration. The complex administrative grid of the German princes was forever destroyed and the French military regimes abolished in favor a new system of four Rhenish départements that paved the way for annexation. Rudler imposed a uniform legal system and abolished the tithe, seigneurialism, and the guilds. Yet international concerns prevented Reubell from fully realizing his vision. Although Holy Roman Emperor Francis II recognized French possession of the left bank of the Rhine at the Rastatt Congress of 1797-1798, he did so only to gain French consent for Austrian annexation of Salzburg. The French demanded not only recognition of their annexation of the entire left bank of the Rhine, but also their retention of several bridgeheads on the right bank. Attempts by France to form the south German States into a French-led protectorate challenged one of Austria’s primary raisons d’être: protecting

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3 The four départements were Roer, Sarre, Rhin-et-Moselle, and Mont-Tonerre. On Rudler’s reforms, see Grab, *Napoleon and the Transformation of Europe*, 92-3; Blanning, *French Revolution in Germany*, 81. Rowe, in *Reich to State*, 59, observes that Rudler “did not extend any democratic elements as existed in France proper. Instead, he abolished the old regime institutions through administrative fiat.”
the Holy Roman Empire. Accordingly, in mid-1798 Vienna began searching for allies in Prussia and Russia for a Second Coalition against France.\(^4\)

Ultimately, the Rhine frontier did not provide the French a sufficient sense of security to halt their expansion in Europe. In 1798-1799, the French made territorial adjustments in Italy, Switzerland, and the Low Countries that could be viewed only as acts of aggression. Bonaparte’s seizure of Malta in 1798 led Tsar Paul of Russia into an alliance with Austria, Great Britain, and the Ottoman Empire. Unlike in 1792, the French prepared for war by passing a new conscription law that institutionalized an annual draft. Yet after war officially commenced on 12 March 1799, the French discovered lingering problems in their military system. Within a few months, the Austrians and Russians overturned French conquests in Italy while the British destroyed Bonaparte’s fleet off the coast of Egypt. On the Rhine, Jourdan – who had joined the French legislature and received a new appointment as general – commanded the Army of the Danube against Archduke Charles. Although Jourdan crossed the Rhine and invaded Bavaria through the Black Forest, he was defeated by the Austrians at the 25 March Battle of Stockach. Jourdan resigned from command in April.

Amid the disastrous start of the War of the Second Coalition, Reubell drew the lot, forcing him to withdraw from the Directory in May. In November 1799, General Bonaparte exploited French political tensions to overthrow the Directory and establish himself as First Consul. France was saved only by two great victories: André Massena’s at Second Zurich and First Consul Bonaparte’s at Marengo. In the aftermath, Bonaparte turned his attention to peacemaking. Although abandoned by Russia in 1799, Austria resisted peace even after Marengo and did not agree to negotiations until its forces in Germany were defeated by Moreau at the 3 December 1800 Battle of Hohenlinden. On 9 February 1801, France and Austria concluded the Treaty of Lunéville. Napoleon allowed Austria to retain Venetia but

forced Emperor Francis to recognize all of France’s gains at Campo Formio: including the annexation of Belgium and dominion over the left bank of the Rhine. Yet Napoleon recognized the unviability of the natural frontiers as a defensive system for France and forced the Austrians to recognize the early stages of his Grand Empire: the Cisalpine, Ligurian, Batavian, and Helvetic Republics. In this atmosphere, the obsession with natural frontiers diminished. Cleary, by 1800 Napoleon had overtaken and surpassed the natural frontiers policy of the Revolution.5

For Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, the natural frontiers became one part of a much larger imperialist mission in Europe. In *Napoleon and the Integration of Europe*, Stuart Woolf argues that “the political class that had emerged from the Revolution” attempted to “extend their ideals of progress and civilization to every region of Europe touched by French armies.” He asserts that “there are few indications that the French political and military class ever doubted its mission as vector of the most advanced form of civilization, to be carried to, or imposed upon, less fortunate peoples.” Based on the experience of French expansion to the Rhine, Woolf’s claims do not hold merit for understanding the period of conquest and occupation between 1792 and 1797. While many did view France as a superior nation bringing light to Europe, some became disillusioned with this project. Carnot, for example, clearly rejected it and favored a foreign policy aimed much more at exploitation to strengthen a weak and vulnerable France. As Woolf later acknowledges, “the form and direction taken by the expansionist policy remained unclear, because they were internally contested.”6 A more convincing summarization of French Revolutionary expansion up to 1799 has been offered by Michael Broers: “The most important point about the nature of French power in

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5 Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1446, comments that “France’s Rhine frontier against the Batavian Republic was a boundary to be achieved, then – during the reign of Napoleon – surpassed as the limit of France.”

6 Woolf, *Napoleon’s Integration of Europe*, vii, 9, 15.
1799 was its limitations, not its extent.” Weakness – not strength – led the French to pursue expansion to the natural frontiers after 1792. In particular, French expansion to the Rhine gained the lasting enmity of Great Britain and Austria even if it did not necessarily make future wars inevitable. While London and Vienna could begrudingly accept French possession of the left bank, the Rhine’s inability to provide security compelled further French expansion, which led Bonaparte across the European continent and back to the Rhine in 1813 after the collapse of his empire. France’s doomed struggle to defend the Rhine frontier in 1814 was largely predicted by critics of the natural frontiers policy during the War of the First Coalition.

As for the significance of natural frontiers in French history, the realm of foreign policy reveals one area in which ancien régime continuity battled against, yet ultimately succumbed to revolutionary change. The natural frontiers policy emerged from the challenges of diplomacy and war after 1789. It played an important role in French military strategy between 1792 and 1797 but never attained universal support. Nonetheless, the “French push to the Rhine” committed France to a war of conquest with an army raised for national defense. The contradiction between these ideas proved endemic throughout the war and contributed to logistical, administrative, and political problems within the army. Moreover, the natural frontiers did not provide a rallying point to unite ideologically disparate factions of the Revolution. Instead, the war of conquest became a significant point of contention and introduced a host of new challenges and unintended consequences. The coup of 18 fructidor marked a significant turning point in two respects. First, it poisoned France’s democratic experiment with militarism. Second, it marked the last period in which serious advocates opposed to pursuing the natural frontiers existed in French politics until the Restoration of the Bourbons. The desire for natural frontiers was not universal among Frenchmen during the

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Revolution but it did represent a key dimension in French foreign policy and warfare, and also in the history of the Revolution itself.
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