



**THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE
PENINSULAR WAR, 1808 TO JUNE 1811**

by

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| Adm. | Admiralty. |
| F.O. | Foreign Office. |
| H.M.C. | Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts |
| N.R.A. | National Register of Archives. |
| P.R.O. | Public Record Office. |
| P.R.O.N.I. | Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. |
| W.D. | <i>The Despatches of Field Marshal The Duke of Wellington, during his various campaigns in India, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, the Low Countries and France ...</i> compiled by Colonel Gurwood, 8 vols., (London, Parker, Furnivall and Parker, 1844). |
| W.S.D. | <i>Supplementary Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur, Duke of Wellington, K.G.</i> edited by his son, The Duke of Wellington, 15 vols., (London, John Murray, 1858-1872). |
| W.O. | War Office. |

Preface

Thirty years ago Piers Mackesy wrote in the preface to *The War in the Mediterranean 1803-1810* that "the British conduct of the war against Napoleon still awaits the scholar".¹ His point was that while the campaigns of Nelson, Wellington and Sir John Moore have been admirably described, the role of Government in the central direction of the war has been largely ignored. This is important because "Government alone could link together the diverse activities of generals, admirals, diplomatists and bankers, of strategy and politics and finance, and direct them towards a common goal".²

This thesis is intended as a contribution towards ending that neglect, by studying the formation and implementation of a central aspect of British strategy at a crucial stage of the war. It examines how the Ministers reacted to the unexpected opportunity of the Spanish Uprising, how their policy changed when buffeted by ill-fortune, and how a coherent strategy gradually emerged. It explores the often difficult relations between the Ministers in London and their commanders in the field. And it seeks to place the Peninsular War firmly in the wider context of Britain's war against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

It is also intended as a contribution to British political history. The years from 1807 to 1811 form an important but neglected transitional period from the essentially 18th Century world of Pitt, Fox and George III, to the quite different atmosphere of the Regency. The generation of politicians who came to the fore in the Portland and Perceval Governments - Canning, Castlereagh, Perceval, Liverpool and others - were to dominate British politics for the next twenty years. The ministerial turbulence of these few years generated rivalries and alliances which shaped British politics almost until the end of the reign of George IV.

¹ Piers Mackesy, *The War in the Mediterranean, 1803-1810* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981. First published by Harvard University Press in 1957). p vii.

² *Ibid* p vii.

Above all, the thesis seeks to bridge the gap between political and military history, and use each to shed light on the other. All too often works on the Peninsular War make unwarranted assumptions about British politics, while the converse also frequently occurs. And yet, events in the Peninsula had a considerable impact on British politics and were in turn influenced by them. The story of Canning's protracted resignation and the consequent fall of the Portland Government is an example of how intricate and important this relationship could be. Disgust over the Convention of Cintra and the long debate in Cabinet over Portugal both played a large role in Canning's dissatisfaction, while his resignation and the collapse of the Government had important implications for Britain's future role in the Peninsula.

The primary focus of this study is the strategic decisions made by the Cabinet and the relations between the Ministers and their generals. On the one side it branches out to include brief descriptions of military operations such as the Talavera Campaign and the French Invasion of Portugal; while on the other side it includes, for example, an account of Perceval's difficulties in forming a Government in late 1809. This is necessary to understand properly the course of events and to appreciate fully the complexity of the problems facing the Ministers and their agents. No attempt is made to write a comprehensive history of Britain during these years: little or nothing is said of the state of Ireland, the unrest in the industrial midlands, or the deterioration of relations with the U.S.A., although all these issues and many others are important and to some extent relevant. Similarly no full account is given of Britain's relations with Spain and Portugal, although they are examined at various points when pertinent.

In making their decisions the Ministers usually faced an interlocking mosaic of problems each of which affected the others, not always in predictable ways. Given this, it has seemed best to present events in the form of a detailed narrative, rather than wrench issues from the context in which they arose and treat them in isolation. Each chapter therefore advances the story chronologically, frequently

with some overlap between adjoining chapters. Thematic problems are examined as they arise and the structure of the chapters is flexible enough for detailed discussion of specific questions.

Sources for the topic proved abundant and I am greatly indebted to the work of numerous historians. While it is unfair to single out any, I cannot resist paying tribute to Sir Charles Oman's authoritative *A History of the Peninsular War*,¹ and Professor Aspinall's magnificent edition of *The Later Correspondence of George III*.² Many other works deserve special thanks, but it is impossible to list them all in a preface, and so reference to them in footnotes and bibliography must carry with it my implicit thanks. This certainly includes the few works with which I strongly disagree, for I have found them stimulating and they have forced me to reconsider, clarify and sharpen my views.

Unpublished sources were equally abundant and here I must thank the staff at the Students' Room, British Library; the Public Record Office, Kew; the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland; the West Yorkshire Archive Service in Leeds; the Kent Record Office in Maidstone; the House of Lords Record Office, Westminster; the National Register of Archives in Chancery Lane; and particularly the Wellington Papers at Southampton University Library. At all these places the staff were efficient and friendly when I visited them, and they often gave me good advice.

I would also like to thank Mrs Linda Shaw of the University of Nottingham Library who went to considerable trouble to provide me with copies of some letters in the Portland Papers; and to Mr. K.J.C. Dunn of the Durham Record Office.

Lord Harewood kindly gave me permission to photocopy numerous letters in the Canning Papers in Leeds which proved invaluable for the early chapters of the thesis. D.C.L. Holland Esq. granted me access to the microfilm copy of the

1 7 vols., (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1902-1930).

2 5 vols., (Cambridge University Press, 1962-1970).

Perceval Papers which he holds. Miss F.J.E. Moorhead, personal secretary to the Marquis of Normanby, went to enormous trouble to photocopy whole sections of the detailed catalogue of Lord Mulgrave's papers for me. Unfortunately the sudden illness of my father prevented me from visiting Mulgrave Castle to work on these papers, but I am none the less grateful to Miss Moorhead.

At Southampton University in 1986 I met Dr Charles Esdaile, author of *The Spanish Army in the Peninsular War*,¹ who has become a good friend and a good critic, advising me on many aspects of the thesis, especially those relating to the affairs of Spain.

I would like to thank the University of Adelaide whose scholarship enabled me to have two trips to England while I was researching this thesis; and the history department which paid some of my considerable photocopying bills. My supervisor Professor Austin Gough has always been available with good advice, helpful suggestions and general encouragement. I am particularly grateful for the freedom he has given me which has allowed the thesis to evolve into its present form. Many other members of the history department, the history department office, and the University in general have encouraged me. I should especially like to thank Dr. Robin Prior for his encouragement when the thesis was in its early stages, and Mrs Bev Arnold who typed the thesis with great efficiency and remarkable good humour despite the last minute, pre-Christmas rush.

Finally my family, who have given me constant unending support and especially my mother, whose fault it all is, by giving me a love of history and setting me a scholarly example!

¹ (Manchester U.P. 1988).



General Map showing the regions of Spain.

Chapter 1

Strategic and Political Background.

By the end of 1807 Britain had been at war with France almost continuously for 15 years. What was Britain fighting for, and why had the war continued for so long?

When most of the other powers of Europe declared war on the French Revolution in 1792 Britain remained firmly neutral. Pitt and his fellow ministers were unconvinced by Burke's oratory and had no interest in an ideological crusade. It was only when the French armies rapidly advanced through the Austrian Netherlands (i.e. Belgium) and threatened Holland, that the British Government felt impelled to act.¹ The defence of the Low Countries against French expansion was a longstanding aim of British foreign policy; it had led to war in the past and would have done so in 1793 whatever the nature of the French Government. Essentially, Britain went to war for her traditional interest in the balance of power in Europe with particular reference to the independence of the Netherlands. It is true that the war quickly acquired an ideological dimension (largely due to the fear of subversion and the sympathy for France among some radical groups) but this was always secondary and died away within a few years. The British Government carefully avoided making any unequivocal commitment to the restoration of the Bourbons - the cause championed by many of her allies - and as early as 1795 was willing to discuss peace with the French Republic.²

As in her earlier eighteenth century wars against France, Britain could not hope by herself to defeat the powerful French army. In the first campaigns she managed to put an army of 25,000 British, and 15,000 German auxiliaries into the

¹ T.C.W. Blanning *The Origins of the French Revolutionary wars* (London, Longman, 1986) p 158. There is a detailed account of the breakdown of relations between Britain and France in John Ehrman *The Younger Pitt vol. 2 The Reluctant Transition* (London, Constable, 1983) p 206-260.

² Peter Jupp *Lord Grenville 1759-1834* (O.U.P. Clarendon Press 1985) p 152-4; 192 on the restoration of the Bourbons; and Robin Reilly *William Pitt the Younger* (New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979) p 309-10 on peace overtures.

field in Flanders, but even this substantial force was only one component in an allied army of some 160,000 men, which was itself only one of a number of armies fighting the French.¹ Throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars Britain had difficulty collecting the men to campaign on the continent. After the first couple of years her army was actually quite large but it was heavily committed to the defence of Britain (including a large garrison in Ireland) and her overseas empire. In general Britain relied on her Continental Allies to defeat the French, assisting them with a British military contingent and large subsidies. While the war continued in Europe the Royal Navy protected Britain from invasion and defended her trade while attacking that of the French. Colonial expeditions gained valuable prizes which might either be kept, or used as bargaining counters in peace negotiations.

In the past these methods had proved successful but the First Coalition was a failure. The French armies completely overran the Low Countries, and forced the British contingent to withdraw from the Continent in 1795. In the same year Prussia, Spain, and Holland withdrew from the war. The fighting was now concentrated in the Rhineland and Northern Italy - theatres too remote for substantial British intervention. In 1796-7 General Bonaparte conquered Northern Italy and advanced to within 70 miles of Vienna forcing the Austrians to make peace. Britain was now isolated and facing severe domestic problems with growing tension in Ireland, mutinies in the fleet at Spithead and Nore, and a financial panic leading to the Suspension of Cash Payments. Yet she did not make peace. Britain had made valuable colonial acquisitions including the Cape of Good Hope and Ceylon, which she had become reluctant to part with. No British concessions, however great, could restore the balance of 1792, and faced with an inevitably more powerful France, the British Government decided after some hesitation, to retain

¹ The Hon. J.W. Fortescue *A History of the British Army* 13 vols (London, Macmillan, 1899-1930), vol 4 Part 1 p 296, 227 gives the figures.

her conquests and continue the war despite the fact that the immediate prospects looked bleak.¹

In 1797 and 1798 France held the initiative. Temporarily at peace with the other Continental Powers she was able to concentrate her resources against Britain. A direct invasion was considered but rejected as impractical, and instead General Bonaparte was sent with an army to conquer Egypt. Although this move caused some alarm and concern in Britain it did not immediately threaten her interests.² French possession of Egypt might menace Britain's hold on India in the long term but many risks were involved, and in the event France lost both her fleet and her army for nothing. More than anything else the Egyptian expedition illustrates the difficulties the French faced in attempting to attack British interests outside the Continent.

Britain had not remained passive while the French took the offensive - no sooner had the First Coalition collapsed than she set about constructing another, and at the end of 1798 the Second Coalition including Austria and Russia was formed. But it is misleading to imply that this or any of the other Coalitions was primarily the result of British diplomacy or British gold. The other powers fought, as Britain did, for their own perceived interests. The expansion of French power and - earlier - the promulgation of revolutionary doctrines threatened them all, and that is why they went to war. Subsidies and diplomacy facilitated the formation of the Coalition and helped to pay for the armies but their importance was limited.

The Second Coalition, despite some initial triumphs, proved no more successful than the First. British troops returned to the Continent as part of an Anglo-Russian expedition to Holland in 1799 - again under the command of the Duke of York - but the army soon became bogged down and was forced to re-

¹ Jupp *Lord Grenville* p 206-7. Political changes within France also played a large role in the breakdown of the peace talks.

² There was virtually no British overland trade through Egypt. John Marlowe *Anglo-Egyptian Relations 1800-1956* (London, Frank Cass, 1965) p 13. I do not believe that an overland march from Egypt to India was feasible.

embark. The early tide against the French was turned by Massena's victory at Zurich. Russia withdrew from the war; Bonaparte returned from Egypt and defeated the Austrians at Marengo thus regaining Northern Italy; and Moreau defeated the Austrian army of Germany at Hohenlinden. Austria was forced to make peace and Britain was left once more without allies.

At the same time the political situation in Britain changed dramatically. Pitt the Younger had been Prime Minister ever since 1784. In the early 1790s the Opposition had split over its attitude to the French Revolution and the war. Its nominal leader the Duke of Portland led the majority of his followers into a union with Pitt giving the Government an overwhelming ascendancy in Parliament. Charles James Fox - in many ways the real leader of the Whigs - remained in Opposition with a minority of more radical members, and continued to call for peace, reform and a diminution of royal power. After a few years Fox and his supporters became disillusioned with the unequal struggle and withdrew from Parliament, not returning until 1801.¹ Pitt's authority remained unchallenged from either within or outside the Government but as the decade and the century drew towards their end he showed increasing weariness with the burdens of office, and the unending war. He and his closest colleagues, Lord Grenville (his cousin) and Henry Dundas (later Lord Melville) also became rather arrogant in their behaviour towards the King, offending him by their failure to consult him and take sufficient account of his views.² This tension would probably have been contained if it had not been for the situation in Ireland and the Government's fear of another uprising. Pitt believed that the problem could best be solved by a union between Great Britain and Ireland followed by Catholic Emancipation - a measure which he knew the

¹ The secession was never total: some Whigs, such as George Tierney, never ceased attending regularly, while others attended to vote on some important questions. H.K. Olphin *George Tierney* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1934) p 42, 44.

² For a detailed account of one example see Piers Mackesy *War without Victory. The Downfall of Pitt 1799-1802* (O.U.P. Clarendon Press, 1984) p 127-133. At a later point Mackesy describes the three ministers as "the bullying triumvirs" (p 195).

King violently opposed. Despite some opposition the Union was successfully implemented in part due to the hard and often distasteful work of Lord Castlereagh who first rose to prominence at this time as Chief Secretary of Ireland. But when Pitt tried to gain Catholic Emancipation he met the resolute opposition of the King which he could not overcome. Discouraged by the failure of the war, weary of office and frustrated at the defeat of his plans for Ireland, Pitt resigned in February 1801.¹ Grenville and Dundas also left office along with many other Ministers (including the young George Canning) who gave priority to their loyalty to Pitt. But the former Prime Minister did not encourage such defections and did his best to ensure that the Government could continue without him. Henry Addington (later Lord Sidmouth) the Speaker became the new Prime Minister and quickly gained Royal favour. Not only was Addington staunchly opposed to Catholic Emancipation, he was extremely conservative on other issues, and lacked the obvious brilliance of Pitt - with which the King had never been really comfortable.²

The Addington Government was founded on the negative principle of excluding Catholic claims and the positive one of making peace. The new Foreign Secretary, Robert Banks Jenkinson, Lord Hawkesbury (the future Lord Liverpool and Prime Minister) was an Oxford contemporary and friend of Canning. He faced a difficult task in having to follow the able and experienced Lord Grenville, and negotiate a peace which was bound to disappoint many in Britain. It is thus not surprising that his tenure at the Foreign Office was generally - if perhaps unjustly - regarded by his contemporaries as a failure. This led many people to under-estimate Hawkesbury - as Canning had always done³ - but time was to prove his ability not

¹ Reilly *William Pitt* p 385-388. The implementation of Pitt's resignation was delayed for several weeks by a break-down in the King's mental health.

² Philip Ziegler *Addington. A Life of Henry Addington First Viscount Sidmouth* (London, Collins, 1965) p 127-9.

³ Norman Gash *Lord Liverpool* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984) p 25-6; 49-51.

least in the patient, tactful management of temperamental colleagues and subordinates.

When Britain negotiated her peace with France she took into account the Franco-Austrian Peace of Luneville which recognized the independence of the Batavian, Helvetian, Cisalpine and Ligurian Republics and which included a French promise to withdraw their troops from the Batavian Republic (ie Holland). Indeed Britain's willingness to make peace was based on the assumption that these terms would be adhered to, but the Government foolishly failed to have them included in her own peace with France. By the terms of the Peace of Amiens Britain kept Trinidad and Ceylon but returned all her other colonial conquests including the Cape of Good Hope.¹ She also agreed to evacuate Malta, and recognized the French annexation of Nice, Savoy, the left bank of the Rhine, and Belgium. In return the French withdrew their troops from Naples.

The Peace of Amiens did nothing to settle the rivalry between Britain and France, but neither had the peace treaties that ended the earlier wars against them. What was different on this occasion was that neither side was exhausted, and though not eager for war, neither would go far out of their way to avoid it. The problem was compounded because both sides had unrealistic expectations of the benefits of peace. The British expected Bonaparte to be quiescent and hoped for a commercial treaty similar to that of 1786 which had brought them much prosperity. Bonaparte thought that the peace gave him a free hand for both his continental and colonial schemes. In other words each side hoped to gain more from the peace than they would be able to gain from war, and so both were disappointed.

The responsibility for the collapse of the peace must thus be shared although it was the British who forced the actual rupture. Under the peace terms, they had

¹ For a most interesting discussion of the relative importance of Ceylon and the Cape, and the reasons why the British preferred to keep the former, see G.S. Graham *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean 1810-1850* (O.U.P. Clarendon Press 1967) p 24-28, 312. The Cape was not of great value to the British, but was considered dangerous if held by an enemy, and for this reason it was reconquered in 1806.

accepted a far stronger France than had existed before the Revolution and when they discovered that these 'natural frontiers' were not the limit of French ambitions - that they intended to keep their troops in Holland and their control over northern Italy - the British felt that they had to act. Yet their strategic position was no better than before the peace, and they continued to depend on continental allies to actually fight the French.

Addington remained in office for 12 months after the renewal of the war, primarily because Pitt was reluctant to move into open opposition. This and a number of other differences led to a split between Pitt and Grenville, who had made an unlikely but durable alliance with Fox and the Whigs. With the country threatened by invasion there was a widespread hope of a broadly based Government including Pitt, Fox and Grenville, but the King vetoed the inclusion of Fox, and Grenville would not take office without him.¹ Pitt returned as Prime Minister in May 1804 but his Government was little stronger than Addington's, from whom he was soon seeking Parliamentary support.

Meanwhile the search for allies continued but proved difficult. Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor and made extensive preparations for the invasion of England. He recruited, organized and trained the finest French army of the era and needed only to gain command of the Channel for a few days to make his attempt. But the French navy had deteriorated during the Revolution; being demoralized by a number of defeats at the hands of the British, and losing skills and experience due to the British blockade. Napoleon's plans for gaining temporary superiority in the Channel failed miserably, with Trafalgar being only the final blow after a series of less dramatic setbacks. Even if Napoleon had got his army to England it is by no means certain that he would have succeeded - extensive preparations had been made to meet the French and there was no inclination to surrender.² Yet it was

¹ Jupp *Lord Grenville* p 332-333.

² Richard Glover *Britain at Bay. Defence against Bonaparte, 1803-14* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1973) p 83-89.

undoubtedly the best chance he ever had of securing the complete defeat of Britain. After 1805 his invasion preparations - the flotillas, harbours etc. rapidly deteriorated and while he continued to build warships he could not find experienced, capable crews. Equally important were the increasingly powerful British coastal defences which would have made an invasion extremely difficult. Napoleon never seriously contemplated invading Britain after 1805 and had to rely on costly and inefficient indirect means to attempt to defeat her. Neither Britain nor France was capable of defeating the other without the extensive help of allies, except perhaps by a long drawn out war of attrition.

Thwarted in his hopes of conquering Britain it was with some relief that Napoleon turned east in August 1805 to confront the new coalition which was mobilizing against him. Prussia again remained neutral but Austria and Russia had combined in a new attempt to reduce the power of France. But Napoleon understood war as his adversaries did not, and by marching his army hard he surrounded the foremost Austrian army and forced it to surrender at Ulm before they knew the danger they were in. He exploited his advantage by a rapid advance up the Danube valley and captured Vienna. Prussia became alarmed at Napoleon's success and considered entering the war, but before she could move Napoleon had crushed the Austro-Russian army at Austerlitz and Austria was again forced to make peace.

The news of Austerlitz arrived in Britain as Pitt lay dying. According to legend "Pitt pointed to a map of Europe and said, 'Roll up that map: it will not be wanted these ten years'", but there is little evidence for the story.¹ Pitt's Government fell with his death. The King hoped that it might continue under Hawkesbury but the Ministers understood their own weakness too well to make the attempt. This left George III with no alternative to Fox and Grenville whose Government, known as the 'Ministry of All the Talents' also included Sidmouth

¹ Reilly *William Pitt* p 435.

and his supporters, but not the members of Pitt's last administration. Fox became Foreign Secretary and made a determined effort to negotiate a peace with Napoleon. In the resulting talks Britain made greater concessions than ever before and was prepared to accept a far stronger France than Louis XIV had dreamt of. Yet the talks eventually collapsed, not due to any British intransigence, but mainly because Napoleon showed little interest in making peace. Fox fell seriously ill during the talks and died on 13th September 1806. Only a few of the most radical members of his party, included Samuel Whitbread, continued to believe in the possibility of an acceptable peace with Napoleon.¹

Napoleon's cool response to Britain's peace overture may have been related to the still unsettled state of the Continent. Austria had yet to recover from her defeat, but Russia remained at war with France, and Prussia was drifting towards war. The final rupture occurred at the beginning of October and it only took Napoleon a fortnight to crush the main Prussian armies at the twin battles of Jena-Auerstädt. In the classic example of Napoleonic pursuit he then overran most of Prussia, capturing countless fortresses and thousands of prisoners before she could recover from the blow. He continued his advance into Poland, with the Russians now his main opponents, until he was checked at the bloody battle of Eylau and both armies went into winter quarters.

From Berlin on 21st December 1806 Napoleon launched a new offensive against Britain. Restrictions on trade with the enemy had always been part of the war, but Napoleon's Berlin Decrees were far more wide-reaching and systematic than earlier attempts at economic warfare. They banned the import of British goods, or goods carried by British ships, while permitting some exports to Britain providing that they were paid for in gold. In this way Napoleon hoped to destroy the British credit system by which the Government raised much of the funds it

¹ Whitbread unfortunately was not in the Cabinet, and so did not know the full extent of the concessions Fox was prepared to make.

needed to fight the war on the London money market.¹ It was this credit system which had enabled Britain to be the paymaster of the coalitions against France. The system depended entirely upon confidence and this made it seem vulnerable to the French whose memories of the rapid devaluation of the *assignat* were still fresh.² In fact it proved both strong and flexible and Napoleon might well have been better advised if he had tried to cripple the British economy and provoke internal unrest by prohibiting all trade.

The British retaliated in kind with a series of trade embargoes known as the Orders-in-Council. Altogether the economic war harmed both sides without making either any more inclined to peace. The Continent suffered particularly from a shortage of colonial goods while the Orders-in-Council became increasingly unpopular in Britain - especially in the hard hit industrial areas of northern and central England. British restrictions on neutral trade were largely responsible for the decline in relations with the United States, which led to war in 1812.

The death of Fox deprived the Ministry of All the Talents of its greatest member. Their military expeditions to Egypt, the Dardanelles and South America were unsuccessful. They reacted slowly to the entry of Prussia into the war partly because Anglo-Prussian relations had been extremely poor, and partly because Grenville and the Whigs both doubted the value of the absolutist monarchies of the Continent as allies. Grenville was in fact becoming increasingly pessimistic about the long term prospects facing Britain. He limited financial aid to Prussia and Russia to such a low figure that they felt insulted; and prepared to re-open the Catholic question in the belief the concessions were necessary both to secure recruits for the army, and to gain stability in Ireland.³ Unfortunately there was a

¹ Audrey Cunningham *British Credit in the Last Napoleonic War* (C.U.P. 1910) passim, and especially p 3.

² Eli F. Heckscher *The Continental System : An Economic Interpretation* (O.U.P. 1922) p 62-4, 69-70.

³ Jupp *Lord Grenville* p 392-4.

misunderstanding of the scale of the proposed concessions, which George III used to precipitate a crisis. The King demanded not only that the measure be dropped, but also that he be given a formal pledge that the Ministers would not raise it again during his lifetime. This was completely unacceptable to Grenville and his colleagues and in March 1807 they resigned - as the King had intended.

A new Government was formed from Pitt's supporters who quickly promised more aid to the Russians and prepared an expedition to the Baltic. But it was too late: on 14th June 1807 Napoleon trapped and defeated the Russian army at Friedland and Czar Alexander decided to make peace. The result was the famous meeting between Napoleon and Alexander at Tilsit and their alliance. Tilsit established a new order in Europe. With Prussia emasculated and Russia his ally Napoleon's hegemony over western and central Europe appeared unassailable. Britain was left with only Sweden, Sicily, and Portugal as allies, while Napoleon's hands were freed, if he wished, to concentrate the resources of Europe on overcoming Britain's command of the sea, and hence her very independence.

The Tilsit settlement removed any reasonable hope of France being defeated in the foreseeable future while at the same time greatly increasing the danger facing Britain. Why then did she continue the war rather than making peace, even on unfavourable terms, and waiting for a better opportunity of curtailing French power? Napoleon and the Russians made overtures, but they were briskly rejected by the new British Government. Portland's Ministers were committed to the vigorous prosecution of the war, and in their rejection of the peace feelers they had the support of the whole Parliament except for a handful of radical M.P.s led by Whitbread. Britain continued the struggle because she was reluctant to admit defeat and because there was little direct immediate pressure on her to give way - it was not as if French armies were advancing on London through Kent and Sussex. There was also the fear that peace would enable Napoleon to consolidate his domination of Europe and rebuild his navy. It was in Britain's interests to keep the Continent as unstable as possible, to stir up trouble and encourage discontent, until

a final settlement that was genuinely acceptable to her could be achieved. Canning, the new Foreign Secretary, expressed these arguments with his customary eloquence,

"Our interest is that till there can be a final settlement that shall last, everything should remain as unsettled as possible; that no usurper should feel sure of acknowledgement; no people confident in their new masters; no Kingdom sure of its existence; no spoiler sure of his spoil; and even the plundered not acquiescent in their losses."¹

There were risks in continuing the war. By mobilizing all the naval resources of Europe Napoleon might be able to overwhelm the Royal Navy; or the British financial system might collapse under the strain of the economic war but it was generally accepted that these risks were less than those of a peace which "would sanction and settle some dozen green and tottering usurpations, and leave Bonaparte to being anew".² Not that Britain's continuing the war automatically checked Napoleon's ambitions - he was suspected of having designs upon the Ottoman Empire for example - but it meant that Britain could act quickly against them whenever an opportunity arose.

* * * * *

The new Government, with a few minor changes, was to conduct the war for the next 2¹/₂ years, while its members were to dominate British politics for the next two decades. The new Prime Minister was the same Duke of Portland who had led his supporters to join Pitt in 1794. He had been Prime Minister before in 1783 (as a Whig) and had immense experience in many senior offices. But Portland was now 69 years old, ill, lethargic and incapable of acting decisively or giving the real leadership his young ministers needed. He seldom spoke in the Lords and was often absent from Cabinet.³ His influence on the Government's policy was slight, while his procrastination in 1809 was to destroy the Ministry.

¹ quoted in Wendy Hinde *George Canning* (London, Collins, 1973) p 186.

² quoted in Hinde *Canning* p 186.

³ *The Earl of Malmesbury Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury ... edited by his Grandson* (London, Richard Bentley, 1844) vol. 4 p 404-5.

Portland was no more than a figurehead, a nominal leader, yet his presence in the Government was essential. The real strength of the Government lay in a group of young efficient Ministers none of whom stood out sufficiently to be generally acceptable as the leader. Portland's age and prestige; the genuine respect he inspired; and even his inactivity, made him eminently suitable to preside over a Cabinet of equals. The Portland Ministry has often been described as a Government of Departments i.e. one in which individual Ministers pursued their own policies in their own departments with little co-ordination or coherence. This is a considerable exaggeration, at least in respect to the management of the war.¹ Important decisions were made by the Cabinet as a whole not by individual Ministers, and on a number of occasions, as we shall see, the relevant Minister's own views were over-ruled. But the lack of a strong leader meant that disputes within the Cabinet could drag on for months before being decided. Pitt had run the war with the assistance of Grenville, Dundas and one or two other Ministers. Under Portland there were eleven (later thirteen) members of Cabinet, most if not all of whom had to be convinced before a policy could be adopted. Yet on the whole the Cabinet was reasonably efficient. Most of its members had served in previous Cabinets, and there seems to have been a general willingness to co-operate and accept advice and suggestions.

The four most important Ministers in the Government were Canning, Castlereagh, Hawkesbury and Perceval. Canning, the new Foreign Secretary, was the most brilliant and colourful minister, and certainly the greatest orator in the Government at a time when oratory was still politically important. He was a man of biting wit and invective, with immense confidence in his own ability, who often

¹ Perceval used the phrase in a letter to Huskisson on 21st August 1809. This is an important letter which sheds much light on the workings of the Portland Government, and I have drawn on it in writing this paragraph and elsewhere. But it needs to be remembered that Perceval was writing with particular reference to the administration of financial affairs which were certainly subject to less co-ordination than military expeditions. See also below p 245 Perceval to Huskisson, 'Private and Confidential', 21st August 1809, Perceval Papers Reel 9 Bundle XIV No. 10 (National Register of Archives (henceforth N.R.A.) No. 199).

inspired either great friendship or deep dislike and distrust. He had played a leading role in the *Anti-Jacobin*¹ and in 1809 was involved in the foundation of the *Quarterly Review* as an alternative to the Whig *Edinburgh Review*. Canning collected round him a group of talented followers and friends including William Huskisson, George Rose, John Hookham Frere, Charles Ellis, and Lord Granville Leveson Gower, many of whom held junior ministries or diplomatic posts. Much of the history of the Portland Government can be attributed to the tension between Canning's energy, impatience and perfectionism, and the more staid conservative qualities of his colleagues in the Cabinet.

Castlereagh was Secretary of State for War and the Colonies - a post he had already held for six months in Pitt's last Government. He had far greater experience of high office than Canning but was not generally so well regarded.² Partly this was due to the fact that he was usually a poor speaker in Parliament, but he was unpopular for other reasons. His manner was cold and arrogant (which may well have sprung from a deep-seated shyness) and allegations concerning the methods he had used to push through the Irish Union still damaged his reputation. The later assumption that he was Canning's rival in the Portland Government appears to be incorrect. Canning was generally regarded as essential to the

¹ The poetry in the *Anti-Jacobin* made its reputation and some of Canning's lines are remembered even today.

"A steady patriot of the world alone,
The friend of every country but his own." [ie the Jacobin]

and "Give me the avowed, erect and manly foe;
Firm I can meet, perhaps return the blow;
But of all plagues, good Heaven, thy wrath can send,
Save me, oh, save me, from the candid friend."

both from 'New Morality' are included even in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (O.U.P. 1981) p 61. Canning's *Poems* were published in 1823. See also *Hinde Canning* p 58-65 on the *Anti-Jacobin*.

² Grenville thought Castlereagh unfit for Cabinet office in 1806. Julian R. McQuiston 'Rose and Canning in Opposition, 1806-7' *Historical Journal* vol. XIV No. 3 1971 P 510. There were rumours in early 1808 that Castlereagh would be going to the Lords where he "would be useful ... in the second rank of speakers" Francis Bickley (ed) *The Diaries of Sylvester Douglas (Lord Glenbervie)* (London, Constable, 1928) vol. 2 p 13, 29th January 1808.

Government's survival, while Castlereagh was disposable.¹ It was only after he left office in the autumn of 1809 that Castlereagh's reputation began to rise, while it was not until his long tenure at the Foreign Office (1812-22) that he fully displayed or developed his great ability.

Hawkesbury's influence in the Portland Government is hard to assess. As Home Secretary and leader of the Government in the Lords his importance is undeniable, but there is little evidence for his influence on the management of the war, although he temporarily replaced Castlereagh when the latter was ill in late 1807.

Canning, Castlereagh and Hawkesbury were all born in either 1769 or 1770; Spencer Perceval was some seven years older than them. He had been a successful lawyer, and Attorney-General in Addington's Government. In 1807 he hoped to return to this post and was only persuaded with difficulty to accept the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the Government in the Commons. He had no special expertise in finance and relied heavily on William Huskisson, the Secretary to the Treasury and an acknowledged authority on the Government's finances. He was appointed leader of the House because he was a staunch opponent of Catholic Emancipation (unlike Canning and Castlereagh), because he came from an old English family, and because his ability was gradually being appreciated.² As leader he came into frequent contact with George III who greatly liked his honesty and straightforwardness. Perceval was hardworking, devout, and intelligent if unimaginative. He was not a great orator, but a capable and courageous debater. His management of the Commons during the Portland Government was open to criticism, but overall no one was to increase their reputation as much as he did over the next five years.

¹ See below Chapter 4, p 160.

² Hawkesbury to the King, 23rd March 1807 in A. Aspinall (ed) *The Later Correspondence of George III* (C.U.P. vol. 4 1968, vol. 5 1970) vol. 4 No. 3408 p 535. The implied comparison with Canning in this letter is obvious.

The six other Cabinet ministers, all of whom were in the Lords, were less important. Mulgrave (First Lord of the Admiralty) and Chatham (Master-General of the Ordnance) were both able but lazy and presided over the further ossification of departments badly in need of reform. Eldon, the reactionary Lord Chancellor, was a strong link with the King. He was an intelligent energetic man, reputedly better at identifying weaknesses in proposals than in suggesting plans.¹ Lord Bathurst was later to prove an excellent Secretary of State for War and the Colonies (1812-1827) but in the Portland Cabinet he was only President of the Board of Trade, and apparently restricted himself in the main to the affairs of his office. Finally John Fane, 10th Earl of Westmorland, (Lord Privy Seal) and Lord Camden (President of the Council); two ministers who contributed little if anything of value. Westmorland was reportedly a boorish fool whose lack of manners appalled Lord Wellesley,² while Canning called Camden 'Lord Chuckle' and found him intensely irritating.

The individual ability of these Cabinet ministers was considerably more important than it would be today, because the administrative machinery supporting them was so much smaller. To take one example: the staff of the Foreign Office in 1807 consisted of the Foreign Secretary (George Canning), two Under-Secretaries, a dozen clerks and a few miscellaneous officials such as a librarian,³ while Castlereagh's staff at the War Department was even smaller. This meant that the task of making policy was very largely confined to the Ministers themselves, sometimes assisted by confidential advisors who might or might not hold a relevant

¹ Henry, Lord Brougham *Statesmen of the Time of George III and IV* (Edinburgh, Adam and Charles Black, 1872) vol. 2 (4th volume of *Lord Brougham's Works*) 'Lord Eldon' p 50. Eldon was also apparently indecisive and unsure of his own opinions. Aspinall in introduction to *Later Correspondence of George III* vol 4 p xxxiv paraphrasing a letter by Canning.

² A. Aspinall 'The Cabinet Council 1783-1835' 1952 Raleigh Lecture on History, published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy* vol. 38 p 145-252. ref p 190-1. A.D. Harvey calls Westmorland "a drunken clod given to asking absurd questions". A.D. Harvey *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, Batsford, 1978) p 117.

³ For more details see C.R. Middleton *The Administration of British Foreign Policy 1782-1846* (Durham N.C., Duke University Press, 1977) Chapter VI p 151-176.

office. Two such advisors are worth mentioning: Edward Cooke, one of the Under-Secretaries for War and the Colonies, was an old friend of Castlereagh who had worked with him in securing the passage of the Irish Act of Union. Cooke "was not an administrator ... [but] 'a shrewd, outspoken man',"¹ intensely loyal to Castlereagh yet not afraid to disagree with him. Sir Arthur Wellesley was Chief Secretary for Ireland, but in addition acted as unofficial military advisor to Castlereagh and the Cabinet on strategic questions, as he had previously done to Lord Grenville in 1806-7.

A much larger staff was of course needed to implement policy once it was made: the Foreign Office had its embassies, though their staffs were usually small, while two separate structures were responsible for administering the army. The Secretary at War was a junior minister (although he was sometimes a member of the Cabinet) who was responsible for the army's finances and for all troop movements within Britain. He presided "over that remarkable rabbit warren of red tape and civilian clerks which was the War Office",² and had well over one hundred staff to assist him. The office gave its holder no say whatever on strategy, although if he were a member of Cabinet he would naturally take part in its discussions on all subjects. The other structure of military administration was the Horse Guards, at whose head stood the Duke of York, George III's second son, who had been made Commander-in-Chief of the army in 1795. This military bureaucracy was responsible for the internal workings of the army - training, discipline, promotion etc. Inevitably there was sometimes friction between the Horse Guards and the War Office and in 1810 the young Palmerston (Sec. at War) became involved in a violent controversy with the aging Sir David Dundas (York's replacement as CinC). The Commander-in-Chief had no right even to be consulted on strategic matters,

¹ Middleton *Administration of British Foreign Policy* p 130 quoting Cornwallis to Ross 25 December 1800.

² Richard Glover *Peninsular Preparation. The Reform of the British Army 1795-1809* (C.U.P. 1963) p 35-6 (quote on p 35).

but Castlereagh and the Cabinet, did frequently seek his advice, and on some occasions also that of other senior officers in the Horse Guards. In addition to the War Office and the Horse Guards the Commissariat (which answered to the Chancellor of the Exchequer) and the Ordnance were involved in the administrative and logistical affairs of the army.

But the Cabinet was only one arm of Government and its power was much less relative to both Crown and Parliament than it is today. In theory the King had the power to accept or reject his ministers' advice on any subject but this power was weakened by their ability to resign if their advice was not taken. In practice the King's immense experience (he had been on the throne for well over 40 years) and his businesslike habits ensured that when he chose to intervene he could have a real influence over the Government's decisions. But in general the King chose not to intervene on questions of policy - except occasionally to urge caution - and played his largest role at times of Ministerial crisis. For the King's greatest power was to choose his servants i.e. to nominate the Prime Minister and to insist on the inclusion or exclusion of certain individuals. Obviously constraints affected this power, but political parties in this period (except to some extent the Whigs) were fragmented, and there remained a large number of M.P.s who would support the Government of the day regardless of its composition. It is not true that a Government with Royal support could not be overturned - for Perceval was nearly defeated in 1810 despite George III's unequivocal support - but even a weak government might survive. Parliament - or rather the Commons¹ - was also more independent and fluid than today, due to the weakness of the parties. No Government could survive if it lost the confidence of the Commons, although the Ministers did not automatically resign if they lost one or two votes on questions of secondary importance. To gain the confidence of the Commons the Ministry had to include a number of men of proven ability. To retain this confidence it must

¹ Court officers and the bench of Bishops usually gave the Government of the day a secure majority in the Lords in this period.

perform reasonably well. Addington was forced from office because he had lost the confidence of Parliament; Pitt's colleagues would not continue without him because they knew that they did not possess it; and the Talents were driven from power by the King. Cabinet governed from day to day but in 1807 neither Parliament nor the King was a rubber stamp.

And the people? Their power was of course less direct. The electorate had actually contracted over the eighteenth century,¹ although some constituencies such as Liverpool remained relatively open. But voting was not the most efficient means of expressing popular feelings. Petitions to Parliament, many calling for peace, were frequent but largely ineffective. Riots were a more direct form of communication and were provoked by issues ranging from the arrest of a radical M.P. to the rise in the price of a theatre ticket.² Such turbulence certainly concerned Ministers but it is doubtful if it greatly influenced their policies, at least in the management of the war. And yet there were occasions in which popular feelings and those in Parliament coincided and reinforced one another, and then the Government trod very warily indeed.

* * * * *

When the Portland Government took office they were alarmed by the state of the country's armed forces, which had suffered from some well-intentioned but ill-judged reforms made by the Talents. Castlereagh promptly set about repairing the damage, with his first priority being the regular army which he found dangerously under-strength. This problem was temporarily solved by drafting into the army nearly 30,000 men from the militia.³ But this of course exacerbated the existing weakness of the militia, and here Castlereagh made more extensive changes

¹ W.A. Speck *Stability and Strife. England 1714-1760* (London, Edward Arnold, 1977) p 16.

² ie the Burdett Riots in April 1810 and the O.P. (or Old Prices) Riots in late 1809 when the Managers of Covent Garden, re-opened after a fire, tried to introduce higher prices.

³ R. Glover *Peninsular Preparation* p 249. c 21,000 from Britain and c 7,000 from Ireland.

which not only made the militia more efficient, but which helped the long-term recruitment needs of the regulars. Inevitably there were some disadvantages in the new system, but overall it was a great success, providing the foundation for Britain's resurgence as a military power. It was Castlereagh's greatest achievement as War Minister.

Thanks to these reforms, by April 1808 Britain had an effective military force of over 300,000 men if the militia (who numbered nearly 100,000) are included.¹ But the great majority of these men were required for garrison duty both at home and abroad. Nearly half the regular forces were kept at home where they provided security against a French invasion or another uprising in Ireland. Many of them were weak second battalions, not really fit to take the field, but still useful if there was an emergency. They also fed recruits to their first battalions if these were overseas. Britain's success at acquiring colonies meant that she had garrisons scattered across the globe from the Channel Islands to New South Wales. The largest of these were in India and in the West Indies, but Sicily, Malta, Gibraltar, Canada, and the Cape of Good Hope all required forces of at least four or five thousand men.

This left Britain with a pitifully small disposable force. In early 1807 Castlereagh doubted whether it would be safe to send a mere 10-12,000 men to the Continent.² Even in 1808 with the first benefits of his reforms, it required a gigantic effort to put 40,000 men on the Continent, and this at a time when Napoleon was invading Spain with 200,000 men and had another army of almost

¹ 'Statement of Effective Force ... enclosed in a Memorandum by Castlereagh' [10th April 1808] in *Later Correspondence of George III* vol 5 no. 3641 p 61 which also gives figures on the distribution of the British army which I have used throughout the paragraph. Also R. Glover *Peninsular Preparation* p 249. I have deliberately given only rough figures, as any more precise figure involves a number of subsidiary issues not relevant here (e.g. nominal or 'effective' totals; gross or just rank and file; including or excluding auxiliary formations such as the King's German Legion etc).

² Castlereagh 'Memorandum respecting the State of the Military Force', 26th May 1807, in Charles William Vane (ed) *Correspondence, Despatches, and other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh* 2nd Series (London, William Shoberl, 1851) vol. 8 p 62-66 esp p 62-3. (Henceforth cited as *Castlereagh Correspondence*.)

equal size in Germany. Of course Britain had a smaller population than France, and did not have any form of conscription for the regular army, but it was her fear of invasion and her many colonies that prevented her from using more than a small proportion of her army for offensive purposes. This at least had the compensation that the troops which were used were among her best - a fact which largely accounts for the high quality of Wellington's army.

The shortage of men was not the only constraint on British operations however: there was also a serious shortage of transport ships, especially horse transports. Such transports could carry only a few hundred men at most, or less than a hundred horses. Even a small expedition thus required large numbers of ships while the Walcheren Expedition - admittedly Britain's largest ever - needed over 600.¹ Ships were also expensive to hire and absorbed large numbers of seamen - another commodity in short supply.

And even when the ships and men had been found, there were still many problems in mounting an expedition. These included the complex and inefficient organisation of Britain's military, in which the artillery and engineers had a completely separate establishment to the army and were represented in Cabinet by the Master-General of the Ordnance, while the Commissariat fell under the purview of the Treasury. Then there was the dependence of sailing ships upon the weather: adverse winds could keep an expedition in harbour for weeks or make it dangerous to linger off the coast. But perhaps the most crippling problem of all was the slowness and unreliability of communications. By the time that a request for orders reached London, was considered, and the reply reached its destination, the situation could have changed so dramatically that the new orders would be completely inappropriate. This left the Government with little option but to issue discretionary orders to its generals. The man on the spot usually was in a better position to

¹ Gordon C. Bond *The Grand Expedition. The British Invasion of Holland in 1809* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1979) p 27, 172. The 600 ships included their naval escorts.

judge the wisdom of an attack, but the system was not without its dangers. Selfish generals sometimes abused their discretion to the detriment of the common cause. Most generals felt that it imposed upon them an unwanted responsibility that could be exploited by politicians in the event of failure. While this feeling was not unjustified by events, the alternative of arbitrary orders to be obeyed no matter how inappropriate, was obviously worse.

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The Portland Government took office in March 1807 committed to the vigorous prosecution of the war. The Russians were defeated at Friedland before anything could be done to help them, and the Cabinet's immediate concern became British security. Even before the first news of Tilsit arrived in London the Ministers considered taking action to prevent the Danish fleet falling into Napoleon's hands. Then, on the night of 21st/22nd July 1807, fresh secret intelligence arrived which confirmed the danger.¹ Cathcart's expedition was already in the Baltic. The Danes were requested to give up their fleet 'for the duration' but naturally refused and Cathcart bombarded Copenhagen for three days before they surrendered.

The coup was bold and ruthless. It did much to enhance Britain's security but its immorality troubled many in Britain including the King.² It also did much damage to Britain's reputation on the Continent and reinforced Alexander's French sympathies.

Copenhagen was a limited operation, essentially defensive in its objectives, and it did little for Britain's strategic position in the Baltic. Here Britain was embarrassed by her alliance with the 'mad' King Gustavus IV of Sweden. Canning made it clear that he would understand if Sweden felt impelled to come to terms

¹ Denis Gray *Spencer Perceval* (Manchester University Press, 1963) p 162-5 and Hinde *Canning* p 169-172, have excellent accounts of this, though they do not explain the curious omission of any reference to this fresh intelligence in *The Later Correspondence of George III*.

² Canning to Mrs Canning 26th August 1807, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 4 p 607n.

with her enemies, for he knew that Britain could do nothing to protect her against Russia's ambition to acquire Finland. Yet Gustavus refused to take the hint and the British Government reluctantly continued the Swedish subsidy and even, in April 1808, agreed to send an expedition on the understanding that it was to be used for small defensive operations such as the defence of Gothenburg. Unfortunately the Swedish ambassador in London had blundered - a few days after the Cabinet had made its decision, and fully three weeks before the expedition under Sir John Moore sailed, he learnt that his King only wanted the British force if it was authorized to take part in an offensive against Denmark. If only the ambassador had had the courage to admit his mistake the whole fiasco might have been avoided.¹

The confusion which followed can be readily imagined: nothing Sir John Moore or Thornton (the British envoy in Stockholm) could have done would have prevented it, but in fact their actions and personalities made the problem worse. The farce ended only when Gustavus placed Moore under house arrest and the resourceful general fled back to the ships from which his men had never disembarked.²

The damage to Anglo-Swedish relations was irreparable but unimportant. The defeat of the Swedish armies, their loss of Finland, and the subsequent deposing and exile of Gustavus were all but inevitable. Of more importance was the ill will created between the British Cabinet and Sir John Moore.

Moore had long held a low opinion of the strategic insight of politicians and he had never really understood the intentions of the Government in sending him to Sweden.³ He was predisposed to believe that Ministers, especially Pittite

¹ Raymond Carr 'Gustavus IV and the British Government, 1804-1809' *English Historical Review* vol. 60 1945 p 59. For a clear statement of the Government's purpose in sending the expedition to Sweden see Castlereagh to the King 17th April 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3646 p 65-66.

² Sir J.F. Maurice (ed) *The Diary of Sir John Moore* (London, Edward Arnold, 1904) vol. 2 p 225-230.

³ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2 p 203-4 4th May 1808.

Ministers, were fools, and his experiences in Sweden confirmed him in this opinion. To make matters worse he did not try to conceal his view and was blunt even rude, in his interviews with Castlereagh.¹ Not surprisingly the Ministers resented his behaviour. There was already considerable prejudice in the Cabinet against Moore² and it was quite reasonably felt that he had behaved badly in Sweden albeit in extremely difficult circumstances. Whatever his military talents the Government must have felt that he was unsuitable for a chief command where he might damage relations with important and sensitive allies; nor was there the goodwill and trust which is essential for harmonious relations between a general in the field and his political masters.

The defeat of Sweden removed Britain's last ally in northern Europe and Napoleon's domination of the mainland of the Continent was almost complete, so it was only on the southern periphery of Europe that Britain could look for allies. With Russia joining France, a future alliance with the Ottoman Empire might be possible, although an unfortunate attempt to coerce the Porte in 1807 by forcing the Dardanelles and invading Egypt meant that the reconciliation would take time and skilful diplomacy.³

Sicily was an existing ally whose ports were vital for continued British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean.⁴ For this Britain paid in both men and money. A garrison of at least 10,000 men was necessary to secure Sicily against a possible French invasion from Naples, while the Treaty of Alliance signed on 30th

¹ In this he had some justification, for Castlereagh's treatment of him on his return from Sweden was extraordinarily ill-judged and tactless and did much to exacerbate Moore's resentment. *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2 p 239-243, 250-252.

² It has often been assumed that Canning was Moore's principal or only enemy in the Cabinet. No doubt Canning, seeing events through the eyes of his diplomats in Sicily and Sweden, was unimpressed by Moore, but so were other Ministers, eg Portland to Canning, 'Private & Confidential', 31st December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 33A where the Prime Minister makes it plain that he has never trusted Moore since his first contact with him in the 1790s.

³ Both operations were ordered by the Talents and neither achieved anything.

⁴ Piers Mackesy *The War in the Mediterranean 1803-1810* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981 - first published by Harvard U.P. in 1957) p 16.

March 1808 specified an annual subsidy of £300,000.¹ In theory Sicily was an ideal base for raids into Italy, but amphibious operations proved difficult to manage and full of risks. Many attacks were considered but only one was carried through on a large scale, and though this led to a victory over the French at Maida (6th July 1806), it did not result in any permanent gains.

Britain's only other ally in southern Europe was Portugal. Their alliance, already centuries old, had been invoked once or twice during the war with mixed results when Spain had threatened an invasion. Hitherto Portugal had been on the margin of the war - ineffectually supporting Britain and subject to occasional threats and harassment from France and Spain. Queen Maria I had been insane since 1792 and her son Prince João ruled as Regent. He was a weak vacillating man who had done nothing to revitalize his country.

Tilsit freed Napoleon's hands and gave him the leisure to direct his attention to the future of Iberia. His plans were far reaching and Portugal played only a relatively minor part in them, albeit as the first act, if not the prologue, to the main entertainment. On 27th October 1807 he signed the Treaty of Fontainebleau with Spain, by which the two powers agreed to a joint invasion and partition of Portugal in which France would obtain Lisbon and the centre of the country. A French army under General Junot had already entered Spain; it now hastened to Lisbon urged on by Napoleon's fears that the British might cheat him of his prize as they had done at Copenhagen.² These fears were well founded: when Junot's exhausted vanguard entered Lisbon on 30th November they found that the Portuguese Court had fled to Brazil escorted by their fleet and a squadron of the Royal Navy. But although Junot had failed to secure the Portuguese fleet, Napoleon's other objectives had been achieved. The English had been driven from Portugal - which strengthened

¹ Later increased to £400,000. John M. Sherwig *Guineas and Gunpowder. British Foreign Aid in the Wars with France, 1793-1815* (Harvard University Press, 1969) p 195-196. The public clauses of the Treaty are printed in *Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates* vol. 11 cols. 845-848 (Henceforth cited as *Parliamentary Debates*.)

² Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 92.

the Continental System - and more importantly, he had managed to peacefully introduce no less than three French armies into Spain under the pretext of supporting Junot.

The British had been watching Portugal with concern for some time. In 1806 they feared a French invasion and prepared to intervene, preferably to aid the Portuguese to defend their country, or at least cover the flight of the Court and navy, but if necessary to remove the Portuguese fleet by force.¹ The outbreak of Napoleon's war with Prussia had put to rest these fears for a time, but towards the end of 1807 they revived in response to the renewed French threat. In this instance the policy of the Portland Government was almost identical to that of its predecessor.² The only difference, surprisingly, was that the new administration was less ready to become involved in the defence of Portugal - a fine irony indeed in the light of subsequent events and attitudes! A British force was again assembled to intervene if necessary, but after much hesitation, and with much reluctance, the Portuguese Regent finally decided that the long journey to Brazil was the lesser of the two evils. He sailed on 28th November - just two days before Junot arrived.

The French occupation of Portugal led to a reduction of British exports from £1.7m in 1806 to only £430,000 in 1808, but this only represented a drop from under 4 per cent of total exports to just over 1 per cent.³ The British trading community had received plenty of warning of the impending crisis and had taken successful precautions to minimize their losses.⁴ The reduction in trade was more

¹ Fox to the Earls of Rosslyn and St Vincent, and to Lt-General Simcoe, 9th August 1806, in Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers* presented in pursuance of the address of 15th February 1808 p 347-357, especially p 347-351. This incident shows the Talents in a more vigorous and determined light than the rest of their war policy, and makes their outraged criticism of Copenhagen seem a little hollow.

² Canning to Hawkesbury (acting for the ill Castlereagh) 6th, 7th and 8th November 1807, Canning Papers Bundle 32/2. Castlereagh to Cooke, 11th November 1807, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 357-361. See also *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2 p 193-200; Lord Holland *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party 1807-1821 ...* (London, John Murray, 1905) p 9-11, 393-5; and Canning to the Rev. William Leigh, 19th Nov. 1807, quoted by Aspinall in *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 4 p 661n.

³ Heckscher *The Continental System* p 245.

⁴ A.D. Francis *The Wine Trade* (London, A & C Black, 1972) p 269.

than made up by the opening of the Brazilian market to direct British exports.¹ Other Portuguese colonies also attracted British attention: Madeira was of strategic rather than economic importance and preparations had been made for its peaceful occupation even before affairs in Portugal reached their crisis.² It was occupied by a small force under General Beresford on 24th December 1807. Finally even the Portuguese colony of Macao was briefly occupied until the Chinese authorities forced the British to withdraw by threatening to end their trading rights.³

Long before the Portuguese Court sailed for Brazil the British Government had been interested in South America. The Spanish colonies in particular exercised a powerful attraction for British statesmen. Their legendary wealth, the immense size of their potential market, and their alleged discontent with the rule of Spain, all made them appear as an appealing alternative when affairs on the Continent went badly.

During the Revolutionary Wars Dundas repeatedly advocated British action, but nothing was done. In 1805 Pitt for a time contemplated supporting Miranda and other agitators for South American independence, but finally withdrew under pressure from Russia. (The Russians were hoping that Spain would join the coalition against France.)⁴

1 William W. Kaufmann *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America 1804-1828* (no place, Archon Books, 1967) p 55.

2 Canning to Hawkesbury, 6th and 7th November 1807, Canning Papers Bundle 32/2; Castlereagh to Cooke, 11th November 1807, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 357-361; Hawkesbury to the King, 13th November 1807, *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 4 no. 3556 p 646; Samuel E. Vichness 'Marshal of Portugal: the Military Career of William Carr Beresford 1785-1814' unpublished PhD thesis, submitted in 1976 to Florida State University p 63-68.

3 Herbert J. Wood 'England, China, and the Napoleonic Wars' in *Pacific Historical Journal* vol. 9 June 1940 p 139-156 especially p 145-156 gives an interesting and amusing account of this little known incident. The British even considered attacking Portuguese outposts in Africa, but decided against it. R. Dundas to Castlereagh and reply, 12th and 13th December 1807, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 8 p 93-96.

4 Kaufmann *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America* p 13.

After the allied defeats of 1805 and Pitt's death in early 1806, the question was re-opened, not by the Talents, but by an unauthorized and initially successful attack on Buenos Aires by a force from the Cape of Good Hope under Admiral Sir Home Popham. News of this success led to a commercial boom and inspired the Government to adopt a variety of ill-considered plans for the conquest of all Spain's American colonies. But no sooner had preparations been set in train than news arrived of the surrender of the British force at Buenos Aires. A much more substantial expedition was despatched under General Whitelocke but it met with no greater success and all British forces withdrew, leaving the dreams of a new American empire in tatters.

Although Whitelocke's failure had restored the territorial status quo the South American venture had considerable consequences. It had led the Government to respond with icy cold reservation to indications that Spain might wish to change sides and join the allies in 1806.¹ No doubt it also increased Spanish fears of Britain's intentions - fears which were to persist and cause tension throughout the Peninsular War. Finally it may even have encouraged the spirit of independence and self-sufficiency among South Americans, although surprisingly it left little residual hostility to Britain.²

Whitelocke had been sent by the Talents but by the time of his capitulation (7th July 1807) they had been out of office for over three months. Portland's Government disapproved of the policy of conquest : their strategic priority was Europe and they believed that the drain on their scarce military resources created by a need to garrison Buenos Aires was more than it was worth.³ Consequently they

¹ Cabinet Minute, 20th October 1806, *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 4 No. 3318 p 482.

² Kaufmann *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America* p 33.

³ Castlereagh to Sir Arthur Wellesley, 25th April 1807, in Wellington, 2nd Duke of, (ed) *The Supplementary Despatches of ... the Duke of Wellington* (London, John Murray, 1858-1864) 15 vols. vol. 5 p 22. (Henceforth cited as *W.S.D.*) "Memorandum for the Cabinet" by Castlereagh, 1st May 1807, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7 p 314-324 esp. p 319.

were not dismayed when news of Whitelocke's capitulation arrived in September especially as the political blame for the failure could be directed at their opponents.¹

And yet the new Government appreciated the arguments for action in South America as well as their predecessors. Indeed the pressure to trade there had been increased by the fleeting opportunities of 1806-7, while the importance of denying the resources to the enemy was as strong as ever.

During 1807 and early 1808 Castlereagh considered various forms of intervention which would not require too great a British commitment, but was unable to get the Cabinet's approval for any of his schemes. Castlereagh himself was not prepared to propose the most obvious alternative to the policy of conquest - that of encouraging the local independence forces - for fear that they would become revolutionary. He did suggest the unlikely scheme of placing the Duke of Orleans at their head in the hope that this would guarantee their stability,² but this idea was wisely not pursued.

The principal reason for the Cabinet's reluctance to become involved in South America was probably their fear that it would divert resources from their Continental operations. But there were other objections, including a dislike of disrupting the established order of the world. George III appears to have felt this strongly, and his opinion always influenced the Cabinet.³

¹ See Canning to Lord Boringdon, 12th September 1807, in Augustus Granville Stapleton *George Canning and His Times* (London, John W. Parker and Son, 1859) p 128-9. Castlereagh however was angry at the news: Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 16th September 1807, P.R.O.N.I. Castlereagh Papers D3030/2533/2. This adds some weight to other, inconclusive, indications that Castlereagh advocated and Canning opposed a South American strategy. But against this is Canning's letter to Castlereagh of 17th May 1807 (Canning Papers Bundle 32/3) which appears to support Castlereagh's plans. It may be significant that Castlereagh's close friend and advisor Sir Arthur Wellesley had been deeply involved in planning the South American expeditions of the Talents and continued to provide plans on this subject to Castlereagh. See *W.S.D.* vol. 6 p 35-82 passim.

² "Memorandum for the Cabinet" by Castlereagh, 1st May 1807, in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7 p 314-324.

³ George III's opposition can be deduced from Portland's letter to him of 21st April 1808, printed in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3649, p 67-8; and from Castlereagh to Portland, 18th April 1808, Portland Papers held at the University of Nottingham, PwF8580 - see below Chapter 2, p 37.

The arrival of the Portuguese Court at Brazil at the end of 1807 raised new concerns and lessened others, but it did not in the end greatly change British policy. There was a new fear of encroachments on Brazil from the Spanish provinces and a recognition that independence forces could threaten Portuguese as well as Spanish authority.¹ On the other hand the pressure for direct trade with the Spanish colonies eased in response to the opening of Brazil to British trade by the 'Portuguese' Government.

South America thus remained a point of concern for Portland's Ministers throughout their first year in office. Whitelocke's failure had enabled them to escape the inherited policy of conquest with all its dangers and liabilities; but so long as there were no opportunities for sustained British action in Europe the temptation to try their hand in South America would remain. Had they succumbed to this temptation in 1807 they would have been unable to respond to the unforeseen opportunities that arose in 1808.

¹ Memorandum for Cabinet, Measures suggested respecting South America", by Castlereagh, 21st December 1807, in *Castlereagh Correspondence*, vol. 8, p 96-100.

Chapter 2

From Bayonne to Cintra The First Months of the Peninsular War

Britain lacked the military resources to make lasting strategic opportunities for herself on the Continent. Without allies she was powerless to take the war to Napoleon, and Tilsit appeared to establish his hegemony beyond challenge. Yet within a year Napoleon's blunder in Spain had rescued Britain from her isolation, and provided her with an alliance which was to last until the end of the war.

When Napoleon decided to intervene in the Peninsula, he had of course no way of guessing the results of his actions, and it is ironic that his decision arose as much from caution as from greed. Certainly he coveted Spain's treasure, fleet and colonies, but he also feared that she would betray him. This was no paranoid fear, for in October 1806 when Napoleon was at war with Prussia the Spanish Government had made unmistakable preparations to change sides, and had only drawn back from the brink when it learnt of the Prussian defeat at Jena-Auerstädt.

Spain had been a French ally since 1796 but the war had taken a heavy toll, with her trade and colonies suffering from British attacks. The court favourite, Chief Minister and effective ruler of Spain, Manuel Godoy the 'Prince of the Peace' had recognized that Spain had nothing to gain from the war and tried to live up to his title. Thus he welcomed the Peace of Amiens and only re-entered the war in December 1804 when the British seizure of the Spanish treasure fleet left him no alternative.¹ Godoy's dislike of the French alliance was increased when the renewed war led to the destruction of the pick of the Spanish fleet at Trafalgar (21st October 1805), hence his preparations to join the allies when he thought that Napoleon would have his hands full facing the combined resources of Prussia and Russia.

¹ Napoleon had placed immense pressure on the Spanish Government, but it was the British action which precipitated the outbreak of hostilities. Hans Roger Madol, *Godoy. The First Dictator of Modern Times* (London, Hurst & Blackett 1934) p 165-7.

Following the Prussian débâcle Godoy hastily sent renewed protestations of loyalty to Napoleon who chose to accept them at face value as he was still busy confronting the Russian armies in Poland. But Napoleon was not deceived, nor did he forgive, he merely bided his time for a more convenient moment. The Spanish threat had caught him unawares, and while not directly dangerous it might have been extremely embarrassing to a ruler whose position was justified by his military prowess. There is little doubt that from this time Napoleon was determined to take control of Spain and Portugal and so secure their loyalty and - by modernizing their Governments - their efficiency as allies.

Napoleon might have conquered the Peninsula in a few weeks with the *Grande Armée* but even after Tilsit it was needed in Central Europe to support his hegemony. In any case he did not want a war, nor did he believe that one would be necessary to effect the transfer of power he desired in his servile ally. He therefore decided to achieve his ends through intrigue backed by a limited force mainly consisting of fresh conscripts.

Napoleon's first step in this slower, less direct, method of conquering an ally was to 'borrow' 15,000 Spanish troops under the Marquis de La Romana in March 1807 and use them to garrison towns in North Germany and Denmark. This had the double advantage of freeing some of his own troops and disrupting the Spanish army. He then arranged the conquest of Portugal in which Spain took part as an ally sending another 20,000 Spanish troops out of the way. Under the pretext of reinforcing Junot he introduced large French forces into northern Spain, from one end of the Pyrenees to the other. In February and March 1808 these troops seized control of the most important fortresses of northern Spain by a mixture of trickery and force, while another body of French troops advanced south towards Madrid.

These moves naturally alarmed the Spanish Court where nerves had already been worn thin by a series of squalid domestic intrigues. In desperation Godoy

planned to resist the French,¹ while at the same time retiring with the Royal Family towards Seville from where they could flee to Cadiz and even South America if the French triumphed. But Godoy was generally hated and distrusted by the populace and there were serious riots at Aranjuez, 25 miles south of Madrid, which halted the Royal progress and finally led the pathetic Carlos IV first to dismiss Godoy, and then to abdicate (17th - 19th March 1808). His popular son and heir took the throne as Ferdinand VII amid wild public rejoicing.

Ferdinand promptly returned to Madrid where Murat 'The Emperor's Lieutenant in Spain' had arrived the previous day at the head of 20,000 troops. Ferdinand knew that he could not hope to rule Spain without Napoleon's acquiescence, so he was dismayed to find that neither Murat nor the French ambassador would acknowledge his claim to the throne. Yet the French did not reject him outright, and by half-promises and outright lies they lured him to Bayonne to meet the Emperor. There, on French soil, he was confronted with his outraged parents and ordered to abdicate. Faced with the alternative of martyrdom his resistance collapsed after a few days and on 6th May 1808 he resigned his claim to the throne.

Napoleon appeared to have succeeded completely and he chose as the new ruler of Spain his elder brother Joseph who had had some success in introducing reforms to Naples. But already the trouble was brewing that was to deny Joseph the chance of proving his capacity as a moderate enlightened ruler. The influx of French troops, the political turmoil, and the disappearance of the old Royal Family had led to discontent and restlessness throughout Spain. Minor incidents were contained until 2nd May 1808 when there was a large bloody riot in Madrid (the Dos de Mayo), which Murat savagely repressed. A false calm followed which lasted for three weeks while the people in the provinces absorbed the news and some secret preparations for a rising were made. Then, in the last week of May and

¹ Charles Esdaile, 'War and Politics in Spain, 1808-1814' *The Historical Journal* vol. 31, No. 2, 1988, p 300.

the first days of June province by province the whole country rose against the French and the long bloody war began.

The Spanish risings were popular, conservative and local. Once the established authorities agreed to take the lead against the French the uprisings lost most of their revolutionary overtones. Given the French occupation of Madrid and central Spain it is not surprising that political power fragmented and that the newly established provincial juntas behaved as almost independent governments. As such they were well placed to exploit the first wave of popular enthusiasm, but their lack of unity and their rivalry impeded the development of a sensible strategic plan. Most of the old, regular Spanish army was in the provinces of Andalusia and Galicia whose Juntas were inclined to use it as much for regional as for national purposes.

Nonetheless the French were in an uncomfortable position although they did not immediately appreciate their danger, and continued to over-extend their forces. The French army in Spain was not large and included a high proportion of inexperienced conscripts. The lines of communication which ran from the Pyrenees to Madrid lacked protection and appeared vulnerable to a Spanish attack from Galicia. The Spaniards under Cuesta and Blake tried such an attack but were defeated by Bessieres at Medina del Rio Seco on 14th July 1808. This victory should have secured the French position, but its impact was lost when a complete French army of 20,000 men under General Dupont surrendered at Bailen in southern Spain a week later. Bailen was a great defeat for the French and its impact was enormously increased when Joseph needlessly panicked on hearing the news and fled with his French troops all the way back to the Ebro. This foolish action, as much as Bailen itself, gave the Spanish uprising credibility and damaged Napoleon's prestige throughout Europe.

* * * * *

The British Government had watched with concern the growing French presence in Spain in the months before the uprising. Indeed it dominated their strategic planning despite the presence of such other issues as the renegotiation of the alliance with Sicily, and the despatch of Moore's expedition to Sweden. They knew that they could not hope to halt the French advance so they concentrated on minimizing its impact on their strategic position. The six months from December 1807 to May 1808 were filled with plans for pre-emptive strikes along the lines of Copenhagen against enemy squadrons in Spanish ports and against Spanish fortresses. The Ministers also continued to consider the possibility of action in South America, in response to the danger that Napoleon might gain control of the Spanish colonies through his increasing domination of the government at Madrid. As early as 21st December 1807 Castlereagh used this argument in support of an attack on Monte Video, in place of the projected expedition against Corfu.¹ Despite the support of Portland and Camden,² Castlereagh failed to get his plan through Cabinet although he did succeed in stopping the attack on Corfu. Nor did Castlereagh succeed in gaining approval for an attack on the Spanish squadron at Vigo by reinforcements en route to Halifax and Bermuda,³ but the Cabinet seems to have supported most of his subsequent plans.

These plans generally centred around a small force of some 5,000 men under Major-General Sir Brent Spencer which had originally been intended to augment the garrison of Sicily, but was now found to be disposable. On 16th January 1808 Castlereagh ordered Spencer to proceed with his force to the British squadron off Portugal and examine the possibility of capturing the Tagus forts and so permitting the British squadron to attack the Russian warships in Lisbon

¹ 'Memorandum for Cabinet Measures suggested respecting South America' [by Lord Castlereagh], 21st December 1807, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 8 p 96-100.

² Portland to Castlereagh, 21st December 1807 and Camden to Castlereagh, 22nd December 1807 both in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 8 p 100-101.

³ 'Memorandum for the Cabinet relative to Vigo' [by Lord Castlereagh, c 28th December 1807] in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 8 p 101-103.

harbour.¹ If this was impractical Spencer was to go on to Gibraltar and attempt a *coup de main* against the Spanish fortress of Ceuta if he thought that such an attack would succeed.²

Spencer was delayed by bad weather until 21st February; he arrived off the Tagus on the 26th, and on the 29th he wrote to Castlereagh that the forts were occupied by 16,000 French troops, with another 40,000 French and Spanish troops in Portugal, and that he therefore would not make the attack.³ In fact these figures were considerably inflated - Junot had only about 25,000 French troops in all Portugal.⁴ Nonetheless Spencer was wise not to attack and his instructions show that the Government had always doubted whether this attack would be practical.

Spencer arrived at Gibraltar on 10th March and consulted with officers there including the Governor Lt-Gen. Sir Hew Dalrymple before deciding against an attack on Ceuta.⁵ This was a much more serious blow to the Government : the Russian squadron in Lisbon was a nuisance, but if the French gained control of Ceuta they might seriously impede British passage of the Straits of Gibraltar and hence her whole position in the Mediterranean.⁶ Still it was better that Spencer should refrain from making the attack than that he should be ignominiously repulsed, and in the long run his caution was most beneficial to relations between Britain and Spain.

¹ Siniavin's squadron of nine ships had been operating in the Mediterranean but after Tilsit was ordered to return to the Baltic. They took refuge in Lisbon after being battered by a storm and were promptly blockaded by the British. Siniavin personally had little sympathy for the French. Lt. Commander Robert W. Daly 'Operations of the Russian Navy during the Reign of Napoleon I', in *Mariner's Mirror* vol. 34, July 1948, p 169-183 esp. p 177-9.

² Castlereagh to Spencer, 16th January 1808 PRO WO 6/185 p 6-13.

³ precis of Spencer to Castlereagh, 29th February 1808 in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7 p 146-7.

⁴ Sir Charles Oman *A History of the Peninsular War* 7 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1902-1930) vol. 1 p 612.

⁵ precis of Spencer to Castlereagh, 13th March 1808 in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7 p 147.

⁶ Sir Arthur Paget to Canning, 27th December 1808 in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 361-2.

All this was no doubt very frustrating for the British Cabinet especially as the French continued to increase their influence in Spain. Reports of events in the Peninsula reached London from a variety of sources, one of the most important of which was General Dalrymple at Gibraltar. These reports contained many inaccuracies amongst some surprisingly good information. It appears that the British Government thought that the palace coup at Aranjuez marked the installation of a puppet government completely submissive to Napoleon's demands.¹

This led to a major change in British strategy with the Cabinet finally adopting in principle the South American strategy. On 21st April 1808 Portland wrote to the King outlining the reasons for their decision i.e. their fear that France would gain control of all South America including Brazil and that with these resources she could overwhelm Britain. The King recognized the necessity of the decision and only hoped that it would not require too large a commitment of troops - bearing in mind the fact that Moore had just been sent to Sweden with 10,000 men.² He need not have worried, for the Government decided not to implement its new policy until August, when the weather would be most suitable and all the expeditionary forces would be fully prepared.³ In the meantime Spencer was ordered to attack the Spanish squadron in Port Mahon, Minorca,⁴ but by the time this order arrived the situation in southern Spain had been completely transformed and Spencer wisely ignored it.

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¹ Portland to the King, 21st April 1808 in *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3649 p 67-8. Other British observers hoped that Ferdinand could manipulate the French and regenerate Spain. Francis Horner to John Allen, n.d. April 1808 Leonard Horner (ed) *Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner* (London, John Murray, 1843) vol. 1 p 422-3.

² Portland to the King and reply, 21st and 22nd April 1808, *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3649 p 67-69. On 18th April Castlereagh had written to Portland, "I send your Grace The Spanish Papers, with the Cabinet Minute for the King, I trust for the sake of his own Crown his Majesty will have no scruples." Portland Papers, University of Nottingham, Pw F 8580.

³ Castlereagh to the King, 16th May 1808, *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3659 p 76.

⁴ Castlereagh to Spencer, 17th May 1808. PRO WO 6/185 p 17-20.

Sir Hew Dalrymple had been in intermittent contact with General Castanos, commander of the Spanish force blockading Gibraltar, since 1807.¹ From Castanos and other sources Dalrymple closely followed the course of events in Spain and sent the news he gathered back to London. In early May 1808 he learned that there was unrest in Cadiz following the arrival of news of the Dos de Mayo, so he sent Spencer with his force to join Admiral Purvis off Cadiz, where he could take advantage of any opportunity that arose.²

Cadiz was a city of nearly 60,000 people, capital of the South America trade, an almost impregnable fortress and a major naval base.³ As well as a number of Spanish warships it contained a French squadron under Admiral Rosilly - the refitted survivors of Trafalgar. All this gave it immense strategic importance, and the only reason that Spencer had not already been ordered to attack it was that its defences were far too strong for his small force.⁴

Spencer arrived off Cadiz on 15th May but achieved nothing apart from making contact with the local Spanish authorities and issuing a proclamation to the inhabitants.⁵ If anything his presence retarded the patriotic cause for it created suspicion and alarm at Britain's intentions.⁶ Many Spaniards feared then and throughout the war, that if Britain once placed a garrison in Cadiz she would never withdraw it, and that the city would become a second Gibraltar.

¹ Admiral Sir E.G. Fanshawe, *Sir Hew Dalrymple at Gibraltar and in Portugal in 1808* (London, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd. no date) p 6.

² precis of Dalrymple to Castlereagh 13th May 1808 in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7 p 137.

³ Gabriel H. Lovett, *Napoleon and the Birth of Modern Spain* (New York University Press, 1965) vol. 1 p 363n and Chapter IX passim.

⁴ Castlereagh had considered an attack in 1807 but Admiral Collingwood had advised against it. Castlereagh to Collingwood 21st May 1807 and reply 16th October 1807 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 5 p 153-160.

⁵ precis of Spencer to Castlereagh 29th May 1808 (2 letters) in *Castlereagh Correspondence*, vol. 7 p 148-9.

⁶ So Dalrymple judged. Dalrymple to Sir Arthur Wellesley 16th July 1808 in the Wellington Papers, Southampton University, Bundle 1/207.



Southern Spain, 1808

When Seville and Andalusia rose in the last week of May the new Government sought British aid from Gibraltar. Sir Hew Dalrymple was in a difficult position, lacking relevant instructions from London and without the resources to give much aid, but he responded extremely well. He encouraged the Spaniards and gave them what limited material aid that he could, while not making any potentially embarrassing commitments on behalf of his Government. He sent an able officer (Major Cox) to represent him at Seville, and another (Captain Whittingham) to the headquarters of General Castanos, who had assumed command over all the Spanish forces in Andalusia on 30th May.¹

The Spaniards suggested that Spencer's force should join Castanos's army, but the British generals judged that it was too weak to operate in the interior and would only offer to garrison Cadiz or another Spanish fortress, thus freeing its garrison to join the main army.² Not surprisingly this was rejected and some tension arose over Spencer's continued presence off Cadiz. Eventually a compromise was devised with the Spaniards accepting British naval help in capturing Rosilly's squadron. This was achieved on 14th June, and Spencer then felt able to accept suggestions that he might best further the common cause elsewhere.³ He sailed to Ayamonte on the Portuguese border where his presence led a small French column to withdraw back to Portugal.⁴ Then he joined Admiral Cotton off the Tagus but again decided that Junot's force was too strong for him to attack, estimating it this time at 20,500 men.⁵ He therefore returned to Cadiz which

¹ Dalrymple to Castlereagh, 31st May, 2nd June and 9th June 1808. B.L. Add Mss 38, 242 (Liverpool Papers) f231-3, f235-9, f263-4 and enclosures.

² Herrera to Dalrymple and reply, 8th and 9th June 1808. B.L. Add Mss 38, 242 f268, f272; Castlereagh to Dalrymple, 25th May 1808 PRO WO 6/185 p 22-27.

³ precis of Spencer's letters to Castlereagh of 6th, 10th, 12th and 17th June 1808 in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7 p 151-4. Spencer had earlier rejected suggestions from both Dalrymple and the Spaniards that he move.

⁴ precis of Spencer to Castlereagh 17th June (2 letters) *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7 p 153-4.

⁵ Spencer to Castlereagh, 24th June 1808, PRO WO 6/185 p 174-8. see below p 55.

he proposed to save if the French under General Dupont should defeat Castanos. Whatever the Spaniards thought of this prospect they let Spencer disembark his men on the other side of the bay from Cadiz. Here the British troops remained for nearly three weeks until Dupont was defeated, and Spencer finally left to join Sir Arthur Wellesley's force in Portugal.¹

While it is easy to laugh at Spencer's peregrinations it is difficult to see how else he might prudently have used his force. To march into the interior of Spain with 5,000 men, no base, no transport, no lines of communication and no instructions, to join an allied army of which he knew almost nothing would have been to invite disaster and risk court martial even if he had been successful. In fact he was in the frustrating position of being in the right place at the right time but without any role to play. By contrast Dalrymple played his part to perfection, showing considerable diplomatic ability and an understanding of the wider strategic position.

The Government learnt of these developments too late to influence or control them. Through some unfortunate hitch in communications all Dalrymple's despatches from late March to early May arrived together between 21st and 25th May.² The Cabinet's initial reaction was contained in a despatch from Castlereagh to Dalrymple of 25th May 1808. This suspended Spencer's attack on Port Mahon, and approved Dalrymple's correspondence with Castanos. The Government looked forward to open opposition to the French in southern Spain, and promised to send reinforcements to build Spencer's force up to the 10,000 men which they mistakenly thought Castanos had required. Until the reinforcements arrived Spencer was to keep his force united and not to commit it to the interior. Finally

¹ precis of Spencer to Castlereagh 3rd, 13th and 22nd July 1808 in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7 p 156-7.

² Castlereagh to Dalrymple, 21st and 25th May 1808, PRO WO 6/185 p 20-21, 22-27.

they hoped that Dalrymple would vigorously encourage the Spanish resistance while discreetly avoiding any pledge of his Government's faith.¹

On the same day Castlereagh wrote a private letter to Dalrymple in which he concentrated on the action that should be taken if the Spanish cause failed. South America and Cadiz were the most important objects for Britain. Castlereagh hoped that Cadiz would become the refuge and rallying point for the Spanish patriots, and that Dalrymple would facilitate their passage to South America where they would secure the colonies against French influence.²

These two letters show that while the Government leapt at the apparent opportunity in southern Spain - even promising to commit 10,000 men to a cause of which it knew little - it suspended rather than abandoned its previous plans. This was clearly the sensible approach: resistance to the French in Spain could do Britain no harm even if, as must have seemed probable, it quickly collapsed. Napoleon's reputation would suffer if he was forced to conquer an apparently loyal ally and it would increase Britain's chances of success in South America.

During the following fortnight the new policy was consolidated : on 2nd June George III approved the arrangements that had been made for a force of 8,000 men assembling at Cork and intended for "service on the coast of Spain or eventually in South America, should no favorable [sic] opening present itself in Europe for their exertions".³ On 4th June Castlereagh was given authority over all military and naval units off the south-west coast of Spain in order to co-ordinate the

¹ Castlereagh to Dalrymple, 25th May 1808, PRO WO 6/185 p 22-27.

² Castlereagh to Dalrymple, 'private', 25th May 1808, PRO WO 6/185 p 27-32.

³ Castlereagh to the King and reply 1st and 2nd June 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3667 p 82.

Government's policy.¹

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Then on 8th June 1808² British strategy was given another twist by the arrival in London of news of an uprising, not in Andalusia, but in Asturias - a small mountainous province in northern Spain. The messengers were a fully accredited deputation from the ancient provincial assembly which had happened to be in session when the rising took place. They had left Oviedo on 26th May, embarked at Gijon on the 30th, landed at Falmouth and arrived in London early on 8th June. They brought with them an appeal for assistance from the Asturian Junta and unconfirmed news of risings in the other provinces of northern Spain.³

The Asturian deputies received a rapturous welcome in London. Celebratory dinners were held in their honour, they were lionized by fashionable society, and when they went to the theatre, the performance had to be suspended for an hour such was the commotion. The Spanish rising was the first really good war news (except Copenhagen) for nearly a year and its appeal transcended normal social and political barriers. The popular poet Thomas Campbell thought he should die of joy if the Spanish cause succeeded and of misery if it failed, while almost all the Royal Dukes eagerly volunteered to lead British forces to the aid of Spain.⁴

¹ Mackesy, *War in the Mediterranean*, p 226. On this same day (4th June 1808) Castlereagh wrote to the Duke of Manchester, Governor of Jamaica, ordering him to attempt to subvert the Spanish Governor of Cuba, and offering Britain's guarantee for Cuba's independence - so the South American strategy was far from dead. *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 364-8.

² There is remarkable confusion about this date. Oman *Peninsular War* vol. 1 p 220 says 4th June, and also 7th June (vol. 1 p 66); Lovett *Napoleon and the Birth of Modern Spain* vol. 1 p 156 says 6th June; while the *Annual Register* (1808 p 194) says 9th June. For the correct date see Canning to the King 8th June 1808 in *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3669 p 84 and *The Times* 9th June 1808.

³ Canning to the King 8th June 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3669 p 84. The declaration granting them full powers is in PRO FO 72/65 f 10-11 and is printed in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 P 363-4. The appeal to Britain is in PRO FO 72/65 f 13-4.

⁴ Campbell is quoted in Gray *Spencer Perceval* p 179; On the Royal Dukes see Aspinall *Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales 1770-1812* 8 vols. (London, Cassell, 1963-1971) vol. 6, p 247-8.

The press encouraged the popular enthusiasm with *The Times* as early as 9th June calling on the Government to act "with the utmost promptitude" and hoping that "there will be no bartering about terms, no stipulation for retributive concessions or advantages to England --- [and] no attempt to interfere in the internal administration of the country".¹ The Whig *Morning Chronicle* agreed, and claimed that "At this moment the English people would cordially acquiesce in any effort, however expensive, that could assist the cause of that brave and noble nation".² Even Cobbett, by now a radical and a trenchant critic of the war, believed that "This is the only fair opportunity that has offered for checking the progress of Napoleon. It is the only cause to which the people of England have heartily wished success", and demanded action without hesitation or delay.³

London was caught in a Spanish fever which lasted until the end of the year. Each fresh piece of news - whether good or bad - was eagerly awaited and much discussed. The war in Spain was by far the most common topic of the satirical prints which were produced in the second half of the year.⁴ No less than eleven new prints on affairs in Spain were produced in July alone. These ranged from a relatively crude caricature of the events at Bayonne, to a fine print by Gillray depicting the Spanish bull tossing Napoleon much to the delight of the crowned heads of Europe who looked on.⁵ (See illustrations nos. 1 and 2).

¹ *The Times* 9th June 1808.

² *The Morning Chronicle* 15th June 1808 quoted in Michael Roberts *The Whig Party 1807-1817* (1st published London, Macmillan, 1939; this London, Frank Cass, 1965) p 119.

³ quoted by Joseph Farington *The Farington Diary* edited by James Grieg 8 vols. (London, Hutchinson, 1922-1928) vol. 5 p 84 entry for 2nd July 1808.

⁴ M. Dorothy George *English Political Caricature to 1832. A Study of Opinion and Propaganda* 2 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959) vol. 2 p 109.

⁵ Frederick George Stephens and Mary Dorothy George *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires, Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* 11 vols. (London, British Museum Publications, 1978 - 1st published 1870 - 1954) (Hereafter cited as *George BM Catalogue of Satires* ..) vol. 8 nos. 10,994; 10,996-11,001; 11,003-11,006 are the 11 Spanish prints for July. Gillray's 'The Spanish-Bull-Fight, - or - The Corsican Matador in Danger' 11th July 1808 is no. 10,997. A Spanish version of this print - whose design may have been suggested by Canning - was circulated in Spain. Draper Hill *Mr Gillray. The Caricaturist* (London, Phaidon, 1965) p 116.



Now you villain I'll tell you to
your face — and before my dear
Friend Bonny — You are no child
of the Kings. — So you may
shut up shop.

Madam I know all your
tricks, and all the tricks of
Your prince of the peace.

I wish they would
let me be at peace.

Brother dont mind
her, we the Infants
acknowledge
you.

I wish they would let
a poor old King play
quietly on his Fiddle

I'll tell you what if you make such
a Riot at my Table — I'll be d — d if I dont
send you all to the Round House.

Am not I the great
Zavillos — will
you be silent

BILLINGSGATE AT BAYONNE OR THE IMPERIAL DINNER!

Publ. July 11 1808 by R. Ushermaun. T. G. & Co. London

Illustration No 1: Billingsgate at Bayonne or the Imperial Dinner!
[Rowlandson] published 10th July 1808.



The SPANISH-BULL-FIGHT, - or - the CORSICAN-MATADOR in Danger -

Illustration N° 2: The Spanish Bull-Fight - or - the Corsican Matador in Danger by Gillray, published 11th July 1808. Napoleon, the matador, is tossed by the Spanish Bull before the crowned heads of Europe.

The extraordinary response to the arrival of the Asturian deputies is not hard to explain. The idea of a popular rising against the French in Spain was new and exciting; it appealed to Whig ideology and Pittite pragmatism.¹ Unlike the other powers of Europe Spain had played only a small part in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars so that there was little knowledge of her limitations as an ally and plenty of scope for wild hopes of her potential. That Asturias was only a small province in a second rate power was conveniently forgotten while the very lack of information enabled every group in Britain to believe that the Spanish patriots reflected their own particular ideological views.²

On 15th June, a week after the deputies arrived in London, Sheridan raised the Spanish cause in Parliament. Wilberforce's account of what followed is worth quoting at length:

"Sheridan would, against the advice of all the opposition friends, electrify the country on the Spanish business. He came down to the House, but the opportunity being delayed, he going upstairs got so drunk, as to make him manifestly and disgracefully besotted. Yet he seemed to remember a fair speech, for the topics were good; only he was like a man catching through a thick medium at objects before him. Alas, a most humiliating spectacle; yet the papers state him to have made a brilliant speech etc."³

A letter from Whitbread to Grey confirms that Sheridan was "so exceedingly drunk that he could hardly articulate"⁴ a fact which raises doubts of the validity of the speech printed in *Parliamentary Debates* - although it could have been provided by

¹ The Whigs had never liked Pitt's alliances with the Continental monarchies, but the popular nature of the Spanish uprising appealed to them. Henry Lord Brougham *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review* 3 vols. (London and Glasgow, Richard Griffin & Co., 1856) vol. 2 'Spanish Affairs' July 1808 p 187-206 esp. p 192-3.

² British liberals "were blinded by their own complexes and mistook reactionary xenophobia for nationalist idealism". Harvey *Britain in the early Nineteenth Century* p 212. Conservatives - who deplored the influence of Catholicism in Ireland - rejoiced in the struggle of the Spanish priests and peasants.

³ R.I. & S. Wilberforce *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London, John Murray, 1838) 5 vols.; vol. 3 p 367 quoting Wilberforce's diary incorrectly dated 14th June 1808.

⁴ Whitbread to Grey n.d. [16th June 1808] printed in Cecil Price (ed) *The Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* 3 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966) vol. 3, p 38n.

Sheridan subsequently.¹ The opposition of Sheridan's friends sprang from the belief that he intended "to create a Cry for himself as distinguished from all of us";² not from any dislike of the Spanish cause.

In fact most leading Whigs strongly supported the Spanish patriots at this time. Fox's nephew Lord Holland, and Francis Horner both remained ardent advocates long after Spain became unpopular, but in June 1808 Lord Grey and even Whitbread were privately in favour of granting British aid to the Spaniards. The former declared that "To assist the Spaniards is morally and politically one of the highest duties a nation ever had to perform", while the latter wrote that "we ought and must give them every possible assistance".³ Only Lord Grenville and his family were not caught up in the enthusiasm for Spain and they kept their reservations to themselves.

Although he had just come from a dinner for the Asturian deputies, Canning was evidently not drunk when he replied to Sheridan's incoherent speech. He declared that there was "the strongest disposition on behalf of the British government to afford every practicable aid" to the Spaniards. "We shall proceed upon the principle, that any nation of Europe that starts up with a determination to oppose ... the common enemy of all nations ... becomes instantly our essential ally."⁴ Canning's speech caught and expressed the ardent hopes and naive enthusiasm which the Spanish cause had provoked in Britain. It was a transient mood with disillusion following inevitably, but before it disappeared the strength

¹ As was a fairly common practice at the time. See A. Aspinall 'The Reporting and Publishing of the House of Commons Debates, 1771-1834' in R. Pares and A.J.P. Taylor (eds) *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier* (London, Macmillan, 1956) p 227-257 esp p 243-6 and p 251-5.

² Whitbread to Grey n.d. [16th June 1808] printed in *The Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* vol. 3, p 38n.

³ Grey is quoted in Roberts *The Whig Party* p 119n; Whitbread to Creevey 29th June 1808 in *The Creevey Papers* edited by Sir Herbert Maxwell (London, John Murray 1923) p 88.

⁴ *Parliamentary Debates* vol. 11 col. 890-891.

and unanimity of public feeling led Britain to become deeply involved in the affairs of Spain and Portugal.

Behind the scenes there was rather more caution than Canning's speech implied. One Minister, Lord Westmorland, opposed any aid to Spain, declaring that "The Spaniards had got themselves into a d--d scrape, and if we did not look sharp they would drag us in too".¹ Westmorland's views counted for little but he was not the only member of Cabinet to have reservations. Lord Eldon welcomed the Spanish rising but mainly because it would facilitate the Government's plans for ensuring that the Spanish fleet and colonies did not fall into the hands of the French.² George III also urged caution and wished to delay a formal reply to the Asturian plea for assistance until fresh reports from southern Spain had arrived.³ But the Cabinet as a whole disagreed, believing that "the danger of delay in a moment so critical was of all things most material to be avoided",⁴ and on 11th June it presented the King with a reply to the Asturian deputies. This declaration, signed by Canning, assured the Spaniards that,

"his Majesty is disposed to grant every kind of assistance to efforts so magnanimous and praiseworthy ... [and] that no time shall be lost in embarking for the port of Gijon the succours that you require, as being the most pressingly necessary; he will ... [also] send a naval force capable of protecting the coast of Asturias against any attempt which the French may make".⁵

The declaration concluded with a promise that Britain would support any other province of Spain which rose against the French. The King "entirely" approved the

¹ Lord Holland *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party 1807-1821* p 13.

² Eldon to [Canning] 10th June 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 31A.

³ George III to Canning 8th June 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3669 p 84.

⁴ Canning to the King 11th June 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3672 p 85-6.

⁵ printed on p 321-2 of 'State Papers' section of the *Annual Register* for 1808.

Note "as it appears to him sufficiently cautious and entirely appropriate to [the] circumstances",¹ and it was immediately published.

The Government moved swiftly to implement these promises. Orders were issued for shipments of arms, equipment and money to be prepared, and the first of these sailed before the end of the month.² The Asturian, and later all the Spanish prisoners of war were freed, and efforts were made to equip them to take the field.³ Naval squadrons were ordered to protect the Spanish coast and the first steps were taken to make contact with the Marquis de la Romana.⁴ Detailed information was still scarce and on 19th June a military mission of three officers Lt. Col. Dyer, Major Roche and Captain Patrick was sent to the Asturias. Their orders were to supervise the landing and distribution of the supplies they brought with them; to gather intelligence on the strength and quality of the Asturian troops; and to collect whatever information they could on the French forces and events in neighbouring provinces.⁵

The main emphasis in the Spanish requests for assistance was on arms, equipment and money, while their attitude to direct British military co-operation was, to say the least, ambiguous. Castanos had asked for British troops and the Junta of Andalusia repeated this request although it never pressed the point.⁶ The

¹ George III to Canning 12th June 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3672, p 86.

² Castlereagh enclosed a "statement of the supplies which have already been dispatched to the port of Gihon" in his letter to Sir Arthur Wellesley of 30th June 1808 *The Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington ... compiled ... by Col. Gurwood* (London, Parker, Furnival and Parker 1844-1847) 8 vols. - the "enlarged edition" - see note in bibliography - (henceforth cited as *W.D.*) vol. III p 19n. Unfortunately this statement has not been published. See also below Chapter 3 p 92.

³ Castlereagh to Canning 16th June 1808; Castlereagh to Doyle 2nd July 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 370-1; 381-3. Castlereagh to Canning 30th June 1808 PRO W.O. 6/164 p 432-44.

⁴ See below Chapter 3 p 94-95.

⁵ Castlereagh to Col. Dyer, Major Roche and Capt. Patrick 19th June 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 371-3.

⁶ Herrera to Dalrymple Cadiz 8th June 1808 B.L. Add Ms 38,242 f 268.

Asturian Junta presented a request for 10,000 men to Mr Hunter, the acting British consul in Oviedo, on 18th June,¹ but their representatives in London appear to have rejected a proposal to send British forces to their province. Finally the Galician representatives firmly opposed any idea of sending a British army to northern Spain when they reached London, and their Junta confirmed this when Sir Arthur Wellesley consulted them at Coruña on 20th - 21st July.²

There were several reasons for this reluctance to receive British troops. The bulk of the old Spanish regular army had been stationed in Galicia and Andalusia, so these provinces were not short of trained men. Revolutionary fervour had produced over-confidence which was heightened by the (often minor) Spanish victories. Then there was Spanish pride - a natural emotion in a nationalistic movement. There was also considerable suspicion of Britain's motives, while it must be remembered that the British army at this time lacked the reputation it gained in the Peninsular War, so that informed Spaniards almost certainly under-estimated its worth.

Despite this lack of encouragement the British Government was determined to send an army to the Peninsula. Ever since it had taken office the Portland Ministry had been searching for an opportunity for large scale intervention on the Continent, but even if the Cabinet had been reluctant, public enthusiasm for Spain was so great that it would have been difficult for them not to act. Thanks to Castlereagh's reforms of the army there was even a disposable force available for action. Spencer's small corps was already off the coast of Spain, while a rather larger force was being prepared at Cork, and other units could be mobilized,

¹ Asturian Junta to Mr Hunter, 18th June 1808 PRO F.O. 72/65 f 90-92. On Hunter, see below Chapter 3 p 97n.

² On the attitude of the Asturian and Galician representatives in London see Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 30th June 1808 *W.D.* III p 19 n "the deputies from the above provinces [Asturias and Galicia] do not desire the employment of any corps of His Majesty's troops in the quarter of Spain from which they are immediately delegated". On the Galician Junta, Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh 21st July 1808 *W.D.* III p 31-4 esp 33 "the Junta have not expressed any anxiety to receive the assistance of British troops; and they again repeated this morning that they could put any number of men into the field".

although not so quickly. On 14th June Sir Arthur Wellesley was given command of the troops at Cork,¹ and preparations to make them ready to sail were hastened.

Meanwhile the Government hesitated over where to send Wellesley's expedition. The Ministers' first impulse was to send it to northern Spain where the spirit of resistance appeared most vigorous, but the Asturian deputies checked this plan. Southern Spain and Cadiz was the most obvious alternative, but the reports arriving in London towards the end of June were over a month old and had been written before the rising had broken out in Andalusia. There remained a third possibility : an attack on the French army in Portugal. Although the Ministers remained uncertain,² Castlereagh ordered Lt. Col. Browne to Oporto to gather intelligence on the state of the Portuguese insurrection and the strength of the French.³ Nonetheless the Cabinet did not finally commit itself to Portugal until 30th June, and as late as the 26th Castlereagh was still hoping that "some more light may break upon us".⁴ Castlereagh's hope was answered that very day when the Galician deputies arrived in London, although the Cabinet did not consider their views until the 28th. The Galicians not only reassured the Cabinet about the state of affairs in northern Spain and made it clear that they did not want any British troops; they specifically asked that the British army be sent to Portugal.⁵ This fortuitous advice overcame the remaining hesitation in Cabinet and Wellesley's instructions were settled and despatched on 30th June.⁶

¹ H.R.H. The Commander-in-Chief to Sir Arthur Wellesley 14th June 1808 *W.D.* III p 16n-17n.

² see, for example, Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 21st June 1808 *W.D.* III p 17n.

³ Castlereagh to Lt. Col. Browne 21st June 1808 *Great Britain Parliamentary Papers* vol. XI 1809 p 7. Browne is sometimes spelt without the final "e", e.g. in *W.D.*

⁴ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley "Private" 26th June 1808 Wellington Papers Bundle 1/205.

⁵ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 30th June 1808 *W.D.* III p 19n-20n "the deputies ... have rather pressed ... the importance of directing the efforts of the British troops to the expulsion of the enemy from Portugal".

⁶ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 30th June 1808 *W.D.* III p 19n - 20n.

There were sound arguments for sending an army to Portugal : if Junot's army were eliminated it would remove a threat to the flank and rear of the Galicians and free some thousands of Spanish troops imprisoned by Junot.¹ If the French were driven out of Portugal communications between the Spanish patriots in northern and southern Spain would be secured. The capture of Lisbon would also be valuable from a purely British point of view. Lisbon was a fine harbour and it contained Siniavin's squadron of nine Russian warships.² The appearance of this force had frightened many in England and it had added the task of blockading Lisbon to the already over-burdened Royal Navy.

When the British Cabinet discussed Wellesley's instructions they lacked any fresh reliable intelligence from Portugal. At the end of February Spencer had claimed that Junot had 40,000 troops but the risings in Spain and Portugal and the defection of the Spanish troops in Junot's army had clearly created a new and unpredictable situation. Lt. Col. Browne had been sent to Oporto to gather news but it would be some time before his first reports could be expected. The Ministers therefore ordered Wellesley to proceed ahead of his expedition to Coruña,

"where you will have the best means of learning the actual state of things, both in Spain and Portugal; and of judging how far the corps under your immediate orders, either separately or reinforced by Major-Gen. Spencer's corps, can be considered as of sufficient strength to undertake an operation against the Tagus".³

If Wellesley felt that Junot was too strong for his combined force he was to wait at Vigo until he could be reinforced from home.

¹ Oman *Peninsular War* vol. 1 p 209 states that Junot had 6,000 Spanish prisoners - part of the Spanish army which had joined in the invasion of Portugal, and which Junot had disarmed. But it is not clear that the British Government knew much if anything of this at the end of June.

² Michael Glover *Brittania Sickness. Sir Arthur Wellesley and the Convention of Cintra* (London, Leo Cooper, 1970) p 40 has claimed that the choice of Lisbon was dictated by the navy "almost in despite of the wishes of ministers and public opinion". I know of no evidence to support this statement which I find rather implausible. There were many good reasons for going to Lisbon - some of which were quite unrelated to naval concerns. The navy had at least an equal interest in Cadiz, and Lord Mulgrave (First Lord of the Admiralty) certainly did not dominate his colleagues. On Siniavin see above p 36n.

³ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 30th June 1808 *W.D. III* p 19n - 20n.

But on the evening of 30th June - the day these instructions were sent - a dispatch was received from Admiral Cotton who commanded the British squadron blockading Lisbon. Cotton declared that there were no more "than 4,000 French Troops in Lisbon, from whom the Spaniards are now completely separated; and against whom the populace are highly incensed; so that ... five or six thousand British troops might effect a landing".¹ This was welcome news and even the King acknowledged it to be "very satisfactory".² Wellesley's instructions were promptly altered so that he was ordered to send a confidential officer to Coruña rather than proceeding there himself, while he was to accompany the fleet to the Tagus "with the least possible delay".³

Sir Arthur Wellesley received his instructions at Dublin on 3rd July and sailed with his expedition from Cork on 12th July after having been delayed for several days by adverse winds. He was at this time 39 years old and had already proved his ability as an independent commander in a series of fine campaigns in India. Although he was not a politician Wellesley had excellent connections on both sides of politics and held an important post (Chief Secretary of Ireland) in the Portland Government. Sir Arthur's eldest brother, the Marquess Wellesley, was a major political figure. A Pittite but an old, close friend of Lord Grenville, he had made his reputation as Viceroy of India. It was through his influence that Sir Arthur had been made an ADC to the Marquess of Buckingham (Grenville's eldest brother) (1788-1793) and later given the opportunity to prove himself in India. Nonetheless, by 1808, Sir Arthur Wellesley was beginning to emerge as a figure in his own right. He proved a competent and efficient Chief Secretary of Ireland; he advised Castlereagh on military matters and he served with some credit, although in

¹ Cotton to William Wellesley-Pole (Secretary of the Admiralty) 'Secret' 12th June 1808 PRO WO 1/237 f 89-90; for the date of its arrival see Mulgrave to the King 9 pm 30th June 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3682 p 93-4.

² The King to Mulgrave 1st July 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3682 p 94.

³ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 30th June 1808 *W.D. III* p 21n.

a subordinate capacity, in Cathcart's Baltic expedition. He had already impressed a number of Cabinet Ministers with his ability, and it was for this reason that he was given the command of the expedition to Portugal.¹

Wellesley's instructions granted him liberal discretionary powers, as he later told the Cintra Enquiry,

"The general object of the expedition was to aid the Spanish and Portuguese nations; the principal object was to attack the French in the Tagus. But I considered myself authorized by my instructions to pursue any other object, if I thought it more likely to conduce to the benefit of the Spanish and Portuguese nations."²

This broad discretion was unavoidable given the Government's lack of information, and it is clear that it did not cause Wellesley any uneasiness. Indeed he immediately exceeded it, by ignoring Castlereagh's second instructions and proceeding ahead of his force to Coruña.

* * * * *

Wellesley's force was only the advance guard of a substantial British army which the Ministers hoped to employ in the Peninsula. In addition to his 11,000 men,³ and Spencer's 5,000, there was Moore's force of approximately 10,000 men which was expected to return soon from Sweden, while another 10,000 men were being made ready in Britain. The total force might thus comprise some 35,000 men and be the largest British army to take the field for many years.

The objective of this army had yet to be determined. It might be used to support Wellesley's attack on Portugal although after the arrival of Cotton's intelligence it seemed unlikely that this would be necessary. Colonel Gordon, the

¹ On the Ministers' opinion of Sir Arthur Wellesley see below p 78, 81-2.

² Sir A. Wellesley's evidence to the Enquiry into the Convention of Cintra, which is published in *W.D.* III p 135 - 179 quote from p 143.

³ Return of the force embarked 13th July 1808 *W.D.* III p 27n lists 10,728 all ranks (9,505 r & f). The other figures in this paragraph are less precise.

Duke of York's influential military secretary, had already written a memorandum preaching the virtues of a concentration of effort and specifically urging that "our Men, our money, and all our means should be immediately and vigorously exerted upon the Asturias or the Gallicias ... and support them with a powerful Army without a moment's delay".¹ Edward Cooke, Castlereagh's close advisor, also favoured a concentration in the Asturias, and on 2nd July he sent Wellesley a long memorandum arguing that "as long as the Asturias can be supported all will be safe, tho' untoward Events may take Place".² In fact just such an untoward event did take place, and by sending the bulk of the British army to Portugal, it completely disrupted all the plans which had been made for a concentration in northern Spain.

There was no question of Wellesley commanding this combined British army. He had only been made a Lieutenant-General on 25th April 1808 and consequently lacked the seniority for so important a command. There was much speculation in the press that the Duke of York would again take the field and there is little doubt that he would have liked to have done so - certainly his brothers were eager in championing his cause.³ But there was widespread opposition among the public and in the press to the Duke's being given the command and a caricature even appeared entitled "He Cannot Go to Spain, or Canning's Death Blow" in which an unrecognizable but heroic Canning declares "70,000 Souls 6 Millions sterling - he shall not go - I will resign first ... no - no - Death to his Hopes or my Countrymen."⁴ (see illustration no. 3.)

1 Memorandum on Spain by 'J.W.G.' Horse Guards 28th June 1808 PRO WO 1/638 f 495-499.

2 Cooke to Sir A. Wellesley 2nd July 1808 with enclosed Memorandum in Wellington Papers Bundle 1/207 (the quote comes from the covering letter).

3 On the press see reports quoted by D.W. Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign 1808-1809* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974) p 33-4 (reports dating from early July). On the attitude of his brothers see for example the Duke of Clarence to the Prince of Wales n.d. [5th August 1808?] in *Correspondence of George Prince of Wales* vol. 6 no. 2500 p 296-7.

4 George B.M. *Catalogue of Satires* ... vol. 8 no. 11,023 p 670-1.



HE CANNOT GO TO SPAIN.
 or CANNING'S DEATH BLOW.

Illustration No 3: He Cannot Go to Spain [Williams] published 5th Sept. 1808. The Duke of York (half skeleton) bids farewell to 'Elisa', while Canning (centre right) announces his determination that York not get the command.

In fact the Ministers never seriously considered the Duke for the command. At least as early as 30th June it had been decided that Lord Chatham would command the 10,000 men preparing in England and presumably also the whole army once it had been concentrated.¹ Chatham was the son of one Pitt and the brother of the other. He was able but excessively indolent. He had occupied many senior political positions and was Master-General of the Ordnance in Portland's Cabinet. He had seen active service as a subaltern in the siege of Gibraltar (1779-1783) and had commanded a brigade in the Helder Campaign of 1799 - the same year in which he was made a Lieutenant-General.² He had not been in action since, and it seems highly unlikely that he was selected for the command on purely military grounds. Lord Auckland speculated that the real motive was to facilitate a Cabinet reshuffle which would see Mulgrave moved to the Ordnance to make room for either Lord Wellesley or Lord Melville at the Admiralty.³ There is no evidence to directly support this suggestion, although Canning, Hawkesbury and Portland had considered and deferred a similar scheme at the beginning of 1808.⁴ Alternatively Chatham may have been given the command in the hope that he could acquire sufficient prestige to replace the Duke of Portland when the latter's growing infirmities finally forced him to retire.⁵ Whatever the motive - and it may well have

¹ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 'Private' 30th June 1808 Wellington Papers 1/205. See also Huntly to Chatham 15th July 1808 PRO 30/8/3667 p 301 (Chatham Papers).

² Details of Chatham's career from the *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 45 p 344. Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7 p 55 gives a glowing tribute to Chatham's ability which exceeds anything I have seen elsewhere and at times is directly contradicted by other accounts. Even Fortescue however admits that "His great fault was an incurable indolence ...".

³ Auckland to Grenville 20th July 1808. Historical Manuscripts Commission. *Thirteenth Report. Appendix Part 3 The Manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue Esq Preserved at Dropmore* 10 vols (London, Eyre and Spottiswood for HMSO, 1892-1927) vol. IX p 209-210 (Henceforth cited as *HMC Dropmore*).

⁴ Canning to Portland "Private and Secret" 10th January 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/4.

⁵ There is no direct evidence for this but see below Chapter 4 p 160 and also a suggestive letter Canning to his wife 25th January 1810 quoted by Aspinall in *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 p 492n. This idea gains support from the King's known partiality for Chatham - George III would have been happy to see Chatham, not Portland, at the head of the Pittite ministry in 1807 but Chatham declined - see Aspinall introduction to *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 4 p xli.

been simpler than either of these suggestions - it was fortunate that events prevented Chatham from assuming his command, for it is clear from his performance in 1809 that he lacked the necessary ability and energy to command an army against the French.

The arrival of several pieces of news in the days following the departure of Wellesley's expedition from Cork disrupted all these plans. Spencer's letter of 24th June in which he estimated Junot's total force at over 20,000 men of whom nearly 13,000 were in or near Lisbon was the most important arrival for it cast grave doubts over whether Wellesley could succeed.¹ Almost equally alarming was the news that Spencer intended to undertake an operation against the French column at Ayamonte for this made Castlereagh's advisors fear that Spencer might not be able to join Wellesley as quickly as had been expected or with his troops in as good condition.² Together with other news these reports raised the spectre of Dupont defeating Castanos and capturing Cadiz while Spencer at Ayamonte and Wellesley off Portugal were able to do nothing.³ But not all the news was gloomy: the Ministers had been expecting Moore to return from the Baltic since the end of June, and on 15th July his expedition anchored at the Downs.⁴

The Government reacted to the news by immediately ordering the brigades of Acland and Anstruther (together about 5,000 men) which had been preparing at Harwich and Ramsgate to depart for Portugal as soon as possible - they sailed on 19th July.⁵ But their force would only replace Spencer and might still leave

¹ Spencer to Castlereagh 24th June 1808 PRO WO 6/185 p 174-8 see above, this Chapt. p 39; On the reaction to this letter see Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 15th July 1808 *W.D.* III p 25n - Unfortunately I do not know quite when this letter arrived in London.

² Charles Stewart to Castlereagh n.d. Durham Record Office D/Lo/C17/3.

³ Charles Stewart to Castlereagh n.d. Durham Record Office D/Lo/C17/3.

⁴ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2 p 239 entry for 23rd July recording events of the previous 9 days.

⁵ Castlereagh to the King 14th July 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3693 p 103-4 and M. Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 59n for the date they sailed.

Wellesley outnumbered by the French. The Cabinet therefore decided, on 14th July, to send Moore's force on to Portugal as soon as it had been revictualled. This would provide a total force (including Spencer) of some 30,000 men off the coast of Spain and Portugal, enough

"not only for the reduction of the enemy's force in the Tagus, but also may admit of such a detachment being made towards Cadiz without prejudice to the main operation as may be sufficient not only to give security to that place if it should be threaten'd, but may even facilitate the reduction of the French corps under Genl. Dupont which has entered Andalusia".¹

These sudden changes re-opened the whole question of the command of the army. Charles Stewart, Castlereagh's half-brother and one of his Under-Secretaries wrote,

"I think the Individual unto whom the Command has been promised [i.e. Lord Chatham] ... would not be prepared to go off in a Ship of War at a moment's Notice to join the Baltic Force and proceed off the Tagus ... He requires previous Arrangement and much consideration of all matters where He is concerned and I am persuaded ... that You will never get him afloat without having more Devilment ... than You or any other Sec[re]t[ar]y of State has ever yet experienced."²

Stewart suggested that Moore and Hope, the two Lieutenant-Generals with Moore's corps and both senior to Wellesley, be landed in England, and the force be sent on without them. Wellesley would retain command of his expedition, including these reinforcements, until Lisbon was captured on the justification that it was a limited operation, a *coup de main*, in which time was of the essence. Stewart anticipated some opposition from Lord Chatham and the Duke of York to this proposal but believed that Castlereagh could succeed.³

¹ Castlereagh to the King 14th July 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3693 p 103-4 (quote on p 103). Charles Stewart wrote "by sending Moore's force now without disembarking them You positively secure the Tagus Job". Charles Stewart to Castlereagh n.d. Durham Record Office D/Lo/C17/3.

² Charles Stewart to Castlereagh n.d. Durham Record Office D/Lo/C17/3.

³ Charles Stewart to Castlereagh n.d. Durham Record Office D/Lo/C17/3.

Evidently Castlereagh adopted this proposal and carried it through Cabinet for when Moore visited London a few days later he learnt from Colonel Gordon, the Duke of York's military secretary, and from others,

"that there had been much intriguing about the command. Ministers had done everything in their power to give it to Sir Arthur Wellesley; but he was so young a lieutenant-general that the Duke had objected to it, and, afraid of disgusting the army and the nation by such an appointment, they had given it up".¹

Fear of offending the King rather than the nation is a more probable explanation for the Government's back-down, for Stewart at least believed that "The country are all with us as to Wellesley's appointment".²

Castlereagh was clearly disappointed at the defeat and he told Wellesley that "I have made every effort to keep in your hands the greatest number of men, and for the longest time that Circumstances would permit".³ There is no doubt that the Ministers went out of their way to create opportunities for Wellesley and that he was their favourite. This was bound to create jealousy and ill-feeling especially when the favourite general came from a politically powerful family. But Wellesley's ability justified special treatment. He made the most of the opportunities he was given and one can be sure that the campaign of 1808 would have ended more satisfactorily if he had remained in command. The insistence of

¹ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2 p 239 entry for 23rd July 1808.

² The King's role in this affair is not entirely clear, but see Castlereagh to the King 14th July 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3693 p 103-4 recommending the appointment of Dalrymple and Burrard so as not to depart "from that attention to standing in the service which your Majesty was pleased to signify your commands should be attended to in any arrangement that was to be submitted for your Majesty's approbation".

If the King wished to influence the Cabinet he would often express his views informally before the Cabinet had made a decision. In this case it would appear that he supported the Duke of York's objections to giving Wellesley the command of nearly 20,000 men even for a limited operation. The Duke's objections arose from military protocol and friendship for Moore, who would be disgraced by being landed in England while his troops were sent on to Portugal. These reasons are quite sufficient and there is no reason to believe the suggestion that he was jealous of Wellesley.

³ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley "Private and Secret" ? July 1808 PRONI D3030/2677 - this letter is published in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 385 where it is dated 15th July 1808.

the Duke of York and the King that the claims of military seniority be respected was not in itself unreasonable, but its results were most unfortunate.

As Stewart had predicted Chatham was unwilling to assume the command at such short notice, and an alternative commander had to be found. There was never any question of the Government's appointing Sir John Moore who they blamed for the Swedish fiasco.¹ In theory the Ministers had two hundred senior officers to choose from² but in practice - once the aged, infirm, incompetent and distant officers were excluded - the choice was much narrower. The Cabinet selected Sir Hew Dalrymple, the thirteenth most senior lieutenant general and probably the best informed senior officer on the affairs of Spain in the British army. The appointment was widely welcomed although Dalrymple had seen little active service and had never commanded an army - but then, successful experience in the field was rare among the higher ranks of the British army.³

Dalrymple was appointed only "for the present"⁴ and the Cabinet imagined that he would play more of a supervisory than an executive role.⁵ In explaining the decision to the King Castlereagh wrote that "it is probable that the force may act in two separate corps" one operating against Lisbon, the other protecting Cadiz. Castlereagh also hoped that Dalrymple's appointment, with Sir Harry Burrard as his deputy, would allow "the most active and distinguished young officers being brought forward under them".⁶ In other words Dalrymple was only given the

¹ Stewart wrote to Castlereagh that "Something is necessary to be secured, after Moore's mismanagement and failure" n.d. Durham Record Office D/Lo/C17/3; see also Canning to Bagot 'Private' 23rd July 1808 Bagot *George Canning and His Friends* vol. 1 p 254-6.

² M. Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 60 says that there were two Field Marshals, 70 full generals and 130 lieutenant generals - Wellesley was the fourth most junior lieutenant general.

³ There is a useful sketch of Dalrymple's earlier career in M. Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 60-1.

⁴ Castlereagh to Dalrymple 15th July 1808 Great Britain *Parliamentary Papers* vol. XI 1809 no. 22 p 18.

⁵ Castlereagh to the King 14th July 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3693 p 103-4 actually describes it as "the superintending command". (p 104).

⁶ Castlereagh to the King 14th July 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3693 p 103-4.

command temporarily, until the preliminary operations had been completed and Chatham was ready to assume his responsibilities; and while Dalrymple held the command he was to give Wellesley every possible opportunity to enhance his reputation. Castlereagh made this last point clear in an extremely ill-judged letter to Dalrymple in which he recommended Wellesley to Dalrymple's "particular confidence" because of his close connections with the Ministers, which made it "desirable for you, on all accounts, to make the most prominent use [of Wellesley] which the rules of the service will permit".¹ While obviously well intended this letter was bound to do more harm than good and was typical of the shabby treatment Dalrymple received from the Government.

Dalrymple was appointed because the Duke of York and the King insisted that the claims of seniority could not be ignored. Sir Harry Burrard may have been made Dalrymple's deputy for the same reason, or because the Ministers did not want Moore to command the expedition if he arrived in Portugal before Dalrymple. Burrard had considerable experience in subordinate roles, was widely liked and had the support of the Duke of York but he lacked ability. Cautious, conservative and amiable he was an excellent deputy provided that he was never left in command himself.²

Sir John Moore was bitterly disappointed at not being given the command of the army and his dislike of the Ministers increased.³ Yet it is far from clear that the King and the Duke of York would have approved his appointment if the Ministers had wished to make it, for Moore was eighty-eighth in seniority in the list

¹ Castlereagh to Dalrymple 15th July 1808 *W.D. III* p 27n.

² On Burrard see M. Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 65-66; and Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 195.

³ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 239-40 entry for 23rd July 1808. Moore's opinion that only he had a right to the command and that the Ministers showed personal spite towards him by giving it to anyone else, must not be accepted at face value. Nothing in Moore's career gave him any right to assume that the command of Britain's principal army would be bestowed upon him.

of lieutenant generals.¹ In fact, of course, the Cabinet never thought of giving Moore the command. The Ministers did not like or trust him and were not convinced of his ability. When Moore arrived in England in July Castlereagh treated him without courtesy and the result was a quarrel and an exchange of letters which Moore believed was intended to provoke him into resigning.² This may be true, but it is surely more probable that the Ministers were simply out of patience with (as they saw it) a vain and troublesome general.

If the Ministers did not care for Moore, their interest in Wellesley remained undiminished. As well as Castlereagh's attempt to prejudice Dalrymple in his favour, they decided to instruct Wellesley "to continue to carry into execution" his original instructions "with every expedition that circumstances will permit" without waiting for the arrival of either the reinforcements or his superior officers.³ This was a strange and illogical decision for it ignored the fact that, according to Spencer's intelligence, Junot was too strong for Wellesley - the very reason he was being reinforced. The intention behind these instructions was probably to give Wellesley the discretion to continue his operations if he thought it advisable. This would both save time and allow Wellesley to take advantage of any opportunity to distinguish himself. But was this an adequate reason for putting the British army at risk? Wellesley could easily have been ordered to wait for the reinforcements before landing, or advancing from his beach-head if he had landed. This delay would not have been great - Moore's force reached Portugal three weeks after Wellesley's army began disembarking. Perhaps the Ministers trusted Wellesley's judgement implicitly but they were unwise to leave such a decision to an eager,

¹ When Castlereagh came to recommend Moore to command the army in September he acknowledged that "Sir John Moore's standing in the Army is not such as your Majesty would probably wish for so high a command ..." Castlereagh to the King 23rd September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3725 p 127-8. For the King's response see below p 110n.

² *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2 p 240-243; 250-2 which includes the letters. Moore's interpretation is on p 250.

³ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 15th July 1808 *W.D. III* p 26n.

ambitious and self-confident man. In this instance at least their desire for Wellesley's advancement and their impatience seems to have over-ridden their customary prudence.

The decisions which the Government made during these few days in the middle of July dramatically shaped the campaign in Portugal, and led to the absurd situation of the British army having three different commanders in the space of twenty four hours. And yet in general the Ministers had acted with prudence and good sense. Once they received Spencer's news they had no choice but to reinforce Wellesley. They did their best to keep the command in his hands, and when they were forced to give way, the choice of Dalrymple was in the circumstances quite reasonable. Only their treatment of Dalrymple is really reprehensible though their attempts to further Wellesley's interests after his supercession were certainly misguided. The Ministers must bear some responsibility for the confusion which their decisions created in Portugal, but no one could have anticipated or avoided the situation which arose or its consequences.

* * * * *

Blissfully unaware of these developments Wellesley chose to ignore the change to his original orders and sail ahead of the fleet to Coruña where he arrived on the 20th July. He was given a warm and enthusiastic reception by the people and by the Junta of Galicia whose feelings of affection for Great Britain were enhanced by the independent arrival on the same day of a British diplomatic representative - Charles Stuart¹ - who brought with him £300,000 in aid.

At Coruña Wellesley was given much encouraging but generally inaccurate news from all over the Peninsula. There were unfounded accounts of victories over the French in Andalusia and Catalonia and although the Galicians admitted that their

¹ Later Lord Stuart de Rothesay; not to be confused with Castlereagh's half-brother Brig-Gen. Sir Charles Stewart, Under Secretary for War and the Colonies, and later Lord Londonderry.

own army had been defeated at Medina del Rio Seco a week before, they were not alarmed, and grossly exaggerated the French losses in the battle.¹ From this news and from his own observations Wellesley gained an impression of tremendous Spanish enthusiasm and determination - an impression which was both reasonably accurate and useful confirmation for the Ministers in London that the Spanish deputies really did represent the feelings which prevailed in their country.²

There were two letters waiting for Wellesley at Coruña from Lt-Col. Dyer and Mr Hunter - the British military and civil agents in the Asturias. Both letters were three weeks old and both strongly urged Wellesley to bring his army to the Asturias, Hunter's including the news that the French had captured Santander.³ The Galician Junta however assured Wellesley that the situation was not serious, and that measures had already been taken to regain Santander. They did not want his army and he could best serve the allied cause by going on to Portugal. Wellesley chose to accept this advice although he was sufficiently impressed by the importance of the Asturias to urge Castlereagh to try to establish a military presence there and give it greater naval protection.⁴

From the Galicians Wellesley learnt that there were 15,000 French troops in Portugal (12,000 of them near Lisbon) and that he could expect aid from the flourishing Portuguese insurrection which had its centre at Oporto. On the whole this was encouraging news and it must have added to Wellesley's already high

¹ They claimed that the French had lost 7,000 men (Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh 21st July 1808 *W.D. III* p 28-31, on p 31) while Oman *Peninsular War* vol. 1 p 172, accepts Foy's figures of 105 killed and 300 wounded.

² Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh 21st July 1808 (2 letters - both very similar) *W.D. III* p 28-31; 31-34.

³ Dyer to Wellesley 30th June 1808 Wellington Papers Bundle 1/205; Hunter to Wellesley 1st July 1808 Wellington Papers Bundle 1/207.

⁴ Wellesley's evidence to the Cintra Enquiry *W.D. III* p146; Wellesley to Castlereagh 21st July 1808 *W.D. III* p 31-34 esp 33.

confidence, although he was disappointed that there was no news of Spencer's force.¹

From Coruña Wellesley sailed south, briefly contacting his transports off Cape Finisterre, before again sailing ahead, this time to Oporto where he arrived on 24th July. Here he was given substantially the same account of affairs as he had received at Coruña while the Bishop of Oporto (who led the Portuguese insurrection) promised the support of 5,000 men and some logistical aid. Again there was no news of Spencer, but Wellesley hoped that he might be with Admiral Cotton off the Tagus.²

Wellesley ordered his transports to Mondego Bay which he regarded as the most likely place for a landing and sailed on to confer with Admiral Cotton. The next few days were to contain a succession of disappointments for Sir Arthur, the first being the discovery that Spencer and his troops had sailed back to southern Spain in the hope that they could play some role in defending Cadiz against Dupont. Wellesley promptly ordered Spencer to return to Portugal unless engaged in active operations of great importance.³ Three days later Wellesley learnt of Dupont's surrender at Bailen and correctly deduced that Spencer would hasten to join him.⁴

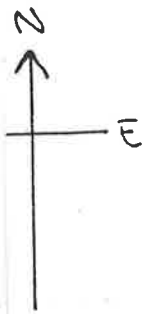
Wellesley received from Cotton Spencer's detailed estimate of the French forces in Portugal which had been compiled from the accounts of three Hanoverian deserters. This gave Junot a total of over 20,000 men, nearly 13,000 of them in the vicinity of Lisbon. These were substantially higher figures than Wellesley had been given at Oporto and Coruña although in fact still a considerable under-estimate.

¹ Wellesley to Castlereagh 21st July 1808 (2 letters) *W.D.III* p 28-31; 31-34.

² Wellesley to Castlereagh 25th July 1808 *W.D.III* p36-7.

³ Wellesley to Spencer 26th July 1808 (4 letters) *W.D.III* p 37-40. For Spencer's activities, see above, this chapter, p 38-40. Given their great concern for Cadiz the Ministers may not have been pleased with Wellesley's recall of Spencer - a fact which he recognized after receiving Castlereagh's letters of 15th July (see Wellesley to Castlereagh 1st August 1808 *W.D.III* p 42-46). Dupont's surrender of course meant that no harm was done but it is hard to agree with Wellesley that - in an emergency - Spencer's force might not have saved Cadiz in much the same way as Albuquerque was to do in 1810 cf Oman *Peninsular War* vol. 3 p 136-8; p 145-8.

⁴ Wellesley's evidence to the Cintra Enquiry *W.D.III* p 183.



Central Portugal for Sir A. Wellesley's Campaign, 1808.

Wellesley chose not to believe this intelligence although he did not completely disregard it.¹

Wellesley rejoined his fleet at Mondego Bay on 30th July and there received his third and most unpleasant surprise: Castlereagh's letters of 15th July announcing his reinforcement and supercession. There is no doubt that he was bitterly disappointed although he promised Castlereagh that "I shall not hurry the operations, or commence them one moment sooner than they ought to be commenced, in order that I may acquire the credit of the success".²

In fact it is debatable whether he should have commenced operations at all or whether he should have waited for the arrival of the reinforcements that would make success a certainty. He justified his decision to begin landing troops on the grounds that any further delay would discourage the Portuguese patriots.³ This is barely plausible, for the reinforcements would make the state of the Portuguese insurrection almost irrelevant. Castlereagh had instructed Wellesley to continue operations as quickly as circumstances permitted,⁴ but the final judgement was up to Wellesley, and only success could justify his decision.

The landing - through heavy surf - was begun on 1st August and completed on the 5th - the same day that the leading elements of Spencer's force arrived in the Bay. It was not until 9th August that the united British army of some 14,000 men⁵ was ready to advance from its beach-head. Wellesley used this time to try to get his woefully inadequate commissariat onto a proper footing and to meet the Portuguese

¹ Spencer to Castlereagh 24th June 1808 PRO WO 6/185 p 74-8. See above this chapter p 39. Wellesley to Castlereagh 1st August 1808 *W.D.III* p 42-46 esp. p 43.

² Wellesley to Castlereagh 1st August 1808 *W.D.III* p 46.

³ Wellesley to Castlereagh 1st August 1808 *W.D.III* p 42-6 esp. p 45 (not the letter cited above) Wellesley's evidence to the Cintra Enquiry *W.D.III* p 139.

⁴ Castlereagh to Wellesley 15th July 1808 *W.D.III* p 26n.

⁵ Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 209n - 210n. This may be something of an underestimate for although Fortescue points out the surprisingly low figure Wellesley gave for Spencer's force he accepts it in making his calculations.

General Bernardino Freire at Montemor Velho on the 7th to arrange plans for the advance. Their co-operation proved short-lived and a sharp dispute led within a week¹ to the separation of the two forces, Freire leaving approximately 2,000 Portuguese troops with Wellesley.²

Junot heard quickly of the British landing and recalled General Loison who had been on an expedition against the Portuguese insurgents in Alemtejo. To cover Loison's retreat, and if possible to slow the British advance, Junot sent General Delaborde forward with a small force of some 4,350 men.³ There was a brief skirmish on 15th August, but the two armies made their first real contact on 17th at Roliça. In the morning Delaborde skilfully delayed the British advance, forcing Wellesley to deploy his army and then retiring to a second stronger position just when Wellesley's attempts to outflank him were becoming serious. He may well have repeated the trick in the afternoon if the British troops in the centre had not attacked prematurely - before the outflanking columns were in position and before Wellesley gave the word. The result was some bloody fighting before the French withdrew, in which they lost 600 casualties and prisoners and the British lost almost 500.⁴

Roliça was a hotly contested but strategically unimportant combat. The result was never in doubt as Wellesley had nearly four times as many troops (including the Portuguese) as Delaborde. Wellesley wrote a detailed and generally accurate account of the action, exaggerating only the numbers of the French engaged "at least 6,000 men" and (in another letter to Castlereagh) their losses

¹ Oman *Peninsular War* I p 233 implies 10th August; Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 205 implies the 11th; but Wellesley's evidence to the Cintra Enquiry (*W.D.III* p 140) says the evening of the 13th.

² Oman *Peninsular War* I p 233-4 where he shows how Wellesley constantly understated the strength of this force. Freire seems to have been to blame for the dispute.

³ Oman *Peninsular War* I p 235n.

⁴ For accounts of Roliça see Oman *Peninsular War* I p 236-40; Fortescue *British Army* vol. 1 p 207-14; casualty figures Oman I p 239 (for the French); Fortescue vol. 1 p 213 (for the British).

"1,500 men".¹ The news of the victory was greeted with more excitement than understanding in England and it helped to create unrealistic expectations of future successes.

On the day after Roliça Wellesley was informed that Acland's brigade from England had arrived off Peniche and that Anstruther was close behind him. On 19th August the British army moved to Vimeiro where it covered the disembarkation of Anstruther's brigade that evening and Acland's the following day.

Wellesley intended to resume his advance on 21st August but his plans were thwarted by the arrival late on the 20th of Sir Harry Burrard who had sailed ahead of his convoy on the frigate *H.M.S. Brazen*. Wellesley joined Sir Harry on board just as the latter was about to land, and described the strategic position and his plans. Burrard was an experienced officer but in 1798, and again in 1799, he had taken part in expeditions which had failed when bad weather had disrupted communications between the fleet and the army which depended upon it.² He was also concerned at the complete French superiority in cavalry and he correctly judged that Wellesley was under-estimating Junot's numbers. He therefore forbade any further advance until Sir John Moore's force should arrive.³

Meanwhile Junot had collected his army together and was marching to attack the British with some 13,000 men: he had left 6,000 to maintain his hold on Lisbon - a blunder which cost him any chance of victory, for Acland and Anstruther had raised the Anglo-Portuguese army to at least 20,000 men.⁴ The French

¹ Wellesley to Castlereagh 17th August 1808 *W.D.III* p 80-83 (the Roliça Despatch); Wellesley to Castlereagh 18th August 1808 *W.D.III* p 85 (the 1,500 men). As the British gained possession of the battlefield they should have been able to make a reasonably accurate estimate of the French losses.

² Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 216.

³ Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 215-6 argues cogently that this was a mistake; but Burrard's arguments were quite reasonable, and his decision is defensible.

⁴ French forces: Oman *Peninsular War* I p 246n - 247n; Lisbon garrison *ibid* p 242-3; British army Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 219n.

attacked on the morning of the 21st and although Burrard had joined the army he left its command in Wellesley's hands.¹ The French attacks were scattered and ill-co-ordinated reflecting little credit on Junot's generalship although the troops fought well. By noon the last French reserves of infantry had been defeated and Wellesley was on the point of ordering a general advance which would have converted the French retreat into a rout, when the unfortunate Burrard again intervened to prohibit any advance. Sir Harry did not appreciate that the defeat of the French army had transformed the strategic position and he maintained that his arguments of the previous evening against any advance retained their validity.² This was sheer nonsense and it is impossible to defend his decision. Some risk is inescapable in war and the opportunity to completely disrupt Junot's army and so reap the full fruits of victory was not one which should have been missed.

Vimeiro ought to have decided the campaign, for even without any pursuit the French had been soundly defeated losing about 2,000 men to the British loss of 720.³ Wellesley's account of the battle was similar to that of Roliga in being generally reliable except on French casualties which he put at not "far short of 3,000 men".⁴ This was increased in a later letter to 4,000.⁵

On the morning of the day after Vimeiro Sir Hew Dalrymple arrived and took command of the army. He was in an uncomfortable position replacing a successful general in whom the army had confidence, when the moment for

1 Burrard's evidence to the Cintra Enquiry quoted in M. Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 122-3.

2 Burrard's evidence to the Cintra Enquiry quoted in Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 123.

3 Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 234 - he says that the French lost 1,800 casualties and 3-400 prisoners.

4 Wellesley to Burrard 21st August 1808 *W.D.III* p 90-93 ('The Vimeiro Despatch') gives no estimate of French losses. The quote comes from Wellesley to Castlereagh 22nd August 1808 *W.D.III* p 94-5.

5 Wellesley to Richmond 27th August 1808 *W.D.III* p 102-3.

exploiting the victory had passed. He did not approve of the way Wellesley had conducted the campaign and he was pessimistic about its outcome.¹

Within a few hours of Dalrymple's arrival the French General Kellermann entered the British camp under a flag of truce. With the reality of his defeated army in front of him Junot had considered his options and decided that a negotiated evacuation of Portugal on generous terms was the best of the possibilities facing him, while even if the negotiations failed they would gain time for his army to rally.² The proposals which Kellermann conveyed to the British were wide-ranging and audacious in their claims. The French army was to be returned to France in British ships without surrendering its arms, equipment, baggage etc. Once landed it would be free to resume the war immediately. The Russian naval squadron would be free to sail from Lisbon unmolested. In return the British would gain undisputed possession of all those places in Portugal held by the French including the frontier fortresses of Almeida and Elvas.

Amazingly all three British generals believed that these terms were acceptable although Wellesley objected to their being included in the Suspension of Arms and to the language in which they were couched. Admittedly they knew that provisions concerning the Russian squadron would probably be disallowed by Admiral Cotton, and Wellesley at least appreciated the disadvantages of involving the French at all on this point, but they all accepted the central point that the French army should be returned to France.³

Had these terms been proposed before Vimeiro they might have provided an honourable and satisfactory, if somewhat disappointing, end to the campaign. But the defeat of the French army at Vimeiro and the arrival of Sir John Moore's corps off the Portuguese coast had completely changed the balance of forces in Britain's

1 Dalrymple's evidence to the Cintra Enquiry quoted in Glover *Britannia Sickness* p 128.

2 Oman *Peninsular War* I p 266-7. Junot had summoned a council of war of his leading officers which shared his opinion.

3 Wellesley's evidence to the Cintra Enquiry *W.D.III* p 153-4.

favour. There was now no danger of the British army being defeated and a reasonable chance that if pressed the French would be too dispirited to make much further resistance. Of course there was a risk that Junot might make a protracted and bloody defence of Lisbon or that he might escape with his army into Spain, but Wellesley's whole campaign had involved much greater risks than these. The acceptance of these terms reflected an unwarrantably pessimistic outlook which can only be explained as lack of confidence on the parts of Dalrymple and Burrard and Wellesley's chagrin at losing his command and contempt for his successors.¹

At Kellermann's suggestion the Suspension of Arms which incorporated these terms was signed, not by Dalrymple, but by Wellesley. This has led to a controversy over their relative responsibilities for the document. At the Cintra Enquiry Wellesley admitted that,

"It is perfectly true that I advised the principle of the arrangement, and that I assisted the Commander-in-Chief in discussing the different points with Gen. Kellermann, and that I gave him my opinion when he asked it, and when I thought it desirable to give it him."²

But Dalrymple was present throughout the negotiations; he accepted some but not all of Wellesley's advice; and if the principles of military responsibility mean anything they mean that he, not Wellesley, was responsible.

The terms granted in the Suspension of Arms were confirmed with some relatively minor improvements (from the British point of view) in the definitive

¹ Yet Sir Charles Oman and most other historians of the campaign have accepted that the basis of the Convention was reasonable and that a prolongation of the campaign would have been detrimental to British interests. While these arguments have some merit I believe that Wellesley's opinion has had undue influence and that some of the arguments used to support it smack of special pleading eg Oman's claim that "The loss of 25,000 soldiers would be nothing to Napoleon" *Peninsular War* vol. 1, p 268, see also p 274-5.

Junot himself admitted later that his army could not have escaped to Elvas, and though he claimed that he could have held out in Lisbon for at least a month inflicting 5-6,000 British casualties, I am inclined to agree with Charles Stewart that this was "mere brag". (Charles Stewart to Castlereagh 17th-18th September 1808 PRONI D3030/P/213/1). The British generals could not know any of this, but it was their job to assess what a defeated army was capable of achieving.

Still, it is hard to run counter to the considered opinions of such weighty authorities as Oman, Fortescue and Napier, and I am well aware that my judgement on this point may be wrong.

² Wellesley's evidence, in *W.D. III* p 156. There is no evidence to support Michael Glover's claim that "Being, at best, a reserved man, it seems probable that he kept silent whenever possible." (*Brittania Sickness* p 136) while the last part of the quote contradicts it.

Convention of Cintra which was signed on 30th August 1808.¹ The document had many objectionable features over and above the central concessions permitting the evacuation and free passage of the French army and Russian sailors.² It showed little consideration for the feelings of the Portuguese and granted political concessions which were quite outside the scope of a normal military convention. This insensitivity was surprising for Dalrymple generally handled the delicate political situation in Portugal with great skill.³ He was however less effective in managing his army which became demoralized, disorganized and faction-ridden. Wellesley's presence was an embarrassment and Dalrymple was glad to give him leave to return home following the death of his temporary replacement as Chief Secretary for Ireland.⁴

Dalrymple had certainly been placed in an unenviable position. He had arrived in the middle of the campaign knowing little of his army or the strategic situation and was immediately confronted with the need to make important decisions. But heavy demands are inevitably made on the holders of high office, and the position might have been far worse e.g. if Wellesley's army had been defeated. Both armistice and convention contained concessions which no British general should ever have been willing to grant, and which had nothing to do with the details of the military position. Dalrymple had proved his ability at Gibraltar, but in Portugal he blundered and while we can sympathize with him, his

¹ It is printed in *W.D. III* p 104-7. The 'Convention of Cintra' is actually a misnomer, but it is too well established now to change.

² Cotton had objected to letting the Russian fleet go, and by a compromise it was agreed that Britain would hold the Russian ships until six months after a peace and immediately repatriate the sailors.

³ As even Canning admitted. Canning to Souza 'Private and Secret' 29th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 47. See also Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

⁴ Wellesley to Dalrymple 17th September 1808 *W.D. III* p 124 requests permission to return to England because of Mr Trail's death. Wellesley left Lisbon on 20th September and arrived at Plymouth on 4th October - see Wellesley to Richmond, Plymouth, 4th October 1808 *W.D. III* p 126.

subsequent disgrace was not unmerited.

* * * * *

Ever since Wellesley had sailed with his army from Cork the British Government and public had been eagerly waiting for news from the Peninsula. On 24th July the Ministers were concerned to learn of the Spanish defeat of Rio Seco, but their fears turned to jubilation when, in the space of a few days (8th - 11th August) news arrived of Dupont's capitulation at Bailen, Bessieres's retreat from Leon and Joseph's flight from Madrid. Castlereagh's optimism did not stop at capturing Lisbon or even at driving the French from Spain: "how glorious to England it would be, after recovering Portugal, by her Command of the Sea, to meet the Enemy at the Foot of the Pyrenees, and to forbid his return to France".¹ On the same day Castlereagh's Under-Secretary wrote with a little more caution "Dupont's Surrender has raised us to the Skies - we think Junot will now try to make himself a golden Bridge, but don't let him carry away his Plunder".² Lord Hawkesbury was similarly excited, and now expected the operation against Lisbon to be "short and easy".³ Yet this was days before the news of Wellesley's safe landing in Portugal had reached London.

There followed a long and painful fortnight with no further news from the army. Confidence was still high and public opinion was pleasantly diverted by the exciting news that the Royal Navy had rescued more than half of Romana's Spanish corps from Denmark.⁴ On Portugal one of the papers speculated that Sir

1 Castlereagh to Stewart 10th August 1808 PRONI D3030/Q2/2 p 49.

2 Edward Cooke to Stewart 10th August 1808 PRONI D3030/AA/1.

3 Hawkesbury to Canning 11th August 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 69.

4 Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 161 on the Press reports; see also below Chapter 3 p 94-5.

Arthur Wellesley would "display a truly wise and dignified forbearance, by not making the attack until the arrival of the army of Sir Harry Burrard".¹

On 1st September Captain Campbell, Wellesley's ADC, arrived with news of Roliça and Vimeiro and a report that on the day he left the army (22nd August) "General Kellermann had arrived with a flag of truce to treat for a capitulation of the French army in Portugal".² The country went wild with excitement - even Cobbett and the London radicals lauded the Government - who were not slow to make the most of the victory. The Tower guns were fired and Roliça streated as a victory of equal stature with Vimeiro even by those - like Castlereagh - who should have known better.³

To the public, and even perhaps to the Ministers, the complete surrender of Junot's army appeared only a matter of time. As days passed without further real news a variety of generally optimistic rumours circulated and were printed in the press. So confident were the papers that the *Morning Chronicle* (which supported the Whigs) called for the British army to be sent to liberate Italy as there was no further need for it in Spain, while *The Times* looked for "the final dissolution of the Continental tyranny and the overthrow of the Tyrant".⁴

Unknown to the public however, the Ministers' complacency had been rocked on 4th September when the Portuguese representative in London the Chevalier de Souza had protested to the Government at the terms he alleged had been granted to the French in an armistice. The reaction was one of horror and incredulity. The King could "hardly bring himself to believe that any British officers could ...think of agreeing to such a Convention", and declared that he could

¹ quoted in Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 161 where the source is not identified.

² Castlereagh to the King 12 pm [1st Sept 1808] *Later Correspondence of George III* no. 3711, p 119.

³ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley 4th September 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 420-1.

⁴ quoted in Hinde *Canning* p 201; for the *Morning Chronicle* see Glover *Brittania Sickens* p 164.

never sanction such a proceeding if it were true.¹ Portland did not know how to express his "astonishment and perplexity" but concluded that it was "impossible that any English officer could have sanctioned them" let alone Sir Arthur Wellesley.² Castlereagh wrote a letter to his half-brother listing seven unbelievable advantages the French would derive from such an armistice and ended, rather desperately, "it must be a base forgery somewhere, and nothing can induce me to believe it genuine".³ The general conclusion was that the report could not be true and that the terms if not totally spurious, were those the French proposed at the beginning of the negotiation.⁴ Canning wrote accordingly to Souza while Castlereagh wrote an account of the whole business to Dalrymple hoping that the mystery would soon be cleared up.⁵

It was not. Dalrymple had inexcusably delayed writing home until 3rd September and his despatch did not reach London until the 15th, by which time Canning, Portland, Chatham and Hawkesbury had left the capital. The remaining Ministers endeavoured to put the best face possible on the news and treat it as a victory in the hope that the public reaction would follow their lead.⁶ The scheme failed miserably for public expectations, already high, were raised still higher by the

¹ The King to Canning 4th September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3714 p 121.

² Portland to Castlereagh 4th September 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 423-4.

³ Castlereagh to Stewart 4th September 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 421-3.

⁴ It is only fair to point out that George III thought the style of Dalrymple's letter (as quoted by Souza) to be genuine, although he "entirely" approved Canning's reply which denied the authenticity of the report. The King to Canning 4th September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3714 p 121.

⁵ Castlereagh to Dalrymple 4th September 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 425.

⁶ Canning agreed with this policy "There can be no doubt I think that we ought to take this as a great event - and accordingly I am about to make the bell ringers here drunk. They cannot ring worse after that encouragement than they have been doing of their own accord". Canning to Perceval 'Private' Hinckley 2.30 pm 16th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1. Canning's house at Hinckley is still standing just opposite the Church. "I yet think that you did right to fire the guns, because not to have done so, would have precluded all fair judgement and explanation". Canning to Perceval 'Private' Sat. morn. 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1.

firing of the Park and Tower guns and consequently the shock and disillusionment when the real nature of the news was understood was all the greater. A caricature by Williams called "*(Extraordinary News)*" expresses the mood well. In the first scene John Bull, at supper with his wife, reacts to the sound of the guns with surprised delight: "The Tower Guns at this time of Night! *Extraordinary News* arrived! by Jupiter we've sent Juno [sic] to the Devil, and taken the Russian Fleet! - Illuminate the House call up the children and tap the gooseberry wine Mrs Bull, we'll drink to our noble commanders in Portugal". The second scene shows a small crowd of well-dressed elderly men outside an office listening in stunned amazement to one of their number who reads details of the Convention aloud from the *Extraordinary Gazette*. One member of the crowd protests that the French should not be allowed to take away their ammunition, "What! carry away sixty Pounds [sic] a Man! why that ought to have been in the pocketts [sic] of our brave fellows! D -- m me if I ever believe the Tower Guns again!!" [See illustration number 4).¹

This sequence of initial jubilation almost immediately followed by dismay was not limited to London. The artist Joseph Farrington was in Cheshire and recorded in his diary for 16th September "This night news was brought from Newcastle under Lyme of Surrender of Junot and His army, in Portugal. The Bells rung till midnight." But on the following day,

"in the evening the London Post brought newspapers which contained an account of the disgraceful convention with Junot, which allowed Him and His Army to be transported to France with their arms and much of their plunder in British Vessels. This turned the joy which had been excited by the report of the day before into lamentation".²

The King was reported to be "exceedingly angry"³ while Wilberforce confided "I have been deeply hurt. The stroke fell just when our feelings made the

¹ George *BM Catalogue of Satires....* vol. 8 p 676-7 no. 11,034.

² *The Farrington Diary* vol. 5 p 98-99.

³ Auckland to Grenville 20th September 1808 *HMC Dromore* vol. 9 p 215-6.

I saw Sir if there isn't the big guns at the Tower going off!

The Tower Guns at this time of Night!
Extraordinary News arrived! by Jupiter
we've sent Juno to the Devil, and taken the Nuffin
Fleet! Illuminate the House call up the children &
tap the gooseberry Wine Mr Bull, well drink to our
noble commanders in Portugal.



William Duke of Cumberland



THE TOWER GUNS
Surprise the First.

(EXTRAORDINARY NEWS.)

ART. IV. The French Army shall carry with it all its
artillery of French calibre, with the Horses belonging to it,
and the bombs, supplied, with sixty rounds per gun.
all oth...

What! carry away sixty Pounds a Man! who
that ought to have been in the pockets of our
brave fellows! Damn me if I ever believe the
Tower Guns again!!!



THE CAZETTE
Surprise the Second.

Pub: September 1808 by W. & G. Wood
where may be had every new Publication

discord of such a note the most inharmonious".¹ Lady Bessborough wrote that "the terms seem madness"² while even after the initial shock Moira was still bitter "we have bungled ... the most glorious opening that fortune could have presented".³ Lord Auckland could not "recollect any instance in which the feeling of all parties were so strong and so warm as they are with respect to the French convention".⁴ The disappointment was felt by all classes as well as by all parties and it has been suggested that only the distraction of a fire at Covent Garden prevented serious rioting.⁵

The newspapers fanned the flames of the nation's fury. According to Farington "every newspaper contained expressions of the warmest kind condemning the act as most disgraceful to Great Britain, and unjust to Her Allies. - *The Sun, The Globe, The Pilot, The Traveller, The Star*, - papers of all parties concurred in execrating the measure".⁶ Even before learning the details of the Convention *The Times* had made its own position clear "We can hardly refrain from shedding tears ... the common cause has suffered most grievously by this expedition to the Tagus; it has been cruelly detrimental to our affairs, and, above all, to our character."⁷

In contrast to the popular fury the Ministers in London reacted calmly to the news. They had spent their anger in reacting to Souza's report which had warned them that something may have gone wrong. For them the news was disappointing

1 Wilberforce to Babington 28th September 1808, Wilberforce *Life of Wilberforce* vol. 3, p 379-380.

2 Lady Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower 24th September 1808 in *Lord Granville Leveson Gower (First Earl Granville) Private Correspondence 1781-1821* ed by Castalia Countess Granville (London, John Murray, 1916) vol. 2, p 329.

3 Moira to McMahon 26th October 1808 in *Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales* vol. 6, p 334-5.

4 Auckland to Grenville 29th September 1808 *HMC Dropmore* vol. 9, p 220.

5 Roberts *The Whig Party* p 120.

6 *The Farington Diary* vol. 5, p 100.

7 *The Times* 16 September 1808.

but not completely unexpected, and Castlereagh and Perceval agreed "that we ought to deal with the past, now that it is irrevocable, only as it bears upon our future Means of rendering Service".¹ Accordingly Castlereagh advised the King, only two hours after the despatches arrived, that while the Ministers felt "deep disappointment ... at the terms which have been conceded to the enemy, they ... do not perceive that there is any sufficient ground upon which they could advise your Majesty to oppose any obstacles to the Conventions agreed to being carried into effect".²

But one Minister at least was unable to take the news calmly. Canning was staying with his family at Hinckley when the news of Cintra arrived - not by the official messenger who arrived two hours later - but with the mail coach. He described what happened to Perceval,

"The news, as reported by the **Guard** was all glorious, and the place was in an uproar, bells ringing, mobs shouting, before I had the means of confirming or qualifying one word of what they all took for certain. When your note came I hardly knew what to do. However upon the whole I thought it much better to do as little as I could. The Hinckleyans are not very likely to enter into nice distinctions, and the surrender of a Fleet and an Army was reasonable ground enough for making a noise."³

Canning's own views on the Convention were uncompromising:

"a few hours reflection has shewn me all the disgrace and disaster of this transaction ... I think that there is [not] the least chance or possibility of the transaction turning out to be such as we can approve. And if we do disapprove of it, I cannot foresee any circumstances which could reconcile me to our omitting to mark our disapprobation of it in the strongest manner. ... This Convention must be distinctly **ours**, or **our Commanders**. We must judge **them**, or the Public will judge **us**. And I confess, unless there are circumstances to come out, of which I can form no conjecture, I

¹ Castlereagh to Perceval n.d. 'Sunday Evening' (Gray *Spencer Perceval* p 184 n3 dates it as 18th September 1808) Perceval Papers 8/VII/6. This letter is printed in Spencer Walpole *The Life of the Rt. Hon. Spencer Perceval* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1874) 2 vols. vol. 1, p 300-301.

² Castlereagh to the King 6 pm 15th September 1808 in *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3720 p 124-5.

³ Canning to Perceval 'Private' Saturday morning 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1. There is an inaccurate and wrongly dated version of this letter in Walpole *Life of Perceval* I p 294-6.

shall not be prepared to consent to take an atom of responsibility for this work upon our own shoulders.

The mischiefs to result in it appear from every point of view, and in every quarter of the world.

Portugal ... must hate us for the Article giving up their Plunder. Instead of hailing us as deliverers, they must consider us as having interfered only to sanction and secure French Robbery. By no other probable combination of circumstances could the French not only have kept what they had stolen, but have carried it out of the country unmolested. ... It makes me sick with shame to think of it - and in what Country after this - in what part of Italy - of Spain, or the North, shall we be received with open arms as deliverers?"¹

Later that day when he had seen the full text of the convention in the extraordinary Gazette, Canning wrote again to Perceval,

"I confess it is even worse than my expectations. The Substance to be sure I could not expect to be different, but I did not think that I should find every sore place touched in the coarsest manner; and all the shameful parts of the transaction brought forward with such unsparing, such studious and laboured particularity".²

And so Canning went on, lacerating himself and his readers with his anger, working on it so that it grew rather than lessened as the hours passed. In the two days, 16th and 17th September Canning wrote at least eleven letters to his colleagues on the Convention.³ He wrote to Perceval and to Castlereagh; to Bathurst, Portland and to Chatham, and to all and sundry he expressed his fury. The more he wrote, the more dire the consequences he foresaw particularly in Britain's relations with her allies. He feared that the repatriation of the Russian sailors would be a great blow against Sweden and was inclined to think that Baird's force - which was preparing in England for service in the Peninsula - should be sent

¹ Canning to Perceval 'Private' Sat. morn. 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1 - see previous note.

² Canning to Perceval 'Private' 5 pm 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1 - There is an inaccurate version of this letter also in Walpole *Life of Perceval* I p 297-299.

³ Canning to Perceval, 3 letters, 16th, 17th, 17th Canning Papers Bundle 32/1; to Castlereagh 3 letters all 17th September Bundle 32/3; to Chatham 17th Bundle 31; to Portland 17th Bundle 32; to Bagot (Canning's under secretary) 2 letters both 17th, Bagot *George Canning and His Friends* vol. I p 274-6 and to Bathurst 16th September: Historical Manuscripts Commission: *Report on the Manuscripts of Earl Bathurst Preserved at Cirencester Park* (London, HMSO, 1923 Series 76). p 75-6.

to the Baltic to counter-act the Russians.¹ Fortunately this idea was not pursued, but it did not take Canning long to decide that Dalrymple would have to be recalled because no army could serve under him with confidence.² Canning went on,

"It is indeed a grievous consideration that Wellesley's name is mixed in this transaction - He too I think must account for the armistice which he signed on the 22nd - and if he cannot do so satisfactorily he is available no longer for the high purposes for which he seemed destined.

If he can - why should not **local** rank make him equal to **any** command, without regard to the technicalities of army etiquette?"³

Gradually Canning's rage took a clear shape and became more coherent:

"The military parts of th convention may be accounted for - that is possible - But I can conceive **no** possible case in which the latter part of the 5th Article - and the stipulations of the 16th, 17th and 18th Articles can be sanctioned by the Government of this Country, or can be talked of ... otherwise than with the most decided and unqualified reprobation."⁴

The 5th Article permitting the French to keep their "property" particularly rankled for it was feared that this would include all the loot which the French army had accumulated.⁵ Canning said that he was even prepared to break the whole Convention rather than allow this to happen.⁶ Castlereagh told him "your suggestion however of **breaking the Convention**, rather than suffer any

¹ Canning to Bathurst 16th September 1808 *HMC Bathurst* p 75-6; see also Canning to Castlereagh 'Private' 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

² Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3. Canning regretted the necessity for Dalrymple's recall for he thought him well suited to the civil parts of the Portuguese command.

³ Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3. I quote this at length because even Denis Gray, who gives one of the best accounts of the reaction to Cintra, states that "In essence Canning's advice to sacrifice Arthur Wellesley to save the government was the most squalid he ever gave." (Gray *Perceval* p 184). Far from sacrificing Wellesley, Canning wanted him to command the combined British army, providing of course, that he could explain his signature on what Canning regarded as a damnable document.

⁴ Canning to Castlereagh 'Private' 6 pm 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

⁵ "What **property** can they have but plunder?" Canning to Perceval 'Private' 2.30 pm 16th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1.

⁶ Canning to Castlereagh 'Private' 6 pm 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

plunder to Escape ... goes much further than any opinion stated in Cabinet."¹ Nonetheless none of the Ministers was happy with this article which Hawkesbury described as "a Stipulation which is not only discreditable in itself but which must have the Effect of lowering us in the Opinion of our Allies".²

Canning's other particular source of anger was the 16th, 17th and 18th Articles of the Convention. The 16th Article protected French subjects in Portugal and gave them one year to dispose of their property. The 17th Article granted an amnesty to all Portuguese who had collaborated with the French. And the 18th Article pledged the British general to seek the release of all Frenchmen (military and civilian) who had been imprisoned in Spain before the outbreak of hostilities.³ Canning feared that these articles, together with the 5th Article, would completely alienate the Portuguese and indeed Britain's other allies. He was annoyed that the Portuguese General Freire had not been consulted,⁴ and wondered why a convention signed by a general was regarded as irrevocable when the Government's right to refuse ratification of an agreement signed by a diplomat was well established.⁵ He argued strongly that Dalrymple had no authority to make an agreement on political matters such as those covered by the 16th, 17th and 18th Articles. For the sake of Britain's relations with her allies, as well as the Government's survival, he felt that "There must at least be some mode of Shewing that we are not parties to it, that we disclaim and abjure it. Otherwise ... we shall have lost Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and our Character".⁶ If Canning had had his way the Government would have strongly condemned the Convention as a whole

¹ Castlereagh to Canning 'Private' n.d. "Sunday Even." [18th Sept. 1808] Canning Papers Bundle 34.

² Hawkesbury to Canning 'Private' 18th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 69.

³ The text of the Convention is printed in Oman *Peninsular War* I p 625-8.

⁴ Canning to Perceval 'Private' 5 pm 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1.

⁵ Canning to Portland 'Private' 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/4.

⁶ Canning to Perceval 'Private' 5 pm 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1.

and sought to force changes to the 5th, 16th, 17th and 18th Articles. When he failed to persuade his colleagues even to condemn these specific articles Canning considered resigning,¹ but in the end sent the King a memorandum formally expressing his disagreement on this issue with the rest of the Cabinet.² This was a most unusual but not unprecedented action, and it was the strongest step he could take short of resignation.³ He later attributed his decision not to resign to the conciliatory attitude of his Cabinet colleagues and their patience in listening to his case.⁴ But he also came to regret the decision,⁵ although there is no doubt that the Convention did not do as much damage to Britain's relations with her allies as he expected. Infuriating as the 5th, 16th, 17th and 18th Articles of the Convention undoubtedly were, they were not the primary cause of Canning's anger. Like almost everyone else in Britain he was bitterly disappointed at the repatriation of the French army and the Russian sailors. This was the real cause of his fury although it was less technically offensive - hence his concentration on the lesser articles which were more clearly wrong.

The Government's initial response to Dalrymple was submitted to the King on 16th September and approved the following day. But Castlereagh, with the consent of the few of his colleagues who had remained in town,⁶ then submitted an amended version which included a protest at Dalrymple's having let the French negotiate for the Russians and expressed the hope that no loot would be allowed to pass as baggage. The King approved this on 18th September regarding the changes

¹ Canning to Frere 'Private and Most Secret' 19th November 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

² Canning to the King 28th September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3730 p 133-6.

³ Aspinall 'The Cabinet Council' p 217.

⁴ Canning to Portland 24th March 1809 enclosed in Canning to Portland 'Private' 2nd April 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33/A - see below Chapter 4 p 158-9.

⁵ Canning to Villiers 'Private and Confidential' 27th September 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

⁶ Castlereagh to Canning Private n.d. [18th Sept 1808] Canning Papers Bundle 34.

as "a very material improvement".¹ The despatches were sent on their way but Mulgrave and Castlereagh quickly developed doubts when Canning's letters began to arrive, and used the naval telegraph to prevent the despatches from sailing. As Castlereagh explained to Perceval they did so because "a good understanding amongst ourselves was much more important than the communication of our decision to Dalrymple a few hours sooner".²

The Ministers in London generally took the view that they should put the Convention behind them as quickly as possible and concentrate on the future. Castlereagh and Perceval both agreed "that we can only justify ourselves to Spain by **increased and accelerated exertions**".³ Wellesley's signature on the Suspension of Hostilities caused general dismay among the Ministers. Canning's reaction has already been quoted; Hawkesbury wrote that "The treaty is moreover particularly painful as till explained it tarnishes the Reputation and glory of those whom we should most wish to uphold".⁴ Castlereagh argued that "we ought well to weigh how we can best save, together with our own character and that of the country, **the instrument**, which of all others seems capable ... of consoling us and the world for any faults which he himself or others have committed".⁵ Even Portland believed that "if we can save Sir Arthur and have full use of His Talents such ... [indiscipherable] may be made as will obviate, if not all, much of the mischief You apprehend".⁶

¹ The King to Castlereagh 18th September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3723 p 127; Castlereagh's letters submitting drafts to the King are in *ibid* p 125 and 127.

² Castlereagh to Perceval n.d. [18th Sept. 1808] Perceval Papers 8/VII/6 see above p 76n1.

³ Castlereagh to Perceval n.d. [18th Sept. 1808] Perceval Papers 8/VII/6.

⁴ Hawkesbury to Canning 'Private' 18th Sept. 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 69.

⁵ Castlereagh to Perceval n.d. [18th Sept. 1808] Perceval Papers 8/VII/6.

⁶ Portland to Canning 'Private' 18th Sept. 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 33A This letter is extremely hard to read and I may have transcribed one or two words incorrectly.

The essential difference between Canning's view and Castlereagh's was that Canning believed that Wellesley should be made to account for his signature, while Castlereagh believed that he should be saved whatever the faults he might have committed. This basic disagreement led to different approaches to the Cintra affair. Canning feared the damage that might be done to the Government's reputation; he was acutely aware of the difficulties they had faced in the Session of 1808 and the discontent the Convention would cause among the Government's supporters.¹ These fears were not unreasonable and one modern scholar has gone so far as to say that if "Parliament had not been in recess the government might easily have been swept away in the first flood of public indignation".²

Castlereagh was less influenced by such considerations and, as he told Wellesley, "My first object is your reputation; my second is, that the country should not be deprived of your services at the present critical conjuncture. I should wish to see you placed in a more responsible situation ...".³ Castlereagh's discovery that Wellesley supported the central elements of the Convention and had not protested at being asked to sign the armistice almost dictated his views on the line the Government should take.

There could be no disavowal of the Convention without endangering Wellesley's reputation, and this, for Castlereagh was the central issue. There was no question of Wellesley being technically responsible for either the armistice or the Convention. Dalrymple was in command and whatever advice he may have been given the responsibility was his and his alone. Wellesley could only be held accountable by an enquiry or court martial for the condition of the army at the time Burrard took command.⁴ But the real question was not Wellesley's technical

¹ Canning to Perceval 'Private' Sat morn. 17th Sept 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1.

² Gray *Perceval* p182.

³ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley [Private] 26th September 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 453-4.

⁴ Castlereagh to Sir Arthur Wellesley [Private] 26th September 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 453-4 "With respect to your having advised any part of the measure, this

responsibility but his reputation, for if the public blamed him for the armistice and convention the opposition to his future employment might become insuperable.

Wellesley had many influential supporters inside and outside the Government and they quickly mounted a vigorous and unscrupulous campaign to clear his name. When Lady Bessborough visited Dublin at the end of September she reported that,

"The D. of Richmond shews about some letters of Sir A. Wellesley that make one's blood boil. The first is just after the battle, saying he hopes soon to have still better news to send, but that not a moment is to be lost; that he has tried already, and hopes still to persuade Sir H. Burrard to renew the attack. ... The letter is written by bits, with ye utmost vexation, saying in one part 'that Dowager Dalrymple and Betty Burrard are Haggling with Kellermann on inadmissable terms, and losing a glorious opportunity of having the whole French army at our mercy.' ...He next says he is call'd upon to sign the most disgraceful convention that ever was made, that he has resisted to everything short of Mutiny, and only submits to the command of his superior Genl."¹

It is not clear how far the campaign in defence of Wellesley was officially organized and how far it was a campaign run unofficially by people most of whom happened to be members of the Government. No doubt the pro-Government papers received and acted upon instructions in this matter - as they did on most controversial questions.² At first Wellesley's defenders claimed that he had only signed the armistice under orders from Dalrymple; that he disapproved of its terms; and that he had formally protested against it. This story perfectly suited the mood in Britain but unfortunately it was completely untrue - not only had Wellesley not protested, he actually approved the substance though not the form of the armistice and Convention. Faced with this inconvenient fact Wellesley's champions seized upon his statement that "I have not seen the Convention, and I do not know what it

may certainly make part of his [Dalrymple's] justification, but it cannot transfer his responsibility in strictness to you."

¹ Lady Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower 27th-29th Sept 1808 *Private Correspondence of Granville Leveson Gower* vol. 2, p 329-331.

² A. Aspinall *Politics and the Press c1780-1850* (London, Home and Van Thal, 1949) p202-3, 206-9.

contains",¹ and spread it widely in an attempt to distance Wellesley from the odious document. Technically the statement was true, and in its original context it was not particularly misleading, but this was not how it was used. The final Convention was closely based on the original armistice and it was outrageous of Wellesley's supporters to claim that he was ignorant of anything more than the details of the final terms.²

It is hard to assess the effectiveness of the campaign waged in Wellesley's defence. Lady Bessborough wondered "Why did he not throw up his commission? He might have been sure of being reinstated."³ Her correspondent, Granville Leveson Gower, was even less impressed "This, in my opinion, does not exculpate Wellesley, who ought rather to have suffered his right hand to be cut off than put his signature to such disgraceful Terms."⁴ And these were the reaction of people prejudiced in Wellesley's favour! The press campaign prompted a backlash from other papers with *The Times* attacking Wellesley savagely. A single sample of the controversy adequately conveys its flavour,

"It hardly now appears any longer to be worth our while to give consequence to the sneaking insinuations which are obtruded on the Public, in the way of apology for Sir Arthur Wellesley, by replying to them as if they were arguments. Sir Arthur is settled; and all that the injudicious zeal of his friends can now do, is heap obloquy upon those who have supplied proofs of his guilt. When they find they cannot build a wall of defence around his person, they pelt his enemies with the stones which they had brought together."⁵

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh 5th September 1808 *WD III* p 117.

² Richard M. Schneer 'Arthur Wellesley and the Cintra Convention : a New Look at an Old Puzzle' *Journal of British Studies* vol. 19, no. 2 1980 p 93-119 gives a useful account of the campaign mounted by Wellesley's partisans. I disagree with many of his conclusions, however.

³ Lady Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower 27th - 29th September 1808, in *Private Correspondence of Granville Leveson Gower* vol. 2, p 329-331.

⁴ Granville Leveson Gower to Lady Bessborough n.d. *Private Correspondence of Granville Leveson Gower* v. 2 p 331-2. In a marvellous understatement in the same letter Leveson Gower says that Canning - a close friend - "is really quite unhappy about the detested Convention".

⁵ *The Times*, 29 September 1808.

The obvious activity of Wellesley's defenders seems to have attracted public attention to his role in the affair and so reinforced the connection between his name and Cintra. On the other hand they successfully muddied the water and created confusion about Wellesley's actual role in the negotiations leading to the armistice. but even this came at a price, for if Wellesley's supporters had done nothing there would probably have been a wave of public sympathy for the young triumphant general superseded in the hour of victory only to have all his achievements undone by his elderly and incompetent superiors.

The public image of Dalrymple was certainly unflattering. Two prints by Williams published in October lay the blame firmly at his feet. 'A Portugal Catch for three Voices' shows a lead-faced Dalrymple confronted by a British and a Portuguese officer; the British officer sings "T'was You Sir Hew - T'was Hew that let the French Escape,/That makes you look so blue Sir Hew Sir Hew!"¹ In the second print, 'Quakers conversing on the Affairs of Portugal' two Quakers sit at a table on which lies a copy of the extraordinary Gazette; the first says "Thinkst the friend Nathan they will try Sir Hew?" the other replies "He has been tried Friend, and he will not do!"²

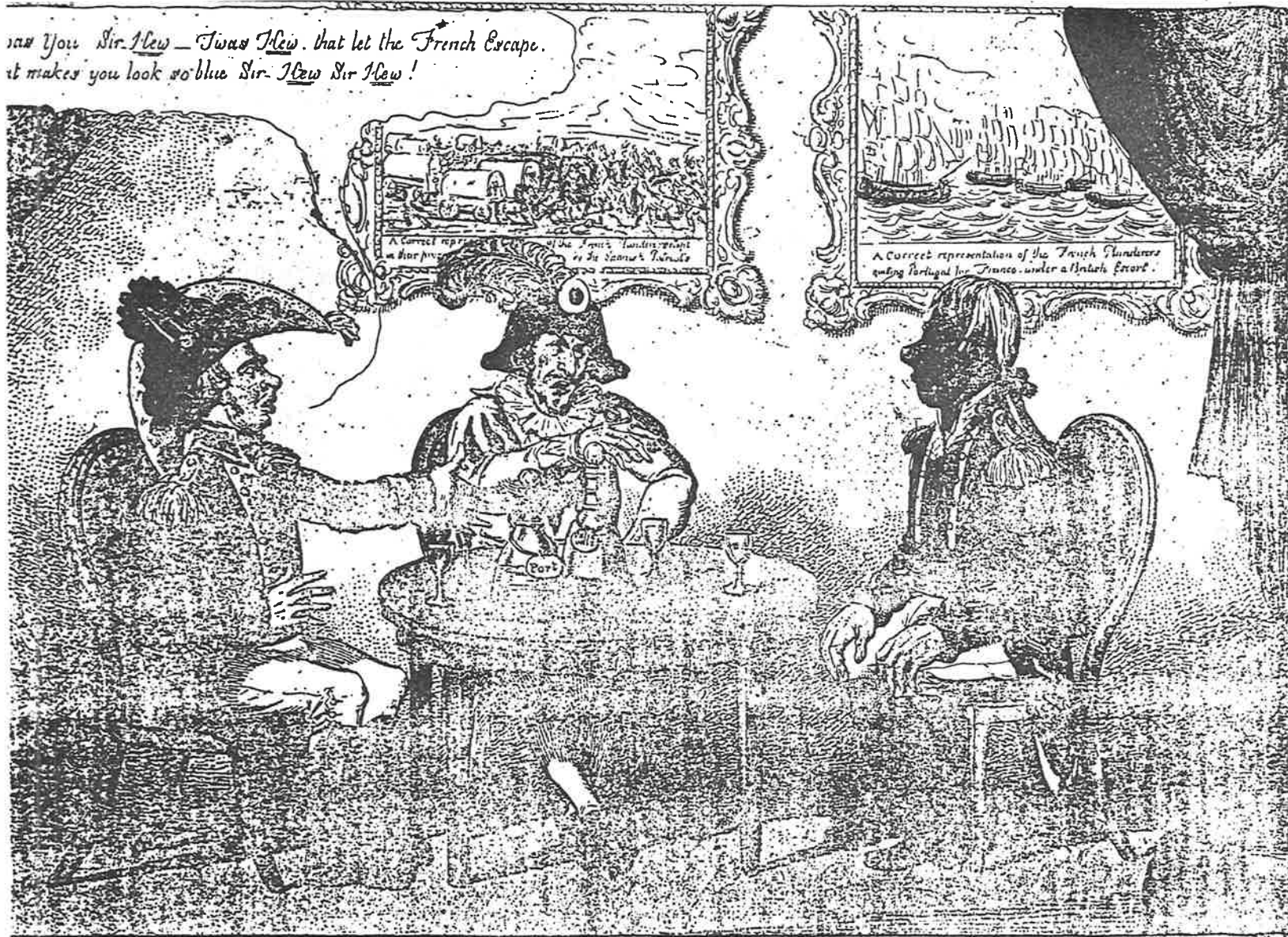
The Ministers agreed, and on 21st September Castlereagh submitted to the King the third and final answer to Dalrymple: his recall. The King's response is interesting for, with the possible exception of Chatham,³ he was the only influential figure with any interest in defending Dalrymple. George III considered "it very fair towards Sir Hew Dalrymple to give him an early opportunity of personally

¹ George *BM Catalogue of Satires* ... vol. 8 no. 11,042 p 682-3 see illustration No. 5.

² George *BM Catalogue of Satires* ... vol. 8 no. 11,043 p 682 see illustration No. 6.

³ Wellesley believed that he had the support of all the members of the Government "excepting indeed Lord Chatham, who thought that I was responsible for signing the Armistice, for which act I ought to be tried". Wellington to Castlereagh 14th October 1809 *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 401-3. In the same letter he explains that soon after he returned from Portugal he saw Canning and satisfactorily explained his signature to him. Speaker Abbot also makes Chatham, along with Canning and Eldon, one of the opposing party in Cabinet over Cintra. *The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester*, ed by Charles, Lord Colchester 3 vols. (London, John Murray, 1861) vol. 2, p 163.

now You Sir Hew — Twas Hew. that let the French Escape.
it makes you look so blue Sir- Hew Sir Hew!



A PORTUGAL CATCH for three Voices.

Illustration No 5: A Portugal Catch for three Voices [Williams]
published October 1808.

Thinkst the friend Nathan they will try Sir Flew?

He has been tried, Friend, and he will not do!!



QUAKERS conversing on the Affairs of Portugal.

Publ. Octob. 1808 by Wm. W. Williams
and may be had every new Circulation.

Illustration No 6: Quakers Conversing on the Affairs of Portugal
[Williams] October 1808.

explaining his conduct".¹ Dalrymple's recall and the public outrage provoked by the Convention made some form of enquiry inevitable. The Cabinet accepted Richard Ryder's advice and established a Board of Enquiry rather than a Court Martial whose scope would have been limited by the specific charges which must have been formed.²

The Enquiry opened on 17th November, and its Report was published on 22nd December "approving the armistice after Vimeiro by six votes to one and the terms of the convention by four to three", and unanimously recommending no further proceedings.³ But the result of the enquiry had little importance. The military men who composed it had no interest in causing trouble. Only Lord Moira, a distinguished soldier and friend of the Prince of Wales, was prepared to argue the issues at any length, and his report still makes interesting reading.⁴ But by the time the Enquiry had opened, the public's attention had moved from Portugal to the dramatic events unfolding in Spain. Most people had already made up their minds about Cintra and Sir Arthur Wellesley; a damning report could still have destroyed his career but the Board's approval of the Convention had little influence.

And so the affair ended, as such affairs usually do, in the muffled whimper of an official enquiry. Sir Arthur Wellesley's reputation had been bruised and he had lost all the glory he had gained at Roliça and Vimeiro. But the Ministers' confidence in him was undiminished and he avoided involvement in Moore's campaign. The Government also lost all the credit it would otherwise have gained

1 The King to Castlereagh 22nd September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 no. 3723 p 127. Castlereagh's letter recalling Dalrymple is printed in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 447-8.

2 See Ryder's unsigned, undated notes in Perceval Papers 10/C/18 cf Gray *Perceval* p1 86.

3 Gray *Perceval* p 187. The Board's report is printed in *W.D. III* p 177-8. It praises the "highly honourable and successful" operations of the army while under Wellesley's command, and avoids passing judgement on the merits of the armistice and Convention. The individual members of the Board were then asked to state their opinions, leading to the results described by Gray. see Glover *Brittania Sickness* p 191-2.

4 Moira's opinion, dated 27th December 1808, is printed in Oman *Peninsular War* I p 628-630.

from its prompt reaction to the Spanish uprising and from Wellesley's victories in Portugal. The Opposition tried to exploit Cintra in Parliament in 1809 but with little success; the issue, and the passions it generated, had grown cold and been supplanted by the collapse of the Spanish armies and Moore's retreat. Yet the dismay caused by Cintra had damaged the Government's reputation; not all the blame was heaped on the generals, and any failure, whoever was to blame, lowered the standing of the Ministry. More serious than this was the damage to the Government's cohesion. Canning was deeply alienated. He considered resigning and later regretted that he had not done so.¹ This was the origin of his discontent which was to explode in April 1809,² and which eventually brought down the Government. Quite why he felt the blow so keenly is not at all clear, but he was a passionate, active committed man who poured his energy into whatever he undertook. This was his strength and also his weakness. Some of his colleagues were more phlegmatic, others more controlled. None possessed his brilliance, his energy or his inspiration.

Finally Cintra destroyed the early unanimity of support for the war in the Peninsula. Popular enthusiasm declined sharply and the Opposition distanced itself from its early support. The initial euphoria had gone and could never be replaced. British participation in the war in Portugal and Spain had become and would remain a controversial political issue.

¹ Canning to Villiers 'Private and Confidential' 27th September 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

² Canning to Portland 24th March 1809 enclosed in Canning to Portland, 'Private', 2nd April 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 33/A. See below, Chapter 4, p 158-9.

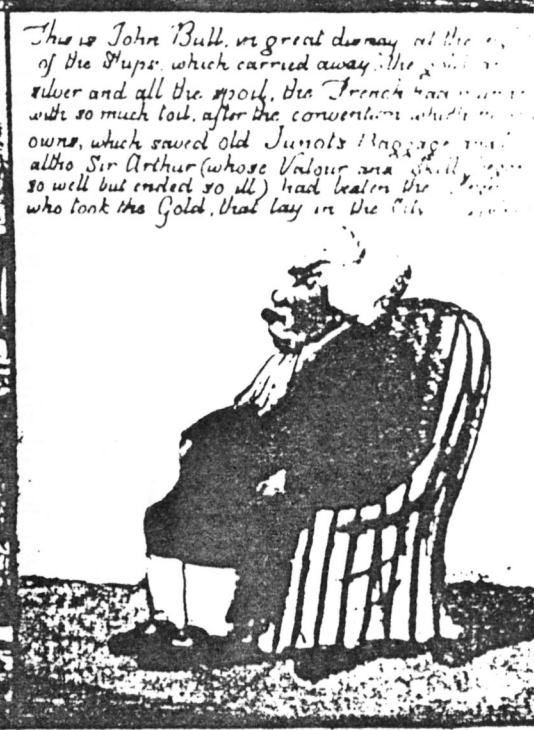
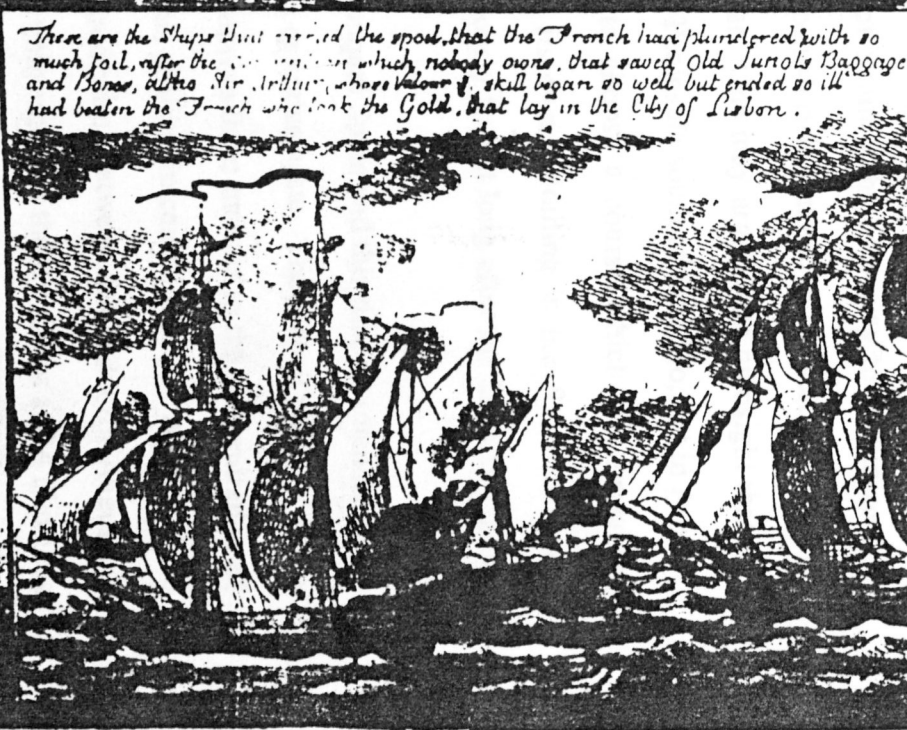
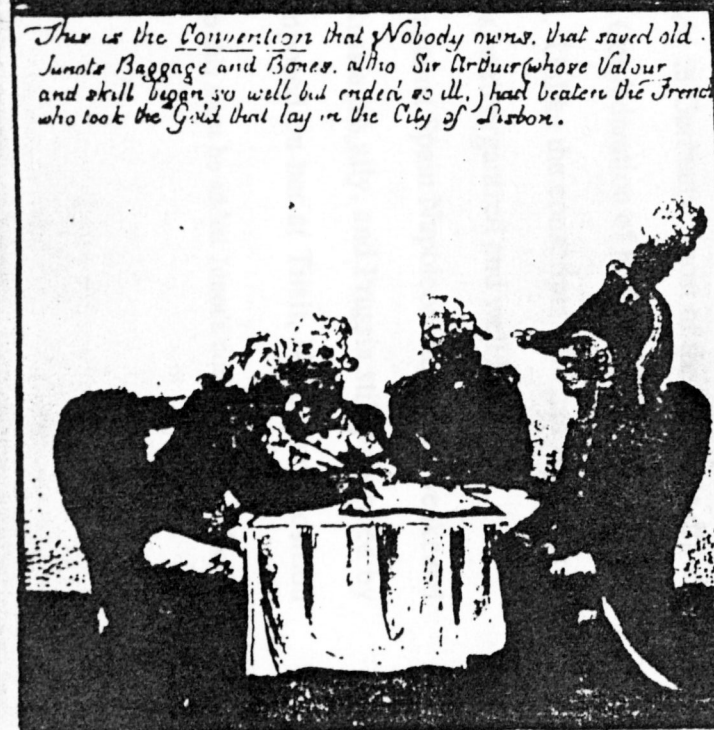
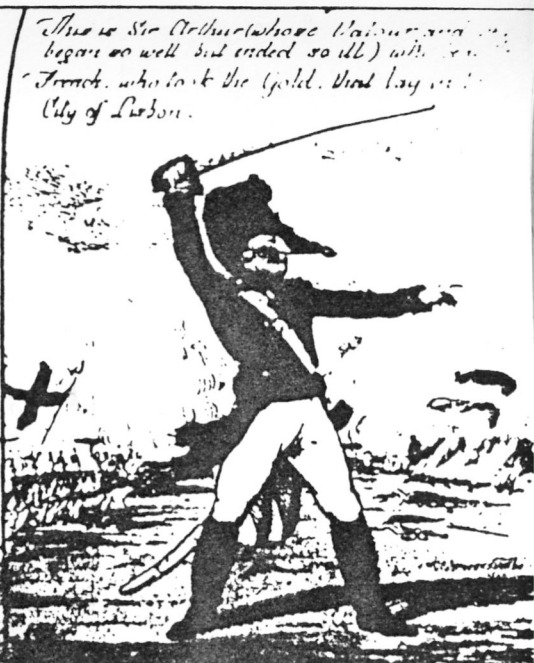
The Convention of Cintra.

A Portuguese Gambol for the Amusement of John Bull.

(A satire by Woodward published 3rd February 1809, George, *BM Catalogue of Satires ...*, No. 11215).

The text reads as follows:

- I This is the City of Lisbon.
- II This is the Gold that lay in the City of Lisbon.
- III These are the French who took the Gold that lay in the City of Lisbon.
- IV This is Sir Arthur (whose Valour and skill, began so well and ended so ill) who beat the French who took the Gold that lay in the City of Lisbon.
- V This is the **Convention** that Nobody owns, that saved old Junot's Baggage and Bones, altho' Sir Arthur (whose Valour and skill) began so well and ended so ill) had beat the French who took the Gold that lay in the City of Lisbon.
- VI These are the Ships that carried the spoil that the French had plundered with so much toil, after the Convention which nobody owns, that saved old Junot's Baggage and Bones, altho' Sir Arthur (whose Valour and skill, began so well but ended so ill) had beaten the French who took the Gold, that lay in the City of Lisbon.
- VII This is John Bull in great dismay at the sight of the Ships which carried away, the gold and silver and all the spoil, the French had plundered with so much toil, after the convention which nobody owns which saved old Junot's Baggage and Bones altho' Sir Arthur (whose Valour and skill, began so well but ended so ill), had beaten the French who took the Gold, that lay in the City of Lisbon.



Woodward del.

London: Printed and Sold by J. G. ...

THE CONVENTION of CENTRAL PORTUGUESE GAMBOLE for the Amusement of JOHN BULL.

Chapter 3

The Road to Coruña (August 1808 - January 1809)

Napoleon was understandably furious when he learnt of Joseph's unnecessary retreat from Madrid to the line of the Ebro. The blow to his prestige and to that of French arms was even greater than that of Bailen, while Joseph lost whatever credibility he had as King of Spain. The only way to minimize this damage was to completely crush the Spanish rising and so to reassert to the world the Emperor's primacy in the art of war. One may argue with hindsight that the Emperor ought to have abandoned the Peninsula south of the Ebro, but in August 1808 there was no reason for him to choose a course which was certainly humiliating and not without risks of its own. Nothing in the Spanish rising indicated that the war would be tenaciously fought long after the Spanish regular armies were defeated.

Napoleon was determined to conquer Spain and this time he intended to do the job properly with no half-measures or undue haste. The French position on the Ebro was safe and he could afford to devote three months to the concentration of reinforcements and the shoring up of his position in central Europe. Already there were almost 100,000 French troops in Spain; between 5th and 17th August he ordered a further 130,000 men to the Peninsula.¹ Of these 3 Corps and 4 divisions of cavalry came from the *Grande Armée* in Germany; most of the rest were drawn from Napoleon's allies in Italy and the Confederation of the Rhine; and finally, last but not least, were the Imperial Guard. Unlike the conscripts who had surrendered with Dupont, these were veteran troops, well organized and well led.

But in strengthening his hand against Spain Napoleon inevitably weakened his hold over central Europe. With Russia his ally, and Prussia still prostrated by the débâcle of 1806 and the terms imposed on her at Tilsit, Napoleon's position

¹ Oman *Peninsular War* I p 339. To this must be added Junot's corps with an effective strength of 20,000 men. *ibid* p 644-5.

should have been secure. But the Russian alliance had quickly cooled, German nationalism was beginning to wake, and Austria was becoming increasingly hostile. It was not a time in which Napoleon wished to be hundreds of miles from the cockpit of Europe immersed in a war in the heart of Spain.

Still the war in Spain could neither be avoided nor deputed, and success there would do much to dampen the ferment in Germany and consolidate French hegemony. To hold the line until this could be achieved Napoleon played his Russian card by holding a spectacular summit with Alexander at Erfurt (27th September - 14th October). The actual negotiations at Erfurt did not go particularly well for Napoleon: his position was much weaker than at Tilsit and he had to make more concessions than he gained. Nonetheless he benefited from the conference enormously - the very public reaffirmation of the Franco-Russian alliance cooled the hot-heads in Germany and Vienna, while his concessions to Russia slowed her drift into renewed antagonism.¹

It may thus have been with an easier mind that Napoleon left Erfurt on 14th October. He stopped only briefly in Paris before continuing his journey, entering Spain at Bayonne on 3rd November, and taking command of his army on the 5th. Most of the reinforcements had now arrived although Junot's corps - so conveniently returned by the British - had not yet fully recovered from its sea-sickness and was lagging a little behind. Napoleon had already laid his plans and he now wasted no time in launching an offensive which he was quite confident would destroy the Spanish armies and put an end to the miserable, unwanted, troublesome war.

* * * * *

¹ For an account of Erfurt see R.B. Mowat *The Diplomacy of Napoleon* (London, Edward Arnold, 1924) p 215-222. He makes the point that Alexander was then 36 years old and Napoleon 39. (p 220).

The Spaniards reacted to Joseph's retreat from Madrid with a mixture of jubilation and relaxation. Their already excessively high confidence soared to new levels, and they began to behave as if they had already won the war. The last French troops left Madrid on 1st August; the first Spanish troops did not enter the capital until the 13th, while Castanos with the leading elements of his victorious army did not arrive until 23rd August.¹ The French retreat had been so precipitate and the Spanish advance so lethargic that there was a clean break between the armies. It was several months before major operations were resumed.

In this lull the Spaniards set about creating a new Government. There was some disagreement about the form this should take, and some reluctance on the part of a few provincial Juntas to give up their power, but the need was so obvious that it over-rode all objections. A Supreme Junta was formed comprising two deputies from each of the provincial juntas and one from the Canary Islands. There is no doubt that the Supreme Junta was neither very wise, nor very efficient. British observers were frustrated by its concern for formalities and by its apparent failure to recognize the urgent military crisis facing Spain. Yet they did not fully understand all the Junta's problems. The concern for titles and ceremony was, in part, an attempt to bolster the Junta's authority which rested on shaky legal foundations. The machinery of government through which the Junta had to rule had been completely disrupted by the French occupation and the popular uprising. Given these and other problems it is not really surprising that the Junta achieved little.

The most serious British grievance against the Junta was its failure to appoint a commander-in-chief to co-ordinate the Spanish armies and to define the role which the British army could play in future operations. The arguments in favour of appointing a supreme commander were so obvious and so strong that the British could not comprehend why the new Spanish Government failed to do so.²

¹ *Oman Peninsular War* I p 342, 346.

² Lord William Bentinck - head of the British military mission in Madrid - even went so far as to protest over the Spanish Government's decision. Bentinck to Florida Blanca Aranjuez 30th

In fact there were two powerful reasons: with some justification the Government felt that it could not trust such power in the hands of any one general,¹ and the Government itself probably lacked the power to force the other generals to submit to the authority of a generalissimo. The Spanish armies were firmly based on their provinces and if the commander of the Army of Galicia, for example, had objected to being subordinated to the commander of the Army of Andalusia he might well have received support from his provincial junta. Neither central, nor civilian, government was firmly established in Spain in this turbulent time.

The comparatively easy victory of Bailen and Joseph's unexpected retreat from Madrid led to an unreasoning over-confidence and a relaxation of effort just at the time when Napoleon was concentrating his resources against Spain. For this the Supreme Junta cannot be blamed - they first met on 25th September only six weeks before Napoleon began his great offensive.² The chief responsibility must rest with the local authorities who failed to tap the great resources of the newly liberated provinces of Old Castile, New Castile and Leon, and who failed to maintain the early momentum in many other provinces. For example "Andalusia had 40,000 men under arms in July, and no more than 50,000 at the beginning of November".³

Nonetheless by November the Spaniards had a creditable 109,000 men in their front line on the Ebro and many more in reserve.⁴ The quality of these troops

September 1808 *Parliamentary Papers 1809* vol. XI p 107-8. Bentinck had hoped and expected that Castanos would be appointed. Bentinck to Dalrymple 2nd October 1809 *ibid* p 106-7.

1 Cuesta, the most senior Spanish General, openly talked of staging a coup, and was finally dismissed for arresting some members of the Supreme Junta. Oman *Peninsular War* I p 357 + n, 359. The political ambitions of other generals were less glaringly obvious, but no less dangerous.

2 Not that the Supreme Junta was slow in assembling - less than two months passed from Joseph's evacuation of Madrid to their first session - a short enough time in any period for the creation of a new government - let alone an era with such slow communications.

3 Oman *Peninsular War* I p 347; p 363-4 on central Spain; Oman's criticism of the Supreme Junta (p 365) is quite unfair.

4 I am most grateful to Dr Charles Esdaile for supplying me with this figure (in a letter dated 9th October 1988) which corrects the misleading figure given in Oman *Peninsular War* I p 636.

was not particularly high and they were badly led. The Spanish generals had devised a common plan on 5th September but they did not abide by it.¹ In many ways this did not matter - their defeat by Napoleon was inevitable. Spain was a second rate power which could not possibly defeat France without the assistance of at least one of the great powers of central Europe. The pattern of the war in the Peninsula with its succession of advances and retreats had already been established. So long as neither side could gain a complete victory a successful allied advance simply made the French retreat and concentrate their forces until they had regained the superiority. The French would then, in their turn, advance until their forces were over-extended and the allies regained the initiative. This equilibrium was not really stable - it required an increasing British presence to sustain the allied cause - but it lasted until the collapse of Napoleon's Empire following the Russian campaign.

* * * * *

The British Government gave support to the Spanish patriots in a variety of ways. The dispatch of Wellesley's army to Portugal was one form of assistance. More direct and possibly more useful was the generous material and financial aid which was sent to Spain. Accounts differ but it is clear that by the middle of November over 120,000 muskets, millions of cartridges, and vast quantities of other equipment had actually reached Spain.² Over £1 million in silver had been

¹ Oman *Peninsular War* I p 382.

² Oman *Peninsular War* I p 365 cites Charles Vaughan's papers for the figure of 122,000 muskets received before 16th November. Canning writing to Frere on 16th November 1808 (*Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. 15 Pt N no. 13 p 16-7.) claimed that over 160,000 muskets had been sent. There are detailed official returns in *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol. XI p 204-5 on all military equipment sent to Spain between 1st May 1808 and 20th March 1809. This lists 151,000 muskets, 62,000 pikes, 52,000 swords, 150 cannon of different types with 40,000 rounds of ammunition, 11,000 barrels of gunpowder, 19 million ball cartridges, 25,000 sets of infantry accoutrements and much more. As little aid was given to Spain between December 1808 and March 1809 most of the above would have been sent by the end of November 1808. (All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.)

sent before November; a further £585,000 was sent at the end of that month and another £220,000 had been sent in the form of Treasury bills.¹ These sums virtually exhausted Britain's reserves of specie and so created a problem that was to haunt her war effort over the next few years.² As early as 27th July Canning wrote that Britain could not give the Spaniards as much financial aid as she wished due to a shortage of specie.³ This did not restrict her ability to supply equipment and goods that were produced in England and could be paid for in paper currency - Britain was not short of money simply of precious metals.⁴ In fact it seems that the revolution in Spain reduced the supply as well as increasing the demand for Britain's bullion reserves for "It is only by a direct but secret Understanding with the late Government of Spain, under the Connivance of France, that any Considerable Amount of Dollars has been collected in England".⁵ The revolution disrupted this secret arrangement and Britain could only hope to replenish her supplies if she were allowed to trade with Vera Cruz ie exchange British merchandise for Mexican silver.⁶ But this raised the extremely prickly subject of British trade with Spanish America in general and it remained a delicate and troublesome issue in the relations between the allies.

¹ *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol XI p 247. Charles Vaughan acknowledged the arrival of approximately £1.2 million by 16th November (*Oman Peninsular War* I p 365 - Vaughan's figures are in Spanish dollars - approximately \$4¹/₂ to the pound - see Sherwig *Guineas and Gunpowder* p 198n). Canning claimed on 16th November (to Frere *Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. 15 Pt. N no. 13 p 16-7) to have sent approximately £1.6m. The Treasury bills would be sold in Spain at a discount to merchants, speculators etc.

² Sherwig *Guineas and Gunpowder* p 200 and see below Chapter 5, p 171-2, 182-4; Chapter 8 p 287-290.

³ extract of Canning to Mr Duff 27th July 1808. Canning Papers Bundle 46.

⁴ This is a deliberate over-simplification of a complex problem. The specie shortage was reflected in Britain's internal economy by the gradual disappearance of guineas etc and the depreciation of paper currency against gold. This resulted in a Parliamentary Enquiry ('The Bullion Committee') whose findings are examined in Chapter 11 below.

⁵ extract of Canning to Mr Duff 27th July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 46. There is a most interesting and well documented account of this arrangement in Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* p 67-9.

⁶ extract of Canning to Mr Duff 27th July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 46.

A third form of British aid makes one of the great romantic stories of the Peninsular War. This was the rescue by British ships of Romana's Spanish corps from Denmark. Even before the Spanish rising the British Government had considered whether it might be possible to win over Romana and his men but two attempts to establish contact had ended in failure. When the Asturian deputies arrived in London they asked that another attempt be made, but it seems that this had already been decided upon. The agent was a Scottish monk Brother James Robertson (an old acquaintance of the Duke of Richmond, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland) who had returned to Britain after some years on the Continent. Robertson received his instructions on 10th June and was taken to Heligoland from whence he was landed on the Continent by a smuggler. His task was considerably complicated by the fact that the Spanish corps had been moved from Holstein and Hamburg to scattered quarters in Denmark - and he could not speak Danish. Still by cool courage and considerable common sense he succeeded in reaching Romana and convincing him that his proposals were genuine. Romana accepted his offer and with some difficulty word was sent back to London. The actual escape did not go entirely according to plan, and only two thirds of the 14,000 Spanish troops got away, but it was still one of the most remarkable feats of secret service performed during the Napoleonic wars. The escape was on 7th August and by 11th October Romana's corps was concentrated at Santander in Spain.¹ As it was based on no single province (unlike the other Spanish armies) the British Government agreed to pay its expenses until the Supreme Junta could do so.² The glamour of the escape and their own role in it made the British Ministers and public take a special, proprietary interest in the fortunes of Romana and his men. Romana himself landed

¹ Sir Charles Oman 'Brother James Robertson in the Baltic' in *Studies in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, Methuen, 1929) and Oman *Peninsular War* I p 367-375. I have not seen Robertson's own account of his adventure.

² Castlereagh to Leith 26th September 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 451-2.

in England and met members of the Cabinet who seem to have been most impressed by him.¹

The British military missions to Spain might be regarded as another form of aid although their role seems to have been primarily to gather intelligence and distribute material aid rather than to help train and organize the new Spanish levies. This is confirmed by the fact that the missions each consisted of a handful of officers without the drill masters and non-commissioned officers that a training mission would require.² The performance of the missions varied widely but they did gather vast quantities of intelligence which was sometimes supplemented by shrewd comments. The officers sent to Spain had no special qualifications for their service other than the fact that they could speak Spanish. That some were next to useless and one or two were even dangerous mavericks is thus hardly surprising. The most colourful of the mavericks was probably Colonel Doyle whose misdeeds may actually have done some damage to Anglo-Spanish relations. Not only did Doyle desert his post, but he created false expectations of a British landing in Asturias and interfered egregiously in Spanish politics associating himself with the disreputable intriguer the Duke del Infantado.³ As the Spaniards could not be certain that he was acting entirely on his own initiative, and that the British Government disapproved of his actions, he was a source of confusion and embarrassment.

¹ e.g. Castlereagh to Romana 1st October 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 460-1; Canning to Romana 7th April 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

² There is no mention of training in Castlereagh's instructions to Dyer, Roche and Patrick (19th June 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol. XI p 5-6) the first military mission, but it was included as one of Maj-Gen Broderick's duties when he was sent to Coruña on 4th August (*ibid* p 32) and similar instructions were sent to Brigadiers Sontag and Decken. There is an incomplete list of the detached officers in, Castlereagh to the Officer Commanding in Portugal 18th August 1808 *ibid* p 38 which excludes the officers detached in southern Spain by Dalrymple, and possibly others.

³ Canning to Castlereagh 29th August 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3 - published in *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 416-8. Cooke to Doyle 31st August 1808 *ibid* vol. 6 p 419-420.

The most important military mission came not from London but from the British army in Portugal, when Sir Hew Dalrymple sent Lord William Bentinck to Madrid to consult with the Spaniards over the advance of the British army into Spain.¹ Bentinck was both a Major-general and a son of the Duke of Portland, the Prime Minister. He was a man of considerable ability and was an excellent choice for the job. He found it extremely frustrating. There was no Spanish Commander-in-Chief with whom he could confer, the Minister of War was a non-entity, the Spaniards appeared to have no coherent plan and he could not even get reliable information on such basic matters as the quality of strategic roads.² He had an interesting conference with General Castanos - of whom he formed a high opinion - but as Castanos could speak only for himself, and as he was not well informed of the plans of his colleagues, these talks were not especially useful.³ Yet they were the only indication that Britain could gain of Spanish plans and of the role the British army could play within them. If British strategic planning in 1808 was often faulty one must remember the dearth of useful information in which it occurred.

* * * * *

The profusion of British military missions to Spain occurred at a time when there were few British diplomats in Spain, because there was no central government to which they could be accredited. Three civil missions were however established before the creation of the Supreme Junta. Mr Duff the former consul to Cadiz

¹ Bentinck arrived in Madrid on 24th September and left on 24th November to rejoin the army. His correspondence is in PRO WO 1/230 and it is printed, except for some interesting deletions and omissions in *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol. XI P106-120. His instructions from Sir Hew Dalrymple are also in *ibid* p 101-3. John Rosselli *Lord William Bentinck. The Making of a Liberal Imperialist 1774-1839* (London, Chatto and Windus for Sussex University Press, 1974) is an interesting biography although it has little on this episode in Bentinck's life.

² Bentinck found the whole experience discouraging and wrote to Castlereagh (14th November) "I have never been very sanguine from having seen the blind confidence and gross mismanagement which have prevailed." PRO WO 1/230 p 163 (passage deleted in published text).

³ There is a detailed account of these talks printed as an enclosure in Bentinck to Castlereagh 2nd October 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol. XI p 108-114.

returned there and became the channel through which aid and communications with the Junta of Andalusia passed. Mr Hunter played a similar role in the Asturias arriving in Gijon as early as 18th June.¹ Neither of these men played as prominent a role as the military mission in their area. The third civil representative was more important and had a higher diplomatic status. This was a 'special mission' to the Junta of Galicia by Charles Stuart, a rising young diplomat who later played an important role as Britain's Minister to Portugal 1810-14.²

Stuart arrived at Coruña on 20th July 1808 - the same day but by a different ship as Sir Arthur Wellesley. He brought with him £200,000 in Spanish dollars as aid for the Junta of Galicia, but his powers were strictly limited. He had no authority to make any agreement and was to refer all proposals back to London with the explanation that Britain could not send an accredited Minister to a provincial junta but would certainly send one to a central Spanish government when this was formed.³ This reflected the main concern of British policy at this time which was to see a single Spanish government created. By late July Canning thought this could be achieved by recognising the claims to paramouncy of the Junta of Andalusia but the reaction from Galicia to this proposal quickly removed this illusion!⁴ Stuart was involved in more realistic attempts to unite the northern provinces but even this failed when the Asturias refused to co-operate despite strong British pressure.⁵

¹ For this date see Asturian Junta to Mr Hunter 18th June 1808 P.R.O. F.O. 72/65 f90-92. According to *The Times* of 9th June Hunter had been sent from Madrid to St Andero [sic: Santander] as a prisoner by Murat but had been freed by the popular uprising in St Andero. I do not know what Hunter had been doing in Madrid or when he arrived there.

² On Stuart see: Mildred L. Fryman 'Charles Stuart and the "Common Cause" : The Anglo-Portuguese Alliance 1810-14' unpublished dissertation submitted to Florida State University in 1974.

³ extract of Canning to Stuart 6th July 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. XV Pt. E no. 1

⁴ Canning to Stuart 27th July 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. XV Pt. E no. 3; Stuart to Canning 9th August 1808 *ibid* Pt. N no. 5; On this see also Villiers to Canning 22nd July 1808 (Canning Papers Bundle 48) and reply 24th July (Bundle 40) where Villiers (later Minister at Lisbon) stresses the importance of having a Minister in Spain and Canning explains the obstacles.

⁵ extract of Stuart to Canning 17th August 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. XV Pt. N no. 6; ditto 30th August *ibid* Pt. N no. 9.

Unity could not be achieved until the French evacuated central Spain and even then it remained fragile.

Stuart left Coruña on 25th August when the Junta of Galicia moved to Lugo to meet the juntas of Leon and Castile. From there he went on to Aranjuez and Madrid where he observed the Supreme Junta and co-operated with Bentinck. While his presence was quite useful his absence from Coruña proved most unfortunate, when the local authorities refused to allow Sir David Baird to land his army in the middle of October. This led to a strong reprimand from Canning which did not deter Stuart from committing the same offence in the following year when he sailed without authorization from the Foreign Office, to Austria thus jeopardizing secret and extremely delicate negotiations with that power.¹

The creation of the Supreme Junta allowed the British Government to send an Ambassador to Spain. John Hookham Frere who had been the British Minister at Madrid 1802-4 was chosen. He was a close friend of Canning, a witty, scholarly man who had contributed to the *Anti-Jacobin* and who is chiefly remembered now "as the inspirer of the style, stanza, and idiom of Byron's *Beppo* and *Don Juan*" and for his translations of Aristophanes.² Unfortunately he was a poor man of business who had been a failure when he had followed Canning as Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office in 1799.³ Given his previous experience in Spain his appointment was not unreasonable but it is a great pity that Canning did not recognize his friend's limitations and keep him from a position which only involved him in bother, controversy and discredit.

¹ Canning to Frere 'Private' 19th April 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

² Margaret Drabble (comp.) *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (O.U.P., 1985), p 369. There are excellent pen portraits of Frere in Holland *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party* p 19-20 and J.W. Ward *Letters to 'Ivy' from the First Earl of Dudley* [ed] by S.H. Romilly. (London, Longmans, 1905) p 143.

³ Middleton *Administration of British Foreign Policy* p 148 + n.

Officially Britain's policy was not to interfere in the internal politics of Spain but in practice this neither could be, nor was, implemented. From the moment she declared her support for the Spanish rising Britain was enmeshed in the internal affairs of Spain and the strong views of the British Government on a number of issues ensured that she would not play a passive role. And while Britain was distrusted by many in Spain there were others who looked to her to use her influence to overcome the provincialism and personal jealousies that were a part of the Spanish rising from its beginning.¹

No better example of this can be found than the pressure which Britain applied to the provincial juntas to form a national government, although it must be conceded that this pressure was not the decisive factor in the creation of the Supreme Junta. Britain's support for the new Government did not stop at its formation: when its authority was questioned by the Junta of Seville, Canning told Frere to secretly organize petitions from towns, artisan groups etc thanking the Supreme Junta for assuming power.²

Yet the Supreme Junta was not the form of Government Britain would have chosen for Spain. The British Cabinet was strongly in favour of a Royal Regency to reinforce the monarchical principle and dispel revolutionary tendencies. It disapproved equally of government by committee and of a non Royal Regency or a rotating Presidency.³ Unfortunately there were few possible regents with royal blood. Of these the two most credible were Ferdinand's sister Carlotta - wife of Prince Regent João of Portugal - who was then in Brazil; and Ferdinand's cousin Prince Leopold of Naples who actually arrived at Gibraltar in August hoping in vain

¹ See for example Morla to Canning, Cadiz, n.d. c Sept 1808 P.R.O. F.O. 72/65 f 211-212.

² Canning to Frere "Private and Most Secret" 15th October 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 45. It is unclear whether this was approved by the British Cabinet.

³ Canning to Frere 5th October 1808 P.R.O. F.O. 72/60 f 19-29.

for a warm welcome.¹ The selection of either of these candidates would complicate Britain's relations with either Portugal or Sicily, and Canning wondered hopefully whether a compromise could not be found in the person of the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo who was also a prince of the Spanish Royal House.² Unfortunately the Cardinal had discredited himself in his dealings with Murat when the latter commanded Madrid, so that he now had no popular support. In this he was little different from the other candidates for few Spaniards at this time found the idea of a Royal Regency appealing given the absence of a willing and obviously competent claimant. This indifference left the British little opportunity to interfere although Carlotta's continuing ambitions were to cause them some diplomatic problems in later years.

As ambassador to Spain Frere did not deal - at least at first - with purely military matters, but his brief excluded little else. Probably his most delicate initial job was to explain that Britain's reserves of specie were exhausted and that financial aid could not be resumed until Britain could trade at least with Vera Cruz.³ He also had to make clear that all future aid would be to the Supreme Junta - no more would be distributed to the provincial juntas - and to request that the provincial juntas withdraw their delegations from London and that they be replaced by a single minister.⁴ On the extremely sensitive subject of South America Frere was instructed to be very tactful and let the Spaniards raise the issue before explaining the reasons why Britain favoured a more liberal position especially on trade. (Britain's policy

¹ As he came with the approval of the British Minister at Palermo (Mr Drummond) and in a British ship there was a risk that he would appear to have the support of the British Government. This was not the case and the cool reception Dalrymple and Collingwood gave the Prince correctly anticipated the Government's policy. Collingwood to Castlereagh 14th August and 16th August 1808; G.L. Newnham Collingwood, *A Selection from the Public and Private Correspondence of Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood ...* (London, James Ridgeway, 1829).

² Canning to Frere 5th October 1808 PRO FO 72/60 f 19-29. See also Canning to Hawkesbury 16th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/2 where he considers the implications of a choice between the Sicilian Prince and the Portuguese Princess.

³ Canning to Frere 5th October 1808 PRO FO 72/60 f 33-4.

⁴ Frere's initial instructions, signed by George III, 4th October 1808 PRO FO 72/60 f 3-18.

was to both her advantage and that of the Spanish colonies, but it was less advantageous for Spain herself.)

Frere must have handled these issues, and a host of lesser ones, with some skill for he became popular with the Supreme Junta. Unfortunately this was at the cost of his detachment : he sympathized too much with the Junta's viewpoint and failed in his primary responsibility of effectively representing his own government. Most seriously he failed to see through the Spanish accounts of the war, accepting their bombastic claims as true and acting - especially in his correspondence with Moore - accordingly. Only Canning's strenuous defence and fierce partisanship saved him from being recalled in disgrace within six months of taking up his post.¹

The Anglo-Spanish alliance began with a welter of good will on both sides. The British were full of romantic ideas of noble Spanish Grandees resisting the might of Napoleon, and freely gave vast quantities of aid without haggling or delay. The Spaniards in turn looked to Britain as their natural ally against France and - in some quarters - as a desirable model of a constitutional monarchy. But beneath this amicable surface there were considerable tensions arising from such issues as British pressure to trade with South America; underlying Spanish suspicion of Britain stimulated by the memory of Gibraltar; and British frustration at what they saw as Spanish incompetence in waging the war. The fact was that the two countries were not natural allies, they shared little common history or culture, were largely ignorant of each other, and where not ignorant were inclined to antipathy. So long as the war went well these tensions generally remained submerged, but when the Spanish armies collapsed in November both sides became disillusioned. Yet their common hostility to Napoleon drew them back together after a few months, in an alliance which they both found irritating but essential.

* * * * *

¹ Canning to Frere 'Private and most Secret and Confidential' 20th April 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45 and see below p 133-4.

In the summer and autumn of 1808 the British Government had to make a number of important decisions on the strategy to adopt in the Peninsula. The responsibility for making these decisions rested with the Cabinet which received little institutional support or professional advice. The task was greatly complicated by the lack of reliable information from the Peninsula; the prevalence of false rumours; and the Spanish failure to give practical co-operation. The British Ministers lacked reliable estimates of the size of either the French or the Spanish armies and most accounts which they received were far too optimistic. The dearth of information included even such basic points as the nature and existence of roads from the ports of northern Spain where the British army might be disembarked, to the interior where it would have to operate.¹ The Ministers actively sought information by despatching military missions, and sending naval officers to survey harbours but all too often their reports arrived too late or were incomplete. These problems were not unique to the Peninsula - they were characteristic of warfare, or at least British warfare, in the 18th and early 19th centuries - but they were far more serious than usual in the first six months of the Peninsular War.

From the moment when the Asturian deputies first arrived in London there was a strong interest in Britain in the fate of northern Spain. Edward Cooke and Colonel Gordon both argued that Wellesley's army should be sent to the Asturias,² and although the arrival of the Galician deputies checked this plan, the predilection did not disappear. Dupont's capitulation at Bailen and Joseph's flight to the Ebro removed British concern over the security of Cadiz and increased the importance of northern Spain. Even before this, Sir Arthur Wellesley had written from Coruña that the Government ought to "endeavour to prevail upon the Asturians to receive a

¹ Castlereagh to Maj-Gen Leith 26th August 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6 p 413-5.

² See above p 52-3.

body of our troops".¹ In London Canning was very concerned about the possibility of a French attack on Asturias and was receiving frequent requests from the Asturian Junta for military assistance.² Britain had promised to protect the Asturias from any French attack by sea, but Canning felt that not enough was being done, and wanted many more small ships swarming off the north coast of Spain and in the Gulf of Lyons.³ He also wanted to send a small expedition - of about 3,000 men - to secure the province against disaster together with some officers to drill their levies and perhaps some cavalry which the Asturians wanted.⁴

These proposals were largely impractical : the navy was desperately short of small ships and not strong enough to divert lavish resources against improbable threats.⁵ Nor is it clear why Canning thought that 3,000 British troops could protect a whole province against invasion although they would certainly have provided a solid nucleus for the newly raised Asturian troops. The idea of sending British officers to help train these levies had more merit, and it is not clear why it was not adopted.

Despite his initial failure Canning persisted in his attempts to convince Castlereagh of the advantages of having a small British force in the Asturias, and indeed of small forces in general. On 23rd July he wrote that the recovery of St Andero [sic Santander] confirmed him in his opinion of the advantages of having a small force on the spot and at the very least he wanted to send "a great many more officers" to train the Asturians.⁶ On the following day he was seized by the idea of unrest in the south of France, (suggested in a memorandum from the French emigré

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh 21st July 1808 *W.D. III* p 33.

² Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 17th July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3. The Asturian deputies had at first declined troops; see above Chapter Two p 48n.

³ Canning to Mulgrave 'Private and Secret' 17th July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 31.

⁴ Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 17th July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

⁵ Mackesy, *War in the Mediterranean* p 117, 255-6.

⁶ Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 23rd July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

General Dumouriez), and wanted to send a small force there as well as one to Asturias:

"if Rousillon is in Arms, or disaffected (which it certainly is) the whole of that part of the South of France might catch the Flame from Spain - and we might at once save Catalonia from Bonaparte and raise the French against him. Save Catalonia we **must**".¹

Just as he finished this letter, news arrived of the Spanish defeat at Medina del Rio Seco which with some reason was attributed to a lack of cavalry. As Britain had plenty of cavalry the solution to Canning was obvious and he added a postscript urging the immediate dispatch of some British cavalry to northern Spain.

Poor Castlereagh! One must sympathize with his feelings on receiving a letter like this. To implement any one of the ideas so lightly suggested would have required weeks of hard work, arranging all the minute details involved in mounting an expedition. But we must not be too hard on Canning either - he was not making formal proposals, simply floating ideas for his colleague's consideration. Canning's lively effervescence may sometimes have been hard to live with, but the rest of the cabinet more than made up for it with their stolid, unimaginative virtues.

The War and Foreign Departments had to work closely together over Spain and there is no evidence in the letters before Cintra of personal tension between Canning and Castlereagh. It is true that Canning was frustrated by the slowness of action but this was not limited to the War Department (it is even more evident in his correspondence with the Ordnance) and rather than blaming Castlereagh for the delays he recognized how hard Castlereagh was working to overcome them.² Canning's frustration was partly due to his natural impatience but it was fed by the importunities of the Spanish deputies with whom as Foreign Secretary he had to deal. On 5th August he told Castlereagh that the Asturian and Galician Deputies

¹ Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 24th July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

² see a glowing tribute in Canning to Perceval 17th September 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/1 : there is an inaccurate version of this letter in Walpole *Life of Perceval* vol. 1 p 294-6.

were now loudly asking for cavalry and artillery. What could be sent and when?¹ Castlereagh replied on the same day that "I am myself very strongly impressed with the importance of sustaining the Northern Provinces"; that some cavalry could certainly be sent, though they must have some infantry with them; and that he was doing all he could to increase the number of horse transports, but that progress was slow.²

This reply reflected Castlereagh's growing interest in northern Spain as he strove to devise a coherent strategy for the British army once it had driven the French out of Portugal. His initial plans - which have not survived - had been disrupted by the need to send heavy reinforcements to Portugal in mid-July. He had then proposed that once Junot was defeated, the British army should be again divided and that Wellesley should lead the bulk of it into Spain while his superiors cooled their heels in Lisbon. This plan ran into strong opposition in Cabinet from those who felt that it would involve too flagrant a breach of military protocol.³ They were probably right - the Duke of York and the King would certainly have objected, while such obvious political favouritism might have seriously divided the army.

Castlereagh's next idea was that troops on their way from England to Spain should mount a raid on the French squadron at Boulogne. This scheme too was defeated, not in Cabinet, but by the Duke of York who made it clear that there were not enough men available.⁴ No progress had been made at the end of July and

1 Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 5th August 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

2 Castlereagh to Canning 'Secret' 5th August 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 34.

3 Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 17th July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3. Canning supported Castlereagh's plan. The Cabinet meeting to discuss the plan had been held on 16th July.

4 Castlereagh to the Duke of York 24th July 1808 and reply 25th July. *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3696, p 106-8.

Castlereagh had to admit to the King that the Cabinet could not decide where they should act.¹

By 10th August Castlereagh had organized his ideas into a coherent plan which he expressed in a Memorandum and which was discussed at a preliminary Cabinet meeting at the Duke of Portland's the following day. Castlereagh wrote the memorandum after he had learnt of Bailen and the French retreat from Leon and Valencia but before he heard of Joseph's flight from Madrid (news of which reached London later that day). Castlereagh proposed that a light corps of 8-10,000 infantry and all the British and Portuguese cavalry that could be spared, should be immediately detached from the army in Portugal to assist the Spanish armies recapture Madrid and press the French. No mention is made of who was to command this force but it is not hard to guess who Castlereagh had in mind! The 10,000 men who were ready at home would be sent immediately to the Asturias where they could be joined by more troops from Portugal as soon as operations there were concluded.² Castlereagh hoped that an active British presence in the Asturias could lead to risings in the more easterly of the northern provinces such as Biscay, which lay across the French lines of communication. He even dreamt that a British army - co-operating with the Armies of Asturias and Aragon and aided by risings in Biscay - could cut off Joseph's retreat to France and force him to surrender.³

Alas for Castlereagh: this plan too ran into opposition within and outside the Cabinet. The Duke of York had made his views plain in a memorandum on 1st August in which he strongly argued against any division of the British army and

¹ Castlereagh to the King 28th July 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3697, p 110.

² 'Memorandum for consideration, on Measures projected in the present State of Affairs in Spain and Portugal' "[by Lord Castlereagh]" 10th August 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6, p 399-401.

³ Castlereagh to Stewart 10th August 1808 P.R.O.N.I. D3030/Q2/2 p 49.

expressed little confidence in the Spanish armies.¹ We do not know whether this influenced Castlereagh's opponents in Cabinet - indeed we do not know who they were or what line they took.² But again Castlereagh's plan was thwarted and the next ten days were devoted to "long and repeated Discussions and little done and similar Opposition to whatever is proposed".³

Finally weary of interminable talk it was decided to seek the opinion of the commander closest to the spot, and on 20th August Castlereagh wrote to Dalrymple outlining the alternatives and asking for his advice.⁴ Dalrymple was not impressed with the letter - which was poorly constructed - or the ideas which lay behind it. He refused to give a firm answer but instead sent Lord William Bentinck off to Madrid to consult the Spaniards. In some ways this was perfectly sensible - the best British plan would obviously be one which was co-ordinated with that of the Spaniards. But there were two problems: one was that there was no Spanish Government or Commander-in-Chief to co-ordinate their own plans, let alone advice on where the British army could do most good; the other was that there was no time to waste - Bentinck did not reach Madrid until 24th September: only two days before the Government finally issued its instructions to Moore. Had they waited to learn the result of his discussions with Castanos they would have lost two vital weeks and the British army would hardly have left Portugal when Napoleon launched his great offensive. The only way that there could have been consultation in time, was if the British Government had sent a senior officer from London as soon as they learnt of Joseph's retreat from Madrid. This would probably have

1 "Memorandum Concerning the State of the Army" by H.R.H. the Commander-in-Chief 1st August 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 8, p 179-183.

2 The only account of the meeting I have seen is a brief one in Hawkesbury to Canning 'Private' 11th August 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 69. Canning was not at the meeting - he was at the death-bed of his much loved uncle William Leigh at Yarmouth.

3 Cooke to Stewart 19th August 1808 P.R.O.N.I. D3030/AA/2.

4 Castlereagh to Dalrymple 20th August 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6, p 403-7.

been wise, although given the confusion in the Spanish command it is unlikely that such an officer could have achieved very much.¹

In the event the Government did not even wait for Dalrymple's reply before making up its mind. On 1st September Castlereagh wrote to the King to announce the Cabinet's decision. It was simply to concentrate as many troops as possible in the northern provinces of Spain once operations in Portugal were completed. The idea of sending a 'light corps' into the interior of Spain was abandoned, as was the idea of sending the troops from home in advance of those from Portugal. All the troops would go by sea although it had not yet been determined at which point they would be disembarked (the choices were Coruña, Gijon, and Santona). It was hoped that Romana's men from the Baltic would join them to form a powerful army which the Ministers "cannot but flatter themselves ... must not only accelerate his [the French] expulsion from Spain, but may also contribute, if his retreat shall be delay'd, to the destruction of a considerable proportion of his army".²

It was a curious decision and the optimistic rhetoric sat oddly with the refusal to send ahead the troops from home as an advanced guard. The abandonment of the idea of sending a light corps into Spain could be justified on the grounds that the continued French retreat made it unnecessary, but why take the decision to send troops to northern Spain long before it could be implemented? Two factors seem to have been present: one was that the Government did not know how the campaign in Portugal was progressing (news of Roliça and Vimeiro

¹ I have discussed this at length as the private comments Moore wrote in his diary on 8th September after being shown Castlereagh's letter, have often been quoted with approval. They contain inherently reasonable criticisms but Moore knew nothing of the situation in Spain or of the problems facing the British Government. The language he uses shows his dislike and contempt for the Ministers and a considerable amount of self-satisfaction, but he was, after all, writing in a private journal *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 281.

² Castlereagh to the King 1st September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3711, p 118-9.

arrived at midnight that night¹) which inclined the Cabinet to caution; the other was the news that the Biscay provinces had risen,² which inclined them to action.

The decision of 1st September therefore seems to have been a compromise between the bolder members of the Cabinet - who certainly included Castlereagh and Canning - and their more cautious colleagues. It did not provide a proper plan of campaign but it confirmed that "the north of Spain" would be the theatre for British operations, and this enabled Castlereagh to tell Dalrymple that he could proceed there with the army without further orders from home, if there was an emergency.³ Castlereagh's proposed strategy of attacking the French flank and rear through Biscay and other provinces to the east of the Asturias was not mentioned and although it was not explicitly excluded, it may already have been abandoned. In any case it became impossible when it was decided to base the British army at Coruña rather than Gijon or Santander further east. As Castlereagh explained to Lord William Bentinck, Santander was felt by all military men, and especially Romana, to be too far forward and hence too exposed to the danger of a French attack before the British army could be fully concentrated and equipped for service.⁴ This was undoubtedly true, and Castlereagh's plan - reasonable in early August - would have led to disaster in October.

¹ Castlereagh to the King 12 pm 1st September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3711, p 119.

² Castlereagh to Dalrymple 27th August 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol. XI, p 42.

³ Castlereagh to Dalrymple 2nd September 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1809, vol. XI, p 43.

⁴ Castlereagh to Bentinck 30th September 1808 in James Moore *A Narrative of the Campaign of the British Army in Spain, commanded by ... Sir John Moore* (London, Joseph Johnson, 1809) p 241-3. Although Wellesley, when he arrived in England in October, strongly disapproved of the choice of Coruña, saying that the British infantry at least should be landed at Santander. Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh 19th October 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 6, p 476-481. Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* is the only historian who discusses the evolution of British strategy at length and he lays undue emphasis on Col. Gordon's memorandum of 28th June and does not realize that Castlereagh's plan for turning the French flank had been abandoned before Moore's instructions were issued. Nonetheless I am deeply in his debt for first making me aware of the questions discussed in this section.

The decision to base the British army at Coruña led almost inevitably to the adoption of a strategy which was first expressed in an unsigned memorandum from the Horse Guards dated 23rd September.¹ This argued that the French were now stronger than the Spaniards and that there was a large gap in the centre of the Spanish line. This was on the plains - good cavalry country - and lack of cavalry was the greatest Spanish weakness. Britain had no shortage of cavalry although finding horse transports was a problem. Given the probable strength of the French forces a weak British army would be quite useless: she should concentrate every man she could in a strong army which could defend itself if necessary without relying on Spanish co-operation. The memorandum concluded with a detailed if optimistic statement showing how 60,000 men could be found for service in Spain.

On the same day as this memorandum was written the Cabinet took the disagreeable but necessary decision to appoint Sir John Moore to command the army.² The Ministers still did not like or trust him but they had little real choice. Public concern that the Duke of York might be given the command had revived,³ while *The Times* reacted angrily to a report that Sir Arthur Wellesley was to lead an army into Spain.⁴ In these circumstances Chatham's appointment would have been too blatantly political even if he had been willing to accept it. There was no obvious general in England who could be appointed over Moore's head and the fiasco of Cintra made the Cabinet unwilling to experiment. Canning agreed to Moore's appointment with the greatest reluctance and many forebodings.⁵ If the

¹ *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3726, p 128-30.

² Castlereagh to the King 23rd September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3725, p 127-8.

³ The caricature 'He Cannot Go to Spain' described above in Chapter 2 p 53 was published on 5th September. See also *Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales* vol. 6, p 304-7 for evidence of continuing expectations in early September that York would get the command.

⁴ *The Times* 29th September 1808; see also *The Times* 23rd September 1808.

⁵ Canning to Portland 24th March 1809 enclosed in Canning to Portland 'Private' 2nd April 1809: "While the discussion upon that subject [Cintra] was going on, the march of the British Army into Spain under the command of Sir John Moore, was decided: a measure in which, under the circumstances of the moment, I was induced to concur - (how reluctantly, and with how little hope of good Your Grace well knows)." Canning Papers Bundle 33A.

decision had not been made in the middle of the controversy over Cintra he would probably have fought much harder against it. His suspicions of Moore were not diminished and he felt further alienated from his colleagues. Nor was the King pleased by Moore's appointment - he would have preferred that the command went to a more senior officer - but George III agreed with his Ministers that the staff of the army in Portugal should be spared any further disruption if possible.¹

Moore's instructions, issued on 25th September, drew heavily on the ideas in the anonymous Horse Guards memorandum of the 23rd, although his army is put at only 30,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry - still the largest British army since Marlborough's day according to Moore.² Of these, 10,000 men under Sir David Baird would sail from Falmouth to Coruña, while the rest would be drawn from the army in Portugal, and Moore was given the choice of taking them by land or sea.³ The army would assemble either in Galicia or on the borders of Leon, and it was to co-operate with the Spaniards in the expulsion of the French from Spain. A more detailed plan would depend on the intentions of the Spanish commanders with whom Moore was ordered to consult.⁴

These instructions were considerably less detailed and precise than many of the plans which the Cabinet had considered earlier. Unlike Castlereagh's proposals in August they did not contain any clear conception of the role which the British army was to play - the orders simply specified a point of assembly (Galicia or the borders of Leon) and a general objective (the expulsion of the French from Spain).

¹ The King to Castlereagh 24th September 1808 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3727, p 131. "His Majesty is sensible of that officer's abilities, but must regret that he is not of higher standing in the army, when selected for so extensive a command, although he is willing to admit that the desire not to make any material alteration in the present Staff arrangements warrants the appointment as a matter of necessity."

² *Diary of Sir John Moore* 14th October 1808, vol. 2, p 272.

³ See below p 113n.

⁴ Castlereagh to Moore, 25th September 1808, *Moore Narrative ...* p 237-240. This letter is dated 26th September in *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol. XI, p 51, but *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 272 appears to confirm the 25th.

This vagueness was quite appropriate, for it was intended that the British army would co-operate closely with the Spanish armies and its movements would necessarily be shaped by theirs. The opportunity for turning the French flank - if it had ever existed - had long since passed, and the British Government was surely correct in determining to use its army to strengthen the Spanish line at its most vulnerable point.

The lack of precision in the orders gave Moore a broad discretion - possibly broader than was desirable given the lack of trust between him and the British Cabinet -but this was unavoidable as the Ministers could not hope to foresee even the general shape of operations. The greatest flaw in the British plan was that it was simply too late. For the British army to play its intended role in the campaign it would have had to have been concentrated in Leon in September - a time when its orders were only just being issued and the army itself was still in Portugal and England. This delay arose first from the initial Spanish refusal to allow the British army to land in northern Spain, and second from the concentration of excessively large forces for the Portuguese campaign, (although the reasons for this were sound at the time). Put another way, the British could not keep pace with the rapidly changing course of events due to slow communications and the logistical restraints of amphibious operations. The Ministers were well aware of the need for haste, but there was little which they could do to overcome these problems.

* * * * *

Sir Hew Dalrymple left Lisbon on 2nd October and a few days later Castlereagh's letters appointing Moore to the command arrived. Moore was both pleased and surprised "There has been no such command since Marlborough for a British officer. How they came to pitch upon me I cannot say, for they have given sufficient proof of not being partial to me".¹ Castlereagh had sent a conciliatory

¹ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 272 14th October 1808.

private letter with the instructions and Moore replied in a friendly manner although his diary records his cynical estimate of the value of Castlereagh's assurances of support: "I shall have it if I am successful, and if I am not, that alone will vex me so much that the displeasure of a Minister more or less will be of little importance to me".¹

Moore had no hesitation in choosing to march his army overland through Portugal and Spain, rather than transport it by sea to Coruña. His reasons included the disruption to the troops of an embarkation, sea passage and disembarkation; the fear that even Baird's force would strain the depleted resources of Galicia; and the advice of Castanos relayed by Lord William Bentinck.² But he soon found that marching overland had its own disadvantages - the roads of northern Portugal were said to be dreadful and the autumn rains were approaching. With great reluctance Moore decided that he must send his artillery along the Lisbon - Badajoz - Madrid highway although this involved a lengthy detour and further divided his army. Both these decisions have been criticized but not convincingly.³

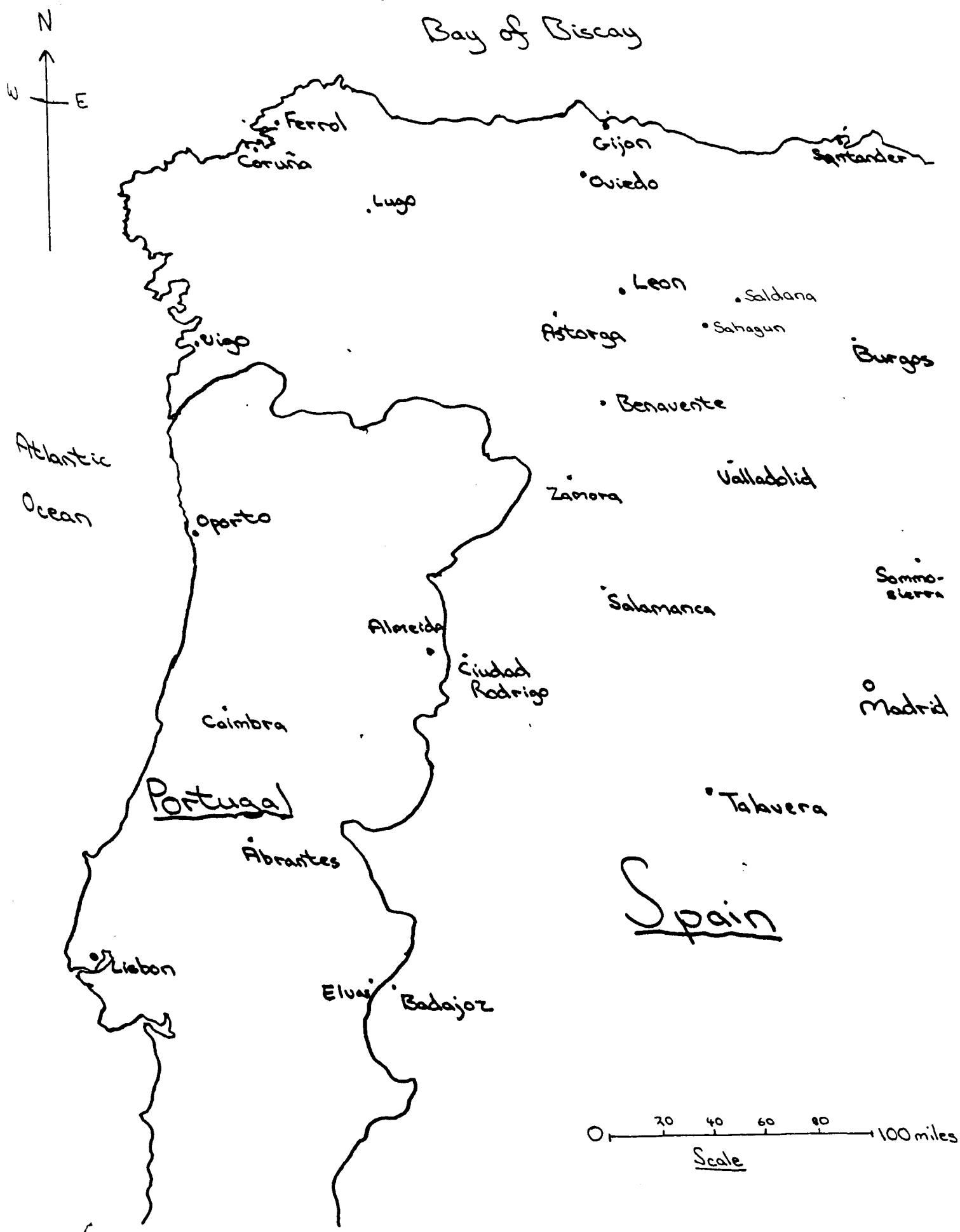
The preparations to march were hampered by many problems including a shortage of specie and the inexperience of the British officers - particularly the

¹ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 273 14th October 1808. Castlereagh's letter is printed in *ibid* p 331-2, and Moore's reply is in *Moore Narrative* ... p 245-6.

² Moore to Castlereagh, Lisbon, 9th October 1808 *Moore Narrative* ... p 243-4; and *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 273 14th October 1808.

³ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 273-4 27th October 1808; Moore to Castlereagh 27th October 1808 *Moore Narrative* p 250-2. Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* p 61, 71 points out that strictly speaking Castlereagh's instructions obliged Moore to send at least part of the infantry and artillery by sea. This is true but Davies is wrong to connect this with Castlereagh's earlier plan to attack the French flank in Biscay, and he does not give equal weight to the fact that the instructions also obliged Moore to send the cavalry by land. Castlereagh to Moore 25th September 1808 *Moore Narrative* ... p 237-240. Castlereagh himself did not interpret his orders so strictly: he wrote to the Duke of York that Moore was to go by land or sea "as he may find more eligible". Castlereagh to the Duke of York 26th September 1808 P.R.O.N.I. D3030/28284.

Oman's criticisms (I p 494-6) of Moore's decision to send the artillery on the detour have been well answered by Maurice in *The Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 287, 315-321; and Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6, p 294-5, although these need to be supplemented with S.G.P. Ward, 'Fresh Light on the Corunna Campaign' in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* vol. 28, no. 115 Autumn 1950, p 107-126 esp. p 109-112.



Portugal and North-West Spain: Sir John Moore's

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commissaries - at moving a large body of troops far from the coast. Nonetheless the bulk of the army was on the move by 18th October, with the last regiments of Moore's force leaving Lisbon on the 29th. The general had left two days before this and riding ahead with his staff overtook his army, so that he was with the advanced guard when it crossed the frontier at Ciudad Rodrigo on 11th November. They had not beaten the rains, which began falling on the 6th, but all things considered it was a creditable performance.

Meanwhile Sir David Baird was having an equally troublesome time. His force sailed from Falmouth on 8th October and arrived at Coruña on the 13th only to find that the local junta would not let them land without express permission from the Supreme Junta. This was not an auspicious beginning and unfortunately it proved typical of relations between the allies during the campaign. Baird sent a special messenger to the Supreme Junta who returned on 22nd October with grudging permission to land at Coruña if Baird's instructions prohibited him from landing nearer the front at Santander.¹ This was not the end of Baird's problems - he was short of money and had great difficulty gathering transport and supplies. Further the Junta insisted that his force be sent forward in small parties which disrupted both its cohesion and his plans. It is not hard to imagine how much worse these problems would have been if Moore had brought his force to Coruña.

On 19th October Frere arrived at Coruña and eased Baird's financial plight by giving him £50,000.² Baird's army began to disembark on 26th October and were all ashore by 4th November. On 8th November a large force of cavalry and artillery under Lord Paget arrived together with the waggon train, all of which were

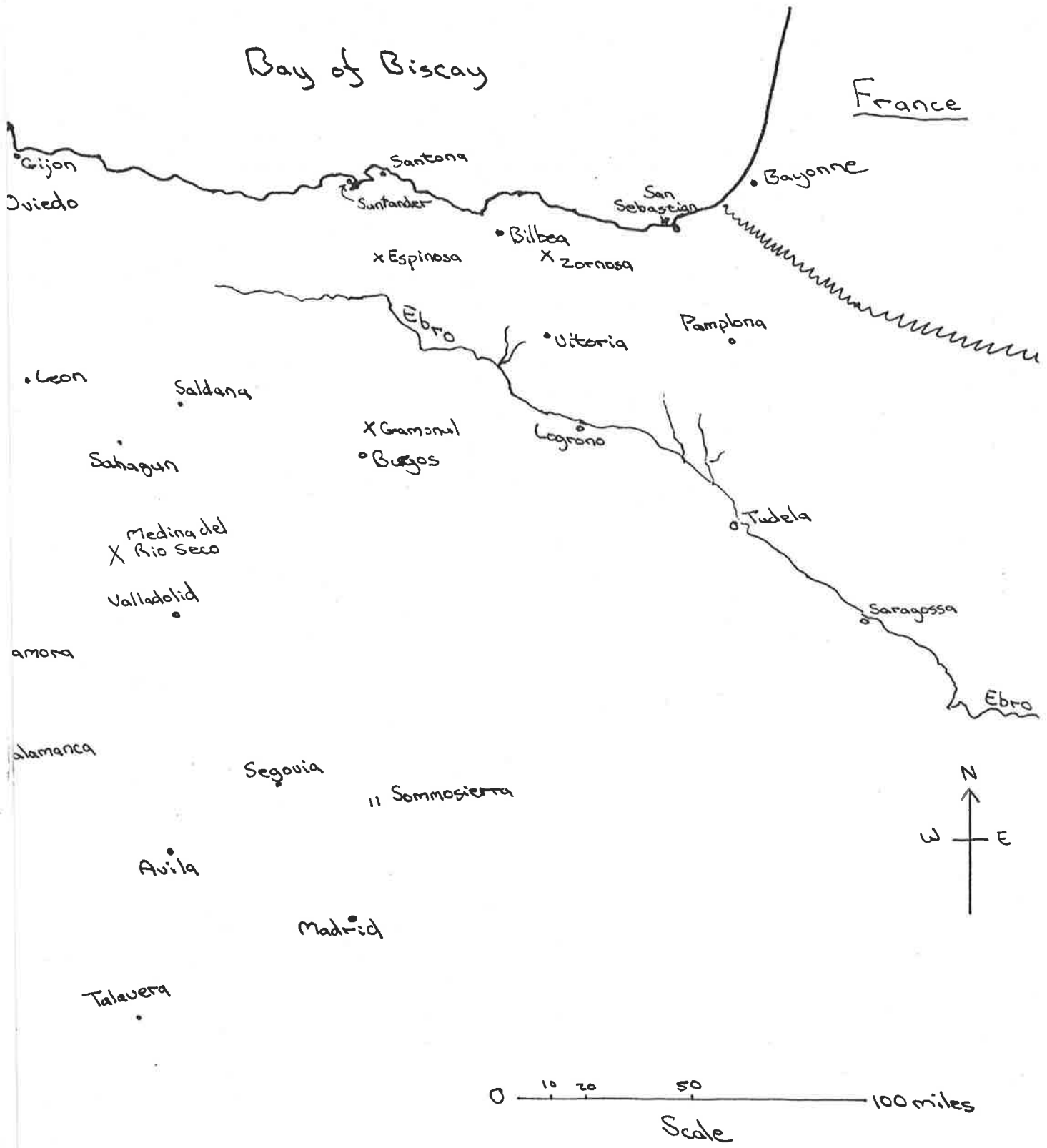
¹ Baird to Moore 13th, 15th and 24th October 1808 in Theodore Hook *The Life of General, the Right Honourable Sir David Baird Bart.* 2 vols. (London, Richard Bentley, 1833) v.2 p 184-5; 185; 194-5.

² Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6, p 301 says it is difficult to know why Frere did not give Baird more; but the £50,000 was equal to almost one quarter of the \$1 million that Frere brought to aid the Spanish Government.

disembarked by the 13th. Finally on 9th November \$500,000 (approximately £100,000) arrived easing the logistical difficulties.

By the middle of November the British army was still widely dispersed and far from ready to go into action. But Napoleon had taken command of his army on 5th November. Already an ill-judged offensive by Blake had been rebuffed at Zornosa (29th October). The Spaniards still had no idea of the forces that were about to be unleashed upon them and wasted their time dreaming of driving the French back to the Pyrenees rather than finding good defensive positions or preparing for a retreat. The lack of co-operation, planning, and common sense among the Spanish generals really mattered little, for the forces which Napoleon brought against them made their defeat inevitable. The weak centre of the Spanish line - which Moore's army was meant to strengthen - was held by a small raw army under the Conde de Belvedere. Drawn up in disarray Belvedere's army was destroyed with contemptuous ease by the French at Gamonal on 10th November.¹ On the allied left Blake's army was battered in a succession of engagements culminating in the Battle of Espinosa on 11th November. Though not completely destroyed the Army of Galicia was badly mauled, and Blake was removed from the command and replaced by La Romana. The Spanish right under Castanos and Palafox survived for almost a fortnight after the defeat of the left and centre. The reason was that Napoleon was attempting to surround their armies and annihilate them completely. The attempt failed but the Spanish armies were badly beaten at Tudela on 23rd November. Castanos's men escaped Ney's encircling corps and fled in disarray while Palafox's Aragonese retired within Saragossa to endure another appalling siege. With the disintegration of all the regular Spanish armies Napoleon felt free to advance on Madrid. He brutally forced his way through an attempt to block his path at Sommosierra and arrived outside Madrid on 2nd December. The city was indefensible and although the inhabitants were briefly

¹ Oman *Peninsular War* I p 420-423. Oman puts the French losses at less than 200 and says that the Spaniards lost 2,500 casualties, 900 prisoners and all their artillery.



Northern Spain for Napoleon's Campaign,

inclined to die heroically they peacefully surrendered on 4th December and the French re-occupied the Spanish capital.¹

News of the Spanish defeats reached the British generals spasmodically as they advanced into Spain. Baird learnt of Blake's defeat at Zornosa on 9th November before he had even left Coruña. On the 18th when he reached Lugo he received an account of Espinosa and the French occupation of Valladolid. He believed that Blake's army had been "completely defeated and dispersed" and began to fear that the French would prevent his junction with Moore. Nonetheless he continued to advance and at Astorga on 22nd November he learnt of Gamonal and concluded that "it is totally impossible for me to join Sir John Moore ... at Salamanca, until such time as more of my Corps is collected and come up". Baird emphasised that there was now no screen of Spanish troops protecting his advance and also began to fear that the French might even push along the coast and so threaten his communications and line of retreat.²

Moore learnt of Belvedere's defeat and the French occupation of Burgos when he arrived at Salamanca with his advanced guard on 13th November. He halted to allow the main body of his army to arrive from Portugal and on the 15th he was told that the French had advanced to Valladolid. It was too much: Valladolid was only a few marches away and his army was still widely dispersed. He ordered Baird and Hope (commanding the column with the artillery and its guard) to halt their advance and concentrate their forces. He also decided that if the French moved any nearer he would fall back to Ciudad Rodrigo.³ On the following day (16th November) Moore's anxiety was relieved when he discovered that there

¹ *Oman Peninsular War* I p 466-70.

² Baird to Castlereagh 9th, 18th and 22nd November 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol. XI, p 144-6.

³ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 279-280 Salamanca 15th November 1808; Moore to Baird 16th [sic] November 1808 in Hook *Life of Baird* vol. 2, p 210-11. Hook contradicts himself on the date of this letter, which Moore's diary entry shows was in fact 15th November.

was no more than a brigade of French cavalry at Valladolid and he ordered the British units to resume their advance.¹

Moore stayed at Salamanca for more than three weeks while his army drew slowly closer together. He remained unhappy about his strategic position and the failure of the Spanish generals to write directly to him. He was short of money and of news and continued to think that he would probably have to retreat into Portugal once his army was united. He was irritated to receive, on 17th November, cheerful letters from Castlereagh. He recorded in his diary that, "Lord Castlereagh has very little idea of the situation in which we are here. The Spaniards are certainly upon the eve of receiving serious defeats, and their ultimate success will depend on whether they sink under them or are roused to greater exertions".² In the three days 24th - 26th November Moore wrote no less than five pessimistic letters to Castlereagh. As he told Baird, Moore believed that "the sooner the eyes of the good people of England are opened the better".³ Moore also wrote to Frere complaining of the lack of Spanish co-operation which he blamed on the "imbecility of the Spanish Government". He went on,

"if things ... continue in this state, the ruin of the Spanish cause, and the defeat of their armies, is inevitable; and it will become my duty to consider alone the safety of the British army, and to take steps to withdraw it from a situation, where, without the possibility of doing good, it is exposed to certain defeat."⁴

Frere took this as a direct threat to withdraw the British army if more co-operation were not forthcoming and made strong representations to Martin de Garay, the Secretary of the Supreme Junta. According to Frere, Garay responded by deprecating "in the most earnest terms the retreat of our Troops upon Portugal, as a

1 Moore to Baird 16th November 1808 in Hook *Life of Baird* vol. 2, p 211.

2 *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 281 18th November 1808.

3 Moore to Baird 26th November 1808 Hook *Life of Baird* vol. 2, p 226-7. For more on these letters and the furore they caused in England see below, this chapter, p 127-9.

4 Moore to Frere 19th November 1808 Moore *Narrative* ... p 38-40.

measure which must ensure the ruin of their cause; an opinion in which I could not help agreeing with him".¹

Moore was not in fact nearly so ready to retreat without firing a shot as Frere supposed. As the days passed without the French advancing against him Moore's confidence grew. Slowly Baird's and Hope's columns crept nearer. On 27th November Moore, in writing to Baird, dismissed stories of a French force at Rio Seco and looked confidently forward to uniting the two forces.² In another letter on the following day he acknowledged that the British army should have concentrated at Seville not Salamanca but "it is our business to make every effort to unite here, and to obey our orders and the wishes of our country, to aid the Spaniards as far as lies in our power - it would never do to retreat without making the attempt".³ Moore thought that the French were probably concentrating against Castanos who he privately expected "will either be beaten or [forced to] retreat".⁴

On 27th November, while Moore was still feeling confident, he wrote to Frere seeking his opinion whether the British Cabinet would prefer him to withdraw safely into Portugal or to "throw myself into the heart of Spain, and thus run all risks, and share in the fortunes of the Spanish Nation".⁵ It is clear from his other letters that Moore was seeking to implicate Frere in his decision to risk the safety of his army by not retreating in a probably forlorn hope to help the Spaniards.⁶ But Frere was understandably misled by the extravagant language and

¹ Frere to Canning 24th November 1808 *Parliamentary Papers* 1809, vol. XI ordered to be printed 5th May 1809.

² Moore to Baird 27th November 1808 Hook *Life of Baird* vol. 2, p 228-9.

³ Moore to Baird 28th November 1808 Hook *Life of Baird* vol. 2, p 229-230.

⁴ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 282 28th November 1808.

⁵ Moore to Frere 27th November 1808 *Moore Narrative ...* p 63-5.

⁶ Moore almost admits as much in his letter to Frere 6th December 1808 printed in *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 349-352: "it was my intention to have marched on Madrid and to have shared the fortunes of the Spanish nation ... I wished to have my opinion confirmed by yours, which was the reason of [sic] my addressing you on the 27th. Had you seen the affairs of Spain in a different light, your opinion on such a subject would, I may say certainly, have decided me to have altered my intention". (p 349-350). Moore's other letters on and around 27th November confirm that he was seriously intending to take the offensive.

by Moore's earlier pessimism. He believed that he was being asked to lend his weight to Moore's decision to retreat, and he reacted angrily.¹

Meanwhile Moore's whole mood was changed by the arrival, late on 28th November, of news of Castanos's defeat at Tudela. Only hours after writing in his diary that "it would never do to abandon the Spaniards without a struggle",² Moore decided to do just that. He believed that the defeat of Castanos put an end to allied hopes in northern Spain and that the British army could not achieve anything even if it managed to unite. He decided to remain at Salamanca until Hope's column with the artillery joined him (if it succeeded in doing so) and then retreat on Portugal from where he could sail to Cadiz if the Spaniards in southern Spain continued to resist.³ He advised Baird to begin to send back his stores immediately, but asked him to delay the retreat of his main body for a couple of days if possible.⁴

Moore's new found determination to retreat lasted almost a week. During this time Baird began to retreat from Astorga, Moore sent his sick men and reserve ammunition back to Portugal, and Hope's column finally joined Moore. Also during this week Moore reaped the consequences of his letters to Frere. On 3rd December Moore received a visit from two Spanish generals (Escalante and Bueno) who had been sent by the Supreme Junta to concert plans with him. As all the Spanish armies had now been defeated, and as Moore found that he knew more of the French progress than his visitors, he remained unimpressed.⁵ At much the same time Moore received Frere's first, angry response to his letter of 27th November. Frere strongly urged Moore to make an immediate effort for the

¹ Frere to Moore 30th November 1808 Moore *Narrative* ... p 79. Reading Moore's letter to Frere by itself, it is easy to see why Frere was misled.

² *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 283 28th November 1808.

³ *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 283 30th November 1808.

⁴ Moore to Baird, 28th November 1808, Moore *Narrative*... p 69-70.

⁵ Moore to Frere, 6th December 1808, Moore *Narrative* ... p 100.

defence of Madrid and attacked any idea of a retreat on Portugal as particularly demoralizing.¹ With this letter Moore received one from Charles Stuart which played down the scale of Castanos's defeat and the number of French troops in Spain and warned that a British retreat could lead to the fall of the Supreme Junta.²

Despite this pressure Moore maintained his resolution to retreat until 5th December when it was overturned by reports that Madrid was preparing to strenuously resist the French. Moore had already, on 2nd December, learnt of Napoleon's success at Sommosierra from which he gathered that the main French army was moving away from his position at Salamanca and towards Madrid.³ On 5th December he received an appeal from General Morla and the Prince of Castelfranco begging him to march to the relief of Madrid which they implausibly claimed would be defended by 75,000 Spanish troops.⁴ Later that day Colonel Charmilly - an adventurer whom Moore had already met and distrusted - arrived with dispatches from Frere and a graphic eye-witness account of the popular determination to defend Madrid.⁵ Moore remained sceptical and even told Castlereagh that, "I cannot derive much hope from the resistance of one town against forces so formidable, unless the spark catches, and the flame becomes pretty general; and here the people remain as tranquil as if they were in profound peace".⁶ Nonetheless Moore felt that he could not ignore the Spanish appeal and wrote that night to Baird asking him to suspend his retreat and return to Astorga.⁷

¹ Frere to Moore, 30th November 1808, Moore *Narrative* ... p 80-84.

² Charles Stuart to Moore, 30 November 1808, Moore *Narrative*... p 77-9.

³ Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* p 120 makes the importance of this plain.

⁴ Castelfranco and Morla to Moore, 2nd December 1808, Moore *Narrative* ... p 87.

⁵ Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* p 123-6 gives a good account of the Charmilly episode and shows that by his own account Charmilly was in Madrid for only three hours on a winter's night and that much of his time was spent in talks. Moore suspected the value of Charmilly's evidence but could not completely discount it.

⁶ Moore to Castlereagh, 5th December 1808, Moore *Narrative* ... p 273.

⁷ Moore to Baird, 5th December 1808, Moore *Narrative* ... p 91.

On the following day (6th December) Moore confirmed his intention to take the offensive in another letter to Baird. His tone was now rather more confident though still realistic,

"If the flame catches elsewhere, and becomes at all general, the best results may be expected; if confined to Madrid, that town will be sacrificed, and all will be as bad or worse than ever. In short, what is passing in Madrid may be decisive of the fate of Spain; and we must be at hand to aid and take advantage of whatever happens."¹

He did not conceal the risks that this involved and told Baird that "I mean to proceed bridle in hand; for if the bubble bursts, and Madrid falls, we shall have a run for it".² While asking Baird to return with his whole force to Astorga he particularly told him to continue preparations for an eventual retreat along the road to Coruña.

On this same day Colonel Charmilly, unaware of Moore's change of plan, produced a second letter from Frere in which the diplomat demanded that Charmilly's evidence be examined by a council of war.³ Moore dismissed this foolish attempt to subvert his authority with the contempt it deserved and sent Charmilly packing without giving a hint of his real intentions.⁴

At this stage Moore planned to unite with Baird at Tordesillas then advance on Valladolid from where he could strike at the French lines of communication near Burgos. He hoped that the French would become entangled in the siege of Madrid but this was not essential to the success of the plan. Indeed he continued the operation after 9th December when he learnt that Madrid had fallen.⁵ Moore's hope was that by creating a major diversion in Napoleon's rear he would give the Spanish armies time to rally.

1 Moore to Baird, 6th December 1808, *Moore Narrative* ... p 92-3.

2 Moore to Baird, 6th December 1808, *Moore Narrative* ... p 92-3.

3 Frere to Moore, 3rd December 1808, *Moore Narrative* ... p 95-6.

4 Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* p 125-6 see also Moore to Frere 6th December 1808 in *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 349-352.

5 Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* p 129.

This plan was modified on 14th December when Moore received a copy of an intercepted letter from Berthier to Soult which gave details of the size and location of the French army and showed that Napoleon was convinced that the British were retreating on Lisbon. The interception of this letter was Moore's greatest piece of good fortune during the whole campaign. Suddenly the unusually dense fog of war evaporated. Moore discovered that his planned attack on Burgos would have led to his being almost completely surrounded.¹ He also learnt that Soult's weak corps was isolated near Saldana and quickly decided to direct his attack against it. The defeat of Soult would not in itself alter the strategic balance in the Peninsula but it would give the allies some much needed encouragement and be at least as good a diversion as an attack on Burgos.²

And so the British army continued to move forward, although with a different immediate objective. The soldiers were delighted at the prospect of action, while Moore too was probably happier to be running great risks by advancing than to be safely retreating. Certainly it took the sting out of an extremely offensive and foolish letter which Moore received from Frere, who was still under the impression that the British army was in retreat.³

The first contact between British and French troops occurred on 12th December when the British cavalry surprised a small French detachment at Rueda. This and subsequent skirmishes alarmed General Franchesi (commander of the division of French cavalry in the region) and Marshal Soult who began to prepare for action. On 21st December Lord Paget surprised and defeated Debelle's brigade of cavalry at Sahagun in what Oman calls "perhaps the most brilliant exploit of the British cavalry during the whole six years of the war".⁴ Sahagun brought no

¹ Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6, p 327.

² Berthier's letter to Soult 10th December 1808 is printed in *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 399-401. see also Moore to Castlereagh 16th December 1808 *Moore Narrative ...* p 297-299.

³ Frere to Moore 8th December 1808. *Moore Narrative ...* p 138-9.

⁴ Oman *Peninsular War* I p 538.

immediate strategic benefit - although it gravely alarmed Soult - but it reinforced the already high self-confidence in the British army.

Late on 23rd December as the British army was beginning the final stage of its advance against Soult, Moore received word from Romana that Napoleon was moving against them.¹ There was no choice but to immediately abandon the offensive and hastily begin to retreat. The soldiers grumbled unhappily but Moore knew that he could not afford to delay. Already there was a danger that Napoleon might reach the Galician passes before the British and cut off their escape. And so the epic retreat to Coruña began.

Napoleon had in fact been slow to understand the location and intentions of the British army. He had clung to his belief that Moore was retreating on Lisbon after he had definite evidence to the contrary, and even when he abandoned this idea he replaced it with one misconception after another. But once Napoleon understood that the British were hundreds of miles from their base and still advancing he made an enormous effort to concentrate resources against them. The bulk of the French army left Madrid on 21st December and hastened north-west through the Guadarrama with Napoleon marching at their head in a famous blizzard.

The two armies rapidly converged on Benavente but the British won the race and their line of retreat was assured. When the leading French troops arrived at Benavente on 27th December they were repulsed by a British rear-guard in a celebrated skirmish. On the last day of 1808 Moore reached Astorga and decided to continue his retreat to the coast. Supplies were short and winter was rapidly closing in. Even if Moore had managed to repulse the French at Astorga, or at some later point during his retreat, little would have been gained. The British army would not benefit from a winter spent in the Galician mountains and it would be tempting fate to dally in front of Napoleon.

¹ Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* p 146, 158, shows that Romana's spies were actually mistaken, although the error proved a fortunate one.

After Astorga Moore's principal problems were the weather, lack of supplies, and the gradual breakdown of discipline in his army, not the French pursuit. Napoleon abandoned the chase on New Year's Day 1809. The British had eluded his grasp and would make their escape safely back to their ships. Meanwhile trouble was brewing at home in Paris, and Austria was growing restless. It was not a time to go on a wild goose chase through the barren wastes of Galicia. Soult with a greatly strengthened corps could shepherd the British back to the sea, while the rest of the army which Napoleon had assembled for the pursuit, was dispersed in every direction.¹

The retreat to Coruña was full of horrors as semi-starvation, drunkenness, and winter combined to play havoc. While the rear-guard and a few other regiments maintained their order, discipline in the rest of the army broke down and straggling became rife. Only the prospect of action animated the soldiers - which is perhaps why the rear-guard retained its cohesion.

But although the retreat was terrible it was not prolonged. On 9th January the army reached the sea at Betanzos and the worst was over. Moore let the troops rest on the 10th and it was late on the 11th that the army finally reached Coruña. Here Moore made the unpleasant discovery that the transports which were to take him and his troops to England had yet to return from Vigo where they had been sent by mistake. There was no choice but to wait patiently and re-equip the army from the large stock-piles of weapons which had accumulated at Coruña. Moore wrote to Castlereagh on 13th January that he intended to bring the army home to be properly refitted.² Despite strategic and political disadvantages this was probably

¹ *Oman Peninsular War* I p 559-561. The irony is, of course, that if Napoleon had continued the pursuit he would have found the British with their backs to the sea at Coruña. Whether or not he could have defeated and destroyed Moore's army would largely have depended on the proportion of his army he had kept in the chase. Certainly the whole army could not advance through Galicia due to the shortage of supplies.

² Moore to Castlereagh 13th January 1809 *Moore Narrative* ... p 306-9.

the correct decision. After the rigours of the campaign the army needed rest and reorganization before it again took the field.

The French arrived a couple of days after the British. Soult was not eager to attack for his men had suffered almost as much advancing through Galicia as the British had in their retreat, and the French found no stock-piles of food and weapons waiting for them. Soult's army was only a shade larger than the British¹ but after pursuing for so long neither honour, nor the Emperor, would be satisfied if he passively watched his enemy escape. Soult therefore gave his men a couple of days rest and attacked on 16th January 1809.

Moore had drawn his army up in a generally strong position some two miles from Coruña. The rough broken nature of the country made the powerful French cavalry largely ineffective thus negating Soult's greatest advantage. The weak point in the British line was on the right flank beyond the village of Elvina. Soult perceived this and concentrated his efforts on trying to turn the British flank while pinning that end of the line with frontal attacks. A strong battery of French artillery on high ground opposite Elvina supported the attacks of the French infantry and inflicted many casualties including Sir David Baird whose wound cost him his left arm. The bloodiest fighting of the day was in and around Elvina which changed hands several times as each side brought up fresh troops. Moore had anticipated Soult's plan of attack and had strong reserves protecting his far right and supporting his front line near Elvina. Judiciously introducing these reserves he had little trouble in repulsing the French attacks. Towards the close of the day Moore himself was mortally wounded, although he lived to see his army victorious. Moore was buried on the ramparts of Coruña and a monument to him, ordered and devised by Soult, was erected by Romana, in a rare tribute of friend and foe.² The

¹ Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6, p 380n Soult's army had just over 16,000 men compared to approximately 15,000 in Moore's army.

² Oman *Peninsular War* I p 595. The British appear to have suffered some 700-800 casualties in the battle while estimates of the French loss range from 600 to 1,500.

command of the British army devolved onto Sir John Hope who prudently dismissed the temptation to counter-attack Soult, and concentrated on embarking the army safely.

And so the campaign, which had begun with such high hopes, ended in a profitless victory and embarkation. Once again the British army had ventured onto the Continent only to be driven off in disorder. Neither Sir John Moore nor the British Government were to blame for this. The British army could not stand by itself against the full force of Napoleon's army, so the collapse of the Spanish forces made the British retreat inevitable. It is to Moore's credit that he managed to extricate his army safely, and at the same time disrupt Napoleon's plans for conquering Portugal and southern Spain. Indeed it is hard to conceive of a way in which the British army could have been used more effectively. There was no way in which it could have stopped the tide of French conquest, and if it had been in the front line on the Ebro in November, it would certainly have been overwhelmed. Moore's achievement was considerable, but this was not immediately obvious in Britain, where the gruelling retreat and battered condition of the army were more apparent than the disruption to Napoleon's plans.

* * * * *

In England the Ministers and public had watched the unfolding of Moore's campaign with great interest and growing apprehension. Officially the Ministers fully supported each and every one of Moore's major decisions, but in private their misgivings gave way to alarm and then despair. As early as 25th November rumour had it that "Lord Castlereagh has been loud against Moore's march",¹ although it is not clear whether this refers to Moore's decision to march overland rather than go by sea to Coruña, or to the division of the army, or even the

¹ Buckingham to Grenville 25th November 1808 *HMC Dropmore* vol. IX, p 244-5.

slowness of the march itself. A week later Tom Grenville heard "a rumour of [the] Ministers being violent against Baird, from their finding that Baird stopped at Astorga from the 17th to 24th [November]".¹

Whether these rumours were accurate or not, they certainly reflected the attitude of most members of the Opposition - neatly represented by Lord Auckland's comment "I am only surprised that the glaring folly and danger of the two marches from Lisbon and Corunna is not yet visible to the optics of our shortsighted countrymen". Auckland too had heard rumours, for he went on "I have reason to believe that the King originally stated strong and sensible objections to those measures, over which he now groans loudly".² But whatever the attitude of the Court, the majority of the Opposition and some Ministers the public in early December was still warm in its support for Spain and still retained some of its high expectations.

Castlereagh had asked Moore to write to him frequently, and during October Moore had done so. But the rigours of the march through Portugal and the anxieties of Salamanca had distracted him, and although he found time to write many other letters, he did not write to Castlereagh for four weeks from 27th October to 24th November.³ Then came a spate of five letters in three days all of which arrived in London around 10th December, and shattered any remaining complacency felt by the Ministers. For these were not cheerful letters, being written soon after Moore had learnt of the Spanish defeats, and before he had recovered from that terrible blow. He damned the Spanish generals and Government and warned that "Reverses must be expected".⁴ Indeed the British

¹ T. Grenville to Grenville 3rd December 1808 *HMC Dropmore* vol. IX, p 246-7.

² Auckland to Grenville 29th November 1808 *HMC Dropmore* vol. IX, p 245-6. I know of no other evidence of these supposed objections of George III, but Auckland did have a source of information close to the Duke of York - probably Col. J.W. Gordon, who later corresponded with Grey. see Roberts *The Whig Party* p 165.

³ Davies *Sir John Moore's Peninsular Campaign* p 96-8 points this out.

⁴ Moore to Castlereagh, 24th November 1808, *Moore Narrative* ... p 257-60.

army is certainly too much adventured, and risks to be brought into action before it is united, and before its stores, ammunition etc are brought forward to enable it to act I see nothing that has a chance of resisting the force that is now brought against this country. There seems neither to be an army, generals, nor a government the ruin of the Spanish cause ...[seems] to me so inevitable, that it [will] very soon become my duty to consider alone the safety of the British army, and withdraw it from a contest which risked its destruction, without the prospect of doing the least good. ... your lordship must be prepared to hear that we have failed; for situated as we are, success cannot be commanded by any effort we can make ..."1

The only consolation he could offer was that the British army had stood up well to the rigours of the campaign. In the last of these letters Moore did mention his scheme to throw up his communications and march to the aid of Madrid;² but the Ministers - like Frere - did not realize that he was serious.

The Ministers were not pleased with these letters but the official response from Castlereagh was everything that Moore could have wished. The Government approved the decision to retreat while regretting the necessity for it. There was no hint of blame directed at Moore and they accepted his assessment that Leon and Castile would fall, but hoped that both the south of Spain, and the more remote provinces in the north, would continue to resist.³ This was combined with a strong letter from Canning to Frere telling him that the British army was retiring into Portugal so that it could unite, that it had no intention of giving up the struggle, but that it was the only British army and it could not be endangered for an inadequate object. Canning added that the army would not again advance into Spain until the Spaniards had a coherent plan and had established better communications with the British generals.⁴

1 Moore to Castlereagh, 24th November 1808, *Moore Narrative* ... p 260-4. (different letter)

2 Moore to Castlereagh, 26th November 1808, *Moore Narrative* ... p 267.

3 Castlereagh to Moore, 10th December 1808, *Parliamentary Papers* 1809 vol. XI, p 77-79.

4 Canning to Frere, 9th December 1808, PRO FO 72/60 f 147-156. An extract of this letter is printed in *The Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 359-361 where it is dated 10th December.

But in private Canning in particular felt considerable disquiet. He hated the idea of disembarking reinforcements in order to send empty transports to Lisbon as Moore had requested, fearing that this would encourage "a shameful retreat" whereas the reinforcements might lead Moore into the successful defence of Portugal.¹ He thought that Moore was exaggerating the dangers of his position, and on 11th December wrote privately to Castlereagh: "I cannot help doubting upon reflection whether we have not been somewhat too despairing in our instructions to Moore, and taken too hastily the colour of our General's representations".² He was particularly disturbed by Moore's letter of 25th November in which Sir John had described the Portuguese frontier as indefensible, and implied that if the French advanced against him he must evacuate his army.³ Canning suspected that Moore simply wanted to bring his army home as quickly as possible, and it was in order to avert this military, political and diplomatic disaster that the Government raised the idea that if Moore was forced to embark his army from Lisbon he should proceed with it to Cadiz, rather than bringing it home.⁴

In the event these concerns proved premature if not altogether ill-founded. Moore gained his second wind and abandoned the idea of a precipitate retreat into Portugal. On 5th December he announced that his junction with Hope was secure and - later that day - that he would not retreat until he saw what had happened at Madrid. These letters arrived on 16th December and were much more to the taste of the Ministers, with even Lord Harrowby (Perceval's close friend and not at this time a member of the Cabinet) wanting Moore to fight it out and not leave the

1 Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret' 3 pm 10th December 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

2 Canning to Castlereagh 'Private and Confidential' 11th December 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

3 Moore to Castlereagh 25th November 1808 Moore *Narrative* ... p 265-6.

4 Canning to Frere 'Private and Most Confidential' 11th December 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 45. see below Chapter 4 page 136-7. Moore was actually thinking along the same lines - see *Diary of Sir John Moore* vol. 2, p 283, 30th November 1808.

Spaniards in the lurch.¹ Canning's suspicion of Moore subsided into uncertainty, although he warned Frere to make sure that the Spaniards communicated fully with Moore to prevent the General using their failure to do so as an excuse for despair.²

On 29th December Canning felt that affairs were looking brighter and was pleased to note that there was no more talk of cowardly Spaniards or of retreating.³ But then, on the following day, he received copies of Moore's correspondence with Frere and foolishly believed everything Frere had written. To Castlereagh he wrote "The Cause of Spain is safe, if Moore does not ruin it. And if he does, I hope we are prepared to throw the responsibility where it ought to rest".⁴ And on the following day after he had received copies of the despatches from Moore and Cradock "I still tremble for a flight before the Enemy - which, if it does take place, will disgrace us as a nation for ever".⁵

This was foolish enough, but it was in his letters to the Duke of Portland that Canning really went beyond the excusable. Enclosing the Moore-Frere letters Canning commented that if after receiving Frere's letter of 30th November, Moore

"persisted in **running away** ... I have no hesitation in maintaining, as an individual opinion, that he ought to be recalled to answer for his conduct." "I confess my blood boils when I think of what has been lost, for want of a little enterprize, of a little heart." "I do not deny Genl. Sir J. Moore's military Skill. - I do not doubt his personal gallantry. - I do not question his disposition to act faithfully by his Country in any cause. - But I do most intimately and conscientiously believe, that under the present circumstances, acting under the present government, the cause of Spain is not safe in his hands."⁶

1 Harrowby to Canning, 17th December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 34A.

2 Canning to Frere, 'Private' 24th December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

3 Canning to Castlereagh, 'Private and Secret' 29th December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

4 Canning to Castlereagh, 'Private and Confidential' 30th December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

5 Canning to Castlereagh, 'Private' 31st December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

6 Canning to Portland, 'Private and Confidential' 31st December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 32/4.

In his second letter Canning goes further, not merely urging the replacement of Moore, but nominating Lord Moira as the best alternative.¹

If it is hard to believe that the hot-headed, passionate and impetuous Canning could seriously propose replacing Moore in the middle of the campaign only a few months after Cintra, it is impossible to understand how the aged, experienced and usually phlegmatic Duke of Portland could actually agree to the proposal, but that is what he did.

Portland replied to Canning's first letter on 31st December before he received the second. He agreed that an attempt should be made to remove Moore if they thought it could succeed but he foresaw considerable opposition to the attempt. Portland believed that the only man capable of doing the job was Sir Arthur Wellesley but his appointment would arouse great hostility among his superiors who would feel cheated and it might lead to a shortage of good subordinates. He was not keen on the alternatives to Wellesley,

"Can we who remove Moore for Political Reasons, look with more Confidence to Ld. Moira? and what Alternative have we! None I fear but the D. of York himself and a moment's Reflection ought to convince me of the Absurdity of such an Idea and the absolute impossibility of its being listened to ..."²

Canning's second letter, evidently written before he received Portland's reply, impressed the old Duke with its strongly put argument in favour of Moira. Such an appointment would certainly lessen the problems of sacking Moore, he acknowledged in his reply on New Year's Day, and Moira was certainly no more hostile politically to the Government. Could they discuss the matter further as soon as possible before broaching it to the Cabinet?³

¹ Canning to Portland, 'Private and Confidential' 31st December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 32/4.

² Portland to Canning, 'Private and Confidential' 31st December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 33/A.

³ Portland to Canning, 'Private and Confidential' 1st January 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 33/A.

There the evidence ends, with no record of any discussion or whether the idea was ever put to Cabinet - although it seems unlikely, for if Cabinet had discussed it, it is probable that more evidence would have survived. One would like to say that there was no chance of the Cabinet ever agreeing to such a foolish scheme, but the fact that the Government's ablest Minister (Canning) and its most experienced one (Portland) could agree to it, destroys any easy confidence on the subject. We can hope that a revival of good sense led to the abandonment of the idea, but it seems more likely that it was news of the rapidly changing situation in Spain that decided the question.

Over the next three weeks news of Moore's retreat slowly trickled in. Scarred by Cintra, Canning early on made it plain that he believed that Moore should be made to take the full responsibility for what Canning thought to be a disastrous and unnecessary failure in Spain. As early as 31st December he was urging Castlereagh to contradict a report in the *Whig Morning Chronicle* that Moore's junction with Baird was delayed by interference from the Government, for if such rumours were not quickly denied and the campaign ended in failure the Opposition and "Moore's faction (which are much the same thing)" would latch onto it.¹

A week later Canning commented, again to Castlereagh, on a fresh despatch from Moore:

"It is apparent that his defence is to be rested upon the inferiority of his numbers, which he now stated in his public despatch at 27,000. I am at a loss to conceive how this calculation is made. But, as the whole question will turn upon it, it seems very important to verify it without delay, and beyond the possibility of misrepresentation."²

Clearly Canning was preparing for a major battle in Parliament over Moore's conduct of the campaign, and possibly even for a Court Martial. Whether he could have carried his colleagues with him on this may be doubted, but it seems likely that

1 Canning to Castlereagh, 'Private' 31st December 1808, Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

2 Canning to Castlereagh, 'Private' 7th January 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 32/3.

had Moore lived and the Government chosen to defend him, Canning would have resigned. Cintra was too bitter a pill to be swallowed twice in a few months.

In the event Moore's death created a completely new situation with even Canning recognizing that 'Moore's heroic death precludes all criticism upon his previous conduct'.¹ Nonetheless Canning was dismayed by the generosity of Castlereagh's eulogy on Moore in the Commons in which he declared that although the expedition had failed in its main purpose "that failure was not at all attributable to Sir John Moore".² This speech may well have been "extremely well received" by the House,³ but in Canning's opinion it made the "dreadful" first impression of the news as bad as possible. Writing privately to Frere, Canning said that he did not think the Government would fall over the campaign in Spain because the Government's conduct would be seen in a fairer light the more the question was discussed. Even so, Canning was further alienated from his colleagues by what he saw as an acceptance of responsibility for "all Moore's blunders and misconduct" where he would have preferred a more aggressive defence of the Government's policies.⁴

Canning believed that while a conciliatory approach lessened the immediate problems facing the Government it resulted in a greater weakening of its standing in the long run. The first part of this statement is certainly true - for Castlereagh's praise of Moore took the wind out of the Opposition's sails and deprived them of their most obvious line of attack. Moore had many friends in the Opposition and his romantic death, (in the tradition of Wolfe and Nelson) made him a natural hero. Nothing could be easier for the Opposition than to champion his cause against the

1 Canning to Villiers, 'Private' 28th January 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 48.

2 *Parliamentary Debates* vol. 12, col. 140 25th January 1809.

3 as Perceval stated in his reports on the debate to the King. Perceval to the King, 25th January 1809 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3797, p 176-8.

4 Canning to Frere, 'Private and Confidential' 1st March 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

attacks of the Ministers; but with Castlereagh proposing a monument in St Paul's this line of attack was clearly not open.

It took some time before the emerging details of the campaign gave Moore's family and friends the right angle with which to attack the Government: they found it at last in Moore's correspondence with Frere and the latter's indiscreet employment of Colonel Charmilly. This was fertile ground, although the Opposition undoubtedly exaggerated the significance of Frere and Charmilly in determining the course of the campaign. Canning naturally defended his friend vigorously although in private he admitted that Frere had blundered.¹ The Opposition kept up the attack and during April Canning decided that the only way to save Frere's diplomatic career from total ruin was to move him to another embassy. In this he was influenced by the fact that he himself might soon be resigning and that if he did so Frere "would unquestionably be recalled by the first Messenger".² The announcement of Frere's replacement eased the hostility to him and Canning was able to report that the debate had gone well, with nothing being said that would prejudice Frere's employment in another diplomatic post.³ Yet when Canning nominated Frere for the Constantinople embassy the King killed the idea⁴ and Frere retired from public life to devote himself, with much greater success, to literature.

The political storm over Moore's campaign exacerbated the damage that had been done by Cintra. It completed the popular disenchantment with the Peninsula, so that in the first half of 1809 the public's attention in Britain was concentrated on

1 Canning to Frere, 'Private' 19th April 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

2 Canning to Frere, 'Private, and Most Secret, and Confidential' 20th April 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

3 Canning to Frere, 'Private' 20th May 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

4 The King to Canning 29th April 1809 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3868, p 266. see also Canning to Frere 'Private and Confidential' 30th April 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45. In fact Frere remained Britain's representative in Spain until August. See below Chapter 6 p 203.

domestic scandals - notably the affair of the Duke of York and Mary Anne Clarke - and the revival of reform.¹ The Opposition reflected and encouraged this change of mood with only a few individual exceptions, such as Lord and Lady Holland (who were then travelling in Spain) and Francis Horner, continuing to publicly support Britain's involvement in the Peninsula. Canning was further alienated from his colleagues and grew more impatient and frustrated than ever. As Wendy Hinde has remarked Canning "never learnt to make the best of a disappointment".² As the months passed Canning grew increasingly unhappy and regretted his failure to resign over Cintra. He disapproved of the Government's tactics in defending the Duke of York and chafed over the deterioration in the political strength of the Ministry. Yet it was Canning who recognized that the war must be continued and who first perceived the opportunity that existed in Portugal.

¹ George *English Political Caricature* vol. 2, p 116 "From February to June, five months of crucial importance for the war, the caricaturists, ignoring news of Moore's retreat and death, and of the Austrian declaration of war, turn their backs on the world to absorb themselves in the affairs of Mrs Clarke, the Duke of York, and Army commissions." While not perfectly reflecting the public's priorities, the caricatures do provide a useful guide.

² Hinde *Canning* p213.

Chapter 4
In Search of a Strategy :
Cadiz and Lisbon (December 1808 - April 1809)

The months following the defeat of the Spanish armies were crucial to the continuation of Britain's involvement in the Peninsular War, as the Government struggled to salvage a suitable role for her army from the ruins of their high hopes. Gone forever was the prospect of an easy victory, of quickly expelling the French from the Peninsula and perhaps even invading the south of France. At first the Cabinet thought simply of transferring Moore's army to Cadiz, and there continuing the struggle to at least preserve Andalusia from the French. But unforeseen difficulties arose which forced the Government to completely reconsider its relations with Spain and which led eventually to the choice of Portugal as the focus for Britain's efforts in the Peninsula.

The trouble over Cadiz began in early December 1808 when the British Government learnt of Moore's decision to retreat from Salamanca into Portugal. Although the Ministers expected that Moore would be able to remain in Portugal until a new plan could be worked out with the Spaniards, they felt it necessary to provide some plan in case Moore was compelled to embark his army. Castlereagh therefore wrote to Moore that in this event he should take his army to Cadiz and continue operations from there rather than bring it home.¹ At the same time Canning, in a long letter to Frere which covered many aspects of Anglo-Spanish co-operation, told him to gain Spanish permission for a possible British presence at Cadiz.² Unfortunately in another official dispatch Canning instructed Frere that he need not raise the subject of Cadiz at once if the military situation in Spain was less

¹ Castlereagh to Moore 10th December 1808 - see Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 120n. Unfortunately I have not seen the original of this letter.

² Canning to Frere 9th December 1808 P.R.O. F.O. 72/60 f 147-156.

serious than Moore had represented,¹ while in an intemperate private letter Canning went further, telling Frere that the Government had only raised the subject of Cadiz in order "to present some object to Moore, to prevent him from thinking that he could have nothing to do but to run away".² This was to prove a costly error for which Canning must bear most, but probably not all, of the blame.

Given these letters it is hardly surprising that Frere - who always took a much more optimistic view of the situation than Moore - did not discuss Cadiz with the Supreme Junta. It was a subject of great delicacy and Frere well knew the Spanish prejudices it aroused. He was proud of his good relationship with the Supreme Junta, and had no doubt that if Cadiz was actually threatened he could persuade it to accept a British garrison.³

At first it appeared that this omission would matter little: Moore did not retire into Portugal let alone evacuate his army. Nevertheless Cadiz was now in the minds of the Ministers and as the French kept advancing they began to feel some anxiety for its security. This concern was mainly based on the importance of Cadiz in itself, rather than as the potential base for the British army, which they still hoped could remain in northern Spain or Portugal. In any case on 18th December Castlereagh instructed Colonel Sir George Smith to proceed to Cadiz where he was to observe events and to keep Sir John Cradock and Sir John Moore informed.⁴ In the event of a crisis Smith might forward a Spanish request for troops to the British commander in Portugal. These orders gave Smith no powers to summon help on

¹ Canning to Frere 10th December 1808 P.R.O. F.O. 72/60 f 160-162 - As this was an official dispatch it was presumably sent with the approval of Cabinet.

² Canning to Frere 'Private and Most Confidential' 11th December 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

³ Frere to Canning 'Private and Secret' 14th December 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 45 on Frere's view of his relations with the Junta. Frere to Canning 'Private and Secret' 27th? December 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 45 where he says "I have not much fear of their refusing to admit our troops into Cadiz".

⁴ Castlereagh to Sir G. Smith 18th December 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 19-20. Unfortunately Canning was not given a copy of these instructions to send Frere - which added to the subsequent confusion.

his own initiative without Spanish permission; nor did they even permit him to try to obtain such permission; his role was simply that of a conduit. Unfortunately Castlereagh did not emphasize this, believing that Smith's "own sagacity and experience render it unnecessary for me to furnish you with detailed Instructions".¹ He was to prove sadly mistaken.

The Government became even more concerned for Cadiz in mid-January 1809 when it belatedly realized that Moore's army would indeed have to be evacuated. They still did not want it to return to England - which would be seen both at home and abroad as confirming its defeat and which would have unpleasant domestic political repercussions, as well as damaging Britain's standing with her existing and potential allies (i.e. Austria). Cadiz was the obvious alternative but they had not as yet heard anything from Frere on this subject.

On 14th January Canning wrote his first official letter of the year to Frere, at last making clear to the envoy the importance of Cadiz:

The question of the employment of a British Army in the South of Spain, depends essentially upon the disposition of the Spanish Government to receive a corps of that Army into Cadiz. Without the security to be afforded by that fortress, it is impossible to hazard the Army in the interior after the example of the little co-operation which Sir John Moore represents himself to have received from the Spaniards in the north.²

In the accompanying private letter Canning reiterates the importance of gaining access to Cadiz and assures Frere that the Government have no objective other than gaining a secure base for their army and a gesture of trust to ease the wounded feelings of Moore and his men.³

But the Cabinet's new-found sense of urgency could not be so easily satisfied: they decided to send General Sherbrooke with a force of nearly 4,000

¹ Castlereagh to Sir G. Smith 18th December 1808 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 19-20.

² Canning to Frere 'Secret' 14th January 1809 *Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. XV, Section C No. 3 - P.R.O. F.O. 72/71 f1-2 are the first 3 sides of this letter which are not printed.

³ Canning to Frere 'Private and Secret' 14th January 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

men to preserve Cadiz from the danger of a *coup de main*. Sherbrooke's men had originally been destined to reinforce Moore but on 12th January Castlereagh issued the new orders: the force was to sail direct to Cadiz where it was to form part of the garrison if the Spaniards agreed. Sherbrooke was instructed to obey both Moore and Frere and to conciliate the Spaniards. He was not to insist on having the overall command in Cadiz, and he was warned that "Too much care cannot be taken to guard against jealousy". He was commanding the advance guard of the army and must not endanger relations with the locals. If he was not granted access to Cadiz he was not to land, but was to proceed to Gibraltar and await further orders.¹

By dispatching Sherbrooke at the same time as its orders to Frere the Cabinet took the risk that the troops would arrive at Cadiz before Frere could prepare for their reception. This danger would have been avoided if they had prompted Frere on Cadiz sooner but they were preoccupied by the unfolding of Moore's campaign. In fact Sherbrooke did not reach Cadiz until March: his convoy was dispersed by bad storms and lost weeks re-assembling in Ireland.²

The Ministers were now on tender-hooks for news from Frere. Moore's army had been forced to return home after Coruña to recover from the ordeal of the retreat but the victorious battle and Moore's heroic death had averted dishonour. The public however had lost their enthusiasm for Spain. They were shocked at the deplorable condition of their fine army, and at the numerous tales of Spanish indifference and callousness the soldiers told. This led Canning, who was always sensitive to changes in the popular mood, to fear that if the Spaniards did not soon grant permission for the British to garrison Cadiz,

there is an end of the War in Spain - of the British Operations there I mean - for after the reception which the British Army has met in the north, and after the loss of Ferrol with all its shipping, it is hopeless

¹ Castlereagh to Sherbrooke 12th January 1809 (2 letters). P.R.O.N.I. D3030/2952/1 and D3030/2953/1. On the strength of Sherbrooke's force see Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 120n-121n.

² Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 121.

to expect that the system of sacrifice ... can be carried further with the consent of Parliament or of the Country.¹

Canning's fears were probably exaggerated; but he was feeling the pressure acutely. Frere was his friend and his appointee. Frere's recent letters had been so "barren and unsatisfactory" that Canning had taken the unusual step of showing the Cabinet Frere's private letter in which he had anticipated little difficulty in gaining British access to Cadiz. Now it was up to Frere to justify this claim.²

Meanwhile in the Peninsula, events had developed in a way no one in London could possibly have anticipated. The French armies had been disrupted by their pursuit of Moore and so were unable to pose any threat to a nearly defenceless Andalusia. Spanish confidence was beginning to recover, although an extremely ill-judged and premature attempt to resume the offensive was crashed at Ucles (13th January 1809). Nonetheless there was no immediate threat to Cadiz, and Frere still felt reluctant to broach the subject. But Sir George Smith had arrived at Cadiz and found its defences in a deplorable condition and at his prompting Frere at last asked the Supreme Junta to consider a British garrison "not (as I told them) from any wish (which I certainly do not feel) to see British troops so employed at the present moment", but so that they will have already considered it if an emergency arises.³ The response was less hostile than Frere expected, but he nevertheless determined not to summon aid from the Tagus unless it was absolutely necessary - the danger of arousing Spanish jealousy was simply too great. Frere acted in this with uncharacteristic caution and good sense; he could not know the urgency which the Ministers had begun to feel about Cadiz - he had approached the Spaniards before Canning's letter of 14th January had even been written, let alone received. He must

¹ Canning to Frere, 'Private and Confidential', 25th January 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45

² Canning to Frere, 'Private and Confidential', 25th January 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45 - The private letter from Frere referred to, is that of 27th? December 1808 quoted above p 137n3.

³ Frere to Canning [Private] 13th January 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

have thought that he had the situation well in hand, but he reckoned without Sir George Smith!

That gallant Colonel had been deeply perturbed by the state of the defences of Cadiz. He did not know that the French power of attack was restricted and he feared that they might suddenly over-run Andalusia and so threaten Cadiz before aid could be summoned from Portugal. On his own initiative he therefore wrote to Sir John Cradock, commander of the British forces in Portugal, suggesting that if he could afford to send any troops to Cadiz "it might be most advisable to send them ... and should the operations in the North of this Kingdom prove so favourable as not to require this immediate assistance the troops might remain at Gibraltar ready to move for this place either by sea or land".¹ Smith thus wanted the troops simply as a precaution; he expected a French attack, though he had no grounds for believing it to be imminent, and he thought that faced with immediate danger the Spaniards would not hesitate to admit a British garrison. Although he was in fact exceeding his instructions he must have felt that he was doing no more than was reasonable. Cadiz was immensely important and it was obviously better to have British troops ready at hand to defend it, rather than to have to summon them from the Tagus in the event of an emergency. In this he was simply recognizing the same considerations which had led the Ministers to despatch Sherbrooke to Cadiz.

What Smith did not appreciate however was the wider implications of his actions. Cradock's force at Lisbon was small and if he acceded to Smith's request he would become powerless to hold his position against even a small French force. Nor did Smith inform Frere of what he was doing and so the envoy had no chance to prepare the Junta for the news of the arrival of the British force at Cadiz.² Finally he did not consider the inevitable confusion which would arise if independent agents actively interfered in strategic decisions without the knowledge

¹ Sir G. Smith to Cradock 19th January 1809 P.R.O. W.O. 1/232 p 505-511.

² Frere to Canning 9th February 1809 *Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. XV, Pt. C, no. 8, p 5-6.

of the Government. Co-ordinating the many separate elements of the British army from London was no easy task; it would become quite impossible if they were to move hither and thither as a result of military agents acting outside the scope of their instructions. Smith's action was well-intentioned and the idea he proposed was not intrinsically foolish, but he went beyond his orders with no pressing necessity and without proper consideration.

Smith's letter placed Sir John Cradock in an extremely difficult position. It was not a requisition of troops to aid in the immediate defence of Cadiz, but rather a scheme to enhance the security of Cadiz at the cost of reducing the British presence in Portugal. Whatever Cradock did he was open to criticism and if he refused to send the troops and Cadiz subsequently fell he would certainly be blamed. Cradock consulted Admiral Berkeley and Mr Villiers (the British Minister at Lisbon) and they agreed that he had little real choice but to send the troops.¹ And so, on 31st January 1809, Cradock ordered Major-General Mackenzie to take a force of five battalions and a detachment of artillery to Cadiz by sea. Cradock gave Mackenzie detailed cautious instructions emphasizing that his only object was to be the defence of Cadiz, and that he should not employ any part of his force outside that city "without the express solicitation of Mr Frere".² Mackenzie sailed from Lisbon with his 4,000 men on 2nd February and arrived at Cadiz late on the 5th.

In the middle of January the Supreme Junta had reluctantly agreed with Frere's request that they consider the possibility of a British garrison in Cadiz in an emergency. Now, only three weeks later, when there was no emergency of any kind, they were informed of the unannounced arrival in Cadiz harbour of a substantial British force. Is it any wonder that in these circumstances all their latent suspicion of British intentions came to the surface? After all, there were no French troops within hundreds of miles of Cadiz and the French appeared to have lost the

¹ Cradock to Castlereagh 31st January 1809 P.R.O. WO 1/232, p 351-361.

² Cradock to Mackenzie 31st January 1809 PRO WO 1/232 P 367-372.

military initiative. The Spaniards had already been betrayed by one old ally (France) and by many of their own number; now it looked suspiciously as if there new ally was intent on betraying them as well, and was engaged in a *de facto* partition of their country with Napoleon.

Frere too was caught off guard; he knew nothing of the British force and did not dare disown it. He felt that a public rebuff to Britain must be avoided if possible and he therefore endeavoured to ensure that the troops were not simply turned away.¹ This determination was much strengthened by the arrival, a few days later, of Canning's letter of 14th January outlining the Government's reasons for wanting a presence in Cadiz and announcing the dispatch of Sherbrooke's force.² Armed with this, Frere negotiated with the Supreme Junta trying to find some compromise by which they would allow the admission of at least some British troops into their prize fortress. Privately the members of the Junta assured Frere that they did not themselves doubt the honesty of Britain's intentions, but they warned him that popular feelings were running high and that the Junta of Seville would use any concession as a political weapon against the Supreme Junta.³ Whatever the truth of the first part of this statement, Frere recognized the reality of the political danger, even the Junta's unspoken anxiety about General Cuesta, but he did not believe that such considerations should outweigh the importance of the alliance and he said so.

While these discussions continued at Seville, Mackenzie waited in Cadiz Bay. Sir George Smith died of a fever on 15th February without ever fully realizing the damage he had done. From 22nd to 24th February there were serious

¹ 'Narrative of the Proceeding of Major-General Mackenzie's Detachment from Lisbon to Cadiz' by [Maj-Gen.] R. Mackenzie, Lisbon 13th March 1809 P.R.O. WO 1/240 f 187-197. (printed in Napier *History of the War in the Peninsula* vol. 2, p 441-5.)

² Frere to M. de Garay Seville 13th February 1809 (translation) *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Part C, p 11-12.

³ Frere to Canning 4th March 1809 *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Pt. C. no. 11, p 9-11; Frere to Canning 'Private' 21st February 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 46A.

riots in the city; they were not due to the presence of the British, indeed the rioters were generally pro-British, but they did nothing to endear the presence of the British troops to the Spanish Government.¹

Mackenzie rejected Frere's initial idea that his force go into cantonments outside Cadiz because it would reduce the mobility of his force; put its re-embarkation at some risk; and might imply a more active part in the defence of southern Spain than his instructions permitted. Frere's next idea -after he had received Canning's letter was that Mackenzie should divide his force leaving part in Cadiz and advancing with the rest to Seville. Mackenzie was reluctantly prepared to consider this, but in the end the Supreme Junta would not agree.² Here negotiations stalled and eventually ended. Mackenzie was anxious about the French threat to Portugal: if Cradock were forced to evacuate would the Spaniards admit him into Cadiz? Frere's intelligence suggested that Soult had failed in his attempt to invade Portugal, and he suggested that Mackenzie might take his force to help the Spaniards defend Tarragona. Mackenzie had just agreed to this when he learnt to his surprise that Cradock was intent on defending Portugal and wanted him to return. This obviously had priority over Tarragona, and on 6th March Mackenzie's force sailed from Cadiz, arriving in Lisbon on the 12th, on their way they met Sherbrooke's force which returned with them.³

And so the whole unfortunate business ended with the British corps returning from when it had come having achieved nothing. Sir George Smith, who must take most of the blame for the fiasco, was dead, and in any case had acted with the best of intentions if with little judgement. Two factors were largely responsible for the trouble : one was the Government's failure to warn Frere earlier

¹ Memorandum by Mackenzie 22nd-24th February 1809 PRO WO 1/240 f 43-46 gives an interesting account of the riots. See also Oman *Peninsular War* vol. 2, p 29-31.

² Mackenzie's 'Narrative ...' PRO WO 1/240 f 187-197.

³ Mackenzie's 'Narrative ...' PRO WO 1/240 f 187-197; see also Mackenzie to Cradock, Cadiz, 3rd March 1809, PRO WO 1/240 f 105-107.

of the importance of Cadiz as the only acceptable base for British operations in southern Spain; the other was the confusion which developed between using Cadiz as the base for the army, and the need to protect it from any imminent French threat. The Spanish reaction to the arrival of the British troops was regrettable but understandable; and all the major British actors in the drama except Smith were well aware of the strength of Spanish sensitivity upon the subject.

The events at Cadiz had far-reaching results on the course of the war. The British Government was forced to reconsider its whole involvement in the Peninsula at a time when Anglo-Spanish relations were at their nadir. The Ministers believed that Moore had been let down by the Spaniards and they would not again commit a British army to the interior of Spain without a secure base, held by British troops, on which it could retreat. Cadiz was ideal for such a purpose while its preservation was itself a strategic objective. Having been humiliatingly rebuffed from Cadiz they were in no mood to consider inferior alternatives. Spain had never been an easy ally with which to co-operate; she was now proving impossible. Many other frustrations were involved in the deterioration of the alliance: the extravagance of the Spanish requests for aid;¹ their refusal to grant British merchants access to their American colonies; their failure - despite British warnings - to keep their naval squadron at Ferrol out of French hands;² the disappointing performance of their armies; their internal divisions, and their unbusinesslike habits. Britain had welcomed Spain as an ally with unprecedented generosity and wildly inflated hopes; now her disillusionment was almost equally exaggerated.

Something else underlay the new British attitude to Spain - she was no longer Britain's only important ally. Although the Austrians did not actually begin

¹ Don Pedro Cevallos arrived in London in February asking to raise a loan of £10 million or £20 million on the London money market. Sherwig *Guineas and Gunpowder* p 203-4 and Aspinall *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p 214n (for the date of Cevallos's arrival).

² See *Parliamentary Debates* vol. 13, col. 796-7 for the use made of this incident by the Opposition.

the new war until April they had been engaged in secret negotiations with the British Government since late 1808, and by the spring of 1809 they were firmly committed.¹ The Austrian decision to go to war was another result of Napoleon's disastrous intervention in Spain. They feared that if he could take over a submissive ally in Spain, he might attempt to do so in Austria. They knew that Czar Alexander would not take a vigorous part against them, and they hoped to mobilize the growing nationalist sentiment in Germany and defeat Napoleon while a large part of his army was still occupied in Spain.²

The British Government had reacted coolly to the first Austrian approaches in late 1808 when their hopes were still centred on Spain. Even in 1809 when the British were more willing to support Austria there was little that they could do to help. The new war would be fought on the Danube and in north-eastern Italy - areas too remote and inaccessible for British military intervention. Britain's reserves of bullion and stockpiles of weapons had been virtually exhausted by the aid sent to Spain but she did manage to scrape together some much-needed financial assistance.³

The entry of Austria into the war gave Britain an added incentive to take as active a part as was possible with her relatively small army much of which was still exhausted by the ordeal of the retreat to Coruña. But where should Britain act now that Spain appeared impossible? Several possibilities were seriously considered including northern Germany, the Low Countries and Portugal, with objectives ranging from limited operations directed against French naval squadrons to the opening of a new front against Napoleon. Unfortunately the Cabinet tended to look

¹ The best account of these negotiations that I have seen is in Sherwig *Guineas and Gunpowder* p 207-213, but it necessarily leaves many questions unanswered as does the briefer account in Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 32, 36-7.

² There is an excellent account of the Austrian decision to go to war in J.A. Vann 'Hapsburg Policy and the Austrian War of 1809' *Central European History* vol. 7, no. 4, December 1974, p 291-310.

³ Sherwig *Guineas and Gunpowder* p 212. See below Chapter 5 p 172.

at each possible operation in isolation and there is no evidence that any of the Ministers had an overall coherent plan. *Ad hoc* decisions were made, and it was more due to good fortune than foresight that one of these decisions (to increase the army in Portugal) laid the basis of a strategy which was to prove extremely productive in the long term.

* * * * *

After the Convention of Cintra the British Government had been happy to forget Portugal and to concentrate their efforts on supporting Moore and Baird. By the middle of November however they felt it necessary to appoint an officer to command the British troops left in Portugal by Moore and an envoy to represent the British Government with the new Portuguese Regency Council. They selected Lt-Gen Sir John Cradock and Mr John Villiers respectively. The latter's appointment provoked "no small surprise and merriment even amongst the friends of the new Minister ... Villiers is a man turned of fifty who has all his life been doing nothing: a mere courtier, famous for telling interminably long stories".¹ It is not clear why Villiers was chosen although his appointment has been attributed to the influence of the reactionary Duke of Cumberland.²

Of the two men Villiers had the more complex and delicate task, for Anglo-Portuguese relations had become intricately tangled and twisted. Many of these problems resulted from the division of authority between the Portuguese Prince Regent in Brazil; his Minister the Chevalier de Souza in London; the Regency Council which he left behind him in Lisbon, from which Dalrymple had purged

¹ Francis Jackson writing on 8th November 1808 'Diaries of George Jackson' vol. 2, p 302 quoted by Aspinall in *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p 151n.

² Gray *Perceval* p 192-3 citing Perceval to Portland 13th November 1808 Perceval Papers: a letter which I have not seen. There is no mention of this in an excellent biographical essay on Villiers by D.R. Fisher in *The House of Commons 1790-1820* 5 vols. (London, Secker and Warburg, 1986) edited by R.G. Thorne, vol. 5, p 454-7. Part of the *The History of Parliament* under the auspices of The History of Parliament Trust.

those who had openly co-operated with Junot; and the leaders of the Portuguese insurrection, most notably the Bishop of Oporto. The conflicts between these men formed part of the web of factional fighting that was Portuguese politics. Neither Villiers nor the British Government could hope to appreciate the full significance of what they did and what they saw, for they understandably lacked the necessary detailed background knowledge of Portuguese politics. The problem in Portugal was particularly acute - not because factionalism was worse there than in other countries - but because power was so divided and because the Prince Regent continued to attempt to exercise authority from Brazil despite the fact that correspondence took months to reach him and be considered.

An example of the practical problems these Portuguese divisions created for the British can be found in the very appointment of Villiers. For Souza, the Portuguese Minister in London, denied the legality of the Regency Council as reconstructed by Dalrymple and therefore opposed the appointment of a British Minister to it. It was no light matter to over-rule the wishes of a duly accredited Minister of a friendly Court on such a matter, and Canning only did so reluctantly having wasted much time endeavouring to persuade Souza to change his mind.¹

The appointment of a British Minister in Lisbon was essential for many reasons. The British Government needed more reliable information than they could get from Souza who, as Canning pointed out, had not visited Portugal for the last 19 years!² In particular the Cabinet wanted to know how well the provisional government in Lisbon was performing and how effective its measures to increase the Portuguese army had been. Villiers might also be called upon to use his influence to strengthen the provisional government although Canning hoped that any such overt interference would be unnecessary. On the crucial question of aid, Villiers was to bear a simple message: Britain would give generous amounts of aid

¹ Canning explains this at length in his formal instructions to Villiers: Canning to Villiers 22nd November 1808 PRO FO 63/74, f1-16.

² Canning to Villiers 22nd November 1808 PRO FO 63/74 f1-16 esp. f4.

to help increase the Portuguese army providing that two conditions were met - the troops raised with British help would be liable for service in the common cause not simply in Portugal or the Peninsula but anywhere in the world, and secondly that Villiers should be given a place and a veto on all the Councils of the Regency relating to these troops. If the Portuguese agreed to these conditions Villiers was authorized to immediately give aid for 10,000 men, with further aid to follow as more men were mobilized.¹

It is not clear whether Canning anticipated any difficulty over these terms which were surely harsher than were necessary. There was no need to make the Portuguese troops liable to serve outside the Peninsula. In fact the Portuguese Government did not finally and unequivocally agree to the conditions until March 1809 so that three months and much good will were lost for nothing.²

Compared to problems such as these the tasks facing Cradock were simpler although this did not make them much easier to solve. He arrived on 13th December to face the immediate prospect of Moore retreating with his army into Portugal and perhaps even back to the ships. It was not a promising beginning and Cradock cannot have enjoyed writing his first dispatch in which he warned Castlereagh that the complete evacuation of Spain and Portugal by the British might soon become necessary.³ Fortunately it did not, but even so, Cradock's position was not a comfortable one. The reconstruction of the Portuguese army had made little or no progress and the provisional government appeared slothful and incapable. He was short of money, of transport, and of troops. His primary role was to reinforce Moore with every available man and this he did most honourably

¹ Canning to Villiers 22nd November 1808 PRO FO 63/74 f17-20.

² Negotiations over this point are confusing. At first Villiers apparently believed that the Portuguese had readily agreed to the conditions - see his private letter to Canning of 24th December 1808 (Canning Papers Bundle 48) but in March he was to threaten that Beresford would not take up his duties if the Portuguese Government did not give the assurances he required: Villiers to Freire 4th March 1809 PRO FO 63/75 f182.

³ Cradock to Castlereagh 14th December 1808 PRO WSO !/232 p 65-68.

although it left him short of men to fulfil his own needs. Whatever criticisms can be made of Cradock's command, selfishness is not among them.

By the end of January all communication with Moore's army had been lost and Cradock was on his own.¹ It was a time of great anxiety and uncertainty. For all he knew Moore's army might appear at any moment off the Tagus; on the other hand the French might easily invade Portugal and there would be absolutely nothing he could do to halt their advance. He had at this time rather more than 5,000 men ready to take the field and this number was gradually increasing as stragglers drifted in from Moore's army and an occasional regiment arrived from home.² In addition there was a British batalion in each of the frontier fortresses (Elvas and Almeida) until Cradock withdrew them in January deeming the garrison too small to delay an invading army. The rest of his force he kept united just outside Lisbon. If the French invaded Portugal he would have no choice but to evacuate the army, but this in itself would pose many dangers.³ The turbulent population of Lisbon might well react badly to such 'desertion' by their allies, and even if this did not prevent the British getting away they had no desire to leave anarchy behind them. Nor did they wish to leave several Portuguese warships and a number of large merchantmen in the Tagus, although this was a problem for Villiers and Admiral Berkeley, not for Cradock.⁴

Cradock did not have the power to solve the problems which confronted him: he simply had to wait and hope that substantial reinforcements were sent from England before the French were able to prepare an invasion. Fortunately the Portuguese Government recognized that much needed to be done to improve their

¹ Cradock to Castlereagh 4th January 1809 PRO WO1/232 p 191-203 esp. p 191.

² Return published in Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 115-6. Cradock's total force at this time exceeded 11,000 men, but much of it was committed to the defence of the Tagus and the preservation of order in Lisbon.

³ Cradock to Castlereagh 12th February 1809 P.R.O. WO 1/232 p 429-438.

⁴ On this problem see Villiers to Canning 26th or 27th December 1808 PRO 63/75 f22-24. (Both dates are given on the letter.)

own forces and so in late December they asked Britain for the loan of a general to reform and command their army.¹ The use of foreign generals in such a role had many precedents in eighteenth century Portugal and other small states, to whom it offered many advantages. According to Villiers - and there is no reason to doubt him - the request was unprompted, and he attributed it largely to the difficulties Forjaz was having in reforming the army.² No individual was mentioned officially by the Portuguese, who only specified that if possible he should be a Lieutenant-General or above, and who promised that he would be given the rank of Marshal of Portugal. In private however it was made clear to Villiers that Sir Arthur Wellesley would be most acceptable.³ Villiers whole-heartedly supported this idea, writing privately to Canning on 3rd January that Wellesley's appointment would be ideal because "He is so venerated here".⁴ In this same letter Villiers also urged that the British presence be increased to 10,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry, a force which he felt would be strong enough to operate on the frontier.

Canning replied privately on 14th January that the Government was considering the request and that he hoped it would soon be accepted. The Duke of York had agreed that a number of junior British officers be allowed to serve in the Portuguese Army and that these officers be given one step of promotion as an incentive.⁵ A fortnight later Canning wrote again and explained that "Sir Arthur Wellesley is thought too good for the Portuguese. - Will Doyle do?"⁶

1 C.R. Freire to Villiers 26th December 1808 P.R.O. FO 63/75 f36.

2 Villiers to Canning 26th or 27th December 1808 P.R.O. FO63/75 f22-24. Vichness 'Marshal of Portugal' p 120 claims that Villiers put pressure on the Portuguese to request a British general. While this is possible it is not supported by my reading of his official dispatches (in F.O.63/75) or his private letters to Canning (in Canning Papers Bundle 48).

3 "Sir A. Wellesley has been mentioned here with a wish for his appointment" Villiers to Canning Private 26th December 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 48. Villiers thought that Wellesley would be perfect, but doubted that he would accept the post.

4 Villiers to Canning 'Private and Confidential' 3rd January 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

5 Canning to Villiers Private 14th January 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

6 Canning to Villiers Private 28th January 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

But Doyle was not appointed, and to Canning's intense frustration time drifted on without anything being settled. Finally on 10th February Canning sent a circular to his Cabinet colleagues "Mr Canning cannot forebear earnestly recalling the attention of His Colleagues to the situation in Portugal: Which he cannot persuade himself but we might have saved by exertion; and possibly it may not yet be too late". He ended the note by asking that the Cabinet make a firm decision on the following day. Beneath this three of his colleagues added their own comments as they received the circular: Portland (or possibly Perceval) felt that "no Subject can be of greater Importance and Urgency"; Mulgrave however argued that "No time has yet been lost by Cabinet as Wind and Weather have rendered all operations impossible, since the return of the Army from Corunna"; while Bathurst simply urged that it was "absolutely necessary" to come to some decision.¹ The issue at stake was not simply the appointment of a British general; Canning also wanted a clear commitment that Britain would make a serious attempt to defend Portugal. Castlereagh however was unenthusiastic, and it was he - Wellesley's great patron - who opposed his appointment to Portugal notwithstanding the fact that Wellesley was most willing to accept it.² The old myth that Castlereagh deserves the credit for Britain's commitment to Portugal is completely fallacious, being based on nothing more than his constant and devoted support for Wellesley. Ironically it was Canning, who Fortescue so disliked, who had the "desperate struggle to prevail with the Cabinet" not Castlereagh, his hero among politicians.³

¹ Circular to the Cabinet by Canning 10th February 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 41.

The additional comments are only initialled: Portland and Perceval were the only P's in the Cabinet and the writing and initial look to me unlike Perceval's who would in any case be more likely to initial his comment 'Sp.P.'. Mulgrave was the only 'M' and Bathurst the only 'B' in the Cabinet.

² Castlereagh admits having opposed Wellesley's appointment in an important letter to Charles Stewart of 22nd September 1809 P.R.O.N.I. D3030/3295 in which he also claims that "there was never an hour's delay" in sending reinforcements to Portugal. On Wellesley's willingness to serve in Portugal see below p 154, 156; and also Canning's Circular to the Cabinet of 24th February 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 41A.

³ Fortescue *British Army* vo. 7, p 128. Unfortunately Fortescue's detestation of Canning distorts everything it touches. I believe it arises mainly from Canning's hostility to Moore (one of Fortescue's heroes) and to a lesser extent the subsequent conflict between Castlereagh and Canning which will be dealt with below (later in this chapter and in Chapter 6). It is only fair to add that

Canning did not gain the commitment he sought at the Cabinet meeting, nor did he get Wellesley appointed, but he did not completely fail for on 15th February Major-General William Carr Beresford was appointed to command the Portuguese army.¹ Beresford was then forty years old, a tall man with unprepossessing manners and a glass eye.² He had experience dealing with the Portuguese having commanded the British expedition to Madeira and for a time acted as liaison officer with the Portuguese authorities after Cintra. He had some knowledge of the language although he did not write it well. His only previous claim to fame was his command of the military side of the first, unauthorized and inglorious British expedition to Buenos Aires which had ended in failure after an initial success. Many years before he had served at Toulon under Lord Mulgrave and in India under Wellesley, and it has been suggested that he owed his appointment to Wellesley's influence.³ Certainly he had talents as an administrator which made him suitable for the position although it seems unlikely that he was better qualified than all of his superiors. In the end he was successful but the Portuguese must at first have been disappointed, especially as he was not even the Lieutenant-General they had requested.⁴

Canning did not give up his struggle to increase the British presence in Portugal. On 24th February he raised the issue again in another Cabinet circular,

the other standard accounts (eg Oman and Napier) are equally if less vehemently inaccurate on this point.

¹ Castlereagh to Beresford 15th February 1809 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 34.

² He had lost one eye in a hunting accident in 1785 or 6. For this and other details of Beresford's person and career I am indebted to Vichness 'Marshal of Portugal'. Personal details come from p 2, 3 and 127-134. P4, 10-11, 26-60, 63-8 and 85 for the points in his career I mention later in the paragraph.

³ Oman *Peninsular War* II p 217.

⁴ The Cabinet may deliberately selected an officer junior to Sir Arthur Wellesley so as to leave the way open for Wellesley to return to Portugal later. This would explain the choice of a mere Major-General, when the Portuguese specified a Lieutenant-General. Beresford, like his junior assistants, was given a step in rank and so became a Lieutenant-General in the British service as well as a Marshal in the Portuguese Army. This caused some discontent in the British army during the Oporto Campaign.

arguing that the Spanish refusal to admit British troops into Cadiz made the defence of Portugal the most suitable strategic objective for Britain in the Peninsula. "If we think the trial worth making at all, we ought surely to make it in the most advantageous manner, with the best instruments we can." This in his view meant that the British army should be increased to some 15,000 men; that more should be done to mobilize Portuguese resources; and that Sir Arthur Wellesley should be sent to Portugal to command both armies.¹

But the Cabinet remained unconvinced. Canning expressed his frustrations in a revealing private letter to Villiers,

"It is no want of urgency on my part, or of willingness on Sir A. Wellesley's - but, but, no matter what the impediments are, I shall get over them if I can ..." "I am persuaded, as sincerely and as strongly as you could wish me to be, that Sir A. Wellesley at the head of a large combined force in Portugal, is the first necessary element of success to the Spanish cause."²

He had consulted Wellesley who believed that 5,000 reinforcements and the return of Mackenzie and Sherbrooke (which would bring the army in Portugal up to around 20,000 men) would be sufficient - indeed it would have to be, for there was no prospect of finding more men for Portugal for a long while.³

Three weeks later on 21st March Canning was near despair, writing to the Prime Minister that "Portugal is a source of constant, daily, and nightly uneasiness to me".⁴ And then, on 26th March, the battle was suddenly over and Castlereagh wrote to the King conveying the Cabinet's recommendation that Sir Arthur Wellesley be appointed to command the army in Portugal which should be reinforced by a further three regiments of cavalry.⁵ The following day the King

¹ Circular to the Cabinet by Canning 24th February 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 41A.

² Canning to Villiers 'Private and Confidential' 28th February 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

³ Canning to Villiers 'Private and Confidential' 28th February 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

⁴ Canning to Portland 'Private and Secret' 21st March 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33A.

⁵ Castlereagh to the King 26th March 1809 *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3844, p 246-7.

acquiesced, while expressing his reservations at "so young a Lieut-General holding so distinguished a command while his seniors remain unemployed" and insisting that if the army was subsequently increased the claims of these senior officers be considered.¹

The reason for this abrupt success is obscure - for it does not appear to have been due to fresh intelligence from the Peninsula. Possibly the Cabinet had only just realized that with the return of Mackenzie and Sherbrooke to Lisbon, and the arrival of Hill's reinforcements, they would have a substantial army in Portugal which ought to be commanded by a general who they implicitly trusted.² Possibly Canning's insistence finally wore down his opponents, or possibly his success was due to the end of the Parliamentary crisis over the Duke of York which permitted the Ministers to concentrate their attention on the war for the first time in months.³

Wellesley's appointment marked the final stage in the process of shifting British strategic attention from Spain to Portugal. As early as 27th February the Government had given up hope of gaining access to Cadiz, and Castlereagh had ordered Sherbrooke and Mackenzie to go to Lisbon. At the same time he had expressed the Government's policy "to use every exertion to strengthen the defences of Portugal" and to maintain the British presence there "for as long as possible".⁴ This was at least an improvement on the instructions sent to Cradock a month before which had taken for granted that he would be compelled to evacuate his force and had merely sought to delay this until the last moment.⁵ Nonetheless it

¹ The King to Castlereagh 27th March 1809 *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3844, p 247.

² This is the explanation suggested by Castlereagh to the King 26th March 1809 *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3844, p 246-7.

³ As Canning wrote to Portland: "The sad business which has for so long occupied the House of Commons has, among other ill effects, had that of suspending everything like naval or military operation". Canning to Portland 'Private and Secret' 21st March 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33A.

⁴ Castlereagh to Cradock 27th February 1809 *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 37-9.

⁵ Castlereagh to Cradock 28th January 1809 PRO WO 1/232, p 287-291.

was not until Wellesley's appointment that Canning could convince the Cabinet that the long-term defence of Portugal might be possible.

This lack of spirit can be attributed to discouragement arising from the defeat of the Spanish armies, and Sir John Moore's opinion that the Portuguese frontier was indefensible.¹ Yet Moore's remarks were made in a quite different context and the Cabinet had since received two considered opinions to the contrary. The first of these came from Colonel R. Donkin, an intelligent officer who had toured the frontier of Portugal and prepared a detailed and thoughtful report for Cradock who had sent it home to Castlereagh on 4th January. Donkin argued that the line of the frontier, especially along the River Ponsul and the River Coa, was very strong, but that it would need an army of "30,000 men + 40 or 50 pieces of Cannon" to hold it against a major French attack.²

The second professional opinion arguing in favour of the defence of Portugal was that of Sir Arthur Wellesley who put his views in writing in a famous memorandum on 7th March.³ In this Wellesley proposed a comprehensive scheme, not merely for the immediate defence of Portugal, but for her transformation into a powerful ally who could assist Britain in turning the tide of the war in the Peninsula. These ideas were not new - Wellesley had outlined some of them in August 1808 before he even landed in Portugal⁴ and Villiers and Canning had advocated them throughout 1809. In essence the argument was that if Britain would defend Portugal for a time, and provide the resources to rebuild her army, she would gain a subsidiary force strong enough to make the combined Anglo-Portuguese army a major player in the struggle in the Peninsula.

¹ Moore to Castlereagh 25th November 1808 in *Moore Narrative ...* p 265-266. But see Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 126.

² Donkin to Cradock Lisbon 1st January 1809 P.R.O. WO 1/232, pp 231-8 enclosed in Cradock to Castlereagh 4th January 1809 P.R.O. WO 1/232, p 191-203.

³ 'Memorandum on the defence of Portugal' London 7th March 1809 *W.D.III* p 181-3.

⁴ Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh Private HMS Donegal 1st August 1808 *W.D.III* p46-7.

Yet even Wellesley's appointment did not signal the wholesale adoption of these ideas by the Cabinet. Castlereagh did not dispute the merits of Wellesley's plan but he continued to doubt whether Portugal could be defended while it was being implemented.¹ In the end, after nearly three months had been wasted,² the Cabinet agreed to let Wellesley try his hand in Portugal, but as his instructions made clear, it was a limited and primarily a defensive commitment, not part of a broader strategy.³

British strategy in the first three months of 1809 had been marked by confusion, hesitation and delay. This is hardly surprising for it took time for the Ministers to adjust their plans after the defeat of the Spanish armies. The impulse to send their army to Cadiz and continue the war in southern Spain was perfectly natural and its failure was due to faults in execution rather than conception. But there is little doubt that this failure proved beneficial in the long run. Anglo-Spanish relations were always fraught with problems and the friction caused by close co-operation would certainly have made them worse. Cadiz was a great natural fortress, a focus of the Spanish resistance and the centre of the South America trade but it was not an ideal base for the British army.

Lisbon lacked the obvious attraction of Cadiz and when the Ministers sent Wellesley back there they did not appreciate its full potential. The advantages of Portugal as a strategic base took time to emerge although Wellesley had already perceived many of them. Paramount among these advantages was the fact that

¹ "the only hesitation on my part in sending Arthur Wellesley depended on the question whether there was a reasonable prospect of his finding the British Army in possession of Portugal." Castlereagh to Charles Stewart 22nd September 1809 P.R.O.N.I. D3030/3295.

² Castlereagh later claimed that no time had been wasted in sending reinforcements to Portugal and that the only delay had been in the appointment of Sir A. Wellesley. Castlereagh to the King [1st October 1809] *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3980, p 378-381. While this may be technically true the point is that until Wellesley arrived the British presence was passive and purposeless. Cradock, with his men concentrated near Lisbon, was simply waiting to be expelled, as Castlereagh was sure he would be. It was only the arrival of Wellesley, with his energy and vision and the reinforcements that accompanied him that gave the British a future in Portugal.

³ See below Chapter 5 p 176.

Portugal was small, weak, and totally dependent on Britain for her defence. It was this which enabled the British to force through the painful but essential reforms which were to make the Portuguese troops an integral part of Wellington's army. Britain could never have coerced Spain as she coerced Portugal, nor would the Portuguese have continued the struggle without outside help with the obstinacy and determination which the Spaniards consistently displayed. More by good luck than good judgement the Ministers had hit upon the best possible strategy for the British to pursue in the Peninsula, although it took a considerable time for them to appreciate the fact.

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In late January 1809 allegations were made in Parliament that the Duke of York Commander-in-Chief of the Army had colluded with his then mistress Mary Anne Clarke to accept bribes in return for promotion and other advantages to army officers. The result was a Parliamentary Enquiry which dominated the Session of 1809 and revived the dormant reform movement. The evidence presented to the enquiry showed that while the Duke was innocent of accepting bribes he had been naive and foolish in his dealings with Mrs Clarke. Faced with a Parliamentary censure the Duke reluctantly resigned on 18th March.¹

The long struggle in Cabinet over Portugal, and differences with his colleagues over tactics in defending the Duke of York,² proved the straws which broke Canning's patience. On Monday 3rd April 1809 he sent the Duke of Portland a letter which he composed ten days before - on 24th March. In this letter Canning stated his belief that "the Government has sunk in public opinion since the end of the last Session of Parliament" in June 1808. He attributed this to the

¹ *Gray Perceval* p 194-204.

² *Abbot Diary of Lord Colchester* vol. 2, p 179. Entry for 30th April 1809, recounting a conversation with Canning.

Government's acceptance of responsibility for the Convention of Cintra and - to a lesser extent - Moore's failure in Spain. Canning argued that the Government's popularity would not have suffered to the same extent if it had not accepted responsibility for what was not its work nor its fault. The "evil appears to me to have arisen from a spirit of compromise, from a desire to avoid meeting difficulties in front, and a hope of getting round them by management ... unsuited ... to a Government acting in such times as these". Recent months had brought no sign of improvement and he had reluctantly come to the conclusion "**that the Government as at present constituted does not appear to me equal to the great task which it has to perform**". In these circumstances Canning wished to inform the Duke that if the defects "wherever they lie" could not be remedied, he would resign.¹

It seems strange that Canning sent this letter only a few days after achieving his belated victory over Portugal, but there were good reasons for its timing. He explained to Portland that he had originally intended to resign over Cintra but had allowed himself to be dissuaded. As a member of the Cabinet he therefore shared the responsibility for sending Moore to Spain although he never liked the decision. He thus felt obliged to remain in the Ministry while these decisions were debated in Parliament, and in doing so he had become committed to the defence of the Duke of York. Now that matter was concluded and Parliament was in recess for Easter; the discussions of the events of 1808 were almost over, while most of the crucial strategic decisions for 1809 were yet to be made. It seemed a suitable opportunity to make changes in the Government.²

¹ Canning to Portland 'Private' Sunday 2nd April 1809 enclosing Canning to Portland 24th March 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33. A note on the back of the letter of 2nd April states that it was sent on 3rd April. All quotes come from the letter of 24th March; all underlinings are Canning's.

² Canning to Portland 24th March 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33 - this letter was of course written (though not sent) before the Cabinet agreed to send Wellesley to Portugal.

Canning presented Portland with a most unwelcome choice: either he must undertake an extensive reconstruction of his Ministry or lose Canning whose support Portland and others believed to be vital to the survival of the Government.¹ Portland asked Canning down to Bulstrode where they discussed possible ways of resolving the crisis between 4th and 8th April. Unfortunately neither appears to have left a written record of these talks, but according to one of Canning's closest friends, Portland was most conciliatory and several schemes for reshuffling the Cabinet were discussed including one in which "Lord Chatham would be placed at the head of the Treasury and the old Duke go to the Presidency of the Council; Lord Castlereagh² turn[ed] out into his original nothingness; Lord Wellesley take Castlereagh's place and Lord Mulgrave the Ordnance".³

Whether or not all these details are accurate it is certain that Canning and Portland agreed that the Duke should make way for Lord Chatham.⁴ Portland returned to London and tendered his resignation to the King but His Majesty rejected it preemptorily without giving any opportunity for explanations.⁵ According to Canning, Portland "acquiesced in that refusal very cheerfully"⁶ while the Foreign Secretary agreed to continue in office if less extensive changes were made, notably the replacement of Castlereagh with Lord Wellesley at the War

¹ Earl Bathurst 'Negotiations of 1809' an undated [Sept. 1809?] memorandum in *H.M.C. Bathurst* p 112-9, esp. p 113. see also Liverpool to the King 11th July 1809 *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3919, p 310-312, where he says that he would expect the Government to fall if Canning resigned.

² or possibly Lord Camden who was President of the Council.

³ Granville Leveson Gower to Lord Boringdon 10th April 1809 quoted by Aspinall in the introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, P xviii.

⁴ Canning's Memorandum of an Audience with the King on 13th September 1809 [14th September 1809] *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3960, p 342-9 esp 345 where Canning gives some of the reasons why he would have found Chatham an acceptable leader. Chatham knew nothing of this proposal and the King later said that he did not think he would have agreed to it. *ibid* p345.

⁵ Bathurst 'Negotiations of 1809' *H.M.C. Bathurst* p 112-9 esp. p 112.

⁶ Canning's Memorandum of an Audience with the King on 13th September 1809 [14th September 1809] *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3960 p 342-9 esp p 345.

Department. Canning never recurred to the scheme of replacing Portland with Chatham and it is evident that he soon realized that it would have been a dreadful mistake.

Portland now turned to two of his Cabinet colleagues for advice: Earl Bathurst (who Portland hoped would eventually succeed him)¹ and Earl Camden (Castlereagh's step-uncle). He did not explain the full extent of the changes Canning had originally sought, instead concentrating on the problem of how to remove Castlereagh without acrimony or disrupting the Government.

Before these Ministers could find a solution Castlereagh was accused in Parliament of attempting to misuse Indian patronage for political purposes when he had been President of the Board of Control in 1805. There was no doubt of Castlereagh's guilt although the offence would normally have been regarded with tolerance, especially as it was never consummated. But the recent scandal over the Duke of York had revived the reform movement and it was generally felt that Castlereagh would be forced to resign.² Not surprisingly Canning believed that he should do so before the debate, and was incensed that the Government was committed to Castlereagh's defence without any prior discussion in Cabinet.³ In the event, the debate (on the evening of 25th-26th April) went surprisingly well for the Government. The respected independent Henry Bankes moved a motion which explicitly avoided anything which might lead to Castlereagh's resignation while condemning the abuse of patronage. With the Government's support this was carried by 216 votes to 167, a result with which Castlereagh was "perfectly satisfied".⁴

¹ Portland to Bathurst 4th May 1809 *H.M.C. Bathurst* p 92.

² Bathurst 'Negotiations of 1809' *H.M.C. Bathurst* p 113.

³ Canning to Portland 'Private and Confidential' 5th May 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33A.

⁴ Castlereagh to ? n.d. quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5 p 264n. On the debate generally see Perceval to the King 27th [26th] April 1809 *ibid* no. 3867, p 261-3. On Bankes see R.G. Thorne's essay in R.G. Thorne (ed) *The Commons 1790-1820* vol. 3, p 128-133. On 28th April Tom Grenville wrote to Lord Spencer,

This affair, and another similar scandal which erupted soon afterwards, made Castlereagh's retirement "infinitely more desirable" while at the same time adding greatly to the "difficulty and delicacy" of achieving it.¹ It was felt that his removal would be seen as the Government punishing him after he had been acquitted in the Commons.² And so the days drifted by with nothing being done. On 5th May Canning informed the Duke that he would resign on the following Tuesday as nothing had been done in the five weeks since he had raised the issue.³ Portland managed to persuade him to wait a little longer and on the advice of Bathurst the Duke again tendered his resignation to the King.⁴ On this occasion the King was more receptive and Portland was able to explain Canning's dissatisfaction with Castlereagh although not his desire for broader changes or the fact that he wished to introduce Lord Wellesley (who the King disliked) into the Cabinet. The King promised to personally find a solution to the problem.

As the weeks went by without producing any result Canning grew wild with frustration. He complained of the "incessant and harassing"⁵ work of the Commons and later explained to Frere the awkwardness of having to continue to co-operate with Castlereagh:

All is here at sixes and sevens; half the Government wanted Castlereagh out, and [Lord] Wellesley most especially wanted it inasmuch as he was the destined successor if the Irish Lord should be forced out, and so eager were the friends of Wellesley to accomplish this, that his three members all voted against Castlereagh, and Canning made a most feeble and washy speech of a few minutes only.

quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p 261n.

¹ Canning to Portland 'Private and Confidential' 5th May 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33A. Perceval was implicated in the other (Quintin Dick) affair as well as Castlereagh but it was summarily dismissed by the Commons 310 votes to 85. Perceval to the King 12th May 1809 *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3876, p 275-6 + n.

² Bathurst 'Negotiations of 1809' *H.M.C. Bathurst* p 113-4.

³ Canning to Portland 'Private' 5th May 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33A.

⁴ Bathurst 'Negotiations of 1809' *H.M.C. Bathurst* p 114. Bathurst did not expect the King to accept Portland's resignation.

⁵ Canning to Villiers 'Private and Confidential' 19th May 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

I could not go on, with my neighbour[ing] Office in the hands in which it is. From the Convention of Cintra, upon which you witnessed my feelings, downwards we have been at variance in Opinion almost constantly - never in anger, but always knowing each other's Minds. The employment of Moore in Spain - the unqualified panegyrics upon Moore in the H. of C. - all that happened with respect to yourself - the Smiths - Sir Sidney at Rio Janeiro¹ - and the other poor man at Cadiz - these and other things of the same Sort made a change in one or other of the two Offices absolutely necessary ... without ... any feeling on my part of personal hostility or unkindness."²

On 31st May Canning submitted his resignation to the King but was told that His Majesty was considering how best to solve the problem and that in the meantime his resignation was refused.³ About a week later the King announced his solution: at the close of the session of Parliament the business of the War Department was to be divided with all the political correspondence being transferred to the Foreign Office.⁴ Canning accepted this proposal with many misgivings - it was obviously impractical and would exacerbate rather than reduce friction between the Ministers but the origin of the idea made its rejection virtually impossible.⁵ Castlereagh of course still knew nothing of what was going on, although Canning had protested to Portland against the concealment.⁶

¹ Admiral Sir Sidney Smith (no relation to the witty clergyman) commanded the British naval squadron off the Tagus in 1807 and that off Brazil in 1808-1809. While in Brazil he became involved in intrigues which tended to work against the policy of the British Government.

² Canning to Frere 'Private and Confidential most secret' 20th July 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

³ Aspinnall introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p xx.

⁴ Aspinnall introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p xx.

⁵ Canning to Perceval 26th June 1809 quoted in Walpole *Life of Perceval* vol. 1, p 352-3; "so far from wishing it, I have distinctly declared that I was prepared to acquiesce in it, not because I had any personal liking to it, not because I thought it cured all the evil, but simply out of deference to a suggestion of the King's." (original emphasis)

⁶ Canning to Portland 'Private and Confidential' 5th May 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33/A,. See also Portland to Canning 'Secret and Confidential' 18th July 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33/A.

Parliament was prorogued on 21st June and on the following day Perceval became the sixth or seventh member of Cabinet to be let into the secret.¹ He strongly objected to the proposed re-arrangement of the War Department and to the continued secrecy. The Government had just approved Castlereagh's plans for the Walcheren expedition and it was grossly unfair for such decisions to be made with half the Cabinet knowing of Castlereagh's impending demotion and the other half in the dark.² Lord Chatham was given command of the Walcheren expedition on 16th June and let into the secret a few days later. Like Perceval he reacted with anger and embarrassment at the impossible situation in which he had been placed, and pressed that no change be made until the result of the expedition had been determined.³ In early July Canning told Liverpool what was going on and he too reacted with distress and annoyance.⁴

During June and July numerous schemes were proposed to solve the problem and more than one Minister offered to resign in order to facilitate a reshuffle.⁵ In the course of these discussions the King's proposal was mercifully dropped. In the end it was agreed that Camden would resign and be replaced by Castlereagh as Lord President of the Council as soon as the result of the Walcheren Expedition was known, whether it succeeded or failed.⁶ Canning was not entirely happy with this solution and he had doubts whether it would be implemented, but

¹ Canning, Portland, Bathurst, Camden and Eldon already knew, and Chatham was told at about the same time as Perceval. Lords Harrowby and Leveson Gower, both soon to be introduced into the Cabinet, also knew what was going on.

² Perceval to Canning 25th June 1809 in Walpole *Life of Perceval* vol. 2, p 352.

³ Aspinnall introduction to *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p xxi.

⁴ Liverpool to the King 11th July 1809 *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3919, p 310-2.

⁵ Liverpool did so: Liverpool to the King 11th July 1809 *Later Correspondence of George III* v. 5, no. 3919, p 310-2: so did Camden: Canning to Mrs Canning 5th July 1808 Canning Papers Bundle 23; Bathurst had already done so: Bathurst to Portland n.d. [3rd May 1809?] *H.M.C. Bathurst* p 91.

⁶ Canning to Portland 27th June 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33/A; Canning to Mrs Canning 5th July 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 23.

he was weary and frustrated; he received solemn assurances from Portland and his colleagues and he told himself that if there was any prevarication when the time came for this promise to be fulfilled he would unilaterally resign.¹

The question of Castlereagh's future had come to completely dominate the discussion of Canning's demands despite the fact that he had originally asked for a far more wide-ranging reconstruction of the Ministry. Some minor changes had been made; Canning's friend Lord Granville Leveson Gower had been introduced into the Cabinet as Secretary at War - which Canning found a "great Comfort to me in all my difficulties".² The conservative Lord Harrowby also came into the Cabinet as President of the Board of Control, but he was closer to Perceval than to Canning.³ Robert Dundas, son of Lord Melville, replaced Sir Arthur Wellesley as Chief Secretary for Ireland.

But Canning's plans extended beyond the redistribution of a few offices. He wanted to make Lord Wellesley Secretary for War in place of Castlereagh, but he also wanted to change the loose undirected nature of Portland's Government. He blamed the succession of problems (major and minor) which had dogged Britain's efforts in the Peninsula upon,

"the evils and inconveniences arising from the complexity and conflict of Departments in this Government. ... I ... feel them so strongly, that I believe it utterly impossible to carry on any great and comprehensive System, with such a constitution of executive Government. (I speak not of persons - but of the system.) The fault is radical." This had been a problem of all Governments since Pitt's death but it is worse now "when the Oppositions of the

¹ Canning to Mrs Canning 12th July 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 23; Canning to Portland 'Private' 14th July 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 33/A.

² Canning to Frere 'Private and Confidential most secret' 20th July 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45. Other less favourable reactions to Leveson Gower's entry into the Cabinet are quoted by Aspinall in *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p 301n: Eldon was said to be particularly angry, while the appointment aroused some adverse comment because Leveson Gower had recently lost £20,000 at piquet. Lord Melville's comment is particularly interesting "The appointment of Lord G. Leveson to a seat in the Cabinet cannot ... receive any other construction than as an addition to the weight of Mr Canning, who has already either too much or too little".

³ Walpole describes him as the "most intimate of his [Perceval's] political friends" *Life of Perceval* vol. 1, p357.

Foreign and War Departments are so intimately blended in all that concerns Portugal and Spain".¹

The lack of direction and cohesion in the Government had also affected its performance in Parliament. In the Commons the Opposition were weak, divided and virtually leaderless, yet the Government often struggled for slim majorities on important questions. Canning was incensed that he could not adequately protect his friend Frere from the Opposition's attacks and complained that "it is impossible to convey to you an idea of the looseness of our support in Parliament ... anything less suited to the times than the support which we receive in Parliament it is not possible to imagine".²

Canning contrasted the existing state of the Government with a rosy memory of the golden age of Pitt's dominance. Significantly he had never been a member of Pitt's Cabinet and so was free to exaggerate its determination and unity of purpose. He strongly felt that the times demanded a strong Government and conveniently ignored the fact that his discontent did more than anything else to weaken and disrupt Portland's administration. To be fair: Canning wanted a quick bold reshuffle, not the long drawn-out crisis that was the unexpected result of his actions. If his plans had been implemented the Government would certainly have been very different. Without the details of the changes he was proposing it is hard to say more, but one thing is clear: Canning's own power and status would have been enormously enhanced, not because of the individual changes he had made (Wellesley was a far more serious rival than Castlereagh) but simply because he had demonstrated that he had the power to reconstruct the Cabinet. He would have broken the basic assumption on which Portland's Ministry was based: that no one Minister had the power to dominate the others. It is not clear that this was Canning's conscious intention for even his intimate letters speak only of his

¹ Canning to Villiers 'Private and Confidential' 19th May 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 48.

² Canning to Frere 'Private and Confidential' 30th April 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

discontent with the status quo. But whether conscious or not his actions fall very little short of an attempt to seize power within the Government.

This was one reason why so many of his colleagues reacted with alarm and none really supported him (except of course Leveson Gower). Perceval, in particular, understood that the balance of forces within the Government was under threat, and that if Canning could force Castlereagh from office by threatening to resign, he might employ the same tactics again.¹ Even without this wider significance most of the other Ministers felt sympathy for Castlereagh and viewed Canning's methods with distaste. Canning was privately blamed for the concealment which he had not sought and which he repeatedly attacked. He was held accountable for all the confusion and unpleasantness which resulted from the secret negotiations. His colleagues continued to recognize that he contributed far more to the Government than Castlereagh, and they were prepared to sacrifice Castlereagh in order to keep him,² but they did not relish the choice or the sense of guilt which it brought, and for this too they blamed him. By the end of August 1809 Canning's colleagues were suspicious of his motives and tired of the trouble he had caused. His attempt to force a reconstruction of the Ministry had failed disastrously. Far from strengthening the Government it made it much weaker and at the same time his actions had destroyed the existing support for him within the Cabinet.

Ironically Canning's failure was primarily due to the weak leadership of the Duke of Portland. A strong leader would either have accepted Canning's resignation or quickly forced through the changes he sought. But then, the problem would not have arisen if Portland had been a strong leader. Canning failed to anticipate the procrastination and vacillation which prolonged the crisis for months.

¹ Perceval to Huskisson 'Private and Confidential' 21st August 1809 Perceval Papers 9/XIV/10.

² eg Liverpool to the King 11th July 1809 *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3919, p 310-312.

It was this extraordinary prolongation of the agony which did most of the damage to the Government and which created the greatest ill feeling. Portland, Camden and the King who all added to the delay and encouraged the concealment must thus share the responsibility with Canning the original instigator of the trouble.

The Portland Ministry was not inherently stable, but until the outbreak of the Peninsular War its internal tensions had been contained. It was the stresses and strains of the opportunities in Spain and Portugal operating on Canning's intense nervous personality that brought these tensions to breaking point.

Chapter 5

The Military Campaigns of 1809

(April to August 1809)

On 9th April 1809, less than a week before Sir Arthur Wellesley sailed for Portugal, the Austrian army invaded Bavaria without a declaration of war. The Hapsburgs had been seriously alarmed by Napoleon's intervention in Spain and after some understandable hesitation decided that their best hope for survival was to attack Napoleon while a large part of his army was occupied in Spain. They hoped to encourage and exploit the stirrings of German nationalism and carry the war to Napoleon. It was a bold almost desperate strategy for despite the commitment to Spain and a dilution of quality since 1805, the French army remained larger and better than the Austrian. The Archduke Charles who commanded the Austrian army was a capable soldier who had made important reforms in the army, but he was intimidated by Napoleon's genius and lacked the confidence to exploit the opportunities which arose during the early stages of the campaign.

Napoleon had been aware of the Austrian preparations for war, but their sudden attack caught him partly by surprise. The problem was compounded by a serious error by Berthier and for a few days the French army was threatened with disaster. But then Napoleon arrived at the front and a combination of his manoeuvres, Davout's tenacity, and the fighting quality of the French soldiers restored the situation in a few days of hard fighting which culminated in the confused battle of Eckmühl (22nd April 1809). The Austrians were defeated but escaped to the north bank of the Danube where they rallied while Napoleon advanced on Vienna, which he captured in 13th May.

The rapid French advance destroyed the Austrian hopes of gaining the initiative and of a widespread rising in Germany. There were a few small outbreaks but the only serious problem for the French was an insurgency which arose in the Tyrol. Elsewhere the French remained effectively in control. Prussia stayed quiet

while the Russians occupied some Austrian territory in Poland - much to the annoyance of the pro-French Poles. But these were subsidiary operations and the war would be decided on the Danube.

In Vienna Napoleon was facing the difficulty of how to cross the great river and advance against the Archduke Charles. In 1805 Murat and Lannes had captured a vital bridge through a mixture of bravado and trickery, but that piece of good fortune could not be repeated. On 18th May Napoleon established an advanced position on the island of Lobau in the Danube downstream from Vienna. On the 20th the first French troops crossed to the north bank and occupied the villages of Aspern and Essling. Gradually their number increased although the flow of men was halted several times when the temporary bridge gave way. But the Archduke Charles was much closer than Napoleon had realized, and on the afternoon of 21st May he attacked the 24,000 French who had crossed the river with an army of 95,000 men. The Battle of Aspern-Essling lasted until the early hours of 23rd May and was one of the most desperate of all Napoleon's actions. Repeatedly the bridge which was the life-line of the French army broke and repeatedly it was repaired. The fighting centred on the villages and in particular the huge granary in Essling. This the French held, although their major attack on the centre of the Austrian line on the 22nd failed. Finally Napoleon ordered his army to withdraw to Lobau which they did during the night of 22nd/23rd. Each army had lost in excess of 20,000 casualties including the intrepid Marshal Lannes who was mortally wounded.

Aspern-Essling was the greatest military defeat which Napoleon had ever suffered and it sent shockwaves around Europe, but it did not gain the military initiative for the Austrians, nor did it induce the Prussians to enter the war. The war would still be decided on the Danube and Napoleon's secret enemies would wait for a much clearer sign of his demise before they ventured into open hostilities.

After Aspern-Essling both generals concentrated their efforts on collecting as many men as possible for the decisive battle which still had to be fought. But Napoleon's resources and skill were both greater than those of his opponent and

when the day came he had an army of approximately 188,000 men compared to an Austrian army of 155,000 men.¹ Napoleon's array included his troops from Italy, but the Austrian forces under the Archduke John failed to reach the battlefield in time.

Napoleon made meticulous preparations for his second attempt to cross the Danube paying particular attention to the vital bridges. The crossing began on the night of 4th/5th July still from Lobau but at a point slightly further downstream. The Battle of Wagram lasted two days (5th-6th July) with many changes of fortune. On the whole Napoleon found the opposition tougher than he had previously encountered while the large numbers of troops and their lower quality inhibited his finesse. In the end the Austrians were soundly defeated though not completely broken. Both armies lost nearly 40,000 casualties and prisoners.²

The French army slowly advanced after the Austrians but there was no vigorous pursuit. A few days later there was a combat at Znaim (10th-11th July) which was followed by an armistice (12th July) and peace negotiations which lasted until October. Napoleon had defeated the Austrians but less decisively and with more trouble than ever before.

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The British Government were able to do little to directly assist the Austrian war effort. Austrian approaches in late 1808 and early 1809 came at a time when British attention was focussed on the Peninsula and when her supplies of bullion and equipment were extremely low due to the generous aid she had given Spain.

¹ David Chandler *Dictionary of the Napoleonic Wars* (London, Arms and Armour, 1979) p 471; F.L. Petre *Napoleon and the Archduke Charles* (London, Arms and Armour, 1976 - 1st published in 1909) p 351-2 gives slightly lower figures : nearly 180,000 French and 142,000 Austrians.

² David Chandler *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York, Macmillan, 1974) p 729 puts the French loss at 32,500 casualties and 7,000 prisoners compared to an Austrian loss of over 37,000 men including prisoners.

The Austrians initially sought a subsidy of £7.5 million per annum which was totally beyond Britain's means. In April the British proposed that the Austrians raise £3m-£4 million by the sale of British 5 per cent Exchequer Bills at Vienna, but the Austrian treasury was unable to cope with such an innovation at a time of crisis. In the end they received a mere £1.2 million subsidy, half of which was in specie.¹ The most remarkable thing about the Anglo-Austrian negotiations was the coolness of the British Government. It would seem that the Ministers were disillusioned by Austria's many previous defeats, but it is nonetheless surprising that they did not do more to encourage such a powerful potential ally.

The British were no more helpful on the issue of military co-operation. There could be no question of sending British troops to fight on the Danube, but the Austrians wanted a British expedition to north Germany to aid the widespread risings they anticipated.² This proved impossible as the shortage of specie prohibited an extended campaign on the Continent.³

The specie shortage also prevented any considerable increase in the British presence in the Peninsula which in any case was still regarded as a limited commitment. Instead the Ministers turned to the one type of operation which they could afford and which might provide a diversion for the Austrians - a *coup de main* against one of Napoleon's naval bases. Copenhagen was only one of a long series of actual and projected expeditions designed to destroy Napoleon's ships in their harbours. In 1808 Spencer had been ordered to attack Spanish squadrons, and Castlereagh had considered an expedition against Boulogne.⁴ The French

1 Sherwig *Guineas and Gunpowder* p 208-212 esp. p 212. The shortage of specie in Britain was so great that the Government had to resort to the Spaniards - who had received large shipments of specie early in the year from South America - in order to aid the Austrians. Canning to Frere, 10th April 1809, P.R.O. F.O. 72/71 f 78-81.

2 Bond, *The Grand Expedition* p 7-8.

3 Castlereagh to Charles Stewart, 31st July 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/Q2/2 p 70-5 "I consider, and have all along considered, a Campaign on the Continent as out of the Question."

4 see above Chapter 2 p 35-7, and Chapter 3 p 105.

shipbuilding programme in the Scheldt had always caused the British Government particular concern and they had frequently considered attacks against it. As recently as March 1809 the Cabinet had wanted to strike a lightning blow at the French ships in Flushing but had been prevented from doing so because the army had yet to recover from Coruña.¹ Castlereagh accepted this set-back but did not give up his scheme, and on 21st June 1809 the Cabinet approved his plans for an expedition to the Scheldt.²

During the spring of 1809 Castlereagh's plans had grown more ambitious and the objectives of the expedition now included the destruction of all the French arsenals and ships at Flushing, Terneuse, and Antwerp, and if possible making the Scheldt impassable to warships.³ There was also some hope that the expedition might inspire nationalist risings in the Netherlands as well as acting as a diversion for the Austrians.

Because it was intended as a limited operation close to England, troops were drawn from the home garrison. The result was probably the largest expedition ever to have sailed from Britain at that time, with over 40,000 troops in more than 600 ships.⁴ Without consulting anyone except the Duke of Portland, Castlereagh offered this splendid command to Chatham,⁵ probably to compensate him for missing out on the Spanish command the year before. While there may have been

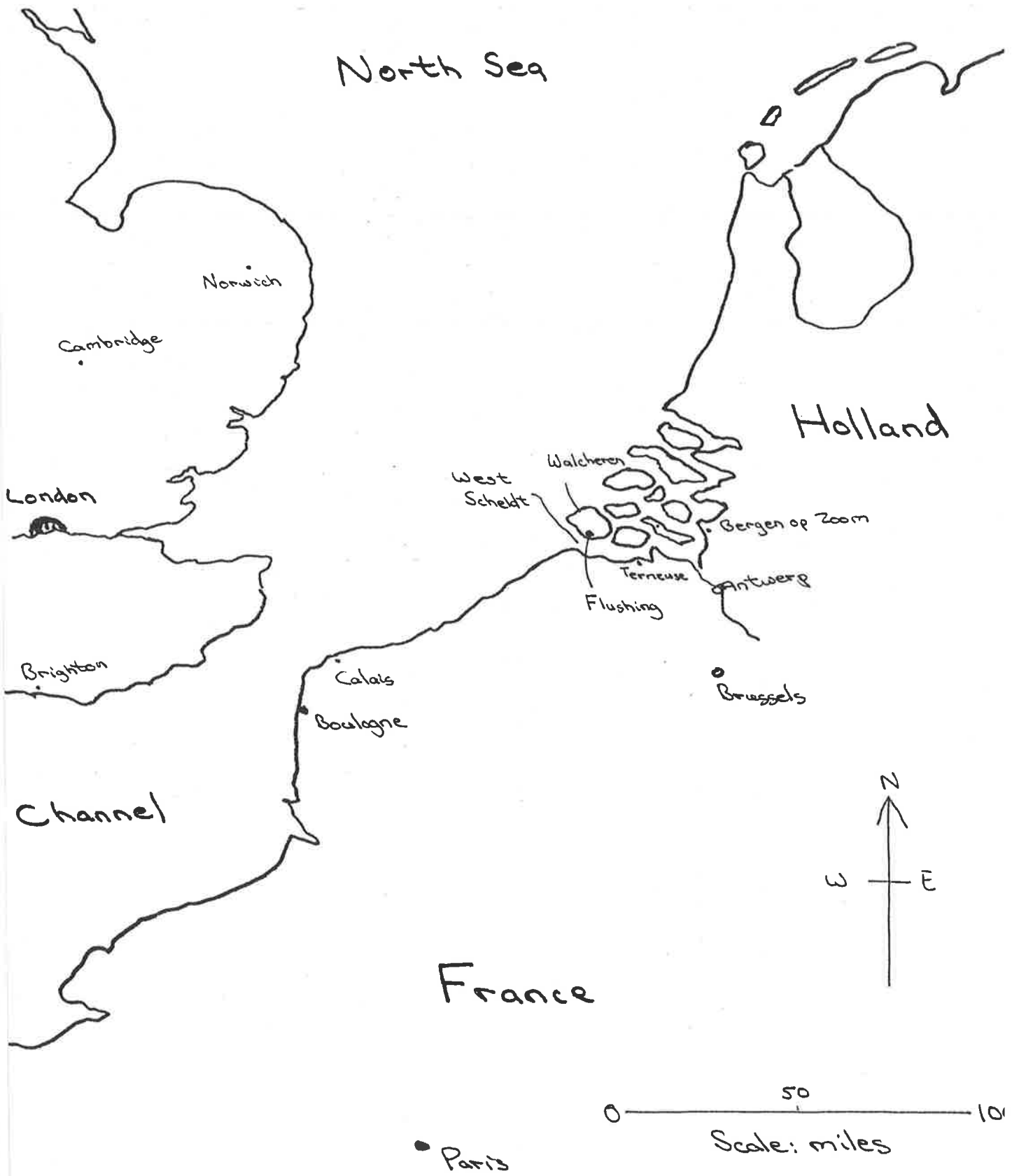
¹ Bond *The Grand Expedition* p 11-12. Canning had been a keen advocate of such an attack despite his preoccupation with Portugal. See his letters to Castlereagh 'Private and Secret', 21st March 1809, and to Portland 'Private and Secret', 21st March 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 34 and 33A respectively.

² Castlereagh to the King, 21st June 1809, *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3910, p 302-303.

³ George III's instructions to Chatham, 16th May 1809, Chatham Papers P.R.O. 30/8/260 f 12-14.

⁴ Bond *The Grand Expedition* p 27, 171, 172.

⁵ Castlereagh to Chatham, 10th (?) May 1809, Chatham Papers P.R.O. 30/8/366 f 58-9. This letter must have been written before 15th May 1809 when Castlereagh formally recommended Chatham's appointment to the King. *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3905, p 298. Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 47-8 is therefore wrong to date it 18th May although, at first glance, that does appear to be the date on the letter.



The Walcheren Expedition, July to December 1809.

sound personal and political reasons for the choice, it was clearly unfortunate that a man noted for his dilatoriness should command an expedition whose success depended upon its celerity.

There were enormous problems in mounting an expedition on such a scale and it did not sail until 28th July by which time it had lost its value as a diversion due to the Austrian defeat at Wagram and the resulting armistice. Castlereagh recognized this and privately admitted that it might not even capture Antwerp but explained that,

in truth we had hardly any option, for we had neither funds for a Campaign in the North of Germany, nor any material Extension of our Effort in Spain. We could only look, at the present moment, to a Coup de Main, and in no Quarter could such an effort be made to comprehend so many objects.¹

But even as a *coup de main* the expedition proved a failure. A combination of bad weather, bad luck, and bad management destroyed its chances of success in the first few days. The vital attack on Cadsand was bungled and critical days were wasted in a regular siege of Flushing. By the time that the town fell the French had gathered so many troops at Antwerp that further progress was impossible. Logically the expedition should have been promptly withdrawn but procrastination was in vogue in 1809 and the British did not finally withdraw from Walcheren until December by which time at least 4,000 British soldiers had died and hundreds more had been incapacitated by Walcheren fever.² A disappointing result was thus transformed into a disaster.

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¹ Castlereagh to Stewart, 31st July 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/Q2/2 p 70-5 (quote on p 70-1).

² Bond *The Grand Expedition* p 207 n 58. Gray *Perceval* p 284n says that 5060 died; 440 were discharged and 609 deserted.

Meanwhile, in the Peninsula, the strategic position had changed little in the two months following Napoleon's departure from Spain in late January. Before he left, the Emperor had dictated a wildly over-optimistic plan which he believed would complete the conquest of the Peninsula. Marshal Ney with his weak corps was to subdue all the wilds and mountain fastnesses of Galicia and at the same time support Soult who was ordered to over-run Portugal on an impossibly ambitious timetable. Napoleon did not expect any opposition from the British troops in Lisbon but even if this assumption had proved correct, Soult could not have overcome the difficulties of weather, terrain and incessant local resistance to reach Oporto by 1st February and Lisbon by the 10th.¹ On capturing Lisbon Soult was to lend one of his divisions to Marshal Victor, who was to invade Andalusia by an unexpected route beginning at Badajoz, thus securing surprise. The last Spanish provinces on the east coast were to be secured by the two corps commanded by Mortier and Junot when they had captured Saragossa.²

In the event the plan failed almost completely: Ney could not control Galicia let alone assist his colleague. Soult overcame immense difficulties to begin his invasion of Portugal on 9th March and succeeded in capturing Oporto on the 29th but could go no further. Without Soult's support Victor could not begin his invasion of Andalusia, and the conquest of Valencia had to be postponed when Napoleon withdrew Mortier's strong corps from active operations after Saragossa had fallen, in case he needed it in Germany.³

But even though the French plan had been reduced to shambles their position was still strong. They had crushed a foolish Spanish counter-attack at Ucles in January and gained an important victory at Valls in Catalonia on 25th

¹ These dates were later changed to 5th and 16th February respectively but remained impossible. Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 111.

² *Oman Peninsular War* II, p 16-18.

³ *Oman Peninsular War* II p 410. Mortier's corps only withdrew as far as Burgos and then returned to Valladolid.

February. In central Spain their dominance was increased by the victory of Ciudad Real in La Mancha on 27th March and the overwhelming triumph at Medellin in Estremadura two days later. These battles were the result of Spanish offensives and they did not portend an imminent French attack on Portugal from the east, or an attack on Andalusia. But the British did not know this and when the news arrived in London it caused great concern, not least to Sir Arthur Wellesley who was about to sail for Portugal.

Wellesley had been given his instructions on 2nd April and had been told that although "The defence of Portugal ... [was] the first and immediate object" of his command, he could use his discretion in determining how best he could cooperate with the Spaniards as well as the Portuguese.¹ On the following day however these orders were amended, prohibiting Wellesley from embarking on any campaign in Spain without "the express authority of your Government".² This was explicitly done as retaliation for the Spanish refusal to admit British troops into Cadiz and Wellesley was instructed that if Frere announced that the Spanish Government had changed their mind on this point, he should immediately detach an adequate force for its defence. This provision clearly demonstrates both the deterioration of Britain's relations with Spain, and the continuing importance which the Government placed on the preservation of Cadiz. It also shows a surprising lack of consideration for the problems facing Wellesley, for he now had to constantly bear in mind the possibility that his small army might be suddenly reduced by some thousands of men, irrespective of the circumstances facing it at the time. Castlereagh's promise to replace the men from home was irrelevant - it would

1 Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 2nd April 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 46-7.

2 Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 3rd April 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 49-50. These orders could be interpreted to allow operations in Spanish provinces adjacent to the Portuguese frontier but no more. Canning probably did not disagree with this policy for he had written to Frere "I am very well contented to send no Armies to Spain - to accumulate our force in Portugal - and watch events". Canning to Frere "Private and Confidential" 1st March 1809 Canning Papers Bundle 45.

be weeks before they could arrive in which time incalculable damage might have been done. Judging from his future behaviour, one can confidently assert that in a crisis Wellesley would not have hesitated in disobeying even an unequivocal order such as this, but the Cabinet was wrong to place him in a situation where he might be forced to do so. Cadiz was immensely important, but it was not more important than the safety of Wellesley's army and on this point the Ministers should have trusted their favourite general with more discretion.

The news of Soult's advance on Oporto and Cuesta's defeat at Medellin arrived just as Wellesley was preparing to sail. Edward Cooke, one of Castlereagh's two under-secretaries sent an urgent message to Wellesley not to sail until he received supplementary orders.¹ Wellesley himself was most pessimistic, writing to Charles Stewart "I think it almost certain that affairs in Portugal will be decided before I shall arrive there".² Wellesley wrote a memorandum asking for instructions in the event of the British army having been forced to embark before he arrived, and suggesting that he would not replace Cradock if he was engaged in active operations or had already driven back the French attack.³ Castlereagh was most unhappy with this last idea, believing that it placed Cradock in the intolerable position of continuing in his command purely by Wellesley's forbearance, but he left the final decision up to Wellesley.⁴ If the army were forced to withdraw from Portugal, Castlereagh ordered that Wellesley try to gain permission to land at Cadiz,

¹ Edward Cooke to Charles Stewart, 9th April 1809, enclosed in Stewart to Sir A. Wellesley, 10th April 1809, Wellington Papers Bundle 1/254. Cooke's message was sent by "telegraph" i.e. the Admiralty's semaphore.

² Sir A. Wellesley to Charles Stewart, 10th April 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/3044.

³ Memorandum by Sir Arthur Wellesley, 11th April 1809, in *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 221-222.

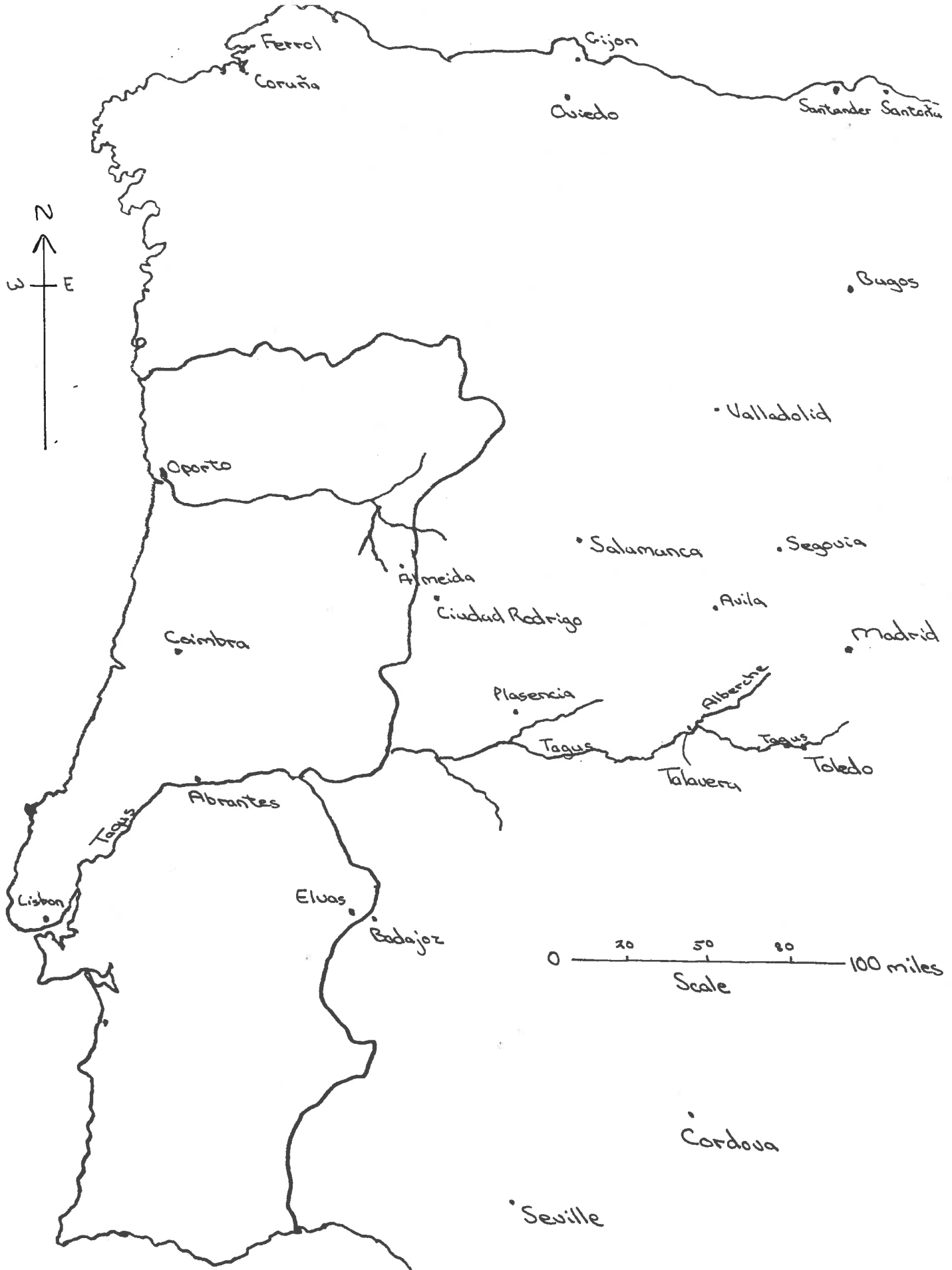
⁴ Castlereagh to Charles Stewart, 13th March [sic: 13th April] 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/3012 Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 11th April 1809, and 13th April 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 56-7; 58-9.

and that if this were refused he was to reinforce the garrison of Gibraltar by 8,000 men and bring the remainder of his force home.¹

Wellesley finally sailed on 15th April and arrived in Lisbon a week later, where he was relieved to find that neither Soult nor Victor was advancing against him. He quickly decided to seize the initiative and go onto the attack, choosing Soult as his first target, because an attack on Victor would need Spanish co-operation and would take longer to prepare. He took command of the army and made the necessary preparations for an advance. He expected that Soult would retreat without offering battle, so he endeavoured to keep the advance secret, but Soult got wind of it and was able to pull his advanced units back to Oporto. Wellesley reached the Douro opposite Oporto on 12th May but the French had broken the bridge and expected to hold the line of the river for several days in order to make a safe and leisurely retreat into Spain. The Douro was a formidable obstacle but its strength made the French over-confident so that their guard above the town was slack. The chance discovery and retrieval of four wine barges gave Wellesley the opportunity he needed and he did not hesitate in seizing it. Using the wine barges small parties of British troops crossed the river and were ensconced in the partly built Bishop's seminary - a strong isolated building whose approaches could be covered by artillery fire from the British bank. By the time that the French realized what was afoot the British had enough troops across to successfully defend the Seminary. The French made several attacks but they had been caught off-guard and time was running against them. One error compounded another when, in order to make another attack on the British position, they withdrew their garrison from the town. At this, many of the Portuguese inhabitants crossed to the British bank in numerous small boats which quickly returned filled with British soldiers. It was all over with the French and they were forced to flee in disorder.² Wellesley's pursuit

¹ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 11th April 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 55-56.

² *Oman Peninsular War* p 332-342. Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 158-163.



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could not cut them off but it forced them from the favoured line of retreat onto rough tracks which destroyed their equipment and took a high toll of the soldiers. After a week Wellesley gave up - it was not in his interests to become involved in a difficult campaign in Galicia and he had achieved his primary objective of removing the threat to Portugal. Unaware as yet of the resilience of French troops, he expected that it would be many weeks before Soult's corps could again take the field.¹ Although this proved rather too optimistic, the Oporto Campaign was still a remarkable achievement both for its speed and for the economy and boldness with which the victory was gained.

The news of Oporto got a mixed reception in England. Some, like Lord Londonderry (Castlereagh's father) believed that it presaged the deliverance of the whole Peninsula.² Castlereagh himself was more realistic, writing to Stewart (who was serving in the army) that "Your movements and Exploits have animated and rejoiced us - we hope for yet further Successes, but I have kept down expectations as much as possible."³ The Opposition's expectations of course were already quite low enough - as always they predicted disaster and minimized victories achieved, Grey writing that "Wellesley's success ... appears to have been nothing more than an affair of a rear-guard, and is ridiculously magnified".⁴ Even the professional soldiers at the Horse Guards criticized Wellesley for not surrounding Soult - as indeed did Cuesta.⁵ These attacks naturally irritated Wellesley, who asked quite reasonably "what right had they to expect that I should do so much?"⁶ Nonetheless

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Villiers, 17th May 1809, *W.D.* III p 238-9. Soult is "in a state so crippled that he can do no harm, and he may be destroyed by Romana".

² Londonderry to Stewart 25th May 1809 P.R.O.N.I. D3030/Q2/2 p 67-9.

³ Castlereagh to Stewart 26th May 1809 P.R.O.N.I. D3030/Q2/2 p 67.

⁴ Grey to Grenville, 25th May 1809, *H.M.C. Dropmore* vol. IX, p 308.

⁵ on Horse Guards: Brownrigg to Murray 'Private', 16th June 1809, P.R.O. WO 133/13 p 116-7; on Cuesta: Cuesta to Cornel, 3rd May 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. XV, Part A, p 16-7: Cuesta was criticizing Wellesley's plans not the final achievement.

⁶ Sir A. Wellesley to W. Wellesley-Pole, Castello Branco, 1st July 1809, 'Some Letters of the Duke of Wellington to his brother William Wellesley-Pole' edited by Sir Charles Webster, *Camden Miscellany* 3rd Series, vol. LXXIX 1948, no. 9, p 13-5.

the general reaction - particularly among the supporters of the Government - was appreciative, and Wellesley's reputation was certainly enhanced.

A week before he reached Oporto and only a fortnight after he arrived in Portugal, Wellesley had written to Castlereagh asking that his instructions be altered so that he could continue operations against the French even when he had driven them far from the Portuguese frontier.¹ Indirect support for this request came from Frere's dispatches in which he urged that the British army play a greater role in Spain notwithstanding the continuing Spanish refusal to make any concessions over Cadiz.²

The Cabinet was clearly reluctant to give its approval to what amounted to a complete change in the role of their army in the Peninsula. They still did not trust the Spaniards and did not wish to venture their army in the perils of an extended campaign where the support of an unreliable ally would be essential.³ On the other hand they trusted Wellesley as they trusted no other general. His ability was widely recognized in the Cabinet not least by Canning who wrote to Frere that "In Wellesley ... you will find everything that you can wish - frankness - temper - honesty - quickness - comprehensiveness - and military Ability - not only eminent beyond any other military Commander that could be chosen - but perhaps possessed by him alone, of all our Commanders, in a degree that qualifies for great undertakings."⁴ But it was not just Canning who approved of Wellesley - within the cabinet he was a general favourite as well as a favourite General.

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 7th May 1809, *W.D.III* p 219-220. The request related to operations against Victor not Soult.

² Frere to Canning, 25th April 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Part A, no. 2, p 5-7.

³ "there is a fixed determination not to hazard a British Army (the British Army) again in Spain on anything like the same terms as before". Canning to Frere, 'Private', 19th April 1809, Canning Papers, Bundle 45.

⁴ Canning to Frere, 'Private', 19th April 1809, Canning Papers, Bundle 45.

Nonetheless it was probably only the news of Oporto which decided the question in Wellesley's favour and reluctance breathes through every word of the Cabinet's permission, which allowed him

"to extend your operations in Spain beyond the provinces immediately adjacent to the Portuguese frontier, provided you shall be of opinion that your doing so is material in a military point of view, to the success of your operations, and not inconsistent with the safety of Portugal."¹

It is worth noting that the Cabinet thus prohibited him for extending his operations into Spain except for military reasons i.e. they rejected Frere's arguments which were based on internal Spanish politics. They also made it crystal clear that if Wellesley chose to launch an extended campaign in Spain, the decision and the responsibility were his - they merely granted him, at his request, the discretion to do so if he thought it best.

But although the Cabinet gave their consent reluctantly they did not hesitate to support Wellesley with as many men as they could. Already the elite Light Brigade had been ordered to Portugal although it was detained for many weeks, first by the effects of the Coruña Campaign, and then by contrary winds.² At the same time as they gave Wellesley permission to extend his operations into Spain the Ministers also ordered that a further 5,000 men be sent out to him. This reinforcement would, they hoped, secure him against any sudden disaster, and so permit the return of some of the large and expensive fleet of transports in the Tagus - ships that were needed for the Walcheren expedition.³

The news of these reinforcements was welcomed in Portugal. Wellesley had felt constrained by the circumstances in which he got the command not to pester

¹ Castlereagh to Sir Arthur Wellesley, 25th May 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 71.

² Castlereagh to Sir D. Dundas, 28th April 1809; Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 13th May 1809; Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 11th June 1809. *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 60-1; 63-4; 82-4. Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 200. It reached the Tagus at the end of June and joined the army, after a famous forced march, on 29th July - the morning after Talavera.

³ Castlereagh to the King, 25th May 1809, and reply (26th May) *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3887., p 284-5.

Castlereagh with demands for more troops.¹ Villiers was not under any such restraint and he had pestered Canning with a vengeance.² This was most unfortunate for relations between Canning and Castlereagh were now severely strained, and in any case Canning felt that he deserved some credit from Villiers for what he had already done for Portugal, rather than simply more demands.³

The Government also did its best to find specie to send to Portugal, but it was only with a great effort that they could gather £230,000 in "dollars, doubloons and Portugal gold" and despatch it in early June.⁴ This arrived in Lisbon on 15th June and did not reach the army, which was waiting for it at Abrantes until 25th June. By this time Wellesley was almost frantic with impatience. As early as 5th May he had written to Huskisson (the Secretary to the Treasury) explaining the dire financial position of the army and requesting that £100,000 in specie be sent immediately.⁵ As time passed the problem grew worse and Wellesley was forced to "request" a loan of £10,000 from the merchants of Oporto.⁶ The army could not be paid and the troops began plundering the countryside.⁷ After his pursuit of Soult Wellesley brought the army down to Abrantes but he did not dare begin his advance into Spain until at least some money arrived and discipline was restored.

1 Villiers to Sir A. Wellesley, 11th May 1809, Wellington Papers 1/259: "Though I feel the delicacy of yr situation, from what you told me, yet I am sorry you do not press for immediate reinforcements."

2 eg Villiers to Canning, 15th May 1809, Wellington Papers 1/260.

3 Canning to Villiers, 'Private and Confidential', 19th May 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 48; Canning to Bagot, 20th May 1809, Bagot *George Canning and His Friends* vol. 1, p 306; Villiers to Canning, 'Private', 5th June 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 48.

4 Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 11th July 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 95-6. Wellesley also received £100,000 from Cadiz : see Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 196.

5 Sir A. Wellesley to Huskisson, 5th May 1809, *W.D. III* p 212-3.

6 This led to protests: for Wellesley's version of the affair see Sir A. Wellesley to Villiers, 1st June 1809, *W.D. III* p 268-9.

7 Sir A. Wellesley to Villiers, 31st May 1809; Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 17th June 1809, *W.D. III* p 262-3; 302-4.

Wellesley's temper was not improved by the wait at Abrantes. Even before arriving there he had written to Huskisson that the financial situation was worse than ever and that £300,000 in specie was now needed adding "In short, we must have money from England, if we are to continue our operations in this country".¹ He repeated this request to Castlereagh along with one for 30,000 pairs of shoes, 1,500,000 lbs of biscuits, 3 million pounds of hay and the same quantity of oats.² (These supplies, whose purchase in England did not require specie, were immediately dispatched.)³ On the same day Wellesley wrote to Villiers that "We are terribly distressed for money. ... I suspect the Ministers in England are very indifferent to our operations in this country".⁴

This preposterous statement was not an isolated outburst, and it is an example of one of the least attractive sides of Wellesley's complex character. Whenever his plans were frustrated or thwarted, he lashed out without considering that those he was attacking might be just as concerned to overcome the obstacle as he was himself. He seldom showed much appreciation for the problems facing others particularly when they involved money. Thus on 11th June he seriously wrote to Castlereagh that the Government should send £200,000 in specie to Portugal each month for some months.⁵

Ten days later he wrote to Villiers that "The British government appear to me to have undertaken more in this country than they can manage; and I am concerned that I have it not in my power to make up for the deficiency of supplies which they have furnished for the service".⁶ This was an extraordinary claim from

1 Sir A. Wellesley to Huskisson, 30th May 1809, *W.D.III* p 261.

2 Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 31st May 1809, *W.D.III* p 265.

3 Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 13th June 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 84-5.

4 Sir A. Wellesley to Villiers, Coimbra, 31st May 1809, *W.D.III* p 262-3.

5 Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, Abrantes, 11th June 1809, *W.D.III* p 289.

6 Sir A. Wellesley to Villiers, Abrantes, 21st June 1809, *W.D.III* p 313-4.

a man who had long argued for the defence of Portugal, and who had only recently demanded that the commitment be increased to cover a campaign in Spain. It is not good enough simply to dismiss this letter as having been written in pique, for the criticism contains some truth. The defence of Portugal was not beyond Britain's means, but the campaign in Spain was to stretch the small available quantity of specie dangerously thin. Perhaps the Ministers should have vetoed the campaign because of this, but one may doubt whether Wellesley would have approved of such a decision.

Fortunately for Wellesley the Ministers in London did not take his complaints too seriously. They did all they could to supply him with specie and they ignored his wilder outbursts. Nonetheless it was dangerous as well as foolish for him to write that "It will be better for government, in every view of the subject, to relinquish their operations in Portugal and Spain, if the country cannot afford to carry them on".¹ He did not mean this, and there was always the danger that the letter could go astray or be used by a new government to justify withdrawing the British army from the Peninsula.

Despite his grumbles, Wellesley had high hopes for the coming campaign. Although the French force in the Peninsula was huge, it was poorly distributed and appeared vulnerable to a sudden attack. Of the seven French corps, the strongest was isolated in Catalonia, three including Soult's were in the north-west of the country, one was trying to hold down Aragon leaving only those of Victor and Sebastiani, together with King Joseph's small reserve to hold Madrid and central Spain. Wellesley hoped that by adding the British army to Cuesta's and gaining the support of Venegas in La Mancha he could force the French to either evacuate Madrid, or fight at a disadvantage. In either case, Wellesley was confident of forcing them back, at least to the line of the Ebro, and possibly beyond.²

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Huskisson, Cortiçada, 28th June 1809, *W.D.III* p 331-2.

² Sir A. Wellesley to Lt Col Carroll, 19th June 1809, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 289-290; Sir A. Wellesley to Lt Col Bourke, Abrantes, 21st June 1809, *W.D.III* p 310-11.

Ultimately the success of the campaign would depend on events in Germany, for if Napoleon triumphed over the Austrians, he would be able to pour reinforcements into the Peninsula and force the allies to retreat. Conversely, if Napoleon were in difficulties he would be forced to withdraw troops from Spain and the allies could hope to press on to the Pyrenees. In any case it made good sense to try to exploit Napoleon's distraction, for even the temporary capture of Madrid would bring considerable political advantages.

Wellesley's plan needed the co-operation of the Spanish armies and this inevitably involved him in Spanish politics - about which at this time he knew little. The Supreme Junta was far from united and many of its members did not trust the British. There was much tension between the Junta - particularly its more liberal members - and some of the Spanish generals who were suspected of plotting against it. A number of generals had already been removed from their commands for this and other reasons but Cuesta, whose antipathy and contempt for the Junta were well known, had retained his army despite leading it to defeat at Medellin.

In the second half of April 1809 the Junta approached Frere requesting that the British army might return to Spain.¹ Frere's instructions on this point were unambiguous - the British army would only return if a British garrison could be placed in a Spanish fortress, preferably Cadiz, on which it could retreat in the event of an emergency.² But Frere knew that the Junta needed the prospect of British military co-operation in order to prevent Cuesta resuming the offensive now that he had rallied his army. And Frere had become so deeply involved in domestic Spanish politics that he had forgotten that his first duty was to represent the views of his government even when he disagreed with them. He therefore agreed to write to Sir John Cradock and urge him "in the strongest terms ... to march in force

¹ Frere to Canning, 25th April 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Pt. A, no. 2, p 5-7.

² Canning to Frere, 19th April 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Part A, no. 2, p 2-3 and many earlier letters cited in Chapter 4.

against Soult, and having beaten him to proceed without delay with a respectable power to Elvas to settle the plan to be followed for the future".¹ Cuesta was sceptical - regarding the prospect of British assistance "as very remote" - but he did agree to remain on the defensive.²

Fortunately for Frere, Wellesley arrived the day after the letter to Cradock was written and quickly devised a plan very similar to that outlined in the letter. But he also argued - on purely military grounds - that Cuesta's army should be heavily reinforced - a view which did not find favour with Frere or Frere's friends on the Junta.³ Nor would Wellesley's sensible advice that Cuesta remain strictly on the defensive have endeared him to that General under the circumstances.⁴

After Wellesley's success at Oporto he began corresponding with Cuesta to devise a plan of campaign against Victor, who was occupying a dangerously advanced position. Disagreements immediately arose and on 13th June Wellesley's impatience found expression in a letter to Frere, "I can only say that the obstinacy of this old gentleman is throwing out of our hands the finest game that any armies ever had; and that we shall repent that we did not cut off Victor when we shall have to beat the French upon the Ebro".⁵ Luckily, before relations between the two generals could come to a complete break, Victor was forced to retreat to Talavera by a lack of food.⁶ The possibility of surrounding him was gone, but the line of advance for the two armies was clear.

¹ This is a quote from Cornel (the Minister for War in the Spanish Government) to Cuesta, 20th April 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, Pt A, p 9. Frere to Cradock, 21st April 1809, *ibid* p 7 is not in fact "in the strongest terms".

² translation of Cuesta to Cornel, 21st April 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Pt. A, p 10-11.

³ Frere to Canning, Seville, 8th May 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Pt. A, no. 3, p 12-3.

⁴ Sir A. Wellesley to Cuesta, Villa Franca, 29th April 1809, *W.D.III* p 197-8.

⁵ Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Abrantes, 13th June 1809, *W.D.III* p 294.

⁶ *Oman Peninsular War* II p 443-5 gives the reason for Victor's retreat, which greatly puzzled Wellesley and Cuesta.

Wellesley was forced to wait at Abrantes until 27th June, but then the army marched well with the advanced guard crossing the frontier on 3rd July and reaching Plasencia on the 8th. It was on this march that Wellesley first began to receive reports that Soult's corps had withdrawn from Galicia and that Mortier's was at Valladolid. This was unfortunate but not necessarily serious, especially as Soult seemed to have no more threatening plan in mind than to invade northern Portugal and ravage the countryside. Nonetheless Wellesley was prudent enough to repeat his earlier requests to Cuesta to occupy the Puerto de Banos and the Puerto de Perales - the passes which lay on the left flank of the British advance.¹ It is perhaps a little surprising that Wellesley relied on Cuesta for this, given the Spanish General's evident reluctance, rather than calling up a brigade or two of Beresford's Portuguese, but he had yet to see Cuesta's army and he may have rated the Spanish troops much higher than Portuguese.

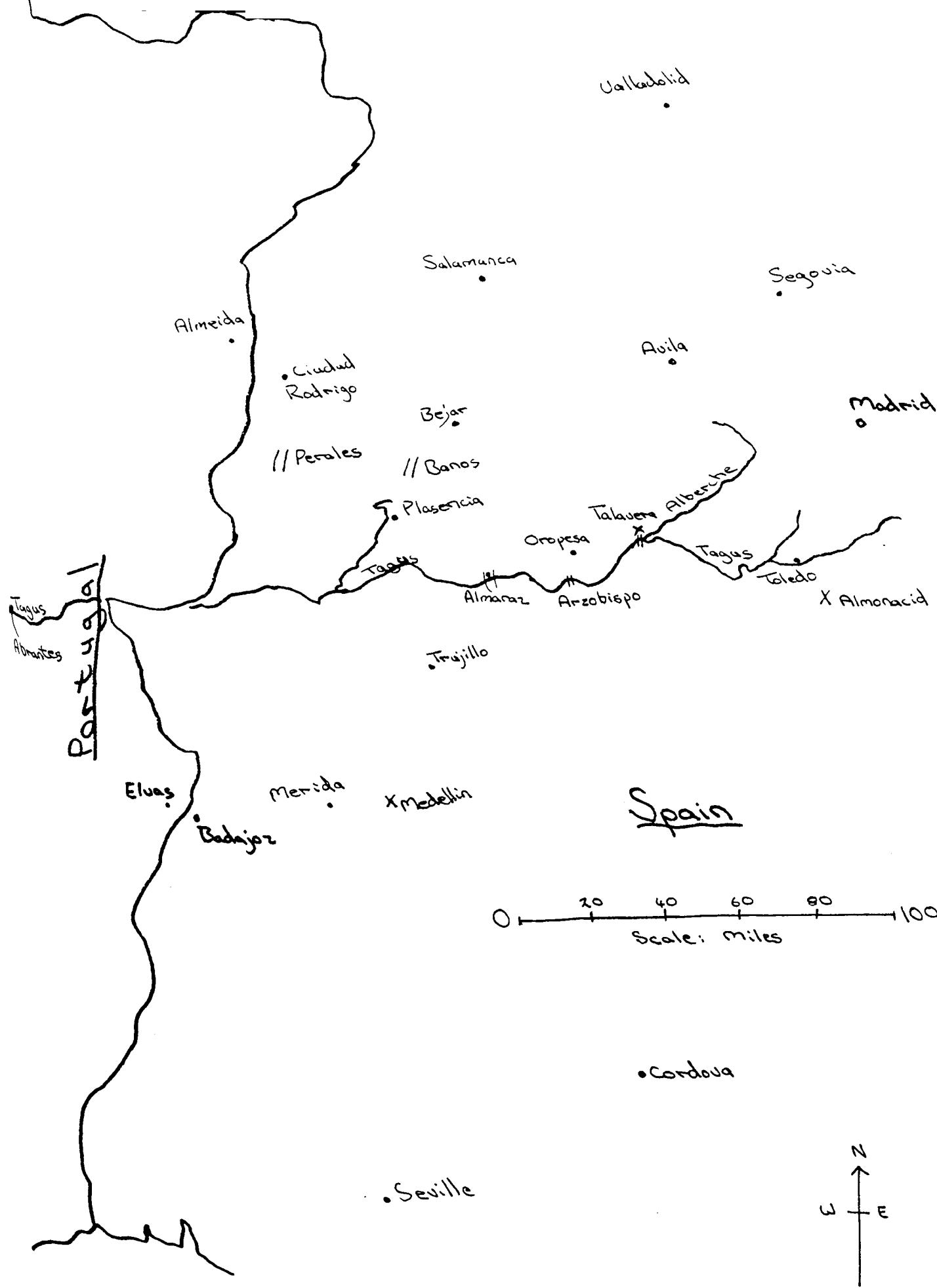
Wellesley and Cuesta met at the latter's headquarters on 11th July. According to Wellesley the meeting was cordial although the two generals had to talk through an interpreter.² They agreed that their armies should advance together against Victor while Venegas would contain Sebastiani in La Mancha. They would not begin their advance until 18th July in order to co-ordinate it with Venegas. Wellesley also put forward the idea that Cuesta should detach 10,000 men to march through Avila to Segovia where they could menace Madrid from the rear. Cuesta would not consider this and Wellesley did not press the point for fear of creating "a jealousy of me in the mind of Cuesta which does not appear now to exist".³ In fact the plan was one of Frere's and its object was to weaken Cuesta's army and hence reduce the danger of a coup.⁴ For some inexplicable reason Wellesley saw military

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Lt Col Roche, (liaison officer at Cuesta's headquarters), 4th July 1809 and 8th July 1809, *W.D.III* p 342; p 347-8.

² Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Plasencia, 13th July 1809, *W.D.III* p 353-4 "The General received me well, and was very attentive to me".

³ Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Plasencia, 13th July 1809, *W.D.III* p 353-4.

⁴ Frere to Sir A. Wellesley, 8th July 1809, *Parliamentary Papers 1810 Pt A*, p 34-5.



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virtue in the idea, but as even Fortescue admits, Cuesta was "perfectly right" to reject it "for if this weak corps had taken the direction put forward for it, it must inevitably have marched into the jaws of Mortier's superior force and must have been destroyed".¹

Frere had told Wellesley of the fear of Cuesta's intentions that was current in Seville and which had been increased by the recent defeat of General Blake - a soldier whom the Junta trusted.² Wellesley saw much at Cuesta's headquarters to justify this fear: "The general sentiment of the army ... appears to be contempt of the Junta and of the present form of government; great confidence in Cuesta, and a belief that he is too powerful for the Junta, and that he will overturn that government".³ Frere communicated this to Martín de Garay the sympathetic Secretary of the Junta and an opponent of Cuesta. Garay replied - perhaps with a touch of bravado - that Cuesta was unfit to command his army and that if Wellesley would make a formal complaint the Junta would sack him.⁴ There the matter rested for it was in no one's interests to precipitate a crisis in the middle of a campaign.

On another occasion about this time Garay asked Frere how the British army would react if Cuesta did attempt a coup, and Frere sensibly replied that he "could not imagine that any case could occur in which Sir A. Wellesley would think it right or I for him to shed a single drop of Spanish blood in any of their civil disputes".⁵ He went on to argue however that the British presence in itself contributed to stability and reduced the risk of either a popular revolution or a

1 Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 210.

2 Frere to Sir A. Wellesley, 8th July 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810 vol. XV, Pt. A, p 34-5.

3 Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Plasencia, 13th July 1809, *W.D.III* p 353-4.

4 Frere to Canning "Private, secret and confidential", 19th July 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

5 Frere to Canning "Private, secret and confidential", 19th July 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45: the same letter as above but describing a different meeting.

military takeover. Although this was probably correct it cannot have given Garay much comfort, but no other answer was possible.

After their meeting on the 11th relations between Cuesta and Wellesley should have been smooth, but within a few days a new problem had arisen. Wellesley had advanced into Spain with the expectation of finding plentiful supplies and obtaining transport locally. But Estremadura was a poor region at the best of times and it had suffered much from the marches and counter-marches of Victor and Cuesta. Neither food nor transport (mules, bullocks and especially carts) were there to be had.¹ But Wellesley refused to accept this, and believed instead that the Spaniards were deliberately keeping supplies from him. This was unfounded. Cuesta's troops were also going hungry,² although they probably did do better than the British whose commissaries were still very inexperienced and not really up to their jobs. Wellesley's reaction was extraordinary: on 16th July he wrote to Cuesta's Chief of Staff stating that if transport was not supplied he would do no more than help Cuesta drive Victor beyond the Alberche - the first stage of the operations agreed to on the 11th.³ Naturally he also complained to Frere who was pleased to find that the Supreme Junta had already taken steps to do what it could.⁴ Unfortunately these steps were to prove inadequate, not from any lack of good will, but from the intractability of the problem, which was to recur during the campaign.

But for the next few days Wellesley was as good as his word, co-operating whole-heartedly in the object of pushing Victor from his position at Talavera. As the British and Spanish advanced there were a few minor skirmishes, important only in that they revealed the British presence to the French, and gave the Spanish troops a chance to display their deficiencies. This was the first time Wellesley had

¹ *Oman Peninsular War* II p 484-5.

² Cuesta to Cornel, 18th July 1809, (translated) *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Pt A, p 40-41.

³ Sir A. Wellesley to Col. O'Donaju, Plasencia, 16th July 1809, *W.D.III* p 360.

⁴ Frere to Canning, 22nd July 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol. XV, Pt A, p 38.

seen Spanish troops in action, and in planning his campaign he had expected something better.¹ To be fair, it must be said that Cuesta's army had suffered a catastrophic defeat only a few months before, and was not well commanded - other Spanish armies under other leaders often performed much better.

On the afternoon of 22nd July the allies came up with Victor's army which was occupying a strong position on a range of heights behind the Alberche. The 21,000 British and 33,000 Spanish troops greatly outnumbered Victor's 22,000 men, and Wellesley feared that the French would retreat if they were not attacked. He therefore proposed a night march followed by an attack at dawn on the 23rd. Cuesta reluctantly agreed but failed to move his army. Wellesley was furious but the Spanish General refused to attack at all on the 23rd and would only agree to an attack at dawn on the 24th. This was accepted, but by then Victor had retreated.²

Cuesta's motives remain mysterious. There were good grounds for opposing Wellesley's initial plan however: a night march over unknown ground which was "thickly strewn with woods and olive plantations"³ with tired troops against an active alert enemy who knew the country was a recipe for disaster. Yet Cuesta's acceptance of a dawn attack on the 24th seems to show that this was not the reason why he rejected Wellesley's plan. Much the simplest and best solution would have been if both generals had agreed to an ordinary attack on the morning of the 23rd.

With Victor in full retreat Wellesley now announced that he would advance no further. He had fulfilled his obligations and he had not been provided with the transport and supplies he needed. The army had received no food for the last two days although it "is ridiculous to pretend that the country cannot supply our

1 *Oman Peninsular War* II p 481.

2 *Oman Peninsular War* II p 489-491.

3 so *Oman Peninsular War* II p 503 describes it in another context.

wants".¹ Wellesley was not blind to the consequences of his decision - he even exaggerated them in writing to Frere possibly with the hope of adding to the pressure on the Supreme Junta,

I am well aware of the important consequences which must attend the step which I shall take in withdrawing from Spain. It is certain that the people of England will never hear of another army entering Spain after they shall have received the accounts of the treatment we have met with; and it is equally certain that without the assistance, the example and the countenance of a British army, the Spanish armies, however brave will never effect their object."²

In fact he hoped for a better result as he wrote to Castlereagh, "I have great hopes, however, that before long I shall be supplied from Andalusia and La Mancha with the means which I require, and shall then resume the active operations which I have been compelled to relinquish".³

In the meantime Wellesley expected that Cuesta "will get himself into a scrape". "If the enemy discover that we are not with him, he will be beaten, or must retire", but "any movement by me to his assistance is quite out of the question".⁴ This remarkable statement is made all the more sinister by another letter from Wellesley to Frere on the same day.

I find Gen. Cuesta more and more impractical every day. It is impossible to do business with him, and very uncertain that any operation will succeed in which he has any concern. ... He has quarrelled with some of his principal officers; and I understand that all are dissatisfied with him. ...

Upon the whole, I understand that there is a material change in the sentiments of the army respecting him; and I am told (although I cannot say that I know it to be true) that if the government were now to deprive him of the command, and the army would allow that their order should be carried into execution. However I think that the government, before they take this step, ought to have some cause for removing him, the justice of which would be obvious to everybody, or they ought to be more certain

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Frere 24th July 1809 *W.D.III* p 366-7. There is a copy of this letter in B.L. Add. Ms 37,286 f118-121.

² Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Talavera, 24th July 1809, *W.D.III* p 366-7.

³ Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, Talavera, 24th July 1809, *W.D. III* p 368-9.

⁴ Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Talavera, 24th July 1809, *W.D. III* p 366-7.

that their order would not be resisted by the army than I have it in my power to make them.¹

Reading this letter it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Wellesley was deliberately abandoning Cuesta in the expectation that he would be defeated, and then removed from his command. The logistical problems facing Wellesley were genuinely serious, but halting his army in the exhausted country around Talavera was a strange way of dealing with them. His whole conduct in the affair was extraordinary. To withdraw his army in the middle of a promising campaign was bad enough, but at the same time to attempt to subvert the position of his Spanish counterpart is scarcely credible. It is interesting to consider Wellesley's reaction if Cuesta had suddenly withdrawn his army while at the same time conspiring with the Whigs in London to have Wellesley sacked. That Wellesley was a military genius and Cuesta a bumbling fool is true, and to some extent was known at the time, but is this in itself a sufficient excuse? Compared to Wellesley's behaviour Cuesta appears a champion of harmony and goodwill between the allies rather than the surly, suspicious old man that he was!

With Victor in full retreat and Wellesley sulking in his tent, Cuesta had no hesitation in resuming the advance. Unfortunately for him the strategic situation was rapidly changing. Venegas had failed to keep Sebastiani busy and the French were concentrating their forces. King Joseph left only a tiny garrison in Madrid - a mere 4,000 men - and marched with the remainder of his reserve (nearly 6,000 men) to join with Victor and Sebastiani. They met on 25th July at Bargas near Toledo, behind the Guadarama River, with a total force of some 46,000 men.²

When Cuesta discovered the size of the army facing him he hastily retreated and succeeded in drawing his army away without disaster, returning to the Alberche late on the 26th. He cannot have been pleased to be met by Wellesley who hastened up to give reams of interfering advice to his colleague (who was nearly 30 years his

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Talavera, 24th July 1809, *W.D. III* p 367-8. There is a copy of this letter in B.L. Add. Mss. 37,286 f116-7.

² *Oman Peninsular War II* p 499-500.

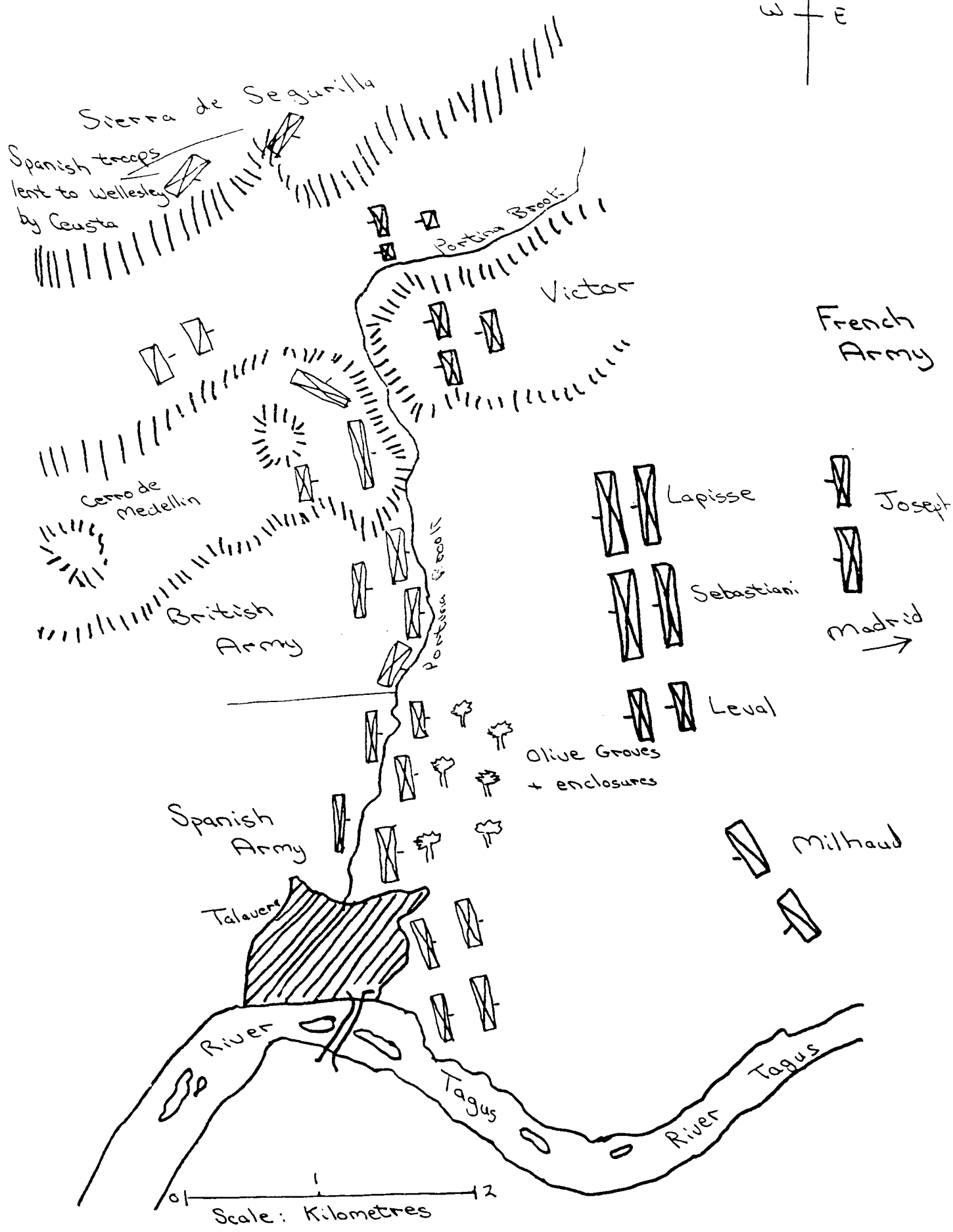
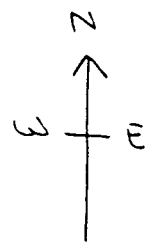
senior)¹ - advice which was made no more palatable for being correct. But it was the British, not the Spanish, who were caught off-guard as they withdrew on the 27th and lost 440 men before they could extricate themselves.

The position which Wellesley had chosen for the combined armies to defend ran from the town of Talavera (which lies on the Tagus) to a steep hill, the Cerro de Medellin some three kilometres away. The Spaniards occupied the town and right centre of the line - a strong position due to the many stone enclosures and other broken ground which protected it. The centre of the allied line, held by the British, was in open country with only the Portina brook to pose a slight obstacle to an attack - this was the only part of the position where the terrain did not give the defenders a substantial advantage. The left wing held the Cerro de Medellin in front of which the Portina flows in a deep channel. Beyond the hill was a narrow plain or shallow valley and then a further range of hills - there was to be some fighting on this plain although it was not part of the original allied line. Wellesley had shown his usual talent in choosing a strong position which was all the more creditable as the advantages of the ground were not immediately obvious.

It was about seven o'clock on the evening of the 27th that the leading elements of the French army arrived opposite the Allied position. Their appearance proved too much for a few raw units in the Spanish line who fled in a discreditable panic right under Wellesley's long nose - a sight he never forgot. Many units in the British army had yet to occupy their ground there being no expectation of a French attack before the morrow. But Marshal Victor was an impetuous hot-headed man who felt nothing but contempt for King Joseph 'the gentle Bonaparte',² his nominal commander. Victor saw that the Cerro de Medellin was the key to the field and determined to seize it in a night attack. For this he used the three regiments of

1 Cuesta was born in 1740; Wellesley in 1769.

2 as Owen Connelly, his biographer, has called him. Owen Connelly *The Gentle Bonaparte* (New York, Macmillan, 1968).



The Battle of Talavera 27th - 28th July 1809.

Ruffin's division from his own corps.¹ Two of the three regiments did not come seriously into action, but the third, the 9th Léger had considerable initial success owing to the confusion in the British line. They broke Low's brigade of the King's German Legion and captured the summit of the hill from which they were only driven after a hard fight by Richard Stewart's brigade. There was no more serious fighting that night, but sleep was hard to get, with constant alarms and much restlessness.

Despite his first failure Victor had not given up his idea of seizing the Cerro de Medellin with a partial attack. About 5 a.m. on the 28th his artillery opened a heavy fire on the British troops on the hill and soon after Ruffin's division was sent to make a second assault. On this occasion the 9th Léger, shaken by their heavy losses of a few hours before, did not come into action at all, but the 24th and 96th Regiments reached the top of the hill before being repulsed with nearly 1,200 casualties by Hill's division assisted by flanking fire from the south. The British counter-attack drove the French back over the Portina and went a little too far before the impetuous soldiers could be restrained by their officers. Still, on this occasion, little harm was done and the British were able to fall back to their original positions in reasonable order. In repelling this attack Hill's division had lost some 700-800 casualties including its commander who was wounded in the head. It had all taken less than an hour.

The French artillery continued to bombard the allied line until gradually their fire slackened so that by about 8.30 a.m. the battlefield would have been peaceful if it had not been for the cries of the wounded. In a short time an informal truce was established with soldiers from both armies amicably mixing at the Portina as they sought water and collected their wounded comrades.² During this lull - which lasted until early in the afternoon - Wellesley reinforced his left by sending two

¹ Each of these regiments fielded three battalions, while British regiments usually had only one battalion in the field: a French regiment was thus often as strong as a British brigade.

² Such truces became common between British and French in the Peninsula.

brigades of British cavalry to the plain north of the Cerro de Medellin, and the French commanders considered whether or not they should renew the attack. Joseph, Marshal Jourdan, (his military advisor) and Sebastiani were all inclined to stop the battle. They knew, as Wellesley and Cuesta did not, that Marshal Soult with the 50,000 men of his own, Ney's and Mortier's corps, was advancing from Salamanca through the Puerto de Banos onto Wellesley's lines of communication with Portugal. Provided they preserved their own army Joseph and his Generals hoped that they might catch the allies between two fires, or at least force them into a difficult and precipitate retreat through the rough country south of the Tagus. Victor, of course, was eager to continue the battle but it was not his arguments, but the arrival of two pieces of unwelcome news which changed Joseph's mind. The first was the news that Venegas had at last advanced and was threatening Madrid; the second was a letter from Soult revealing that he could not reach Plasencia until 3rd August at the earliest (although in fact he was to capture it on the 1st). If Joseph was to save Madrid, he would have to detach troops against Venegas before Soult's movement could affect Wellesley and Cuesta. But as the allies already substantially outnumbered the French any such detachment would be extremely dangerous unless the allies had first been defeated. This reasoning made a third and much more extensive attack appear the most sensible way out of an unpleasant dilemma.

Victor's two partial attacks had been made by a single division but the third attack was to involve most of the French army of which three full divisions were to come into close contact. Before the French made their great attack Wellesley requested some assistance from Cuesta who responded most generously, sending a division of infantry, one of cavalry and a battery of heavy field artillery (12 pounders). Wellesley used most of these troops to further reinforce his left flank, beyond the Cerro de Medellin. Ironically there was to be little serious fighting there: Victor sent Ruffin's division to turn the flank of the British position but the troops were shaken and exhausted and made little progress. A British counter-

attack by Anson's brigade of cavalry failed disastrously when they charged into a gully.

It was in the centre that the crisis of the battle was to occur, where the three French divisions of Leval, Lapisse and Sebastiani's own division nearly broke through. Leval's division (4,000 Germans and Poles) came into action first, just at the point where the British and Spanish armies met. The impetus of the attack was weakened by the rough terrain, and Campbell's brigade and the Spaniards had little difficulty in driving them off. Lapisse and Sebastiani were much stronger - their two divisions amounted to nearly 15,000 men, and they were attacking the British line at the one point where it was not favoured by the terrain. In their path stood Sherbrooke's division: two brigades of the King's German Legion; one of British line and the brigade of Guards - in all some 6,000 men. The British had been ordered to hold their fire until the French were within 50 yards, and they are supposed to have done so. Certainly the British fire and charge was completely successful and the first wave of the French attack was put to flight. But the counter-attack got out of hand and went too far so that the second French line had no difficulty rolling back the confused mass of Sherbrooke's division which had now lost all its cohesion. This was the crisis of the battle, for if this renewed French advance could not be halted the allied centre would be broken and they would have no alternative but to retreat. Wellesley was caught off guard, with only Mackenzie's brigade in reserve; to this he added the 48th which he brought down from the Cerro de Medellin - a mere four battalions, but they proved enough to check the French advance and enable Sherbrooke's men to rally. Slowly the tide turned in favour of the British, Lapisse was killed, and the French gave way.

The battle was over. It had cost the British some 5,400 men including 800 killed; the French had lost over 7,000 casualties of whom 761 were dead; while the Spanish losses were light, as only a few units in their army had come seriously

into action - although those had performed well.¹ On the night after the battle the French withdrew behind the Alberche, but there was no pursuit. The British army was too exhausted, the Spanish too poor at manoeuvring, and the powerful French cavalry remained intact.

In the days following Talavera the course of the campaign changed rapidly: at first Wellesley thought of capturing Madrid once his troops had had a couple of days rest,² but on the night of the 1st August news arrived that Soult had captured the pass of Banos, and on the following day it was learnt that he had captured Plasencia. Wellesley and Cuesta still thought that Soult had only about 20,000 men and Wellesley was surprised at his temerity in advancing so far. The allied commanders consulted and agreed that one should hold Talavera while the other marched to defeat Soult. Cuesta gave Wellesley the choice and he elected to tackle Soult in the belief that he could do so more quickly and certainly than the Spaniards.³

On 3rd August Wellesley received from Cuesta a captured letter which revealed Soult's true strength - although Wellesley at first refused to believe it.⁴ Cuesta decided that he must march to Wellesley's assistance in the hope that their combined armies could beat Soult and renew the campaign; he left a strong rear guard at Talavera, and caught up with the British at Oropesa late that day.⁵ Meanwhile it appeared that the bridge at Almaraz had been destroyed, and that if the allies were to retreat it must be over that at Arzobizpo. When they met on the 4th

¹ Casualty figures from Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 256-8. The higher proportion of British killed to wounded reflects the French superiority in artillery whose fire was more likely to kill than to wound. The account of the battle is largely based on Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 223-261 and Oman *Peninsular War* II p 507-558.

² Sir A. Wellesley to Beresford, Talavera, 29th July 1809, *W.D. III* p 379-380.

³ Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Oropesa, 3rd August 1809, *W.D. III* p 389-90 Wellesley expected to drive Soult off "probably without a contest".

⁴ Sir A. Wellesley to Col O'Donoju, Oropesa, 3rd August 1809, *W.D. III* p 390-1 "Depend upon it, you are mistaken in Soult's strength".

⁵ Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 268. I have followed Fortescue's careful reconstruction of the sequence of events on this day.

this, to Cuesta's consternation, was what Wellesley proposed to do. Cuesta vigorously protested, but Wellesley refused to listen and sent his army across the river that day. Cuesta waited until his rear guard had come up - fending off French probes - and crossed late on the 5th, the same day that Victor re-occupied Talavera and captured hundreds of British wounded 'abandoned' by Cuesta.

This was not quite the end of the campaign - on the 8th Soult forced the Tagus mauling Cuesta's rear guard in the process, and on the 11th Venegas was defeated, in a battle he should never have fought, at Almonacid. The French had the opportunity to extend their operations but for various reasons - including the excessive heat - chose not to. Both sides fell back on the congenial occupation of mutual recrimination. Cuesta was good at this, but did not enjoy it for long - on 12th August he was partially paralyzed and he resigned his command on the following day.

So ended the Talavera Campaign, which had promised so much and delivered so little. The glorious and hard fought victory was barren, for despite it the French were in a better strategic position in August than they had been in June, and Anglo-Spanish relations were certainly no better. Wellesley had had his campaign in Spain, and it was a costly failure. Of course, the failure was not due to him (it never was) but he could and should have anticipated some of the problems that arose during the campaign. In particular his confidence in the Spanish troops and in Spanish promises of logistical support are inexplicable given Moore's experiences. These problems led to a breakdown in relations to Cuesta long before Soult appeared from the north with a force far stronger than anyone could have predicted. It is in his initial decision to advance into Spain, and in his behaviour towards Cuesta, that Wellesley's conduct is most open to criticism. The first of these points remains a matter of judgement - balancing known risks against potential benefits. Even so staunch a defender of Wellesley as Fortescue believes that in this he "was somewhat impetuous and over-confident" and that "it is not

easy to acquit Wellesley of temerity for entering upon this campaign".¹ But this smacks of hindsight and takes too little account of how much Wellesley, with good reason, hoped that he could achieve. The campaign was certainly audacious but the potential benefits probably justified the risk. On the second issue - Wellesley's conduct of the campaign - it is hard to acquit Fortescue of special pleading when he lays almost all the blame on the Spaniards.² Wellesley's behaviour towards Cuesta was disloyal, and his tantrum over the lack of transport foolish and counter-productive. As the Supreme Junta pointed out, by halting he remained in a devastated and barren region while by advancing he would have entered the fertile country near Toledo.

The reaction in England to the campaign had little to do with such technical niceties - there opinion faithfully reflected party allegiance mixed with considerable indifference. Talavera was fought on the same day that the Walcheren expedition sailed, and attention in England was not concentrated on events in Spain. The failure of the Spaniards in 1808 largely prevented inflated expectations although Castlereagh's under secretary Edward Cooke fell victim to rumours of Napoleon's defeat in Germany - but by 20th June he took for granted that the British would capture Madrid and wrote to Charles Stewart "We expect to hear of you from the Escurial, and I desire you will send me some *Nudes* of the Titian and Guido Pencil - They say they are all locked up as offensive to Modesty".³ A week later he believed final victory over Napoleon was in sight: "I think you will have no more fighting in Spain - We trust to have 40,000 merry fellows [ie the Walcheren Expedition] in the Sea this day fortnight in order to come in for a share of the Pye - We never think now of Spain or Portugal".⁴

1 Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 286.

2 Fortescue *British Army* vol. 7, p 283-4.

3 Cooke to Stewart, 20th June 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/AA p 8.

4 Cooke to Stewart, 27th June 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/AA p 9.

But Cooke's exuberance was not typical either of the Ministers or of the public. Castlereagh indeed was inclined to worry over the result, although on 5th August (before the news of Talavera arrived) he wrote to his half-brother: "Every step Wellesley has taken since he landed appears to me to have been full of Judgement, and he has fulfill'd every wish I could have formed".¹ A fortnight later he rejected some criticism of Wellesley by Stewart, writing with feeling that Wellesley was very far from being too cautious - if anything he was over-bold.²

Castlereagh was not the only member of Cabinet to be relieved to see Wellesley extricate his army from a difficult position, as Canning's first reaction to Talavera shows "I never received so welcome news. The plot to run down Arthur Wellesley was thickening - But God be praised, this defeats it entirely - and he may, and shall now be all that he ought to be".³ What he ought to be apparently, and certainly what he became, was "Baron Douro of Wellesley, in the county of Somerset, and Viscount Wellington of Talavera, and of Wellington in the said county".⁴

This creation, and the handsome pension which went with it, naturally roused the ire of the radicals who had never had much love for any of the Wellesleys. The more conservative members of the Opposition also criticized the campaign, as usual predicting disaster.⁵ But perhaps the most heartfelt response of all came from the old, blind King who "deeply laments that success, however glorious, have been so dearly bought".⁶

¹ Castlereagh to Charles Stewart, 5th August 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/Q2/2 p 77.

² Castlereagh to Charles Stewart, 21st August 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/Q2/2 p 79.

³ Canning to Bagot, 14th August 1809, Bagot *George Canning and His Friends* vol. 1, p 318.

⁴ Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 26th August 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 117, the title was approved by the King on 19th August and gazetted on 4th September.

⁵ see e.g. Tom Grenville to Grenville, 15th August 1809, *HMC Dropmore* vol. IX, p 313- On the radicals see below Chapter 8 p 262-3.

⁶ The King to Portland, 16th August 1809, *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3934, p 324.

1809 was still far from over, but the strategic opportunity created by the Austrian War had gone, and the British Government had completely failed to exploit it. The sole achievement of lasting significance to come from the campaigns of 1809 was the consolidation of the British hold on Portugal - an achievement that was to be put to the test in 1810. Not only had the Government failed to exploit the opportunity - it had not even systematically tried to do so. The decision to defend Portugal was made in isolation, not as part of a wider strategic plan. The Ministers had then allowed themselves to be bullied into a campaign in Spain which they did not want and could not afford. The commitment to Portugal and Spain precluded the possibly more logical alternative of a campaign in north Germany, while they allocated far more resources to the Walcheren expedition than it was ever likely to justify. In short the Ministers lacked a coherent vision or an overall plan. The Cabinet was deeply divided and in desperate need of strong leadership. But the limitations of the British Government were not the cause of the allied failure in 1809. Napoleon's Empire was simply too strong for the combination of Austria, Spain, and Britain. Better management might have achieved greater immediate success e.g. the capture of Antwerp or Madrid, but nothing short of a crushing French defeat on the Danube could have brought the allies victory in 1809.

Chapter 6

Diplomacy, Strategic Debate, and the Collapse of the Portland Government (August to November 1809)

On the morning of 1st August 1809 Richard Marquess Wellesley, Britain's Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Spain, landed at Cadiz to an enthusiastic welcome. Bells tolled, "people lined the city's streets, and so that his first steps on Spanish soil might symbolically be over Spain's oppressor, a French flag was strategically placed at ...[his] point of disembarkation".¹ Napier describes this reception as "extravagant and unbecoming", while Severn suggests that the Spanish authorities were playing on Wellesley's well known vanity, but for the populace it was simply an appropriate occasion on which to celebrate the news of Talavera.²

The new ambassador was 49 years old, a friend of both Grenville and Canning, and an important figure in British politics. He had made his reputation as Governor-General of India (1797-1805) where he had demonstrated undoubted ability, energy and determination. Indeed his determined pursuit of aggressive expansionist policies against the orders of the East India Company had led to his recall in 1805. Back in England he had been dismayed by the rift between Pitt and Grenville which left him with strong ties on both sides of politics. Accusations of misconduct in India prevented him joining Grenville's Cabinet in 1806, and for the same reason he declined Portland's offer of the Foreign Office in 1807.³ It was not until June 1808 that this cloud was lifted, and April 1809 before Canning began to agitate for his inclusion in the ministry.

¹ John Kenneth Severn 'Richard Marquess Wellesley and the Conduct of Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy, 1809-1812' (Doctoral thesis submitted to Florida State University in 1975) p 91.

² Napier *War in the Peninsula* vol. 2 p 199; Severn 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 93.

³ Aspinall *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 4 introduction p xxix (for 1806), and p 537n (for 1807).

A number of factors lay behind Wellesley's mission to Spain. Officially it was in response to the mission of Don Pedro Cevallos who had reached London in February and whose extravagant proposals had so angered Canning.¹ Unofficially the Opposition's attacks on Frere in Parliament had made his recall necessary and it would reduce the damage to his reputation if he were replaced by a man of Wellesley's rank and eminence.² A brief and successful mission would enhance Wellesley's reputation and thus facilitate his introduction into the Cabinet, while the fact that he was Sir Arthur's brother made his appointment particularly appropriate. Finally Canning hoped that his mission might help to revive the flagging enthusiasm in England for the Spanish cause.³

The King granted his approval to Wellesley's appointment on 29th April⁴ but the new Ambassador did not sail from Portsmouth until 24th July. Writing in confidence to Frere, Canning attributed the first three weeks of this lengthy delay to "a discussion about a whore; whom he [Wellesley] was about to take with him, or to suffer to follow him - but whom, after all that had passed this year in relation to the Duke of York - it was quite impossible to allow him to take - though it was exceedingly disagreeable to be obliged to interfere with such an arrangement".⁵ Another month was lost to illness - Wellesley's first, and apparently severe, attack of gout. Yet this does not account for all of the three month delay and it is quite possible that Wellesley delayed his departure in the hope that the offer of a cabinet

¹ Canning to Frere, 1st May 1809, Montgomery Martin (ed.) *The Despatches and Correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley, K.G. During His Lordship's Mission to Spain ...* (London, John Murray, 1838), p1n-2n. (Hereafter cited as *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain.*) On Cevallos's mission see Sherwig *Guineas & Gunpowder* P 204, and Canning to Frere, Private, 19th April 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

² Canning to Frere, 'Private & Confidential', 30th April 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

³ Canning to Frere, 'Private & most Secret and Confidential', 20th July 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

⁴ The King to Canning, 29th April 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3868, p 266.

⁵ Canning to Frere, 'Private & Confidential most secret'. 20th July 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45.

post would make the journey to Spain unnecessary. Certainly Canning kept him informed of the progress of his attempts to reform the Ministry.¹

Wellesley's appointment was not greeted with universal approbation. The Spaniards regretted the loss of Frere and rightly feared that Wellesley would prove less sympathetic to their point of view.² In England Wellesley was strongly disliked by both the King and by radical Whigs such as Creevey.³ Even his brother Arthur disapproved: "I acknowledge that I do not consider Lord Wellesley's appointment a subject of congratulation to himself or to his friends. I suspect that the task which will devolve upon him will be a most arduous one; and that some time will elapse before he will be sufficiently *au courant des affaires* to be able to form a judgement of its extent".⁴ But this reaction was unusual with more typical reactions ranging from bored indifference, through faint approval to the enthusiasm of *The Times* which believed that Lord Wellesley's fortitude "is that which the necessities of the hour render indispensable".⁵

But *The Times* was wrong to believe that Wellesley's appointment signalled the adoption of a bold aggressive policy devoid of "cold or timid precaution" and half-measures.⁶ In fact the Ministers recognized that the fate of Spain was being

¹ [Memorandum by Lord Wellesley no date - early October 1809] printed in *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 4028, p 442-445.

² Severn 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 92-3.

³ On George III's dislike of Wellesley, see Canning to Mrs. Canning, 2nd August 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 23. In approving Wellesley's appointment the King had written that he "acquiesces" in it - a term which he reserved for decisions which he did not like. The King to Canning, 29th April 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3868, p 266. On Creevey's attitude: John Gore (ed.) *Creevey's Life and Times. A Further Selection from the Correspondence of Thomas Creevey* (London, John Murray, 1934) p 37; *The Creevey Papers* p 129-132 and p 118.

⁴ Sir A. Wellesley to Frere, Oporto, 22nd May 1809, *W.D.* III p 247. To his brother William Wellesley-Pole, Sir Arthur wrote, "I am sorry that Wellesley accepted the Office of Ambassador; he will not be able to do any good". 'Wellington's Letters to Wellesley-Pole', No. 9, p 13-15.

⁵ *The Times*, 1st May 1809, quoted in Severn, 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 82.

⁶ *The Times*, 1st May 1809, quoted in Severn, 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 82.

decided in Germany, and while "the diminished strength of the French armies in Spain, and the impossibility under which Buonaparte evidently must be of reinforcing them", provided a good opportunity for limited Spanish attacks, the moment of driving the French from the Peninsula "is certainly not yet arrived".¹ This opinion explains their reluctance to let Arthur Wellesley advance deep into Spain, and the caution of their instructions to Richard Wellesley.

Wellesley's main instructions were issued on 27th June and were supplemented on 18th and 20th July. They concentrated on outlining the terms of the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Alliance signed in London in January, but they also reflected the subsequent deterioration in relations. Thus Wellesley was to block any Spanish attempt to get Britain to fulfil its obligation of negotiating a formal treaty of succour with Spain, while at the same time attempting to overcome Spanish opposition to British trade with their American colonies.² Other grievances were also referred to - such as the Spanish refusal to take adequate precautions to evacuate their warships from harbours that were in danger of falling into French hands - as had happened at Ferrol in January.³ But the British Government seems to have been trying to improve relations and Wellesley was not instructed to press these points hard, while the resumption of British financial aid in June was more than a conciliatory gesture.⁴

On the sensitive subject of internal Spanish affairs, Canning warned Wellesley to avoid exciting jealousy by appearing eager to interfere. But he went on to make it plain that Wellesley should play an active role dispensing advice, "urging

¹ Extracts of Canning to Wellesley, 27th June 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain* Appendix F p 190-191. In fact Napoleon had scarcely reduced his army in Spain, withdrawing almost all the Imperial Guard, but little else.

² Extract of Canning to Wellesley, 27th June 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain* Appendix C p 186-188, and Canning to Wellesley, 27th June 1809, *ibid* Appendix D p 188-189.

³ Canning to Wellesley, 27th June 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain* Appendix B p 185-6.

⁴ Sherwig, *Guineas & Gunpowder*, p 219.

in the strongest manner such arrangements as may appear to you necessary for the effectual prosecution of the war on the part of Spain, and for the administration of internal affairs of the Government in the manner most conducive to the welfare of the nation, and to the preservation of the monarchy".¹ To do this without exciting jealousy would be no easy task and the danger was that his advice - however appropriate - would sour relations without doing any good.

When the Cabinet issued their initial instructions to Wellesley they could not anticipate how the position of the armies might have changed by the time he arrived in Seville. They therefore restricted their instructions on military points to the simple injunction that Wellesley should do his best to ensure that the Spaniards co-operated fully with his brother's army, if Sir Arthur decided to extend his operations into Spain.² But before the Ambassador sailed news of the progress of Sir Arthur's plans, and of the disgrace of Blake and Romana led the Ministers to wonder whether General Wellesley might not be given "the chief command of the Spanish forces".³ It is not clear whether this was meant to include all the Spanish armies or simply those in the region in which he was operating. Wellesley was "not to suggest, much less to solicit" such an arrangement - he was simply to test the water.⁴ Canning's thoughts had been tending in this direction for some time - as early as 19th April he had told Frere privately that a clear Spanish request for Sir Arthur to assume command of their armies might be acceptable, and on 20th July he hinted at this in replying to a private letter from Garay.⁵ Both these comments were

¹ Extract of Canning to Wellesley, 27th June 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix E, p 189-190.

² Extract of Canning to Wellesley, 27th June 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix F, p 190-191.

³ Canning to Wellesley, 18th July 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix H, p 192.

⁴ Canning to Wellesley, 18th July 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix H, p 192.

⁵ Canning to Frere, Private, 19th April 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45; Canning to Garay, Private, 20th July 1809, BL Add Ms 37,286 (Wellesley Papers) f104-115.

made in response to the statement by Frere and Garay that the Spaniards had offered Sir John Moore the command of their armies, but that he had refused it.¹

If the Marquess Wellesley had sailed for Spain during May, he might have arrived in Seville in time to play a constructive role in the Talavera Campaign - although it may be doubted if he would have proved any more successful than Frere at solving the problems that arose. Indeed these problems seem to have been beyond the scope of any Ambassador however talented. But Wellesley did not arrive in Spain until Talavera had been fought, and did not reach Seville until 11th August² by which time the military co-operation between the armies had foundered, and there was little for him to do, except extricate his brother's army as diplomatically as possible.

Sir Arthur Wellesley's disillusionment with the Spaniards rapidly grew after his retreat across the Tagus on 4th August. By the 8th he had come to believe that it was almost impossible for him to keep his army in Spain "notwithstanding that I see all the consequences of withdrawing".³ And on the 12th his position had hardened so that he wrote that "every day shows the absolute necessity that the British army should withdraw from this country".⁴ His principal grievance remained the Spanish failure to adequately supply his army. This really was a serious problem for the never fertile countryside had been exhausted by the repeated passage of armies while the inexperienced British commissaries were unable to make the most of what was available. Sir Arthur was worried that continued privations might see the

¹ Garay to Canning, Private, no date (1st March in written on the manuscript in Pencil), BL Add Ms 37,286 (Wellesley Papers) f36-44 esp. f41-2; Canning to Frere, Private, 19th April 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 45 - referring to Frere's report of this incident. The incident remains obscure, and Fortescue's brief mention of it does little to clarify it. Fortescue *British Army* vol. 6 p 330.

² He delayed at Cadiz for a few days in order to arrange for a suitable residence to be obtained in Seville and to gather intelligence before taking up his post. Wellesley to Canning, Seville, 11th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain* p 1-3.

³ Sir A. Wellesley to Marquess Wellesley, Deleytosa, [Private], 8th August 1809, *W.D.* III p 404-5.

⁴ Sir A. Wellesley to Marquess Wellesley, Jaraicejo, 12th August 1809, *W.D.* III p 415-6.

cohesion of his army disintegrate as it had threatened to do in May and June.¹ But this was not the only reason he wished to quit Spain - his recent experiences had left him with nothing but contempt for the Spanish armies and little desire to continue operations in co-operation with Cuesta or his successor. The news from the Danube was not encouraging while the concentration of French forces in central Spain removed the opportunity which had tempted him into the Talavera Campaign. He had risked much on his own responsibility by advancing into Spain, he had been disappointed by the Spaniards and naturally felt disinclined to run further risks in their cause. Portugal was the first object of his instructions, and to Portugal he wished to return.

The Supreme Junta were dismayed at the idea of a British withdrawal. The concentration of French troops provoked by the advance of Wellesley and Cuesta threatened to over-run Andalusia while the Junta's domestic opponents would be strengthened if the British 'abandoned' their ally. Both dangers were heightened by the defeat of the loyal if incompetent Venegas at Almonacid on 11th August, although Cuesta's stroke and resignation two days later did something to lessen the risk of a military coup. Nor did the French advance as had been feared for the exhaustion of his troops and new orders from Napoleon persuaded Joseph to postpone the conquest of Andalusia until a more convenient moment.²

Nonetheless the Spanish Government put a great deal of pressure on the Marquess Wellesley to persuade his brother not to withdraw. They had already offered Sir Arthur the rank of Captain-General which "was intended as a step to enable him to supersede General Cuesta".³ They repeatedly promised to solve the logistical difficulties facing the British and elaborated on the unfortunate

1 Sir A. Wellesley to Marquess Wellesley, 8th August 1809, *W.D.* III p 404-5.

2 *Oman Peninsular War* II p 617-8.

3 Frere to Canning, 5th August 1809, *Parliamentary Papers* 1810, vol XV, Part A, p 53.

consequences of a withdrawal.¹ Faced with this pressure the Marquess Wellesley attempted to find a practical compromise. He devised an elaborate scheme for ensuring that supplies reached the British army, and he attempted to persuade his brother, that if he must withdraw it should only be to the frontier and not beyond.² But it was no use - Sir Arthur was loath to remain, and though the Supreme Junta would promise the moon they were simply incapable - not unwilling but unable - to fulfil their promises.³ Wellesley's negotiations delayed the British withdrawal for a few weeks, but only at the cost of immense frustration for all concerned. On 20th August the British army fell back to a position on the border where it remained, in deference to Spanish wishes and despite the unhealthiness of the Guadiana Valley, until December. The Junta's response was to spread - or at least not to deny - rumours that the British were only retreating because the Junta had resisted their demands for the cession of Cadiz and Havana! This foolish attempt to divert popular anger did nothing to improve Anglo-Spanish relations.⁴

If circumstances precluded the Marquess Wellesley achieving much in the field of military co-operation, his own growing contempt for the Supreme Junta prevented him gaining much satisfaction from the most tangible success of his embassy. On 19th September he wrote privately to his brother,

For the last two days I have been employed in endeavouring to save the necks of these caitiffs [ie the Supreme Junta] from the just fury and indignation of the people and soldiery; and I have succeeded. A regular plot was formed to seize them (and I believe to hang them) all; they well desire it; but I could not suffer such outrages under my nose; so I interfered and saved the curs from the rope. They

¹ Marquess Wellesley to Canning, 15th August 1809; Marquess Wellesley to Sir A. Wellesley, 22nd August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain* p 21-30; p 60-63, and many similar letters.

² Marquess Wellesley to Garay, 21st August 1809 and enclosures; Marquess Wellesley to Sir A. Wellesley, 22nd August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain* p 42-46; p 60-63. Marquess Wellesley to Sir A. Wellesley 29th August 1809, *W.S.D.* vol. 6 p 337.

³ As Lord Wellesley himself recognized: Marquess Wellesley to Garay, 21st August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, p 46-48.

⁴ Marquess Wellesley to Canning, 24th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, p 71-75.

were all gratitude for an hour; but now that they think themselves secure, they have begun to cheat me again.¹

The plot, led by the Duke of Infantado, was serious and if it had succeeded it might have precipitated a complete collapse of central authority among the Spanish patriots. Bad as the Supreme Junta was, it was clearly preferable to chaos, or to the kind of regime that the likes of Infantado would have established if their coup had succeeded.

But while Wellesley could not condone or support any attempt to overthrow the Supreme Junta by force, he agreed with the plotters that radical changes to the Spanish Government were needed if the cause was to prosper.² Indeed the deficiencies of the Supreme Junta as a wartime Government were glaringly obvious, and had been so ever since its inception. Its cumbersome size, lack of internal cohesion and - with some notable exceptions - the quality of its members, all made it unfit to be more than an interim administration. But describing the problem was much easier than solving it and there were serious difficulties in the way of any solution, over and above the natural disinclination of the members of the Junta to give up the power and privileges that they had acquired. Wellesley had been instructed to encourage efficiency in the Spanish Government and this he did by informally urging on Garay the necessity of the Junta appointing a Regency Council of no more than five members, assembling the Cortes and making concessions to stem the rising discontent of the colonies.³ Wellesley hoped that these proposals would make the Spanish Government both more effective and more amenable to British influence.⁴ The Junta however rejected Wellesley's plan, and

¹ Marquess Wellesley to Wellington, Seville, Private, 19th September 1809, *W.S.D.* vol 6 p 372-373; see also Marquess Wellesley to Wellington, 17th October 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain* p 161-162, and *Oman Peninsular War* III p 4-5.

² Marquess Wellesley to Canning, Seville, 15th September 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain* p 119-144 especially p 125-129.

³ Marquess Wellesley to Canning, Seville, 15th September 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, p 119-144, especially p 130-131, and same to same, 24th October 1809, *ibid* p 162-166.

⁴ Severn, 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 155, quoting an undated memorandum by Wellesley.

on 1st November adopted its own scheme of reform including the creation of an executive committee of seven members, and elections for the Cortes on New Year's Day 1810. While far from ideal this at least represented a measure of progress although the Junta was acting more in response to domestic pressures than to Wellesley's diplomacy.¹

The three months Wellesley spent as Britain's ambassador to Spain reveal more of the limitations than the strengths of the alliance. Friction was constant, with even simple issues causing major problems. The attempt at military co-operation had failed and left a residue of bitterness. The Spaniards were disgruntled by the level of British financial and material aid while the British resented what they perceived to be Spanish ingratitude. Britain wanted the right to trade with South America, and Spain wanted a secure subsidy agreement. Wellesley's personality did little to ease the tension. He was haughty and arrogant, and quickly grew impatient when he encountered opposition.² His attempts to reform the Spanish Government sometimes led him to neglect purely British interests as, for example, when he failed to make arrangements for the purchase of specie.³ Nor was he particularly successful in the objects he did pursue. British aid to Spain was not great enough to give her ambassador a predominating influence, while the forces involved in Spanish politics were too complicated and powerful to be manipulated by an outsider who inevitably failed to appreciate all their subtleties.

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1 Severn, 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 176.

2 He joked to Bathurst that, "I keep up my spirits by scolding the Secretary of State twice a day." Marquess Wellesley to Bathurst, 19th September 1809, BL Add Ms 37314 f5. How would he, as Foreign Secretary, have appreciated such treatment from an allied ambassador?

3 Severn 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 163-4.

The British Government first learnt of the Austrian defeat at Wagram from unconfirmed French accounts on 21st July.¹ They at once began to consider its implications for the Peninsula, although hopes of a renewal of the war in Central Europe persisted for several months. By his victory Napoleon had reasserted his hegemony and would now be free to send vast reinforcements into the Peninsula. Faced with the undiluted attention of Napoleon, the prospects for the Spaniards looked grim, and if the Peninsula fell Britain would be isolated again. The danger of a Spanish defeat revived concern in London over the fate of Cadiz, which was seen as the key to the Spanish navy and South America. Colonel Herbert Taylor, the King's private secretary unofficially suggested to Canning that if the Spaniards agreed, the base of the British army be moved from Lisbon to Cadiz. Taylor like many others believed that the naval arsenals and almost impregnable defences of Cadiz made it a more suitable base than Lisbon.² But the Ministers refused to seriously consider abandoning Portugal. The old alliance, and the trust that the Portuguese had reposed in them, created a moral obligation, while with good reason they felt some uneasiness about relying more heavily on their uncertain Spanish allies.³ Yet they recognized the importance of Southern Spain and Cadiz, and decided to ask Sir Arthur Wellesley if its defence could be combined with that of Portugal.

On 4th August Castlereagh wrote privately to Sir Arthur apparently outlining the direction of the Cabinet's thinking.⁴ Eight days later, after much discussion, the Cabinet at last agreed on an official despatch which took the form of a long letter

¹ Mulgrave to the King, 21st July 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3926, p 316-317.

² Taylor to Canning, 28th July 1809, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p 317n-318n.

³ Canning to Lord Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix L, p 193-196; and Canning to Lord Wellesley, 'Private & Confidential', 12th August 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 34.

⁴ I have been unable to locate a copy of this letter whose contents can be broadly deduced from: Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 102-3; and Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 25th August 1809, *W.D.* III p 449-454.

from Canning to the Marquess Wellesley on the possibility of future Anglo-Spanish military co-operation.¹ A copy of this despatch was sent to Sir Arthur whose opinion was sought. This despatch can only be properly understood if it is realized that when it was written the Ministers had yet to learn of Talavera. The latest letters they had received were those of 24th July in which Sir Arthur had announced his refusal to advance beyond the Alberche unless the Spanish authorities supplied his army more effectively.²

The central question of Canning's despatch was whether a British army of 30,000 men, co-operating with the Spaniards, would be able to hold its own against the French, once they had received their reinforcements? In a private letter to Lord Wellesley Canning commented, "I confess I shall not be surprized, if the decision shall be, that there is no war to be carried on; that there is nothing to be done but to keep our army together, and bring forward the Portuguese".³ But it is clear that he hoped that this would not be the result: to Sir Arthur Wellesley he admitted "I still cling to the hope that ... Spain may yet be saved, and you one of the main instruments of her salvation".⁴ While to Bagot he wrote that if Wellesley were given the command of the Spanish armies and reinforced by troops from Walcheren everything might "yet go well".⁵

If Sir Arthur advised that "with so limited a force as 30,000 men, offensive operations in Spain on an extended scale could not be prudently attempted"⁶ that

¹ Extract of Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, p 193-196; which is also in *W.S.D.* vol. 6 p 350-353. The full text of this letter has not been published but is in BL Add Ms 37,286 f 257-272.

² Castlereagh to Sir A. Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 101; Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 24th July 1809, *W.D.* III p 368-369.

³ Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 'Private & Confidential', 12th August 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 34. Another copy is in BL Add Ms 37,286 f 253-256.

⁴ Canning to Sir A. Wellesley, 'Private', 27th August 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 46A.

⁵ Canning to Bagot, 24th August 1809, *George Canning and His Friends*, vol. 1, p 318-319.

⁶ Extract of Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix L, p 193-196 especially p 193.

was the end of the matter. His instructions, with their emphasis on the defence of Portugal, would not need to be altered. Occasional joint operations with the Spaniards might still be possible, depending on a suitable opportunity arising, but this would be the most that the Spaniards could expect. This British withdrawal could be explained by reminding the Spaniards that it was only because of their refusal to admit a British garrison into Cadiz that Portugal had become the centre of British operations, and that Britain was only responding to the trust that the Portuguese had placed in her.¹

If however Sir Arthur believed that "Portugal itself would be best defended, in the end, by making the defence of that Kingdom a part of a system of general operations throughout the Peninsula",² then a whole new set of questions arose. For after Moore's experiences and Wellesley's own difficulties with Cuesta, the British Government were not prepared to commit their army to operations in Spain without certain guarantees. The first of these, on which the Ministers insisted, was that the Spanish authorities effectually overcame all the problems of transport and provisions which had hindered the British advance. Transport and supplies provided to the British army would be paid for by the British Government, but they must be available on demand. On two other conditions the Cabinet wanted Sir Arthur's advice. Was it essential, they asked, to have a British garrison at Cadiz and the Spanish Generals subordinated to Sir Arthur? If so, these conditions would be stated to the Spanish Government as the inescapable price they would have to pay to retain British co-operation. Even if the British army withdrew from Spain these points were to be pursued by the Marquess Wellesley although in that case he was to press for the appointment of a Spanish Commander-in-Chief, who would

¹ Extract of Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix L, p 193-196, especially p 193-4.

² Extract of Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix L, p 193-196, especially p 194.

not have any authority over the British army.¹ The British Ambassador was instructed to "spare no pains" to get a British garrison into Cadiz, irrespective of whether his brother's army remained in Spain² while Canning privately told him that this "is the greatest Object that you can now accomplish".³

All this reveals that the Ministers were far from confident about the future of the war in the Peninsula. The prospect of almost unlimited French reinforcements was alarming, and no one could have confidence in the Spanish ability to withstand their impact. On the other hand, there seemed little reason to believe that Portugal could long be defended if Spain succumbed. Whatever course was chosen the chance of success looked equally slim.

Canning was rather anxious that Sir Arthur might resent having the responsibility for this unpalatable choice foisted upon him and wrote to both brothers assuring them that the Cabinet would take full responsibility for the result.⁴ But Liverpool - who perhaps knew Arthur Wellesley better - expressed a different point of view when he wrote to him,

I trust you will be satisfied with the large discretionary powers which have been recently sent to Lord Wellesley and yourself. You on the spot can alone duly estimate the ultimate chances of success in Spain; we know you will estimate them dispassionately; and it is therefore properly left to your discretion to follow up your advantages or to extricate yourselves from your difficulties, as the aspect of affairs in the Peninsula may appear to render most prudent and advisable.⁵

1 Extract of Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix L, p 193-196, especially p 195.

2 Extract of Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 12th August 1809, *Wellesley's Despatches from Spain*, Appendix M, p 197.

3 Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 'Private & Confidential', 12th August 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 34.

4 Canning to Marquess Wellesley, 'Private & Confidential', 12th August 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 34: "The only practical effect of the Reference is, to give his Decision more authority, and to pledge us more distinctly to the Support of it." See also, Canning to Sir A. Wellesley, 'Private', 27th August 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 46A.

5 Liverpool to Sir A. Wellesley, 20th August 1809, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 331-2.

Yet the Cabinet had not abrogated its responsibilities to the extent that this suggests. Far from granting the Wellesley's *carte blanche* to run the war in the Peninsula as they chose, it had given Sir Arthur the choice of two clearly defined alternatives, one of which had significant conditions attached to it. Thus Sir Arthur was actually given less discretion than in May, although the issue was of more lasting significance. Nor, as we shall see, did Sir Arthur make a final decision - he indicated his preferences but left room for the Cabinet to over-rule him if it chose to do so.

Sir Arthur received Castlereagh's letter of 4th August on the 23rd and replied to it on the 25th - well before Canning's official letter arrived. He began his reply by calculating the strength of the opposing forces in the Peninsula. Counting only those men who were available for active operations, i.e. excluding garrisons, sick etc., he estimated that the French already had 125,000 men in the Peninsula compared to 80,000 Spaniards, 25,000 British and 10,000 Portuguese. These figures, which give the French only a slight numerical superiority seem if anything a little optimistic. But Sir Arthur now had no illusions about the quality of the Spanish armies which he castigated, rightly concentrating his sharpest criticism on their cavalry. He blamed the Spanish Government for the low standard of their armies observing that they "have attempted to govern the Kingdom in a state of revolution, by adherence to old rules and systems, and with the aid of what is called enthusiasm; and this last is, in fact, no aid to accomplish anything".¹

After these statements his conclusion was hardly surprising: "I feel no inclination to join in co-operation with them again, upon my own responsibility ... and I do not recommend you have anything to do with them in their present state". He would not now accept the command of the Spanish armies unless instructed to do so by the British Government, and he warned that to do so would "incurr the risk of the loss of your army". On Cadiz, he claimed that the jealousy of the

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 25th August 1809, *W.D.* III p 449-454.

Spaniards was so great, that it was better to leave the issue alone, and that if a British garrison was admitted its safety would be in danger unless it was extremely large - 15-20,000 men was his figure. In short "If you should take Cadiz, you must lay down Portugal, and take up Spain".¹

Wellesley's account of Portugal was not much more cheering although it was certainly the strategy he preferred. He emphasised that his views on Portugal were a little tentative, as he had yet to receive an important report from Beresford. He disapproved of the way in which Beresford had used the British officers seconded to the Portuguese service, and he cast substantial doubts on the ability of the Portuguese Government to enforce the conscription needed to provide the manpower for its army. This rather reduced the value of his opinion that "we ought to be able to hold Portugal, if the Portuguese army and militia are complete". Nor did he explain how this was to be achieved, admitting that it would be "very difficult" to hold the line of the frontier, while it "is difficult, if not impossible, to bring the contest for the capital to extremities, and afterwards to embark the British army". As if this was not enough to depress the Ministers he predicted that when the French reinforcements arrived in the Peninsula "their first and great[est] object will be to get the English out", and requested the return of the transports which had been withdrawn for the Walcheren Expedition.²

This letter was so comprehensive that when Sir Arthur received Canning's despatch of 12th August in early September, he simply had to clarify a few points and make one correction. In the ten days since he had written to Castlereagh he had discovered that a garrison of 4 or 5,000 men would be secure in Cadiz, although he still believed that the Spanish Government and people would be violently opposed to the admission of British troops. He did not hide his preference for basing his army in Portugal, but he wrote that he would "not be surprised if the advantage of

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 25th August 1809, *W.D.* III p 449-454.

² Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 25 August 1809, *W.D.* III p 449-454.

the possession of the fleets of Spain, and the certainty that the army could be embarked at Cadiz, which is not, in the Tagus, quite clear, should induce our government to prefer the operation in the south of Spain to that in Portugal". If this option were preferred he regarded the possession of Cadiz, command of the Spanish armies, guarantees on supplies etc. as absolutely essential.¹

Sir Arthur thus neatly returned the responsibility for making the final decision to the Cabinet where it belonged, while making quite clear both his preference for Portugal, and his doubts that the Spaniards would ever grant the conditions which he regarded as essential. Indeed he went further than Canning's official despatch by acknowledging the importance of Cadiz, and leaving open the possibility of the Ministers choosing to base the army there for broader strategic reasons. But he ruled out the possibility of combining the defence of Southern Spain with that of Portugal and made it clear that the Government would have to choose one or the other. In this he was perfectly correct: against the vast French reinforcements, (and possibly Napoleon himself), the British army would be hard pressed to defend one object; to attempt to defend two would invite disaster.

Wellesley's preference for Portugal was in large measure due to his disgust with the Spaniards after the Talavera Campaign. His assertions that Portugal could be defended were far from convincing, and in fact he had yet to devise the plan which made its defence practicable. On the other hand his objections to continued close co-operation with the Spaniards were well founded. It is almost certain that any attempt to base the British army at Cadiz would have led at least to a further deterioration in Anglo-Spanish relations, and quite probably to a military disaster. Wisely the Cabinet rejected this idea out of hand. The aftermath of Talavera proved conclusively to them the dangers and disadvantages of military co-operation with the Spaniards. They remained concerned over the fate of Cadiz but treated this as a

¹ Sir A. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 4th September 1809, *W.D.* III p 477 and "Observations on Mr. Sec. Canning's Dispatch of the 12th August to Marquis Wellesley", 5th September 1809, *W.D.* III p 477-8.

separate issue. They accepted that Wellesley's army could not be used to defend southern Spain - the question now was whether it could safely be used to defend Portugal?

By the time that Wellesley's letter of 25th August reached London on 12th September the political crisis which had been brooding over the Government for months had finally erupted. Portland, Canning, and Castlereagh had all resigned, although they remained in their posts until replacements were found. Castlereagh unofficially circulated Wellesley's letter to the Cabinet and replied that he was increasing the transports in the Tagus and that,

Should the defence of Portugal be persevered in, troopships capable of withdrawing **the men** of the Army may possibly be kept there, (although not without heavy expense, say 40,000 tons at an annual expense of about £50,000 a month).¹

Horse transports were far too expensive to be kept indefinitely in Portugal. Two days later Castlereagh sent Wellington² a formal request for a full report on Portugal "stating your opinion on its defensibility, with what force, British and Portuguese, and at what annual expense".³

There the matter rested for some five weeks while the Ministers were pre-occupied with the political chaos and the daunting task of forming a new Government. It would be up to that new Government, in consultation with Wellington, to determine future British strategy in the Peninsula.

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¹ Castlereagh to Wellington, 12th September 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 118-9 corrected from the copy in P.R.O.N.I. D3030/3276 : corrections simply capitalization, underlining and punctuation.

The last phrase in the quote is rather obscure, but I presume that Castlereagh meant that while the expense of hiring transports fluctuated, it would average out over a whole year at approximately £50,000 per month.

² Sir Arthur Wellesley's peerage was gazetted on 4th September 1809.

³ Castlereagh to Wellington, 14th September 1809, *Castlereagh Correspondence* vol. 7, p 120-1.

By the late summer of 1809 Canning had been waiting for over four months for the changes in the Government which he had been promised. At Bulstrode in April he had agreed to suspend his resignation for a little while to give Portland time to make the necessary arrangements. Then he had reluctantly given way to pressure from the King, who had insisted that no changes should be made until the end of the Parliamentary Session in late June. When the time arrived for this promise to be fulfilled, Perceval's reaction had led to a further postponement until the Walcheren expedition sailed - a concession which was then extended by Camden and Chatham who, from different motives, successfully argued that Castlereagh not be told until the result of the expedition be known.¹

This long series of delays and procrastination had left Canning, and all his colleagues who knew what was going on, heartily sick of the whole business. While they naturally blamed Canning as the original instigator of the trouble, he blamed the weakness and ineffectual leadership of the Duke of Portland, and the intrigues of Castlereagh's friends, particularly Lord Camden. Both views were reasonable but they did not make for a happy or coherent Government.

Then, on 11th August, only a fortnight after the expedition sailed, Portland suffered an epileptic fit.² Although he recovered quickly, his family and friends remained deeply concerned about his health, and the King decided that he would have to accept his repeatedly offered resignation.³ On 16th August George III warned Bathurst and Liverpool to begin looking for a new Prime Minister.⁴ To Perceval and other ministers this seemed to provide a perfect opportunity for gracefully easing Castlereagh from his office as part of a broader restructuring of the Ministry. There remained only the problem of finding a new leader.

¹ See above Chapter 4 pages 158-168.

² Camden to Chatham, 17th August 1809, Chatham Papers P.R.O. 30/8/366 f12-14. Gray, *Perceval*, p 222 describes it as "a paralytic stroke".

³ Camden to Chatham, 17th August 1809, Chatham Papers PRO 30/8/366 f12-14.

⁴ Gray, *Perceval*, p 222-223.

On the 28th August Perceval approached Canning. "The principal question is," he wrote, "is it desirable to preserve the present Government with as little alteration as possible? If we all think it is ..." he went on to suggest the replacement of Portland with a similar nominal leader from the House of Lords.¹ But Canning of course could not agree to the basic proposition. Ever since Cintra he had been unhappy with the Government's performance, while in April he had told Portland that he did not believe that it was capable of doing its job properly. Far from wishing to preserve the Ministry "with as little alteration as possible" he had spent the last four and a half months struggling to force changes in it. This was the essential difference in the positions of the two men: Perceval believed that the Government, with all its faults, was the best that could be constructed,² while Canning was convinced of the need for change. He therefore replied to Perceval that he could not believe that such a Government was "either satisfactory or expedient". He added that, "in these times" a "Minister - and that Minister in the House of Commons - is indispensable". He acknowledged that this meant either Perceval or himself, and conceded that neither could be expected to serve under the other.³

This was a new development which startled and alarmed Canning's colleagues, and ensured that there could be no smooth transition between the Portland Administration and its successor. Canning had given no hint of the direction his mind was taking, and as recently as April 1809 he had been willing to accept Lord Chatham as the nominal leader of the Government.⁴ The most obvious explanation for the change in his attitude is his experience of the effects of

¹ Quoted in Gray, *Perceval*, p 223-224; a longer but different extract of this letter (or another of 28th August) appears in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 1, p 358-359.

² Perceval to Huskisson, 'Private & Confidential', 21st August 1809, Perceval Papers 9/XIV/10 N.R.A. No. 199.

³ Canning to Perceval, 31st August 1809, printed in full in Walpole, *Life of Perceval* vol. 1, p 362-363.

⁴ see above, Chapter 4 p 160-161.

Portland's ineffective leadership in the intervening months. Nothing could make the need for a real leader more obvious than the chaotic state of the Ministry all summer. But there were other factors at work as well. Canning had already become disillusioned with Lord Chatham, while the growing indications that the Walcheren expedition had failed made him ineligible.¹ Perhaps as important was long powerful memorandum Canning had recently received from Huskisson which painted an extremely gloomy picture of the nation's finances.² Only a strong leader, and preferably one in the Commons, could force his Ministers to accept the cuts in expenditure which Huskisson argued were essential.³

At another level Canning's stand may be viewed as an ambitious attempt to seize power. Canning knew that the King and Cabinet were unlikely to prefer him to Perceval, but he probably gave a Ministry led by Perceval little chance of surviving for long in Parliament, and he may have hoped to be summoned back to power in order to protect the King from a Grey-Grenville Government.⁴ If Canning really did have such a risky plan it shows not only the extent of his ambition, but also his frustration and despair at the inadequacies of the Portland Government.

Canning's forthright declaration did not put an immediate end to negotiations with Perceval. At first Perceval tried to persuade Canning to change

1 Canning told his wife on 30th August that the attack on Antwerp had been given up. Canning to Mrs. Canning, 30th August 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 23.

2 [Huskisson's Memorandum on the War], 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,415 f355-368. See also below, Chapter 7 p 242-250.

3 If Canning had become Prime Minister he would probably have made Huskisson (a close friend and ally) his Chancellor of the Exchequer.

4 There is no direct evidence for this, but Canning hinted at it in his interview with the King on 13th September 1809, and other odd references in his later letters may refer to such a scheme. Canning's Memorandum of an Audience with the King on 13th September 1809, [14th September 1809], *Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, no. 3960, p 342-9 esp. p 347. Canning to Mrs Canning, 10th March 1810, quoted by Aspinall, in *ibid* p 539n. Canning himself believed he had acted "with no more mixture of selfish motives than the impatience of misconduct in others and of discredit to one's self, and the anxious and confident hope of being able to do good, and the desire of being placed in a situation to do it, naturally and laudably inspire". Canning to Mrs Canning, 20th September 1809, quoted by Aspinall in *ibid* p 368n-369n.

his mind offering a range of compromise peers to lead the Government including even Lord Wellesley, but Canning remained determined. Interestingly both men agreed that if another nominal leader were acceptable Lord Bathurst would be the most suitable choice.¹ Perceval then hesitated whether he might not be prepared to serve under Canning as Home Secretary in the Commons. It was only after consulting his brother Lord Arden that Perceval became convinced that the damage which this submission would cause to his reputation would greatly reduce his value as a Minister of the Crown.² In fact Canning would have been unwilling to let Perceval humiliate himself in this way; instead Canning hoped that he would accept a Peerage and the office of Lord President of the Council, but this Perceval resolutely declined citing the additional costs of living as a Peer as his reason.³ This threw "an unforeseen and most formidable difficulty" into Canning's plans, but even he acknowledged Perceval's genuine modesty, writing to his wife that, "Nothing could be more candid, more manly, more modest ... than Perceval's whole behaviour".⁴

On Saturday 2nd September 1809, with the future leadership of the Government still unresolved, Cabinet met to consider gloomy despatches from Lord Chatham. At this meeting the Ministers decided to suspend further operations against Antwerp although not to relinquish Walcheren. The expedition had failed to achieve most of its objectives, and that very afternoon Canning wrote to the Duke of Portland pressing him to honour his obligation and dismiss Castlereagh.⁵

1 Canning to Mrs Canning, 1st September 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 23.

2 Perceval to Canning, 31st August 1809, in Walpole, *Life of Perceval* vol. 1 p 363-4; Perceval to Lord Arden, "Most Private and Confidential", 3rd September 1809 B.L. Add Ms 49,185 f43-44; Perceval to Canning, n.d. [c4th September 1809], Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 1 p 364-5.

3 Canning to Mrs Canning, 1st September 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 23.

4 Canning to Mrs Canning, 1st September 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 23.

5 Canning to Portland, 'Private', 2nd September 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 33A. Canning did not know that there was any question of Portland's imminent retirement.

Portland promptly sent Perceval a copy of the letter which Perceval regarded as most importunate : if Canning was determined to break up the Government over the question of the leadership he should, Perceval felt, let Castlereagh's future subside into that melting pot.¹ Given the difficulties which accompanied the formation of the next Government this was reasonable enough, but it was not unnatural for Canning to expect that at least one of the many solemn promises he had been made during the summer should be kept.

Perceval's practical response was to encourage Portland to resign at once and so precipitate the break up of the Administration.² Bathurst was staying with Portland at Bulstrode and he added his weight to Perceval's plea "not only from public but from private motives".³ The Duke's family, friends and doctors had all been encouraging his retirement and he finally succumbed to the combined pressure, although he later came to regret his decision.⁴ The King accepted Portland's resignation on Wednesday 6th September after Bathurst had privately informed him of the state of the Duke's health.⁵

Ironically Canning was upset when he learnt of the pressure which had been brought to bear on Portland to make him resign.⁶ When he was told that further difficulties had arisen in removing Castlereagh he resigned at once (on 7th

¹ Bathurst, 'Negotiations of 1809' *H.M.C. Bathurst*, p 112-9 especially p 116-7. Canning largely agreed with this, and dropped his demand for Castlereagh's removal as soon as he learnt that Portland intended to resign. 'Canning's Memorandum of an Audience with the King' [14th September 1809] *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3960, p 343.

² Bathurst, 'Negotiations of 1809' *H.M.C. Bathurst*, p 116.

³ Bathurst, 'Negotiations of 1809' *H.M.C. Bathurst*, p 116.

⁴ Eldon to Lady Eldon, no date c.13th September 1809, Horace Twiss, *The Public and Private Life of Lord Chancellor Eldon ...* (London, John Murray, 1846) (N.B. This is the two volume third edition; page numbers may therefore be different from the earlier three volume edition). vol. 1 p 413.

⁵ Bathurst, 'Negotiations of 1809' *H.M.C. Bathurst*, p 117.

⁶ Canning to Bootle Wilbraham, Private, 19th December 1809, *George Canning and His Friends* vol. 1, p 344-347.

September) despite assurances that the King's promise would be fulfilled.¹ When Canning failed to attend Cabinet that day Castlereagh grew suspicious and closely questioned his step-uncle. Camden had never been happy with the concealment and he now let the whole story out, naturally emphasising Canning's iniquity as he did so.² Humiliated by the discovery that for months he had only been in Cabinet on sufferance, Castlereagh resigned on the following day - the 8th September.³

The remaining Ministers and the King now faced a simple choice between Canning and Perceval. There was never any doubt where the King's preference lay: he respected Canning's talent and valued his powerful performance in the Commons, but Perceval was "the most straightforward man he had almost ever known".⁴ As leader of the House Perceval had been in almost daily contact with the King reporting its debates. This had led to mutual respect, trust and even affection. Perceval's modesty made a sharp contrast to Canning's ambition, and above all Perceval was a staunch Protestant and evangelical, while Canning favoured Catholic Emancipation.

The King made his preference known as early as 6th September; and it might well have influenced his Ministers had they been in any doubt. Of all the Cabinet except Leveson Gower, Liverpool was probably the most sympathetic to Canning but even he scarcely hesitated in his choice. Strangely Liverpool purposely excluded "all Consideration of Comparative Personal Advantage" from his decision, and instead concentrated solely on the relative situation of the two Ministers. If Perceval became Prime Minister Liverpool saw no reason why

¹ Canning to Portland, Private, 7th September 1809, and Portland to Canning, 'Private & Confidential', 7th September 1809, both in Canning Papers Bundle 33A. Canning later told the King that he had long intended to resign at the same time as Portland. This resolution must, however, have been made since April. 'Canning's Memorandum of an Audience with the King' [14th September 1809] in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3960, p 343-344.

² Camden to Liverpool, no date, 'Friday morning', BL Loan Mss 72 vol. 9 f85-6.

³ Castlereagh to the King, 8th September 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/3271, printed in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3952, p 336.

⁴ Bathurst, 'Negotiations of 1809', *H.M.C. Bathurst*, p 118.

Canning should not continue to serve as Foreign Secretary, while if Canning gained power Perceval must relinquish both his office of Chancellor of the Exchequer and his leadership of the House.¹

Other Ministers followed their own paths to reach the same conclusion: Harrowby, Eldon, Bathurst and Camden had always been closer to Perceval than to Canning who had chosen to cultivate his own circle of friends and admirers. Mulgrave and Westmorland carried little weight and were happy to follow the inclination of the majority as was the absent Chatham. Portland, Canning, Castlereagh and Leveson Gower had already resigned² although Portland returned to the Cabinet without office for his last remaining weeks.

And yet in some ways the choice of Perceval was surprising for he had none of Canning's confidence in his ability to form a Government, nor could he dominate the Commons like Canning with his oratory. Where Canning was brilliant, Perceval was honest and worthy but usually uninspired. He had not made a success of his management of the Commons,³ while he had relied on Huskisson's expertise in dealing with the work of the Exchequer. But to some extent Canning's own virtues counted against him. His restless energy unsettled his colleagues and his brilliance alienated the King. After the political turmoil of the previous months both the Ministers and the King sought peace, continuity and stability. They knew that the task of forming a Government without Canning would not be easy, and they honestly wished that he would not resign, but one must suspect that deep in their hearts they breathed a sigh of relief when he departed.

Canning did not give up the fight easily. On 13th September he had a long interview with the King in which he assured George III that he could form a purely

¹ Liverpool to Perceval, "Private and Confidential", 3rd Sept 1809, Perceval Papers 7/II/15 N.R.A. No. 209.

² Leveson Gower did not in fact resign until later, but there was no question of him continuing in office. All the other Ministers remained temporarily in their offices until replaced.

³ Even Charles Long, who remained in office under Perceval, agreed with Canning that Perceval's management had "really let down the dignity of the Government", quoted by Aspinall in the Introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p xvii.

Pittite Ministry.¹ Canning felt that the interview had gone well. The King had encouraged him to expand on his plans, and at the very least he had ensured that "if I go out, I go out without quarrelling with Knobbs".² But Canning's confidence had led him astray and outraged the King who was confirmed in his regard for the modest Perceval.³

In the meantime Castlereagh had been brooding over his humiliation and growing angrier and angrier - especially when he discovered that the affair went back as far as April. What hurt him most was the knowledge that Canning - who he had always regarded as no more than an equal - had for five months had the absolute power to decide whether Castlereagh remained in the Cabinet.⁴ This of course was an exaggeration and logically Castlereagh should have been almost equally angry with Portland and the King, but Castlereagh's wounded pride was far from logical. His honour was besmirched and on the 19th September he challenged Canning to a duel in terms that left no room for an explanation.⁵

¹ Canning's lengthy account of this interview is printed in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3960, p 342-349.

² i.e. George III. Canning to Mrs. Canning, 13th September 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 23.

³ Perceval to Liverpool, 19th September 1809, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 349n-352n.

⁴ Castlereagh to Lord Londonderry (his father), 21st September 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/3292. Castlereagh was also worried about his public reputation,

"I hope my publick and private character will survive the perils to which it has been exposed, but you may imagine what would have been the impression had I submitted to be duped and practised upon, and how small a portion of the world would have believed that I was not privy to my own disgrace, it being more generally credible that a public man should be guilty of a shabby act to keep himself in office than that his colleagues, his friends, his private connection Lord Camden, should presume without any authority from him, without even his knowledge, to place him in a situation so full of danger and so full of dishonour".

(ibid). See also Edward Cooke to Charles Stewart 21st Sept 1809 P.R.O.N.I. X3030/Q3/3 no. 5 for a long partisan account of the whole crisis. Cooke half-heartedly tried to dissuade Castlereagh from the duel but really approved "the unavoidable line".

⁵ Castlereagh to Canning, 19th September 1809, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/3290.

According to Lord Holland Castlereagh "was an excellent marksman, who had practised with pistols to qualify himself for the Irish House of Commons".¹ According to Charles Ellis, Canning's second, Canning had never fired a pistol before in his life.² Even if both were exaggerating it was certainly a most unequal contest.

The two Ministers met at 6 am on 21st September on Putney Heath. The seconds, less bloodthirsty than Castlereagh, set the distance at 12 paces - the longest for which there was good precedent. The Ministers fired, and both missed. Lord Yarmouth, Castlereagh's second, proposed that that should conclude the affair, but Castlereagh's honour was not yet satisfied and the seconds reluctantly agreed to another exchange. On this occasion His Majesty's Secretary of State for War and the Colonies succeeded in wounding the Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs in the thigh: blood flowed, his honour was satisfied, and he did not demand a third chance to murder his colleague.³

By great good fortune the ball passed straight through the thigh missing the bone and artery, and the wound healed well.⁴ Within three weeks Canning was sufficiently recovered to resign the seals of the Foreign Office personally to the King, and to give the curious monarch a full account of the encounter and his wound.

The duel naturally aroused much public scandal and disapproval. In general Castlereagh was blamed for the challenge,⁵ while Canning's intrigues over the

¹ Holland *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party*, p 35. Nine years before, Castlereagh had only been dissuaded with the greatest difficulty from challenging the ill Grattan after a personal attack during the debate on the Irish Act of Union. Hinde *Castlereagh*, p 95.

² quoted in Hinde *Canning* p 227 citing Ellis's account of the duel.

³ Aspinall in the Introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5 p xxxiii-xxxv; Hinde *Canning*, p 226-7.

⁴ "The wound, as it happens, is a very good wound, as wounds go, but an inch more to the right [and] it would have killed him." Charles Ellis to Lord Binning (another of Canning's friends) 2nd October 1809 quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 368n.

⁵ e.g. Henry Bankes to Lord Camden, 19th October 1809, Camden Papers C86/5/5. Bankes believed it was the least excusable of all the political duels of recent years, while Wilberforce condemned the long delay before the challenge which made it "appear a cold-blooded measure of

preceding months were also widely condemned. In the longer term there seems little doubt that the affair played a part in the steady revival of Castlereagh's reputation which began at this time. Conversely it did Canning's standing no good, although the duel in itself certainly did not exclude him from office - the King had already made his choice, and in any case was not so perverse as to blame Canning for a duel which he so clearly did not want, but could not avoid.¹

And so the Portland Government ended in a farce which came within an inch of real tragedy. Its faults were numerous and obvious but it may be doubted if a more effective Ministry could have been formed from either side of the House. Certainly its successor was to be just as divided and lacking in common purpose, while being even weaker in Parliament.

delibrete revenge". Wilberforce to T. Babington, 20th November 1809, *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. 3, p 341.

¹ The King hated duelling but was very kind to Canning. Aspinall in Introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III* vol. 5, p xxxiv. Canning to Huskisson, 13th October 1809, printed in Lewis Melville (ed.) *The Huskisson Papers* (London, Constable, 1931), p 69-71.

Chapter 7

The Formation of the Perceval Government (September - December 1809)

The confusion which followed the resignations of Portland, Canning, and Castlereagh in early September 1809 was not finally settled for several months. Perceval continued to hope for a compromise until at least 11th September, and it was not until the 13th that the King authorized him - not to form a Government - but to consult his colleagues about the situation.¹ They were generally not optimistic. Liverpool thought that they should ask the Opposition to join a coalition Government. Eldon disliked this plan but admitted to his wife that, "I think it very clear, that if we stand alone, we must fall after a very short - very, very short, - desperate conflict, with the Opposition joined by Canning and his followers".² Another opponent of the idea of an overture was the Solicitor-General Sir Thomas Plumer, who warned Perceval of the damage it might do to the Government's standing in the Commons. But Plumer was almost equally discouraging about the alternatives, for he was gloomy about the level of support Perceval could expect in the Commons, and warned against recourse to an election while the popular mood still favoured reform.³

The biggest obstacle in the path of the Cabinet's deciding to hold firm to office, was the lack of the necessary ministerial talent for the Government to command respect in Parliament. Perceval, Liverpool and Eldon were able enough, but the rest of the Cabinet gave them little support. Bathurst was capable, but the Board of Trade was a minor office, while Harrowby's health was so bad that at this crisis he had to give up his position as President of the Board of Control, though he

¹ Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 1, p 372. Aspinal in the introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p xxx.

² Eldon to Lady Eldon, no date, [11th September 1809], Twiss, *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 1, p 411-3. Eldon refers to Liverpool's position as well as his own.

³ Sir T. Plumer to Perceval, 14th September 1809, Perceval Papers 7/II/17, N.R.A. no. 221.

remained in the Cabinet without portfolio. Mulgrave, Westmorland and Camden were light-weights, and the Walcheren Expedition had discredited Chatham. Perceval was the only Cabinet Minister in the Commons, and his reputation there was at a relatively low ebb, for his leadership of the House had done nothing to enhance the fine reputation he had gained in opposition to the Talents.¹ This weakness in the Commons was most worrying and on 12th September Perceval offered the Speaker, Charles Abbot, one of the vacant Secretaryships of State, only for it to be promptly rejected.²

Nonetheless it seems that the Cabinet came close to deciding to make the attempt to stand alone. On 14th September the King gave individual audiences to all the Cabinet who were in town in order to stiffen their resolve. But then it all collapsed due to a revolt of the junior ministers, as Eldon explained to his wife,

the train of settlement we seem to have got into is all undone. Shocked as I am to say it, George Rose has declared his attachment to Canning, - Huskisson has done the same - Charles Long won't abide by us, - Sturges-Bourne has declared for Canning. As these are the four men of business, it appeared to us last night that, without junction, the King must be sacrificed.³

The Cabinet later explained the importance of these junior Ministers to the King,

Their characters for efficiency as men of business justly give great consideration to them - long and steadily as they have been connected in Government with Mr Pitt and his friends - and particularly acquainted as they are known to be with the state of the House of Commons, their retirement will be considered as indicating a well-informed opinion of an almost total disunion of Mr Pitt's old connexions [sic] and of the want of strength in your Maj.'s Administration, and it is to be feared that it will be followed to a considerable extent and will guide the judgement and conduct of others.⁴

¹ On Perceval's reputation in Opposition see, for example, Camden to Bathurst, 10th December 1806, *H.M.C. Bathurst*, p 52-4, and Gray, *Perceval*, p 61 & n. On his leadership of the Commons see above, Chapter 6 p 255n and Henry Bankes to Camden, 19th October 1809, Camden Papers C86/5/5.

² Perceval to Abbot, 12th September 1809, and reply (13th) in Colchester, *Diary of Charles Abbot*, vol. 2, p 204-5.

³ Eldon to Lady Eldon, no date, [18th September 1809], Twiss, *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 1, p 415.

⁴ Cabinet Minute, 18th September 1809, in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3966, p 357-362, quote on p 361.

Of these four only Huskisson and Sturges-Bourne were really firmly committed to Canning but the others shared a general feeling that the Government was too weak to try to carry on without making at least some approach to the Opposition.¹ Although the Cabinet did not know it Robert Dundas and his formidable father Lord Melville (who tightly controlled the Scottish seats) shared this view, and their stance would have doomed any attempt to carry on the Government if the Ministers had not already changed their plans.²

And so, on 17th September, seven members of Cabinet, including Westmorland but not Mulgrave,³ drew up a lengthy memorandum which fully explained to the King the difficulties of any attempt to carry on the Government and concluded that

it would be most expedient that your Majesty's confidential servants should be commanded to make a direct communication to Lord Grey and Lord Grenville with a view to their uniting with them in forming an extended and combined administration.⁴

On the following day Perceval had a long interview with the King who greatly disliked the idea of an approach to the Opposition and to Lord Grenville in particular. The Catholic Question was at the bottom of this and Perceval had to firmly reject the King's plea that Grey and Grenville be asked to give pledges not to raise it. As Perceval well knew, such a demand would have doomed negotiations from the outset and given the Opposition a new grievance to rally around. Nor was

¹ Charles Long, for example, wrote to his patron Lord Lonsdale on 14th September 1809: "I am very anxious to see a strong Government and ... such a one cannot now be formed without some junction ..." quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 360n.

² On 17th September 1809, R. Dundas had written to his father, "If there is any intention to patch up the form of a new Administration out of the remnants of the present, I certainly will not belong to it or continue in office." Quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p xxxix.

³ Apparently he could not be got out of bed: Eldon to Sir William Scott, no date, [19th September 1809?] Twiss, *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 2, p 416-7. He later approved the contents of the Memorandum and asked that his name be included on it. Mulgrave to the King, 21st September 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3969, p 364-5. Gray, *Perceval*, p 232 for some reason omits Westmorland.

⁴ Cabinet Minute, 18th September 1809, in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3966, p 357-362, quote on p 362.

it necessary, for as he explained to the King, a coalition ministry could never bring forward such a proposal as a Government measure, and if Grey and Grenville persisted in bringing it forward, Perceval and his conservative colleagues could break up the Government and appeal to the people to rally to the Church and King. Even with these assurances George III remained reluctant and distressed, with some feeling that he had been betrayed. He did not yet consent to the overture, but it is evident from the later part of the conversation that he was slowly becoming reconciled to it.¹

On the 20th the King spoke to the remaining Ministers at a levee where they all supported the Minute including even Lord Chatham.² On the 21st Canning and Castlereagh fought their duel, and on the 22nd the King finally bowed to the inevitable. He did not conceal his regret that his Ministers should advise recourse "to a party, whose proceedings while they were in office, and whose conduct when their administration was dissolved, [had] rendered them so justly obnoxious to His Majesty, and must cause their readmission to be so grating to his feelings".³ But he accepted that he would not have been given this advice if any alternative existed and so he reluctantly gave his consent while reserving his right to disapprove of any arrangement which the overture might produce. It is clear that he hoped that the negotiations would fail and that he only agreed to them to satisfy his Ministers. He made it plain that if the negotiations did fail he would expect the Ministers to use "every possible expedient and resource which other quarters may furnish, to prevent his being thrown into the hands and the power of the Opposition". He ended his letter with a pointed panegyric on the Duke of Portland, who had

¹ Perceval to Liverpool, 19th September 1809, printed by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 349n-352n. This letter gives a long, detailed account of the interview.

² Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 26.

³ The King to Perceval, 22nd September 1809, in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 27-30. Aspinall does not print this letter, but on p 371 of *The Later Correspondence of George III*, he lists some corrections to the letter as printed by Walpole.

sacrificed his personal comfort to rally to His Majesty in a period of great difficulty and doubtful prospects. If nothing else, at least the King left Perceval and his colleagues with no doubt of his feelings!¹

Despite this hostility at Windsor and Eldon's gloomy prognostications, Perceval seems to have genuinely believed that a coalition could be formed.² The overture took the form of identical letters to Grey and Grenville each from Perceval and Liverpool which briefly requested them to come to town in order to form "an extended and combined administration".³ No details were given of the basis of the proposed new Government, but it is clear from other sources that Perceval envisaged an equal division of offices with either Grenville or Grey becoming Prime Minister, while he might accept the Home Office, (if another suitable post could be found for Liverpool), and retain the lead in the Commons.⁴

From Perceval's point of view these terms were fair, even generous, but to a jaundiced Opposition it could easily appear that they were simply being asked to save the old Government in return for a few jobs. Both Opposition leaders were at their country seats - Grey at Howick in Northumberland and Grenville at Boconnoc in Cornwall. This not only made any consultation between them impossible, it also made the burdens of office distinctly unappealing. Grey was at this time particularly pessimistic about the state of the war and the country's future. Even before Perceval's letter arrived he had virtually made up his mind to reject any approach that fell short of an invitation to form a Government on his own terms.⁵ The ambiguity of Perceval's letter and the fact that the approach came from Perceval

¹ The King to Perceval, 22nd September 1809, in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 27-30. See previous note.

² Perceval to Liverpool, 19th September 1809, printed by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 349n - 352n, especially p 351n.

³ Perceval and Liverpool to Grey and Grenville, 24th September 1809, in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 31. See also Gray, *Perceval*, p 236.

⁴ Gray, *Perceval*, p 238-9; Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p 354-357.

⁵ Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p 351.

and not from the King left him with no doubts at all. The very day that Perceval's letter arrived he replied with a curt refusal even to come to London to discuss the issue.¹ Grenville was not so intransigent and journeyed up to London, but as he was determined not to break with Grey, he had little choice once he arrived but to rule out a coalition.²

To all appearances Opposition leaders had blundered, if only in the manner of their refusal, which proved of incalculable service to Perceval in rallying support to him in defence of the King. Whether their rejection was wrong in content as well as style is quite another matter. Had they joined Perceval, they almost certainly would have split the Opposition to form a Government as divided and incoherent as the Ministry of All the Talents.³ The King's hostility to them had not weakened and it was all too probable that they would be disposed of as soon as their support was no longer needed. They were, in effect, being asked to compromise their principles and destroy their party for a half share in a Ministry which appeared doomed from the outset. Further, it seemed unlikely that Perceval's Government would survive long without their help, in which case they had a reasonable chance of coming to power on their own terms. They were not impatient for office, and there was no great measure that they were eager to pass; given this, the arguments against accepting Perceval's offer were overwhelming. Under the circumstances their refusal, however it was expressed, was bound to cause some political damage, and Grey's curtness at least spared them protracted negotiations and accusations of greed.⁴

¹ Grey to [Perceval ?], 26th September 1809, in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 31-32.

² Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p 349-352.

³ Aspinall, in the introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p xxxviii; and Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p 357.

⁴ Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p 357-359, damns the Opposition for not joining Perceval at a time of national emergency, but an unstable coalition Government was not what the country needed.

The stand of the Opposition leaders was generally welcomed by their supporters, although there was naturally regret that they had not acted in complete unanimity.¹ On the other side of the political fence there were mixed feelings: Perceval and Liverpool were disappointed but Eldon and the King were relieved if not delighted.² There was now no choice but for Perceval and his colleagues to attempt to "patch up a Ministry" as Eldon put it.³ Few thought that they would have much success. Eldon believed that the Government "will die in the first week of Parliament".⁴ He would have preferred to resign "but that the King would not hear of for a moment".⁵ Strangely Grey was for once more perceptive,

... I am not one of those who are so confident in the impossibility of its standing. As far as I can judge, the public feeling is not much attacked by it. It is true, people in conversation lament the present state of affairs, and speak of the ministers as entitled neither to respect nor confidence. But there it ends, and we gradually accustom ourselves to things when they have taken place, which at a distance we should have declared it impossible to submit to. The disasters of Spain and Walcheren are now talked of with the calmness of history; and if, at the meeting of Parliament, it shall be found that the business of the country has gone on under these men for three months in its usual course without any new calamity, I do not think you will see much disposition to take active measures for a change ...⁶

While influenced by his habitual pessimism these comments were prophetic not only for the immediate crisis but for the political history of the next few years.

¹ e.g. Tom Grenville to Lord Grenville, 2nd October 1809, *H.M.C. Dropmore* vol. 9, p 328-9; Brougham to Grey, 3rd October 1809, *The Life and Times of Henry Lord Brougham, written by Himself*, (Edinburgh & London, William Blackwood & Sons, 1871) 3 vols. vol. 1 p 461-463.

² Eldon to Lady Eldon, no date [2nd October 1809], Twiss *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 1, p 420-1. The King to Perceval, 30th September 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3978, p 376.

³ Eldon to Lady Eldon, 25th September 1809, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 375n.

⁴ Eldon to Lady Eldon, 25th September 1809, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 375n.

⁵ Eldon to Lady Eldon, no date [2nd October 1809], in Twiss, *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 1, p 420-1.

⁶ Grey to Brougham, 11th November 1809, in Brougham, *Life and Times*, vol. 1, p 471-3. Grey had expressed similar sentiments as early as 10th October: *ibid* p 463-5.

On 30th September all nine remaining members of Cabinet¹ met at Perceval's house and composed a formal minute in which they requested the King to appoint a new Prime Minister.² Eldon delivered the minute to the King on 1st October together with a verbal message that it was the unanimous opinion of the Cabinet that their new leader should be in the Commons.³ As Perceval was the only Cabinet Minister in the Commons, and as the King's preference for him was already well known, the King's reply nominating Perceval can have surprised no one, although the warmth of the royal endorsement must have pleased the new Prime Minister.⁴ Yet the delicate deference of these proceedings was important, for it symbolized the only real rationale for the new Government: a determination to protect the King from the Opposition.

Perceval's problem in forming a new administration was unusual: rather than having too many supporters chasing too few jobs, he had great difficulty finding anyone willing to replace the Ministers who had resigned. He retained all the existing members of Cabinet and asked the Duke of Portland to return to the Cabinet without portfolio. Portland agreed, but he died on 30th October after an operation for the stone. Perceval needed to find two new Secretaries of State, a new Chancellor of the Exchequer, a new President of the Board of Control, and new Secretary at War⁵ and a new Secretary to the Treasury.

1 Perceval, Eldon, Liverpool, Bathurst, Harrowby, Mulgrave, Chatham, Camden, and Westmorland.

2 Cabinet Minute, 30th September 1809, in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 33-34.

3 So says the King in his letter to Perceval, 2nd October 1809, in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3985, p 385-6.

4 The King to Perceval, 2nd October 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 3985, p 385-6.

5 The Secretary at War was concerned primarily with administration and was not always in the Cabinet. The Secretary for War was responsible for strategy etc. The respective outgoing Ministers were Leveson Gower and Castlereagh.

He began by writing to the Marquess Wellesley offering him the Foreign Office.¹ It was widely felt that Wellesley's response would be crucial to Perceval's hopes of success.² The accession of a new and prominent figure, not previously a member of either the Government or the Opposition, would help to replace the weight and credibility which the Ministry had lost. Wellesley's answer to the Government could not be expected for some weeks and while it was anxiously awaited the able and conservative Bathurst looked after the Foreign Office to the King's great satisfaction.³

On the same day, 5th October, Perceval began negotiations with Sidmouth. These were, to put it mildly, delicate - for Perceval wanted two of Sidmouth's closest supporters, but not Sidmouth himself. It shows the difficulty of the problems facing Perceval that he thought it worth making this extraordinary proposal at all. To include Sidmouth would bitterly antagonize both Canning and Lord Melville. On the other hand the votes of Sidmouth and his supporters, if they could be obtained without alienating the other groups, would be very useful, and Perceval particularly wanted Nicholas Vansittart as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Bragge Bathurst as Secretary at War. Not surprisingly however Sidmouth would have nothing to do with the idea and both Vansittart and Bathurst supported him.⁴

The Chancellorship of the Exchequer gave Perceval more problems than any other office. On 13th October Vansittart refused it. A week later the young Palmerston rejected it, although he agreed to become Secretary at War.⁵ Perceval

¹ Perceval to Wellesley, Private, 5th October 1809, in *The Wellesley Papers*, by the editor of 'The Windham Papers', (London, Herbert Jenkins, 1914), 2 vols. vol. 1, p 261-3.

² Gray, *Perceval*, p 255.

³ The King liked Bathurst and disliked Wellesley. He did not conceal his hope that Wellesley would refuse the appointment. The King to Perceval, 5th November 1809, in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4028, p 445-6.

⁴ Perceval to the King, 7th & 9th October 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, nos. 3989 & 3992, p 391-2 & 394-5.

⁵ Gray, *Perceval*, p 362-363. Palmerston chose not to sit in the Cabinet, (Perceval gave him the choice). The position of Secretary at War had already been refused by Charles Long, Lord William Bentinck (Portland's son), and Robert Milnes.

then approached in turn no less than three Canningites : Robert Milnes, George Rose, and Charles Long all of whom were prepared to support the Government but none of whom would accept the Exchequer. Finally admitting defeat Perceval decided to retain the office himself.¹

Almost as involved and much more important was the saga of the War Department. On 12th September Perceval tentatively approached Robert Dundas, son of Lord Melville and Chief Secretary for Ireland. The Dundas/Melville group was at first expected to support Canning but by early October Robert Dundas had agreed to replace Castlereagh as Secretary for War. But Robert Dundas was totally dependent for political support on his formidable father, and on 24th October a thunderbolt from Scotland unequivocally conveyed Lord Melville's deep disapproval. Dundas hastily withdrew his acceptance, although a more conciliatory letter from Melville, arriving on the 26th permitted him to replace Harrowby at the India Board, and even to sit in Cabinet.²

Perceval then approached Charles Yorke, who would have accepted the War Department if it was not for the fact that he was dependent on his brother Lord Hardwicke, who supported the Opposition and who vetoed the idea.³ Almost in despair Perceval persuaded the reluctant Liverpool to move from the Home Office and replaced him with Richard Ryder, Lord Harrowby's brother and a close friend of Perceval's.⁴ Ryder was far from ideal: his health was poor and his nerves

¹ Gray, *Perceval*, p 263. At this time, the Exchequer was not a particularly important post when the Prime Minister was active and in the Commons. George Rose had been firmly committed to Canning, but according to Eldon, his family put great pressure on him for "deserting the King". Eldon to Sir William Scott, no date, c.19th September 1809, Twiss, *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 1, p 416-7. After an emotional interview, Canning could not bring himself to condemn Rose's betrayal. Canning to Mrs Canning, 19th September 1809, Canning Papers Bundle 23. Charles Long could not accept that the Prime Minister had to be in the Commons, and that this necessitated Canning's retirement. Long to Huskisson, Private, 30th September 1809, BL Add Ms 38,737 f358-9.

² R.G. Thorne's essay on Robert Dundas in R.G. Thorne (ed.) *The Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 3, p 649-650. Gray *Perceval*, p 257-261.

³ Perceval to the King, [24th October 1809] and [25th October 1809], in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, nos. 4007 and 4010, p 417-8 and 421-422.

⁴ The King regretted Liverpool's move as much as he did. Perceval to the King, [26th October 1809] and reply [27th October], *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4010,

weak, his support for Perceval in the Commons was largely ineffectual, but at least he could be prevailed upon to take office and was not prevented from doing so by family ties. By this time Perceval was becoming grateful even for such small mercies.¹

By the end of October the Perceval Government had virtually taken shape, with only Lord Wellesley's response yet to come. Few observers were impressed with what was all too plainly a mere rump of the Portland Ministry devoid of any recruits of substance. The press was highly critical with *The Times* dismissing the new Cabinet as a "Junto of Scheldites".² Canning, watching from the political wilderness, could feel little satisfaction with what, in a very real sense, was his achievement. His ostensible aim had been achieved, for if nothing else the Perceval Government did indeed have a real leader, and that leader was in the Commons. The problem was that the new Ministry was absurdly weak, while Canning was convinced (probably incorrectly) that he could have formed a strong stable Government.³ Canning had to wait another eighteen years before he got his chance at Cabinet making, and then he found it every bit as difficult as Perceval did in 1809.

Perceval's letter of 5th October was delivered to Wellesley at Seville on 27th October by Benjamin Sydenham - a confidential friend and toady of the Marquess, who had eagerly agreed to act as messenger. Wellesley had already received highly distorted accounts of the political crisis from his brother William Wellesley-Pole and from Sydenham. Neither of these men were particularly honourable, both were

p 422-425; and Liverpool to the King [28th October 1809] and reply, [29th October], *ibid*, no. 4015, p 428-9.

¹ Ryder was painfully aware of his own unfitness for high office and when offering his services to Perceval he had stipulated against a Cabinet post, but had given way when pressed, although he knew that his reputation could not survive such elevation. R. Ryder to C. Yorke, 29th October 1809, BL Add Ms 45,038 f124-5.

² Quoted in Gray, *Perceval*, p 269.

³ Canning felt tricked and betrayed by the course of events and bitter towards Perceval, e.g. Canning to Bootle Wilbraham, 19th December 1809. *George Canning and His Friends*, vol. 1, p 344-347.

hostile to Canning, and they shared a strong desire for Wellesley to take office in the new Government. Sydenham even went so far as to tell Wellesley that Canning had first opposed Wellesley's admission to the Cabinet, and then vetoed a firm proposal that Wellesley be made Prime Minister.¹ Sydenham seems also to have given Wellesley an exaggerated idea of the influence he would possess in the new Government.²

On the basis of these reports Wellesley had decided to accept office even before Perceval's letter reached him. He sent Wellesley-Pole a long and none too discreet statement of his relations with Canning, which Pole passed on to Perceval and, through him, to the King.³ George III had never liked Wellesley, and he did not find this statement endearing. He made it perfectly plain to Perceval that he hoped that Wellesley would refuse office, and that the more compatible Bathurst would remain at the Foreign Office.⁴ But the King was to be disappointed, for on 23rd November Perceval received Wellesley's letter accepting the Foreign Office "without hesitation".⁵

Richard Wellesley was not a modest man. He had no doubt of his own ability, or that he would be pre-eminent within the new Government. Perceval, as Prime Minister, might manage the Commons and the finances, but Wellesley confidently expected his new colleagues to defer to his views on the war.⁶ Nor was

¹ Sydenham to Marquess Wellesley, 16th September 1809, *The Wellesley Papers*, vol. 1, p 248-252, especially p 249; and same to same, 19th September 1809, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p 252-256, especially p 252. See also Gray, *Perceval*, p 251-2.

² Memorandum [by Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 257-288, especially p 258. On this Memorandum see below, Chapter 8, p 260n.

³ Marquess Wellesley to William Wellesley-Pole, no date, c.8th October 1809, printed in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4028, p 442-5. Perceval's copy enclosing it to the King is in *ibid.*, p 441-2.

⁴ The King to Perceval, 5th November 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4028, p 445-6.

⁵ Marquess Wellesley to Perceval, 'Private', 30th October 1809, *The Wellesley Papers*, vol. 1, p 277-279. For the date of its arrival, see Perceval to the King, 23rd November 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4034, p 451.

⁶ Memorandum [by Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.*, vol. 7, p 258-9.

he immune to the trappings of power. He had already strongly urged his claims for the next available Garter on the Duke of Portland, and he redoubled his efforts when he learnt of the Duke's death (which created a vacancy). The Ministers had intended to bestow the riband on the Duke of Richmond who had served loyally and effectively as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, but Wellesley was "so great a card at the present moment, and so aware of it"¹ that his claim could not be denied. But though Wellesley succeeded in gaining his object it was not an auspicious beginning to his tenure of office, and did nothing to lessen the King's prejudice against him.²

* * * * *

William Huskisson was the most missed of all the junior Ministers who resigned with Canning. Perceval described him as "my right hand", and begged him to stay, while the Marquess Wellesley looked to him "as a main source of assistance" in the new Government.³ Huskisson was a financial expert who, as a Secretary to the Treasury, had done much of the departmental work which Perceval faced as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Indeed much of the credit for Perceval's budgets of 1807-9 was given to Huskisson, for Perceval was a lawyer with no previous experience in managing the nation's finances.⁴ In addition to this role

¹ Bathurst to Richmond, 6th November 1809, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 464n.

² Correspondence relating to the Garter is printed in *The Wellesley Papers*, vol. 1, p 280-5; and in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p464n-5n.

³ Perceval to Huskisson, 'Private & Confidential', 21st August 1809, Perceval Papers, 9/XIV/10, N.R.A. no. 199; Marquess Wellesley to Arbuthnot, Private, 30th October 1809, BL Add Ms 37,295, f165-166.

⁴ Gray, *Perceval*, p 305, and 331.

Huskisson was one of the principal organizers of the Government's majorities in the Commons, and in this capacity too the new administration missed him sorely.¹

But Huskisson did not resign solely out of loyalty to Canning. On 18th August 1809 he had sent copies of a 7,000 word memorandum to both Canning and Perceval.² In this memorandum he ranged widely over Britain's performance in the war against Napoleon and expressed great concern for the country's future. In particular he concentrated on financial problems, notably the supply of specie, and a crisis which he foresaw in the budget if the Government's expenditure could not be cut dramatically.

Huskisson had borne the brunt of the shortage of specie in June 1809 which had halted the British advance into Spain, and he knew that the problem had been temporarily overcome rather than truly solved. He calculated that an army of 40,000 men in Portugal would cost £2,500,000 a year of which half would be extraordinary expense. In addition to this £1,500,000 would have to be found for the Portuguese army and aid to Spain, while another £1,700,000 would be needed for Sicily of which approximately £1 million was extraordinary. Thus the Government would need to find nearly £6 million per year, although some of this could be paid in goods or bills of exchange. Huskisson bluntly warned that,

I wish to be understood as entertaining strong doubts whether it will be practical to provide the remittances for these two Services for any length of time, unless we can obtain very great facilities for procuring Bullion in America, and those facilities can only be given, upon any permanent or productive scale by opening to us the Trade of that Continent.³

¹ His replacement, Charles Arbuthnot, did not do his job well in 1810: see Lord Lowther to his father, 10th March 1810, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 539n, and compare it with Plumer's praise of Huskisson quoted by Gray in his *Perceval*, p 267n.

² [Huskisson's Memorandum on the War], 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f355-368, cited in the rest of this section as 'Huskisson's Memorandum'. Covering letters: Huskisson to Canning, 'Private & Confidential', 18th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f107-8; Huskisson to Perceval, 'Private & Confidential', 18th August [1809], Perceval Papers, 9/XIV/9 N.R.A. no. 196.

³ Huskisson's Memorandum, 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f357.

But serious as this problem was, it was overshadowed by Huskisson's anxiety about the budget. From the beginning of the war in 1793 the British treasury had borrowed heavily to cover the greatly increased spending which the war required. As a result Britain's funded debt rose from £230m to 1793 to £507m in 1802.¹ At its low point in 1797 the British Government derived less than 30% of its nett income from revenue, and although the crisis of that year forced Pitt to rely more heavily on taxation, the proportion in 1809 was still only 51.6%.² The interest on these borrowings, and a contribution to the Sinking Fund for their eventual repayment, were secured by new taxes which had to raise approximately 6% of the amount borrowed each year.³ This security was essential, for it underpinned the confidence in the British financial system on which the Government's ability to raise money depended. But by 1809 the system was beginning to break down due to the difficulty of raising new taxes and a considerable increase in spending under the Portland Government. Already in 1806 the Ministry of All the Talents had failed in its plans to impose taxes on pig iron and private brewing, and had had to resort to a much criticized and ultimately abandoned 'New Plan of Finance'.⁴ During the Portland Government the cost of the war had risen sharply from an average of £37 million in 1805-7, to £42 million in 1808, and £44 million in 1809.⁵ While some of this increase could be attributed

¹ Heckscher, *The Continental System*, p 61.

² N.J. Silberling, 'Financial and Monetary Policy of Great Britain during the Napoleonic Wars', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 38, 1924, Table 3, p 218.

³ Huskisson, Rose and Perceval all state that a loan of c£22.5 million would require £1.35 million in interest and sinking fund i.e. 6 per cent; but a smaller loan might have been obtainable at a lower rate of interest, thus reducing this figure slightly. Huskisson's Memorandum, 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416, f357. *The Diaries and Correspondence of George Rose*, edited by Rev. Leveson Vernon Harcourt, (London, Richard Bentley, 1860), 2 vols, vol. 2, p 416. Perceval, 'Memorandum on Financial Affairs of Britain', no date, [late August or very early September 1809], Portland Papers, University of Nottingham, Pw F no. 7635, p4.

⁴ Gray, *Perceval*, p 353-4.

⁵ Silberling, 'Financial and Monetary Policy ...', Table 1, p 215. These figures appear tiny to us, so it is worth noting that according to one modern estimate, in 1811 Britain spent 16% of her Gross National Income on the war : the same proportion as in 1915! Harvey, *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century*, p 334.

to the outbreak of the Spanish war, Huskisson had no doubt that the more fundamental cause was the failure of the Duke of Portland to bring to his office of First Lord of the Treasury "the Character and Efficiency which ought to belong to it as a check upon the general Expenditure of the Empire".¹ And, sounding a very modern note, he said that the main departments of state would always want to spend more money, and that restraints had to be placed on them from elsewhere within the Government.² It was notorious that this had not been so under the Duke of Portland with one outside observer commenting that he had been surprised,

that the Treasury exercised so little control over the other departments in matters of expenditure. Indeed in the manner in which the business has of late years been transacted there, you might almost have at once transferred it over to the Bank of England, upon which all the great offices should draw at pleasure; this sounds absurd, but the practise was not far short of it.³

Moving from the general to the specific, Huskisson spelt out the immediate problems facing the Treasury as a result of the unchecked growth in expenditure. Total supplies granted for 1809 were just short of £52 million; of which some £4¹/₂ million came from Ireland, and £7 million from ordinary income after allowing for permanent charges on the Consolidated Fund. This left £40,588,000 to be found from extraordinary means. The war taxes would raise £18 million so that £22¹/₂ would have to be borrowed. A loan of this size would require new taxes worth some £1,350,000 to secure the interest and the contribution to the sinking fund.

Can we find new Taxes to this Amount, and for how many years?

¹ Huskisson to Perceval, 'Private & Confidential', 24th August 1809, Perceval Papers 9/XIV/II N.R.A. no. 200.

² Huskisson's Memorandum, 13 Aug. 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f 316. Rose spelt this out even more clearly in his [Notes on Finance] 11th Nov. 1809, BL Add Ms 31,237 f192-201, esp f197:

"in separate Departments the pressure on the whole Expenditure is not felt by the Head of Each: And I am quite confident that untill [sic] every Expence of whatever kind it may be, is submitted, previously to its being incurred, to the Consideration of the One responsible Person at the Head of the Treasury, no effectual Remedy will be found for the evil so incalculably mischievous, and, in truth, ruinous to the country".

³ Col J.W. Gordon to Huskisson, 25th September 1809, quoted in Gray, *Perceval*, p 359.

Is the present Government sufficiently strong to carry thro' such Taxes in Parliament?

Would not the effect of their increased pressure speedily create in the Country a Clamour for Peace, and give strength to that which already prevails for reform? ...

The fact is that there are scarcely any new objects to which Taxation can be applied. The existing Taxes upon Articles of Consumption cannot be carried higher. [Huskisson then went on to prove this point by exhaustively examining many examples.]¹

Huskisson's conclusion was that a large reduction should be made in the Government's expenditure, unless the Ministers were convinced that they would be able to make peace on good terms within a very few years. He did not advocate the withdrawal of the British army from the Peninsula, but some of his proposed reductions - particularly of troopships - would certainly have impeded its operations and possibly even threatened its safety.

Most of the Government's expenditure was directed either to servicing the National Debt, which could not be tampered with, or to the armed forces, which consequently attracted Huskisson's attention.² He pointed out that in 1805, with Napoleon's army at Boulogne, the navy had received £15,450,000 including £800,000 from the Vote of Credit, while in 1809 it was given £19 million not including anything which it might receive from the Vote of Credit. In these four years the number of seamen had increased from 120,000 to 140,000 despite the triumphs of Trafalgar and Copenhagen, the capture of the Russian squadron at Lisbon, and the removal of the Spanish fleet from the ranks of Britain's enemies. Huskisson urged that the Navy's budget be reduced to the level of 1805,

By this Reduction, and by not hurrying forward the immense number of new Ships now building, a saving of at least £1,500,000 may be reckoned upon with great relief to our Trade.³

¹ Huskisson's Memorandum, 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f358.

² In 1809 total nett British expenditure was £121¹/₂ million, of which £70¹/₂ million was spent servicing the debt, £44 million was spent on the war and only £7 million on civil government. Silberling 'Financial and Monetary Policy ...' Table 1 p 215.

³ Huskisson's Memorandum, 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f360.

He also hoped to save £2 million a year on transports by cutting those employed to 60-70,000 tons - an idea whose implications would have horrified Wellington. This would make a total saving on the naval vote of about £3¹/₂ million.

The Ordnance "has hitherto been under no check or control with respect to Expenditure", which made Huskisson hope that a saving of £1 million per annum could readily be achieved there.¹

His proposals on the army were both more detailed and more cautious. Again he compared its 1809 budget of £17¹/₂ million with the 1805 figure of £14,741,000 but in this case he only hoped to save £2 million. In the regular establishment he argued that by,

the Reduction of some second and third Battalions; of several of the local and provincial Corps; by a Recasting of the Garrison and Veteran Battalions; by a close Inspection into the recruiting Establishments of the Regiments; by a Reduction in the Waggon Train and several other Arrangements a very considerable diminution of Expenditure may be effected, without any diminution of real efficiency.²

Other proposals included dismounting one fifth or one quarter of the cavalry, and reductions in the staff of the army at home. Beyond the regulars, he urged the abolition of the Volunteers, and a drastic reduction in the local militia whose organization he, like many other observers, strongly attacked.

Altogether Huskisson looked to a total reduction of Government spending of some £8 million to £10 million. But even if this were achieved, he pointed out that the Government would still have to borrow about £12 million a year and raise fresh taxes to cover the interest and sinking fund. He believed however, that if the Government made these cuts it would have far less trouble getting new taxes through Parliament. And just in case his readers retained any spark of optimism, he explained that Britain's financial problems would not disappear with the coming of

¹ Huskisson's Memorandum, 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f364.

² Huskisson's Memorandum, 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f360. The Waggon Train was reduced in 1810 from twelve troops to seven. Michael Glover, *Wellington's Army in the Peninsula, 1808-1814*, (Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1977), p 18.

peace - indeed they would get worse, unless the war taxes could be retained and the military establishments savagely reduced.¹

Huskisson was not the only member of the Government to be alarmed by the problems of the budget. Old George Rose, another financial expert and junior Minister, was even more emphatic declaring that,

To carry on the War on the present Scale of Expense with the Ordinary Means of the Country, or anything approaching to it, is utterly impossible: It is not a question that any Man living can conceive will admit of Discussion, after an attentive Consideration of the actual resources of the Country. It follows therefore of absolute necessity that unless our Expences can be very greatly reduced, we cannot continue to exist long as an independent Nation.²

Faced with these gloomy accounts from two of his most trusted advisors, Perceval had no choice but to take the problem seriously. Soon after receiving Huskisson's Memorandum he drew up a paper of his own which he based heavily on Huskisson's ideas, and which he circulated to his Cabinet colleagues in the dying days of the Portland Government. Perceval admitted that the necessary new taxes could "not be found without considerable difficulty even in the first year, and that to find Taxes at the rate of [£] 1,300,000 for several successive years ... appears to him to be scarce possible".³ He linked the problem to that of specie and concluded by accepting "the necessity of limiting the scale of operations, and of endeavouring as far as possible to confine the War to a War of Defence". He accepted Huskisson's argument that it "is absolutely essential" "to adopt the most rigid system of economy ... in the great Branches of publick Expenditure", and was willing to be more specific: "The Navy, the Transports, the Army, the home

¹ Huskisson's Memorandum, 13th August 1809, BL Add Ms 37,416 f368. This particularly struck Perceval who could not foresee any reasonable prospect of a peace which would permit a "reduction of our establishment to a very low scale." Perceval, 'Memorandum on Financial Affairs of Britain', no date, [late August or early September 1809], Portland Papers, University of Nottingham, Pw F no. 7635, p14.

² [Notes on Finance, by George Rose], 11th November 1809, BL Add Ms 31,237 f192-201, quote on f192.

³ Perceval's 'Memorandum on Financial Affairs of Britain', no date, [late August or early September 1809], Portland Papers, University of Nottingham, Pw F no. 7635, p 11.

Defence, the Ordnance; the Colonies, the Commissariat, the Barracks, every Department ... must ... submit to great reduction".¹

When the new Government was formed Perceval sent a copy of this Memorandum to Lord Wellesley telling him, "You will see the necessity of keeping it in view in the Consideration of our future plans of Military Operations".² He also sent a copy to the King with an explanatory note which emphasised,

how serious a duty is imposed upon your Majesty's servants to endeavour to reduce the expences of the War in every department of your Majesty's Government within as narrow limits as good faith to yr. Majesty's Allies and the security of your Majesty's dominions will allow.³

The King replied that he had "long seen with concern the increased [sic] expences of the War and had felt the necessity of reducing them",⁴ while Wellesley declared himself "fully impressed with the necessity of founding all our Plans of Military Operation on the basis of our Financial means".⁵

But it was easier to urge the necessity of this policy than to implement it, and within a few months Perceval had to admit defeat. In January 1810 he told Wellesley that he would not include a proposed reference to economies in the King's Speech as he feared it would raise expectations which could not be fulfilled. After all his efforts he had come to the conclusion that "We cannot without absolute reduction of Army, or Navy, make any such saving ... a most terrible truth, but, at

¹ Perceval's, 'Memorandum on Financial Affairs of Britain', no date [late August or early September 1809], Portland Papers, University of Nottingham, Pw F no. 7635, p 25.

² Perceval to [Wellesley], no date, [late 1809, c.1st Decmeber], Perceval Papers, 7/I/10, N.R.A. no. 352.

³ Perceval to the King, 5th December 1809, *Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4041, p 465.

⁴ The King to Perceval, 6th December 1809, *Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4041, p 465-466.

⁵ Wellesley to Perceval, 'Private & Confidential', 2nd December 1809, Perceval Papers, 7/I/11, N.R.A. no. 353.

least as far as this year's expense is concerned I believe it to be an indisputable one".¹

Although Perceval could not cut expenditure he did contain its growth for a time : in 1810 Britain spent £45¹/₂ million on the war, only £1,300,000 more than in 1809.² At the same time a healthy rise in revenue allowed the Government to reduce its funded borrowing from £22¹/₂ million in 1809, to £21¹/₂ million in 1810.³ But beneath the surface all was not well, and in September 1810 the bankruptcy and suicide of Abraham Goldsmid, a leading financier, nearly precipitated a crisis. Perceval reacted to the emergency with great coolness and common sense, and his intervention was certainly important in averting a panic.⁴

The Ministers remained concerned about the problem of the budget and in early 1811 they strongly expressed their worry to Wellington, but this did not prevent them increasing the Portuguese subsidy.⁵ From 1811 British expenditure on the war grew rapidly, reaching a peak of more than £70 million in 1813.⁶ This level of spending could be sustained then because victory was in sight and the British economy was beginning to recover following the collapse of the Continental System. None of this could be foreseen in late 1809 however, when it seemed likely that the war would continue for many years, even decades. Faced with this alarming prospect, with the economy showing clear signs of strain, and dire warnings from the experts, Perceval and his colleagues could not responsibly act other than with prudence.

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1 Perceval to [Marquess Wellesley], no date, [January 1810], B.L. Add. Ms. 37,295 f227.

2 Silberling, 'Financial and Monetary Policy ...', Table 1, p 215.

3 Silberling, 'Financial and Monetary Policy ...', Table 2, p 217.

4 Gray, *Perceval*, p 377-8.

5 See below, Chapter 11, p 350-352.

6 Silberling, 'Financial and Monetary Policy ...', Table 1, p 215.

When Perceval's Ministers examined the financial problems raised by Huskisson they did so in a strategic context little better than that of two years before. The first reports of a peace between France and Austria reached London in the middle of October and they were confirmed at the end of the month.¹ This should not have come as a surprise, but the Ministers had been misled into hoping that the war might be resumed. Britain was now alone again with only her minor allies on the periphery of Europe: Sicily, Portugal and Spain. The war in the Peninsula absorbed Napoleon's energy and resources, but there seemed no greater hope of defeating France than there had been in 1807. The Franco-Russian alliance was cooling, but the power of Austria had been dealt a heavy blow.

Faced with this stalemate, and acutely aware of problems in the Peninsula, Mr Villiers, the retiring British envoy to Lisbon, recommended that the Government seek an accommodation with France in order to save Portugal.² But his plea received no support from those in power in England, and the few tentative overtures which were made in 1810 all came from the French side, and made little or no progress.³ As in 1807, the Ministers felt no great pressure to make peace and believed that it was not in their interests to help Napoleon consolidate his power. It was still generally assumed in England that the countries of Europe were unwilling subjects of the French imperium and would welcome any opportunity to liberate themselves. There was also the question of Spain, on which neither side was willing, or even really able, to compromise. And so the war went on.

The first strategic decision facing the new Ministry was whether to withdraw their army from Walcheren. Although the expedition to the Scheldt had

¹ Undated Memorandum by Liverpool printed in, Charles Duke Yonge, *The Life and Administration of Robert Banks, Second Earl of Liverpool*, (London, Macmillan, 1868), 3 vols: vol. 1 p 280-4, especially p 281-282.

² Villiers to Marquess Wellesley, 'Private & Confidential', Lisbon, 24th December 1809, B.L. Add. Ms. 37,288 f420-423.

³ See P. Coquelle, *Napoleon & England, 1803-1813*, (London, George Brell and Sons, 1904), Part IV, for an account of these contacts.

been intended primarily as a raid, the temptation to try to hold Walcheren was evident even in Chatham's instructions.¹ This temptation grew once the island was occupied. As early as 23rd August, even before the attack on Antwerp had been abandoned, Bathurst urged that "There is no calculating the advantages to be derived from Walcheren: if we can keep it".² In another letter, probably written a few days later, he confirmed that "we intend to keep it if possible".³

Bathurst's interest in Walcheren was primarily as an outpost for British trade. Already Heligoland and Gothenburg were major bases for smuggling British goods onto the Continent despite Napoleon's prohibitions, and the combination of the commercial spirit of the Dutch and the intricate waterways around Walcheren was very promising. But this was not the only reason which tempted the Ministers to retain possession of the island. Britain had long feared an invasion from the Scheldt which in many ways posed a greater danger than Boulogne.⁴ There was also the hope that a British presence might encourage disaffection in the Low Countries.⁵ And - until confirmation of the peace arrived - there was a desire to maintain the expedition as a diversion in favour of the Austrians.⁶

But Walcheren was notoriously unhealthy and late summer and early autumn was the worst season for its fevers. By 8th September there were 10,948 sick in the British force.⁷ In the following week over 300 men died, while by 1st

¹ George III's Instructions to Chatham, 16th May 1809, Chatham Papers, P.R.O. 30/8/260 f12-4.

² Earl Bathurst to George Rose, 23rd August [1809], BL Add Ms 42,773 f215-8, quote on f217.

³ Bathurst to Rose, no date, [late August 1809], BL Add Ms 42,773 f219-220.

⁴ Bond, *The Grand Expedition*, p 9.

⁵ Undated Memorandum by Liverpool, printed in Yonge's *Life of Liverpool*, vol. 1, p 280-4, especially p 282.

⁶ Undated Memorandum by Liverpool, printed in Yonge's *Life of Liverpool*, vol. 1, p 280-4, especially p 282-3.

⁷ Bond, *The Grand Expedition*, p 128.

October the total deaths from fever had risen to 1,728.¹ Sir Eyre Coote who had succeeded Chatham in command, and who had to deal with the epidemic wrote that, "The advantages must indeed be great that can compensate [for] the loss of lives and treasure which the retention must necessarily occasion".² He advised the Government that they would need a garrison of 20,000 men and extensive repairs to the fortifications if they were to hold the island.³ Meanwhile Perceval had already expressed to his colleagues his concern at the financial cost of retaining Walcheren.⁴

Yet as late as 28th October the Government was still undecided, with Liverpool telling the King that Cabinet had called for a full report from the Admiralty.⁵ Two days later confirmation of the Austrian peace reached London and finally, on 4th November, the Government ordered the evacuation to begin.⁶ Even then it was a lengthy process, with the last of the sick not being embarked until 26th November. All the naval arsenals were destroyed by 11th December, but bad winds delayed the final evacuation until 23rd December - almost five months since the armada had sailed.⁷

The expedition had cost Britain over 5,000 men dead, 440 discharged as unfit and 609 who deserted.⁸ The vast majority of those who died were victims of the fever rather than enemy action, and many of those who caught the fever and

¹ Bond, *The Grand Expedition*, p 128, and p 135.

² quoted by Bond in *The Grand Expedition*, p 131.

³ Bond, *The Grand Expedition*, p 131.

⁴ Perceval, 'Memorandum on Financial Affairs of Britain', no date [late August or early September 1809], Portland Papers, University of Nottingham, Pw F 7635, p 22.

⁵ Liverpool to the King, 28th October 1809, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4015, p 429.

⁶ Undated Memorandum by Liverpool, printed in Yonge's *Life of Liverpool*, vol. 1, p 280-4, especially p 282.

⁷ Bond, *The Grand Expedition*, p 138-9.

⁸ Gray, *Perceval*, p 284n.

then recovered were permanently weakened. The expedition was not a complete failure: some significant secondary objectives were achieved; but its cost was totally disproportionate to these benefits. The responsibility for this must be shared. The original conception and planning were at fault, for the expedition was too large for a *coup de main*, and too small for extended operations. The execution was equally faulty, with Chatham's notorious indolence and poor co-operation between the services hampering progress. Finally Perceval's Cabinet must accept the blame for prolonging the agony and so increasing the losses. This delay was not primarily a result of the political confusion, but rather a consequence of the reluctance of the new Government to take a firm and unpalatable decision.

With Napoleon now free to lead vast armies of reinforcements over the Pyrenees, the prospects for resistance in the Peninsula looked bleak indeed. As we have seen the Portland Government had already begun to consider its strategic options in the Peninsula and had sought Wellington's advice.¹ Liverpool and his colleagues in London accepted Wellington's objections to any continued close co-operation with the Spaniards and began their assessment from the premise that,

it must be our policy to remain in Portugal as long as we can remain there without risking our army. But we must secure the return of the army if a serious attack is made by the French upon the country. The delicate question will be as to the time of embarkation, and this must be left in a great measure to the discretion of the officer commanding, who must decide it on the spot according to all circumstances which may be then known to him.²

This virtually took it for granted that Portugal could not be defended against a major French attack - a view which was common both in London and in Wellington's own army.³ But the Ministers wanted more information, and so, on 20th October, Liverpool sent Wellington four queries: 1) What chance did the

¹ see above p 212-5.

² Liverpool to Wellington, 1st November 1809, *W.S.D.*, vol. 6, p 421.

³ On the attitude in England a few months later see, Liverpool to Wellington, 'Private & Confidential', 13th March 1810, B.L. Add. Ms. 38,325 f27-31, which is printed in *W.S.D.* v.6 p 493-4, and which is discussed below Chapter 8, p 283-4. On opinion in Wellington's army see Oman, *Peninsular War*, vol. 2, p 169-170. See also below p 309.

increased French forces have of completely subduing Spain? 2) Will the French attack Portugal before they consolidate their hold on northern and central Spain? 3) What is the prospect of successfully resisting an immediate and serious attack on Portugal? and 4) Would the army be endangered - if resistance is unlikely to succeed - by delaying its withdrawal?¹ Although more specific, these queries generally echoed Castlereagh's letter of 14th September.²

Wellington did not share the common assumption that Portugal was indefensible against a superior force. On 20th October 1809 he sent Colonel Fletcher his chief engineer a Memorandum in which he outlined his plan for an intricate line of field fortifications running across the Lisbon Peninsula from the Tagus to the sea. While these fortifications - known as the Lines of Torres Vedras - were held, Lisbon and a separate embarkation point would both be secure.³ This was only one element in Wellington's complex plan for the defence of Portugal, but it was particularly important at this time, for it allowed him to assure the Government that even in the event of disaster the British army could safely be evacuated.

On 14th November Wellington wrote two letters officially replying to Castlereagh's despatch and privately answering Liverpool's queries. He began his official letter by saying that there was no danger of a successful attack on Portugal before the French received their reinforcements, and that even when these arrived "the enemy will find it difficult, if not impossible, to obtain possession of Portugal". To defend Portugal he required a British army with an effective strength of 30,000 men. To reach this figure he would need some 5,000 reinforcements, and also requested that some of his second battalions be replaced by first

¹ Liverpool to Wellington, [Private], 20th October 1809, *W.S.D.*, vol. 6, p 412-3.

² See above p 219.

³ 'Memorandum for Lieut. Col. Fletcher, commanding Royal Engineers', [by Wellington]. 20th October 1809, *W.D.* III p 556-560.

battalions.¹ He estimated that the annual cost of this army would be £1,756,236 - only £568,044 more than it would cost to keep it in England. To support the British army he would have the Portuguese army - theoretically some 45,000 men - and their militia. As the Portuguese Government was impoverished it would be necessary to increase British aid to Portugal to just over £1 million per annum. In addition to these expenses there would be the cost of the transports, but most of these "would be on the public service [even] if the army were at home". If possible, additional transports should be provided to evacuate those Portuguese soldiers who wished to remain with the British. Finally he emphasised that if the British army was withdrawn, the whole country would promptly fall to the French, probably without a struggle.²

In response to Liverpool's four specific questions Wellington stated that there was little danger of the French subduing all Spain if the Spaniards were reasonably prudent; that Portugal was likely to be the first French object once their reinforcements arrived, that they would need 80,000 men to hope to take Lisbon; but they could not attack until their reinforcements arrived; and that even after a defeat the army could be safely evacuated.³

The most curious thing about these letters is that they say nothing about how Wellington intended to defend Portugal - they do not even mention the Lines of Torres Vedras. Whether this was due to a misplaced desire for secrecy or to some other reason, this was an extraordinary omission. Wellington simply assured the Cabinet that Portugal could be defended and the army evacuated in an emergency, without explaining how this was to be achieved.

It is clear that the Ministers were not convinced by the bald assertion that Portugal could be defended - indeed it would have been remarkable if they had

¹ These requests were in the second (private) letter - not the official one.

² Wellington to Liverpool, 14 November 1809 *W.D.* III, p 583-6.

³ Wellington to Liverpool, [Private], 14th November 1809, *W.D.* III p 587-8.

been. But they did accept that Wellington's army was in no immediate danger, and that he had taken precautions to facilitate an embarkation whenever it might be necessary. The Government had no wish to withdraw the army prematurely. As Liverpool wrote, "It would neither be just nor politic to abandon Portugal before such a measure was absolutely necessary".¹ The presence of the British army in Portugal posed a problem for the French and so helped the Spanish patriots. If the British army was withdrawn Portugal might well fall without a struggle which would be a major strategic and psychological blow to the resistance in Spain, and to Napoleon's enemies throughout Europe. Britain would be accused by her existing and potential allies of bad faith and of betraying Portuguese trust. At home such a withdrawal would greatly strengthen the hand of the Opposition which had strongly attacked the Peninsular commitment in 1809, and at the same time give Canning good grounds for an unrestrained attack on the new Government. The Cabinet thus had good reasons for delaying the withdrawal of the British army from Portugal for as long as possible. They trusted Wellington not to risk his army in an unnecessary battle, and if he did manage to save Portugal, so much the better!

¹ Liverpool to Wellington, 20th October 1809, *W.S.D.*, vol. 6, p 412-3. See also, Liverpool to Wellington, 1st November 1809, *W.S.D.*, vol. 6, p 421; and below Chapter 8, page 280 to 287.

Chapter 8

Part 1 : The Early Trials of the Perceval Government, (January to June, 1810)

When the Perceval Government took office, it was generally not expected to survive for long. Lord Eldon reported that "Bets here go twenty guineas to one that we never face it [Parliament]".¹ Perceval sensibly decided to postpone the meeting of Parliament for as long as possible (i.e. until late January 1810), but even in the interim the Government suffered an embarrassing defeat. The death of the Duke of Portland on 30th October 1809 meant that a new Chancellor of Oxford University had to be elected. As "the spiritual home of 'No Popery'",² Oxford could normally be trusted to elect a staunch opponent of Catholic claims and a firm supporter of the Government. But on this occasion the protestant vote was divided with both Lord Eldon and the "fox-hunting Duke"³ of Beaufort standing. As a result Lord Grenville, the Opposition's candidate, was narrowly elected after a hard fought contest.⁴ The symbolic importance of the defeat was enormous, for the Government was seen to be defeated in its stronghold by divisions among those who normally supported it. The defeat made the Ministry appear weaker and more flimsy than ever and this perception further undermined the Government's strength.

Parliament was due to meet on 26th January 1810 and in the meantime the troops came home from Walcheren and wild rumours circulated of dissensions within the new Cabinet culminating, according to one newspaper, in a duel between

¹ Eldon to Sir William Scott, no date, c.4th October 1809, Twiss, *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 1, p 421-422.

² Gray, *Perceval*, p 285.

³ Eldon to Sir William Scott, no date, (after the election), Twiss, *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 1, p 426-7. Clearly Eldon did not mean the phrase as a compliment.

⁴ Polling was on 13th-14th December 1809. Grenville received 406 votes, Eldon 393, and Beaufort 238. Twiss, *Life of Lord Eldon*, vol. 1, p 426. Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 471n. Gray, *Perceval* gives rather different figures: Grenville 406; Eldon 390; Beaufort 288, and points out that from a total electorate of 1274, 1084 votes were cast (on his figures) and concludes that, "Never had such an election been so bitterly fought" p 285. Canning supported Beaufort. Canning to Bagot, 23rd November 1809, *George Canning and His Friends*, vol. 1, p 340-1.

Perceval and Lord Wellesley.¹ The truth seems to have been much less dramatic with the Ministers working hard on the King's Speech.

Parliament met on 23rd January 1810 and the debate on the King's Speech went surprisingly well for the Government. The Address was seconded by the young Robert Peel who made an impressive *début*, and the Government carried the division by 263 votes to 167.² But this majority soon proved to be illusory. The Opposition's amendment had been too strong, and it had alienated Canning, Castlereagh, Sidmouth and their friends, swelling the Government's numbers far beyond their real strength. This was soon demonstrated for on 26th January Lord Porchester moved for an enquiry into the Walcheren Expedition. Although Perceval had the support of Canning and his friends in opposing the enquiry, the Government was defeated by 195 to 186 votes. Two days later the Ministry was defeated three times in rapid succession in divisions over the composition of the finance committee.³ In other circumstances these defeats might have brought the Government down, but Perceval and his colleagues knew that they faced a difficult task and were determined not to give way unless they were defeated in the Commons on a vote of confidence.

The Walcheren Enquiry was conducted by a committee of the whole House which met twenty times between 2nd February and 30th March. At first all went well for the Government with Castlereagh of all people making an excellent speech.⁴ But then, on 20th February, the radical Lord Folkestone raised the issue

¹ Gray, *Perceval*, p 277.

² Gray, *Perceval*; p 287-288; Norman Gash, *Mr. Secretary Peel. The Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830*, (London, Longmans, 1961), p 68-70.

³ Gray, *Perceval*, p 288-9. A couple of weeks later Perceval also had to agree to the establishment of an Enquiry into the high price of bullion, on which see below, chpt 11, p 364-6.

⁴ Gray, *Perceval*, p 299 says that the *Sun* described it as the best speech made in the Commons since the death of Pitt. J.W. Ward wrote about this time "Castlereagh has astonished all the world by his speech the other night. I am glad he succeeded, for, though an abominable minister, he is an excellent man and a perfect gentleman" *Letters to Ivy*, p 91. Feelings such as these must have played a large part in the great rise in Castlereagh's reputation which began at this time. Canning commented on this in writing to his wife after a fine speech by Castlereagh on the Vote of Thanks to Wellington: "My own love will be very angry with Castgh. for having spoken very well again, but so he certainly did - *il faut avouer*. Being turned out has certainly done him a

of an account of the expedition which Chatham had foolishly and unconstitutionally given to the King. Immediately the mood changed, and on 23rd February the Government was defeated by 178 to 171 votes on a motion calling for the tabling of all relevant communications from Chatham to the King. The crisis in Parliament was mirrored in the Cabinet with Chatham fighting to prevent the production of a detailed reply. On 3rd March Whitbread - one of the leading Whigs in the Commons - tabled a savage motion condemning Chatham. Perceval managed to have the debate postponed until the 6th, and made it clear to Chatham that his resignation would be readily accepted, but Chatham would not take the hint. On the 6th the Government was defeated 221 to 188 votes, but still Chatham refused to resign. The following evening Whitbread warned that he would not let the matter drop, and there was a stormy Cabinet meeting culminating in a "long harangue" by Wellesley and at last the noble Earl resigned.¹

Chatham's obstinacy had jeopardized the Government, but he had resigned just in time to avert disaster, and the Government had little difficulty surviving the rest of the Enquiry. At 4 a.m. on 31st March the Commons passed four motions approving the policy and conduct of the expedition, by majorities ranging from 21 to 51. The Enquiry and the resignation of Chatham had satisfied the general desire for some retribution for the disaster of Walcheren, and the majority of members did not want a change of Government.

No sooner had the Government survived this crisis than another of their own making blew up. On the night of 5th/6th April 1810, Perceval - showing more

world of good - both given him speech and obtained him a hearing". Canning to Mrs Canning 2nd February 1810 quoted by Aspinnall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 504n-505n.

¹ Memorandum by [Col Meyrick Shawe], printed in *W.S.D.* vol. 7 p 257-288, quote on p 260. Meyrick Shawe was a close friend of Wellesley, and while his account - which was written in January 1814 - must be used with some caution, it does present what is effectively Wellesley's version of events in much greater detail than can be found anywhere else.

There is an excellent account of the Walcheren Enquiry in Gray, *Perceval*, p 299-303, while Perceval's reports of the debates and divisions are printed in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, where Professor Aspinnall also quotes much valuable incidental material.

See also Perceval to Chatham, no date [March 1810], Chatham Papers, P.R.O. 30/8/368, f135-6 for Whitbread's warning.

determination than sense - drove his supporters into voting to imprison the radical MP Sir Francis Burdett in the Tower for contempt of Parliament. Burdett was certainly at fault, but there was no point in making him a political martyr, and many of Perceval's supporters regretted his action. Even so the mistake might not have been serious if the order had been executed promptly and effectively. But Colman the Serjeant at Arms bungled the matter badly, and although Sir Francis took no special precautions to avoid arrest he remained free. On the evening of the 6th large crowds gathered in support of Sir Francis outside his house in Piccadilly. Ministers had their windows broken and their supporters harrassed. Westmorland was covered in mud when he ventured onto the streets and passers-by were made to shout 'Burdett for ever'. Richard Ryder the Home Secretary was unable to cope with the crisis, and Perceval had to give him constant support and guidance. The troops were called out to restore order, but their loyalty was questioned and the Volunteers were used wherever possible.¹ Burdett appealed to the Sherriffs of Middlesex for protection against the Serjeant at Arms, and the Government's lawyers developed doubts over what action Colman could legally take to enforce the warrant. Friday became Saturday, and Saturday became Sunday without a resolution to the crisis. On Monday morning heavy rain dispersed most of the crowds, and Burdett's friends decided to offer only passive resistance. With the aid of the troops Colman broke down Burdett's front door and arrested the baronet as he - with a proper sense of theatre - was instructing his son on the contents of the Magna Carta. By taking a long detour Colman avoided trouble *en route* to the Tower, although several members of the crowd were killed as the troops returned to their barracks. Burdett remained in the Tower until the end of the Parliamentary

¹ The 4th Duke of Portland to Perceval, 17th April 1810, Perceval Papers 10/XXII/85. See also Moira to Sir Charles Hastings, 11th May 1810, "it required very little tact to perceive how much the feelings of every soldier there were in unison with those of the populace." Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Reginald Rawdon Hastings, Esq., of The Manor House, Ashby de la Zouch*, (Hereafter cited as *H.M.C. Hastings*), vol. 3, edited by Francis Bickley, (London, H.M.S.O., 1934) p 279-80. Moira was Constable of the Tower, and received Sir Francis Burdett.

Session in June when he was automatically released. Huge crowds waited to welcome him but he prudently avoided them and slipped away.¹

The Burdett Riots did not pose a direct threat to Perceval's Government. Neither the mob nor the London radicals had any stomach for revolution, while the turbulence on the streets rallied all shades of 'respectable' opinion around the Government. Yet Perceval's initial mistake in precipitating the crisis, and Ryder's incompetence in dealing with it, did not go unnoticed. The Government had survived the crises of the Walcheren Enquiry and the Burdett Riots, but it remained weak and lacking in ministerial talent. The rest of the Session of 1810 passed quietly, but while most members of Parliament had no wish to see the Ministry displaced, they certainly wished that it could be strengthened.

* * * * *

During the Walcheren Enquiry, before the fate of the Government had been decided, the Commons had three opportunities to express its sentiments on the Peninsular War: on 1st February there was a debate on the Vote of Thanks to Wellington; on 16th February Wellington's pension was considered, and on 9th March the House voted on the Portuguese subsidy. The Vote of Thanks was carried easily without even a division, Perceval observing to the King that "if there had been [a division] the numbers against the Motion would have been exceedingly few".² Lord Milton did propose an amendment for the Opposition which was supported by Ponsonby, (the Opposition leader in the Commons), and by some of

¹ Gray, *Perceval*, p 289-290; M.W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett and His Times (1770-1844)*, (London, Macmillan, 1931), 2 vols., vol. 1, chapter XII, p 240-294.

² Perceval to the King, 1st February 1810, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4076, p 504. Creevey gives an interesting account of the affair from the perspective of a radical member of the Opposition. *The Creevey Papers*, p 125-7.

the more radical members of the Opposition: Whitbread, Tarleton, and Folkestone. But Windham supported the Government as did Canning and Castlereagh, who made another fine speech. In the Lords, Grey, Grenville, and Lauderdale all opposed the Thanks with the two last entering a formal protest.¹

There was naturally less support for the pension than for the Thanks - especially as many found the Wellesley family over eager for honours, places and rewards of all kinds. On this occasion Windham opposed the motion and Canning, (who supported it), acknowledged that "His distinctions were very rational and just, between this vote and the thanks".² Most of the other Opposition speakers were again from among the more radical Whigs. Canning and Wilberforce spoke in favour of the motion, while Castlereagh was absent due to his sister's death. The Opposition forced a division, but despite "the greatest exertions", could only muster 106 votes to 213.³

Unlike these two questions, the Portuguese subsidy directly tested the support in Parliament for the continuation of Britain's Peninsular commitment. Those speaking against it included not only the radicals but George Tierney and the independent Henry Bankes. Nor did the Opposition speakers equivocate: Sir J. Newport declared that "the contest [in the Peninsula] was now hopeless", while Curwen "could not imagine that there was any rational hope of success", and believed that the notion "of our driving the French out of Spain ... was absurd".⁴ More influential was probably the opposition of General Ferguson who had served with distinction in the Vimeiro campaign, but who now rose to deride the Portuguese army which Parliament was being asked to subsidize.⁵

¹ Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 504n.

² Canning to Mrs. Canning, 17th February 1810, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 516n.

³ William Wellesley-Pole to Richmond, no date, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, v. 5, p 516n.

⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 16, p 9***-10*** (Newport) and p 10***-11*** (Curwen).

⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 16, p 15***.

On the Government's side, after Perceval had introduced the motion its advocacy was left to obscure and inept speakers.¹ Canning intended to speak but was pre-empted by Huskisson and chose not to follow him. According to Canning "the House [was] jaded - and the debate the dullest that I had almost ever heard".² Yet 346 members stayed until the House divided at around 2 a.m., and the Government easily defeated an Opposition amendment 204 votes to 142.³

These three tests clearly show that the maintenance of Wellington's army in Portugal, enjoyed the support of many in the Commons who were not committed to Perceval's Government. Only three days before the last vote, the Ministry had been defeated by a substantial majority on the censure of Lord Chatham, but it could still gain a majority of 3:2 in support of the war in Portugal. Castlereagh and Canning both advocated vigorous measures and warmly praised Wellington. Sidmouth argued that "our honour, and our own immediate interests impose upon us the obligation of affording to Portugal all the assistance in our power for the purpose of delaying its final subjugation".⁴ Even within the Opposition there were some influential advocates of the war in the Peninsula: Lord Holland, Francis Horner,

¹ One Captain Parker was typical: he argued that "while there was life there was hope"! *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 16, p 9***. The others were little better. Parker was a naval officer who sat in Parliament only from March 1810 to June 1811. See Peter Jupp's entry on him in R.G. Thorne, *The Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 4, p 721.

² Canning to Mrs. Canning, 10th March 1810, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 539n.

³ Perceval to the King, [9th March 1810], *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4109. p 538. This hardly justifies Liverpool's later claim that, "the Portuguese subsidy was carried by a small and unwilling majority; and I believe that if the House had been left to act upon their own feelings, they would ... have decided for withdrawing the army from Portugal." Liverpool to Wellington, 10th Septemember 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 591-3. But Liverpool was trying to convince Wellington of the Government's support for him and this apparently led him to exaggerate the opposition to the Government's policy.

⁴ Sidmouth to Grenville, 18th February 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 12. Sidmouth of course sat in the Lords, but he had a substantial party of friends, relatives and followers in the Commons.

and the Marquess of Buckingham (Grenville's elder brother), from different perspectives all championed the cause.¹

Perceval's Government did not suffer from its commitment to Portugal; and its firm stand in Parliament on the issue probably gained it some lasting friends as well as giving it cohesion and a sense of direction. Many years later one member of Parliament even claimed that the Government only survived the Walcheren debates, because the Commons feared that an administration formed by the Opposition, "would not prosecute the war in Spain with the vigor that was desired" - but this was surely an exaggeration born of hindsight.² Still, so long as the war went well, it would help the Government to survive. But equally, any serious setback in Portugal might well prove a mortal blow to the Government. Perceval would have little hope of surviving if Wellington's army was defeated, while even an orderly evacuation of Portugal in the face of overwhelming odds might precipitate a political crisis. Such a crisis would not necessarily favour the Opposition however, for the King's hostility to them was well known and widely respected, and Canning was waiting in the wings ready and eager to 'rescue' his Majesty.

* * * * *

Wellington viewed political events in England with considerable concern. The call in December 1809 by the Common Council of the City of London for an

¹ Buckingham to Grenville, 15th February [1810], *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 11-12; Roberts, *The Whig Party* p 149.

² Stuart-Wortley speaking in a debate on the influence of the Crown on 24th June 1822. *Parliamentary Debates*, new series, vol. 7, 1822, col. 1315.

enquiry into the Talavera campaign touched a raw nerve by evoking memories of Cintra.¹ He told Liverpool that,

I cannot expect mercy at their hands, whether I succeed or fail; and if I should fail, they will not enquire whether the failure is owing to my own incapacity, to the blameless errors to which we are all liable, to the faults or mistakes of others ... or to the great Power and abilities of our Enemy. In any of these cases I shall become their victim; but I am not to be alarmed by this additional risk, and whatever be the consequences, I'll continue to do my best in this country.²

To Villiers he wrote more simply, "I act with a sword hanging over my head".³ Wellington frequently used exaggerated language and expressed his worries in unwarrantably vehement terms, but there can be no doubt that in this case he was genuinely anxious.

His assessment of the political situation was consistently pessimistic. On 1st March he told Liverpool "I am convinced that the Govt cannot last".⁴ A month later he wrote to one of his subordinates that,

The government are [sic] terribly weak, and I think it probable will be beaten upon the Walcheren question. It is impossible to say what will be the consequence. I think the King may be able to form a government without having recourse to Lord Grenville; but there will be no strength in that government and the members will have no satisfaction in conducting public affairs.⁵

Yet he was no more cheerful when he learnt that the Government had survived, telling his brother that "I think that Govt and Country are going to the Devil as fast as possible".⁶

¹ The call was for a rigid, impartial and general inquiry into both Walcheren and the Peninsula. Aspinall, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 474n.

² Wellington to Liverpool, 2nd January 1810, *W.D.* III, p 671, corrected from the copy in BL Loan Mss 72, vol. 20, f55.

³ Wellington to Villiers, 2nd January 1810, *W.D.* III, p 670-1.

⁴ Wellington to Liverpool, 1st March 1810, *W.D.*, III, p 759-762, corrected from copy in BL Loan Mss 732, vol. 20, f65ff.

⁵ Wellington to Craufurd, 4th April 1810, *W.D.* IV p 1-2.

⁶ Wellington to William Wellesley-Pole, 9th May 1810, 'Wellington's Letters to Wellesley-Pole' *Camden Miscellany* no. 28, p 33-34.

The weakness of the Government annoyed Wellington and aroused his contempt, "what can be expected from men who are beaten in the House of Commons three times a week?".¹ He complained that the Ministers should show more leadership and "take pains to inform the public and guide their opinion, and not allow every newswriter to run away with the public mind, upon points essential to the interests of the country".² He was well aware of the connection between the success of his operations and the survival of the Ministry: "The government are terribly afraid that I shall get them, and myself, into a scrape".³ "The state of opinion in England is very unfavorable to the Peninsula. The ministers are as much alarmed as the public ... and they appear to be of opinion that I am inclined to fight a desperate battle which is to answer no purpose".⁴

There is no denying that these grievances had some foundation. But it is striking that Wellington's letters show little or no sympathy for the Ministers, whose desperate battle in the Commons was fought as much for the King, and for Wellington, as for any love of office for its own sake. Wellington on the other hand was selfish and egotistical. The weakness of the Government encouraged him to take a high and peremptory tone in his correspondence with the Ministers, which stands in sharp contrast to Liverpool's conciliatory, almost deferential, approach. He was more inclined to blame the Ministers for the weakness of their administration, than to praise them for not giving way to the Opposition. Like many generals before and since he resented the intrusion of political considerations into what he saw as essentially military problems. "A great deal might be done now, if there existed in England less party, and more public sentiment, and if there was any government".⁵ But Wellington was no political innocent. For two years

¹ Wellington to Admiral Berkeley, 7th April 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 103-104.

² Wellington to Villiers, 5th June 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 103-104.

³ Wellington to Admiral Berkeley, 7th April 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 7-8.

⁴ Wellington to Charles Stuart, 21st April 1810, *W.D.*, IV, p 27-29.

⁵ Wellington to Adml. Berkeley, 7th April 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 7-8.

he had held a difficult and demanding position in the Irish Government. He knew that the war was an inevitable and proper subject for political debate, and that Perceval's Government was stalwart in his defence. His outbursts can be attributed to tension, tiredness or spleen, but whatever their cause they were a poor return for the kindness, loyalty and consideration which he received.

* * * * *

The Ministers were also concerned at the weakness of the Government. Lord Wellesley was particularly anxious and repeatedly urged Perceval to seek new strength.¹ But the Prime Minister recognized that no one was likely to want to join the Government until it had survived the Walcheren Enquiry.² When Chatham resigned Perceval therefore approached the politically insignificant Earl of Pembroke to take charge of the Ordnance, but even Pembroke declined.³ The office remained vacant for nearly two months until 1st May when a weary Mulgrave transferred to it from the Admiralty.⁴

Perceval faced many of the same problems in attempting to strengthen his Government that he had confronted in forming it only six months before. He had no shortage of offices to offer including the Admiralty, the Home Office and the

¹ Marquess Wellesley to ? [Perceval], 'Private & Confidential', 13th March 1810, *The Wellesley Papers*, vol. 2, p 4-7. Gray, *Perceval*, p 391.

² Perceval to Richmond, 8th March 1810, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 537n-538n.

³ Pembroke to Bathurst, 9th March 1810, quoted by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 541n.

⁴ Mulgrave had tired under the constant work of the Admiralty and a bitter dispute with Lord Chatham. Mulgrave to Perceval, 'Private', 8th February 1810, Perceval Papers, 10/XXII/80, N.R.A. no. 408.

Exchequer.¹ The question was not how to find room for the recruits, but rather to persuade the various elements of Pitt's Friends to serve together.

Canning was certainly willing, indeed eager, to return to office, even if it meant serving under Perceval and alongside Sidmouth. He had not enjoyed his experience of equivocal opposition and recognized that his hopes of becoming Prime Minister had failed - at least for the present. But if Canning was willing to forgive his enemies, it was by no means certain that they would forgive him. An overture to Sidmouth through Charles Yorke was firmly rejected, while Vansittart, Sidmouth's close friend, found it difficult to take the idea seriously.² Faced with this reaction Perceval refused to even approach Castlereagh whose grievance against Canning was so much more recent.³

This left the Ministers with an unpalatable choice. They could continue without reinforcements, but both Lord Wellesley and Lord Melville indicated their opposition to this, the latter even forcing Robert Dundas to threaten to resign.⁴ They could exclude Canning in which case Sidmouth and Castlereagh would take office. This would be both grossly unfair to Canning and politically dangerous, for it would drive him into determined and bitter opposition to the Government, and he was still the greatest orator in the Commons. In any case Wellesley made it clear that he could not accept Canning's exclusion.⁵

The only other alternative was to include Canning without either Castlereagh or Sidmouth, and of all the Cabinet only Wellesley, Dundas and Mulgrave were

¹ Perceval would have given up the Exchequer while retaining the Treasury. Richard Ryder would have given up office with relief. Perceval to Richmond, 30th April 1810, printed in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 79-81.

² Yorke's account is printed in Walpole, *Life of Perceval* vol. 2, p 81n-82n. On Vansittart's reaction see Aspinall, introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p xlvi.

³ Perceval to Richmond, 30th April 1810, printed in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 79-81.

⁴ Aspinall, introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p xlvi-xlvi.

⁵ Marquess Wellesley to Perceval, 3rd May 1810, *The Wellesley Papers*, vol. 2, p 9-11, esp. p 11.

prepared to agree to this.¹ Canning was too powerful, too vigorous, too active and too disruptive to have on his own. Wellesley was already a difficult colleague to work with and his close alliance with Canning was well known. Acting together they could totally alter the balance of power within the Government if Canning's accession was not counter-balanced by some other addition of weight and influence. Bathurst expressed all this in a frank exchange with Wellesley in Cabinet,

"Oh, yes. I think as highly as you and anyone can of the value of that accession - not in the House of Commons only - but in this room - we should feel the value of it every day that we met. But my doubt is this - whether Canning's accession **alone** to the present Government would not lead to a change of the basis of the Government itself."²

Faced with this deadlock the Ministers accepted defeat. Lord Melville let Dundas withdraw his threatened resignation, and the Cabinet agreed to go on without significant reinforcements. At Wellesley's insistence an approach was made to Castlereagh in August, but it was curtly rejected. Mulgrave's place at the Admiralty was taken by Charles Yorke who was able to accept owing to Perceval's generosity in giving him a valuable sinecure which had become vacant early in the year.³

Charles Yorke was a competent rather than a brilliant Minister. He had been a great success as Secretary at War under Addington, but had failed when Addington promoted him to Home Secretary. This had led to the harsh but widely

¹ Eldon to [Camden], 'Confidential', no date, Camden Papers C90/2/4.

² quoted by Aspinall in introduction to *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p xlix.

³ A tellership of the Exchequer worth some £2,700 per annum. Its previous holder was William Eden, a younger son of Lord Auckland, who committed suicide on or about 19th January 1810. Auckland felt that under the tragic circumstances Perceval ought to have bestowed the sinecure on another of his sons, but few people supported this view. Others in the Opposition suggested that Wellington be given it instead of a pension, thus saving the Treasury. Canning regretted that he should be out of office for he felt that his claims were far superior to Yorke's. But the most revealing observation is the King's, that Perceval - a man of large family and no fortune - did not take the opportunity to secure the future of one of his six sons. *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 9, 10, 13-15, 17; Perceval to the King, 26th January 1810 and reply, 28th January, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4076, p 496-498 and 498n; Gray, *Perceval*, p 121.

accepted opinion that "he is one of the most respectable of the second rank, and while he continues in that rank".¹ Nonetheless he was certainly not less worthy of high office than Richard Ryder - or, one might add, many others in Perceval's Cabinet. In fact he seems to have injected some new vitality and freshness into a Cabinet, some of whose members were growing jaded after over three years in office. In his first month in office he raised issues ranging from the progress of negotiations with France for an exchange of prisoners, to plans for an attack on French naval bases in the Indian Ocean.² No doubt this early enthusiasm soon waned under the burden of routine work, but Yorke's presence in the Cabinet must amply have made up for Chatham's absence.

Still, as Wellesley pointed out, Yorke's accession did nothing to strengthen the Government's standing in Parliament.³ But gradually as time passed the Government did grow stronger. With the Walcheren debates behind them the Ministers gained confidence, while Perceval's courage and tenacity in adversity enhanced his reputation. The Government's task was made easier by the disunity and lack of talent in the Opposition in the Commons. The death of Lord Lansdowne in November 1809 had promoted his son Lord Henry Petty to the Lords. The nominal Opposition leader in the Commons remained George Ponsonby but he had little control over his supporters. Whitbread was probably the ablest of the Whig spokesmen, but he continued his flirtation with the radicals. Finally there was the competent but uninspiring George Tierney. Canning far outclassed anyone in the Opposition, but he had his own game to play and was as reluctant to join with the Opposition as they were to have him.⁴ During the

¹ Henry Bankes, quoted in the excellent entry on Yorke by Professor Aspinall and R.G. Thorne, in R.G. Thorne, *The Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 5, p 665-674, quote on p 671.

² Charles Yorke, Circular to the Cabinet, 7th May 1810, and Circular to the Cabinet, 'Secret', no date, May 1810, B.L. Add. Ms. 45,042 f107-8, and f120-121.

³ Marquess Wellesley to Perceval, 'Private & Confidential', BL Add Ms 37,295 f282-3. (Printed in *The Wellesley Papers*, vol. 2, p 9-11.)

⁴ Grey to Brougham, 22nd November 1809, Brougham, *Life & Times*, vol. 1, p 476-9.

Walcheren debates when the Government's future was in doubt, these divisions and weaknesses had been obscured, but towards the end of the Session they became much more apparent.

When Parliament rose on 21st June 1810 Perceval's Government remained weak and far from cohesive. Yet it had done much better than anyone had expected, not merely surviving but establishing itself in office. The storm over Walcheren was weathered with only the loss of Chatham, and even the mismanagement of the Burdett affair did no lasting damage. In January the general expectation was that the Government would fall; by June it was widely accepted that it would continue despite its evident inadequacy. Its survival can be explained in part by the strong support of the King, and to the political advantages which always accrued to the incumbants in office. But equally powerful was the lack of an acceptable alternative. The Commons would not force Grenville and Grey on the King, knowing his dislike of them, and horror of Catholic Emancipation. This left only Canning, or a reconstruction of the existing Ministry under Wellesley or some other Minister. But Canning had as many enemies as admirers, and was generally blamed for his exclusion from office.¹ Nor did there seem to be much point in simply reshuffling elements of the same pack. The Commons would have preferred a broader administration including all the elements of Pitt's old party (except Grenville), but as this could not be achieved they accepted Perceval, who was at least honest, straight-forward and well-meaning. As Grey had predicted to Brougham, people gradually became resigned to Perceval's administration once the early storms had been weathered.

But this is not the whole story, for it neglects the courage and fortitude of Perceval in particular, who met and repelled the full fury of the storm in the Commons with little ministerial support. It was his determination not to be daunted, even by a string of defeats on the floor of the House, that in the end was

¹ Canning to Mrs. Canning, 2nd February 1810, printed by Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p 505n.

the most important reason that his Government survived its early trials. Poor Perceval! Little did he know that they were only a foretaste of things to come!

**Part 2 : Strategic Discussions,
(January to June 1810)**

While Perceval and his Ministers faced political challenges in England, Wellington had problems of his own in Portugal. On 14th November 1809 he had told Liverpool that if the Spaniards were commonly prudent and did not launch a premature offensive, the French would need very large reinforcements indeed to over-run Spain.¹ But the Spaniards could see little prudence in idly waiting for the French reinforcements to arrive. Probably they should have used the interval to train their troops, supply their fortresses, and lay plans for protracting the resistance after initial defeats. Instead they not unnaturally preferred to strike while the enemy was relatively weak, in the hope of gaining a strategic advantage, or at least a morale boosting victory which would encourage the resistance in the hard times to come. Mixed with this reasoning was a liberal dose of political self-interest, for the Supreme Junta was becoming increasingly discredited and needed a victory to re-establish its authority and popularity.²

For their offensive the Supreme Junta had two armies: the numerous but poorly trained and ill-equipped Army of Galicia under the Duque del Parque, and the far more substantial Army of La Mancha under Areizaga. Del Parque and his 50,000 men were ordered to create a diversion by threatening Madrid from the north, while Areizaga launched the main attack from the south. The plan was wildly over-ambitious, but given the available forces and their location, and the basic decision to launch an offensive, it is hard to see how it could have been improved.³

¹ Wellington to Liverpool, 14th November 1809, *W.D.* III, p 587-8, see above, Chapter 7, p 256. At the time Wellington wrote this the Spanish offensive was already under way.

² Oman, *Peninsular War*, III p 8, p 67.

³ except by British co-operation, which Wellington had made clear would not be forthcoming.

The campaign began surprisingly well when del Parque defeated a French attack at Tamames on 18th October and captured Salamanca a week later. When the French were reinforced and advanced against him, he sensibly retired, thus preserving his army. In the south Areizaga's advance caught the French off-guard and a better general might have made much of the advantage. But Areizaga was alternately hesitant and rash, and the French commanders soon regained their composure and concentrated against him. On 19th November a French army of over 30,000 men came up with Areizaga's 50,000 troops at Ocaña. The result was the worst single Spanish defeat of the war, when the French cavalry turned the exposed Spanish flank. The Spaniards lost some 4,000 casualties and 14,000 prisoners, and their army was totally dispersed. The day before Ocaña operations had resumed in the north. On 24th November del Parque heard the news and promptly began to retreat, but on 28th November he was caught at a disadvantage at Alba de Tormes. His army was not badly beaten, but it disintegrated in the ensuing retreat.¹

Wellington reacted to the Spanish defeat with annoyance but not despair. He feared that it might open the way for the French to conquer Andalusia, but hoped that if the Spanish troops rallied, "We may yet keep up the ball in the Peninsula sufficiently long to tire out Buonaparte".² He made it clear that he had played no role in encouraging the Spanish offensive, and sought to reassure the Ministers that, despite frequent waste and improvidence, it would be worth the effort and expense to provide fresh arms and equipment for new Spanish armies if they could be formed.³

The French did not immediately invade Andalusia. Their hold on the countryside had been weakened when they withdrew local garrisons to concentrate

¹ This account of the Campaign is based on Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, Section XVII, Chapters I & IV.

² Wellington to Richmond, 28th November 1809, *W.S.D.* vol. 13, p 376-377.

³ Wellington to Liverpool, 7th December 1809, *W.D.* III, p 628-8.

their forces against Areizaga and del Parque. King Joseph's first priority was to re-assert his authority in the areas already nominally under his control before undertaking any new projects. He also repeatedly sought permission from his imperial brother, but Napoleon remained silent. And so it was not until January 1810 that the French armies swept forward into Andalusia. They met with little resistance for few of Areizaga's men had returned to the colours. Seville fell on 31st January but Cadiz, the greatest prize of all, was saved. Albuquerque hurried his small army direct from Estremadura and reached the great port on 3rd February - only two days before the French.¹ His march saved the city which had been left without an adequate garrison, and the French were forced to begin a siege which was to continue, without any real hope of success, for the next two years.

Andalusia was the heartland of the regular Spanish resistance and its conquest was a major - almost a mortal - blow. With the French now occupying all the richest and most heavily populated provinces, the Spaniards found it increasingly difficult to recruit and maintain their field armies. Never again were they able to bring into action the nearly 100,000 men they had mobilized for the Ocaña Campaign. Henceforth the resistance was to be more localized and less regular. Only in the peripheral provinces of Valencia, Murcia, Estremadura and Galicia could regular Spanish armies continue to be collected, and not all of these armies survived for long. But the French paid a high price for this great benefit. A whole army - 70,000 troops - was required to hold down southern Spain, and whenever it was significantly reduced for operations elsewhere the Spanish resistance would immediately flare up again. The conquest of Andalusia had done nothing to break the Spanish will to resist, and though the guerrillas posed less of a challenge to French control than the regular Spanish armies, they inflicted more casualties over time. The French paid a high price for their occupation of

¹ Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 145, and Fortescue, *British Army*, vol. 7, p 34, agree on these dates. Lovett, *Napoleon and the Birth of Modern Spain*, vol. 1, p 362 says that Albuquerque arrived on 4th February, one day before the French; while Severn 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' makes Albuquerque arrive on the 2nd and the French a day later.

Andalusia, but it was a price which had to be paid if they were to have any hope of truly conquering Spain. The absorption of 70,000 men in Andalusia used up all the disposable force of the old French Army of Spain and meant that extensive new operations could not be undertaken until huge drafts of fresh troops arrived from Napoleon. Their object would be to complete the conquest of the Peninsula: to over-run the remaining unoccupied provinces of Spain, such as Valencia, and to drive the British out of Portugal. The Spanish defeats of late 1809 and early 1810 meant that for the first time (except briefly during Moore's Campaign) the Anglo-Portuguese army was the most important allied force in the Peninsula. It remained so for the rest of the war.

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The British had never lost their concern for Cadiz. Although Wellington had always been "one of those who are of [the] opinion that the English ought to have nothing to say to Cadiz",¹ he kept a watchful eye in that direction. On 22nd December 1809 he wrote to Major-General Whittingham (a British officer serving in the Spanish army) and asked him for a report on the defences of Cadiz.² In early February 1810 he received an appeal for help from the Spanish authorities, and promptly despatched Major-General W. Stewart with three regiments of British infantry to assist in the defence of Cadiz. A few days later he added a regiment of Portuguese infantry to Stewart's force.³

But these were not the first Anglo-Portuguese troops to arrive in Cadiz. On 18th January Benjamin Frere, who was acting as British envoy to the Spanish

¹ Wellington to Whittingham, Badajoz, 22nd December 1809, *W.D.* III p 660-1. There is a copy of this letter in B.L. Add Mss 38,244, f261-3.

² Wellington to Whittingham, Badajoz, 22nd December 1809, *W.D.* III, p 660-1. Same letter as cited above.

³ Wellington to W. Stewart, Torres Vedras, 5th February 1810, *W.D.* III, p 725-6 and same to same, 9th February 1810, *ibid.*, 728-9.

Government, successfully demanded the destruction of the small fortress of Santa Carolina which in hostile hands could threaten shipping in Cadiz Bay. Ten days later Frere received a request from the citizens of Cadiz for a British garrison and he promptly wrote to Major-General Colin Campbell the commander of the Gibraltar garrison. Campbell immediately sent troops who arrived on 7th February - too late to have saved Cadiz if Albuquerque had not already arrived. These troops landed as soon as Albuquerque had assured their commander that they would not be caught up in any capitulation. Major-General Stewart arrived on 11th February and landed after receiving further assurances, while the Portuguese regiment arrived on 16th February.¹

Then on 28th February, Henry Wellesley the new British Minister to Spain arrived at Cadiz.² He was not impressed with what he found. On 9th March he told Wellington that "The force you have sent here has saved the place" and that the Spanish troops were "wretches". "After seeing the Spanish troops I despair of anything being done in Spain".³ The Supreme Junta had lost its remaining credibility with the fall of Andalusia, and it had been replaced by a Regency which Henry Wellesley regarded as only a slight improvement. He hoped that the British Government would soon send out "a few more regiments" as the defence of Cadiz depended entirely upon the British. Wellington disagreed about the need for reinforcing the British component of the garrison and had even told Liverpool that he thought that reinforcements might arouse Spanish jealousy.⁴ But on this point he was contradicted by those on the spot. Stewart wrote to Sir David Dundas (who

¹ All this from Severn 'Marquess Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 245-9.

² Canning had intended Henry Wellesley to replace Villiers at Lisbon but this appointment had been delayed by the confusion surrounding the end of the Portland Government. As the new Foreign Secretary the Marquess Wellesley was eager to promote his youngest brother's career and recommended his appointment as 'Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary' to Spain on 11th December 1809. It was approved by the King on the following day. *Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, no. 4042, p 467-70.

³ H. Wellesley to Wellington, Cadiz, 9th March 1810, *W.S.D.*, vol. 6, p 490-492.

⁴ Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 6th March 1810, *W.D.* III, p 767-8.

had replaced the Duke of York as Commander-in-Chief) and told him that eight to nine thousand additional British troops were needed.¹ Henry Wellesley, who had a better knowledge of the constraints facing the British Government, asked for only 5,000 reinforcements.² Their requests did not go unheeded, and by 30th July 1810, the British garrison of Cadiz (including the Portuguese regiment) amounted to all but 10,000 men.³ At last there was a substantial British garrison in Cadiz, so that at least one of the Government's long standing anxieties was relieved.

Although generally welcomed the British presence at Cadiz aroused some local resentment. Henry Wellesley's manner and the considerable influence he wielded over the Spanish Government naturally made him enemies.

"The British ambassador exerted a powerful influence" wrote one of his opponents, "He behaved more like a Spanish potentate than as a foreign agent. He had a hand in the appointment to high and low offices and promote and exclude whomever he wanted. His anger was a proscription for the person who incurred it. Thus the Regents visited him on the sly, flattered him fawningly, and feared him."⁴

This account is exaggerated even for the period of Wellesley's greatest influence in the closing stages of the war, but it does indicate the hostility which a more active British policy in Spain might have produced.

Many of the problems which had bedevilled Anglo-Spanish relations remained unresolved. Britain's desire to trade with Spain's American colonies, Spanish requests for more aid and many other issues continued to cause tension. The Spaniards had not completely lost their suspicion of British motives which would have been reinforced if they had seen the "hint" which Henry Wellesley privately sent to his brother at the Foreign Office on 12th March 1810:

"I have sometimes thought that, in the event of the conquest of the rest of Spain, Cadiz might be induced to declare itself a free port

¹ Stewart to Dundas, Cadiz, 22nd March 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 497-499.

² H. Wellesley to R. Wellesley, Cadiz, 21st March 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 497.

³ according to the return printed in A.M. Delavoye, *Life of Thomas Graham, Lord Lynedoch*, (London, Richardson, 1880) p 397.

⁴ quoted in Lovett, *Napoleon and the Birth of Modern Spain*, vol. 2, p 767.

under the protection of the English, and that its connection with South America might (if Spain were to be conquered) facilitate any arrangements we might wish to make in that quarter."¹

This might not make Cadiz another Gibraltar, but it was not an idea to comfort Spanish nationalists!

The alliance between Britain and Spain was maintained in 1810 but it did not flourish. The scars left by the events of 1809 slowly healed but there was little confidence or ease on either side of the relationship. Hostility to the French continued to bind them together, but sour memories and issues of substance ensured that the alliance would continue to be marred by suspicion, irritation and friction.

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Wellington opposed any increase in the British garrison at Cadiz for several reasons, including the fear that a greater British role in Spain might tempt the Government to weaken its commitment to Portugal. That commitment had been spelt out on 15th December 1809 in three despatches from Liverpool. The Cabinet agreed to provide the resources which Wellington had said were needed to defend Portugal, namely a British army of 30,000 effectives and financial aid to Portugal of nearly £1 million per annum.² Wellington would be reinforced by 5,000 infantry and a regiment of cavalry to bring his army up to strength, but he was warned that, given the financial situation, the Ministers were "anxious to know, with some certainty that we have our Money's worth for our Money".³ No increase in the financial aid would be forthcoming and it was "absolutely necessary" that the

¹ H. Wellesley to Marquess Wellesley, Private, 12th March 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 492-3.

² Liverpool to Wellington, 15th December 1809, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 438-441.

³ Liverpool to Wellington, 'Private', 15th December 1809, B.L. Add Mss 38,244 f112-8 - an extract of this letter is published in *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 441.

Portuguese Government adopt "vigorous and effective measures" to make up any shortfall.¹ Wellington was also gently reminded that his army comprised a large proportion of the country's disposable force and would be essential for the defence of Great Britain if the French should succeed in conquering the Peninsula.²

On 2nd January 1810 Wellington's instructions were altered prohibiting him from advancing beyond the Spanish frontier, unless he was satisfied that he would be adequately supplied by the Spanish government and receive proper co-operation from their forces.³ This curiously belated reaction to the Talavera campaign comes quite out of context, for Wellington was not contemplating any such operations. It was totally irrelevant at the time although it became important in 1811.

On the following day Wellington was sent instructions on what to do with his army if he were forced to evacuate Portugal. They are remarkably similar to those issued to Sir John Cradock nearly a year before. Six thousand men were to be sent straight to Gibraltar, while Wellington was to proceed with the remainder of the army to Cadiz, but he was not to land unless the Spaniards agreed to admit a British garrison to the fortress. If they refused Wellington was ordered to bring his army home.⁴ A codicil on 4th January explained that the Government could not afford the cost of the transports needed to evacuate the Portuguese army, but the Cabinet hoped that they would cross the Tagus and continue the struggle in the sought of the country.⁵

At the end of January Wellington sent word of the French invasion of Andalusia and asked what he should do if the Spanish resistance collapsed

¹ Liverpool to Wellington, 15th December 1809, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 438-441, (quote on p 440).

² Liverpool to Wellington, 15th December 1809, *W.S.D.* vol. 6., p 438-441 especially p 439.

³ Liverpool to Wellington, 2nd January 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 464. Copy in B.L. Add. Ms. 38,244 f 149-150.

⁴ Liverpool to Wellington, 3rd January 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 465-466.

⁵ Liverpool to Wellington, 4th January 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 466-7.

completely, leaving the French free to concentrate overwhelming forces against Portugal? Should he "defend this country to the last", or make an early, orderly evacuation taking with him as many Portuguese who would leave, before the moment of crisis arrived?¹

He wrote again on 9th February with more confidence. He assured Liverpool that the French would not be able to attack Portugal for some time, and gave a favourable first impression of the new Spanish Regency. Although the defence of Portugal might eventually become unprofitable, he now thought that the Cabinet in London were in no position to judge this, and he asked that he be allowed to decide "the period of the evacuation as a military question".²

The Government replied to these unsettling letters on 27th February. Liverpool told Wellington that he must rely on his discretion in interpreting his instructions but that,

"the safety of the British Army in Portugal is the first object which His Majesty has in view. But as far as is consistent with this object His Majesty would be unwilling that His Army should evacuate Portugal before circumstances should render it absolutely necessary.

I trust that this explanation of the views of His Majesty's Government will enable you to regulate Your Conduct."³

Wellington chose to interpret this as meaning:

"if there exists a military necessity for it, I am to evacuate the country ... I am not to be frightened away by a force which I shall not consider to be superior to that which I shall have under my command."⁴

Liverpool replied that Wellington had "fully understood" the "Spirit and meaning" of his instructions.⁵

1 Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 31st January 1810, *W.D.* III, p 719-722.

2 Wellington to Liverpool, Lisbon, 9th February 1810, *W.D.* III, p 729-731.

3 Liverpool to Wellington, 27th February 1810, P.R.O. WO 6/50, p 40-3.

4 Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 2nd April 1810, *W.D.* III, p 809-812, (quote on p 810).

5 Liverpool to Wellington, 24th April 1810, P.R.O. WO 6/50, p 61-68, (quote on p 66).

In private however the Ministers were perturbed at the prospect of hard fighting in Portugal. On 13th March Liverpool sent Wellington a 'private and confidential' letter indicating that he "would rather be excused for bringing away the army a little too soon than, by remaining in Portugal a little too long, exposing it to those risks from which no military operations can be wholly exempt". The tactful wording of this last phrase was wasted in the next sentence when Liverpool wrote that "the chances of successful Defence are considered here, by all Persons, Military as well as civil, so improbable, that I could not Recommend any Attempt at what may be called desperate Resistance".¹

Wellington reacted violently to this letter. He told Stuart that he would not accept "private hints and opinions from ministers, which, if attended to, would lead to an act directly contrary to the spirit, and even to the letter, of the public instructions".² He demanded an explanation from Liverpool: "All I beg is that if I am to be responsible, I may be left to the exercise of my own Judgement; and I ask for the fair Confidence of Government upon the measures which I am to adopt". At the same time he sought to reassure the ministers: "Depend upon it, whatever people may tell you, I am not so desirous, as they imagine, of fighting desperate Battles; If I was, I might fight one any day I please". But on the central point he was inflexible. "If government take the opinions of others upon the Situation of Affairs here, and entertain doubts upon the measures which I propose to adopt, then let them give me their Instructions in detail, and I will carry them strictly into execution." But if the Government left Wellington with the responsibility for the campaign they must give him the discretion to act as he thought best. And in that case he would fight a battle to save the country, unless the enemy came in

¹ Liverpool to Wellington, "Private & Confidential", 13th March 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 493-4, corrected from copy in B.L. Add. Mss. 38,325 f27-31.

² Wellington to Charles Stuart, Viseu, 221st April 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 27-29, (quote on p 27).

overwhelming force, for he was convinced that even if he was defeated he could safely embark his army.¹

Liverpool responded to this rocket by re-assuring Wellington that "the fullest confidence is placed in your discretion in the important and delicate service in which you are engaged".² His original hint on 13th March had no doubt been made in all innocence, but Wellington's reaction was both understandable and justified. He would be held accountable in the event of a disaster and it was unfair to officially give him unrestricted discretion and then try to influence his judgement with unofficial hints. It must have been with considerable satisfaction therefore that Wellington received a copy of a letter from Colonel Taylor (the King's private secretary) to Liverpool, expressing the King's "very high opinion of Lord Wellington's sense" and the view that Wellington would best operate "unfettered by any particular instructions which might embarrass him in the execution of his general plan of operations".³

Wellington's sensitivity on this issue was heightened by his suspicion that the Ministers sympathized with the common view in England that his army would be better employed at Cadiz than in Portugal. Liverpool had previously told him that "There can be no doubt but that in this Country a higher Value is set upon Cadiz (connected with the Spanish Fleet, arsenal, etc) than upon Lisbon". And the Minister had gone on to ask whether it was "not true that Cadiz and some Part of the South of Spain might be defended if Portugal was for the Time lost, but that Portugal could not long be defended if Andalusia was in Possession of the French?"⁴

¹ Wellington to Liverpool, Visou, 2nd April 1810, *W.D.* III p 809-812 and copy in B.L. Add. Ms. 38,244 f275-284.

² Liverpool to Wellington 'Private' n.d. [April 1810] *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 517 and B.L. Add. Ms. 38,325 f31-5.

³ Taylor to Liverpool, Windsor, 21st April 1810, enclosed in Liverpool to Wellington, 25th April 1810, and printed in *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 515.

⁴ Liverpool to Wellington, 13th February 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 483-4 corrected from B.L., Add. Ms. 38,244 f198-201.

The French invasion of Andalusia was the catalyst for the revival of this tired old question. Wellington replied with a most interesting assessment of the state of the war in the Peninsula and a patient exposition of his reasons for preferring Lisbon to Cadiz as the base for the British army. He expected the regular Spanish resistance to collapse, except at Cadiz and some other isolated strongholds but there would,

remain an universal disposition to revolt, which will break out upon the first, and every opportunity, that will be afforded by the absence or the weakness of the detachments of French troops, which must usually be kept in all parts of the country for the ordinary purposes of government.

Rather strangely he expected that "in the end, the French yoke must be shaken off". He did not think that the Spaniards would welcome the arrival of a large British army at Cadiz, while the evacuation of Portugal would be quickly followed by her submission to the French with the loss of all that Beresford and Wellington had achieved there. The fall of Portugal would enable the French to concentrate their forces against Cadiz and though the fortress might hold out its influence in the rest of Spain would be diminished. Finally Lisbon was a far better base from which to launch a counter-offensive should the opportunity ever arise.¹

All these arguments rested on a single unstated premiss: that the defence of Lisbon, if not Portugal, was possible with the means available to Wellington. If this was accepted, they amounted to a conclusive case for preferring Lisbon to Cadiz, even without invoking further - mainly political - arguments which reached the same conclusion.

The problem was that the Ministers could not fully share Wellington's confidence in the accuracy of this premiss. Their trust in his judgement was beset from all sides, not just by the eternal pessimists of the Opposition. Liverpool later complained that in the debate on the Portuguese subsidy in February 1810,

¹ Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 1st March 1810, *W.D.* III, p 759-762, (quotes on p 759-60).

Not one officer ... expressed ... any confidence as to probable success, and not a mail arrived from Lisbon which did not bring letters at that time from officers of rank and situation in the army ... avowing their opinions as to the probability and even necessity of a speedy evacuation of the country.¹

Colonel Taylor wrote privately, on his own behalf, to Bunbury, Liverpool's Under-Secretary that "The superior importance of Cadiz must be acknowledged; once in our hands, and adequately garrisoned, no reverse of Fortune sustained in the Field could deprive us of it", while "Portugal offers us no similar or comparative advantage".² Taylor shared the common view that the Portuguese frontier was indefensible, and that Lisbon could only be held for long enough to cover a hasty and precarious embarkation.

Yet the Ministers continued to support Wellington and Liverpool assured him that,

I never knew a question on which there was less difference of opinion in Cabinet than upon the subject of Portugal, either as to the expediency of persevering in the defence of it, as long as could be consistent with the safety of the British army, or as to the belief that there existed a fair chance of success, provided the attack was deferred till after the British army was reinforced and had recovered [from] the effects of the sickness of the last campaign, and that time could be gained for the equipment and discipline of the Portuguese force.³

This was hardly a ringing endorsement of Wellington's plans but the Ministers had no reason for greater confidence: Wellington still had not explained to them how he proposed to defend Portugal. Nor was he always tactful in the things he did say: for example he twice told Liverpool that he was afraid that his soldiers "will slip through my fingers, as they did through Sir J. Moore's, when I shall be involved in any nice operation with a powerful enemy in my front".⁴

¹ Liverpool to Wellington, 10th September 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 591-3, (quote on p 592).

² Extract of Taylor to Bunbury, ? November 1809, BL. Add Ms. 38,244 f59-62.

³ Liverpool to Wellington, 10th September 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p591-3, (quote on p 591-2).

⁴ Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 24th January 1810, *W.D.* III, p 698-700 (quote on p 700); the other occasion was, Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 11th April 1810 *W.D.* IV, p 14-5.

Given that the Cabinet was supporting Wellington against the almost universal military opinion in England, it is hardly surprising that such reticence combined with such forebodings left the Ministers with a certain apprehension.

* * * * *

Other problems also marred relations between Wellington and the Cabinet during 1810. Of these a recurrence of the specie shortage probably caused the most irritation. When Huskisson, the Secretary to the Treasury, resigned with Canning in September 1809 he believed that the new Government had enough specie to last until the end of the year. In the event it was on 13th December that Wellington wrote to first of many letters to Liverpool asking for the urgent (it was always urgent) shipment of specie. On this occasion Wellington felt that an immediate £100,000 in specie, followed by a similar sum in January, and any additional aid to Portugal taking the form of specie, should solve the problem.¹ Unfortunately the Government was unable to send any specie at all. Preoccupied by the Ministerial crisis, and lulled into a false sense of complacency by the disappearance of the specie problem in the Peninsula in the second half of 1809, they had neglected to pursue new sources of specie with vigour, or even to buy all that that was offered to them.² It was not until February that Perceval could send 500,000 dollars to Portugal - only a fraction of the sum that Wellington needed by then.

As usual with any crisis over money Wellington quickly lost his temper and used the most extravagant language. From December until the following June he directed an unceasing barrage of violent letters at Liverpool, as though he believed

1 Wellington to Liverpool, Badajoz, 13th December 1809, *W.D.* III, p 647.

2 Gray, *Perceval* p 345.

that the Government were deliberately withholding the specie from him rather than making every effort to obtain it in difficult circumstances. It did not take long for him to return to his favourite themes of June 1809; for example, on 6th January 1810 he told Villiers that "It is very obvious to me that Great Britain has undertaken more than we can afford in this country ... I have always said that we were going beyond our means ... and the truth is now discovered".¹ When the \$500,000 arrived in February he wrote a cold letter to Liverpool pointing out how far this sum fell short of what he had asked for.² Three weeks later he began to threaten: without £80,000 for the Portuguese Government "their army must disband".³ After another week he was almost pleading "You cannot conceive how much the Want of Money distresses us ...".⁴ By early April he was showing more sense: "It is useless to trouble you with more official dispatches upon this subject [ie specie]. I am convinced that you will do everything in your power ...".⁵ But quiet submission was not in Wellington's nature, and by May he had reverted to threats: "If you cannot supply us with money, you ought to withdraw us. We are reduced to the greatest distress".⁶ Fortunately this proved to be the low point and from June

1 Wellington to Villiers, Coimbra, 6th January 1810, *W.D.* III, p 677-8.

2 Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 21st February 1810, *W.D.* III, p 741.

3 Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 14th March 1810, *W.D.* III, p 781.

4 Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 21st March 1810, *W.D.* III, p 791-2; capitalization in quote corrected from the copy of the letter in B.L. Add Ms. 38,244 f229-30.

5 Wellington to Liverpool, Viseu, 6th April 1810, *W.D.* III, p 799.

6 Wellington to Liverpool, Celorico, 23rd May 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 87 checked with copy in B.L. Add Ms. 38,245 f70-71. See also a similar letter of 16th May in *W.D.* IV p 72-3. It is interesting to compare all these letters with Wellington to Villiers, Viseu, 14th January 1810, *W.D.* III p 684-686 in which he wrote:

"I will neither endeavour to shift from my own shoulders on [to] those of the Ministers the responsibility for failure, by calling for means which I know they cannot give, and which, perhaps, would not add materially to the facility of attaining our object; nor will I give to the Ministers, who are not strong and who must feel the delicacy of their own situation, an excuse for withdrawing the army from a position which, in my opinion, the honor and interest of the country require they should maintain as long as possible."

the supply of specie began to improve and the subject disappears - for a time - from Wellington's letters.

It is difficult to know how seriously we should treat these letters. Clearly Wellington was extremely anxious and distressed by the damage to his army which he saw before him, caused by lack of money. But it is equally clear that he exaggerated the problem. It was pure folly to talk of recalling the army and, as with his similar letters in 1809, it was dangerous folly for such letters could be used by an incoming Government to justify the abandonment of Portugal. Nor is it easy to excuse the rudeness of the letters. No doubt Wellington was under pressure, but so were the Ministers, and he ought to have realized that they were doing their best to solve an almost intractable problem.

The temporary solution of the specie shortage in the second half of 1810 was partly the result of an increased supply from England (which in turn was due to measures Perceval and others had taken earlier in the year), but mainly the result of increased purchases in the Peninsula itself.¹ The bulk of specie was always bought in the Peninsula with Bills of Exchange on England. Thus in 1809 £466,000 was sent out in specie compared to £2,174,000 raised locally. In 1810 the cost of the army grew enormously (partly because it was in the Peninsula for the full twelve months) and the respective figures were £679,000 in specie, and £5,382,000 in paper.² Wellington always disputed the Ministers' claims that more money could be raised locally, and he was hostile to the mission of Commissary-General Drummond who was sent to the Peninsula in August to investigate the situation.³ Whether Drummond himself achieved much has been disputed, but his arrival

¹ Gray, *Perceval*, p 345-9 has an interesting account of the problem from Perceval's perspective (he was the responsible minister).

² All these figures from Sherwig, *Guineas and Gunpowder*, p 232n.

³ Wellington to Liverpool, Celorico, 16th May 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 72-3, where he says he does not believe that more than half the money can be raised locally; and Wellington to Col. J.W. Gordon, Celorico, 1st August 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 198 where he attacks Drummond's mission.

coincided with a further improvement in the situation, for which the principle he embodied (local purchasing) was certainly responsible.¹

The acute shortage of specie in early 1810 caused much heart-burn and absorbed much time and energy from Wellington and the Ministers alike, but it is doubtful whether it did any serious damage in the longer term. The army's pay fell into arrears, and some troops misbehaved but there was no general collapse of discipline. Shortage of money probably retarded the steady improvement in the Portuguese army, but here too there is little evidence of serious damage. The results could have been much worse. If the French had invaded, as Wellington had expected, in early 1810 and the crisis of the campaign had occurred in May or June when specie was still extremely short, it would have made Wellington's task much more difficult. More than this we cannot say, except that it was extremely fortunate that the specie problem began and ended when it did.

* * * * *

Wellington's complaints about money and his sometimes acrimonious correspondence with Liverpool played a part in the increasing alienation of the Marquess Wellesley from his colleagues. As a member of Cabinet Wellesley frequently saw Wellington's letters to Liverpool, including the private letters in which Wellington expressed himself more forcefully.² According to Wellington

¹ On Drummond's mission see T.M.O. Redgrave, 'Wellington's Logistical Arrangements in the Peninsular War, 1809-1814', Ph.D. Thesis submitted to King's College, University of London, no date, [1979], p 114-6. Redgrave concludes that Drummond's trip "was barren of any useful consequence". p 115.

² see for example Liverpool to Marquess Wellesley, 15th June 1810, B.L. Add. Ms. 37,295 f312-3 in which he encloses Wellington's recent letters and draws his attention to one of the private letters.

there was no direct correspondence between the brothers,¹ but Wellington did write frequently and without reserve to his brother William Wellesley-Pole in Ireland.² These letters to Pole often contained savage criticism of the Government and complaints that the Ministers were not treating him (Wellington) fairly. It is possible that Pole then passed at least the substance of these letters on to Wellesley, presumably without Wellington's knowledge.³

If this is correct, it is not surprising that Wellesley quickly became dissatisfied with his colleagues' conduct of the war. He was in any case disappointed in the Government. He had taken office under the impression that he would have the dominant voice in the formation of the Government's war policy. Such an arrangement was so obviously suitable that he could not imagine how his colleagues could object to it.

None of them had acquired much fame either as war ministers or diplomatists, and Lord Wellesley flattered himself that he would have little real difficulty in persuading them to adopt **his opinions** regarding the best mode of maintaining the contest with Buonaparte.⁴

It is probable that he hoped to go further and supplant Perceval. Certainly he disagreed violently with Canning's contention that the times required a Prime Minister in the Commons, and he happily listened to the "many respectable members of the House of Commons" who grumbled "at the want of a leader of higher name and reputation as a statesman than Mr Perceval".⁵ His credentials as a Pittite were excellent and he had not been a member of Portland's administration. If

¹ Wellington to Charles Stuart, 4th August 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 207-8. See also Wellington to Marquess Wellesley, 26th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 553.

² Many, but I suspect not all, these letters are published in 'Wellington's Letters to Wellesley-Pole', *Camden Miscellany*, and *W.S.D.* vol. 6 and 7.

³ In the Wellesley Papers in the British Library there is the second half of an unpublished letter from Wellington to ? dated, in another hand, 4th June 1810, in which Wellington bitterly attacks the British Government. As Wellington was not writing directly to Lord Wellesley at this time (see above) this letter must have been sent on to Lord Wellesley from its original recipient, who I suspect was William Wellesley-Pole. B.L. Add. Ms. 37,415 f57.

⁴ Memorandum by [Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 258-9.

⁵ Memorandum by [Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 260.

Perceval's Government had foundered on the Walcheren Enquiry then Wellesley would have been well placed to rally Pittites of all factions to the defence of the King.

But the Government did not fall and Wellesley's relations with his colleagues began to deteriorate. There had already been hints and rumours of trouble - including the sensational and wholly unfounded account of a duel between Perceval and Wellesley at the end of 1809 - but other evidence indicates that relations were cordial for the first few months.¹ Then disagreements over policy and Wellesley's persistent attempts to bring Canning into the Cabinet began to sour the atmosphere. The other Ministers were also disappointed by various aspects of Wellesley's own performance. He had a high reputation as an orator, but proved "a most **uncertain** speaker"² making some fine set speeches but at other times remaining mute or speaking poorly. In the Walcheren debates he appeared more eager to dissociate himself from colleagues than to defend them, thus increasing suspicion of his motives.³

Wellesley's private life also aroused adverse comment and it was generally accepted that his philandering affected his work. Even Wellington, who was certainly no prude, wrote,

I wish that Wellesley was castrated; or that he would like other people attend to his business and perform too. It is lamentable to see Talents and character and advantages such as he possesses thrown away upon whoring.⁴

¹ Gray, *Perceval*, p 277 for the 'duel'. Moira to Sir Charles Hastings, 23rd January 1810, *H.M.C. Hastings*, p 277, reports rumours of disputes between Perceval and Wellesley. On the other hand, Arbuthnot to Perceval, 'Private', 9th January 1810, Perceval Papers, 9/XXI/24, N.R.A. no. 385, indicates that at that time relations were harmonious.

² Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party*, p 115-6.

³ Iris Butler, *The Eldest Brother. The Marquess Wellesley, 1760-1842*, (London, Hodder and Soughton, 1973), p 441.

⁴ Wellington to Wellesley-Pole, 6th April 1810, 'Wellington's Letters to Wellesley-Pole', *Camden Miscellany*, No. 26, p 31-32.

To the evangelical Perceval and to many other members of the Ministry and of Parliament such behaviour was abhorrent.

Yet all this might have been forgiven if Wellesley had proved an efficient and capable Minister, but to almost everyone's surprise he was not. As a colleague he was touchy and proud, bitterly resenting any alteration of his drafts or dispatches and sometimes failing to inform the Cabinet or even the Prime Minister of initiatives he had undertaken.¹ Worse than this: he simply did not do his work. When he fell ill in September 1810 Hamilton, his Under-Secretary went to Apsley House where he found 70 boxes of official papers which had been totally neglected and most of which were hopelessly out of date. Hamilton sorted through the papers and left six boxes for Wellesley to deal with.² Stratford Canning, Britain's Minister to the Porte, received no instructions at all for two years and a total of only 16 despatches of which seven were routine acknowledgements while another was "a request to use thicker envelopes when writing".³ Even more serious was Wellesley's failure to keep Charles Stuart, Britain's new Envoy in Lisbon, informed and given relevant instructions during the critical months of 1810.⁴

Wellesley's vanity and his poor opinion of his colleagues protected him from any recognition of his own deficiencies and he continued to believe that he should have the dominant voice in determining the Government's policy especially on the war in the Peninsula. He believed that "the revolution in Spain afforded the first fair prospect of reducing Buonaparte's over-grown power; and that the efforts of England should ... [be] exclusively employed upon the Peninsula".⁵ This view

¹ Gray, *Perceval*, p 274-5. Wellesley once complained to Mulgrave that "he thought he was among a Cabinet of statesmen, but found them a set of critics" quoted in Harvey, *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century*, p 267.

² Gray, *Perceval*, p 274.

³ Harvey, *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century*, p 266.

⁴ Fryman, 'Charles Stuart and the "Common Cause"', p 177-8.

⁵ Memorandum by [Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 259.

had broad support in the Cabinet which had already agreed to a similar stipulation by Liverpool when he accepted the War Department.¹ The lesson of Walcheren had been taken to heart.

Wellesley's further conclusions were more controversial. He argued that the united efforts of Britain, Spain and Portugal should be concentrated under Wellington; that Wellington needed more men and money and that other projects should be sacrificed to ensure that he got them; and that success could only be achieved if the resources of Spain were fully mobilized - something which could only be done if Britain played a much larger and more active role in her affairs. In short he called for a much greater war effort and claimed that "the military and pecuniary sacrifices required from England for the accomplishment of these objects were not of excessive magnitude, nor beyond her means".²

The most radical of Wellesley's proposals concerned Britain's relations with Spain. He believed it was necessary to mobilize her resources to a much greater extent than had so far been achieved, and he pointed to Portugal as an example of how this could be done. He did not believe that the Government of Spain was capable of adopting or enforcing the necessary measures "without the active interference of the British government". However he thought that "the British government was entitled to interfere directly in the management of the resources of Spain by the sacrifice of so much of her own blood and treasure in the Spanish cause".³ He acknowledged that such interference might cause resentment but hoped to counter-act this by providing generous financial aid untied to commercial concessions. He prepared a detailed proposal on how the Spanish army could be reformed by taking large numbers of Spanish soldiers into the British service, giving them British officers and training them, much as had been done with the

¹ Liverpool to Wellington, 26th June 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 547-8.

² Memorandum by [Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 259-260.

³ Memorandum by [Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 259.

Portuguese. He expected that this would produce an efficient army of some 30,000 men, and he estimated the cost of this particular scheme at approximately £3 million per annum.¹

Wellesley had the support of his brother Henry for these plans.² On 12th March Henry Wellesley had written privately to his brother that if only the Spaniards were prepared to make an effort to improve their army they had a perfect opportunity.³ He did not expect much from the existing Spanish Government but nonetheless he tried to persuade them to give Major-General Stewart command over the entire garrison of Cadiz as a first step to reorganizing the Spanish army under British supervision. In the end he was forced to drop the idea when it ran into strong opposition⁴ but his interference in the defence of Cadiz and in the workings of the Spanish Government aroused considerable hostility.

Richard Wellesley presented his proposals to Cabinet in early April, soon after the Walcheren debate. Apparently he met with little success, but returned to the subject at the end of May and again at the end of June. On this occasion the Cabinet discussions lasted for three days and Wellesley had to be persuaded by his friends not to resign at the end of the second day. In the end the Cabinet agreed to send Wellington some reinforcements but would make no other concessions to Wellesley's views. Wellesley was bitterly unhappy and told his friends that "his opinions were always over-ruled, but that the opposition he met with could only proceed from jealousy, or from a real contempt for his judgement". Parliament rose

¹ Memorandum by the Marquess Wellesley on a Spanish Army, no date, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 550-2.

² But not that of Wellington who disagreed with Wellesley's emphasis on Spain - see above p 278, 280.

³ Henry Wellesley to Marquess Wellesley, Private, 12th March 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 492-3.

⁴ Severn 'Marquess Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy' p 263-4.

in 21st June and when his last attempt to broaden the composition of the Government failed in September he decided to resign before Parliament resumed.¹

The great weakness of Wellesley's proposals was that he gave no indication how they were to be paid for, simply asserting that the country could easily afford them. Yet as we have seen Britain was facing major financial problems in 1810.² It is true that Perceval had given up the idea of radical cuts in expenditure but this does not mean that he could responsibly countenance a voluntary increase of £3 million per annum - a figure which past experience of military estimates suggested would rapidly increase. As even his most sympathetic biographers acknowledge, Wellesley had no understanding of finance and a passion for grand dramatic gestures.³ He might have willingly supported wholesale reductions in expenditure if Perceval had insisted upon their necessity, but the cautious conservative policy which Perceval preferred made no appeal to his imagination.

Wellesley later argued that,

'True economy ... consists not in a languid and unavailing endeavour to spare our resources, but in an immediate and vigorous exertion of all our means to bring the contest to a speedy and successful issue.'⁴

This was the heart of the matter, for if Britain could hope to defeat Napoleon and gain victory, it would have been worth running almost any risk - military or financial - to seize the opportunity. But no such opportunity existed. Even if Britain poured every man and every guinea into the Peninsula she could not hope for more than a local and temporary success, and in the following season when Britain was exhausted and bankrupt Napoleon would draw on his immense reserves

¹ Memorandum by [Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 262-4 (quote on p 264); Bathurst 'Notes of a Conversation with Lord Wellesley', 17th January 1812, *H.M.C. Bathurstg*, p 160-1 also refers to Wellesley's intention to resign before the Session of 1811.

² See above Chapter 7 p 242-250.

³ Severn, 'Marquess Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy', p 267.

⁴ [Marquess Wellesley], 'Observations on the alleged impracticality of providing more effectually for the prosecution of the War in the Peninsula ...', 9th January 1813, B.L. Add. Ms. 13,806 f166-184, quote from f167.

and move to crush her presumption. The brutal fact was that Napoleon's Empire in 1810 was far too strong for Britain - or any single power - to hope to defeat. Nor were there any grounds for believing that the great powers of central Europe, who alone could match Napoleon's armies, would turn against him. Russia remained a French ally; Austria had just become one through the dynastic alliance of Napoleon and Marie Louise and Prussia was far too weak to act alone.

Wellesley's colleagues had less passion and more sense. They could not accept his claim that "their efforts were **just too short**: that an addition of no very great magnitude would enable Lord Wellington to do something towards expelling the French from Spain".¹ This was pure fantasy: Wellington would be hard pressed to hold his own against the armies which Napoleon was sending into Spain and it was absurd to think of taking the offensive. The storm had to be weathered before there was any hope of regaining the initiative.

The majority of the Cabinet recognized this, and Liverpool expressed their views when he wrote to Wellington in September 1810:

we must make our option between a steady and continued Exertion upon a moderate Scale, and a great and Extraordinary Effort for a limited Time, which neither our means Military nor Financial will enable us to maintain permanently.

If it could be hoped that the latter would bring the contest to a speedy and Successful Conclusion, It would certainly be the wisest course; but unfortunately the Experience of the last fifteen Years is not encouraging in this respect.²

The war might go on for decades and Perceval, Liverpool and most of the Cabinet were determined to husband Britain's resources, so that she would not be forced to sue for a premature and disastrous peace.

¹ Memorandum by [Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 262.

² Liverpool to Wellington, 10th September 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 591-3, (quote on p 593) corrected from copy in B.L. Add. Ms. 38,325 f58-65.

Chapter 9

The French Invasion of Portugal (July - October 1810)

In the autumn and winter of 1810/11 two events threatened Britain's continued participation in the Peninsular War. One was the long awaited invasion of Portugal by the French. The other was the unexpected illness of George III, which required the establishment of a Regency, and threw great doubts over the continuation of Perceval's Government. There was no connection between the causes of these two events and their conjunction was purely coincidental. Yet each crisis had considerable implications for the other, and the final resolution of both was fundamental to future British strategy in the war against France.

* * * * *

Napoleon had begun preparations to finish the war in the Peninsula even before he signed the Peace of Schönbrunn (14th October 1809). On 7th October he ordered General Clarke, his Minister of War, to prepare nearly 100,000 reinforcements for the army in Spain - a figure which ultimately rose to almost 140,000 men.¹ At first Napoleon intended to lead these fresh armies in person, but he gave up the idea when he divorced Josephine (15th December 1809), and married the Archduchess Marie Louise (1st and 2nd April 1810).² He hoped that by this dynastic tie he would establish an alliance with Austria which would further consolidate his position in central Europe and, by providing him with an heir, end damaging speculation within the Empire over the succession. Neither of these

¹ Napoleon to Clarke, 7th October 1809, quoted by Donald D. Horward in *Napoleon and Iberia - The Twin Sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida, 1810*, (Tallahassee, University Presses of Florida, 1984) p 14. Oman, *Peninsular War*, III p 205 gives the figure of 140,000 men.

² The civil ceremony was on the 1st; the religious on the 2nd. They had already been married by proxy in Vienna on 11th March 1810. Oman, *Peninsular War*, III p 197-199, on the reason for Napoleon's decision not to go to Spain in person.

objectives were to be completely fulfilled, but at the time the marriage was felt as a heavy blow by Napoleon's enemies.¹

Napoleon did not appoint a commander-in-chief for his armies in Spain. He may have been reluctant to trust such a large force (over 300,000 men) to any of his subordinates, but in any case the appalling communications in the Peninsula meant that effective command had to be devolved onto local commanders. The war in Catalonia or Andalusia could not be run from Madrid or Portugal, and broad strategic decisions allocating resources to regions could be made as well in Paris as anywhere else. Napoleon's continued general supervision of the war was thus quite reasonable - at least while he was in France - but when he was tempted to interfere in operational details his orders were so outdated as to be irrelevant if not damaging.

With the regular Spanish resistance crippled by the occupation of Andalusia, Napoleon turned his attention to the expulsion of the British. On 16th April 1810 he appointed Marshal André Massena, one of the most experienced and ablest of the marshals, to command the Army of Portugal.² This force consisted of some 130,000 men, of whom only 86,000 were available for active operations.³ Napoleon believed that this was an ample force to conquer Portugal. He assured Massena that "the army of General Wellington is composed of no more than 24,000 British and Germans, and that his Portuguese are only 25,000 strong".⁴ These last were "poor troops"⁵ of no great importance. Napoleon was so confident that he told Massena to take his time. "I do not wish to enter Lisbon at this moment,

1 Wellington wrote of it, "The Austrian marriage is a terrible event, and must prevent any great movement on the Continent for the present". Wellington to Craufurd, Viseu, 4th April 1810, *W.D.*, IV, p 1-2.

2 Horward, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 50. Only Davout, the victor of Auerstädt, is sometimes regarded as greater.

3 Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 206.

4 Napoleon to Berthier, 29th May 1810, quoted in Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 227.

5 Napoleon to Massena, 18th April 1810, quoted in Horward, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 52.

because I could not feed the city, whose immense population is accustomed to live on sea-borne food. ... spend the summer months in taking Ciudad Rodrigo, and then Almeida ... [do] not hurry, but ... go methodically to work."¹

This confidence - which virtually doomed the campaign before it began - was not unreasonable given the incomplete and inaccurate information available to Napoleon. He knew nothing of Wellington's preparations to meet an invading army, nor did he know of the progress which had been made in retraining the Portuguese army. Wellington's failure to assist the Spaniards either in the Ocaña campaign or when Andalusia was invaded, appeared an admission of weakness. Napoleon had no reason to think highly of Britain's military capacity or resolve, and his low opinion was reinforced by intelligence gathered from English newspapers, which under-estimated the size of Wellington's army and were pessimistic about its prospects. Altogether it seemed likely that the British would embark as soon as a sizeable French army advanced against them.

* * * * *

In fact, of course, Wellington had no intention of embarking unless it was absolutely necessary. He had been preparing to meet a French invasion since late 1809 and was pleasantly surprised that the first half of 1810 slipped by before the French made their move. Each passing month enabled a further improvement in his defences, which were a skilful combination of traditional Portuguese methods with bold innovations based on a clear understanding of the courses open to the French.

There were three main elements in Wellington's plan for the defence of Portugal: the Anglo-Portuguese army; the Lines of Torres Vedras and other

¹ Napoleon to Berthier, 29th May 1810, quoted in Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 227.

fortifications; and the devastation of the countryside in the path of an invader. The army was the most obvious of these, and the only one of which Napoleon had even an inkling. But Napoleon regarded only the British troops as worthy of consideration and he under-estimated their numbers. Wellington actually had 33,000 British and German rank and file in June 1810, which rose to 41,000 in October and the quality of these troops was constantly improving as they gained experience.¹ Nonetheless, the British army by itself could have done nothing - it was only the re-creation of the Portuguese regular army which made the defence of Portugal possible. The long, tedious, exasperating work of Beresford and his subordinates bore fruit in 1810, when the Portuguese army they had retrained and reorganized took the field and performed most creditably. Although lacking the experience and confidence which they later acquired, the Portuguese regulars doubled the size of Wellington's army without seriously diluting its quality.

But this was not all, for in addition to the Portuguese regular army there were the militia and the Ordenanza. The militia were partially trained and the Ordenanza untrained. Neither was capable of facing the French in the open field but both gave invaluable service. The militia provided the bulk of the garrisons for the important Portuguese fortresses of Almeida, Elvas and Abrantes, and it was they who manned the Lines of Torres Vedras. They also operated in large units protecting Northern Portugal from French incursions, and harrassing the flanks of the French army. The Ordenanza were an ancient form of *levée-en-masse* with little purely military value. Their callout had political as well as military reasons, and was necessary to facilitate the devastation of the countryside. Against the French they operated in much the same way as the guerrillas in Spain, ambushing small

¹ Returns in P.R.O. W.O. 17/2465 (unpaginated), for 25th June 1810, and 25th October 1810. These figures cover all arms, including waggon train and artillery; the King's German Legion, and sick, but exclude officers, sergeants, drummers etc. On 25th June 1810 there were 26,491 rank and file, present and fit for duty, and 4,017 sick. On 25th October these totals had risen to 28,846 and 9,405 respectively. Following Fortescue's recommendation (*British Army*, vol. 6 p 209n-210n) of adding 1 in 8 to allow for officers etc. the total of effectives are approximately 29,800 in June, and 32,400 in October.

parties, killing stragglers and couriers, harrassing foraging parties etc. Such tactics helped to undermine the morale of the French army as well as increasing its losses through attrition.¹

The second element in the defence of Portugal consisted of three independent layers of fortifications. The first, outer-most layer comprised the four frontier fortresses, two Spanish and two Portuguese. Badajoz and Elvas - both strong places with substantial garrisons - guarded the more southerly route into Portugal. Wellington always feared that the French would launch a subsidiary attack from this direction while advancing with their main army from the north. Such an attack would have forced him to hastily retire as far as Torres Vedras to prevent the southern French corps cutting off his retreat.² But Massena lacked the men to make any substantial detachments and this southern theatre did not become active until early 1811. On the more northerly route lay Spanish Ciudad Rodrigo and Portuguese Almedia. Neither were as strong as their southern counterparts but they were still substantial fortresses which could not be taken without a regular seige. Massena's only alternative was to mask the fortress and to advance without taking them, but for this too he lacked sufficient men to make the necessary detachments.³ Wellington could not hope to halt a serious French invasion at the frontier fortresses, but he did expect them to delay the French advance, and make them use valuable rations before they could advance further.

Wellington's second layer of fortifications consisted of field works across several of the possible routes along which the French might advance through northern Portugal. The most important of these was at Ponte de Murcella where he had constructed a series of redoubts behind the River Alva just above its junction with the Mondego. This created an extremely strong position in which Wellington

¹ Oman, *Peninsular War* III, p 178-183.

² Wellington's, 'Memorandum for Lieut. Col. Fletcher, commanding Royal Engineers', 20th October 1809, *W.D.* III, p 556-560. See also Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 157.

³ And in the event Napoleon specifically ordered him to capture the fortresses.

could fight if he chose and which the French must pass if they were to continue their invasion by that route. The redoubts at Ponte de Murcella lay across the most probable line of French advance, but other routes had also been blocked, while Wellington's engineers had even destroyed one road completely, at the same time improving the roads which the Allies used for lateral communications.¹ Wellington did not rely on these defences halting the French invasion - a subsidiary French attack in the south would compel him to abandon them without a fight, and even if he defended them they might be forced. But if the French army was not overwhelmingly strong they provided a good opportunity for checking its advance, while the barren nature of the countryside meant that if the French could not continue moving forward, lack of supplies would soon force them to retire.

The most important series of fortifications were the Lines of Torres Vedras. These were actually a number of self-contained, mutually supporting forts, enhanced by engineering works such as the flooding of rivers and the creation of cliffs and escarpments. The Lines ran the whole 29 miles from the Tagus to the sea so that neither flank could be turned, and they presented a formidable obstacle.² And yet they were not impenetrable: by concentrating his army Massena might perhaps have passed through them though with fearful losses. But the beauty of the Lines was that they were manned, not by Wellington's army, but by the Portuguese Militia supplemented by some regular gunners. The field army was held back ready to pounce on the French wherever they managed to fight their way through the Lines. Given the losses and demoralization which the French would suffer in penetrating the Lines, the result of such a battle would not have been in doubt.

In addition to the two main lines of forts running from the Tagus to the sea, Wellington had fortified the Heights of Almada on the southern bank of the Tagus. This was the final destination for any subsidiary French advance on the southern

¹ Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 190-191.

² For a detailed description of the Lines of Torres Vedras see Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 419-436. On the origin of the concept see Howard, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 28-29.

route from Spain, and if the French gained possession of these heights they could distantly bombard the ships in Lisbon harbour making their position unpleasant if not untenable. The very last layer of defence was a short line of fortifications at St Julians which were intended in the last resort to cover the embarkation of the Anglo-Portuguese army.

The third element in Wellington's plan was the traditional Portuguese practice of stripping the countryside in the path of an invading force. Wellington hoped that starvation would force the French to retreat, possibly even before they reached the Lines.¹ This was much the hardest element to implement and if it had not been for the evil reputation the French had acquired during their earlier incursions into Portugal under Junot and Soult it is unlikely that Wellington could have enforced it. Yet it was vital if Lisbon were not to become another Cadiz - unconquerable but contained. It was also the only element in Wellington's plan which used Massena's own strength against him, for the larger his army the quicker it would starve. In the end the devastation of the countryside, especially in the crucial provinces near Lisbon was far less thorough than Wellington had hoped.² But it was sufficient, and though the French held out for months, they were at last forced to retreat due to the terrible losses they had suffered from lack of food and disease.

With hindsight we can see that these preparations were more than adequate to check any invasion that Massena's army could mount. Napoleon had made the mistake of assuming that his enemy would remain inactive while he prepared his attack. To have had any real chance of success the French should have struck much harder, much sooner. But this is the judgement of hindsight: at the time Napoleon could not see the need for haste, and Wellington could not be sure that his

1 Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 183-7.

2 Wellington to Liverpool, 27th October 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 362-363.

preparations would be effective. Napoleon was foolishly confident and Wellington was anxious and tetchy.

Wellington's two greatest concerns were over the size and direction of the French attack, and whether the Portuguese troops would behave well in action. He could not know that the French would advance into Portugal with an army of only 70,000 men, and without the support of a subsidiary attack from Andalusia. As late as 11th September he told Charles Stuart "that of which I am most apprehensive is that the enemy will raise the blockade of Cadiz".¹ He could not even be certain that Napoleon would not after all come and lead his army in person.² And as for the Portuguese troops, they might be shaping well, but they were an untried force and no one could guess how they would behave when they first came under fire.

The tension of these anxieties is evident in the acrimonious correspondence which Wellington directed at the British Government. The shortage of specie had been relieved so he turned his attention to other questions, although the style of his letters remained much the same. The most important of these issues was the reinforcements which he had been promised by Liverpool and which had failed to arrive.³ As usual there was a genuine grievance beneath all Wellington's hyperbole. His army was marginally below the figure he had specified (and the Ministers agreed to) when discussing the defence of Portugal in 1809, and the Ministers had made promises which they had been unable to fulfil.⁴ But this failure was due to legitimate and often unpredictable problems facing the Ministers, not to any lack of will. Who could have guessed that even in February 1810 there would still be

¹ Wellington to Charles Stuart, 11th September 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 273-5.

² Wellington to Liverpool, 14th July 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 168-9.

³ See Wellington's letters to Liverpool of 11th and 14th July, and 8th, 15th, and 19th August in *W.D.* IV, p 159; 168-9; 216; 228; and 234-5.

⁴ Wellington to Liverpool, 14th November 1809, *W.D.* III, p 583-6, especially p 583, specified 30,000 effectives. Liverpool to Wellington, 15th December 1809, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 438-441 agreed to this. Liverpool to Wellington, 24th April 1810, promised 8,000 reinforcements most of whom failed to arrive. P.R.O. W.O. 6/34, p 133-154 esp. 143.

11,000 men on the sick list due to the Walcheren expedition,¹ or that even when these men recovered they would be unfit for great exertions?² Nor did the Government foresee the sudden need to find 8,000 British troops to garrison Cadiz. Murat's preparations to invade Sicily prevented the withdrawal of four battalions from that garrison to aid Wellington,³ while deteriorating relations with the U.S.A. made it harder to withdraw troops from Halifax. Closer to home the state of Ireland was a source of serious concern even to Wellington,⁴ while few regiments in England were fit to take the field.⁵

But despite all these problems Wellington's army steadily grew in size except for a dip occasioned by the troops withdrawn to garrison Cadiz. In January 1810 the total rank and file (including artillery etc.) was almost 32,000 men. By March this had risen to nearly 35,000 men; it dropped to under 33,000 in June (due to Cadiz) but then rose steadily: 35,500 in August; 38,700 in September; 41,000 in October and nearly 43,000 rank and file in November.⁶ All these figures were well above the numbers Wellington had asked for, but he had specified 'effectives' and these included the sick (although not officers, sergeants etc. who are included in a total of effectives). Wellington's army did not reach his specified figure sooner because of increase in the number of sick, not any failure on the part of the Government to reinforce him. During early 1810 the number of sick was fairly

1 Fortescue, *British Army*, vol. 7, p 441.

2 Sir Charles Oman, *Wellington's Army, 1809-1814*, (London, Greenhill, 1986 - first published 1913), p 187.

3 According to Fortescue, (*British Army*, vol. 7, p 441), "the withdrawal of four battalions from Sicily could not have been safely accomplished without the total evacuation of the island." An opinion which provides some justification for Sir J. Stuart's failure to release the battalions when ordered to do so.

4 Wellington wrote to Pole on 5th September 1810, "So much for Ireland, where I think matters are in a much more dangerous state than they are even here". *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 587-9.

5 Liverpool to Wellington, 10th September 1810, and enclosure, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 591-4.

6 P.R.O. W.O. 17/2465 (unpaginated). The precise figures are: 25th January, 31,824; 25th March, 34,631; 25th June, 32,774; 25th August, 35,564; 25th September, 38,743; 25th October, 40,991; 25th November, 42,824.

stable at a little over 6,000 men, and in the summer this dropped to only 4,000 in June. But as the campaign got under way this rapidly rose: 5,300 in August; 7,000 in September, to 9,400 in October, when it peaked and slowly declined to 7,800 at the end of the year.¹ This rise cancelled out many reinforcements, and meant that the number of effective troops rose only slowly. Yet it was only natural for the number of sick to rise as the campaign got under way; what is more surprising is the total number, which rose to 23 per cent of the rank and file in October, while only a year before Wellington said that he regarded less than half this as normal.²

The disputes between Wellington and the Government over this and a number of other minor irritants are not particularly important. The basic fact is that the Ministers, albeit with some trepidation, were giving Wellington a free hand to run the campaign as he wished unencumbered with detailed instructions. They were also doing their best to ensure that he was adequately supplied with men, money, equipment, food, ammunition and supplies of all kinds. They were not prepared to wantonly sacrifice other interests - such as the British garrisons in Cadiz and Sicily - simply to give Wellington a few more men, but they did everything else in their power to strengthen his position. Wellington for his part grumbled over inevitable deficiencies and, more seriously, was hurt that the Ministers did not have more complete faith in his success. He still did not properly explain his plans but the Ministers, with perhaps excessive humility, did not ask. If the campaign failed neither the Government, nor the General, could hope to escape the responsibility; if it succeeded most of the credit would go to Wellington but Perceval, Liverpool and their colleagues would be bathed in reflected glory - which was as it should be.

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¹ P.R.O. W.O. 17/2465 (unpaginated). Precise number of sick rank and file: 25th February, 6,533; 25th March, 6,273; 25th April, 6,075; 25th May, 5,473; 25th June, 4,017; 25th August, 5,297; 25th September, 7,079; 25th October, 9,405; 25th November, 8,294; 25th December, 7,783.

² Wellington to Castlereagh, 30th June 1809, *W.D.* III, p 334-5.

Marshal Massena arrived at Salamanca on 15th May 1810. Although only 52 years old, he was tired of war and had undertaken the new campaign only with the greatest reluctance. He had a superb record in the field so that even his reluctant subordinates Ney and Junot could admit his superiority.¹ In the Austrian Campaign of 1809 he had shown all his old vigour and fire and performed brilliantly, but then he had had Napoleon near at hand to goad him if he flagged. His heart was not in the new campaign and he foolishly let this show, thus sowing the seeds of discontent among his subordinates which were to grow alarmingly. Those who had known him before and, like Foy, met him again at Salamanca were dismayed at the change in his appearance and manner,² but he was still far from a spent force and Wellington regarded him as a formidable adversary.³

In accordance with Napoleon's instructions, Massena went slowly and methodically to work. Many preparations and preliminary operations had already been made, and by the end of May the French were firmly established in front of Ciudad Rodrigo. A fortnight later they broke ground and on 25th June the bombardment began. Wellington concentrated and brought forward his army which forced the French to keep a strong force covering the siege, greatly adding to their logistical problems. Wellington had repeatedly assured the Spanish Governor General Herrasti that he would relieve the fortress if an opportunity arose,⁴ but he was not prepared to risk a battle except on very favourable terms. This policy led to Spanish accusations of betrayal and considerable discontent in Wellington's own army. Even Edward Charles Cocks, one of Wellington's most trusted junior officers wrote that "It is a bitter pill to us to sit with crossed arms and view this rich prey fall into the hands of the enemy", while in another letter Cocks described it as

1 Horward, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 52.

2 Foy is quoted in Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 208-9.

3 Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 208.

4 Wellington to Herrasti, 7th May, 6th & 9th June 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 55, 105, & 125.

"heartbreaking".¹ But there is no doubt, as Cocks himself acknowledged, that the policy was wise. It made no sense to fight on the frontier where the terrain suited the French cavalry and the British were further from their base than the French.

Despite Wellington's doubts of his determination² Herrasti made a brave and protracted defence of Ciudad Rodrigo. He finally capitulated on 10th July, when a large breach had made the fortress indefensible, and when the garrison's rations were greatly depleted. During the siege the French fired over 40,000 shells and bombs into the city, killing and wounding at least 1,800 Spanish soldiers and civilians.³

Massena moved slowly forward to undertake the siege of Almeida. The slowness of the French advance puzzled many in the allied army. Early in 1810 confidence in the army had been low, but as the months passed it had gradually improved. The failure of the French to live up to their reputation for rapid aggressive movements encouraged even greater confidence, although many British still doubted how the Portuguese would behave in action.⁴

On 24th July the French invested Almeida, after a bloody combat with the allied Light Division, whose commander Brigadier Robert Craufurd delayed his retreat too long. The French operations proceeded at a leisurely pace and they did not break ground until 15th August - Napoleon's birthday. The bombardment began on the 26th and that evening the French had their first (and last) piece of luck of the whole campaign: by chance a shell fired into the town ignited a trail of

¹ Cocks to Rev. Philip Yorke, 10th July 1810, and Cocks to Thomas Somers Cocks, 9th July 1810, Julia Page, *Intelligence Officer in the Peninsula. Letters & Diaries of Major the Hon. Edward Charles Cocks, 1786-1812*, (New York, Hippocrene Books/Tunbridge Wells, Spellmount, 1986), p 60, & 63. Cocks is frequently but wrongly called Somers Cocks.

² Wellington to B. Frere, 30th January 1810, *W.D.* III, p 712-3.

³ Howard, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 180.

⁴ These changing moods are particularly well represented in the letters of John Aitchison: *An Ensign in the Peninsular War. The Letters of John Aitchison*, edited by W.F.K. Thompson, (London, Michael Joseph, 1981), p 82-108.

gunpowder and detonated the main magazine.¹ The tremendous explosion destroyed most of the town, killed some 800 soldiers and consumed almost all the ammunition in the fortress.² Although the walls were not breached surrender was inevitable, but the precipitate behaviour of some of the Portuguese officers prevented Colonel Cox (commander of the garrison) from gaining favourable terms.³

The fall of Almeida was an unexpected blow to Wellington, who had hoped that it would hold out "till a late period in the season".⁴ Yet it is unlikely that the fortress could have resisted for many weeks once the bombardment had begun. Nor did Massena move expeditiously to take advantage of the time he had gained, although his army did benefit from the large quantities of stores captured with the fortress.⁵

The loss of Almeida exacerbated the growing tensions between Wellington and the Portuguese Regency, some of whose members feared that the British would embark and leave them to the mercy of the French. Attempts were made to force Wellington to stand and fight in northern Portugal, and to replace some of Beresford's appointees with other officers.⁶ These intrigues caused Wellington some anxiety, but they were more of an irritant and a nuisance than a real threat. Even the most disruptive members of the Portuguese Regency were firmly

¹ Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 272-4. Horward, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 300 gives several different accounts of what caused the explosion.

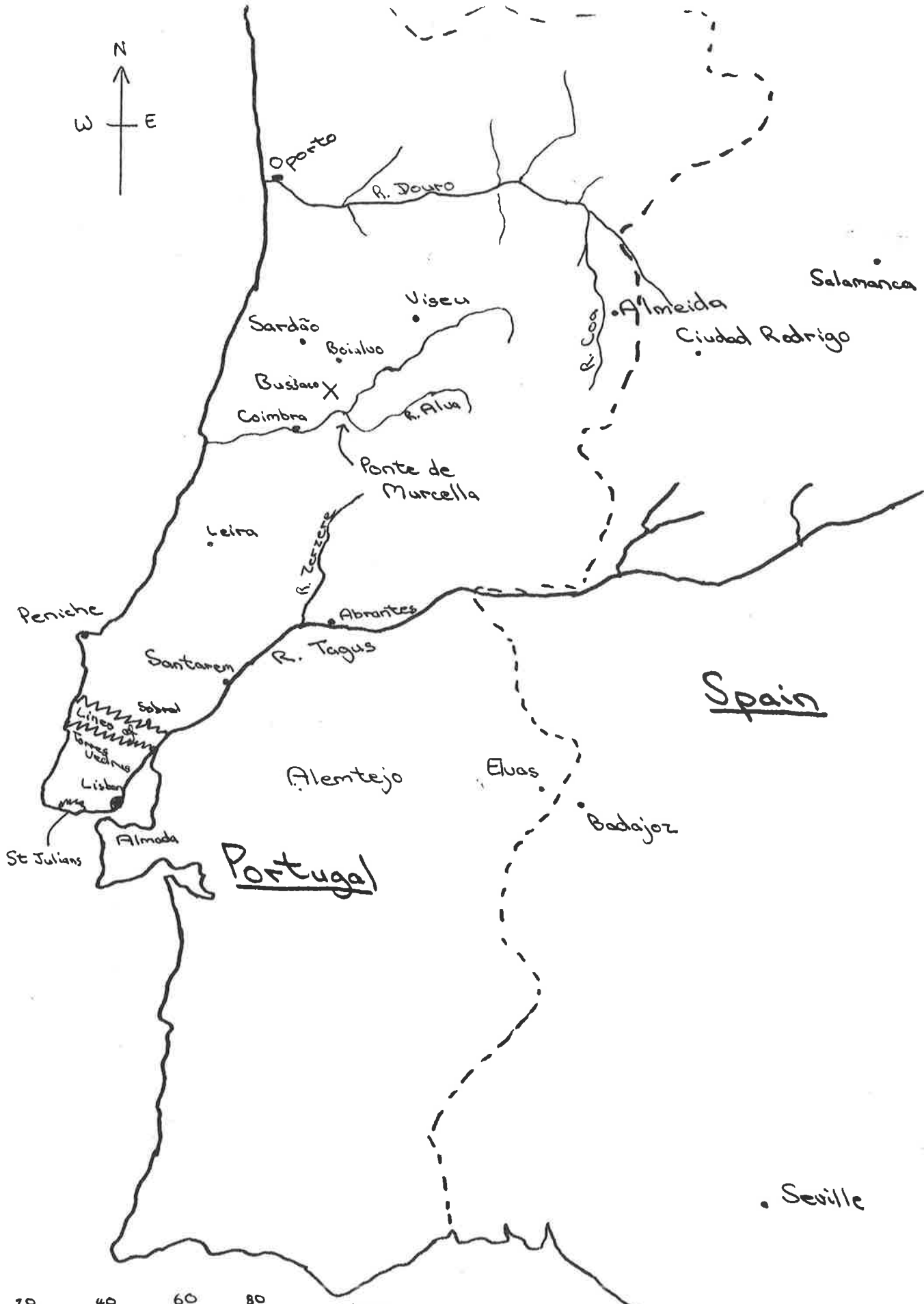
² Horward, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 302-303. Approximately 500 civilians were also killed.

³ Horward, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 304-9.

⁴ Wellington to Liverpool, 29th August 1810, *W.D.* IV p 247-9.

⁵ Horward, *Napoleon & Iberia*, p 311. Wellington to Hill, 28th August 1810, *W.D.* IV p 246, says that the French captured c.350,000 rations; but Massena to Berthier, 8th September 1810, quoted in Oman, *Peninsular War*, III p 342, says that there were really only 120,000 rations.

⁶ Fryman, 'Charles Stuart and the "Common Cause"', p 224-5; 231. Francisco A. De La Fuente, 'Dom Miguel Pereira Forjaz: His early Career and Role in the Mobilization and Defense of Portugal During the Peninsular War, 1807-1814', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to Florida State University in 1980), p 133-136. It was even proposed to replace Beresford with the Duke of Brunswick, *ibid* p 133.



The French Invasion of Portugal

committed to the cause, and in the last resort were therefore in Wellington's power. On 7th September he cracked the whip, threatening to withdraw his army from Portugal if the Regency attempted to interfere in operations or undermine Beresford's authority.¹ While this threat failed to endear him to his critics it was effective - at least for a time - and justified by the circumstances.

Massena advanced with 65,000 men from Almeida on 15th September 1810. After a couple of days he left the main road and so avoided Wellington's carefully prepared position at Ponte de Murcella.² The French slowly advanced along an abominable country track until they reached the Serra do Bussaco on 25th September. Wellington had followed the French movements with keen interest; he had been surprised when they had left the highway and taken "the worst [road] in the whole Kingdom",³ and he decided to occupy the strong position at Bussaco where "I shall do everything in my power to stop the enemy".⁴

The Serra do Bussaco was a formidable obstacle. It was a steep rocky ridge some nine miles long and reaching 1800 feet above sea level, with its southern end resting on the River Mondego. It lay right across the line of the French advance, with precipitate broken slopes and deep gullies hindering any attempt to climb it. The terrain made cavalry useless while the height of the ridge greatly disadvantaged the French artillery. Despite this, Massena was confident of victory and did not

¹ Wellington to Charles Stuart, 7th September 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 263-4.

² Massena was misled by hopelessly inaccurate maps, and the surprising ignorance of Portuguese officers on his staff, but rumours of the redoubts at Ponte de Murcella also played a part in his decision. Jean Jacques Pelet, *The French Campaign in Portugal, 1810-1811. An Account by Jean Jacques Pelet.* Edited, Annotated and Translated by Donald D. Horward. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1973), p 138, 141-2, 152. Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 347-8.

³ Wellington to Charles Stuart, 18th September 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 289-290.

⁴ Wellington to Charles Stuart, 24th September 1810, *W.D.* IV p 299-300, (quote on p 300). It is sometimes alleged that Wellington fought for political reasons, but his correspondence makes it clear that he hoped to stop the French invasion at Bussaco - see for example, Wellington to Liverpool, 30th September 1810, *W.D.* IV p 304-8, where he admits that he will fail "in effecting the object which I had in view in passing the Mondego". See also, Donald D. Horward, *The Battle of Bussaco: Massena vs. Wellington*, Florida State University Studies Number Forty-four, (Tallahassee, Florida State University, 1965), p 142-3.

attempt to turn the position. Wellington's only problems in holding the ridge were that it was too long to be fully occupied by his army of 52,000 men (a track along the top of the ridge made this less serious), and that the broken ground would hinder a counter-attack. He could not have wished for a stronger position in which to give his Portuguese troops their baptism of fire.

The French plan of attack was crude and ill-prepared. Reynier's corps was to march on the right-centre (which the French believed to be the extreme right) of the Allied position and, gaining the summit, was to turn north and roll up the Allied line, while Ney would simultaneously assail it from the front.¹ The attacks were made early in the day without proper reconnaissance or any sustained attempt to soften the enemy troops by skirmishing. Each attack followed a similar pattern: the French columns, screened by skirmishers, would advance up the hill under heavy fire, growing increasingly disordered and winded. As they approached the summit or just before, they would suddenly be counter-attacked by fresh well disciplined troops, and sent reeling back down the slope. The details vary from attack to attack, but this pattern essentially applies to them all. By early afternoon Ney and Reynier's corps had both been repulsed in disorder without making any impression on the Allied position; Massena prudently declined to commit Junot's corps to a new attack when there seemed no prospect of success.²

Wellington was delighted with the result, particularly the performance of the Portuguese who, he told Liverpool, had "proved that the trouble which has been taken with them has not been thrown away, and that they are worthy of contending in the same ranks as British troops".³ Junior British officers writing privately were equally generous in their praise: "The Portuguese astonished us by their coolness

¹ Massena's orders are printed by Oman in *Peninsular War*, III p 549 and discussed on p 347. See also, Horward, *Battle of Bussaco*, P 79-83.

² This brief account is based on Horward, *Battle of Bussaco*, p 97-126, and Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 359-389.

³ Wellington to Liverpool, 30th September 1810, *W.D.* IV p 304-8 (quote on p 307).

and bravery";¹ "it has afforded proof that the Portuguese infantry are to be depended upon",² and "They behaved in a most gallant manner, and full as well as the British".³ It was significant that exactly half the Allied casualties were Portuguese, and their steadiness relieved Wellington of one of his greatest worries.

In all, the Allied army lost 1,252 casualties including 200 killed and 51 missing.⁴ Many of these casualties were suffered in desultory fighting which continued long after the main attacks had been repulsed. Wellington claimed that the French loss was "enormous" and that "The enemy left 2,000 killed upon the field of battle",⁵ which led his supporters at home to put the total French loss at 10,000 casualties.⁶ But in fact only 515 French soldiers had been killed and their total loss, including over 300 prisoners, was less than 4,500.⁷

Massena had been checked and his army defeated, but he had no intention of abandoning the invasion if he could find a way forward. On the day after the battle he ordered reconnaissances to see if the Bussaco position could be turned, and soon discovered a country road running through Boialvo and Sardão which outflanked it. Wellington was well aware of this road and on 19th September had ordered Colonel Trant to occupy it with his brigade of Portuguese militia. But a few thousand militia

¹ Lieutenant Rice Jones, *An Engineer Officer Under Wellington in the Peninsula*, edited by Capt. the Hon. H.V. Shore, (Cambridge, Ken Trotman, 1986), Diary entry for 27th September 1810, p 73.

² Cocks to the Hon. John Somers Cocks, 5th October 1810, in Page, *Intelligence Officer in the Peninsula*, p 84-5.

³ Colbourne to his sister, 29th September 1810, in G.C. Moore Smith, *The Life of John Colbourne, Field-Marshal Lord Seaton ...* (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1903) p 141.

⁴ Horward, *The Battle of Bussaco*, p 175.

⁵ Wellington to Liverpool, 30th September 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 304-8, (quotes on p 307).

⁶ *The Times*, 18th October - they worked on the basis that the wounded would probably number approximately four times the killed. Curiously the real figures were six times in the Allied army, and seven times in the French - an odd result as the Allied artillery played a much more prominent part in the action than the French, and one would expect artillery to produce a higher proportion of fatalities than musketry.

⁷ Horward, *The Battle of Bussaco*, p 173 : 515 killed; 3,608 wounded; 364 prisoners = 4,487 total.

could not detain the French army unless they were defending a regular fortress, and two days later Wellington was still looking for another way of blocking the road.¹ He rejected the idea of detaching part of his field army to block the pass and was unable to devise any other solution. When he observed the French army move off towards Sardão he therefore abandoned his attempt to halt the invasion in northern Portugal and began his retreat to the Lines of Torres Vedras.

By his prompt withdrawal Wellington gained a lead of several marches over the French, so that his retreat was orderly and unhurried with only a little skirmishing between his rear-guard and the most advanced French troops. As the allies retreated they passed streams of Portuguese refugees fleeing with all their portable possessions from the horrors of war. Even before Bussaco there are accounts of the Portuguese peasants turning against the British when they retreated,² while during the retreat to Torres Vedras there were outbreaks of soldiers looting despite all Wellington's attempts to maintain discipline.³

On 7th October the rains began⁴ and a few days later the Allied army retired within the Lines. Wellington was feeling confident and had already written to Charles Stuart that "I am quite certain the French will not get Portugal this winter, unless they receive a very large reinforcement indeed".⁵ To his brother Henry he

¹ On 21st September two days after ordering Trant to Sardão, Wellington wrote that he had "not yet give[n] up hopes of discovering a remedy for this ... misfortune". He later attempted to put all the blame for the retreat from Bussaco on Trant's immediate superior who had delayed his march, but as Oman and Horward point out this is implausible. Wellington to Liverpool, 30th September 1810, *W.D.*, IV, p 304-8; Memorandum of Operations in 1810, by Wellington, 23rd February 1811, *W.D.*, IV p 619-634 esp p 629. Oman, *Peninsular War* III, p 394-5; Horward, *The Battle of Bussaco*, p 140.

² See Cocks's Journal for 1st August 1810. Page, *Intelligence Officer in the Peninsula*, p 71.

³ Rice Jones's Journal, 3rd October 1810, *An Engineer Officer Under Wellington*, p 78. Wellington however wrote, "With few exceptions, the troops have continued to conduct themselves with great regularity". Wellington to Liverpool, 5th October 1810, *W.D.* IV p 315-6.

⁴ Aitchison says "the evening of the 7th" in a letter to his father written on the 9th. Aitchison *An Ensign in the Peninsular War*, p 120. Wellington to Liverpool, 13th October 1810, says the 8th. *W.D.* IV p 329-332 (p 330).

⁵ Wellington to Charles Stuart, 30th September 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 309-310.

simply wrote "I entertain very little doubt of our success",¹ while he told Liverpool that,

as I conceive that I have reason to hope for success, I propose to bring matters to extremities, and to contend for the possession and independence of Portugal in one of the strong positions in this part of the country.²

As this implies, Wellington, and indeed the whole of his army, expected Massena to attack as soon as his army reached the Lines. The men were as confident as their commander: "Fear nothing - Massena and his followers will be driven from Portugal - the sooner he attacks the better",³ and "the fate of Portugal seems to be drawing to a crisis and the British army are in high spirits as to the result"⁴ were typical of the messages being sent home.

But Massena was far too wily to be caught twice in the same way. His army had already suffered heavily in the campaign, particularly when a large hospital he had established at Coimbra was captured by Trant's militia, and was now reduced to little over 50,000 effectives. Wellington's army on the other hand had been reinforced, and had been joined by some 8,000 Spanish troops under Romana.⁵ By the time Massena reached the Lines on 14th October his army was outnumbered. He probed the defences in a small combat at Sobral, but it was obvious that they were far too strong to be stormed by his depleted army. He remained confident that he could defeat Wellington in an open battle, so he dallied for a time in front of the Lines inviting Wellington to attack him. But Wellington was unwilling to take unnecessary risks, and after a month shortage of supplies forced Massena to fall back to Santarem on the Tagus which he fortified.

1 Wellington to Henry Wellesley, 7th October 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 321.

2 Wellington to Liverpool, 13th October 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 329-332 (quote on 332).

3 Aitchison to his father, 13th October 1810, *An Ensign in the Peninsular War*, p 120.

4 F. Boverick (Cocks' servant), to Mrs Gardener, 13th October 1810, Page, *Intelligence Officer in the Peninsula*, p 87.

5 Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 450-451 gives the Allied army at 58,000 effectives, including the Spaniards although these figures are for the end of October and early November.

Massena had done all that was in his power and he referred the problem back to Napoleon. It was for the Emperor to decide if the capture of Lisbon was worth sending another army to reinforce Massena, and ordering Soult to abandon the siege of Cadiz and invade Portugal south of the Tagus. In the meantime Massena maintained his position containing the allied army and keeping Napoleon's options open.

Massena's halt in front of the Lines and his subsequent retreat to Santarem restored Portuguese faith in their British ally - faith that had been badly shaken by the retreat from Bussaco. After all, even members of the Portuguese Government could not be absolutely sure that the British would halt their retreat at Torres Vedras, while the ordinary people who had no hope of escape were naturally apprehensive. This fear led to some hare-brained schemes being circulated - some militia officers wanted to seize the embarkation point in order to force the British to fight the French, while one member of the Regency wanted to withdraw the Portuguese army from Wellington and Beresford and to give battle with it in front of the Lines.¹ Naturally these notions came to nothing and the ferment produced one consolation - no 'French party' emerged to urge surrender.² As the French approached the Lines there was widespread alarm and consternation. Forty thousand refugees streamed into the city and special arrangements had to be made to feed them.³ The discount rate on British Bills of Exchange rose to a peak of 34 per cent between 10th and 19th October, which was serious, but less bad than might have been expected with the French army less than 30 miles from the capital.⁴

1 Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 416.

2 There were a large number of political arrests at this time, but it is generally agreed that they were unwarranted. Wellington - never noted for liberal attitudes on such issues - wrote "I am decidedly of opinion that the Portuguese government had no reason for arresting these individuals". Wellington to Liverpool, 27th October 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 364; see also Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 416-7.

3 Stuart to Wellington, 5th October and 10th October 1810, Wellington Papers 1/316.

4 George D. Knight, 'Lord Liverpool and the Peninsular War, 1809-1812', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis presented to Florida State University, 1976), p 120.

Almost as soon as the French advance was halted the people of Lisbon began to regain confidence,¹ but Wellington's scorched earth policy and the depredations of the French meant that it was years before life returned to normal for many poor Portuguese.

* * * * *

The campaign in Portugal was naturally followed with great interest in England. Most people - including most Members of Parliament - relied chiefly on the newspapers for their news, supplemented by rumours and the occasional sight of a letter from an officer at the front. There were of course no journalists filing reports from Portugal to their London newspapers.² Instead the press relied on official despatches which the Government made available, French accounts gleaned from the *Moniteur*, and letters from officers whose family or friends sent them on to the papers. Not all the letters which were published were genuine, and at least one young officer warned his father to ignore the ludicrous stories in the papers which "exceed the most ridiculous burlesque".³ But some correspondence was genuine including an extraordinary letter published in *The Times* on 21st November 1810. This was a long, detailed account of the Combat of the Coa by none other than General Robert Craufurd, who had been incensed by the French

1 On 10th October Admiral Berkeley wrote to Lord Bathurst, "You can have no conception of the consternation which pervades this great city". Only four days later he was writing "The people at Lisbon begin to pick up a little courage, and do not seem so much alarmed at having the enemy's army so near". *H.,M.C. Bathurst*, p 150-1.

2 Although in 1808 the famous Henry Crabb Robinson had written stories for *The Times* on Moore's Campaign from Coruña.

3 Aitchison to his father, 12th September 1810, *An Ensign in the Peninsular War*, p 111.

version of the affair reprinted in the English press, and had sprung to defend with the pen the reputation which his troops had acquired by the sword.¹

Wellington twice complained to Liverpool that valuable military information was published in the press and so reached the enemy.² Liverpool eventually acknowledged the problem, but pointed out that the Government's powers in this field were limited, and suggested that in future Wellington indicate in his despatches which portions he wished to be kept back.³ It is interesting that even Napoleon's tightly controlled and none too accurate press provided useful information for the British Government.

The mood in England at the beginning of the campaign was apprehensive, even among supporters of the Government. As Liverpool told Wellington, the Ministers found it "impossible not to look with the greatest anxiety to the next movement of the enemy". Like Wellington, the Cabinet saw the scale of the French effort and the performance of the Portuguese as crucial in determining the result of the campaign. Liverpool regretted the loss of Ciudad Rodrigo but hastened to reassure Wellington that no one in England was inclined to criticise him for not attempting to relieve it.⁴ Indeed throughout the whole campaign the British Government firmly approved all of Wellington's major decisions, whatever the private misgivings of the Ministers.

The task of those waiting at home for news was not made any easier by the slow and irregular communications with Portugal. Canning's friend Lord Granville Leveson Gower expressed the tension many felt when he wrote to Lady Bessborough, "I feel very anxious about Portugal, and am not a little annoyed at the

¹ printed in Rev. A.H. Craufurd *General Craufurd and his Light Division*, (Ken Trotman, Cambridge, 1987 - 1st published 1891). p 139-146.

² Wellington to Liverpool, 3rd July and 18th August 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 149, 231-2.

³ Liverpool to Wellington, 16th February 1811, and 7th May 1811, *W.S.D.*, vol. 7, p 61-2; 120-1. I can not account for the delay in this response except by supposing that Liverpool failed to respond to Wellington's earlier complaints because he felt he could do nothing.

⁴ Liverpool to Wellington, 2nd August 1810, *W.S.D.* v. 6, p 567-9.

violent Westerly winds having retarded our reinforcements I could not be more eager for the success of Lord Wellington".¹ A fortnight later George Rose was pleased by news, presumably of the slow progress the French were making before Almeida: "I rejoice at the accounts from Portugal. If I had not entire confidence in Lord Wellington, I should have been nervous lately".² On the same day Granville Leveson Gower was admiring "the Fabian Warfare of Lord Wellington", and declaring that the successful defence of Portugal would bring "more glory than all his previous glorious achievements". But Leveson Gower's praise was based on misinformation, for he thought that Massena could field 120,000 men.³

Early in September Liverpool sent a private and surprisingly optimistic assessment of the broad strategic position to General Craig, commander of the British forces in Canada,

It is evident that he [Napoleon] has not the Military Means of making as large an Effort in Spain and Portugal as his Interest and Reputation requires. As long as the Contest can be maintained in that quarter upon its present scale, we need be under little apprehension for more distant Objects. -

.... the Events of this Campaign have exceeded our most sanguine Expectations and certainly afford no very unreasonable Expectation that the Contest in the Peninsula may finally prove successful.⁴

The sudden fall of Almeida may have sent Liverpool hurrying back into his habitual caution; certainly it caused widespread dismay. Lady Bessborough found it "terrible", while Tierney evidently believed that treachery was involved.⁵ In general the Opposition was most pessimistic about the campaign. Lord Auckland

¹ Granville Leveson Gower to Lady Bessborough, 13th August 1810, *Private Correspondence of Granville Leveson Gower*, vol. 2, p 357-8.

² Rose to Bathurst, 29th August 1810, *H.M.C. Bathurst*, p 148.

³ Leveson Gower to Lady Bessborough, 29th August 1810, *Private Correspondence of Granville Leveson Gower*, vol. 2, p 362.

⁴ Liverpool to Craig, (Private), 11th September 1810, B.L. Add. Ms. 38,233, f79-85.

⁵ Lady Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 19th September 1810, "Tierney is here; he says it is believed to be treachery". *Private Correspondence of Granville Leveson Gower*, vol. 2, p 366-7.

would have been happy to settle for the safe withdrawal of the British army from a conflict which had wasted three years, cost 30 million guineas and countless lives.¹ Not all the Opposition were so gloomy: Lord and Lady Holland and a few others continued to vigorously support the war, but most Whigs and Grenvillites had never recovered from the disillusion of late 1808.

Lady Holland first learnt of "the brilliant repulse of the French at Busaco [sic]"² when she was at Portsmouth on 13th October, and the news reached London late that Saturday night.³ This timing was mortifying for the newspapers which had been reduced to printing such statements as "Another day has passed without affording any direct intelligence from the army in Portugal".⁴ Reactions to the news were sharply political with few members of the Opposition sharing Lady Holland's delight. The Duke of Northumberland dismissed it as another "Talavera victory" to be followed by retreat and probably evacuation.⁵ Many others denied it was a victory at all: Tom Grenville thought that the French had gained the advantage,⁶ while Lord Auckland believed that Massena had "out-generaled us, and turned our position, and forced our strong post and fastness, and forced us to retreat over the Mondego".⁷ He also questioned Wellington's "truth as a writer of despatches" - a claim for which Wellington's four fold vision of French dead at Bussaco provided some justification.

1 Lord Auckland to Lord Grenville, 2nd October 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. X, p 52-3.

2 Lady Holland, *The Journal of Elizabeth Lady Holland, (1791-1811)*, edited by The Earl of Ilchester, 2 vols, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), vol. 2, p 264.

3 *Farington Diary*, vol. 6, p 149.

4 *The Times*, 13th October 1810.

5 The Duke of Northumberland to Col. McMahon, 20th October 1810, in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2747, p 54-56.

6 T. Grenville to Lord Grenville, 17th October 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. X, p 55-56. Tom Grenville was Lord Grenville's brother, and had served in the Cabinet of the Ministry of All the Talents.

7 Lord Auckland to Lord Grenville, 16th October 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. X, p 54.

But the Opposition's reaction to Bussaco cannot be regarded as typical. The pro-Government *Courier* claimed that "we gained a glorious victory, and established our invincible superiority, and ... the French army was cut down like ridges of grass by the scythes of our mowers".¹ Liverpool conveyed the Government's thanks to Wellington and told him that "I never saw the King more entirely satisfied than he has been in the late operations of the army" although he was preoccupied with the illness of the Princess Amelia.² And the cynical Edward Cooke declared "Ld Wellington will keep in Mr Percival"³ - a view which may explain the Opposition's lack of enthusiasm.

The performance of the Portuguese drew special praise, with General Charles Craufurd writing from home to his brother Robert, "As the Portuguese troops conduct themselves so well ... I think one may be justified in being sanguine as to the result of the campaign".⁴ Even the painter Farrington appreciated the importance of this,⁵ while the Government marked it by conferring the Order of the Bath on Beresford.⁶

Another anxious pause now ensued while fresh news was eagerly awaited, and the newspapers had to revert to printing rumours and drawing inflated conclusions from old news. By 18th October *The Times* had accepted the claim that the French had lost 10,000 men at Bussaco and calculated that this left Massena with less than 60,000 men while Wellington had 81,000 Anglo-Portuguese. "But now observe what towering hopes open to us, which the country may indulge, we

1 quoted by Auckland. Auckland to Grenville, 16th October 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. X, p 54.

2 Liverpool to Wellington, 17th October 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 618.

3 Cooke to Charles Stewart, 13th September [sic: October] 1810, P.R.O.N.I. D3030/AA/17.

4 General Charles Craufurd to General Robert Craufurd, 19th October 1810, in Rev. A. Craufurd, *General Craufurd and His Light Division*, p 161-163.

5 Farrington, *Diary*, vol. 6, p 152.

6 Liverpool to Wellington, 17th October 1810, *W.S.D.*, vol. 6, p 618.

may say, with the most perfect confidence". "Massena appears to us, upon the present face of things, to have been infinitely too ardent, and to have involved himself in inextricable ruin ... we do not see how it is possible for him to escape."¹

Expectations thus ran rife and disappointment was almost inevitable. A week later, *The Times* was still confident, but anxious for news:

It is an interval of unprecedented anxiety which is now passing, between the arrival of the preceding and that of the coming news from Portugal. The Armies seemed all but engaged when we quitted them, and the stakes for which they were to fight were the fate of a Kingdom and their own safety.²

The Government's supporters were saying that Massena would be forced to attack Wellington in a position of the latter's choosing or starve, and they were very confident of the result.³

Everyone expected a decisive battle including Wellington and his entire army, but it was not to be. The devastation in front of the Lines had been less thorough than Wellington had wished, and the French were far more resourceful than he expected. Massena neither attacked nor retreated, and Wellington declined risking his own army by attacking him. The resulting stalemate might have been a disillusioning anti-climax for those who waited on tender-hooks in England, but the sudden illness of the King created a political crisis which diverted attention from the Peninsula.

The campaign of 1810 in Portugal had a mixed effect on attitudes to the war in England. The bulk of the Opposition were confirmed in their pessimism, and

¹ *The Times*, 18th October 1810. Reports of this kind made Wellington furious: "The licentiousness of the press, and the presumption of the editors of the newspapers ... have gone near to stultify the people of England; and it makes one sick to hear the statements of supposed facts, and comments upon supposed transactions here, which have the effect only of keeping the minds of the people of England in a state ... of expectation which must be disappointed."

Wellington to Croker, 20th December 1810, *The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Right Honourable John Wilson Croker ...*, edited by Louis J. Jennings (London, John Murray, 1884) 3 vols. (Hereafter cited as *The Croker Papers*), vol. 1, p 40-43, (quote on p 40).

² *The Times*, 24th October 1810.

³ Marquis of Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 27th October 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. X, p 59.

though they no longer expected their army to be expelled from Portugal in disarray, they could see little point in spending vast sums of money to keep it penned up in Lisbon. But supporters of the Government were encouraged by the result of the campaign, although a little disappointed at the final result, and equally aware of its cost. Still their faith in Wellington had been vindicated and the Portuguese army had proved itself. On both sides of politics interest in the Peninsula had been revived after a lull in which the British army had been inactive for nearly a year. The events of the next few months, both in England and Portugal, were to prove crucial to Britain's Peninsular commitment.

Chapter 10

The Regency Crisis (November 1810 - February 1811)

In 1810 George III was 72 years old and was in the fiftieth year of his reign. He was virtually blind but otherwise had good health thanks to a strong constitution and abstemious habits. On at least three previous occasions during his reign, in 1788, 1801 and 1804, he had suffered from attacks whose symptoms were akin to madness, but whose cause may have been the purely physical disorder porphyria.¹ The attack in 1788 had precipitated a political crisis which was only resolved when the King recovered early in 1789. Many of the participants in this controversy were active in 1810 including Grey, Grenville, Sheridan and the Prince of Wales, while others, like Perceval, modelled their conduct on the precedent it afforded.

The immediate cause of George III's attack in 1810 was the prolonged and painful decline of Princess Amelia his favourite daughter. She had never really been well since 1798 and had been seriously ill throughout 1809 and 1810, but did not die until 2nd November.² By then the King was unable to comprehend the long dreaded news. A week before, on 25th October, he had celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his accession to the throne, and at the same time exhibited unmistakable signs of a return of his malady.³ When Perceval saw him on 29th October "his conversation was prodigiously hurried, and ... extremely diffuse,

¹ This diagnosis is presented in Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, (London, Allan Lane The Penguin Press, 1969), passim, and especially p 172-5. As John Brooke points out, "the value of this book is independent of the diagnosis of porphyria. Even if it could be proved that this diagnosis is wrong, this would not diminish the value of the book as the only scholarly account of the King's illnesses". John Brooke, *King George III*, (London, Constable, 1973), p 399.

² "She was the youngest, the prettiest, and the most beloved of the Princesses", wrote the usually acerbic Lady Holland. *Journal of Lady Holland*, 2nd November 1810, vol. 2, p 266. But see Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 2-3, for the darker side of her unhappy life.

³ Macalpine & Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 143; Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 58.

explicit and indiscreet"¹ He was attended by eminent Royal physicians, but early in November the Cabinet decided to call in 'the mad doctors' as the specialists in mental illness were called. This met with spirited and determined opposition from the Queen and the Royal Dukes, who had repeatedly promised the King to protect him from the indignities and barbarous treatment he had suffered from these men in earlier attacks. But the Ministers insisted and the Royal Family could do no more than exclude one doctor who the King especially detested.²

It would be too cynical to attribute the Cabinet's harshness solely to political motives. The Ministers were personally as well as politically attached to the King, and genuinely believed that his recovery from his earlier attacks could be ascribed to the treatment that had been inflicted upon him.³ Yet political prospects may have unconsciously influenced their judgement. If the King did not speedily recover a Regency would have to be instituted with the Prince of Wales as Regent. Although the Prince had formally severed his ties with the Whigs after the death of Fox, and had even declared his political neutrality, there is no doubt that his political inclinations lay with the Opposition and that he had little sympathy for his father's Ministers. The Government's survival appeared to depend - as in 1788 - on the speedy recovery of the King, and at first the doctors did not hesitate to predict this.

The King's illness created immediate problems for the Government. Parliament had been prorogued until 1st November and in the normal course of events this would have been extended at least until the end of that month. But without the King's signature there was no authority to extend the prorogation, and

1 quoted in Macalpine & Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 144.

2 A number of documents concerning this are printed by Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7. See in particular, No. 2756, The Duke of York's Memorandum, 5th November 1810, p 70-72; No. 2757, Perceval to the Prince of Wales and reply, both 6th November 1810, p 73-76; and Bathurst to the Duke of Richmond, 11th November 1810, p 72n-73n.

Macalpine and Hunter state that the treatment meted out to the King, "at least must have aggravated and prolonged the attacks". *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 174.

3 Bathurst to Richmond, 11th November 1810, printed by Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 72n-73n.

consequently Parliament met on 1st November. The Government made considerable efforts to bring its own supporters to town, while few members of the Opposition were advised of the meeting in time to attend. There was no objection to the Government's proposal that Parliament adjourn for a fortnight, and Sheridan expressed the hope that the King would soon recover.¹

In the first week of November the King survived a crisis and began to steadily improve. On 11th November he comprehended for the first time that Princess Amelia had died, and on 16th November he was able to go through some of her things although after a while he grew distressed and confused.² At this time the Prince of Wales was behaving with impeccable discretion and decorum. He spent much time at Windsor where he was engaged in the delicate task of executing Princess Amelia's will. Even when not at Windsor he lived in relative seclusion and gave no indication of his political feelings. All this was in decided and intentional contrast to his behaviour in 1788.³

When Parliament met on 15th November it was influenced by the latest medical bulletin which announced "a progressive state of amendment".⁴ Nonetheless there was some opposition to the Government's proposal for another fortnight's adjournment. In the Commons Perceval was supported by the Whig leader Ponsonby and several other leading Whigs as well as the Carlton House members (that is, those who took their lead from the Prince of Wales). But Burdett and other radicals opposed the motion and forced a division which the Government easily carried (343 v 58).⁵

¹ Perceval to the Prince of Wales, 1st November 1810, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2749, p 65. See also Aspinall's note in *ibid* p 65n-66n, and p 59.

² Macalpine & Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 146.

³ *Journal of Lady Holland*, 2nd November 1810, vol. 2, p 266. His behaviour in 1788 had been so indelicate as to contribute substantially to his unpopularity.

⁴ quoted in Macalpine & Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 146.

⁵ Aspinall in, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 80n-81n and 59.

Unfortunately on the night of 16th/17th November the King had a relapse and between and 23rd and 26th he was very ill. On 28th and 29th November the Privy Council examined the King's doctors who were generally optimistic if vague. Parliament met on the 29th and the Government's proposal for yet another fortnight's adjournment was strongly criticised by the Opposition. Ponsonby moved for a committee to enquire into the King's health, but this was defeated 230 votes to 137, and Perceval's adjournment was carried 233 to 129. The Prince's members left before the vote, but in the Lords it was opposed by the Dukes of Clarence and Suffolk, and the Government's majority fell to 32.¹

The King's condition continued to fluctuate but no improvement was sustained. On 13th December Perceval visited Windsor but found that "no such amendment has taken place in his Majesty's health since the day of the last meeting of the two Houses as would justify his Majesty's servants in proposing a further adjournment".² He therefore moved in Parliament for the appointment of a committee to examine the King's physicians. This was approved without dissent and the Committee comprised 21 members of the Commons including Perceval, Ryder and Dundas (all Ministers); Canning, Castlereagh and Wilberforce (uncommitted); Ponsonby, Tierney and Whitbread (Opposition) and Sheridan and Adam (Carlton House), so that all major groups were well represented.³ The Committee examined the King's doctors on 14th and 15th December and both questions and answers were apparently considerably more sophisticated than they had been in 1788.⁴ In general the doctors maintained their confidence in the King's recovery although they declined to place a time upon it.⁵

¹ Perceval to the Prince of Wales, 29th November 1810, in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 67, no. 2770, p 90, and Aspinall's note in *ibid* p 90n. See also Gray, *Perceval*, p 403.

² Perceval to the Prince of Wales, 13th December 1810, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2279, p 99.

³ The Committee are listed in Perceval to the Prince of Wales, 13th December 1810, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2279, p 99-100.

⁴ Macalpine & Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 148.

⁵ p.t.o.

The Government now had to determine the form of the Regency which they would propose. Two aspects of Pitt's provisions in 1788 had aroused particular controversy: one was the decision to proceed by act of Parliament rather than an Address to the Prince, although the Royal assent needed to make an act valid could only be a legal fiction. The other was Pitt's decision to impose restrictions on the Regent's exercise of Royal prerogatives, particularly the creation of Peers and the award of offices in reversion. On the first question, it was natural for Perceval to follow the precedent set by Pitt and approved by the Parliament in 1788. The question of restrictions however was more doubtful, for the Prince was no longer an indiscreet and impetuous youth of 26, but a middle-aged, if not sober, man of 48 who had been behaving "with the utmost circumspection and decorum".¹ Those speculating on this point were inclined to believe that Perceval would retain some nominal restrictions to preserve the principle but would not risk irritating the Prince by following Pitt's proposals too closely.² They were however mistaken. Perceval was a lawyer not overburdened with imagination but full of principle and rectitude. He saw no reason for great changes and adopted Pitt's proposals with only one major concession: the restrictions should last for only twelve months rather than the three years suggested in 1788.³

The Prince's reply to Perceval's letter announcing the Government's decision was studiously calm, careful and moderate, punctiliously observing the proprieties and referring Perceval to the Prince's reply to Pitt on the same point in 1788.⁴ But despite this calm response there is no doubt that the Prince was

5 Macalpine & Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 148-150.

1 *Journal of Lady Holland*, 2nd November 1810, vol. 2, p 266.

2 Gray, *Perceval*, p 404.

3 Perceval to the Prince, 19th December 1810, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2787, p 109-112. The restrictions prevented the Prince from granting offices in reversion or for life, or making Peers; with some necessary exceptions.

4 The Prince to Perceval, 19th December 1810, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2787, p 113.

understandably outraged at what he could hardly avoid regarding as a personal insult. He summoned his brothers to Carlton House where they all, (ranging from the reactionary Duke of Cumberland to the radical Duke of Sussex), signed a "solemn protest against measures that we consider as perfectly unconstitutional".¹ This proved unpopular with the public and angered many members of Parliament who interpreted it as an attempt to influence them - and hence itself unconstitutional.²

Perceval's proposals for the Regency went before Parliament twice : first in the form of Resolutions which were debated and which the Prince reluctantly accepted, and then as provisions in an Act to establish a Regency. The Resolutions were introduced by Perceval in the Commons on 31st December 1810, and by 8th January 1811 had been accepted by both Houses. There were surprisingly few desertions from the Government although it was generally assumed that the Prince would replace the Ministers as soon as he became Regent. The Opposition dutifully fought his battle against the restrictions, and had one success when Perceval foolishly over-reached himself by trying to give the Queen control over all the officers of the King's household including those whose positions were primarily political.³ Apart from this, Perceval carried the day on every question albeit with slender majorities. In the Lords, the Opposition were hampered by Grenville's unenviable position: as Pitt's lieutenant in 1788 he played a prominent role which the Ministers made sure was not forgotten, and in 1810/11 he tried to maintain the principle, but not the practise of restrictions - a stand which satisfied no one.⁴

¹ Protest of the Royal Dukes, 19th December 1810, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2789, p 114.

² Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 62.

³ Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 124-6. Gray, *Perceval*, p 406, admits that Perceval, "made a major tactical blunder" on this question.

⁴ Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, p 432.

The Resolutions were presented to the Prince on 8th January 1811 and he replied on the 11th. This reply caused much consternation and confusion in the Opposition for the Prince first asked for and received a draft reply from Grey and Grenville and then disregarded it, and instead used a reply which Sheridan had drafted. With more than normal stupidity the Opposition leaders chose to make an issue of the event, criticising the Prince for listening to irresponsible advisers, as if they were already his Ministers. It was a foolish affair which weakened the ties between the Prince and the Opposition at a crucial time, and created bad blood between the Opposition leaders and Sheridan - who for more than twenty years had been their closest connection with the Prince.¹

On 15th January a new Session of Parliament began consideration of the Regency Bill. An amendment to limit the restrictions to six months was defeated by 184 votes to 160. Carlton House prodded the Opposition to take an active but unsuccessful line on the Household question² and the Bill passed its Third Reading in the Commons on 23rd January. It passed through the Lords by 29th January and received royal assent on 5th February. On the following day the Prince was sworn in as Regent at a meeting of the Privy Council.³

Throughout January the Opposition leaders had been engaged in the delightful if frustrating task of Cabinet making. After their experience of working with Sidmouth in 1806-7 they rejected any idea of a coalition despite the pleas of Grenville's conservative elder brother Buckingham who was concerned at Whitbread's influence in the proposed Ministry.

I know not why the idea of Mr Canning, or of Mr Perceval, or even of that contemptible animal Lord Sidmouth is to be abandoned as hopeless; **anything** is better than such an attempt on principles wholly undefensible. It is no disgrace to fail in forming a

¹ Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party*, p 83-86. Correspondence relating to this incident is printed in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 154-165.

² Gray, *Perceval*, p 410.

³ see below p 336n.

Government, and I should prefer infinitely that you should so fail, rather than so attempt to man your boat.¹

But Buckingham's views were extreme even among the Grenville family faction. Grenville himself would have liked to include Canning as well as Whitbread, for the sake of the Government's position in the Commons, but he accepted Grey's warning that Canning's inclusion would drive Whitbread and the radicals into opposition.² This objection did not apply to Huskisson, whose financial expertise was widely appreciated, and an inconclusive overture was made to him.³ The Prince's friends and supporters were to be rewarded with some important positions (e.g. Moira was to be Lord Lieutenant of Ireland), but none was to be in the Cabinet. The Prince however had other ideas and this particular question was never resolved.⁴ By 22nd January Grenville and Grey had come to a rough agreement on the composition of the new Cabinet:

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Lord Grenville | First Lord of the Treasury |
| Grey | Foreign Secretary |
| Holland and Ponsonby | the other two Secretaries ⁵ |
| Whitbread | First Lord of the Admiralty |
| Tierney | Chancellor of the Exchequer |
| Erskine | Lord Chancellor |
| Landsdowne | President of the Board of Trade |
| either Stafford or Hardwicke | Privy Seal (or possibly President of the Council) |
| Auckland | President of the Board of Control ⁶ |

¹ Buckingham to Grenville, 9th January 1811, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 97-99.

² *Journal of Lady Holland*, vol. 2, p 285-6. Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 128.

³ Col. Gordon to Huskisson, 22nd January 1811, B.L. Add. Ms. 38,738 f52-4. Aspinall believes that Huskisson would have rejected the offer from loyalty to Canning. Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 128-9.

⁴ Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 133.

⁵ It is most frustrating not to know which of the two was intended for the War Department.

⁶ The list comes from Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 130-131. Many other, earlier or less reliable lists survive, differing more in the distribution of offices than in composition.

It was a list which combined at least as much experience and ability as Perceval's admittedly weak Cabinet; the wisdom of its likely policies however, is another question. The proposed Cabinet was essentially Whig, with only Auckland and possibly Hardwicke to support Grenville in asserting his faction's influence, but the suggested inclusion of Tom Grenville (who had been out of Parliament for over a year) had not met with approval.¹ A more serious problem proved to be Grenville's own intense reluctance to give up his valuable sinecure of the Auditorship of the Exchequer - which was incompatible with the office of First Lord of the Treasury. This led to an undignified and potentially disastrous squabble, during which it was seriously suggested that Lord Grenville take the Home Office and the patronage of the Treasury, leaving the empty honour of the office to one of his colleagues, possibly Lansdowne or Holland. In the end a compromise was devised but the affair leaves a bad taste in the mouth even after almost two hundred years.²

It may be thought that the Opposition were presumptuous to set about carving the Ministerial turkey before it was even plucked, but neither Grey nor Grenville took their accession to power for granted, and they did not view the banquet with any great relish. The Ministers on the other hand were largely resigned to their fate. At the end of 1810 Palmerston wrote that "We are, I think, all on the **kick and the go**, but probably have a month to run".³ In the middle of January Liverpool told Wellington that "We have no share whatever in his [the Prince's] confidence" but offered - or drew - the consolation that "The King is **CERTAINLY** getting well".⁴ At White's bets were running heavily on a change of

¹ Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 130.

² Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, p 435-6. Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 129.

³ Palmerston to his sister, 29th December 1810, the Hon. Evelyn Ashley, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, 2 vols., (London, Richard Bentley, 1879), vol. 1, p 63.

⁴ Liverpool to Wellington, 'Private and Confidential', 17th January 1811, B.L. Add. Ms. 38,246 f17-8. printed in *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 45-6.

Government, while even the indomitable Perceval had brief thoughts of resignation.¹

But in the final analysis all this was irrelevant: unless the King recovered, the decision would be made by the Prince of Wales. As early as 6th January the Prince had had an interview with Grenville (Grey was in Northumberland attending his pregnant wife, but the Prince saw him on 10th January after he returned to town). According to Lord Holland's account of the meeting the Prince was much embarrassed by his situation, but directed Grenville to confer with Grey and Moira on "the propriety of forming a new Administration and the consideration of the means of completing it". The Prince made plain that he would like to see the Duke of York reinstated as Commander-in-Chief of the army, and hinted at the inclusion of Canning. Although accommodation on these points proved impossible Lord Holland concludes that,

There was a sufficient concurrence of opinion on these topics between him and Lord Grenville to remove all apprehension of a separate will in the Court and the Ministry, should the Whigs possess the latter.²

Despite the subsequent *contretemps* over the Prince's reply to the Regency resolutions there was never any reason to doubt his inclination to change the Government. His connection with the Whigs may have gradually declined over many years and more sharply since the death of Fox and he may have lost his early enthusiasm for some of their causes - notably Catholic Emancipation - but he was bound by ties of long alliance and honour. Nor did he have any cause to love his father's ministers particularly those - including Perceval and Canning - who at one time or another had associated with his detested wife.³

1 Gray, *Perceval*, p 408-9.

2 Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party*, p 80-82.

3 Perceval had been the Princess's closest advisor during the 'Delicate Investigation' while Canning and the Princess were old friends and had once been rumoured to be lovers.

So, if George III had died, there is little or no reason to doubt that his son would have requested Grenville and Grey to form a Government. But the King was incapacitated, not dead, and seemed likely to recover. Indeed throughout January the King's condition steadily improved: on the 18th he was well enough to walk out on the terrace at Windsor for the first time, and a week later the physicians gave their written opinion that he should be informed of the Parliamentary proceedings to establish a Regency.¹ Accordingly on 26th January Perceval and Eldon spent more than an hour with him, during which time "he talked with them in a most collected manner",² while adroitly avoiding discussion of public affairs. On the 29th Perceval had another and even more satisfactory interview in which he succeeded in informing the King of the political situation.

While Perceval was still at Windsor the Queen wrote to the Prince that "His Majesty gave perfect attention to his [Perceval's] report, and was particularly desirous to know how you had conducted yourself, which Mr Perceval answered to have been in the most respectful, most prudent and affectionate manner".³ This letter was generally thought to have been drafted by Perceval not the Queen⁴ but whoever composed it, its kernel was the implication that the King's recovery was nearly complete. The Prince's position had always been delicate for it would be improper and dishonourable to retain Ministers in whom he had no confidence, but unpopular and almost ridiculous to change them only for the King to recover and

1 quoted in Macalpine & Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 152.

2 quoted in Macalpine & Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 152.

3 The Queen to the Prince of Wales, 29th January 1811, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2825, p 190.

4 Sir Samuel Romilly, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, written by Himself ...* edited by his sons, 3 vols, (London, John Murray, 1840) vol. 2, p 367. *Journal of Lady Holland*, vol. 2, p 289, says that the Prince made fun of the fact which was revealed by the phrasing and in particular the use of the word "pending". Aspinall has no doubts on the point: "Perceval had undoubtedly helped her to compose it" in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 137; Gray, *Perceval*, p 411 refers to the suggestion without either supporting or denying it. Olwen Hedley, *Queen Charlotte*, (London, John Murray, 1975), has no comment, while Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p 307, says that the argument, "does not seem to have much weight". p 320.

promptly restore Perceval's Government. This was bad enough, but it was made worse by the suggestion that the King's recovery might be impeded by the shock of learning that his son had dismissed his trusted Ministers. The Whigs strongly suspected Sir Henry Halford of playing on this fear, and certainly the Prince was susceptible to this kind of pressure.¹

Given all this, the steadily improving state of the King's health and the Queen's letter, the Prince really had very little choice but to retain Perceval at least for the moment.² On 30th January 1811 he addressed a series of questions to the King's doctors who continued to be confident of the King's recovery but generally declined setting a time upon it: Halford, however, declared that he believed that the King would recover within three months.³

On 1st February Grey told his wife "nothing is finally settled. I think it, however, pretty near certain that he will not change the Administration. The King is certainly better".⁴ The Opposition leaders took the news of their disappointment calmly, while privately they expressed relief at having escaped the burdens of office and a nearly impossible situation.⁵ Not all their followers were so philosophical but most behaved quite well, in the hope that they might yet be given the fruits of office.

The Prince informed Perceval of his decision on 4th February in an extraordinary letter, in which he declared that, "the irresistible impulse of filial duty

¹ *Journal of Lady Holland*, vol. 2, p 290; Holland, *Further Memoirs*, p 90; and Romilly *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p 365-7, all suspected Halford's influence (although Romilly - published in 1840 - does not name him.)

² Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. p 7, p 137, believes that "The Queen's letter had been the decisive factor" and this is certainly supported by the note of William Adam - the Prince's close confidant - printed in *Ibid* vol. 7, p 191.

³ The questions and most of the answers are printed in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 194-6 and 196n.

⁴ Grey to Lady Grey, 1st February 1811, printed by Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 196n.

⁵ Grenville even told the Duke of Gloucester, "I cannot but consider it personally as a very great happiness to be discharged from a task of so much anxiety and labour." Quoted by Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, p 437.

and affection to his beloved and afflicted father ... alone dictates the decision now communicated to Mr Perceval". This was reasonable enough under all the circumstances but the Prince went on to say,

The motive for the continuance of the present servants of the Crown must of course cease upon an alteration of the circumstances which, in the contemplation of the Prince, have demanded from him this present determination.¹

In other words the Ministers were retained on sufferance, and if the King died or his condition deteriorated they could expect to be dismissed. The Prince's decision did nothing to resolve the political crisis. The situation might have been further complicated if Perceval had taken umbrage at the tone of the Prince's letter and resigned; but he was too good a politician and too disciplined a man to take offence foolishly and he even remarked that the letter was "not more dry than could be expected".²

It is easy to criticize a decision which left Britain - in the middle of a long war and facing a variety of serious domestic problems - with a Government which lacked the confidence of its acting sovereign, and which was liable to be removed without warning at any time. Yet the Prince was placed in a dilemma from which there was no perfect escape and it is commonly agreed that he could hardly avoid the decision which he reluctantly took. The retention of the Government was generally welcomed by those not actively engaged in politics and Bank stocks rose 8 per cent on the news.³

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¹ The Prince to Perceval, 4th February 1811, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2836, p 200-201. The Prince gave a further indication of his feeling on 6th February when he was sworn in as Regent. On that occasion he kept the Privy Council waiting for two hours in a room prominently ornamented by the busts of Fox and Bedford. Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p 370n.

² quoted in Gray, *Perceval*, p 412. It is even possible that the Prince hoped to drive Perceval into resignation, although this would certainly have been most foolish.

³ Gray, *Perceval*, p 412.

The winter of 1810/11 was cold and hard in England, with ice covering the west side of the Thames, and nearly blocking the arches of Westminster Bridge.¹ It was much pleasanter to be in sunny Portugal if you were well fed and had adequate shelter. The young officers in Wellington's army do not seem to have suffered, if Cocks's account can be trusted:

We live very well, having plenty of mutton, beef, fowls, turkey, coffee, butter, bread, potatoes, and figs. My cellar - alias pigskins - is stocked with sherry, Collares, an excellent wine of this country like claret but not so strong, and some draught wine.²

The middle class Portuguese soon recovered their courage after the French retreat to Santarem, and pleasure parties used to visit the Lines of Torres Vedras out of curiosity.³ But life was much harsher for the tens of thousands of Portuguese refugees who had streamed into Lisbon. Some precautions had been taken, but because the emergency lasted far longer than had been anticipated, these proved inadequate. The inhabitants of Lisbon, the Portuguese Government, numerous officers and men in the Allied army, the British public through a subscription, and the British Government all contributed funds to relieve the suffering of the refugees.⁴ Nonetheless there was hunger, disease and thousands of deaths among the civilians behind the Lines that winter.

Even so, the refugees were far better off than their compatriots who stayed behind and fell into the hands of the French. Although Massena and his officers did their best to maintain order and discipline it was inevitable that hungry troops would stray - though few French soldiers deserted to the allies.⁵ These French

¹ Gray, *Perceval*, p 408.

² Cocks to Miss Margaret Maria Cocks, 3rd November 1810, Page, *Intelligence Officer in the Peninsula*, p 91-2.

³ Thomas H. Browne, *The Napoleonic War Journal of Thomas Henry Browne, 1807-1816*, edited by Roger Norman Buckley, (London, Bodley Head for the Army Records Society, 1987), p 134.

⁴ Editorial note by the Hon. H.V. Shore in Lt Rice Jones, *An Engineer Officer Under Wellington*, p 85.

⁵ Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 14. Foreign units serving in Massena's army lost many deserters.

marauders were responsible for most of the worst atrocities against the Portuguese peasants, who responded in kind when they had the opportunity.¹ Despite Wellington's orders the countryside had not been thoroughly devastated and large stocks of food had been hidden rather than destroyed. As the weeks passed and hunger sharpened their ingenuity the French gradually uncovered these hidden stores, and so they continued to occupy their ground months after Wellington had thought that starvation would compel their retreat.

The burden of suffering within the French army was divided unequally. Worst hit was Junot's corps whose troops were inexperienced conscripts fresh to Spain. On New Year's Day 1811 Junot had over 8,000 sick from a total of less than 23,000 men. In the army as a whole there were nearly 19,000 sick and less than 47,000 men under arms.² In the following weeks the number of sick diminished - but only because the number of deaths increased. The veteran troops of Reynier's and Ney's corps suffered less: they were tougher; their experience stood them in good stead, and Ney's men had better ground to forage in. But even the survivors suffered terribly - they lacked not only food and shelter, but clothing, equipment and ammunition.³ And yet, if Wellington is to be believed, there was an illicit trade in luxury goods from Lisbon to the French army, so that some officers at least did not go without coffee, sugar etc.⁴

Massena subjected his army to this appalling suffering because he had no real alternative. A winter retreat through barren Portugal, infested with militia and ordenanza, with Wellington breathing down his heels, was a recipe for disaster and possibly even for the complete disintegration of his army. In any case, it was his duty to remain for as long as possible to contain Wellington's army and to give

¹ Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 10-13, especially p 12.

² Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 13-14, and p 608-610.

³ Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 14.

⁴ Wellington to Charles Stuart, 6th February 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 583.

Napoleon every opportunity to devise means to complete the conquest of Portugal. But even Massena's iron will could not have maintained his position if his army had not received a substantial reinforcement under Drouet at the end of 1810. These men were not enough to enable Massena to take the offensive, but they reduced the risk of a successful allied attack, while of course adding to the number of mouths to be fed.

To a large extent the fate of Massena's army lay in Napoleon's hands; for only the Emperor could order Soult to give up the siege of Cadiz, abandon most of Andalusia and march into Portugal; or, alternatively, only Napoleon could collect and form another army and send it over the Pyrenees and into Portugal to rescue Massena, and possibly even attack the Lines of Torres Vedros. But Napoleon did not choose to adopt either of these alternatives. Perhaps he did not understand the severity of Massena's plight, or perhaps he was unable to raise a new army and unwilling to lose all southern Spain for a doubtful chance of gaining Portugal. After all, if Wellington were expelled from Lisbon, the French could not stop him simply sailing round to Cadiz and resuming his operations from there.¹ In any case Napoleon was distracted by the multiple tasks of managing an enormous Empire, and in his eyes (and those of most of Europe), the pregnancy of Marie Louise was probably of far greater moment, than the fate of a small army in a distant corner of the Iberian Peninsula.

So, Napoleon did little more for Massena than send him verbal encouragement and order Soult to stage a diversionary attack on Estremadura.² Soult does not have the reputation for being one of the more co-operative of the Marshals, but on this occasion he exceeded his instructions and collected a substantial field army by stripping all his garrisons and the force blockading Cadiz to the bone. Soult left Seville on 31st December 1810 with 20,000 men including a

¹ Political problems in England and tensions in the Anglo-Spanish alliance may have prevented this from happening, but from Paris it must have seemed probable, if not certain.

² Oman, *Peninsular War*, III, p 457-8; Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 23-4.

high proportion of cavalry and a strong siege train.¹ His object was to destroy the Spanish Army of Estremadura and capture Badajoz and several lesser frontier fortresses. His force was not large enough to realistically hope to invade Portugal but his offensive would stage a diversion which might help Massena.

Wellington watched all the French movements with close attention, and his sources of intelligence were excellent. He maintained his resolve not to attack Massena's army and he marvelled at its endurance.² He was not unduly alarmed when Massena received reinforcements, although he inevitably used it as a pretext for renewing his calls for more men and more money.³ But the tone of his demands was less strident than usual; there are no complaints of a shortage of specie; and he seems relatively content on these issues.

Relations with the Portuguese Government however became even more strained early in the New Year. On 5th January he told Charles Stuart, "there is a plot on foot against the English, at the head of which are the Bishop [of Oporto] and Sousa".⁴ Three days later he complained bitterly of the inefficiency of the Portuguese Government.⁵ Ten days after that, he made a stinging attack on the Patriarch [ie Sousa],⁶ and so it went on. The culmination came on 26th January in a long letter to the Marquess Wellesley in which he recommended that Britain should either completely take over the Portuguese Government or substantially increase the subsidy.⁷

1 Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 30.

2 e.g. Wellington to Liverpool, 21st December 1810, *W.D.* III, p 466-9. B.L. Add. Ms. 38,245 f301-6.

3 Wellington to Liverpool, 27th December 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 485-6.

4 Wellington to Charles Stuart, 5th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 501-2.

5 Wellington to Charles Stuart, 8th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 509-11.

6 Wellington to Charles Stuart, 18th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 529-532.

7 Wellington to Marquess Wellesley, 26th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 553-6.

On the same day, Wellington wrote to Liverpool announcing the death of La Romana and paying him an extraordinarily warm tribute.¹ Wellington appreciated the Spanish contingent in the Allied army, but it was not generally popular. The British officers were contemptuous of the poor discipline of the Spanish troops, while the Portuguese complained bitterly that the Spaniards plundered their allies.² But it was Soult's expedition to Estremadura, not allied discontent, which led to the withdrawal of the Spanish contingent in the second half of January.

Soult had made a rapid march from Seville and on 11th January he arrived in front of the antiquated fortress of Olivenza which was to serve as an appetiser to his attack on Badajoz. The old fortress fell easily and with it Soult took over 4,000 prisoners for a total loss of less than 60 casualties.³ His appetite duly whetted Soult invested Badajoz on 26th January. Badajoz was the strongest of the four main fortresses on the Spanish-Portuguese frontier, but Wellington had little faith in its resistance. As early as 29th January he told Beresford "I think it also certain that the people of Badajoz will be disinclined to defend the place, particularly when they shall hear of the death of the Marques[s] de la Romana".⁴ He repeated this opinion several times in the next fortnight until suddenly, on 12th February, he changed his mind and told Beresford "I have great hopes that Badajoz will hold out".⁵

Wellington naturally followed the Regency crisis with keen interest and characteristic pessimism. On 15th December 1810 he told Pole that he hoped that the Government would not follow the precedent of 1788 too closely, both because it would alienate the Prince and, more interestingly, because "If they limit the power

1 Wellington to Liverpool, 26th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 557-8.

2 Colville to ? no date, c.10th January 1811, John Colville, *The Portrait of a General. A Chronicle of the Napoleonic Wars*, (Salisbury, Michael Russell, 1980), p 33-34.

3 Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 37. He gives the French loss at 15 killed and 40 wounded.

4 Wellington to Beresford, 29th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 563.

5 Wellington to Beresford, 12th February 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 594-5. He had cast doubt on the resistance of Badajoz on 3rd and 10th February in letters to Henry Wellesley, *W.D.* IV, p 577, and p 593.

of the Prince in too great a degree, they will necessarily democratize the Prince's government, and the mischief done to the country will be permanent".¹ He added that such restrictions were no longer as necessary as they had been in 1788.

Like everyone else Wellington assumed that the Regent would change the Government. On 3rd February he told his brother Henry at Cadiz that "I believe that the ministry are to be changed immediately",² while fresh mail from England led him to give a slightly different version to Beresford on the following day: "I think that when the Regent is appointed the ministers will resign, because it will be apparent that they do not possess his confidence".³

There is virtually no indication in Wellington's letters of the effect of a change of Government on his position in Portugal. On 28th January he told Charles Stuart that he had asked the British Government for an increased subsidy "But I should deceive myself if I believed we should get any thing ... [and] I believe you will agree with me that, if the change which is probable should be made, their chance [of more money] is less than it was".⁴ This extreme discretion, which is so uncharacteristic, may be the result of the later editing and culling to which his papers were subjected, but it seems more likely that Wellington was really being cautious and restrained.⁵

Certainly Wellington had no intention of resigning immediately on a change of Ministers as his advice to brother Henry makes clear,

In the event of a change of government in England, I don't think it is likely that you will be allowed to continue in your office at Cadiz; but I recommend you to remain in it till you will be recalled, on the principle that it is a professional and not a political

1 Wellington to William Wellesley-Pole, 15th December 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 4-5.

2 Wellington to Henry Wellesley, 3rd February 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 577.

3 Wellington to Beresford, 4th February 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 577-8.

4 Wellington to Charles Stuart, 28th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 559-560.

5 Why remove unflattering remarks about life-long political enemies and leave so many insults to political allies? On the culling of Wellington's papers see, R.J. Olney, 'The Wellington Papers 1790-1978' *Archives*, vol. XVI, no. 69, April 1983, p 3-11.

employment. If you should find that the business does not go on to your satisfaction, it will always be time enough to resign.

I shall follow the same course; and indeed, adverting to the attacks of the Opposition upon me at different times, and the inconvenience which will be felt by any change, I am not certain that I shall not offer any new government which might be formed to stay as long as they might think proper.¹

While certainly not apolitical, Wellington was dedicated to his profession, and was convinced that he could not serve his country better than by commanding the largest army possible in Portugal. He could be irritable, petulant, thin-skinned and foolish, but that was when he was dealing with friends! To a new Government he would explain the advantages of Britain's presence in Portugal, beg and plead for resources, threaten dire consequences of any change of policy, and ignore all slights and insults until he was either utterly defeated or got his own way. Then, and only then, would he deal with his new masters with the curtness he had adopted towards Liverpool (if he had been successful), or, if vanquished, turn against them the full force of his personality and his practised skill at exaggerated diatribe.²

* * * * *

Attention in England was naturally diverted from the Peninsula by the Regency crisis. References to the campaign in Portugal are still frequent in letters and diaries during November, but then they become few and far between. In all these months of military stalemate there is only one satirical print on the war, "an unsophisticated song-heading ... *Hogarth's Roast Beef Realised*"³ which played

¹ Wellington to Henry Wellesley, 31st December 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 11-12.

² This is, of course, entirely supposition, based on Wellington's letter to Henry Wellesley quoted above, and a few incidents in his career which are not really analagous.

³ M.D. George, *English Political Caricature*, vol. 2, p 128.

on the privations suffered by the French army, and even this was issued in November. Reactions to accounts from Portugal were predictable, with supporters of the Ministry putting the most favourable possible interpretation on every piece of news, while members of the Opposition constantly expected defeat, dishonour, embarkation and other dire fates. No wonder Countess Spencer was, by her daughter's account, confused by the news of Massena's retreat to Santarem.

At Mrs Howe's it was explained to her as very good, and a proof of Ld Wellington's good Generalship making Massena retreat, and Mr Long¹ had betted (for the pleasure of betting with an Arch Bishop) (of York) that Massena without a battle would be forc'd to retreat into Spain before February. On her return home she met with Ld Carlisle, who assur'd her Massena had not retreated, but taken a better position, and plac'd us in a worse; that Ld. W. was no general at all, and fell from one blunder to another, and the most we had to hope was his being able to embark quietly an bring his troops in safety back to England, which he thought very doubtful.²

This quotation really says it all, for so long as the military stalemate persisted in Portugal neither party in England would give up its long cherished prejudices.

It is quite clear that the position of Wellington's army played absolutely no role in influencing the Prince's decision to retain Perceval's Government. He had not shown much interest in the campaigns in the Peninsula after the first exhilarating months of 1808 when all the world was engrossed in the Spanish struggle. But it is worth remarking that if the military position in Portugal had been much better or much worse, it might well have influenced the Prince and the general state of opinion in England. Perceval's position would have been greatly strengthened if Massena had been forced to retreat during December 1810, (as Wellington had led the Ministers to expect). Conversely his Government would have been weakened by any setback suffered by Wellington's army, and it could hardly have survived a major defeat followed by the evacuation of Portugal.

¹ Charles Long was a junior member of Perceval's Government (Paymaster General).

² Lady Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, no date, 'Saturday', December [1810], *The Private Correspondence of Granville Leveson Gower*, vol. 2, p 372-3.

But if Portugal was virtually irrelevant to the outcome of the Regency crisis, was the reverse also true? What effect would a change of Government have had on Britain's Peninsular commitment? Unfortunately we cannot be sure how a Grenville-Grey Government might have acted. Most of the Opposition had been strongly critical of Wellington's operations ever since his return to Portugal in the spring of 1809. As late as November 1810 an exchange of letters between the Opposition leaders reveals that their attitudes had not changed. On 1st November Grenville wrote to Grey,

We are still without news from Portugal. ... My own opinion remains unaltered, nor shall I shrink from avowing it whatever be the result of this battle. I think the project desperate and wicked; it puts to hazard our safety, failure may involve us in ruin, the utmost success cannot, I am confident, insure to us the least permanent advantage. In the meantime the internal state of this country and of Ireland is such as will speedily leave it no longer a matter of dispute whether we can maintain a war against France on the Continent of Europe.¹

Grey replied on 9th November:

I think I entirely agree with you on the subject of Portugal; all the probabilities were, and in my opinion still are, against eventual success there. I have no faith even in the promised victory I could not deny that such a success would be worth the sacrifices we had made for it. But a doubtful or indecisive victory, and protracted operations, I should think little less ruinous (I am not sure they would not be more so) than an immediate defeat.²

At this same time Lady Holland recorded in her Journal that "Ld. Grey shakes his hopes by his fears as to Portugal; he considers the case as desperate, and Ld. Wellington's army quite ruined".³ Other leading figures in the Opposition were equally gloomy with Lord Auckland, for example, frequently predicting disaster in his letters to Grenville.⁴

1 Grenville to Grey, 1st November 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 61-2.

2 Grey to Grenville, 9th November 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 66-8.

3 *Journal of Lady Holland*, vol. 2, p 268-9.

4 Auckland to Grenville, 2nd, 5th and 24th November; 1st and 7th December 1810, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 63-4, 65-6, 72-3, 77 and 81.

From these accounts it would seem likely that a government formed from the Opposition would not support the war vigorously and might well withdraw Wellington and his army. But Lord Holland, the great Whig champion of the Peninsula wrote in his Memoirs,

I had some scruples about the Spanish war. Lord Grenville, from economy, Lord Grey, from a propensity to criticise military movements, were disposed to contemplate it with less hope, and possibly less zeal, than myself. But as they agreed on the immediate necessity of supplying Lord Wellington's army with reinforcements and vigorously supporting the plans in which he was engaged, I saw no reason ... for exacting a previous concurrence of opinion in certain contingencies which had not yet occurred. It was willing to take my chance of the zeal which the conduct and management of the war would inevitably have inspired in such ardent and sanguine minds as Lord Grey's and Mr Whitbread's.¹

Unfortunately it is hard to give full credit to this account. Lady Holland's *Journal* confirms that her husband did discuss the Peninsula with Grenville, but no mention is made of reinforcements, or indeed of any conclusion being reached.²

But even if it is accepted that a new Government would have taken office with the intention of lessening the Peninsular commitment, or even of withdrawing Wellington's army completely, this does not mean that this intention would ever have been implemented. Policies formed in Opposition are frequently abandoned in Government. By the time a new Government could have been formed, come to a decision on the matter and issued its orders, the military situation in Portugal would have dramatically altered. No doubt Wellington would have appealed for fresh instructions in view of the new situation, and it seems unlikely that even Grey and Grenville would have voluntarily incurred the political opprobrium of withdrawing a victorious army. If this first hurdle was surmounted much could indeed be left to the 'ardent and sanguine minds' of Grey and Whitbread, for they would surely enjoy the novelty of pursuing a policy that was both popular and successful.

¹ Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party*, p 88.

² *Journal of Lady Holland*, vol. 2, p 282.

And yet, who can tell? All we can really say is that a change of Government would have thrown Britain's Peninsular commitment into doubt, and that there is no easy safe assumption as to how a new Government would have acted.

* * * * *

The relationship between the two crises of 1810/11 is complex. Wellington's campaign in Portugal probably helped to strengthen support for Perceval's Government. The Regency Crisis then distracted attention from the Peninsula at a time when Massena's persistence disappointed the hopes of many in Britain. The military stalemate did not influence the result of the political crisis, but the continuation of Perceval's Government was a factor for stability in British strategy where the introduction of a new Government would have led to doubt and uncertainty.

Neither the military nor the political crisis had been properly resolved at the end of February 1811. In Portugal, Wellington continued to watch and wait, while in England the King's condition varied from day to day and week to week. The winter was over but no one could yet safely predict what the spring would bring.

Chapter 11

The Turn of the Tide (February to June 1811)

In February 1811 Perceval and his colleagues were satisfied, even complacent, about the state of the war in the Peninsula. They felt that they had made an unprecedented effort to stem the tide of French conquest at Lisbon and Cadiz. They had trusted Wellington and braved the sceptics, and the risk had proved justified. Lisbon had been saved and - according to Wellington - Massena could not continue to postpone his retreat for much longer. The Ministers hoped that when the French retreated they would be able to reduce their own effort in Portugal which they believed was at an unsustainable level. They remained concerned about the nation's finances, and about recruitment for the regular army. As early as September 1810 Liverpool had firmly told Wellington that the reinforcements he was being sent were only for the duration of Massena's invasion and that "the British army must be reduced as soon as the **present exigency** will admit of it".¹ Wellington had appeared to accept this principle when he asked for the loan of some more troops at the end of 1810,² and in mid-January Liverpool had clearly reiterated it.³

But Henry Wellesley, Britain's envoy at Cadiz, seems to have been unaware of the mood of the Cabinet. He was dissatisfied with the performance of the Spanish armies, and understood that no real improvement could be expected without a complete change of system.⁴ This was quite reasonable, but his proposed solution was totally unrealistic. He wanted Britain to take over the Spanish armies

¹ Liverpool to Wellington, 10th September 1810, *W.S.D.* vol. 6, p 591-3. There is a copy of this letter in B.L. Add. Ms. 38,325 f58-65.

² Wellington to Liverpool, 29th December 1810, *W.D.* IV, p 485-6.

³ Liverpool to Wellington, 17th January 1811, P.R.O., W.O. 6/29, p 19-23.

⁴ Henry Wellesley to Marquess Wellesley, 12th January 1811, P.R.O., F.O. 95/378, p 271-5.

as she had those of Portugal, with British officers to retrain the men, and Wellington given sweeping authority as Commander-in-Chief. Britain would pay for the reforms by a loan to Spain of £8 to £10 million.¹

Henry Wellesley knew that his plan would encounter powerful opposition from many leading Spaniards in Cadiz. Earlier, more modest, attempts to retrain Spanish units with British officers had been thwarted, even when they had gained formal approval.² But Wellesley had convinced himself (quite wrongly) that there was strong support for his schemes in the Cortes.³ Wellington was more sceptical. He told Lord Wellesley that "The Spaniards would not, I believe, allow of that active interference by us in their affairs which might effect an amelioration of their circumstances".⁴ Wellington instead proposed that he be allowed to subsidize the Spanish armies that operated near him, entirely at his own discretion, so that he could force them to co-operate with him.⁵ He was also most unenthusiastic about the idea of his being made Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish armies.⁶

Even without the opposition of Wellington and many Spaniards, Henry Wellesley's plans were doomed to failure. The British Ministers were seeking to reduce rather than increase their commitment to the Peninsula, and would not dream of undertaking such a vast expansion of Britain's role in the war, at a time when the economy and finances were under such strain. In any case, this battle had already

1 Henry Wellesley to Marquess Wellesley, 'Private', 12th January 1811, B.L. Add. Ms. 37,292, f250-1. This is not the same letter as cited above. It is printed without date in *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 52.

2 eg Whittingham's attempts, on which see: Severn, 'Wellesley and ... Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy', p 367-9.

3 Henry Wellesley to Wellington, 25th January 1811, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 47-8.

4 Wellington to Marquess Wellesley, 26th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 553-6, quote on p 555.

5 Wellington to Marquess Wellesley, 26th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 553-6.

6 Wellington to Liverpool, 2nd February 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 575.

been fought out the previous June when the Cabinet rejected Lord Wellesley's very similar proposals.¹

Liverpool spelt out the Cabinet's position to Wellington in an unusually strong letter on 20th February 1811. He complained that the cost of the war in Portugal had risen from less than £3 million in 1809 to over £9 million in 1810 and that, as most of this expense had been incurred in the last few months of the year, it would rise still higher in 1811 unless steps were taken to reduce it.² Liverpool went on to express

the unanimous opinion of every member of the government and of every person acquainted with the finances and resources of the country, that it is absolutely impossible to continue our exertion upon the present scale in the Peninsula for any considerable length of time.³

Liverpool warned Wellington that this meant that the Government faced the choice of either reducing "the scale of our exertion [in Portugal] or ... withdrawing our army altogether". Naturally there was no possibility of giving large scale aid to Spain and consequently there would be no advantage in Wellington being made Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish armies, as without money he would not be able to effect the necessary reforms. He might accept the command of the Spanish forces in provinces adjoining the frontier, but only if this entailed no extra expense and no commitment to operations in the interior of Spain.⁴

This letter made it quite clear the Government's first priority in the Peninsula was the defence of Portugal. The Ministers were pleased to have saved Cadiz from the French, and in 1810 they had also occupied Ceuta, but they had no desire to become more deeply involved in the affairs of Spain. They were

¹ see above, Chapter 8, p 290-7.

² This was an inaccurate comparison as Wellington pointed out, but it is true that the cost of the war had rapidly increased. Wellington to Liverpool, 23rd March 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 691-3.

³ Liverpool to Wellington, 20th February 1811, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 69-70. Copies in B.L. Add. Ms. 38,325 f90-95, and P.R.O. W.O. 6/60 p 180-6, the latter is marked 'Private'.

⁴ Liverpool to Wellington, 20th February 1811, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 69-70.

disillusioned by the continual defeats of the Spanish armies, and by their unco-operative attitude as allies particularly, but not only, during the Talavera campaign. With Massena still at Santarem the defence of Portugal seemed a sufficient objective for British strategy and the Ministers did not yet view it, as Wellington probably did, primarily as a base for campaigns in Spain.

Lord Wellesley's attitude to these questions is not clear. He does not seem to have pressed Henry Wellesley's plans in Cabinet,¹ but there is no reason to doubt that he still hoped that Britain would adopt a more ambitious policy in which Spain would play a prominent part.² He was profoundly out of sympathy with his colleagues and would have resigned late in 1810 if the Regency Crisis had not forestalled him.³

Yet Wellesley was not totally without influence in Cabinet particularly when he was arguing Wellington's case. Perceval could not afford to drive him into resignation, for such a split would give the Prince Regent the perfect excuse to change his Ministers. Wellesley's flamboyance and notorious life-style found sympathy with the Prince where they alienated Perceval and his conventional colleagues. There was a serious possibility that the Prince might install a Wellesley-Canning Government which could draw strength both from the former Ministers and the old Opposition.

It is impossible to fully reconstruct the Cabinet deliberations in February 1811, but it seems likely that Lord Wellesley did not press Henry Wellesley's Spanish plan, and instead concentrated his efforts on supporting Wellington's plea for more assistance to the Portuguese Government. In his letter of 26th January

¹ Hence Liverpool's pointed reference to the "unanimous" opinion of "every" member of the government, quoted above (p 351). But this may be reading too much into a single phrase.

² When Wellesley left the Government early in 1812 he attacked it for not pursuing a more vigorous policy in the Peninsula.

³ Memorandum by [Col. Meyrick Shawe], January 1814, in *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 264; 'Notes of a Conversation with Lord Wellesley' by Bathurst, 17th January 1812, *H.M.C. Bathurst*, p 160-1.

Wellington had written that Britain should either take over the Government of Portugal completely, or at least "increase the subsidy to the real amount of the expense of 30,000 men".¹ The Ministers knew that although they had granted Portugal a subsidy of £980,000 in 1810, the Portuguese Government had only received about £700,000 after the loss on the exchange and the cost of British officers serving in the Portuguese army had been deducted.² According to contemporary rumour Wellesley squeezed an increase in the Portuguese subsidy from Perceval "as if it was so much of his blood".³

Whatever the truth of this rumour the result was an increase in the subsidy to £2 million per annum, barely a fortnight after Liverpool's letter of 20th February urging a need for a reduction in expenditure. Obviously it would have been a false economy to let the Portuguese army deteriorate from lack of funds, but this was still a surprising *volte face*. The increase was granted on condition that Wellington and Charles Stuart (H.M.'s Minister at Lisbon) be granted authority over every branch of the Portuguese administration connected with military operations to ensure that the money was spent efficiently.⁴ The decision marked an important victory for Wellington (and presumably Wellesley), but the Cabinet did not lose its concern for economy, nor did the Ministers give up their intention of reducing Wellington's army when Massena retreated and the immediate threat to Lisbon lessened.

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1 Wellington to Marquess Wellesley, 26th January 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 553-6, quote on p 554.

2 Colonel Bunbury to Liverpool, 8th March 1811, B.L. Add. Ms. 38,246 f53-4. I am inclined to doubt the date of this letter, for its contents seem to indicate that it was written before a definite decision was made to increase the subsidy.

3 quoted in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 204n.

4 Liverpool to Wellington, 6th March 1811, P.R.O. W.O. 6/50, p 188-191.

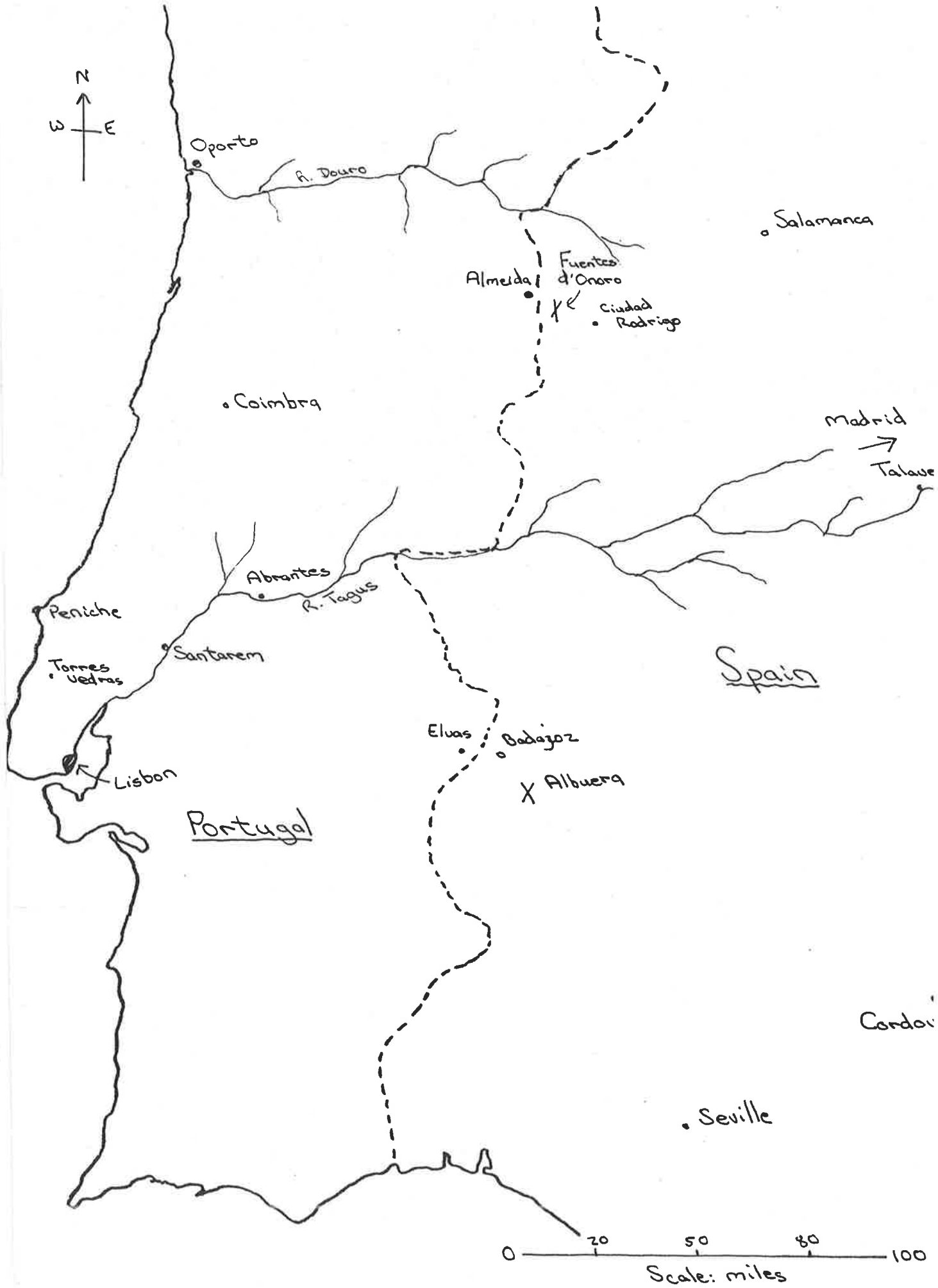
It is significant that the Government decided to increase its commitment to Portugal in early March before it received the latest news from the Peninsula. For at long last the military stalemate had been broken, armies were on the move, and British troops had gone into action again. The first developments however were not in Portugal but in Southern Spain, where Soult's Estremaduran campaign had left the French perilously weak. A combined Anglo-Spanish army, drawn from the garrison of Cadiz and commanded by the Spanish General La Peña, attempted to raise the siege. The campaign did not go well, with considerable friction between the allies. On 5th March, the last day of the campaign, the British contingent was left with little or no Spanish support, to defeat the besieging force under Marshal Victor. The resulting victory of Barrosa cost Graham nearly a quarter of his force; proved that British troops could manoeuvre and attack under heavy fire, as well as defend; and extracted the allied army from an awkward position; but it brought no further benefits.¹ The siege was not lifted and disputes between the allies soured their relations.

Meanwhile Soult's campaign was proving fruitful. Mendizabal, the Spanish general who had succeeded La Romana, foolishly offered battle at Gebora near Badajoz on 19th February. The Spanish infantry occupied a strong position and fought well, but their cavalry had fled at the outset and the result was scarcely ever in doubt. The French took 4,000 prisoners, all the Spanish artillery and six standards for a total loss of barely 400 men.²

After this the siege of Badajoz progressed smoothly until 10th March when the French had blasted a practicable breach in the walls. Soult was growing impatient for he had received alarming news from both Portugal and Andalusia and so, on the morning of the 10th, he summoned the fortress to surrender. General

¹ For an account of the campaign and battle see, Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, Section XXIII, Chapter 4, p 91-130. *Ibid*, Appendix IV makes the Anglo-Portuguese contingent 5,217 strong, and gives its total loss as 1,238 casualties or 23.7 per cent.

² Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 51-55, especially p 54.



Portugal and Western Spain, for the Campaigns of 1811.

Imaz, the Governor of Badajoz, called a Council of War in which there was some debate, but the prevailing opinion, which he accepted, favoured a capitulation. Terms were agreed that afternoon and the fortress surrendered on the following day. The garrison of 9,000 men (including 1,100 sick) was added to Soult's fine collection of prisoners taken during the campaign which now amounted to some 16,000 men - a remarkable achievement for an army of only 20,000 men in a short campaign, in hostile country, in mid-winter.¹

Soult's Estremaduran campaign had done little to assist Massena, but in every other respect it had been an enormous success. He had destroyed the Spanish army of Estremadura and captured the strongest of the fortresses on the Portuguese border. The French possession of Badajoz was a fact of great strategic importance which did much to shape the course of operations for the next twelve months. Wellington was naturally disappointed by its fall and condemned the Governor with his customary vehemence.² But as Badajoz had held out for more than six weeks after Wellington had predicted its speedy fall, it is hard to believe that he had any right to feel aggrieved, even if the defence could have been more tenacious.³

Yet even the fall of Badajoz was of secondary importance compared to the retreat of Massena. The French Marshal had held on grimly at Santarem until the last possible moment. His army had suffered terribly and was now so depleted that Wellington could not resist the temptation any longer, and was preparing to launch an attack.⁴ Massena retreated just in time. He rejected the idea of an attempt to cross the Tagus and, on 5th March 1811, began the painful march back through

¹ Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 61-63. Although Oman is often very critical of Soult, in this case he gives him full credit for his achievement.

² eg Wellington to Marquess Wellesley, 16th March 1811, *W.D.*, IV, p 674: "If it had not been for the treachery of the Governor of Badajoz, Spain would have been out of the fire ...".

³ See above, Chapter 10, p 341. Oman believes that the fortress should have resisted for longer. (*Peninsular War*, IV, p 58-61).

⁴ Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 83-85.

Portugal to the Spanish frontier. He had held out for far longer than Wellington or anyone else could have anticipated and had obeyed the orders of his Emperor as far as was possible. During the campaign he had displayed more determination than brilliance, but he bears little or none of the responsibility for its failure.

Wellington quickly pursued the French and there were a number of fiercely contested combats between the British advanced and French rear-guards. By the end of the first week of April Massena's troops had retired back into Spain where their commander gave them a brief, and wholly inadequate, chance to recover from their ordeal. Wellington settled down to blockade Almeida in the hope of starving it into submission, while Beresford, with a substantial force detached from Wellington's army, besieged Badajoz with an improvised siege train of antiquated weapons.

* * * * *

Wellington must have been relieved by the outcome of the Regency Crisis and by Massena's retreat, which together removed the principal military and political threats to his position. He agreed to send home most of the transports in Lisbon harbour whose hire had been costing the Government dearly, and went on to tell Liverpool,

I have not yet fixed upon any regiments to be sent back to England in consequence of the enemy's retreat; and I beg to know from your Lordship, whether you still desire that the force here should be reduced, and to what extent.¹

He made up for the surprisingly moderate tone of this letter two days later with a trenchant reply to Liverpool's letter of 20th February. He disputed Liverpool's calculations of the cost of the campaign in Portugal, and denied that the

¹ Wellington to Liverpool, 21st March 1811, *W.D.* IV p 689.

Government had it "in their power at present to form an Opinion, of the exact Expense of the War in the Peninsula". He put forward as a general principle "that it was in the interest of Great Britain to employ in Portugal the largest army that could be spared from other Services" and recommended that if reductions had to be made, they should be achieved by reducing the number of British troops at Cadiz and in other garrisons. He reacted violently to the suggestion that the British army might have to be withdrawn from Portugal, asserting that if this were done the French would invade England:

Then indeed would commence an expensive contest; then would His Majesty's subjects discover what are the miseries of war, of which, by the blessing of God, they have hitherto had no knowledge; and the cultivation, the beauty, and prosperity of the country, and the virtue and happiness of its inhabitants would be destroyed, whatever might be the result of military operations.¹

This may be, as Fortescue believed, the outpouring of deep emotion,² but a more cynical reading suggests that heady rhetoric was summoned to conceal paucity of argument. For there was no significant danger of a French invasion of England, and if there had been, the occupation of Lisbon by the pick of the British army would have been a poor means of countering it.

Liverpool's reply was, of course, coloured by the news of Massena's retreat which naturally made the Ministers more enthusiastic about the war. They were also influenced by reports of growing tension in northern Europe which aroused hopes that, at the very least, Napoleon would be diverted from the Peninsula for some time.³ Nonetheless the Ministers did not lose their natural caution. Liverpool told Wellington, "You know our Means both Military and Financial are limited; but such as they are, We are determined not to be diverted

¹ Wellington to Liverpool, 23rd March 1811, *W.D.* IV, p 691-3. There is a copy of this letter in B.L. Add. Ms. 38,246, f65-70.

² Fortescue, *British Army*, vol. 8, p 117.

³ Liverpool to Wellington, 'Private & Confidential'. 11th april 1811, B.L. Add. Ms. 38,246 f106-7, and printed in *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 102. It is not clear whether these reports related to the early stages of the rupture between France and Russia, or rumours of some passing flurry of no lasting significance.

from the Peninsula to other objects. If we can strike a Blow, we will strike it there". He asked Wellington for details of his plans so that the Government could decide whether or not to reduce his army.¹ He suggested that in the meantime Wellington should send home eight weak, inefficient battalions which could be replaced by strong fresh regiments from home if the Cabinet decided to maintain the army at its existing strength.² As a conciliatory gesture a regiment of light cavalry was being sent out to Portugal as soon as it could be made ready.

Accompanying these businesslike despatches were two others. One was a letter of official congratulations on the success of Wellington's defence of Portugal which overflowed with formal phrases of fulsome flattery.³ The other was much more interesting : a speculative letter which called for Wellington's views on the future of the war in the Peninsula and hinted at ideas of the Ministers. Liverpool asked whether an army of 30,000 effective rank and file supported by a reserve of 10-15,000 men kept ready to sail would be sufficient to defend Portugal if the French attempted another invasion? He also gave a broad hint that the Ministers were more interested in an attempt to relieve Cadiz and other coastal expeditions than in an offensive campaign in central Spain.⁴

Wellington received these letters on 6th May 1811 the day after his army had been in action at the Battle of Fuentes d'Oñoro. Massena had quickly rallied and reorganized his army in Spain, collected some reinforcements, and advanced to attempt to relieve Almeida. Wellington gave battle in a position which though strong had one flank hanging in the air. A partial French attack on 3rd May was repulsed after some hard fighting between a relatively small number of units, but the main battle was not until 5th May. Wellington began the day badly when he

1 Liverpool to Wellington, 11th April 1811, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 104-5.

2 Liverpool to Wellington, 11th April 1811, P.R.O. W.O. 6/50 p 203-6.

3 Liverpool to Wellington, 11th April 1811, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 103-4.

4 Liverpool to Wellington, 11th April 1811, *W.S.D.*, vol. 7, p 104-5.

detached the newly formed and inexperienced 7th Division to cover his exposed flank. Most of the rest of the action centred on trying to retrieve this error - one of the very few serious tactical mistakes Wellington ever made in battle. The result was a scrambled fight in which the quality of the British troops was sorely tested as they retreated in the face of superior enemy cavalry. Eventually the French attack was repulsed with an Allied loss of some 1,800 men while the French lost about 1,000 more.¹ A few days later the French garrison of Almeida blew up the fortifications and - to Wellington's fury - escaped through the allied lines.

Wellington replied to Liverpool's letters on 7th May - after the battle but before the fall of Almeida. He repeated his recent complaints about the inefficiency of the Portuguese army which the increased subsidy had apparently done little to improve.² He confirmed that Portugal could be defended by an army of 30,000 effective rank and file and explained that his plans for future operations centred on the capture of Badajoz. With Badajoz in his possession he could either return to the north to besiege Ciudad Rodrigo, or march south to relieve Cadiz. He expressed his strong objections to the coastal operations which frequently tempted Liverpool, and bluntly told the Government that "Portugal should be the foundation for all your operations in the Peninsula". Offensive operations would take the army into Spain where it should be "entirely independent of all Spanish authorities". Of course all this depended on the strength of his army being maintained and any reduction would force him back onto the defensive.³

Before this letter reached London there was another battle. Soult had collected an army and marched to relieve Badajoz. Beresford had concentrated his polygot army of British, German, Portuguese and Spanish troops and gave battle at

¹ For an account of the battle see, Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, p 306-48. Casualty figures from *ibid*, Appendices X, XI, XIV, p 622-4 and p 630.

² He had previously complained to Liverpool on 1st May 1811 (*W.D.* IV, p 782-3), and to Charles Stuart on 15th and 21st April (*W.D.*, IV, p 752, and 762-3).

³ Wellington to Liverpool, 'Private', 7th May 1811, *W.D.* IV p 787-790. There is a copy of this letter in B.L. Loan Mss 72, vol 21, f49-57.

Albuera on 16th May 1811. The allies outnumbered the French by nearly three:two but Beresford was no Wellington, and the result was one of the bloodiest and most savage battles of the whole Peninsular War. By the end of the day the Allies had lost nearly 6,000 casualties including over 4,000 British from a contingent of little more than 10,000. Colbourne's brigade lost two thirds of its men when it was caught in the flank by Soult's Polish lancers and six other regiments in the British army lost more than half their strength. Soult's army also lost nearly 6,000 casualties or one quarter of its total.¹ Neither army was fit to renew the fight and after a couple of days Soult gave up his attempt to relieve Badajoz, and limped back to Andalusia.

According to Wellington, writing in confidence to Pole, "Beresford would have written a whining report upon it [Albuera], which would have driven the people in England mad. However, I prevented that".² It was perhaps just as well that he did, for Beresford had been deeply disturbed by his responsibility for the carnage³ and his report would have arrived at a most inopportune moment.

The success of the British advance through Portugal and the victory at Fuentes d'Oñoro had enhanced Wellington's prestige in England. The Opposition's hostility to the war in Portugal had faltered and the Ministers had revelled in reflected glory. When Wellington's letter of 7th May reached London it found the Ministers' confidence in Wellington at a new peak. In the last days of May the Cabinet took several crucial decisions for the future of the war in the Peninsula. The Ministers gave up all idea of reducing Wellington's army and instead told him that more than 6,000 infantry would soon sail to join his army to

¹ For an account of the battle see, Oman, *Peninsular War*, IV, Section XXVI, Chapter V, p 363-403. Beresford's army amounted to some 35,000 men of whom 10,400 were British; 10,200 were Portuguese, and 14,600 were Spanish. The British lost 4,159; the Portuguese 389, and the Spanish 1,368. Soult had 24,260 men, and lost about 6,000. *ibid* p 631-5. Only a small part of the Spanish troops belonged to the old Army of Estremadura, the rest had been sent from Cadiz and Andalusia.

² Wellington William Wellesley-Pole, 2nd July 1811, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 175-177.

³ Vichness, 'Marshal of Portugal', p 434-6.

make up for recent losses and to replace some of his most depleted units. In addition a fresh regiment of light cavalry and the horses of another would be sent out, while a regiment of heavy cavalry was available if Wellington wanted it.¹ He was also reminded that he had already been given authority to withdraw troops from the garrison of Cadiz to enlarge his army.² And, most important of all, his instructions were altered, to give him complete discretion in the conduct of his operations in Portugal or in Spain.³

This decision marked a significant shift of policy by the Perceval Government. For the first time since the Government was formed it agreed to go beyond a strictly limited commitment to the defence of Portugal and to undertake an active role in the war in the Peninsula as a whole. It was a triumph not for the views of Lord Wellesley or his brother Henry, but for the quite different policy advocated by Wellington. Some Spanish troops might continue to serve with Wellington and under his command, but they were never to be as important to British strategy as the Portuguese. The primary thrust of Wellington's policy was the creation of a single powerful army completely under his control. It was the

1 Liverpool to Wellington, 29th May 1811, P.R.O. W.O. 6/50, p 219-222.

2 Liverpool to Wellington, 30th May 1811, P.R.O. W.O. 6/50, p 222-3.

3 There are two versions of Liverpool's letter granting Wellington complete discretion in his future operations. One is printed in *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 144-5 and is dated 29th May 1811. While this version grants Wellington "full discretion" it stresses that the security of Portugal is the first object which ought to be invariably kept in view, and that after the experience of the campaign of 1809 it would not be expedient that a British army should march into the interior of Spain unless a reasonable system of co-operation with the Spanish armies could be previously arranged.

There is a copy of this letter in B.L. Add. Ms. 38,325 f114-5.

The other version of this letter is in P.R.O. W.O. 6/50, p 223-4 and is dated 30th May 1811. It is shorter, simply granting Wellington full discretion and includes none of the passage quoted above. The opening sentences of both letters are identical.

In *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 3052, p 367 is a letter dated 29th May from Liverpool to the Prince Regent enclosing Wellington's new instructions granting him full discretion. The instructions are not printed.

I suspect that the version dated 29th May and printed in *W.S.D.* was that submitted to the Prince, but either at his suggestion or on second thoughts by the Ministers, the simpler more generous version was that actually sent.

success of this policy which finally made Britain a significant military power in 1813, for the first time in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Not that the Ministers thought of this in May 1811. Their ideas were much less grandiose and they concentrated their attention on more immediate objectives. The escalation of British forces was undertaken gradually, cautiously, step by step, so that if any one step proved too much for Britain's resources it could be withdrawn. But the decisions made in May 1811 mark the beginning of this process and the adoption by the Ministers of a new, more aggressive and optimistic attitude to the war.

* * * * *

Massena's retreat, and the success of British arms during the Spring of 1811, led to a dramatic change in the Opposition's position on the war in the Peninsula. On 18th March before news of the French retreat reached London, they vigorously opposed the increased subsidy to Portugal. Ponsonby, the Whig leader in the Commons, sarcastically remarked that "our success consists in having lost almost the whole of Portugal, and that our army is now confined or hemmed in between Lisbon and Cartaxo". He went on to ask "How long can this country support this expense"? and to declare "that neither in Spain nor in Portugal has anything happened that can give us reason to believe that the war there will terminate to our advantage, although I wish it sincerely".¹ Ponsonby was supported by the Grenvillite, W.H. Fremantle, "I still maintain that you will not and cannot by such a system either relieve your allies or benefit yourselves",² and by General Tarleton - a persistent Whig critic of the Government's handling of the

¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, cols 394-398, (Ponsonby's pseech), quotes from cols. 395, 396 and 397.

² *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, cols. 398-410, (Fremantle's speech), quote from col. 405.

war, who believed that "ruin alone could be the result".¹ Nonetheless the resolution was agreed to without a division.

There was less debate in the Lords where the question was considered on 21st March with only Lord Grenville attacking the proposal and the Government's whole strategy in the Peninsula where "three campaigns had more and more shewn its impolicy".² Grey's silence on this occasion may be significant, but Lord Auckland still had no doubt of "the follies and falsehoods of our Portuguese campaign".³ He also saw no benefits in Graham's victory at Barrosa and was extremely sceptical of the first reports of the French retreat.⁴

Unofficial reports of Massena's retreat reached London by 26th March, although Wellington's dispatches did not arrive until the 6th and 8th April.⁵ One observer sympathetic to the Whigs described the general reaction and its implications for the Opposition, in a letter of 9th April:

I must tell you that people, as usual judging of things by the event, begin now to give Lord Wellington great credit for the campaign; those who were before abusing his delay are now applauding his foresight and wisdom. I hear little or nothing now of a change of Ministers and I think the present people are much stronger in public opinion than they ever were, and that their dismissal will now be far from popular. This is my reluctant opinion. Every prediction on the part of the Opposition with respect to the issue of the campaign - that we should lose our whole army, be obliged to embark in six weeks, etc etc - said much too heedlessly, and too frequently, has been successively refuted by the event, and given people a poor opinion of their sagacity, while the others triumph over them and with some reason.⁶

¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, cols. 414-5, (Tarleton's speech), quote from col. 415.

² *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, cols. 450-7, (Grenville's speech), quote from col. 457.

³ Auckland to Grenville, 7th March 1811, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 126-7.

⁴ Auckland to Grenville, 28th March, and 1st April 1811, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 128 (both letters).

⁵ Liverpool to the Prince Regent, 26th March 1811, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, no. 2960, p 297. Liverpool to Wellington, 11th April 1811, *W.S.D.* vol. 7, p 103-4.

⁶ J.H. Doyle to Sir Charles Hastings, 9th April 1811, *H.M.C. Hastings*, vol. 3, p 288-9.

This general revulsion from their former views was shared by many prominent Whigs, and led to a dramatic *volte face* on 26th April 1811 when Grey seconded a motion by Lord Liverpool proposing a Vote of Thanks to Wellington and his army. Grey admitted that this marked a complete reversal of his earlier attitude and that he had expected a very different end to the campaign. His praise for Wellington was generous: "by the most patient perseverance under unfavourable circumstances, and at the moment of action by the most skilful combination of force and the most determined courage, a great success had been achieved".¹ His previous views were only reflected towards the end of his speech when he warned the Lords that the victory might be followed by an even greater effort by Napoleon and confessed that he still did not believe that an ultimate victory would be possible unless the Spaniards took a greater part in the war.²

On the same day in the Commons a similar motion was proposed by Perceval, seconded by Canning, and supported by General Tarleton, Lord George Grenville (Lord Grenville's nephew) and Ponsonby. The Whig leader now declared that he "was of opinion that the campaign was judiciously planned, and ably executed; and that the result had not tended more to exalt the glory, than to insure the safety of the country".³ Whitbread was not present in the Commons on this occasion but not even he was immune from this infectious enthusiasm, and he took an early opportunity to state in the House that "he should have concurred most cheerfully and cordially in the vote [of Thanks]."⁴ Among the Opposition leaders only Lord Grenville did not publicly change his views - a silence which did not go unnoticed, as his brother told him. "Your abstaining from the praise of Lord

1 *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, p. 766-8, (Grey's Speech), quote from p. 767.

2 *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, p. 766-8, (Grey's speech) quote on p. 767.

3 *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, p. 768-771, (Perceval's speech); p. 772-4 (Canning's speech); p. 774 (Tarleton); p. 775-6 (Lord G. Grenville); p. 776 (Ponsonby).

4 *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, 1st May 1811, p. 782-3.

Wellington after the speeches of Grey and Ponsonby and Lord Lansdowne and Whitbread, is quoted *ad invidium*".¹

But although the change in the Opposition's attitude in public was almost complete, in private they retained many of their reservations. The question was also complicated by their support for the resumption of cash payments which, if it had been adopted, would have cast in doubt the ability of any Government to continue to pay for the war in Portugal.

The depreciation of paper currency or the rising price of bullion had become a prominent public issue late in 1809 partly through a series of open letters from the economist David Ricardo. Stories abounded of guineas being sold for up to 27 shillings and of their illegal export.² The root of the problem was a shortage of bullion caused in part by the adverse balance of trade which in turn was the result of Napoleon's Continental System, and in part by the Government's heavy overseas expenditure, notably on the army in Portugal.

Early in the Session of 1810 when Perceval's Government was still extremely weak, he agreed to the appointment of a Committee of Enquiry, but paid insufficient attention to its proceedings. This allowed three enthusiastic and knowledgeable members to dominate the Committee, although none of them belonged to the Government. They were Francis Horner, a Whig, Henry Thornton a 'Saint' and the Canningite William Huskisson. Between them they wrote the Committee's report which attributed the depreciation of paper to its excessive issue and advocated the resumption of cash payments within two years. This report was published in June 1810 and provoked a fierce battle of pamphlets and counter pamphlets as the Ministers and their supporters attacked its findings.³

¹ T. Grenville to Lord Grenville, 4th May 1811, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 131-3.

² Gray, *Perceval*, p 368.

³ Gray, *Perceval*, p 368-378.

The question was not debated in Parliament until May 1811 when it produced perhaps the longest and most tedious debate of the Perceval Government.¹ Speaker after speaker annoyed the House, which had no love of statistics, by producing unending streams of figures which purported to prove, or disprove, the Committee's contentions. Given the fierce opposition of the Government, and the ambivalent or hostile attitude of independent figures such as Canning and Castlereagh, the proposals were never likely to succeed. The tedium of the debate diminished their support while Perceval clinched their fate by stating that if they were passed it "would be tantamount to a declaration that they [the Members of the Commons] would no longer continue those foreign exertions which they had hitherto considered as indispensable to the security of the country".² In other words, passage of the resolutions would require the curtailment or abandonment of Britain's Peninsular commitment.³ Faced with an inevitable defeat the Opposition leaders tried to persuade Horner to avoid a division, but he insisted and was beaten 151:75 on the first, theoretical, resolution, and 180:45 on the resolution calling for the resumption of cash payments within two years.⁴

It is not clear how deep was the Opposition's commitment to the recommendations of the Bullion Committee. The issue had been championed by relatively junior members such as Horner, and the only Opposition leader who seems to have taken a serious interest in the question was Grenville.⁵ The poor

¹ Gray, *Perceval*, p 379. The debate occupies hundreds of columns of *Parliamentary Debates* (vol. 19) and even Horner admitted that it had been tedious. Gray, *Perceval*, p 383.

² *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, cols 1063-1076, (Perceval's speech), quote from col. 1064.

³ This was not mere Parliamentary rhetoric. Writing to Croker on 11th November 1810 Perceval said, "I should consider the measure he [Huskisson] proposes as tantamount to a Parliamentary declaration that we must submit to any terms of peace rather than continue the war, which, I apprehend under his project, would be found utterly impossible". *Croker Papers*, vol. 1, p 34-5.

⁴ Gray, *Perceval*, p 383. R.G. Thorne's essay on Horner in R.G. Thorne, *The Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 4, p 241.

⁵ As early as 1804 Grenville had been concerned by the growth in the amount of paper money in circulation. Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, p 331.

divisions on the resolutions show that large numbers of Opposition members either stayed away or voted with the Government. So it cannot be taken for granted that a Grenville-Grey Government would have acted on the question.

In public the Opposition took every opportunity to reaffirm their support for the Peninsular War. They supported the Vote of Thanks for Albuera although their leaders had access to private accounts of the battle which cast doubt on the official sanitized version of events.¹ In private however they were more frank. When word of Albuera arrived, Grey told Grenville, "The news from Portugal I think very bad. I have little doubt that the French will claim the victory ...".² Three months later Grey was still more pessimistic,

the French are on the point of making a great effort in Portugal ... which Lord Wellington ... will find himself unable to resist. But even if such an effort could not take place or should not succeed, I am convinced the period when we shall be obliged to give up the contest from an absolute inability to support the expense, is fast approaching.³

Despite this, Grenville doubted whether Grey was "quite as strongly impressed as myself with the desperate and hopeless character" of waging war on the Continent.⁴

Such conflicting evidence makes it impossible to say with any certainty what policy an Opposition Government would have pursued in the Peninsula. Clearly they were far less likely to would abandon Portugal in July 1811 than they had been in February, but it is equally clear that they had no real confidence in the existing strategy. On the whole it is perhaps probable that in office they would have succumbed to Wellington's arguments and adequately support his exertions. They were most unlikely to withdraw his army completely, while a niggardly policy would expose them to political attacks from the former Ministers. But this is

¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 20, 7th June 1811, cols 511-7 (Lords); 519-528 (Commons); Auckland to Grenville, 29th May 1811, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 139-140.

² Grey to Grenville, 4th June 1811, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 144-5.

³ Grey to Grenville, 1st September 1811, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 167-169.

⁴ Grenville to Grey, 28th January 1812, *H.M.C. Dropmore*, vol. 10, p 197-200.

speculation and all that can be said for certain is that even in the summer of 1811, after the Opposition's public recantation of their criticism of the war in Portugal, a change of Government would have cast doubt on Britain's Peninsular commitment.

* * * * *

Dull though they were, the Bullion debates were the highlight of a lacklustre Session of Parliament. Political strife was held in abeyance for everyone knew that the fate of the Government would be decided, not by debates in the Commons, but by the health of the King and the will of the Prince Regent. Surprisingly the Ministers did little to court the favour of the Prince, even after he had confirmed them in office. They made no attempt to mould their policies to suit his known views and there were numerous clashes on questions of patronage.¹ Yet when Wellesley-Pole's conduct of Irish affairs aroused controversy the Prince supported the firm line taken by the Cabinet.² The only issue on which the Ministers could be accused of playing to the Prince was their decision to re-appoint the Duke of York as Commander-in-Chief, yet as they had consistently supported the Duke such a criticism would be unfair. Inevitably the radicals in the Opposition moved to censure the decision, much to embarrassment of their more moderate leaders who did not wish to alienate the Prince, and the motion was heavily defeated.³

The Prince did not learn to love his Ministers during the Spring of 1811, although his sympathy for their opponents waned. He found his position uncomfortable and his duties onerous. Nearly thirty years of dissipation and self-indulgence proved poor training for the daily grind of official business and he never

¹ Aspinall, in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 8, p 6-9.

² Gray, *Perceval*, p 419.

³ Lord Milton's motion censuring the Ministers was rejected 296 votes to 47. Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p365n.

acquired his father's prompt efficient habits. By the end of February he was ill and out of spirits, and would have welcomed his father's recovery and with it his own liberation.¹

The King had continued to improve throughout February and by the end of the month he seemed almost better and his formal resumption of power only a matter of time. As the weeks passed George III grew impatient to be back in harness, but his doctors had their doubts and told him he must wait. It is said that irritation at this decision led to a relapse at the beginning of March, but whatever the cause the setback was not serious and by late March he was again almost well. Almost, but not quite, and so he remained during April and May. Then, at the end of May his condition worsened in a serious relapse. By the middle of July the doctors feared for his life, and though he slowly became less ill his mind never recovered and all hope of his ever resuming his duties was at an end.²

The Prince's reason for retaining Perceval in office had now disappeared.

According to J.W. Ward

His Royal Highness is certainly at this moment more courted and powerful than he ever will be again. Both parties are vying with each other in submission to him. But the choice must soon be made, and the mask will fall from the countenances of the unsuccessful candidates for his favour.

Some think that the change will be made as soon as Parliament is up; others ... that it will be delayed till the Restrictions have expired.³

The Prince came to no decision and gave no sign, although in July he began dining with the Ministers, something he had sworn never to do.⁴ Neither side dared to

¹ Aspinall in *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 7, p 208-9. Macalpine and Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 155.

² Macalpine and Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business*, p 155-160.

³ J.W. Ward, *Letters to Ivy*, no date c. June 1811, p 140.

⁴ Gray, *Perceval*, p 425.

force the issue so attention shifted to the beginning of February 1812 when the Restrictions expired and the Prince would have to reveal his intentions.

The Prince did not make up his mind in July 1811, but nonetheless the fate of Perceval's Government was virtually decided then. The Prince had the perfect opportunity of changing his Ministers and he refused to exercise it. There were no scruples of conscience to be overcome as in February, and he had given Perceval fair warning then that his tenure depended on the King's recovery. The Prince was a most indecisive man: he did not decide to retain Perceval in July, he simply decided to postpone the hateful task of making a decision which would either brand him as a traitor to his friends in the Opposition, or increase his already considerable unpopularity (if he dismissed Perceval).¹ When, at the beginning of 1812, the evil hour could not be postponed much longer, he lay on his couch in an agony of indecision for weeks.² But by then his problem was less coming to a decision, than recognizing the decision he had already unconsciously made. If he had still had any real desire to see Grenville and Grey in office he would have summoned them to power in July 1811.

The Prince's apostasy was not altogether unexpected. During the Regency Debates the Whig Thomas Brand had joked to Plumer Ward that the Regent would keep Perceval in for three months as his father's Minister and then "fall so much in love with him" ... that he will keep him in as his own'.³ Other members of the Opposition were equally suspicious of the Prince's intentions even before there was any just ground for their doubts.⁴ The main reason for this suspicion was not any

¹ It is very hard to establish the Government's popularity at this time. The wild rejoicings which followed Perceval's death in 1812 do not indicate any great love among the public at large although they may not be representative of overall public attitudes. But by the middle of 1811 Perceval and his Government had gained the respect of all sides in Parliament (Gray, *Perceval*, p 426-8), and the Prince was so unpopular that almost any action of his would be taken amiss.

² He had badly twisted his ankle while showing Princess Charlotte how to dance the Highland Fling. To ease his pain he took large doses of laudanum. *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 8, p225n & 232.

³ quoted in Walpole, *Life of Perceval*, vol. 2, p 189-190.

⁴ Whitbread, for example, felt that the Prince "was playing a false, hollow, shabby game" as early as February 1811. *The Creevey Papers*, p 142.

change in the Prince's political views, although he had drifted away from the Whigs particularly on Ireland, reform, and Catholic Emancipation since Fox's death, but a shrewd assessment of his character. If George III had died rather than been incapacitated the Prince would almost certainly have changed the Government without hesitation. It would have been the most natural, the expected, thing for him to do.¹ But the peculiar circumstances of the Regency created a situation where the Prince, having initially retained Perceval in office, had to exert himself and exercise his authority to remove him. In the end it transpired that his fading loyalty to the Whigs was insufficient to overcome his vacillation and indecision. He did not like Perceval and his colleagues but he learned to live with them.

It seems likely that Wellington's success in Portugal played some part in influencing the Prince. Perceval and his colleagues gained credibility from the triumph of their policy, and the Prince must have enjoyed receiving captured trophies and reports of victories.² But the importance of this should not be overstated, for other influences were also at work. The Prince's mistress Lady Hertford was a strong supporter of the Government, as were the Dukes of York and Cumberland and Sir Henry Halford, all of whom saw a good deal of the Prince at this time.³ It is true that when the Prince announced his decision in February 1812 he attributed it to the Peninsular War,⁴ but this was simply because it was the least offensive reason he could give - after all he could hardly attribute it to the influence of his mistress, or even, prudently, to a change of heart on Catholic Emancipation.

The Opposition reacted to the Prince's betrayal with great bitterness despite the fact that it did not come as a great surprise. The rank and file of the Whigs were

¹ An election would automatically follow the King's death which would facilitate a transfer of power.

² Holland, *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party*, p 106.

³ Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p 374.

⁴ The Prince to the Duke of York, 13th February 1812, *Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 8, no. 3371, p 370-1.

particularly hurt for they had been looking forward to the Prince's accession for over twenty years. At the same time there were changes in the Government, for Wellesley had misread the Prince's intentions and resigned, allowing Perceval to bring in Castlereagh, Sidmouth and their supporters.

In the Peninsula the second half of 1811 had proved disappointing with Wellington unable to capture either Badajoz or Ciudad Rodrigo. The French forces in the Peninsula were still far more powerful than the combination of Wellington's army and the remaining Spanish regulars. But the bulk of the French troops were committed to holding down the Spanish provinces which would burst into insurrection if the French presence was reduced. Soult in Andalusia had nearly 70,000 men, but had difficulty collecting a field army of 20,000, and the position was similar in much of central and northern Spain. Only the Army of Portugal based in Leon and Old Castile was not preoccupied with holding territory: its primary function was to hold Wellington in check and this its new commander Marshal Marmont did successfully during 1811. But the initiative lay with Wellington. Napoleon did not regard Portugal as worth the effort of mounting another invasion and he continued to under-estimate the Anglo-Portuguese army, so that Marmont was never given enough men to contain Wellington without the assistance of troops from one of the other French armies. Napoleon ought to have recognized that Wellington's army was now far more powerful than in 1809, but his interest in the Peninsula was waning as his relations with Russia deteriorated. This was fortunate for Wellington, for if it had not been for the threat of war in the east, Napoleon could easily have reinforced Marmont's army so that the British would have been forced onto the defensive and been hard pressed to retain their positions in northern Portugal. Instead, at the beginning of 1812, before the campaigning season had properly begun, Wellington captured Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz in two rapid, well planned operations which took the French by surprise.

For the Prince and for Perceval all seemed to be going well. The Prince had gambled heavily on the future of Perceval's Government for it would be a

humiliating blow for him to have to ask the Opposition to form a Ministry, when he had so publicly rejected them. Then, on 11th May 1812, an unbalanced bankrupt named Bellingham assassinated Perceval in the lobby of the House of Commons. It was a sudden, shocking and totally unexpected blow which temporarily revived fears of revolution until it became clear that Bellingham had acted alone and without political motives. Although Perceval was not one of Britain's great Prime Ministers, or even a man of broad, enlightened views, his particular talents and qualities were well suited to his times. His resolute courage and determination preserved his Government through a succession of difficulties, while his cautious, conservative management of the war nicely balanced the competing claims of Portugal and economy. Pious and modest, he was a strange figure to lead Britain into the Regency, but the values he represented were to triumph over that late flowering of the 18th Century *beau monde*.

At first it seemed that the Government could continue under Liverpool, but on 21st May the Commons passed a resolution calling for a strong and efficient administration, and the Ministers resigned. The Prince's object was now to keep out the Whigs and Grenvillites, and their natural suspicion of him helped to achieve it. Wellesley and Canning tried to form a Government and failed, partly at least because of an extraordinary attack by Wellesley on the dead Perceval. Moira was given a chance, but lost his nerve at the last minute. The Prince succeeded in avoiding any direct overture to the Opposition, and they lost support by displaying intransigence on minor points. Liverpool returned to office with his same team of Ministers and the Commons, satisfied that they could do no better confirmed him in office. Liverpool offered Canning the Foreign Office, but in "the most disastrous political miscalculation of his whole career"¹ Canning refused if he could not also have the leadership of the House. An election in late 1812

¹ Hinde, *Canning*, p 252.

strengthened the Government's position and over the next few years the Opposition wilted.

Meanwhile Napoleon had led his armies into Russia in the ultimate attempt to find security over the next hill, while Britain and the U.S.A. drifted into a pointless war. The war with America placed great strains on the British economy, and might even have proved fatal if the Continental System had not collapsed at the end of the year.¹ In the Peninsula Wellington advanced into Spain but for a time found his match at dextrous manoeuvring in Marshal Marmont. But then Marmont grew a trifle over-confident and careless and Wellington pounced, attacking with his whole army. The Battle of Salamanca (22nd July 1812) was, in purely tactical terms, probably Wellington's finest victory ever, and Marmont's army was completely routed. Wellington went on to capture Madrid but was unable to hold his position when the various French armies combined against him. The end of the year saw the British back behind the Portuguese frontier.

The campaign had shaken the French hold on Spain, led to the abandonment of Andalusia, and given the Spanish resistance an enormous fillip, but it decided nothing. While Lisbon remained secure and the Spanish spirit remained unbroken, Napoleon could never completely win the war in the Peninsula, but nor could he lose it unless he was defeated in Central Europe. The Peninsula was a subsidiary theatre: when Napoleon's Empire was strong and largely at peace he could pour resources into Spain and the French cause would flourish; but when the Empire was in trouble the French cause in Spain would suffer. If Napoleon had triumphed in Russia, he would have reinforced his armies in Spain, the French ascendancy would have been reasserted and Wellington would have been forced back onto the defensive, possibly even to Torres Vedras.

But Napoleon's campaign in Russia was a disaster, not a triumph, and in 1813 he was fighting for the survival of his Empire. Events in the Peninsula were

¹ Harvey, *Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century*, p 330.

of secondary importance in this struggle and Napoleon naturally withdrew many troops from Spain for his campaign in Germany.¹ The weakened French forces fell back but Wellington caught and defeated them at Vitoria (21st June 1813) before driving them into the Pyrenees. His victory is said to have cheered the Allied leaders in Germany who had been defeated in several battles by Napoleon. But the decisive event in 1813 was the entry of Austria into the war, which gave the Allies a numerical superiority which overwhelmed all Napoleon's skill. A gigantic three day battle at Leipzig (16th - 18th October 1813) involved more than half-a-million men and resulted in 127,000 casualties. Napoleon's army was destroyed and his last remaining allies abandoned him.

Leipzig virtually sealed Napoleon's fate, although he might have kept his throne in a reduced France if he had displayed more diplomatic ability and relied less on his military skill. The Austrians would have preferred a compromise peace, but in the end they could not restrain their allies. Paris fell on 31st March 1814 and Napoleon abdicated on 6th April. Four days later, before the news of the abdication arrived, Wellington attacked and defeated Soult at Toulouse in the last battle of the Peninsular War.

Napoleon called it 'the Spanish ulcer' and patriotic British historians have gloried in Wellington's triumphs, but it must be admitted that the Peninsular War did not play a decisive role in the downfall of Napoleon. It is true that it took a fearful toll of French soldiers and was a constant large drain on Napoleon's treasury, but the French Empire did not slowly collapse from attrition: it fell quickly, violently, and by far the most important cause of its fall was the military disasters of 1812 and 1813. If it had not been for the war in Spain, Napoleon would have had a larger and better army in 1812. This may have affected the result, but on the whole it seems unlikely. It is not possible to argue - although

¹ Napoleon actually withdrew fewer men than might have been expected but the French also suffered from increased guerrilla activity in the northern provinces of Spain.

Oman tries to¹ - that these troops would have decided the campaign of 1813. For if there was no war in Spain, these soldiers would have gone to Russia and few would have returned. At most we can say that the Peninsular War sapped the Empire's strength and made it less resilient when disaster struck. Certainly it diminished Napoleon's popularity and undermined his army's reputation for invincibility.

From a purely British point of view, it provided a perfect opportunity for the creation of a large effective field army, without ever exposing it to the full weight of Napoleon's immense resources. This gave Britain more influence in the difficult peace negotiations of 1814-5, and this influence was greatly increased by the prestige Wellington gained by his defeat of Napoleon's last desperate gamble at Waterloo in 1815. In these negotiations Britain ultimately gained most of her objectives: those she had had when she entered the war in 1793, and those which she had acquired subsequently. France was reduced to her former size, a barrier created to her northward expansion, the Scheldt kept in friendly hands, the Spanish, Portuguese and Neapolitan monarchies restored to their former possessions, and a relatively stable pacific Government established in France. Britain kept most of her colonial gains, while the long years of war had established her naval supremacy more firmly than ever. Beyond question, she had more influence in Europe in 1815 than in 1792.

By the traditional standards of statecraft these gains more than recompensed the cost of the war. Few British soldiers or sailors had fallen in action compared to Austrians, Russians, Prussians or possibly even Saxons. Her country had not been occupied, fought over or pillaged. Her economy and trade had thrived (albeit unevenly) while those of her rivals had suffered. Her political system had weathered the stresses of war without violence, except in Ireland. The war had brought high taxation and a three-fold rise in the National Debt, which was largely

¹ Oman, *Peninsular War*, VII, p 517.

responsible for the economic problems of the postwar years. A generation had grown up accustomed to war and this, together with the glory of Wellington's victories, greatly eroded the traditional English distrust of a standing army. How all this, good and bad, is to be compared to the individual suffering it involved is another question, and one which lies beyond the scope of this work.

Note

Lord Liverpool remained Prime Minister for nearly fifteen years - the longest continuous term of any British Prime Minister since Pitt. He was incapacitated by a severe stroke in February 1827 and resigned; he died on 4th December 1828 at the age of only 58. Castlereagh was Liverpool's Foreign Secretary throughout the peace negotiations and the difficult years of post-war depression in England. He committed suicide on 12th August 1822, aged 53. Canning sank his pride and joined the Government in 1816 in the relatively junior position of President of the Board of Control with a seat in the Cabinet. Wellington entered the Cabinet at the end of 1818 as Master-General of the Ordnance. The old King at last died in 1820 and, after almost a decade as Regent, George IV came to the throne. When Castlereagh died Liverpool insisted, against the King's wishes, that Canning should be the new Foreign Secretary. At first there was much antipathy and suspicion between George IV and Canning, but after a while they became reconciled. When Liverpool resigned his Government was divided between a more liberal wing under Canning, and the more conservative members led by Peel and Wellington. George IV asked Canning to form a Government, and with great difficulty Canning constructed a coalition which drew support from both sides of Parliament. But the strain told and after a short illness Canning died on 8th August 1827: he was still only 57 years old. His coalition soon collapsed and the King turned to Wellington. As Prime Minister the Duke was forced to introduce Catholic Emancipation against his own wishes and those of the King. George IV

died on 26th June 1830 at the ripe age (given his lifestyle) of 67. The new king, William IV, did not keep Wellington in office but turned to the Whigs. Wellington remained in public life for many years even returning to the Cabinet when the conservatives were in office. He did not die until 1852 when he was 83 and a venerated figure from bygone age.

Conclusion

When the Portland Government took office in March 1807 they were faced with a difficult strategic situation which deteriorated before they could do anything to improve it. By July Britain was virtually isolated with only a few allies who were more of a burden than a benefit. Her position was better than in 1803 because there was less danger of invasion; but worse because the Continental Powers, which Napoleon had defeated, were less likely to venture into another war with him. Both Britain and France had consolidated their positions; they were both less vulnerable, and a long protracted war of attrition, predominantly economic, seemed likely.

The policies of the Portland Government in the year before the Spanish Uprising were characterised by boldness and good sense. The ruthless attack on the Danish fleet at Copenhagen may have been illegal, and was certainly immoral, but there can be little doubt of its expediency. The caution with which the Ministers avoided becoming entangled in the affairs of South America is equally praiseworthy, for it seems probable that British involvement would have been costly, unsuccessful and run a great risk of precipitating the French activity which it was intended to pre-empt. This gloss is tarnished by the decision of April 1808 to approve intervention in South America in principle, but it must be remembered that this was made on the basis of an inaccurate interpretation of events in Spain, and may never have been implemented even without the Spanish uprising. The Government's policy towards Portugal achieved its objective of ensuring the embarkation to Brazil of the court and the fleet. Hindsight suggests that more might have been achieved if an attempt had been made to defend Lisbon, but this is probably misleading for the circumstances of 1807 were quite different from those of 1808. Only the Government's decision to send Sir John Moore's expedition to Sweden seems open to unequivocal criticism. Admittedly the error was compounded by a misunderstanding for which the British Ministers were not responsible, but even as originally conceived the expedition was little more than an

empty gesture of support to a doomed ally whose persistent loyalty had become embarrassing.

The outbreak of the war in Spain dramatically changed the strategic environment. The British Government had misinterpreted events before the popular uprising, but this is hardly surprising given the confusion of the events themselves and the way news of them was delayed and garbled en route to London. When the Spanish deputies arrived in England the Ministers, as well as the public, welcomed them with open arms and hastened to supply them with weapons, supplies and money. Later critics were to suggest that the Government should have acted with more deliberation, and enquired into the nature of the Spanish rising before committing Britain to its support,¹ but this is to ignore the mood of the moment and to discount the moral effect of a generous, whole-hearted response to the appeal of a former enemy. The early success of the Spanish patriots appeared to vindicate the Government's policy (which, at the time, had near universal support), while it raised expectations of further success even higher.

The British expedition to Portugal was more a product of circumstances than of policy. The troops were available, it would have been culpable not to use them, but the Spanish deputies did not want them. The destruction of Junot's force, and the liberation of Lisbon were suitable objectives for a preliminary operation for Britain's limited forces. The original conception was thus eminently sound. What followed was a comedy of errors and coincidences for which the Ministers bear little real blame. The decision to increase Wellesley's force was made necessary by the arrival of Spencer's new, higher, estimate of Junot's force, while military protocol backed by the King and the Duke of York insisted on the appointment of a more senior commander. The choice of Burrard and Dalrymple proved unfortunate but was quite reasonable at the time. Finally there was the freak of weather which

¹ e.g. Napier, *War in the Peninsula*, vol. 1, p 86. See also Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, vol. 4, p 407.

led to the extraordinary coincidence of Burrard and Dalrymple arriving from opposite directions within thirty-six hours.

This remarkable chain of events was certainly enough to seriously disrupt the campaign in Portugal, but whether it was also sufficient to justify or excuse the Convention of Cintra is quite another matter. For that remarkable document the Ministers can hardly be blamed unless it was in their trust in their generals, all three of whom (including Wellesley) approved its substance. But even if the Government is excused from the responsibility for each individual link in the chain, they have an overall responsibility for the chain as a whole, and the campaign in Portugal purchased a modest success at the disproportionate price of disruption British military preparations and a reduction in popular support for the war.

The concentration of the British army in Portugal in early September 1808 made it difficult for it to assist the Spaniards on the Ebro in November. Coruña was almost as far from the front, but if the British army had landed at Gijon or Santander it might have played a much more prominent role in the campaign of late 1808. And yet, it is difficult to believe that a relatively small British army (never more than 40,000 men) could have done anything to stem Napoleon's invasion. The accident which kept the British out of the first stage of the campaign preserved Moore's army and enabled him to effectively disrupt Napoleon's plans for completing the conquest of the Peninsula. Even if the significance of this has sometimes been exaggerated, it remains a turning point in the war.

During these first months of the Peninsular War the basic object of British policy was to assist the Spanish patriots in every practical way. The rising itself had been so unexpected, and the early successes were so remarkable, that conventional expectations appeared irrelevant. The war in Spain seemed to be of a new, different kind to the previous wars against Napoleon, and this apparent uniqueness justified hopes which later seemed absurdly exaggerated. No doubt the Ministers should have kept their heads and not been swept up in the popular enthusiasm for Spain, but it is easy to be wise after the event, and in any case, it is

not clear that a more cautious approach would have produced a greatly different or much improved policy towards Spain. Subsequent events might suggest that the Government had been over-generous in its supply of arms and specie, and too bold in committing the British army to central Spain, but niggardly aid would have won few friends, and in the event Moore's army struck a valuable blow and survived, albeit not unscathed.

In wider terms the principle of British intervention in the Peninsula was clearly justified, even if the scale and type of British aid can be questioned. At the least, the war in Spain provided a diversion to absorb Napoleon's energies and resources; an opportunity to remove the Spanish fleet from his control; and dramatic evidence for Europe to see of his aggression towards an ally. But in these early months of the war the British Ministers could hope for far more, including access to Spain's American markets and even the defeat of Napoleon. After Bailen and the French flight to the Ebro, it was not unreasonable to believe that the Spaniards would defeat any renewed attempt to conquer their land and that they might throw the French back over the frontier. This would not in itself overthrow Napoleon's Empire, but the French army would lose much of its prestige, and revolts might well follow all over the Continent. Given the grim stalemate of less than a year before, this was an opportunity to be seized avidly for it was unlikely to recur.

The disillusionment following the Spanish defeats was commensurate with the expectations aroused by their success. Even two years later, in May 1811, there were some Ministers in the British Government who remained uneasy at the prospect of the British army returning to the interior of Spain.¹ The security of Cadiz was a separate issue: both as a great naval base and as the gateway to Spanish America it was important for Britain to deny it to the French, and desirable for her to gain influence or control there herself. Despite Spanish suspicions there

¹ See above chapter 11, p 360n and Liverpool to Wellington, 29th May 1811, i.e. the version printed in *W.S.D.*, vol. 7, p 144-5.

was no secret British intention to seize the port, although this may have been the final outcome if resistance in the rest of Spain had collapsed. The unfortunate events at Cadiz in early 1809 contributed one additional factor among several to the further worsening of Anglo-Spanish relations.

Canning deserves the chief credit for the renewed British commitment to defend Portugal in the Spring of 1809, and as this was a pre-requisite of all that followed the point has some importance. Yet Canning did not see the defence of Portugal as part of a wider scheme for British involvement in the Peninsula as a whole. Like his colleagues he was disgusted with the Spaniards and sought to save Portugal simply because she was an old ally under threat and appeared salvagable. Wellesley's attitude at this time is more ambiguous. His Memorandum of 7th March 1809 shows an appreciation of how the British in Portugal could effect events in Spain, but there is little evidence that he played an active role in influencing the Cabinet's decision.

The core of British policy in the Peninsula for the next two years was the construction of a powerful Anglo-Portuguese army to defend Portugal. The Talavera Campaign was a private venture of Wellesley's to which the Cabinet gave reluctant approval. It was a reasonable attempt to exploit a passing opportunity (the poor distribution of the French forces in Spain, and the Austrian war) and its failure was largely due to bad luck. The campaign was costly in lives and gained Wellesley a reputation for fighting pointless battles; it also did a great deal of harm to the already strained relations between Britain and Spain; but it did not threaten Britain's position in Portugal, nor did it seriously damage the Ministers' trust in Wellesley.

The greatest criticism which can be made of the British Government in 1809 is that it did not do enough to assist the Austrians. The defence of Portugal might be a worthwhile strategic aim, and the Talavera campaign a justifiable venture, but only the Austrian War offered any hope of victory over Napoleon. Yet not a very great hope, for even with his massive commitment to Spain Napoleon seemed

clearly stronger than any one Continental Power. Certainly the British Ministers had little faith in Austria whose armies Napoleon had already defeated in three campaigns, but the main reason they did not give more aid, was that they did not have more aid to give: they were critically short of supplies particularly of money. The Walcheren Expedition was a poor substitute although with better leadership it might have achieved more. With the available resources (especially the lack of specie) the troops could not be sent to Spain or Germany, but the Expedition was flawed in conception as well as execution, and the Ministers must bear the responsibility for the dreadful delay in withdrawing the troops.

The weakness of the new British Government under Spencer Perceval cast a shadow over the British commitment to Portugal, but like most shadows this proved more illusion than substance. The Ministers were anxious about the safety of their army and about the cost of the war and neither anxiety was unreasonable although the event proved both to be needless. Perceval's refusal to reduce the Government's military spending despite dire warnings of financial disaster was a triumph of pragmatism over intellectual conviction - though it is easy to imagine the harder names it might have been given if those warnings had been justified. On the question of the army's safety, the Ministers had little with which to answer their numerous critics save their faith in Wellington - who had, as yet, done little in Portugal to warrant such confidence.

When the French invasion eventually came it was almost an anticlimax, for Massena's army was not nearly strong enough to threaten Wellington's meticulous defences. The British General conducted the campaign with great skill and prudence, but his foresight and preparation deserve at least as much praise, for they made the task relatively easy.

The Regency Crisis added an unexpected element to the contest for Portugal and it is still not possible to guess what might have happened if the Prince had immediately changed his Ministers. However this was averted almost by chance, in much the same way as the crisis itself had arisen. The dramatic coincidence in

timing of the military and political crises had more apparent than real significance, although it is worth pausing to consider what might have happened if George III had died in late October 1810 rather than relapsing into his illness.

With our knowledge of the course of events it is clear that Massena's retreat from Santarem marked a watershed in the Peninsular War, and that despite some further French successes on the east coast, their power was generally on the wane from March 1811. But this was not inevitable: Napoleon could have reinforced his armies and regained the initiative, even renewing the invasion of Portugal. And even if this did not occur, there was no reason to believe that the war would end in five, ten or even twenty years, for Wellington's defeat of Massena could be repeated indefinitely without threatening Napoleon's power. All this explains the Government's concern with expenditure, and if anything, makes their decisions of May 1811 to reinforce Wellington and increase the commitment to the Peninsula seem rather rash. It could even be argued that the Ministers were carried away by their enthusiasm for Wellington's success, and endangered the long-term security of Britain by squandering her resources in Portugal for no adequate reason.

There is at least some truth in this charge, for the objectives of British policy at this time were not clearly formulated. It is easy to justify British involvement in the Peninsula during the first stage of the war (up to January 1809) for then there was a chance of defeating Napoleon, at least in Spain. Similarly British policy in the last stage of the war, from the middle of 1812, is explained by the fact that Napoleon was seriously at war, his Empire at stake, and that the Anglo-Portuguese army was maintaining a powerful diversion in the Peninsula. But what was Britain fighting for in the middle stage? During much of 1809 the Austrian war provided some hope and a reason to keep the French forces in Spain busy, but what of the long period from late 1809 to the middle of 1812, a period which coincides with Perceval's Government?

There are many justifications for the Government's policy, possibly because none is a sufficient explanation in itself. Perceval and his colleagues most

frequently cited Britain's obligations, moral and legal, to an old and loyal ally (i.e. Portugal) and this undoubtedly carried weight in their minds, although it had not led them to take any active steps to defend this same ally in November 1807. There were pragmatic reasons for maintaining good relations with the Portuguese Court, among them the access which Britain had been granted to the Brazilian market and through it, (unofficially), to the markets of Spanish America. Lisbon itself was a fine harbour, useful to the Royal Navy and potentially troublesome if held by the French. But the principal justifications for Britain's role were military: the war in Spain might not in itself threaten Napoleon's power, but it absorbed his energies, kept him from new projects and encouraged his enemies. In other words it was an excellent way of keeping the Continent "as unsettled as possible", of stirring the pot, and preventing Napoleon's conquests settling into place.¹ Wellington and the Ministers both believed that even a relatively passive British presence in Portugal would encourage the resistance in Spain and create strategic problems for the French.² (While this is certainly true, it should be recognized that the French would have required a sizeable army to occupy and hold down Portugal even if the British army had been evacuated and the regular Portuguese resistance had fragmented.) But as well as encouraging the Spanish resistance, the British presence in Portugal provided an ideal opportunity for the creation of an effective British field army, which was enlarged without being seriously diluted by the use of Portuguese auxiliaries. In short, Britain's involvement in the Peninsula worked to prevent the consolidation of Napoleon's power in Spain, and in Europe as a whole; and to help forge a weapon which would enable Britain to play an active part if the opportunity of a war to overthrow Napoleon finally arose. For this the British Government was prepared to bear the cost of the war, and run the risk that their army would be defeated, and the event largely justified their judgement.

¹ The quote is from Canning. See above Chapter 1 p 12 for the full quote.

² see, for example, Perceval's speech, 9th March 1810, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 16, p 15** - 11**** and Wellington to Liverpool, 2nd April 1810, *W.D.* III, p 810.

Of course in practice these considerations were only part of the reason why the Perceval Government maintained and then increased its commitment to the Peninsula. It had inherited the policy of defending Portugal from its predecessor and it would have been politically damaging to withdraw the army. Equally the decision to increase the commitment to Portugal arose as much from general enthusiasm at Wellington's success as from the mature weighing of strategic considerations.

In general the Perceval Government appears less innovative and creative in its strategic policy than the Portland Administration. This was partly the result of circumstances which called more for the steady pursuit of existing policy than for new directions; partly a reaction to the failure of Walcheren; and partly a reflection of the composition of the new Ministry. In the Portland Cabinet, Canning's fertile imagination and exuberance had been profitably blended with the more sober, cautious sense of Perceval, Liverpool and the other Ministers. But Wellesley's plans were too grandiose and extravagant to be useful, and the only fresh thinking came from Charles Yorke in his first few months at the Admiralty.

In the early months of the war British strategy was shaped almost entirely by the Cabinet with a little 'expert' advice, and some independent action from men on the spot such as Spencer and Dalrymple. When the army was landed some control inevitably passed to the generals, but even in Moore's campaign, where the general was given very broad discretion, many of the fundamental decisions which shaped the campaign were made, quite properly, by the Ministers. When the British army was evacuated the Cabinet regained almost complete control until Wellesley returned to Portugal. If the Talavera Campaign was undertaken despite the private wishes of the Ministers, it was because they chose to let Wellesley have his head, not because they lacked the power to control him. In the same way the Ministers had the ultimate power in all the broad strategic decisions connected with the defence of Portugal and Wellington's plans for 1811. But this power tended to atrophy from disuse, and in practice the Ministers came to do little more than

provide Wellington with resources and approve his plans. The decisions of May 1811 can be seen as the culmination of this process, although in fact the Cabinet's approval never became a mere rubber stamp.

Relations between a Government and its generals are frequently strained by differing priorities and perspectives, and this was certainly the case in the Peninsular War. The mutual distrust which already existed between Sir John Moore and the Portland Cabinet made him unsuitable for such a senior command in the volatile situation of 1808, but circumstances conspired to ensure that the Government had little real choice but to appoint him. The result was no worse, and possibly better, than could have been expected.

The position with Sir Arthur Wellesley was quite different. He was liked and trusted by most, if not all, the Ministers, and had a special patron in Castlereagh. They saved him from the trouble he got into over Cintra, and risked annoying the King by giving him another large command despite his lack of seniority. In return he gave them his full and frank opinion of his army and of every shortcoming in their arrangements for maintaining it. His self-assurance was remarkable and he did not hesitate to blame anyone and everyone except himself for anything that went wrong. His commitment to his cause was absolute, and no other loyalty could threaten it.

Wellington's talents were formidable and his determination and genius did more than anything else to ensure that the British presence in the Peninsula would be successful. The Ministers deserve great credit for perceiving his ability and then loyally supporting him despite the reams of abuse he hurled at them. Wellington was cursed with a quick pen and an impatient temper, but there is no indication that he ever regretted what he wrote in haste: certainly he never apologized. Yet in retrospect the Ministers could probably smile or laugh, for they had been right: Wellington was the man for the job.

Britain's war in the Peninsula has customarily been viewed from Wellington's perspective and it is no surprise to see him emerge as the hero of that

story. But when the war is viewed from the perspective of the Cabinet in London, the picture widens and other issues become more important. Wellington is still there playing a vital role almost to perfection, but he does not loom so large over the canvas. We see the War in the Peninsula as part of the larger war against Napoleon, and realize that the capture of Badajoz was not, necessarily, worth the loss of Sicily or the risk of a financial crisis. We see that Britain was only a single power in a complex world, pitted against a far larger power which she could not hope to defeat by herself. And we see the Ministers who governed Britain trying to weigh the immediate advantages of a greater effort in one field against the long-term costs and risks it entailed. These Ministers were only human; they made many mistakes and some of their best strokes came about almost by accident. Their task was not easy, yet with prudence and good sense they succeeded in guiding Britain through the dangers which surrounded her, not neglecting the strategic opportunities which arose, nor squandering her resources. They lack the glamour of the marvellous glittering figure in the foreground, but that is no reason to neglect their achievement.

APPENDIX A

The Members of Portland's Cabinet and Certain other Ministers in his Government

In the Cabinet:

In the Lords:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| First Lord of the Treasury: | The Duke of Portland |
| Lord Chancellor: | Lord Eldon |
| Lord Privy Seal: | Earl of Westmorland |
| Lord President of the Council: | Earl Camden |
| Master General of the Ordnance: | Earl of Chatham |
| President of the Board of Trade: | Earl Bathurst |
| First Lord of the Admiralty: | Lord Mulgrave |
| Home Secretary: | Lord Hawkesbury (became Lord Liverpool on his father's death, 17th December 1808) |

In the Commons:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Chancellor of the Exchequer: | Spencer Perceval |
| Foreign Secretary | George Canning |
| Secretary for War and the Colonies: | Viscount Castlereagh |

Joining the Cabinet in June and July 1809:

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Secretary at War: | Lord Granville Leveson Gower |
| President of the Board of Control: | Earl of Harrowby |

(Leveson Gower sat in the Commons)

Some junior Ministers in Portland's Government:

| | |
|--|--|
| Secretaries to the Treasury: | William Huskisson and Henry Wellesley (until April 1809) when replaced by Charles Arbuthnot |
| Secretary of the Admiralty: | William Wellesley-Pole (from June 1807) |
| Under-Secretaries for Foreign Affairs: | George Hammond and Viscount Fitzharris (until August 1807) when replaced by Charles Bagot |

| | |
|---|---|
| Under-Secretaries for War and the Colonies: | Edward Cooke and Charles Stewart (until May 1809) when replaced by Frederick John Robinson |
| President of the Board of Control: | Robert Dundas (until July 1809) |
| Secretary at War: | Lt. Gen. Sir James Pulteney (until June 1809) |
| Treasurer of the Navy: Vice-President of the Board of Trade: | George Rose George Rose |

Irish Government

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Lord Lieutenant: | the Duke of Richmond |
| Chief Secretary: | Sir A. Wellesley (until April 1809) when replaced by Robert Dundas |

Source: Aspinall, in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p li-liii.

APPENDIX B

**The Members of Perceval's Cabinet
and Certain other Ministers in his Government**

In the Cabinet:

In the Lords:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Lord Chancellor: | Lord Eldon |
| Lord Privy Seal: | Earl of Westmorland |
| Lord President of the Council: | Earl Camden (resigned in 1812) |
| Foreign Secretary: | Earl Bathurst (acting) then Marquess Wellesley |
| President of the Board of Trade: | Earl Bathurst |
| Secretary for War and the Colonies: | Earl of Liverpool |
| Master-General of the Ordnance: | Earl of Chatham (until March 1810) Lord Mulgrave (from 1st May 1810) |
| First Lord of the Admiralty: | Lord Mulgrave (until 1st May 1810 then see below) |
| Ministers without Portfolio: | Duke of Portland (until 30th October 1809) Earl of Harrowby |

In the Commons:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| First Lord of the Treasury: | Spencer Perceval |
| Chancellor of the Exchequer: | Spencer Perceval |
| Home Secretary: | Richard Ryder |
| President of the Board of Control: | Robert Dundas (succeeded his father as Lord Melville 29th May 1811) |
| First Lord of the Admiralty: | Charles Yorke (from 1st May 1810) |

Some junior Ministers in Perceval's Government:

| | |
|---|--|
| Secretaries to the Treasury: | Richard Wharton and Charles Arbuthnot |
| Secretary of the Admiralty: | John Wilson Croker |
| Under-Secretaries for Foreign Affairs: | William Hamilton, and Charles Culling Smith (until February 1812) |
| Under-Secretaries for War and the Colonies: | Frederick John Robinson (until June 1810 when replaced by Lt. Col. Henry Bunbury) and Charles Cecil Cope Jenkinson (until June 1810 when replaced by Robert Peel) |
| Secretary at War: | Viscount Palmerston |
| Treasurer of the Navy) Vice President of the Board of Trade) | George Rose |

Attorney-General:
Solicitor-General:

Sir Vicary Gibbs
Sir Thomas Plumer

Irish Government

Lord Lieutenant:
Chief Secretary:

Duke of Richmond
William Wellesley-Pole

Source: Aspinall in *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 5, p liv-lvii.

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W.O. 133/13 Letter book of Maj.-Gen. Robert Brownrigg, Quartermaster-General

Private Papers in the Public Record Office:

P.R.O. 30/8 Chatham Papers, vols. 260, 365-369

P.R.O. 3058 Dacre Adams Papers, Bundle 10

b) At the British Library, London:

Aberdeen Papers: Add. Ms. 43,224 (Correspondence relating to Sir David Baird)

Bathurst Papers: Loan Ms. 57 vol. 4.

Huskisson Papers: Add. Ms. 38,737; 38,738

Liverpool Papers: Add. Ms. 38,193
 38,242 - 38,246
 38,320
 38,323
 38,325
 38,360
 38,361
 38,571
 Loan Ms. 72 vols. 9, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 34, and 56

Perceval Papers: Add. Ms. 49,188

Rose Papers: Add. Ms. 31,237
 42,773

Vansittart Papers: Add. Ms. 31,250

Wellesley Papers: Add. Ms. 13,804
 13,806
 37,286 - 37,289
 37,295
 37,309 - 37,310
 37,314
 37,415 - 37,416

Wellington Papers: Add. Ms. 64,131

Yorke Papers: Add. Ms. 35,894
 45,036
 45,038
 45,042
 45,044

c) At the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast

Castlereagh Papers: D3030/2477-3330. (some of these letters were being treated for conservation, and hence were unavailable)

D3030/H1-44 Correspondence with his father
 (Typescripts)

D3030/P1-40; 205-239 Letters of Charles Stewart,
 1808-1811.

D3030/AA1-14; Letters of Edward Cooke to Charles
 Stewart, 1808-1810

D3030/Q2/2; Volume of typescript letters, mostly
 Castlereagh to Charles Stewart

D3030/Q3/3; Another volume of typescript letters

d) Durham County Record Office, Durham

Papers of Charles Stewart: D/LO/C 17 (2-3)

(I am grateful to the Durham Record Office for supplying me with photocopies of these two important letters from Charles Stewart to Castlereagh which I had seen calendared at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.)

e) West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds District Archives, Leeds

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|---------------------------|--|
| Canning Papers, Bundle 23 | Letters to Mrs Canning, 1809 |
| 31 | Miscellaneous official, 1808-9 |
| 32 | Canning to Perceval, Hawkesbury, Castlereagh and Portland, 1807-1808 |
| 33A | Canning - Portland Correspondence, 1807-1809 |
| 33B | Canning - Perceval Correspondence |
| 34 | Miscellaneous Correspondence |
| 34A | Miscellaneous Correspondence |
| 40 | Miscellaneous Letters of Canning, 1808 |
| 41A | Cabinet Minutes etc. |
| 45 | Correspondence re Spain, 1808-1809 |
| 46 | Spain and Spanish America, 1807-1809 |
| 46A | Correspondence with Spain |
| 47 | Correspondence with Chevalier de Sousa |
| 48 | Correspondence re Portugal and Brazil |
| 63 | Miscellaneous Correspondence |
| 67 | Correspondence with Huskisson |
| 69 | Correspondence with Liverpool. |

f) House of Lords Record Office, Westminster

Microfilm Copy of the Papers of Spencer Perceval, held by D.C.L. Holland Esq.

Microfilm Reels 7 - 10.
Bundles, I, II, VII, XIV, XXI, XXII, C.

g) Wellington Papers, Southampton University Library, Southampton

W.P. 1 Correspondence of Sir Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington

Bundles 201, 202, 204, 205, 206, 207, 210, 212, 213, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 235, 237, 238, 240, 242, 244, 246, 248, 250, 252, 254, 259, 260, 261, 273, 276, 278, 280, 281, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 311, 313, 316

(Many other bundles related to Irish Affairs, or were not fit for production.)

W.P. 12 Papers of Henry Wellesley:

W.P. 12/1/1, 12/2/1 and 12/2/2

Carver Papers (Papers of Richard, Marquess Wellesley, and his son Richard Wellesley)

Carver 8, 34, 54 and 116.

h) Camden Papers, Kent Archives Office, Maidstone

U 840 Papers of John Jeffreys Pratt, 1st Marquess of Camden

Bundles C86, 87, 88, 90, 98, 203, 226, 229, 256 and 258.

i) Portland Papers, University of Nottingham Library, Nottingham

Papers of the 3rd duke of Portland

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