Chapter 6

Advancing the Belgian Plan, August–November 1792

Upon becoming commander of the Army of the North, Dumouriez lost no time implementing the Belgian plan. Two Belgian-Liégeois legions had been under his authority at the Camp de Maulde since before 10 August, and with the assistance of Maret and other agents and LeBrun’s support, he moved to reinforce them with suitable arms and supplies. Maret reported to LeBrun on 13 August that he had expended 200,000 of the 250,000 livres LeBrun had entrusted to him for the legions and that the Belgians were “eager to follow the good cause.”1 Dumouriez made Maret a liaison officer for the legions with responsibility “to coordinate the military measures necessary to increase the strength and resolution of the United Belgian and Liégeois troops.”2 On 23 August, the officers of the legions and the Committee thanked LeBrun for his support, reporting that “the news which has succeeded in reviving us and which gives us complete satisfaction is that our good friend, brave Dumouriez, is coming to take command of the Army of the North.”3

In late August LeBrun sent Dumouriez an additional 600,000 livres for “Belgian affairs,” intended to cover the full expenses of the 2,000 Belgian-Liégeois legionnaires.4 This and the earlier financial aid that LeBrun directed to the Belgian-Liégeois patriots was questioned only once in the Legislative Assembly, by two deputies who had wanted to stop financial support for the Committee so as to “have the National Assembly dedicate itself again to the principle of the sovereignty and the liberty of nations by making it declare in particular that we will not interfere either directly or indirectly in any change in the Belgian constitution.”5 On the
other hand, Duhem, the Robespierist deputy from Lille, on 3 September spoke enthusiastically for the “revolutionary war in Brabant.” In fact, domestic affairs so preoccupied the Assembly that it gave very little oversight to LeBrun’s expenditures. LeBrun, writing to Dumouriez, reaffirmed their close collaboration on the implementation of the Belgian plan:

You have taken on a splendid task in concerning yourself with the affairs of the Belgians and the Liégeois; I am quite sure they will add to your fame. They are your children: you will attend to their education, their political and military organization, while I for my part will do what I can to encourage and support your work and their enthusiasm by my influence in the Council and by the monetary means that are at my disposal. I will be only too happy to have helped in removing from slavery a nation that seems destined for liberty and is fortunate enough to have as their Protector such a talented man, on whom the whole of France pins its dearest hopes.6

From Belgium, Rutteau, the foreign ministry’s chief informer in Belgium, urged LeBrun to expedite Dumouriez’s plans, claiming that conditions were advantageous for an invasion and that LeBrun could have complete confidence in Dumouriez.7

Dumouriez’s military intentions were clear and unequivocal: to invade Belgium as soon as possible. Then on 19 August, the Prussian army, supported on both flanks by Austrian contingents, invaded France. By 23 August, the allies had captured the fortress of Longwy and approached Verdun. Victory there would give the allied army an open road to Paris, and the bulk of the French army, still confronting the main Austrian force on the Belgian frontier, was in danger of being outflanked by the Prussians. Despite the fall of Longwy, Dumouriez informed Servan that he was preparing to invade Belgium rather than fight defensively against the Prussians on French soil between the Sambre and Meuse.8 In response to the immediate danger, Servan argued that Dumouriez should postpone his Belgian plans and concentrate on blocking the Prussian advance on Paris. “The moment of crisis has come,” Servan observed, trusting that “with courage and constancy we will see it through.”9

Unwilling to delay an invasion of Belgium, on 29 August Dumouriez held a council of war at Sedan with Lieutenant-Generals Dillon and Chazot and six other officers, who unanimously rejected Servan’s defensive strategy of intercepting the Prussians and adopted Dumouriez’s offensive plan.10 They were convinced by their commander’s belief that the Belgian invasion would force the Austrians to withdraw their units accompanying the Prussian forces, leaving the Prussians too weak to continue the invasion of France.11 Dumouriez urged LeBrun to persuade his fellow ministers to accept the Belgian strategy, which would open the