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BISMARCK AND THE BAZAINE AFFAIR OF 1873

The verdict of history on the administration of military justice in late nineteenth-century France has been understandably harsh¹. It was a system that was notorious for pandering to populist prejudices, frequently turning judicial proceedings into political show trials for mass consumption. The Dreyfus Affair of 1894 is perhaps the most infamous example of this abuse of power. But the court martial of François-Achille Bazaine (1811–1888) in 1873 constituted an equally egregious miscarriage of justice with an arguably far greater historical significance. The mockery of military law that resulted in Bazaine being condemned to death as a traitor was in many ways France's equivalent of the German »stab-in-the-back« myth (*Dolchstoßlegende*). In the French version, it was one man who was made the scapegoat for the collapse of French arms during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. Another difference was that in 1918 Ludendorff blamed the revolution at home for the defeat of the German army on the front; in 1873 the French condemned Bazaine for betraying the revolution at home on the front.

Because of its wider political significance, the Bazaine Affair did not remain a strictly domestic matter. It garnered widespread international attention. Nowhere was this foreign interest greater than in Berlin. This heightened level of engagement in the proceedings was partly due to the fact that Germans saw themselves as co-defendants during the trial². This intense involvement in the affair was reflected in the press coverage: German newspapers published daily accounts of the hearings. Germany's chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, was even more invested in the courtroom drama since it was his own diplomatic manoeuvres to end the war that underlay the accusations of treason levelled against Bazaine. More importantly, the trial and its outcome threatened to undermine the pillars of the chancellor's French policy. As a result, he followed the affair very closely, and used his influence first to defer the trial, then to secure an acquittal and finally to mitigate the negative political fallout from the guilty verdict. Although Bismarck's role in the Bazaine Affair constitutes an important and fascinating chapter in Franco-German relations, it has been overlooked by researchers.

The focus of this study is the impact that the Bazaine Affair had on German foreign policy, and how Bismarck attempted to mitigate the damage he feared it would cause to his political plans for France. In this context, it will also consider the direct and indirect involvement of the German government in the court martial. This examination of the trial is based primarily on material from the archives of the German Foreign Office, and articles in newspapers under its control, which show that Bismarck was involved in every major phase of the Bazaine affair, from the earliest stag-

1 For Nancy, without whom this would not have been possible.

2 *Kölnische Zeitung*, 30 December 1873, no. 361, 1st ed.

es of the court martial in 1872 until the demise of the exiled and disgraced Bazaine in 1888. This material also reveals that the German Chancellor feared that the trial and the guilty verdict threatened to exacerbate a crisis in his strategy to prevent a French war of revenge.

There is, of course, a much larger historiographical context for the Bazaine court martial as a transnational event. It constitutes, for example, another chapter in the story of the disproportionate influence that Germany exercised over the development of the French Third Republic in its formative years³. As will be illustrated, the prosecution made key decisions about Bazaine's court martial based on concerns about how Germany might react. The Bazaine Affair is also part of a broader historical discussion about the psychological impacts of »defeat« at a national level⁴. Similarly, it touches on the emerging research about the nature and implications of »surrender« in conflicts⁵. While these related areas of historical inquiry will inevitably be an implicit element in the following discussion, they will only be considered where there is specific relevance to Bismarck's policy considerations.

To allow for a proper understanding and analysis of the German side of the Bazaine Affair, a short overview of the events in 1870 that led to the trial will be provided (I). The long period of preparations and debate about whether the trial should even proceed will then be outlined, since it was during this early period that Bismarck's engagement became more intense, if not always voluntary (II). It will also consider the lengthy negotiations initiated by Bazaine to engage his former enemies as defence witnesses in his trial (III). This consideration of the preamble for the court martial will set the stage for the main sections of the analysis, which will examine the efforts made by the German Chancellor immediately before, during and after the trial to counter the threats to his French policy posed by the court martial and its verdict (IV–VI). A final section will consider the lengthy discussions between Bazaine and the German government on the provision of financial support for the disgraced marshal and his family after his conviction and subsequent exile (VII).

I. The Case against Bazaine (August–October 1870)

The charges against Bazaine that led to his court martial in October 1873 stemmed from actions he took while in command of the Army of the Rhine from August to October 1870. Bazaine's misfortunes began on 12 August, when Napoleon III was forced to relinquish command of an army that was already in retreat after initial reverses on the frontier⁶. He had to select one of his corps commanders to take his place, and the then 59-year-old François Bazaine was chosen for this challenging task

3 Allan MITCHELL, *Victors and Vanquished. The German Influence on Army and Church in France after 1870*, Chapel Hill, NC 1984.

4 Herve DRÉVILLON, *La défaite comme symptôme, Hypothèses*, 11 (2008), p. 283–295.

5 Holger AFFLERBACH, Hew STRACHAN (eds.), *How Fighting Ends. A History of Surrender*, Oxford 2012.

6 The background details are from: Michael HOWARD, *The Franco-Prussian War. The German Invasion of France 1870–1871*, New York 1962, p. 134–182. Edmond RUBY, Jean REGNAULT, *Bazaine, coupable ou victime? À la lumière des documents nouveaux*, Paris 1960. Matthias STEINBACH, *Abgrund Metz. Kriegserfahrung, Belagerungsalltag und nationale Erziehung im*

because there was no other suitable candidate. He was also called upon because he was the popular choice of the citizens of Paris. His humble origins had made him a man of the people. Sixteen years later, Bazaine was to confess to the German military attaché in Madrid that he had not wanted the command, and had accepted it only after he was ordered to do so by the emperor⁷. If this is true, then it showed that Bazaine sensed his limitations as a senior commander. He had risen to the highest post in the French army from the ranks, but this unconventional career path had left some important gaps in his training. Bazaine had certainly accumulated considerable battlefield experience leading expeditionary troops during the Crimean War (1853–56), the Second Italian War of Independence (1859/60), and the Second Franco-Mexican War (1861–67). However, the task of manoeuvring an army of 180 000 men in a strategic retreat across France with an enemy moving quickly to block his escape route proved to be well beyond his abilities. Even an abler leader would have found the dire situation he inherited daunting.

The fate of the Army of the Rhine was sealed when Bazaine did not move his forces quickly enough to avoid being outflanked by the swiftly marching enemy troops. The marshal also displayed a lack of tenacity when he failed to exploit an opportunity to break through much weaker opposing forces on 16 August. On that day, his army engaged a single Prussian corps near Vionville/Mars-la-Tour in a classic encounter battle and yet he retreated. Two days later he was forced to fight a battle at Gravelotte-St. Privat with reversed front. His troops again achieved considerable tactical success, but he nevertheless withdrew into the fortifications around Metz. The Army of the Rhine was soon trapped in that city by the German Second Army under Prince Frederick Charles and subjected to a two-month siege. The series of fatal errors made by Bazaine leading to the encirclement of his army seemed so incomprehensible to his later judges that they were prepared to give credence to the claim that so many questionable decisions must have been part of a premeditated plan to betray France.

Bazaine's indictment in 1873 also held him personally responsible for the disaster that befell the Army of Châlons at Sedan on 2 September, which resulted in Napoleon III being taken prisoner and the collapse of the Second Empire. When Marshal Patrice MacMahon took command of this force, he was torn between marching to relieve the Army of the Rhine and moving his army under the protection of the fortifications around Paris. But it proved impossible to abandon Bazaine to his fate. After delays that were to prove fatal, MacMahon marched to free the besieged French troops at Metz. The failure of Bazaine to break through German lines to link up with this relief army, and the lack of timely communications from him about his true sta-

Schatten einer Festung 1870/71, Munich 2022 (Pariser Historische Studien, 56), DOI: 10.1524/9783486832969.

7 Adolf von Deines to the Foreign Office, 12 April 1886, no. 7, Frankreich 80, vol. 1, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PAAA). The report about this conversation was to lead to an international controversy in 1888, in which Bazaine would figure prominently: Frederic B.M. HOLLYDAY, »Love Your Enemies! Otherwise Bite Them!« Herbert Bismarck and the Morier Affair, 1888–1889, in: *Central European History*, 1 (1968), no. 1, p. 56–79, DOI: 10.1017/S0008938900014783. Bazaine described his appointment similarly in his memoirs: François BAZAINE, *Épisodes de la guerre de 1870 et le blocus de Metz*, Madrid 1883, p. 48.

tus, were to be cited in his trial as evidence that he was to blame for the disaster that befell the Army of Châlons at Sedan, thereby making him solely culpable for France's entire defeat in 1870.

But it was Bazaine's attempts to save his army by engaging in negotiations with Bismarck that offered the prosecution the strongest evidence of his alleged treason. The military challenges of breaking a siege by 200 000 German troops were further complicated by the perplexing political situation that arose from the events that took place in Paris following the defeat at Sedan. Napoleon III and the Second Empire were overthrown on 4 September 1870 by a republican revolution that declared a Government of National Defence with the republican Léon Gambetta as its effective dictator. The Empress Eugénie and her son fled to England and found refuge in Camden Place (Chislehurst, Kent) while Napoleon III was a prisoner of war in Wilhelmshöhe castle near Cassel in Germany. This turn of events created a quandary for Bazaine: he had sworn an oath of loyalty to the deposed French Emperor and was totally cut off from a government in Paris with questionable legitimacy, for which he felt no allegiance or sympathy.

As food supplies in Metz dwindled and the hopelessness of extricating his army by military means became clear, the French commander was quick to grasp at the straw of a political solution to his dilemma⁸. Edmond Régnier (1822–1886), a civilian with good intentions and no official mandate, approached Bismarck claiming to be acting as an intermediary for the Empress Eugénie. He alleged that the empress wished to reach an agreement that would allow Bazaine's forces to restore the empire after accepting German peace terms. Régnier was allowed to enter Metz to present his proposals to Bazaine. The unexpected prospect of being able to save his army and return »order« to France appealed to the marshal. Bismarck therefore permitted one of Bazaine's commanders, General Charles-Denis Bourbaki, to leave Metz to discuss the situation directly with the empress in England. It was soon discovered that the scheme outlined by Régnier did not have the backing of either the Empress Eugénie or Napoleon III. The project therefore collapsed. Faced with the prospect of starvation, Bazaine made one final attempt to negotiate the release of his army with the Germans so that he could use it to restore the empire by force. This time the Empress Eugénie was amenable to concluding a separate peace, but her refusal to agree to what was, in effect, a blank cheque with regard to the terms of capitulation resulted in the failure of these talks. Bismarck wrote to Bazaine that the negotiations had reached an impasse, so that the fate of his army was now entirely in the hands of the Prussian military⁹. At the same time, he ordered that the semi-official German press make clear in its disclosures about these discussions that Bazaine was »conducting negotiations independent of the government in Paris and in opposition to it«¹⁰. The chancellor was clearly seeking to publicize Bazaine's attempted betrayal of the revo-

8 HOWARD, *The Franco-Prussian War* (as in n. 6), p. 257–283.

9 Bismarck to Bazaine. 23 October 1870, tel., *Frankreich 70*, no. 6, vol. 2, PAAA. Printed in: Otto von BISMARCK, *Die gesammelten Werke. Politische Schriften*, Friedrich THIMME (ed.), vol. 6b, Berlin 1931, p. 558.

10 Bismarck to the Foreign Office. 22 October 1870, tel. no. 318, *Frankreich 70*, no. 6, vol. 2, PAAA.

lution in order to exert pressure on the Government of National Defence to negotiate peace on his terms.

French republicans thus had some grounds to view Bazaine's actions as an attempt to overthrow the Government of National Defence. For his part, the marshal argued that his actions were entirely honourable because the only legitimate government of France was the imperial court. But it was the circumstances surrounding the actual act of capitulation that did the greatest damage to Bazaine's personal reputation within the army and civilian population. The marshal held out until 29 October when – with the concurrence of his commanding generals – he agreed to an unconditional surrender. Bazaine's insistence on fully complying with the German terms contributed almost as much to his fall from grace as the surrender itself. His refusal to order the destruction of the regimental colours and eagles or spike the cannons aroused harsh criticism in France. This disregard for even a final symbolic display of defiance was seen as a serious breach of military honour.

Of greater strategic importance was the fact that the timing of the fall of Metz was a huge blow to the military position of the Government of National Defence. The republican armies operating south of Paris had been enjoying some success against German forces. But Bazaine's surrender suddenly released almost 200 000 enemy soldiers to fight against the troops of the republic, which effectively ended any hope that France could improve her strategic position sufficiently to negotiate better peace terms. In view of these circumstances, Gambetta reacted to the news of the capitulation of Metz by issuing a declaration on 30 October branding Bazaine a traitor¹¹. The popular perception of Bazaine amongst supporters of the embattled French republic across Europe following his capitulation is captured in a contemporary caricature (Fig. 1).

This edict had no practical consequences for Bazaine, as he was a prisoner of war in Germany. In February 1871, it ceased to have any legal significance, as the Government of National Defence was dissolved and a newly elected National Assembly convened in Bordeaux. The marshal therefore no longer faced a death sentence if he returned to France. The anger aroused by his surrender and the circumstances surrounding it remained, however, and the French people demanded action from the new government to hold Bazaine accountable. Already in May 1871, the National Assembly was presented with a petition to launch an inquiry into the events surrounding the fall of Metz. In October 1871, a special commission was created with the mandate to investigate all the capitulations during the war. It was led by Marshal Achille Baraguey d'Hilliers (1795–1878), a former member of the Imperial Senate¹².

11 Printed in: RUBY, REGNAULT, Bazaine (as in n. 6), p. 304–305.

12 Heinrich SCHULTHESS (ed.), *Europäischer Geschichtskalender 1871, Nördlingen 1872*, p. 402. François-Christian SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine. Un maréchal devant ses juges*, Turquant 2009, p. 47.

II. Bazaine Faces His Accusers (October 1871–May 1872)

After his release from imprisonment in Germany, Bazaine stayed in Geneva, having been advised by the French Minister of War, Ernest Courtot de Cisse, to delay his return to France¹³. He did not travel to Paris until October 1871¹⁴. Just prior to his homecoming, he had already reached out to Berlin to ask for help with his defence against the accusations that he knew he would face. The marshal requested that the German Foreign Office provide him with a copy of a telegram Bismarck had sent to him regarding the negotiations with Régnier¹⁵. He hoped that the publication of this document »would have a favourable influence on public opinion«. Bazaine was also completing a book that sought to justify his actions during the war, and he clearly intended to draw on German support in making his case¹⁶. Bismarck readily complied, although there was a certain irony in the fact that Prussian leaders were providing documents to defend a Napoleonic marshal who lived in the Avenue d'Iéna in Paris¹⁷. Even at this early stage of the affair, Bazaine seems to have recognized that his former enemies might be his only allies in the looming battle.

The hearings of the military commission began on 21 April 1872 and lasted three weeks. It would prove typical of the court martial that followed that the senior officers running this inquiry ignored regulations requiring the proceedings to take place behind closed doors, so that it was conducted under the scrutiny of journalists and public opinion¹⁸. The findings of the investigating team were greatly influenced by a book published during these months by Gaston d'Andlau, a former senior officer in the Army of the Rhine, who had argued that Bazaine's actions were all part of an elaborate and treasonable conspiracy to advance his own career¹⁹. The accusation that Bazaine's decisions on the battlefield were motivated by personal ambition was to become a central element in the subsequent indictment. The new book also stoked an already smouldering resentment against Bazaine in the French capital. Given this prevailing hostile atmosphere in Paris, it is not surprising that the report of the inquiry was damning for the marshal, citing compelling evidence that he had committed multiple breaches of the military code. The panel recommended that Bazaine be subjected to a court martial.

13 RUBY, REGNAULT, Bazaine (as in n. 6), p. 310.

14 The date of Bazaine's return to France is based on accounts of French historians and the marshal's correspondence with the German Foreign Office. However, a report received from an agent of German military intelligence indicates that Bazaine had already travelled incognito to Versailles in June 1871. Agent report. June 8, 1871, Polizei II B 10, vol. 4, PAAA.

15 Bazaine to Bismarck. 20 September 1871. Frankreich 70, no. 6, vol. 6, PAAA. Bazaine to Bismarck. October 14, 1870, *ibid*.

16 François BAZAINE, *L'Armée du Rhin depuis le 12 août jusqu'au 29 octobre 1870*, Paris 1872.

17 Lothar Bucher (Bismarck's personal secretary) to Hermann von Thile (German Secretary of State). 29 September 1871, Frankreich 70, no. 6, vol. 4, PAAA. Thile to Bazaine. 29 September 1871, *ibid*. Thile to Bazaine. 17 October 1871, *ibid*.

18 RUBY, REGNAULT, Bazaine (as in n. 6), p. 312.

19 Gaston d'ANDLAU, Metz, campagne et négociations. par un officier supérieur de l'Armée du Rhin, Paris 1872. SEMUR, L'Affaire Bazaine (as in n. 12), p. 48. Agent report. 14 March 1871, Polizei II B 10, vol. 4, PAAA.

The marshal learned of these findings on 2 May 1872. The next day he wrote to the French president, Adolphe Thiers, demanding to be allowed to make his case in front of a jury of his peers in order to defend his honour²⁰. Thiers wished to avoid a trial, since he felt that »the whole thing was just a mean-spirited intrigue by vengeful lawyers« seeking to pass judgment on a soldier who had undoubtedly made serious errors²¹. But he bowed to Bazaine's wishes and allowed the preparations for the trial to go forward. On instructions from Thiers, Cissey requested that a court martial be convened. Bazaine surrendered himself to French authorities on 14 May and was taken into custody²². He was to remain imprisoned awaiting trial for an unprecedented seventeen months.

At the start of May 1872, Thiers complained to the German ambassador, Count Harry von Arnim, that the court martial of Bazaine had become his main preoccupation²³. It was soon to become a major preoccupation for the German chancellor as well. In fact, Bismarck was given an unexpected opportunity to prevent the trial from even taking place. Bazaine's defenders have always pointed to his insistence on being put on trial as proof of his innocence²⁴. However, the marshal seems to have almost immediately regretted this decision. Only a few days after writing to the president demanding a court martial, Bazaine requested a meeting with the German ambassador. There were two highly sensitive matters he wished to discuss. The first was a request for four senior German officers from the former Second Army to present evidence in his defence at the upcoming trial²⁵. A few days later, President Thiers himself also asked Bismarck to agree to help Bazaine by providing witnesses in his defence, and offered his personal assurance that any German officers who testified would be treated with respect²⁶. Bazaine's second and more startling appeal was for political asylum in Germany in the event that he decided to flee the country²⁷. To support his case for being granted the protection of the German Emperor, Bazaine pleaded that his son was a citizen [sic!] of the Reich as he had been born there while the marshal and his wife were prisoners on German soil. Bazaine motivated this apparent sudden change of heart with reference to his concern that the »red left« – by which he meant Gambetta – was determined to »have his head«. Based on this statement, he may have miscalculated his chances of getting a fair trial when he demanded a court martial. But in view of the suddenness of the volte face, there is probably some truth to what Thiers had confided to Arnim: that it was actually the marshal's friends and comrades who had talked him into demanding a trial when it could have

20 Bazaine to Thiers. 3 May 1872. Printed in: SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine* (as in n. 12), p. 48.

21 Arnim to Bismarck. 11 May 1872, no. 73, *Frankreich* 75, vol. 1, PAAA.

22 SCHULTHESS (ed.), *Europäischer Geschichtskalender 1872* (as in n. 12), p. 382.

23 Arnim to Bismarck. 11 May 1872, no. 75, *Frankreich* 73, vol. 1, PAAA.

24 SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine* (as in n. 12), p. 210.

25 Arnim to Bismarck. 6 May 1872, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 132, PAAA.

26 Arnim to Bismarck. 11 May 1872, *Frankreich* 75, vol. 1, PAAA. Ironically, the discussion between Thiers and Arnim took place as they strolled in the gardens of the Grand Trianon, where the court martial was to take place in 1873.

27 Arnim to Bismarck. 7 May 1872, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 132, PAAA. This report was deemed so secret and sensitive that it was not prepared by the embassy scribe. Instead, it was written by a member of the diplomatic staff at the embassy, Friedrich von Holstein, and marked as »secret« when it arrived in Berlin.

been avoided²⁸. It is otherwise difficult to comprehend why he so quickly gave serious consideration to fleeing the country to avoid being put in front of a firing squad.

Responding to these pleas for help presented serious political challenges for Bismarck. Since both appeals from a Marshal of France touched on military matters and the Kaiser saw this as his exclusive domain, the chancellor asked for an imperial audience to discuss how best to reply²⁹. The emperor was inclined to permit German officers to give testimony on Bazaine's behalf, but stipulated that they only give statements under oath on German soil, which was a sensible precaution given the danger of exposing them to a hostile French public – Thiers' assurances notwithstanding³⁰. When the emperor's views were communicated to Arnim, the one condition attached to any testimony that the German officers might give was that it be limited to purely military matters. The details of the political negotiations had not been made public, and the chancellor wished for them to remain secret. Bismarck was also not convinced that witness statements from the former enemy would be helpful to Bazaine.

The chancellor's handling of Bazaine's appeal for political asylum was more complex and nuanced. He requested that Arnim meet with the marshal again to convince him to abandon his plans to flee to Germany. Bismarck suggested that, if Bazaine genuinely felt that he had to leave France, he should go to England instead³¹. However, he also wanted his ambassador to persuade the marshal to stay and face his accusers. Accordingly, Bismarck instructed Arnim to point out that by fleeing France Bazaine would be admitting his guilt, and that this would not only ruin his own political future, but also undermine any chance for a restoration of the Napoleonic Empire. This rather optimistic assessment of the possibility of the then 16-year-old imperial prince Louis-Napoleon at some point ruling France as Napoleon IV was likely based on an assertion made by Bazaine to Arnim at their recent meeting. During that conversation, he had claimed that »today the Empire was still strong enough in France to seize the reins of power«³². Bismarck clearly sought to use the marshal's apparent belief in a return of the empire in the near future to give him the courage to remain in France. In fact, the chancellor further reinforced Bazaine's positive view of his political prospects in France by expanding on the favourable outlook for an imperial restoration in a separate dispatch, where he indicated that he would look favourably on this outcome³³. When it was published in 1874 during the Arnim trial, this document was interpreted to mean that Bismarck favoured a revival of the Napoleonic Empire in France³⁴. What has been overlooked by contemporaries – and

28 Arnim to Bismarck. 17 October 1873, no. 122, Frankreich 70, vol. 142, PAAA.

29 Bismarck to Wilhelm I. 9 May 1872, Frankreich 70, vol. 132, PAAA.

30 Bismarck to Arnim. 12 May 1872, no. 97, *ibid.*

31 Bismarck to Arnim. 12 May 1872, no. 98, *ibid.* This dispatch was not sent off until 13 May. It probably arrived in Paris on 14 May, which left little time for the ambassador to deliver the message from Bismarck before Bazaine surrendered himself.

32 Arnim to Bismarck. 6 May 1872, no. 70, Frankreich 75, vol. 1, PAAA.

33 Bismarck to Arnim. 12 May 1873, no. 99, Frankreich 75, vol. 1, PAAA. Printed in: August MUNCKEL, August DOCKHORN (eds.), *Stenographischer Bericht über den Process Arnim*, Berlin 1874, p. 159–160.

34 *Ibid.* On the reaction of the French press to the publication of this document during the Arnim

later scholars – is that it was written specifically to be used by the German ambassador to convince Bazaine not to flee France. The chancellor's main concern was that by taking flight the marshal would be confessing his guilt and proving that France had only lost the war due to his collusion with the enemy. This was a mindset that Bismarck believed posed a significant danger to the maintenance of peace. His recommendation of England as an alternate destination shows that he also did not want to have to contend with the political complications arising out of Bazaine becoming a refugee in Germany. However, it does not seem that any of these messages were conveyed to the marshal before he turned himself over to authorities on 14 May.

III. Bismarck Supports Bazaine's Defence (May 1872–December 1873)

Shortly after his incarceration in a military prison, Bazaine again reached out to the German ambassador through an intermediary with another request to assist in his defence. The marshal had heard that citizens of Metz had offered to testify against him at his trial or to hold demonstrations demanding to be allowed to testify³⁵. Immediately after receiving this warning, Bismarck contacted Eduard von Moeller, the regional governor for Alsace-Lorraine, and instructed him to treat any efforts by the citizens of that city to appear before the court martial as an »unlawful participation in French affairs«³⁶. A few weeks later, German military intelligence alerted the Foreign Office that a senior officer from the French secret service (*Deuxième Bureau*) was travelling to Metz under a false identity in connection with the court martial of Bazaine³⁷. Bismarck once again notified Moeller of the particulars of this clandestine operation, including the address where the French officer would be staying in Metz, presumably with the intention of taking action to prevent him from completing his mission³⁸. The chancellor clearly wanted to do all that he could to ensure that Bazaine was not found guilty of the charges against him.

But Bismarck still hoped that the marshal would be released without a trial, and there were several reasons to believe that this would be the outcome. There were, for example, some procedural obstacles that initially blocked the convening of a court martial. The only precedent for putting a Marshal of France on trial was the execution of Marshal Ney in 1815 for his role during the Hundred Days. But in that case it was a civilian body that had passed judgement, as the military court had declared itself incompetent in the matter. French military law required that Bazaine be tried by a tribunal of his peers, but it was not possible to find enough commanders of the same rank to preside. A special law had to be passed by the National Assembly to

trial in 1874: Rudolf Lindau (Press Attaché in Paris) to Chlodwig Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (German Ambassador in Paris). 15 December 1874, *Frankreich* 77, vol. 6, PAAA.

35 Arnim to Bismarck. 23 May 1872, no. 81, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 133, PAAA.

36 Thile to Moeller. 30 May 1872, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 134, PAAA.

37 Private letter from Colonel Brandt. 9 June 1872, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 134, PAAA. The recipient was likely Otto von Bülow, who was the Foreign Office liaison with German military intelligence. James Stone, *Spies and Diplomats in Bismarck's Germany. Collaboration Between Military Intelligence and the Foreign Office, 1871–1881*, *Journal of Intelligence History* 13 (2014), p. 22–40, DOI: 10.1080/16161262.2013.861220.

38 Thile to Moeller. 10 June 1872, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 134, PAAA.

permit the court martial to proceed by allowing admirals and senior generals with battlefield experience to act as Bazaine's judges. It is indicative of the high level of popular pressure to proceed with the trial that this law was passed on 16 May, only two weeks after the decision to convene a court martial was taken³⁹. While this step cleared the path for a trial, its circumvention of longstanding regulations cast doubt on the legitimacy of the entire procedure.

Another factor preventing the immediate prosecution of Bazaine was that parts of France were still occupied by German troops until the war indemnity was completely paid. The prosecutors feared that the trial might be compromised if it took place while the German army controlled French territory, as there would be a fear of reprisals for words or actions by the court that Berlin might find objectionable⁴⁰. This concern was just a symptom of a deeper French anxiety over the likely German reaction to the court martial. In the months prior to the start of the hearings, Paris newspapers reported an irrational paranoia about the likelihood of »Prussian« spies infiltrating the proceedings, although it was unclear why such cloak and dagger tactics were needed given that the sessions were to be open to the public⁴¹. Nevertheless, these rumours illustrate the acute French awareness of Germany's interest in the outcome of the affair, and a sense that Berlin would not look favourably upon Bazaine's conviction. In an effort to minimize German influence over the outcome, the court martial did not convene until 6 October 1873, only a few weeks after the last German troops had left French soil⁴². Initially, this long delay seemed to make it more likely that the trial might not take place at all.

President Thiers was himself the main obstacle preventing the court martial from convening. Thiers hoped to draw things out to allow sufficient time for passions to cool and thereby, he hoped, avoid a trial altogether⁴³. The French president was no doubt encouraged in these efforts by the German embassy, and he was acutely aware of the extent to which he owed his position to Bismarck's backing. To avoid a trial, he attempted to select a senior officer who would favour Bazaine to lead the preparation of the case against him. When he was approached by General Raymond Séré de Rivières, a former subordinate of Bazaine who was anxious to take on the task, Thiers believed that he had found a senior officer who would lean towards a favourable outcome for the accused. In reality, however, Rivières had been made a general by Gambetta during the Government of National Defence, and he shared the republican leader's desire to exact revenge. After conducting interviews of witnesses, he completed his draft report on 31 December 1872. The final version of the written findings was submitted to the National Assembly on 6 March 1873⁴⁴. It was devastating for Bazaine. Thiers felt betrayed, and referred to Rivières in a conversation

39 Heinrich SCHULTHESS (ed.), *Europäischer Geschichtskalender 1872, Nördlingen 1873*, p. 382.

40 Marie de Mirabeau to Edwin von Manteuffel. 18 June 1873, *Frankreich 70*, vol. 141, PAAA.

41 Rudolf Lindau to Bismarck. 11 August 1873, no. 54, *Frankreich 77*, vol. 3, PAAA.

42 Lindau to Bismarck. 13 June 1873, no. 36, *Frankreich 77*, vol. 2, PAAA.

43 SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine* (as in n. 12), p. 53–57.

44 SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine* (as in n. 12), p. 82. Heinrich SCHULTHESS (ed.), *Europäischer Geschichtskalender 1873, Nördlingen 1874*, p. 303.



Fig. 1: Caricature in a Polish (Galician) journal from November 1870 showing »Bazen« [sic] being paid for the surrender of Metz by Bismarck. Note the depiction of Bazaine using an antisemitic stereotype. »Marketplace of the modern Genghis Khan »By Divine Providence« in: »Djabel« (Krakow), Nov. 7, 1870. Copyright: Interfoto/Sammlung Rauch (01085426).

ÉGALITÉ



FEU BAZAINE : A nous la simple détention, ô mon fils!..... C'est aux petits pioupious que sont réservées les balles!

Fig. 2: Dreyfus being haunted by the ghost of Bazaine: »FEU BAZAINE: À nous la simple détention, ô mon fils! ... C'est aux petits pioupious que sont réservées les balles!« Alphonse Hector Colomb (pseud. »B. Moloch«), »Égalité«, in: Le Chambard socialiste, 29 December 1894. Source: Wikimedia Commons (public domain).

with Arnim as a »misérable coquin« (rotten scoundrel)⁴⁵. However, he continued to assure Berlin that he would prevent the court martial from taking place.

In the months leading up to the trial, the imprisoned Bazaine renewed the request he had made of Arnim for Prussian officers to provide testimony in his defence. He now used the Comtesse Marie de Mirabeau as an intermediary to advocate for him with German leaders, including the Kaiser⁴⁶. The countess was a writer and contributor to the conservative newspaper »Le Figaro«, and was a frequent visitor during the marshal's confinement. She was also a friend of Field Marshal Edwin von Manteuffel, who commanded the German army of occupation in France from his headquarters in Nancy. Manteuffel, in turn, had access to both Bismarck and the Kaiser. Mirabeau exploited this relationship effectively to seek support for the marshal, and conveyed letters from Bazaine to Manteuffel and the German Emperor that were then passed on to Berlin⁴⁷. The field marshal was also personally quite sympathetic towards Bazaine's plight, and had spoken out publicly in his defence⁴⁸. During a speech at the unveiling of a war memorial in Metz, Manteuffel cautioned the people of France that their strong emotions about France's defeat would prevent Bazaine from receiving a fair trial. He also praised the French marshal and his troops for having shown themselves to be the equals of their German opponents on the battlefield. Manteuffel had been a corps commander in the Second Army and had led his troops in several engagements against Bazaine's forces, so this was no idle praise. Apparently, this chivalrous gesture was well received in France⁴⁹. And Bazaine expressed his gratitude to his former adversary for the public display of support⁵⁰.

As the start of the court martial approached, Mirabeau and Bazaine increased their efforts to gain approval for the marshal's appeal for German testimony. However, the request for statements from senior German officers was dropped. They now concentrated on obtaining a declaration from Prince Frederick Charles, the Kaiser's nephew⁵¹. In his role as intermediary, Manteuffel recommended to the chancellor that any testimony given by Frederick Charles be restricted to purely military events, with an emphasis on proving that Bazaine had never met with him prior to the surrender of Metz. Bismarck responded by referring to the earlier request made by Bazaine in May 1872, noting that »formal considerations« had prevented a positive response at that time⁵². This time, however, the chancellor promised to recommend to the Kaiser that he grant the marshal's wish. However, he stipulated that all discussions regarding military evidence given to Bazaine's defence attorney would have to

45 Arnim to Bismarck. 17 October 1873, no. 122, Frankreich 70, vol. 142, PAAA.

46 The countess was the mother of Sibylle de Mirabeau, an important French writer who published under the pseudonym »Gyp«. The daughter described some of the meetings with Bazaine while he was in prison in her memoirs: GYP, *La Joyeuse Enfance de la III^e République*, Paris 1931, p. 104–106.

47 Mirabeau to Manteuffel. 18 February 1873 (The dating of the letter is based on its date of arrival in the Foreign Office archives. The letter itself has no date.), Frankreich 70, vol. 137, PAAA. Mirabeau to Manteuffel. 18 June 1873, *ibid.*, vol. 141.

48 Karl KECK, *Das Leben des Feldmarschalls von Manteuffel*, Bielefeld 1890, p. 215–216.

49 Arnim to Bismarck. 9 March 1873, no. 35, Frankreich 70, vol. 139, PAAA.

50 Bazaine to Mirabeau. 9 February 1873, Frankreich 70, vol. 137, PAAA.

51 Manteuffel to Bismarck. 29 December 1872, Frankreich 70, vol. 136, PAAA.

52 Bismarck to Manteuffel. 31 December, 1872, *ibid.*

go through army channels exclusively. He feared that »any externally recognizable involvement of a political personality, like myself, would certainly do more harm than good for Bazaine's cause in France«.

When Bazaine renewed his request in February 1873, Bismarck instructed Arnim to provide him with an assessment of whether evidence given by German generals would help or hurt the marshal's defence⁵³. Arnim responded that support from Prussian officers might help the marshal with the judges, but not the public⁵⁴. He did note, however, that both the marshal and his young Mexican wife had told him that they needed a written declaration from Frederick Charles that Bazaine had never accepted an invitation to dine with him during the siege of Metz. In response, Arnim was instructed to report on any further requests from Bazaine for assistance along with his appraisal of whether granting these wishes would be beneficial⁵⁵. Bismarck clearly wanted to aid the accused, but he was concerned that any succour coming from the enemy would damage the marshal's case. For his part, Bazaine had few options. His fellow generals were not willing to testify for him, and Régnier, who was safe in self-imposed exile in England, had wisely declined to appear before the court martial out of fear that he would be arrested⁵⁶.

Shortly before the trial began, Mirabeau renewed Bazaine's request for a statement from Prince Frederick Charles⁵⁷. The countess had continued to lobby for German assistance for the marshal through the first half of 1873. She had also expressed her outrage that Bazaine was being held for months after the indictment had been completed in order to wait for the last occupying forces to leave France. Bazaine's lawyer had been told that the prosecution was afraid that the indictment was so harsh and offensive to Germany that Berlin might respond by delaying the withdrawal of its troops⁵⁸. The countess also complained that the case against the marshal had been rigged against him to pander to the »radicals'« lust for revenge. She then conveyed the marshal's regards to Prince Frederick Charles, confirming that he would appeal to him to refute specific allegations made against the marshal. In Paris, the legitimist-clerical newspaper »L'Union« reported in June 1873 that Bazaine had already called upon Frederick Charles to testify on his behalf⁵⁹. But while it was true that tentative discussions had already taken place about the prince's testimony, a direct request was not made until the start of September 1873. At that time, the countess asked for a rather far-reaching affidavit that not only denied any secret meetings between the prince and Bazaine, but that would attest to the fact that the marshal had never intended to carry out a coup d'état and was a loyal servant of his country⁶⁰.

53 Bismarck to Arnim. 27 February 1873, no. 25, Frankreich 70, vol. 137, PAAA.

54 Arnim to Bismarck. 9 March 1873, no. 35, Frankreich 70, vol. 139, PAAA.

55 Hermann Ludwig von Balan to Arnim. 28 March 1873, no. 41, Frankreich 70, vol. 140, PAAA.

56 SEMUR, L'Affaire Bazaine (as in n. 12), p. 109. Régnier was in fact condemned to death *in absentia* (*par contumace*) by court martial in September 1874. After the conviction, Bismarck wrote a letter on Régnier's behalf that was published in »The Times«. Bismarck to Régnier. 2 October, 1874, Frankreich 70, vol. 142, PAAA. The Times, 15 October 1874.

57 Mirabeau to Manteuffel. 18 June 1873, Frankreich 70, vol. 141, PAAA.

58 Bazaine to Mirabeau. 1 February 1873, Frankreich 70, vol. 137, PAAA.

59 L'Union, 17 June 1873. Lindau to Bismarck. 20 June 1873, no. 59, Frankreich 77, vol. 2, PAAA.

60 Mirabeau to Frederick Charles. 6 September 1873, Nachlass Prinz Friedrich Karl. Hausarchiv

It was at this point that the process became more formalized. Bazaine's high-profile lawyer, Maître Charles Lachaud, initiated direct discussions with the German military attaché in Paris, Major Alfred von Bülow, outlining the specific and limited attestation he required from Frederick Charles denying any clandestine meetings⁶¹. The declaration was to be addressed to the defence attorney and not to Bazaine in order to avoid any hint of familiarity between the two former commanders. Bülow forwarded this request to Frederick Charles. After receiving the countess's entreaty, the Hohenzollern prince had already consulted his former chief of staff, General Gustav von Stiehle, to ask for his advice. Stiehle recommended that the prince avoid any political references and not deal with the issue of treason. He should only state that he had never met Bazaine before accepting his surrender⁶². This approach aligned with the request from Bazaine's attorney. The prince's final declaration therefore closely followed these guidelines. The Kaiser, who was the prince's uncle, had commanded that Bismarck and Moltke be involved in finalizing the content of the statement, but it is unclear whether either actually reviewed the text⁶³. However, the prince believed that he had Bismarck's approval.

The final result was a very short letter dated 28 September – likely the date of the first draft – which contained the terse statement that the two marshals had met for the first time at the surrender on 29 October 1870⁶⁴. It was presented to the court martial on 8 December along with a second declaration that was requested at the last minute by Bazaine's attorney and hastily formulated by a German liaison officer. Bismarck was not available to review its content on short notice. It was, however, a rather uncontroversial statement that the forces under Bazaine had fought well and that, in the prince's professional opinion, the capitulation of Metz was unavoidable. This second declaration was dated 6 December. Both documents were submitted by the German embassy, but only the military attaché was involved, as Bismarck had stipulated⁶⁵.

With Bismarck's approval, the Hohenzollern court had done all that it could to ensure Bazaine's acquittal, by offering testimony in his defence while carefully avoiding any political assessment of the capitulation.

(HA), Rep. 59, no. 83, Geheimes Staatsarchiv (GStA), Berlin. Special thanks to Professor Wilhelm E. Winterhager for finding and making copies of the relevant material.

61 Lachaud to Major von Bülow. 2 September 1873, *ibid*.

62 Stiehle to Frederick Charles. 19 September 1873, *ibid*.

63 William I to Frederick Charles. 10 December 1873, *ibid*. Frederick Charles to William I. 10 December 1873, *ibid*.

64 The letters were dated 28 September and 6 December 1873. Printed in: SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine* (as in n. 12), p. 250. In the Prussian royal archives there are documents that date the first document to 28 November, but the newspapers and stenographic reports clearly state 28 September as the date of the first declaration.

65 Frederick Charles to William I. 10 December 1873, Rep. 59, Nr. 92, HA, GStA.

IV. The Court Martial and the Crisis in Bismarck's French Policy (May–October 1873)

Bazaine's increased urgency in seeking testimony from Frederick Charles in the second half of 1873 was driven by political developments in France. Up until May 1873, it appeared that the court martial could be prevented. There was certainly strong pressure to proceed with the prosecution. The republicans under Gambetta wanted to hold Bazaine accountable for his attempt to topple the Government of National Defence. The monarchists wanted to restore the pride and honour of the French army by demonstrating that France was not defeated on the battlefield but rather betrayed by a traitor. The French public too was anxious to overcome the national trauma caused by defeat and foreign occupation by finding a scapegoat. In spite of the growing pressure from these forces to hold Bazaine accountable for his alleged crimes, Thiers continued to use his power to prevent the marshal's prosecution from becoming a *cause célèbre* that was likely to sour relations with Germany and create divisions at home. To gain support for his embattled position, the president used the newspapers under his control to socialize the idea that the court martial would not be allowed to proceed⁶⁶. Bismarck fully supported Thiers in his efforts to play for time until it was possible to drop the charges and free Bazaine⁶⁷. In January 1873, the chancellor was still confident that this tactic would succeed. But his republican allies in France worked against this outcome. Gambetta's newspapers protested bitterly against the idea of cancelling the trial, as the republicans wanted Bazaine to face a firing squad; presumably in the hope of an acquittal, the Bonapartists also seized the occasion to push for the tribunal to be convened. When the final indictment against Bazaine was presented to the National Assembly in April 1873, Thiers once again opposed proceeding with the court martial⁶⁸. However, this last roadblock was soon pushed aside. On 24 May 1873, Bazaine's former comrade in arms, Marshal MacMahon, became president after Thiers lost support in the National Assembly. The new monarchist government was committed to moving forward with the trial.

The replacement of Thiers by MacMahon as French head of state raised considerable alarm in Berlin. Bismarck viewed this change as a major setback for his French policy. He had strongly backed Thiers as a leader who was moving France towards becoming a republic. This was the chancellor's ideal outcome, as a republican regime would make it more difficult for France to find allies amongst the other monarchies on the European continent. MacMahon was a conservative leader who was supportive of a restoration of the monarchy. Consequently, this change of regime represented a serious threat to one of Bismarck's key foreign policy objectives⁶⁹. Accordingly, the German semi-official press greeted the change of government by labelling the

66 *Le Soir*, 7 February 1873. Lindau to Bismarck. 8 February 1873, no. 7, *Frankreich* 77, vol. 2, PAAA. Lindau to Bismarck. 18 March 1873, no. 15, *ibid.* Lindau to Bismarck. 28 March 1873, no. 17, *ibid.*

67 Ludwig BAMBERGER, *Bismarcks großes Spiel. Die geheimen Tagebücher Ludwig Bambergers*, Ernst FEDER (ed.), Berlin 1932, p. 299.

68 SCHULTHESS, *Geschichtskalender 1873* (as in n. 44), p. 303.

69 Bismarck to William I. June 1873 (date of draft 25 May 1873), *Frankreich* 78, vol. 2, PAAA. Printed in: OTTO VON BISMARCK, *Gesammelte Werke*. Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe (NFA),

new president »the Marshal of Revenge«, suggesting that the imprisoned Bazaine would have been a better choice⁷⁰. In the months leading up to the trial, efforts by the new government to fill the vacant throne dominated French domestic politics. Bismarck used his influence wherever possible to thwart the plans of the French monarchists⁷¹. These efforts to intervene in the internal affairs of France soon became entangled with the chancellor's attempts to mitigate the potential threats to his French strategy resulting from the trial and conviction of Bazaine.

Once the way was cleared for the court martial to move forward, the difficult task of appointing officers senior enough to conduct the proceedings under the newly relaxed selection rules for the members had to be addressed. The most politically significant appointment to the tribunal made by Thiers was undoubtedly that of its president, Henri d'Orléans, Duc d'Aumale. He was the leader of the Orléanist political faction in the National Assembly, which supported the claims of the Count of Paris to the French throne. As a son of King Louis Philippe, he was also in line to be king. He had only recently returned to France after over two decades in exile following the revolution of 1848. His selection to preside over the court martial was somewhat controversial, as his military credentials to preside were questionable. He had held the rank of general under the July Monarchy and had seen limited combat in Algeria. But his military rank had been bestowed largely for dynastic reasons. When he was named as president of the military tribunal on 10 July 1873, he did not yet have any troops under his command, so he did not meet even the relaxed criteria for acting as one of Bazaine's judges⁷². This situation was remedied on 23 September, only two weeks before the trial began, when he was given command over the French VII Corps in Besançon. One of his first decisions as president of the tribunal was to change the location of the hearings from Compiègne to the Grand Trianon, a royal palace in Versailles. This move to a high-profile venue closer to Paris was clearly designed to give the tribunal, and its president, greater public visibility.

Bismarck did not require any such theatricality to give the Duc d'Aumale's important new role his full attention. He immediately recognized this appointment as a threat to his entire pro-republican French strategy. The Duc d'Aumale was a significant player in French monarchist politics and a prominent member of a French royal house. When Thiers was toppled by the monarchist factions, the duke was widely touted as a leading candidate for the presidency, and he had agreed to accept the position if it was offered to him⁷³. His selection as the next head of state had the potential to fundamentally change the direction of French politics. Choosing a member of

Konrad CANIS et al. (eds.), *Schriften 1879–1898*, Part 3, 1 (1871–1873), Paderborn 2004, p. 534–537.

70 Gabriel de BROGLIE, *Mac Mahon*, Paris 2000, p. 218.

71 Allan MITCHELL, *The German Influence in France after 1870. The Formation of the French Republic*, Chapel Hill, NC 1979, p. 144–176. Heinz-Alfred POHL, *Bismarcks »Einflußnahme« auf die Staatsform in Frankreich 1871–1877. Zum Problem des Stellenwerts von Pressepolitik im Rahmen der auswärtigen Beziehungen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1984.

72 According to the German military attaché, the duke had made multiple attempts to avoid this assignment: Major von Bülow to the Foreign Office. 30 July 1873, no. 41, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 141, PAAA.

73 Raymond CAZELLES, *Le Duc d'Aumale. Prince aux dix visages*, Paris 1984, p. 328–330.

a royal family as president of France could quickly lead to the creation of a regency and the transformation of the system of government into a constitutional monarchy. This scenario was widely discussed in Paris as the »république Aumalienn«⁷⁴. The duke's political ambitions thus threatened the foundation of Bismarck's French policy – which was to promote the establishment of a radical republic. In fact, an Orléanist restoration represented a worst-case scenario for him, as it would be a liberal monarchy that had a greater likelihood of enduring than the absolutist Bourbon alternative. In the context of the Bazaine Affair, this meant that Bismarck sought to seize any opportunity to prevent the Duc d'Aumale from leveraging his prominent role in a sensational political show trial to further his ambitions and the cause of monarchism in France. The duke's appointment thus acted as an additional incentive for him to attack the entire proceeding.

The chancellor's animosity towards the Orléanist leader was evident in how he handled the duke's attempt to prepare himself for his role in the trial. On 6 September 1873, the duke wrote to the French prime minister and foreign minister, Duke Alfred de Broglie, expressing his wish to visit Metz to become familiar with the battlefields that were to be the subject of the court martial⁷⁵. He intended to conduct this visit incognito, but requested that Broglie inform the German government of his intentions to avoid any complications and to obtain its blessing. Even though the trial was set to begin on 6 October, Broglie did not present this request to Count Ludwig von Wesdehlen, the German chargé d'affaires, until 23 September⁷⁶.

As commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the Kaiser was the first to review the duke's proposal, and was inclined to give his approval, but first he asked to hear the views of his chancellor⁷⁷. Bismarck advised his sovereign strongly against granting this wish. He argued that the duke was an important political figure in France, so that his appearance in Metz could be exploited for the purpose of agitating in favour of the Orléanist party⁷⁸. Bismarck did not believe that the Duc d'Aumale would be able to preserve his incognito, so public disturbances seemed unavoidable. If large-scale manifestations of support for the duke amongst the French-speaking population of Lorraine occurred, the chancellor warned, then local authorities would have to step in, and this intervention could cause an international incident. These fears may have been linked to Bazaine's earlier warning about plans to instigate demonstrations in Metz to allow the citizens of that city to testify against the marshal. The chancellor also had political reservations in view of the negotiations taking place in France to restore the monarchy. Against the background of this royalist initiative, the presence of a senior member of one of the French dynasties on German soil with the approval of the Kaiser could be seen in France as a sign of Berlin's endorsement of the efforts to restore the monarchy there – the exact opposite of Bismarck's preferred direction for French domestic affairs. Although Wilhelm I did not share his

74 MITCHELL, *The German Influence in France after 1870* (as in n. 71), p. 132.

75 Aumale to Broglie. 6 September 1873. Printed in: Ernst DAUDET, *Le Duc d'Aumale*, Paris 1898, p. 282–283.

76 Wesdehlen to Foreign Office. 22 September 1873, tel. no. 75, *Frankreich 70*, vol. 141, PAAA.

77 Marginal note of Wilhelm I, *ibid.*

78 Bismarck to Wilhelm I. 27 September 1873, *Frankreich 70*, vol. 141, PAAA.

chancellor's concerns, he reluctantly gave his assent to a negative response, but he ordered that he be shown the dispatch to the embassy before it was sent.

The resulting diplomatic rebuff was rather harsh, but the emperor nonetheless gave it his approval. For the most part, it repeated the concerns raised in the chancellor's briefing for the Kaiser⁷⁹. In addition, Arnim was instructed to convey the impression that the Duc d'Aumale's past hostility towards Germany played an important role in the refusal of his petition. This was likely a reference to his efforts to use the Orléanist press to play up his party's hatred of Germany to counter any perception that their family ties to members of German dynasties made them sympathetic to France's arch foe⁸⁰. Although the official response was already quite strongly worded, Bismarck decided to go one step further in seeking to use this incident to discredit the duke by attacking him publicly. He waited until just after the start of the trial on 6 October to take this rather unusual step. On the following day, he sent a draft article to the Foreign Office to be published in the »Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung« – the chancellor's semi-official organ⁸¹. It was a brief, but incredibly venomous piece of journalism. After revealing the request made by the duke, this front-page article went on to accuse the duke of going through the formality of requesting permission to visit Metz so that he could stage a politically motivated *mise en scène*. Since the duke was »blessed with less tact than other people«, it alleged, he would have managed to convince others to act unlawfully during his visit. The timing of this bit of character assassination was almost certainly designed to steal the thunder of the duke's debut as president of the court martial.

This sharp public attack on a senior French general and member of a royal house by a journal known to express Bismarck's views attracted considerable attention in Paris. Broglie protested to the German ambassador about this particularly egregious »entre-filet« in a newspaper controlled by the Foreign Office⁸². The French press also commented widely on this article. The conservative newspapers criticized the refusal of the duke's petition as an unfriendly act toward France⁸³. The republican papers, in contrast, took their cue from Bismarck and echoed his criticism that the duke's actions displayed a lack of tact. This incident illustrates clearly that Bismarck was prepared to use any means to prevent the duke from turning his leading role in a very high-profile trial into a political platform to promote his brand of monarchism in France.

Many historians also believe that one of the political objectives of the Bazaine court martial was to further the political ambitions of the Duc d'Aumale⁸⁴. After his

79 Balan to Arnim. 28 September 1873, *ibid*.

80 Lindau to Bismarck. 10 April 1873, no. 19, *Frankreich* 77, vol. 2, PAAA.

81 Bucher to the Foreign Office. 7 October 1873, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 141, PAAA. *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 October 1873, no. 236. The published text is not identical to the draft sent by Bismarck. On the government-controlled press: Eberhard NAUJOKS, *Bismarck und die Organisation der Regierungspresse*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 205 (1967), no. 1, p. 46–80, DOI: 10.1524/hzhz.1967.205.jg.46.

82 Arnim to Bismarck. 17 October 1873, no. 120, *Frankreich* 82, vol. 1, PAAA. Johannes LEPSIUS et al. (eds.), *Die Große Politik der europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914. Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes (GP)*, Berlin 1924, vol. 1, p. 213–214.

83 Lindau to Bismarck. 18 October 1873, no. 64, *Frankreich* 77, vol. 3, PAAA.

84 For example: SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine* (as in n. 12), p. 350. RUBY, REGNAULT, *Bazaine* (as in n. 6), p. 315.

conviction, Bazaine certainly felt that he had been sacrificed on the altar of the duke's dynastic aspirations. Events outside of the courtroom were also improving the political prospects of the Orléans princes⁸⁵. At the start of November, the attempt to restore the Count of Chambord to the French throne had failed. And the Count of Paris, the next in line from the house of Orléans, had renounced his claims as part of the monarchist fusion to support the Bourbon pretender. This left the Duc d'Aumale as the most attractive option for those seeking to restore the French monarchy. Since this outcome threatened the entire basis of his French policy, Bismarck was – as will be shown later – even more motivated to repeat his attacks against the Orléanist pretender after the trial had come to its foregone conclusion.

V. The Chimera of a Military Coup (October–December 1873)

In addition to the political danger posed by the Duc d'Aumale's leadership of the trial, the chancellor focused his attention during the court martial on the potential reaction of the French army to the persecution of one of their former commanders. A few days after the hearings began, he reached out to the embassy in Paris to ask that it closely monitor the impression that the affair was making on officers who, like Bazaine, had risen to their posts from the rank and file⁸⁶. Although Bismarck did not initially spell out the scenario he had in mind, he believed that there was a strong possibility that Bazaine's martyrdom might trigger an uprising in the army. Arnim's initial response was to remark – rather pointedly – that he could not comment, as Bismarck himself had instructed him to stay isolated from French society⁸⁷. He did report, however, that the army's interest in the trial was much less than had been anticipated.

Bismarck's belief that a coup d'état could be triggered by the court martial increased after one of its most dramatic moments. The chief of staff of the Army of Châlons and the former military attaché in Berlin, Colonel Eugène Stoffel, was called to the stand on 5 November to testify about communications received from the besieged Army of the Rhine. Instead of answering the prosecution's questions, he angrily objected to insinuations that he had destroyed certain telegrams. He then directly attacked the author of the indictment, General Séré de Rivières, by stating: »I share the sentiments of the entire army and I only feel contempt and disdain for him«⁸⁸. After ignoring repeated warnings from d'Aumale to answer only the queries put to him by the court, Stoffel was placed under arrest and later jailed for three months. The German chancellor believed that Stoffel would not have spoken as he did unless there was widespread disapproval of the trial in the French army. Consequently, he once again instructed the embassy to comment on the likelihood of a military revolt

85 Bazaine to von der Burg. 15 December 1873, *Frankreich* 80, vol. 1, PAAA.

86 Bucher to the Foreign Office. 9 October 1873, *Frankreich* 77, vol. 141, PAAA. Bernhard von Bülow (Secretary of State) to Arnim. 11 October 1873, no. 184, *ibid*.

87 Arnim to B. von Bülow. 15 October 1873, no. 118, *Frankreich* 70, vol. 142, PAAA.

88 SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine* (as in n. 12), p. 138–139. For an eyewitness account see: GYP, *La Joyeuse Enfance* (as in n. 46), p. 123–125.

by officers who had risen through the ranks like Bazaine. This time he requested that the military attaché also provide his assessment⁸⁹.

Major von Bülow responded that the inquiry from the Foreign Office was based upon the false premise that the attitude of French officers would vary depending upon how they had received their commissions⁹⁰. In reference to Stoffel's outburst and subsequent arrest, he pointed out that the colonel's invocation of the »entire army« was only a rhetorical flourish. Stoffel, he noted, had become something of an outsider in army circles as he had shifted his attention to politics⁹¹. In general, the attaché referred to his earlier reports that had stressed the improved discipline in the French army and specifically ruled out the possibility of a coup d'état.

Despite these assurances, Bismarck continued to press the embassy in Paris on this issue. Only a few days after receiving Major von Bülow's response to his query, he once more asked for both a military and political assessment of the possibility of a »pronunciamento« caused by the Bazaine Affair⁹² – the choice of terms was indicative of a growing feeling in Berlin that France might be sliding into the same domestic political chaos plaguing Spain where military coups had become common⁹³. As evidence that the trial might cause an uprising, Bismarck cited an article reproduced in the »Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung« in which a French general had stated that the Bazaine affair was creating unrest in the army.

Once again, both Arnim and Bülow replied that they considered such an eventuality highly unlikely. To prove this point, the German ambassador quoted Bazaine himself, who had told him shortly before his imprisonment that he did not believe that the army would be inclined to stage a coup⁹⁴. With obvious annoyance, Bülow replied by quoting excerpts from earlier reports he had filed on this subject, presumably to emphasize that he had already responded and that repeating the question was not going to change his answer⁹⁵.

Bismarck's persistence in pushing for a confirmation that the court martial might cause a military coup suggests that he was either interested in politically exploiting signs that the trial was causing resentment in the French officer corps or that he had information leading him to believe that a *putsch* was imminent. Of course, he may have just been hoping that pressure from the army might prevent a guilty verdict. And he badly wanted an acquittal, as he believed a guilty verdict would be detrimental to vital German interests in France.

89 Lothar Bucher to the Foreign Office. 7 November 1873, Frankreich 70, vol. 142, PAAA. B. Bülow to Arnim. 10 November 1873, no. 223, *ibid*.

90 Major von Bülow to the Foreign Office. 14 November 1873, *ibid*.

91 Stoffel ran for a seat in the National Assembly in the elections of 1873 and lost.

92 Lothar Bucher to the Foreign Office. 18 November 1873, Frankreich 70, vol. 142, PAAA. B. von Bülow to Arnim. 24 November 1873, no. 243, Frankreich 78, vol. 4, PAAA.

93 Major von Bülow to Bismarck. 6 November 1873, *ibid*.

94 Arnim to B. von Bülow (Secretary of State). 30 November 1873, no. 142, Frankreich 78, vol. 4, PAAA.

95 Major von Bülow to the Foreign Office. 28 November 1873, *ibid*.

VI. Bismarck Reacts to the Verdict (December 1873–January 1874)

As the court martial took its course, it became increasingly apparent that the outcome had been predetermined, and that the proceedings were just an elaborate public spectacle designed to assuage the popular demand for a scapegoat for the defeat of 1870. The formal charge against Bazaine involved the violation of two statutes of the military code that made any capitulation in the field or the surrender of a fortified position punishable by death if the commander had not done all that duty and honour required to continue the fight. The impression of the German embassy that the verdict had been decided at the outset (»un parti pris«⁹⁶) was confirmed by the fact that after only a few hours of deliberation on 10 December the court unanimously found the marshal guilty on both counts and sentenced him to death and degradation in rank. Shortly after the verdict was pronounced, the Duc d'Aumale submitted a request to the minister of war, General François Charles du Barail, to reduce the sentence to twenty years' imprisonment in a fort on the French island of Sainte-Marguerite, off the coast of Cannes. Two days later the French president approved this request and commuted the death sentence. MacMahon, who had followed the deliberations closely, had apparently favoured an acquittal⁹⁷.

The verdict was manifestly of considerable importance to the German Foreign Office. As soon as the judgment was announced, Arnim telegraphed the news to Berlin. He also offered a harsh commentary on the outcome by noting that the conviction of Bazaine was obviously intended to quench Parisians' »thirst for revenge«, and would likely be praised by the republicans as »an act of heroism«. In this brief communiqué, he also ridiculed the Duc d'Aumale as a »theatrical general«, adding that he fully expected that there would be a backlash against the verdict, which would be directed at the president of the court martial⁹⁸. Bismarck seems to have agreed with this assessment, or at least wanted to do what he could to ensure that d'Aumale's prestige suffered as a result of his leading role in this shameful affair. Next to this passage in the decrypted telegram he scrawled in pencil: »The Duke will carry the largest portion of the damage which France has inflicted upon herself with this latest outrage«.

The notation by the German chancellor was not just an empty phrase or an off-hand remark. Studies of the workflow in the Foreign Office under Bismarck have shown that these sorts of marginalia were not so much personal commentaries as directives for use in crafting dispatches or instructing the inspired press⁹⁹. In this case, it appears to have provided some of the key themes for a large-scale newspaper cam-

96 Major von Bülow to Foreign Office. 14 November 1873, Frankreich 70, vol. 142, PAAA. Major von Bülow did note in this context that the indictment against Bazaine was so one-sided that it had actually created some sympathy for the accused, and that the actual outcome was therefore difficult to predict.

97 BROGLIE, Mac Mahon (as in n. 70), p. 267.

98 Arnim to Foreign Office. 11 December 1873, no. 91, Frankreich 78, vol. 4, PAAA. Bismarck's marginal notes were not made on the original telegram, but on a copy of the telegram sent to the chancellor at his estate in Varzin.

99 In particular: James STONE, Cracking the Bismarck Code. A New Perspective on German Diplomatic Documents, 1871–1890, in: *Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke-Gesellschaft*, 25 (2012), p. 175–207.

paign across a wide range of newspapers known to be mouthpieces of the Foreign Office, led by the semi-official »Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung«. The similarities in the content and intent of this simultaneous and coordinated press outburst point to central control. The primary target audiences for this journalistic offensive to mitigate the fallout from the Bazaine verdict were evidently political parties, the government and the newspaper-reading public in France. As shown above with the early attacks on d'Aumale, French reporters carefully monitored the German newspapers known to publish the views of the German chancellor and would reprint the content of these articles or excerpts from them. German-controlled papers in France also used this material to fill their pages. It was certainly a kind of public diplomacy, but more particularly part of an ongoing attempt by Bismarck to influence French domestic affairs and public opinion¹⁰⁰. But foreign governments were also a target audience for these pieces. An analysis of the articles appearing in two representative government-controlled newspapers published in the aftermath of the Bazaine verdict will demonstrate the objectives of this campaign, as well as the tactics employed.

A common theme of the first round of inspired articles that appeared in semi-official newspapers in the immediate aftermath of Bazaine's conviction was scathing criticism of the performance of the president of the tribunal. A few examples will illustrate the political intent of these journalistic salvos. The criticism of d'Aumale in a lead article in the »Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung« was severe, but largely factual¹⁰¹. It began by questioning the legitimacy of the entire court martial due to the lack of experienced officers of sufficient rank to judge the actions of Bazaine. It then singled out the Duc d'Aumale for special attention by pointing out that he had been in exile for twenty-five years, had no real combat experience and was no longer familiar with the French army. The »Kölnische Zeitung«, which was not as closely tied to the government, was much more judgmental in its characterization of the duke's handling of the trial¹⁰². It published a lead article that began by describing how poorly d'Aumale had run the proceedings, alleging that he had embarrassed himself by repeatedly displaying huge gaps in his technical knowledge and an inability to correctly analyse military situations.

This eviscerating assessment of the duke's performance was certainly not based on any objective consideration of his effectiveness as president of the court martial. Rather it was a politically motivated, skewed depiction of events intended to ensure that any backlash from the trial was directed at d'Aumale, which aligned with the intent behind the chancellor's marginal note on the telegram with the news of Bazaine's conviction. Bismarck was clearly trying to prevent the duke from gaining political capital from his involvement in this travesty of justice. He already knew from reports filed by the German embassy in Paris that d'Aumale's conduct of the trial had been praised in the French press across party lines¹⁰³. And when the German military attaché in Paris read the scathing condemnation of d'Aumale's management of the trial in the »Kölnische Zeitung«, he commented in his next report that he found the

100 As described in detail in: POHL, Bismarcks »Einflußnahme« (as in n. 71).

101 Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 14 December 1873, no. 292.

102 Kölnische Zeitung, 12 December 1873, no. 344, 1st ed.

103 Lindau to Bismarck. 13 October 1873, no. 63, Frankreich 77, vol. 3, PAAA.

assertion that the duke's reputation had been damaged by his involvement in the trial to be »completely false« with respect to his personal standing in the army¹⁰⁴. Bülow's frankness is astonishing, since it can be assumed that he was fully aware that the article he criticized likely originated in the Foreign Office. The attaché also pointed out that the duke's ambition and intelligence would allow him to use his solid performance in the trial to strengthen an already strong position in the country and army. Bülow predicted that d'Aumale had a promising future that could not be ignored.

This forecast for a surge in personal prestige and power for the Prince of Orléans was further confirmed by a report from German military intelligence¹⁰⁵. It revealed that the recent failure of the Bourbon candidacy meant that there was a strong possibility that French monarchists would now look to the Duc d'Aumale as the next president of the republic, perhaps under a restored Orleanist constitutional monarchy. It was this eventuality that Bismarck feared most. His use of the press to denigrate d'Aumale's role in the trial was therefore clearly driven by his growing concern that the universal praise of the duke's conduct of the hearings might help to catapult him to power in France. And the chancellor's perception that d'Aumale was a leading advocate of building up French military strength to prepare for a future conflict with Germany was entirely justified¹⁰⁶. In fact, the Orleanist press praised the duke's role in the trial after the guilty verdict by loudly proclaiming him as the man who would lead France's war of revenge¹⁰⁷.

The intense and coordinated reaction of the semi-official German press to Bazaine's conviction also targeted the French president, Marshal MacMahon. Bismarck's newspapers pointed out that if Bazaine was found guilty, then the president of France should also be judged to have violated the same two articles of the military code¹⁰⁸. Bismarck's media mercenaries repeatedly decried the manifest injustice that Bazaine had been sentenced to twenty years in prison just weeks after MacMahon's presidency had been extended for seven years (*septennat*), even though their share in the defeat of France was virtually identical. Although MacMahon had been wounded and had technically given up command of the Army of Châlons shortly before its surrender, the German press argued that as the forces he led into disaster had also capitulated in the field and had given up a major fortress in Sedan, he was as guilty as Bazaine of the two charges.

These attacks against MacMahon were part of a broader ongoing journalistic campaign orchestrated by Bismarck with the goal of removing the French president from power. A few weeks earlier the chancellor had ordered those newspapers under the influence of the government to take every opportunity to portray MacMahon as a

104 Major von Bülow to the Foreign Office. 20 December 1873, no. 50, Frankreich 78, vol. 4, PAAA. Bülow's assessment aligns with that of modern historians. SEMUR, L'Affaire Bazaine (as in n. 12), p. 71. CAZELLES, Le Duc d'Aumale (as in n. 72), p. 359.

105 Excerpt from an agent report. Brandt to the Foreign Office. [Dec 1873], Frankreich 78, vol. 4, PAAA. Stone, Spies and Diplomats in Bismarck's Germany (as in n. 36), p. 22–40.

106 This is the assessment of a recent biographer: CAZELLES, Le Duc d'Aumale (as in n. 73), p. 358.

107 La Liberté, 12 December 1873. Lindau to Bismarck. 12 December 1873, no. 83, Frankreich 73, vol. 4, PAAA.

108 Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 14 December 1873, no. 292. Kölnische Zeitung, 30 December 1873, no. 361, 1st ed.

dictator at home and a threat to the peace abroad¹⁰⁹. Arguing that the French president was equally culpable for France's defeat in 1870 was another way Bismarck sought to undermine MacMahon's domestic position. Specifically, these accusations were intended to counteract the positive Russian media coverage of the trial, which used the affair to place the French president in a very positive light¹¹⁰.

The guilty verdict presented another, more serious threat to German security: it had the potential to significantly increase the risk of a French war of revenge through its psychological impact. To deal with this danger, Bismarck used his newspapers to dampen any resurgence of French chauvinism arising out of Bazaine's conviction. Once again, the »Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung« was somewhat less direct in sending this message¹¹¹. It pointed out that the true purpose of the dramatic »spectacle« staged in Trianon was to convince the public and the armed forces that France had not really lost the war in 1870 because she had been »betrayed«. The piece argued that the proponents of the court martial sought to use it to restore French self-confidence vis-à-vis Germany, especially regarding the two countries' relative military capability. It then noted: »The national vanity [of France] must not be allowed to get used to the idea of the superiority of the power of a foreign nation«. The French people needed a scapegoat, it posited, to restore the world's belief in France's invincibility, and had chosen Bazaine to play that role. To counter any increase in French hubris, the author reminded the newspaper-reading public in France that the defeat of 1870 was the fault of the entire nation: it was, after all, the same public opinion that had demanded that Bazaine be put in charge of the Army of the Rhine in August 1870 that was now demanding his execution as a traitor. Once again, the »Kölnische Zeitung« highlighted Bismarck's real concern more bluntly¹¹². It noted that the guilty verdict had triggered a dangerous boost in the collective ego of the French nation with regard to its military prowess. The author then issued the following warning: »This is of importance for the rest of Europe to the extent that it could fan the flames of a desire for war in this great nation«.

These articles represented only the first wave of Bismarck's journalistic efforts to minimize the damage done to his foreign policy by the outcome of the Bazaine affair. Soon afterwards a second wave of articles appeared in semi-official newspapers dealing with the treatment of the ex-marshal's conviction by the foreign press. The initial round of inspired German journalism had suggested that the trial and its result were viewed with »revulsion« outside of France. However, this claim proved to be inaccurate – or at least premature. It soon became apparent that the guilty verdict had been applauded by the press in most European countries. This second set of articles therefore sought to counteract the negative effects of this unexpectedly positive foreign reaction to the news of Bazaine's condemnation. The »Kölnische Zeitung« published a lead article that critically dissected the position taken by British newspapers¹¹³. »The Times« and other leading English newspapers had praised the verdict as entirely

109 Bismarck to the Foreign Office. 31 November 1873, tel. no. 33, Frankreich 78, vol. 4, PAAA.

110 Alvensleben to the Foreign Office. 28 October 1873, Frankreich 70, vol. 142, PAAA.

111 Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 14 December 1873, no. 292.

112 Kölnische Zeitung, 12 December 1873, no. 344, 1st ed.

113 Kölnische Zeitung, 30 December 1873, no. 361, 1st ed.

justified because Bazaine owed his loyalty to whichever government was in power, regardless of the oath he had given or the legitimacy of that government¹¹⁴. The Cologne paper objected strongly to this »monstrous theory« and defended Bazaine as a man of honour who could not just simply discard a vow that he had sworn.

The »Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung« dedicated a second lead article on the Bazaine verdict to the press of Russia, where official state newspapers had commended the conviction¹¹⁵. This obviously inspired piece took exception to Russia's favourable treatment of the proceedings, noting that its position deviated from that of the rest of Europe and aligned only with the views taken by the French press – which was demonstrably not true. This article triggered a rejoinder in the Russian official press which was personally reviewed by the czar before it was published¹¹⁶. Bismarck's journalistic campaign to reduce the damage done by the guilty verdict now threatened to degenerate into an ugly proxy battle with Russia, Germany's closest ally. To avoid any further deterioration of the situation, the chancellor sought to defuse the emerging conflict by instructing his ambassador in St. Petersburg to disavow the article in the »Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung« by claiming, perhaps with tongue in cheek, that it was a common misconception that everything published in that paper reflected an official opinion¹¹⁷. At the same time, Bismarck used this opportunity to share his views on the trial with the czar. Above all he stressed how the proceedings had revealed the »deceitfulness« of the Duc d'Aumale. He also endeavoured to sway Alexander II in favour of the marshal by pointing out that Bazaine was branded a traitor primarily because of his decision to remain loyal to his emperor and because of his rejection of the revolutionary government in Paris. This argument was tailored to resonate with the conservative czar.

It is noteworthy that Bismarck did not use his journalistic condottieri to engage directly with French republican newspapers which had endorsed and celebrated Bazaine's conviction. The reason for this restraint was likely that the trial created a difficult political dilemma for him. His French policy was based upon supporting the consolidation of a republic in France. He had therefore been using government-controlled newspapers to attack the monarchist regime in France and to sing the praises of the republican opposition led by Leon Gambetta¹¹⁸. Yet it was Gambetta who had been pushing hardest for the conviction of Bazaine. And, as expected, the

114 Count Münster (German Ambassador in London) to Bismarck. 13 December 1873, no. 194, England 63, vol. 3, PAAA.

115 Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 24 December 1873.

116 Heinrich VII Prinz Reuß (German Ambassador in St. Petersburg) to Bismarck. 7 January 1874, no. 1, Russland 53, vol. 1, PAAA.

117 Bismarck to Reuß. 13 January 1874, no. 7. Russland 53, vol. 1, PAAA. Printed in: Otto von BISMARCK, *Gesammelte Werke*. Neue Friedrichsruher Ausgabe (NFA), Konrad CANIS et al. (eds.), *Schriften 1879–1898*, Part 3, 2 (1874–1876), Paderborn 2005, vol. 2, p. 16–18. The original report about the positive coverage of the trial in the Russian press is initialed by the head of the Press Department in the Foreign Office, Ludwig Aegidi, which usually meant that a response in the German press was ordered. Alvensleben to the Foreign Office. 28 October 1873, Frankreich 70, vol. 142, PAAA. On the document workflow see: STONE, *Cracking the Bismarck Code* (as in n. 99).

118 Arnim to Bismarck. 17 October 1873, no. 120, Frankreich 82, vol. 1, PAAA. Printed in: GP (as in n. 82), vol. 1, p. 213–214.

republican press was unanimous in celebrating the guilty verdict. At the same time, left-wing newspapers used the outcome of the trial to further their own political agenda by arguing that the verdict was a vindication of the republican revolution of 4 September¹¹⁹. The Orléanist and government-friendly newspapers also fully supported the judgment of the court, claiming that Bazaine's treason proved the hollowness of the German victories in 1870 since they were made possible only by the treachery of one man – Bazaine. France, they argued, would have prevailed in a fair fight¹²⁰. Although Bismarck did not attack these papers directly, many of the conclusions they reached were repudiated – as noted above – in the first wave of inspired articles.

The chancellor also sought to combat the potentially dangerous fallout from the court martial's guilty verdict in a more sensational fashion. Only a month after Bazaine's conviction, Bismarck staged a major war scare that was to shock France and Europe. The pretext for the scare were a few pastoral letters issued by French bishops that the chancellor deliberately demonized as clerical agitation aimed at instigating another war¹²¹. But the conviction of Bazaine may have also played a role in motivating the chancellor to trigger this crisis. On the eve of the war scare, the French ambassador in Berlin noted that the emerging wave of hostility in the semi-official German press towards the French government was attributable to the chancellor's anger at the Bazaine verdict¹²². The main purpose of the scare that Bismarck orchestrated in mid-January 1874 was to work toward the replacement of the French monarchist government with a republican regime. Through the press and diplomatic communications, he had repeatedly threatened France with a preventive strike if his demands were not met – which would have likely led to the fall of the royalist government. The primary goal of this exercise in sabre-rattling, therefore, aligned closely with Bismarck's desire to ensure that d'Aumale did not ride the wave of popularity from the trial to seize power. But a secondary goal of the war scare may have been to counter the rise in French chauvinism caused by Bazaine's conviction by underlining France's continuing military weakness. When Bismarck spoke in the Reichstag in December 1874 in response to criticism of the scare he had instigated earlier in the year, he likened his actions to giving France a »cold shower« (»kalter Wasserstrahl«)¹²³. Although this rationale does not accurately reflect the main purpose of the scare – which was regime change – it may have correctly described an ancillary objective of the crisis, which was to mitigate the potential threat arising from a resurgence in France's faith in the ability of its army to wage a successful war against Germany that might be triggered by Bazaine's guilty verdict.

119 Lindau to Bismarck. 12 December 1873, no. 84b, Frankreich 77, vol 3, PAAA.

120 Ibid.

121 James STONE, Religion, Rivalry or Regime Change? Bismarck, Arnim and the Pastoral Letters Crisis of 1873/4, in: *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preussischen Geschichte* 32 (2022), p. 71–110. MITCHELL, The German Influence in France after 1870 (as in n. 71), p. 144–176.

122 Élie de Gontaut-Biron to Louis Decazes. 26 December 1873, private. Printed in: André DREUX, *Dernières années de l'ambassade de M. de Gontaut-Biron 1874–1877, d'après ses notes et papiers diplomatiques*, Paris 1907, p. 7.

123 Speech by Bismarck. 4 December 1874. OTTO VON BISMARCK, *Die gesammelten Werke*, vol. 11, Reden, Wilhelm SCHÜSSLER (ed.), Berlin 1929, p. 376.

VII. A German Pension for a Marshal of France (1874–1888)

Bazaine's conviction was also to have an interesting and lengthy dénouement, in which Bismarck became entangled. After his sentence was pronounced, the marshal was able to get a letter addressed to a former staff officer in the Second Army, Colonel von der Burg, to the German military attaché in Paris¹²⁴. It was forwarded to Manteuffel, who then passed it along to Bismarck and Frederick Charles. Bazaine began this missive by lamenting that he had been told that the two declarations from Frederick Charles had done his cause more harm than good¹²⁵. The marshal then explained that his conviction was once again forcing him to seek German assistance, and appealed for financial help for his young wife and three children. He pleaded his case by revealing that he had lost his salary following his conviction, and that he had been charged for the considerable costs of the trial, so that he was no longer able to support his family while he served his 20-year sentence. In his initial reply to the marshal, Manteuffel had advised the supplicant that any German payments to him would be interpreted as further evidence that his capitulation in 1870 had been bought and paid for by the enemy. As a possible solution to the marshal's financial troubles, he suggested turning to Czar Alexander II for help, as the marshal's father Pierre-Dominique Bazaine had served in the Russian army in the corps of engineers¹²⁶. For his part, Bismarck was inclined to assist his former adversary's family, but was concerned about the repercussions if this transaction became known in France. A revelation of this kind would not only harm Bazaine's reputation, but would also lend credence to the dangerous myth that France had lost the war in 1870 solely because a French marshal had sold himself to the Germans.

To avoid any negative fallout, the chancellor worked behind the scenes to promote the solution recommended by Manteuffel. He approached the Russian ambassador in Berlin requesting that the czar consider assisting Bazaine's family. He offered to provide some of the actual funds, but explained that the payments themselves would need to come from Russia¹²⁷. Following Manteuffel's lead, he pointed out that there was a plausible case for Russian largesse towards Bazaine, as his father had helped to fortify the port of Sevastopol – although those same fortifications were later destroyed by French troops led by Bazaine during the Crimean War. Perhaps this was the reason that the czar did not agree to assist the disgraced marshal's family. It is also possible that Alexander II wished to avoid offending France. Perhaps the prospect of indiscretions about Russian financial aid creating Franco-Russian discord was another reason Bismarck favoured this solution.

With the assistance of his young wife, the 63-year-old Bazaine escaped from his island prison in August 1874. He then found asylum in Spain and took up residence in Madrid. From there, he once again turned to Germany for pecuniary assistance.

124 Major von Bülow to the Foreign Office. 20 December 1873, no. 50, Frankreich 78, vol. 4, PAAA.

125 Von der Burg to Frederick Charles. 25 December 1873, Rep. 59, no. 83, HA, GStA. Bazaine to von der Burg. 15 December 1873, Frankreich 80, vol. 1, PAAA. Bazaine to von der Burg. 15 December 1873 (Copy), Rep. 59, no. 83, HA, GStA.

126 Manteuffel to Bismarck. 25 December 1873, Frankreich 80, vol. 1, PAAA.

127 Reuß to Bismarck. 31 December 1873, private, *ibid.* B. von Bülow to Reuß. 6 January 1873, private, *ibid.*

This time he sent a letter directly to the chancellor¹²⁸. Bismarck was appalled by this lack of discretion, as the letter would have passed through France where he was sure that it had been opened¹²⁹. He once again declined the request due to the political risks if these payments were to be discovered¹³⁰. As Bazaine's personal and financial situation deteriorated over the next twelve years, he repeatedly reached out to Bismarck, the Kaiser and Frederick Charles for money¹³¹. In view of the accusations made about the marshal accepting bribes from Germany to surrender Metz, it is worth noting that in making these requests he never once hinted that Bismarck was under any obligation to him for services rendered. The only claim he ever made on the generosity of the House of Hohenzollern was based on a letter he had from the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III thanking Bazaine's father for his service. Nevertheless, the chancellor continued to advise against any payments to the marshal. At one point, Bismarck inquired about the sum of money that the marshal required as an annual stipend. The amount quoted was so large that it contributed to the chancellor's reluctance to grant the request: a disgraced ex-marshal living beyond his means would have raised questions about how he was sustaining this lifestyle. Finally, after receiving reports at the start of 1888 that the ailing old marshal was living alone in appalling conditions, Bismarck approved the payment of a modest monthly allowance sufficient to ensure his well-being¹³². But even this small amount was to be provided in cash and dispensed by the German embassy in Madrid in a manner designed to ensure that the transaction remained secret. The money was also taken from Bismarck's secret »reptile fund«, so that it was protected from any public disclosure¹³³. In fact, the entire correspondence concerning these pleas for financial help was marked either »secret« or »top secret« by the chancellor¹³⁴. Bismarck remained very cautious, even after more than a decade, about avoiding any actions that would support the findings of the court martial. Bazaine's death in September 1888 ended any further risk of exposure.

Conclusion

At first glance it seems counterintuitive that Bismarck became so actively engaged in the defence of a disgraced Marshal of France whose troops had inflicted so many casualties on his countrymen. It is even more puzzling when one considers that the chancellor's own son Herbert was injured at Mars-la-Tour in a cavalry engagement with troops under the command of Bazaine. There were certainly several important political considerations that dictated the chancellor's actions. For one, he was worried

128 Bazaine to Bismarck. 8 July 1875, *ibid.*

129 H. Bismarck to J. von Radowitz. 17 July 1875, *ibid.*

130 Paul von Hatzfeldt (German envoy in Madrid) to B. von Bülow. 12 August 1875, *ibid.*

131 Hatzfeldt to B. von Bülow. 24 May 1876, *ibid.* Bazaine to Hatzfeldt. 19 May 1876, *ibid.* B. von Bülow to Hatzfeldt. 8 March 1877, no. 29, *ibid.* Hatzfeldt to Eberhard zu Solms (German envoy in Madrid). 4 February 1882, no. 2, *ibid.*

132 H. Bismarck to Ferdinand von Stumm (German envoy in Madrid). 20 February 1888, *ibid.*

133 Robert Nöll von der Nahmer, *Bismarcks Reptilienfonds. Aus den Geheimakten Preußens und des Deutschen Reiches*, Mainz 1968, p. 79.

134 On how documents were classified: Stone, *Cracking the Bismarck Code* (as in n. 99).

that the Duc d'Aumale would ride the coattails of his role as president of the court martial to become the French head of state. Furthermore, Bismarck was concerned that a guilty verdict would increase the risk of a war of revenge by popularizing the myth that France had lost to Germany in 1870 only because of Bazaine's treachery. During the trial itself, he became fixated on the notion that the court martial could instigate a revolt within the French army. Bismarck may have also engaged so actively in the court martial because he likely felt that he – along with the rest of Germany – was on trial with Bazaine. Unquestionably, the German military victories of 1870/71 would be diminished if Bazaine were officially branded a traitor. In addition, Bismarck likely had a sense of obligation to the marshal because of his willingness to negotiate with him during the war. In a broader transnational context, the chancellor's strong reaction against the verdict likely reflected his growing frustration over his diminished ability to influence French domestic politics. The first symptom of his weakened control was the fall of Thiers, whom he had strongly backed, in May 1873. Bazaine's fate was yet another clear indication that French leaders were asserting their independence from Berlin.

Ignoring all the politics, the chancellor demonstrably had some genuine admiration for Bazaine. He sincerely respected the marshal's attempt during the siege of Metz to restore the French empire. According to Bismarck, Bazaine »did what a Prussian general would have done« and he »failed only because of [Empress] Eugénie's opposition, as he would have otherwise taken Paris with his 160 000 men, installed a regency and would have gone down in history as a greater [political] soldier than [George] Monck«¹³⁵. In addition, the German chancellor's willingness to provide financial support to Bazaine and his family if it could be done without political risks indicates that he felt a degree of responsibility for the marshal's disgrace and sympathized with his personal predicament. Finally, Bismarck appears to have been sincerely appalled by the mockery of justice that took place in Trianon. In fact, his condemnation of the entire affair in the inspired German press aligns closely with the judgement of most modern historians¹³⁶. It was indeed a flagrant miscarriage of justice, and the much-maligned »Iron Chancellor« was initially a lone voice denouncing this vindictive political show trial instigated by a government claiming to occupy the moral high ground of a republican democracy. However, the French perception of Bazaine and his trial began to shift two decades later, when the Dreyfus Affair revealed the injustices in the administration of military law under the Third Republic. During this second major scandal, journalists and political caricaturists (see Fig. 2) recognized the similarities between the two courts martial and began to view Marshal Bazaine simply as a higher-ranking victim of a system that was fundamentally corrupt.

135 BAMBERGER, *Bismarcks großes Spiel* (as in n. 67), p. 299.

136 SEMUR, *L'Affaire Bazaine* (as in n. 12); RUBY, REGNAULT, *Bazaine* (as in n. 6); Quintin BARRY, *Bazaine 1870. Scapegoat for a Nation*, Warwick 2020.