

Abstract

The Irish rebellion of 1798 is pivotal in Irish history. The ideas of the French Revolution contributed greatly to the development of Irish republicanism in the 1790s, when the United Irishmen began their struggle for an independent, republican Ireland. But the French also contributed in practical manner, by providing military aid in the form of two expeditions to Ireland in 1796 and 1798. This thesis analyses why the French Directory, the executive power during this period, decided to support the Irish, and if it fits within the framework of sister republics. The findings of the thesis suggest that the rhetoric the Directory used to justify the first expedition combined Republican ideals, such as liberating the Irish people from oppression and establishing a republican system of government, with war-strategic arguments such as using Ireland as a weapon to defeat France's great enemy, England. However, the plan to use a guerrilla-warfare strategy, a *chouannerie*, in Ireland, with the aim to cause chaos and civil war, shows that Republican ideals were ultimately not the priority for the promoters of the Irish expedition, Carnot and Hoche. Before the second expedition, the political circumstances were very disadvantageous to the Irish cause, and the only way the French would help Ireland again was when they were to rise on their own. When this ultimately happened, the idea of an Irish revolution was enough to justify another expedition, and the Directory reached back to the rhetoric of the 1796 expedition. Moreover, the establishment of the Republic of Connacht shows that there was an attempt to establish a republican system, and the republican rhetoric was thus not uttered in vain. A successful invasion of Ireland might thus have led to an Irish sister-republic; however, the prominence of French interests in the event of an Irish revolution, the focus on English defeat and the *chouannerie* strategy show that the promotion of Republican ideals was not priority for the Directory.

Republican ideal or war strategy?

French support for an Irish rebellion in the 1790s

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List of Abbreviations

- AD: Paris, la Corneuve: Archives Diplomatiques
- AN: Paris, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine: Archives Nationales
- CP/A: Correspondance Politique/Angleterre
- EP: Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (London, 1982)
- WTWT *i*: R. B. McDowell, T. W. Moody, and C. J. Woods ed., *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone 1763–98, Volume I: Tone’s Career in Ireland to June 1795* (Oxford, 1998)
- WTWT *ii*: R. B. McDowell, T. W. Moody, and C. J. Woods ed., *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone 1763–98, Volume II: America, France and Bantry Bay, August 1795 to December 1796* (Oxford, 2001)
- WTWT *iii*: R. B. McDowell, T. W. Moody, and C. J. Woods ed., *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone 1763–98, Volume III: France, the Rhine, Lough Swilly and death of Tone, January 1797 to November 1798* (Oxford, 2007)

Introduction

Well, England has not had such an escape since the Spanish Armada ... now that all is lost, I am as eager to get back to France as I was to come to Ireland.
- Theobald Wolfe Tone, 26 December 1796¹

With these words, Theobald Wolfe Tone, one of the key figures of the United Irishmen and of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, seems to give up on his great mission: to sail with French troops to Ireland, start an Irish Revolution, and separate his country from England. He writes this on 26 December 1796, when the decision has just been made by French officers on his ship to turn backwards to Brest, an important military port on the Atlantic coast of France. Tone sees his dream falling apart and already makes plans to live as a peasant somewhere in France.²

But the 1796 expedition to Ireland was just the beginning. The idea of French aid for a rebellion was firmly planted into the minds of the United Irishmen. This society, which had started out as a moderate reform organization greatly influenced by the rationalist and libertarian ideals of the French revolutionaries, had re-invented itself in 1795 to become an underground, militant society determined to gain independence from England and become a republic. In 1798 they instigated an uprising in different parts of Ireland, which was put down violently by the English military. A second French expedition providing arms and men arrived too late to help the Irish rebels and ultimately failed. Tone, who was also a part of this second mission, was captured and committed suicide in a Dublin prison before he was to be publicly hanged.³ Ultimately, the uprising was detrimental to the cause of Irish independence: Ireland lost its parliament in the Act of the Union, and all decisions were made in Westminster from then on.⁴

¹ WTWT ii, p. 432, 26 December 1792.

² *Ibid.*

³ M. Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Second Edition* (Liverpool, 2012), p. 385.

⁴ M. Cronin, *A History of Ireland* (New York, 2001), pp. 104-107.

The rebellion of 1798 is pivotal in Irish history. Historians argue that it changed the course of the nation's history and provided a legacy of heroes, myths and an ideology of militant republicanism for future Irish nationalists.⁵ But it also makes sense to take the French Revolution as the event that changed the course of Irish history, as Mike Cronin suggests: The French Revolution, the establishment of the French Republic, and the republican ideology had a huge influence on the United Irishmen.⁶ Moreover, the steady hope for – and to a certain extent the promise of – French military aid kept the republican spirit alive in the second half of the 1790s. This thesis will focus on this French support for the Irish rebels, in order to find out **why the French government sent two French expeditions to Ireland, in 1796 and in 1798**. Motivation is a notoriously difficult term to use, since it is never possible to look into someone's mind and really know why a decision has been made. This is why this thesis will discuss the justifications that the French government used, the reasons the government *gave* for their decisions. How did the French government justify sending French troops to Ireland? What rhetoric did they use? Finally, the thesis will explore the political implications of these expeditions in France.

Marianne Elliott has been a pioneer in the historiography on the French-Irish connection, with works such as *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* and *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*.⁷ Until then, the historiography on Ireland and France was rather thin, focused mostly on Irish soldiers in French service. As Thomas Bartlett states, Elliott's *Partners in Revolution* 'put the historiography of Franco-Irish relations on a completely new footing.'⁸ Elliott argues that the United Irishmen cannot be treated in a purely Irish context, as its association with France informed its development after 1795 into a radical,

⁵ EP, p. xiii; Cronin, *A History*, p. 113; H. Gough, 'The French Revolution and Europe 1789-1799' in H. Gough and D. Dickson ed., *Ireland and the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1990), p. 1.

⁶ Cronin, *A History*, p. 104.

⁷ EP; M. Elliot, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (London, 1990).

⁸ T. Bartlett, 'Avant propos/Foreword: Writing the history of the revolutionary 1790s during "Troubles": historiographical and moral dilemmas', *La Révolution française* 11 (2016), pp. 1-3.

republican organization, and thus the French influence should be taken into account as well. Nevertheless, Elliott focuses mostly on the Irish side of the connection: the organization of the United Irishmen, Tone as the United Irishmen's negotiator in France and issues of sectarianism in Ireland. She describes the Irish desire to rebel, but does not elaborate on the French motivation to support such a rebellion. She classifies French aid as a war strategy based on anglophobia, leaving little space for idealist reasons, such as internationalist ideas of spreading republicanism to other countries, or simply wanting to help the Irish. This thesis will go deeper into the justifications used by the French to explain their decisions for the two expeditions. Moreover, while Elliott describes the aftermath of the failed rebellion of 1798 for Ireland, this thesis will examine the role that the military expeditions played within French politics at that time and what the consequences of their failure were in France.

Many general works on modern Irish history start with the 1790s, such as Jackson's *Ireland 1798-1998* and Ó Tuathaigh with *Ireland before the famine 1798-1848*, which indicates the importance of this period in Irish history.⁹ Most discussions on the 1798 rebellion focus on internal issues at play in Ireland, such as sectarian violence, agrarian disturbances, internal parliamentary affairs, the interplay between Westminster and Ireland and the rights of Catholics. This is also the case for the studies that focus specifically on the United Irishmen and the rebellion, such as Nancy Curtin's *The United Irishmen and Revolution, Counter-revolution and Union* by Jim Smyth.¹⁰ The role of France in the different phases leading up to the 1798 uprising, and their military support are mentioned by all of them, albeit from an Irish perspective.

In the historiography of the French Revolution, Ireland is characterised as one of many European countries where uprisings occurred that were inspired by the French Revolution,

⁹ G. Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland Before the Famine, 1798-1848* (Dublin, 1972); A. Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998* (Oxford, 2000).

¹⁰ N. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1994); J. Smyth, *Revolution, Counter-revolution and Union* (Cambridge, 2000).

with the 1798 rebellion being the final French-inspired rebellion and among the deadliest.¹¹ Studies on the Atlantic Revolutions in particular focus primarily on the American Revolution and the French ‘sister republics’. The United Irishmen and the failed missions to support the Irish insurrection are only discussed in terms of the war between England and France: Ireland is not seen as a possible sister republic.¹² Moreover, R.R. Palmer places the French support for Ireland in the context of the French Revolutionary Wars, particularly the war with Great Britain. Ireland is characterised as part of the French war strategy against England, not as a natural ally of France, who had to be supported out of moral or ideological obligation.¹³ Ultan Gillen describes the impact of the French Revolution, stating that it changed Ireland for good, referring specifically to the republican ideals inspiring the United Irishmen.¹⁴

The thesis is largely based on a variety of sources concerning the French government. The period that will be discussed, from 1795 to 1798, saw a new executive body being installed, the *Directoire Exécutif* or Directory. Therefore, the sources of the National Archives of France on the Directory are used. The register of the minutes of the Directory, which has been published, is used extensively; it provides information on the day to day deliberations of the Directory, including secret meetings, official statements and instructions.¹⁵ Other material used consists of mostly correspondence, including memoranda describing the political situation in Ireland and letters to and from the generals Hoche and Humbert, who led the 1796 and 1798 expeditions respectively.

The General Secretariat preserved the original documents of the Directory of the minutes and orders, together with supporting documents from ministries and the ‘Corps

¹¹ W. Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 341-343.

¹² P. Serna, *Republiques soeur: Le Directoire et la Révolution atlantique* (Paris, 2008); P. Bourdin and J. Chappey ed., *Révoltes et révolutions en Europe et aux Amériques, 1773—1802* (Paris, 2005).

¹³ R.R. Palmer, *Age of the Democratic Revolution: A political history of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (Princeton, 1969), p. 499; I. Coller, ‘Egypt in the French Revolution’ in S. Desan et al. ed., *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (New York, 2013), p. 115.

¹⁴ U. Gillen, ‘Le Directoire et le républicanisme irlandais’ in Serna, *Republiques soeur*, p. 315.

¹⁵ A. Debidour, *Recueil des actes du Directoire exécutif: procès-verbaux, arrêtes, instructions, lettres et actes divers, Tome 1-4* (Paris, 1910-1917).

législative', which would later become the AF/III series.¹⁶ The rule to turn all documents to the General Secretariat did not apply to papers of military and diplomatic interest. These have been preserved in the Diplomatic Archives and the Defence Archives in Paris.¹⁷ Since the Ministry of External Relations was highly involved in the Irish cause, predominantly with secret agents, information gathering and arranging for United Irishmen to come to Paris, the following sources from the Diplomatic Archives are used extensively: political correspondence concerning England (of which Ireland was considered part), including secret communication, and various memoranda and documents. The thesis also uses several documents from the Defence Archives, specifically their folder on the Irish expeditions of 1796 and 1798, and a published work of the correspondence of Napoleon Bonaparte of the year 1798-1799, which adds to the context of the Irish expeditions.¹⁸ These are largely unedited, original documents that contribute to the understanding of this period of French history.

There are certain limits to these sources. It is never possible to know exactly what has *not* been written down, or has *not* been conserved and archived. This is a challenge since the aim of this thesis is to analyse the Directory's motivations, which have not always been written down: sometimes the order was just issued. Another limitation, specifically when it comes to the second expedition in 1798, is that less material is available. It is harder to find out the motivations for the Directory to send troops to the Irish for this period, because there are fewer documents mentioning the expedition at all, due to the short term in which it was ordered and executed.

¹⁶ For a detailed history of the conservation of the archives see: Présentation des archives, sous-série AF/III: Directoire Executif [https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/pog/consultationPogN3.action?nopId=c614xe0077q--1n7fbk mrb0pd1&pogId=FRAN_POG_04&search=] (accessed on 4 May, 2017).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ La Fondation Bonaparte, *Napoleon Bonaparte: Correspondence générale, Tome II: La Campagne d'Égypte et L'Avènement 1798-1799* (Paris, 2005).

For this reason, the thesis also analyses Tone's autobiography, to complement the 'official' approach of the Directory with the personal experience of Wolfe Tone as he engaged with their decisions while in Paris. Four volumes of *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone 1763-1798*, a set of published primary sources, are used. It consists of all of Tone's (surviving) writings, including his autobiography and diary, with letters to him and several contemporary documents relating to his career. It is an edited work, but the editors have kept the works as close to the original documents as possible.¹⁹ Throughout the thesis, all Republican dates have been converted to the Gregorian calendar.²⁰

An important concept within this thesis is republicanism, since it bound together the French and the United Irishmen in an ideological connection. What the French had already achieved, the establishment of a republican state, was what the United Irishmen were striving for. Because of this connection, the Irish revolutionaries saw France as their guide and ally. Republicanism as a form of government is defined as support for a republican system of government, in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and not by a monarch:²¹ 'repudiating the age-old belief that monarchy is necessarily the best form of government'.²²

In this thesis, French republicanism and Irish republicanism are of importance. The French republican ideology was founded upon the events of the French Revolution and the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du citoyen* of 1789 and its values of liberty, equality and civic virtue.²³ The commonly held view of historians is that while the French Revolution was inspired and deeply influenced by the Enlightenment, republicanism and republican ideas

¹⁹ WTWT *iii*, p. v.

²⁰ Online converter, 'The Republican Calendar' [https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/the-republican-calendar/?r_jour2=27&r_mois2=12&r_an2=4].

²¹ P.O. Caresse, 'Republicanism' in A.C. Kors, *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2005), [<http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2232/view/10.1093/acref/9780195104301.001.0001/acref-9780195104301-e-605?rskey=5iD7NR&result=3>] (accessed on 8 June, 2017).

²² M. van Gelderen & Q. Skinner ed., *Republicanism, A Shared European Heritage, Volume I* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 1.

²³ Y. Mény, 'Republicanism: a transatlantic misunderstanding' in R. Elgie et al. ed., *The Oxford Handbook of French Politics* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 13-42 at p. 12.

did not play a central role in this: most *philosophes* believed in monarchy.²⁴ Wright however sees this view as a myth and the Enlightenment as pivotal in the history of republicanism: ‘The moment when an old and august tradition of political thought underwent a fascinating process of *modernization*, with dramatic historical consequences.’²⁵ The republican spirit of the French Revolution was informed by a loose tradition of writers, such as Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Americans of the founding era, such as Jefferson and Madison with common ideas: ‘An empire of law; a mixed constitution, in which different powers serve to check and balance each other; and a regime of civic virtue, under which people are disposed to serve honestly in public office.’²⁶

The First Republic of France was only created on 21 September 1792, when the National Convention met for the first time and formally abolished the monarchy, as a consequence of the royal family’s flight and the deep hatred for the monarchy it caused. No mention of the ‘République’ is made before this date.²⁷ So although the French republican *ideology* is based on Enlightenment ideas, and has been developed during the Revolution, the idea of creating a republic only came into being three years later. Thus, although not rooted in anti-monarchical sentiments, French republicanism during the 1790s did signify a government abolishing monarchy, but also the nobility, feudal privileges and tithes, which were to be replaced by a parliament and (relatively) free political press.²⁸ The Revolution and the establishment of the First Republic in 1792, without a monarch as the highest authority, inspired other republican movements in Europe. One of these was the United Irishmen Society.

²⁴ J. K. Wright, ‘The Enlightenment’ in E. Berenson et al. ed., *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates* (London, 2011), p. 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶ P. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford, 1997), p. 20.

²⁷ P. Gueniffey, ‘The First Republic’ in Berenson, *The French Republic*, p. 11.

²⁸ Gough, ‘The French Revolution and Europe’, pp. 4-7.

There were few outspoken anti-monarchical republicans in eighteenth-century Ireland until the late 1790s, but there was no lack of Enlightenment ideas and arguments, which inspired Irish Patriotism. Patriotism is a broad political description for a variety of protestant political figures who were concerned with economic improvement and Irish legislative rights. This was done in conservative and moderate ways, but republican patriotism became increasingly dominant in eighteenth-century Ireland.²⁹ Tone and the United Irishmen started their society in 1791 with a reformed parliament as their goal; a republic or a separation of Ireland was not on their minds at that time. They were inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution, of liberty and equality, but did not seek a republican government. The United Irishmen were the first to develop the concept of one nation in Ireland, irrespective of national origin or religion: a historical breakthrough in the sectarian Irish society.³⁰ In the second half of the 1790s a ‘radical’ republicanism became much more common: “more egalitarian, more democratic, and tentatively republican in the strict anti-monarchical sense.”³¹ Complete separation from Britain became the goal of this new Irish republicanism. As such, Tone is recognized as “the founder of Irish republican nationalism.”³²

The society of United Irishmen was only one of several republican movements influenced by the French Revolution and French republicanism. But next to the inspiration it provided, the French Republic also actively supported such movements. Therefore, internationalism is another important concept: the idea of the French Revolution as the starting point of revolutions all over Europe and the active support of the French government for republican movements in other countries. R.R. Palmer, who uses the term ‘international revolutionism’, argues that revolutionaries in other countries accomplished nothing except when given support by French armies, yet this term should not be seen in the same way as

²⁹ S. Small, *Political Thought in Ireland 1776-1798: Republicanism, Patriotism, and Radicalism* (Oxford, 2002) pp. 23-32.

³⁰ Elliott, *Wolfe Tone*, pp. 1-3.

³¹ Small, *Political Thought*, pp. 226-227.

³² Elliott, *Wolfe Tone*, p. 1.

twentieth-century international communism: there was never any concerted international organization directed from Paris, or a French propaganda office. France issued the famous November decree in 1792, offering fraternity and assistance to all peoples wishing to recover their liberty, but the decree was laid to rest the following year, when politicians such as Robespierre rose to power and propagated to strengthen the French Republic first, before offering support to foreign republican movements.³³

However, after the fall of Robespierre and the Thermadorian reaction, French internationalism took another turn with the establishment of ‘sister republics’, republican governments that were established and/or supported by the French government. In the period after the fall of Robespierre and before Napoleon’s *coup d’état*, roughly the beginning of 1795 until the end of 1798, these included the Netherlands (the Batavian Republic), Italy (the Cisalpine, Ligurian, Roman and Parthenopean Republics) and Switzerland (the Helvetic Republic).³⁴ The revolution and the French republican ideals were exported to other European countries, in most cases by force of arms. The concept of internationalism was put into practice. In this thesis the concept of internationalism is defined as: active (military) support of the French government for republican movements in other countries.

By analysing the justification for support of the United Irishmen and the political decision-making process that it involved, this thesis contributes to clarify this definition of internationalism and discuss to what extent this term is applicable to the French government policy during the 1790s. Does Ireland fit into the sister republic concept? Was the idea of making Ireland another sister republic the impetus for France to send military aid? The Irish rebellion of 1798 has had a huge impact on Irish nationalism and on Irish history in general. French influences and the hope for French aid were an important factor in the rebellion. The

³³ EP, p. 52.

³⁴ J. Oddens et al. ed., *The Political Culture of the Sister Republics, 1794-1806* (Amsterdam, 2015), pp. 9-14; Doyle, *The Oxford History*, p. 345.

rebellion of 1798, although a complete failure, saw Irish nationalists associating France with concepts and themes that would stick until the early 20th century: the idea of France as the protector of oppressed nationalities and as Ireland's natural ally in its struggle against England – and later the United Kingdom.³⁵ In this thesis the object is to deconstruct and analyse this image of France as a liberator, and to place the decisions to support Ireland within the political context of the 1790s. It will also add to the understanding of the failure of France to support the 1798 rebellion by analysing the decision-making process on the French side.

The thesis is divided into three chapters, chronologically arranged. Firstly, a short history of the French-Irish connections before the French Revolution, and a reconstruction of the political situation of both Ireland and France in the beginning of the 1790s. The second chapter concerns the decision-making process leading up to the 1796 expedition and the consequences of its failure. The third chapter will analyse the foundations for the 1798 expedition. The focus will be on the justifications the government gives for the support to Ireland and in what ways this can be placed in the political context of that time

³⁵ P. Ranger, 'Les représentations de la France dans l'Irlande nationaliste, de l'avènement de Parnell à la création de l'Etat Libre' (Pd.D. thesis, Université Paris-Est, 2009), p. 6.

Chapter 1: From trade ties to republican nexus

1.1 A pre-revolutionary history of French-Irish connections

France and Ireland have a long common history, with military, commercial and political ties bounding the two countries together. Prior to the 1520s no political ties of importance existed; virtually all contact between France and Ireland concerned trade. These trade links were small-scale by contemporary standards, as Ireland was perceived by the French as a peripheral, underdeveloped country with a dangerous coastline and rough seaways, and therefore not as an attractive trading partner. Nevertheless, Ireland maintained commercial relations with French ports throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – the crucial foundations on which all other connections gradually developed from the sixteenth century onwards.¹

Between the 1520s and early 1580s the Irish became politically involved with France for the first time, when several Irish lords sought French assistance in their campaigns against the British Crown. The shared religion of much of France and Ireland made it important for the former to at least appear sympathetic to the cause of Irish Catholic subjects of a Protestant monarchy, but there was no sign of French military aid for Irish campaigns.² An important landmark in Franco-Irish connections was the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which resulted in the defeat and exile of the Catholic King James II and the ascent to the English, Irish and Scottish throne of his son-in-law, the Dutch Protestant *stadhouder* William of Orange. The exiled king and his supporters, the Jacobites, were provided asylum in France by Louis XIV and his court settled in a château near Versailles. Many Irishmen who had fought for James II chose to follow him into exile. This ‘flight of the Wild Geese’ was a collective move on a much bigger scale than the Irish soldiers entering the service of Spain and France earlier in

¹ M. Lyons, *Franco-Irish Relations, 1500-1610: Politics, Migration and Trade* (Suffolk, 2003), p. 11.

² Lyons, *Franco-Irish Relations*, pp. 20-21.

the seventeenth century.³ Between 14,000 and 19,000 Irishmen and their families settled in France and joined the forces of the French monarch. Towards the end of the *ancien régime* the Irish Brigade constituted three of the 101 regiments of infantry in the French Army, of which two units fought against British troops in the American War of Independence, where France supported the American revolutionaries from 1777 onwards.⁴

Franco-Irish connections before the French Revolution were thus primarily commercial, with trade ties going back as far as the beginning of the fifteenth century, but became increasingly political with the Irish Jacobites in the French army and the continuous warfare between France and England. However, it was not until the establishment of the French Republic and the revolutionary wars that the relationship between France and Ireland was to be radically changed, and Ireland was to be incorporated into French political strategy as never before.

1.2 The political situation in Ireland in 1795

France cannot be seen as a ‘natural ally’ of Ireland in the period before the French Revolution in the way it is seen afterwards. The majority Catholic population was traditionally pro-French, as France was seen as an ally of the Jacobites and generally as a fellow Catholic people.⁵ But even though they were a majority within the country, Irish Catholics did not hold political power. In the seventeenth century their lands had been confiscated and transferred to imported English Protestant settlers. This Anglican elite, known as ‘the Ascendancy’ held the power in the Irish parliament, and they understood that their power rested on the oppression of the majority Catholic population. This was realized through the implementation of the

³ N. Genet-Rouffiac, ‘The Wild Geese in France: a French perspective’ in N. Genet-Rouffiac & D. Murphy ed., *Franco-Irish Military Connections, 1590-1945* (Dublin, 2009) pp. 32-54 at pp. 32-34.

⁴ S. Scott, ‘The French Revolution and the Irish Regiments in France’ in Gough and Dickson, *Ireland and the French Revolution*, p. 14.

⁵ EP, p. 3.

Penal Laws in the first half of the eighteenth century, which ensured that Catholics would never be able to acquire property or any position of power, nor could they influence politics in any way.⁶ Catholic society remained largely leaderless and politically powerless: the hierarchy chose to preach obedience to those in power and condemn riots and rebellions.⁷ Without a structured movement the Catholic majority could not regain their rights and instead lashed out in local agrarian warfare.⁸

The early forms of Irish nationalism and anti-English sentiment did therefore not arise within the oppressed Catholic community, but with Protestants in the form of ‘Patriotism’, a term given to politicians who strived for constitutional reforms, legislative independence from England, and free trade regulation. The Patriots were aided in their political reform movement by the outbreak of war in America and the French support for the American revolutionaries, which made an invasion of Ireland a real possibility for the first time since 1759.⁹ Ireland did not have an official militia, and the sense of insecurity and lack of sufficient sources of protection nearby led to the mobilization of the Irish people in Volunteers corps. The Volunteers became the spearhead of a renewed and general Patriot agitation for free trade and Irish legislative independence, which they achieved in 1782.¹⁰

The reform movement of this period slowly diminished, but a core radical group of Volunteers, particularly in Ulster, remained. Catholic emancipation became a divisive point of discussion, with several Belfast Volunteers pursuing the creation of a new political club uniting Catholics and Protestants.¹¹ Tone, a Presbyterian, Trinity College-educated barrister, was one of them.¹² The idea of a union between Catholics and Protestants was first rejected by

⁶ I. McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Isle of Slaves* (Dublin, 2009), pp. 196-199.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 312-341.

⁹ V. Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 166.

¹⁰ D. Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and Revolutionary America 1760-1820* (Dublin, 1981), p. 155.

¹¹ Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, p. 44.

¹² For a detailed account on Tone’s road to radicalism, see: Elliott, *Wolfe Tone*.

a majority during a meeting of Volunteers in July 1791, but Tone's pamphlet *An Argument on behalf of the Catholics in Ireland* united the ranks behind his ideas:

To oppose the unconstitutional weight of Government, subject as that Government is to the still more unconstitutional and unjust bias of English influence, it is absolutely necessary that the weight of the people's scale should be increased. This object can only be attained by a Reform in Parliament and no reform is practicable that shall not include the Catholics.¹³

Tone was invited to Belfast in north-east Ulster, where the Society of the United Irishmen was founded on 18 October 1791, and James Napper Tandy, a Dublin merchant and Volunteer commander who had been part of the reformist Whig club, subsequently set up its Dublin counterpart.¹⁴ It is important to note that the aims of the United Irishmen were not initially to form a republic, nor did they seek separation from England. Rather, they were striving for a limited, dual monarchy, where the King of England were to be King of Ireland too, instead of King of England ruling over Ireland. It was British ministerial control over the Irish parliament of which they complained.

The French Revolution contributed to the founding of the Society and helped forge its identity. A Volunteer demonstration in support of the French revolution on 14 July 1791 in Belfast, celebrating the fall of the Bastille, revived the reform movement that led to the establishment of the United Irishmen. This was not the only celebration of French republican success: they again celebrated this event in 1792, and the Belfast Volunteers also met to celebrate the French victory at Valmy in October 1792.¹⁵ They even sought to set up an Irish National Guard, following the French example, and were generally great admirers of the French army.¹⁶ A few Irish radicals had visited Paris in 1792 and joined the United Irishmen afterwards, such as Arthur O'Connor and Lord Edward FitzGerald. Because they left before

¹³ WTWT *i*, 'An argument on behalf of the catholics of Ireland, 1 August 1791', p. 126,

¹⁴ WTWT *i*, 'Declaration and resolutions of the Society of United Irishmen of Belfast, 18 October 1791', pp. 140-141; 'Circular letter announcing the foundation of the Society of United Irishmen of Dublin, 30 December 1791, pp. 155-158.

¹⁵ N. Curtin, 'Symbols and Rituals of United Irish Mobilisation' in Gough and Dickson, *Ireland and the French Revolution*, p. 69.

¹⁶ R. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1971* (London, 1988), p.270.

the French policy towards foreigners became hostile, they were not rejected by the French, as other patriot groups were, and they brought back a positive image of French goodwill.¹⁷ France was adopted as the United Irishmen's revolutionary model, and continued to support the country throughout the Terror and its bloodshed, and the execution of the royal family. The outbreak of the war between England and France in 1793 changed the position of the United Irishmen: because of their francophilia, they assumed the role of an anti-war party, which isolated them from the rest of the parliamentary opposition and invited repression from the government.¹⁸ But however enamoured they might have been with republican ideals and symbols, it was yet unthinkable that their affiliation with the French Revolution extended to a call for French assistance in Ireland.¹⁹

The following two years would change that position, when 'all the gains of the last two decades had been lost and the constitutional channels through which the popular will could influence parliament closed.'²⁰ The republicanism in spirit developed into a full-blown, militant republicanism. This development cannot be seen separately from the sectarian divide in Ireland, and the deep-rooted fear among Protestants that a Catholic mass uprising could occur at any moment against them. From 1792 to 1795 this fear was more rational than before; as Elliott states, latent Catholic hopes of a reversal of the land settlement came to the fore with the campaign of the United Irishmen for Catholic relief and the creation of a Catholic committee to discuss these matters.²¹ The prospect of a Catholic uprising was strengthened by the rapid spread of the militant Catholic Defenders. In the years 1792-3, while the United Irishmen were still uncertain of their identity and aims, the Defenders instigated violent conflict in several counties and confiscated arms from Protestants. Together with the declaration of war against France, this triggered a harsh reaction by the Irish

¹⁷ EP, p. 52.

¹⁸ Curtin, *United Irishmen*, p. 21, 59.

¹⁹ EP, pp. 31-32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²¹ EP, p.39.

government, where several repressive laws and war efforts were easily supported, even by the opposition that had been so vocal about reforms in the decade before.²²

Although the United Irishmen tried to avert the violence, and confirmed their rejection of republicanism as a form of government, they became the government's target of suppression. The Irish government could simply not believe that the riots were caused by Catholic masses without a clearly defined leadership, and held the United Irishmen and Volunteers responsible. While the 1790s began for the United Irishmen with a sense of optimism about reform by constitutional means, the 'betrayal' of the parliamentary opposition and the accusations of being a treasonable organization left them stunned and helpless. While the government was convinced that the United Irishmen were already militant republicans, it was its repression and rejection of all reform that pushed the United Irishmen from moderate to radical means. And it was in this time, when all hope seemed lost for their reforms, that the French reached out.

1.3 The political situation in France in 1795

At the time the French government agreed to support an Irish effort for revolution, France had just been going through a tumultuous and violent period, and conflicts and civil war were still raging in parts of the country. This section will not describe the causes of the French Revolution or go into detail about its consequences.²³ But it is important to see the Directory and its decisions in the context of the the Terror and Revolutionary Wars, since they also influenced its policy. Moreover, this period marks the beginning of contact between France and Irish revolutionaries.

²² McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, pp. 360-361; Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, pp. 59, 150-154.

²³ This is dealt with directly or indirectly in numerous books, including but not limited to: W. Doyle, *The Origins of the French Revolution: Second Edition* (Oxford 2002); D. Andress ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2015); D.G. Wright, *Revolution and terror in France, 1789-1795* (London, 1990).

The French declaration of war against Prussia and Austria on 20 April 1792 was the start of a series of wars that would carry on until 1802.²⁴ War was advocated by a group within the National Assembly called the Girondins, who sought a conflict not only to defeat France's opponents, but to spread the ideas of the revolution and destroy the *ancien régime* all over Europe. After a difficult start they began winning a series of victories in the winter of 1792-1793, and were on the offensive in Belgium, Savoy, Nice and the German Rhineland. Girondin war strategy was implemented as policy by the National Convention in the last months of 1792: A first decree stated that the French nation would give fraternity and assistance to any people wishing to recover its liberty, a second stated that wherever French armies penetrated, they would abolish nobility, feudal privileges, tithes and monarchs and introduce representative assemblies to organize a republican constitution. However, the scale of French expansion and the execution of the royal family brought about a massive alliance of powers, known as the First Coalition, and France was no longer at war with just Austria and Prussia, but with Britain, Spain, Holland, Portugal and several Italian states as well. Weakened by failures in war, the Girondins were ousted from power and the more radical opponents, the Montagnards, led by Robespierre, took control of the National Assembly on 31 May 1793. Supported by the popular movement, the *sans-culottes*, they introduced a government of Terror. The dictatorial, Revolutionary government mobilised the entire economic resources of the nation to support the war effort and used the revolutionary tribunal to eliminate dissent and crush internal opposition and civil war.²⁵

The bloodshed of the Terror triggered the eventual fall of Robespierre on 27 July 1794 (9 Thermidor II in the Republican calendar) and the Thermidorian Reaction. This was a general retreat from the political and economic radicalism that had characterized

²⁴ M. Belissa, 'War and Diplomacy, 1792-1795' in D. Andress ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), p. 419.

²⁵ Gough, 'French Revolution', p. 7-9.

Robespierre's reign and strove to restore order and put an end to the popular revolution promoted by the Montagnards.²⁶ During this period a new constitution was established that created the Directory, the government's executive power consisting of five Directors: LaRevellière, a Girondin known for his anti-clericalism, took on religion; Reubell, known to support policies of annexation, took on diplomacy; Barras, a military man of great importance, took on the police; and Carnot, who had a longstanding career in the French Revolutionary Army, took on military administration, while his ally Letourneur became the naval expert.²⁷ They had a difficult task ahead of them: France was in a state of economic chaos, warfare with multiple foreign countries and civil war within the country, and the Directory had the task to bring back the peace, but had to do so on Republican terms, to create a Republican order.²⁸

At the start of the outbreak of war with England, France had no intention of promoting disturbance in Britain; they were still unsure of their strategy towards England and saw her as a potential ally. But when England started to meddle in the Vendée in West-France, where a surge of royalist opposition to the Revolution had escalated into civil war, France sought revenge, and turned towards Ireland as a possibility. Several memoranda addressed to the Committee of Public Safety, the executive government during the Terror, detail the situation in Ireland, addresses from the French Republic to 'the people of Ireland' were made and several secret agents were dispatched on Irish missions.²⁹ This interest in Ireland was renewed with the establishment of the Directory, as Carnot harboured an intense hatred of England, while LaRevellière brought republican internationalism into the Directory, favouring a policy

²⁶ L. Mason, 'Thermidor and the Myth of Rupture' in Andress, *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 522-525.

²⁷ H. Dupre, *Lazare Carnot: Republican Patriot* (Oxford, 1940), p. 20.

²⁸ H. G. Brown, 'The Politics of Public Order, 1795-1802' in Andress, *The Oxford Handbook*, p. 539.

²⁹ AD/CP/A/588, fol. 15-19, 'Note et mémoire instructif pour le comité de salut public et le ministre des affaires étrangères, by 'Ferris', 23 September 1793; fol. 142, 'Note sur l'Angleterre' – on the secret agents in Ireland', 1794; fol. 484-493, 'Mémoire sur l'Irlande' by Madgett, 19 November 1794; fol. 480, L'adresse au peuple d'Irlande par citoyen Madgett'; EP, p. 57.

of conquests as a means of liberating other countries.³⁰ A renewed political connection between France and Ireland thus emerged during a tumultuous period in French politics: a time where great war efforts were combined with internal purges, followed by the uncertainty and indecisiveness of the Thermadorian reaction. The Directory not only had the task to rebuild the nation's order, it had to do so while adhering to Republican ideals, and simultaneously addressing foreign threats. At the same time, the United Irishmen became increasingly radical and militant as the Irish government backed down from reform and oppressed every form of opposition. The United Irishmen, once abhorred by the idea of reaching out to the French, began to see a French invasion as the only way out of this situation. It was during this period that one of the leading United Irishmen, Theobald Wolfe Tone, left Ireland and made his way to France.

³⁰ Dupre, *Lazare*, p. 201; EP, p. 77.

Chapter 2: Liberating Ireland: the expedition of 1796

2.1: The arrival of Tone and the foundation of the first expedition

On 3 April 1794 an Irish, Anglican clergyman, William Jackson, arrived in Dublin. He was sent on a secret mission by the French government to inform them of Irish and English opposition politicians and how they saw a French invasion of England or Ireland.¹ He spoke with several United Irishmen, including Tone, who distrusted Jackson and saw him as a possible English spy. Nevertheless, Tone told Jackson that he wanted independence, as something ‘worth risking all to obtain’. Jackson then stated that, if this were the case, they could expect assistance from France.² However, Jackson was arrested on 26 April 1794 for high treason.³ In the indictment Tone is named as someone persuaded by Jackson to travel to France to convince them to invade Ireland.⁴ When Jackson’s trial commenced a year later, Tone struck a deal with the government and set off to Philadelphia on 14 June 1795, from where he arranged to go to France.⁵

In a letter dated 14 December 1795, the Minister Plenipotentiary of France in the United States, equivalent to the function of ambassador, Adet, wrote to the French government (more specifically, he wrote to the Committee of Public Safety, which had by then been replaced by the Directory) to introduce Tone, who had proved ‘son attachement á la liberté.’⁶ Tone would give the letter when he arrived in Paris. In the letter Adet stated that Tone’s information on Ireland meant that it would be sufficient to help an insurrection that had been organized already. Tone would be able to point out to the French government all necessary means for ‘l’émancipation d’un Peuple opprimé, et l’abaissement de la nouveau

¹ EP, p. 63.

² WTWT *i*, ‘Statement of communications with William Jackson, 3 May 1794’, p. 513.

³ AD/CP/A/588, fol. 378, ‘A Full Report of all the Proceedings on the Trial of the Rev. William Jackson’, London 1795, pp. 1-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ WTWT *i*, ‘Statement by Tone on his ‘compromise’ with the government, 23 April 1795’, p. 530.

⁶ AD/CP/A/589, fol. 94, ‘Le Ministre Plénipotentiaire de la République française près des États-Unis d’Amérique aux Citoyens composant le Comité de Salut Public de la Convention Nationale, 14 December 1795. Translation: his attachment to freedom.

Carthage⁷ – Adet equals England to Carthage, the great enemy of the Roman Empire. This is an important justification given for helping an Irish insurrection; both a Republican ideal of liberty and the hope for English destruction are mentioned.⁸ This letter was followed by a report from Minister of External Relations Delacroix, to the Directory on the discontent of the Irish people. In this report, they spoke again of the oppression of the Irish people by ‘le despotisme anglais’, who only awaited a good moment to win back their independence, and asked for French assistance to accomplish that ‘généreux destin’. Delacroix stated that the moment was there to declare themselves for the Irish and invade Ireland, to ‘délivrer [l’Irlande] de la domination anglaise, comme elle [la République] en affranchît l’Amérique.’⁹ This again can be seen as a Republican justification for assistance, but what follows is more strategic: namely that a successful invasion will also deprive England of an important source for their fleet and army, and of its greatest source of industrial wealth.¹⁰ At that moment, it was deemed premature to take measures to put into action such an important plan, but the advice was given to send Tone to Paris and organize an expedition.¹¹

Another letter from Adet, dated 27 January 1796, gives more insight into the specifics of the expedition and its consequences. He proposed to compose a force of 20,000 French soldiers, who would ‘détruire la tyrannie anglaise et rendra la liberté au monde entier’¹², since England, he claimed, could not exist without Ireland (a statement frequently used in memoranda on Ireland as well).¹³ In terms of the justifications for the expedition, this varied from its possibility to weaken or destroy England – a strategist argument – to the republican ideal of helping a poor and oppressed people. But significantly, Adet emphasized that, once

⁷ Translation: the emancipation of an oppressed people, and the fall of the new Carthago.

⁸ AD/CP/A/589, fol. 94.

⁹ AD/CP/A/589, fol. 117, ‘Rapport au Directoire Exécutif Par le Ministre des Relations Extérieures’ January 1796. Translation: liberate them from English domination, like the Republic liberated America.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 118.

¹² Translation: ‘destroy the English tyranny and restore liberty in the whole world’

¹³ AD/CP/A/588, fol. 184, ‘Mémoire sur l’état actuel d’Irlande’, May 1794; AD/CP/A/589, fol. 128, ‘Mémoire de Theobald Wolfe Tone’, 27 January 1796; fol. 155, ‘Reflections on Ireland by agent Duckett’, February 1796.

an invasion of Ireland had taken place, the aim of the French army would be a free Ireland, not its conquest, and to guarantee independence and freedom of thought, religion and opinion.¹⁴ Of course, this is the opinion of an ambassador in the United States, and not of the Directory itself. But his words and his justifications were later used by the Directory and did contribute to the way in which the discourse surrounding the expedition developed.

On 12 February 1796 Tone arrived in Paris, and six days later he had a meeting with Madgett, an Irishman working at the External Relations office in Paris, to discuss the state of Ireland. Tone recalled in his diary that Madgett suggested during this meeting that Ireland could rise before a French invasion. Tone fiercely rejected this, saying that as soon as the French army arrived, the Irish would certainly rise; but that they needed an army of 20,000 with a 'man of reputation' at its head to trigger a mass uprising in Ireland.¹⁵ Even though he could not see Ireland rise without French support, Tone was still positive about the chances for a successful revolution. He began his first memorandum to the Directory by convincing them of the benefits for France. Tone emphasized that Ireland was pivotal to the needs of the British army, both in terms of food supply, as well as the supply of men for their service; the only way to reduce English power, would be to separate Ireland from Great Britain. He then continued by describing the situation in Ireland at that time, and he made some substantial claims: that there was a 'national union' of Catholics and Dissenters, which was ready to turn against a 'common enemy', and that all the 'natural strength' of Ireland is 'devoted to France and adverse to England.'¹⁶ Tone was not the only one who made strong claims about the level of republicanism in Ireland. The Irishman William Duckett, who started working as a secret agent for France in 1793 and continued to supply information for the French government, wrote in a memorandum around the same time: 'L'esprit du peuple y est favorable à toutes

¹⁴ AD/CP/A/589, fol. 129-130, 'Dechiffrement de la Pièce jointe à la Dépêche du Cit. Adet N20', 27 January 1796.

¹⁵ WTWT *i*, 'Diary 16/21 February 1796', p. 58-59.

¹⁶ AN/AF/IV/1671/1, fol. 88-92, 'First memorial to the French government on the present state of Ireland, 22 February 1796'.

les entreprises des republicains...il n'y a pas aujourd'hui de peuple plus dispose à une revolution que le peuple Irlandais.'¹⁷ This rhetoric is important for the way the Directory justified the first expedition later on. These memoranda were the only sources of information they had; information that exaggerated how successful an expedition would be, and how happy the majority of Irishmen would be with a French invasion and an Irish revolution.

In the beginning of the contact between Tone and the French government, communication passed mostly through Madgett and the External Relations office. But on 24 February 1796 Tone went directly to Carnot to tell him about his ideas on an Irish expedition and the state of Ireland. While communicating with Carnot and his right-hand, General Clarke, Tone found out that they had another plan for using Ireland against England: to use a *chouannerie*-strategy in Ireland. The *chouannerie* was a guerrilla warfare waged by the royalist peasantry in the Vendée against the republic (begun under influence of Jean Chouan) which plunged the west of France into a civil war. When open warfare was in their disadvantage, the counter-revolutionists reverted to tactics such as cutting off supplies, starving the enemy and seizing outposts. Soldiers mixed with civilians, blurring the line of warfare, and the strategy was seen as brigandage by the French government and greatly frustrated the National Guards that were sent to repress the insurrections.¹⁸ The British support for the royalists in the Vendée infuriated France, and as Elliott states, France desired to inflict the same devastation on Britain. In 1793 General Hoche, who later commanded republican troops in the Vendée, had already called for an offensive war on Britain, while Carnot had developed an intense hatred of England because of his involvement in the Vendée.¹⁹ The idea of a counter-*chouannerie* gained momentum when English ships started supplying French

¹⁷ AD/CP/A/589, fol.155, 'Reflections on Ireland' From Duckett to the Ministry of External Relations, February 1796. Translation: The spirit of the [Irish] people is favourable to all republican undertakings...there is no other people right now more ready for a revolution than the Irish people.

¹⁸ A. Forrest, 'The insurgency of the Vendée', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 25:4 (2014), pp. 800-813 at pp. 801-802.

¹⁹ EP, p. 83.

royalists to the region in June 1795, and there were preparations underway by Carnot and Hoche in April 1796 for a ‘espèce de chouannerie destinée à agiter l’Angleterre’.²⁰

The information Tone had given on the Defenders and the agitation they caused in Ireland encouraged Carnot to form a plan of an Irish *chouannerie*, which was communicated by Clarke to Tone in a meeting on 2 April.²¹ Tone opposed this idea, claiming it would only produce local warfare, and he wrote another memorandum to Clarke to convince him of the disadvantages of the plan; however, Clarke kept bringing the issue up in subsequent conversations.²² The idea of a *chouannerie* in Ireland, which Carnot continued to promote, could indicate that Carnot wanted to disrupt England at all costs, and that the establishment of an Irish Republic was not his priority; that he mostly wanted to use Ireland to indirectly attack England, if it were by means of supporting a revolution, or by creating disruption and local warfare. Ultimately, he decided to combine the two strategies, seemingly unaware or unconcerned with the conflict of interest between the desire to help Irish republicans and flooding Ireland with French brigands.²³

²⁰ A. Debidour, *Recueil des actes du Directoire exécutif; procès-verbaux, arrêtes, instructions, lettres et actes divers, Tome 2* (Paris 1911), pp. 176-177. Translation: ‘a chouannerie of sorts, destined to agitate England’.

²¹ WTWT ii, ‘Diary 27 March/4 April 1796’, p. 140; AN/AF/IV/6/2, fol. 65, ‘Letter from Tone on the disadvantages of instigating a *chouannerie* in Ireland’ 31 March 1796 (although dated four days earlier, Tone’s diary suggests he wrote it on the 4th of April after his meeting with Clarke).

²² WTWT ii, ‘Diary 22/25 April 1796’, p. 161.

²³ EP, pp. 92-93.

2.2 Progress in the negotiations: official orders and instructions

From the end of April onwards Tone showed himself increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress in the negotiations. On 30 April 1796 he wrote:

Called on Clarke again. He is a sad puppy and I am fairly tired of him. Our dialogue is always the same. 'Well, General Clarke, I have called to know if you have anything to tell me?' Not a word. ... so I take my leave as ignorant as a horse. I confess I cannot fathom General Clarke's policy in keeping me so totally in the dark.²⁴

Tone began to believe that the expedition would not be undertaken at all.²⁵ At this time, the Directory was distracted by internal unrest, as Francois Babeuf, a leading figure of the leftist Society of the Pantheon in Paris, and his followers created a 'Conspiracy of the Equals', who propagated an insurrection to restore 'true democracy and social equality'; they were arrested on 10 May 1796.²⁶ In the end of June, Tone finally received good news from General Clarke: he would be appointed to the French army within a month, which would mean that the expedition was finally underway.²⁷ Indeed, the imminent threats of continental war had been removed and with generals and forces available, the opportunity, means and government support finally came together, and it was possible to launch an expedition to Ireland.²⁸ On 19 June 1796 the Directory proposed General Hoche as the commander of that expedition, and outlined the strategy. Although in this document the Republican ideals are briefly mentioned, namely 'render un pays généreux et mûr pour une révolution à l'indépendance et à la liberté qu'il appelle', most of the statement concerns the advantage of Irish independence for France, and how it reduces England to a minor power. Moreover, the *chouannerie* is again mentioned as part of the plan: but it is now directed at Wales and

²⁴ WTWT ii, 'Diary 26 April/2 May 1796', p.172.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.175.

²⁶ M. Lyons, *France Under the Directory* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 29-35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 'Diary 14/23 June', p. 209.

²⁸ EP, p. 92.

Cornwall, and meant as a distraction to contribute to the independence of Ireland.²⁹ Three days later, Carnot personally wrote to Hoche again, to express his own views: that he sees in the success of the operation ‘la chute du plus irréconciliable et du plus dangereux de nos ennemis’ which would bring peace and quiet to France for centuries to come, and that it would open up a great career of glory for Hoche. Again, the Vendée and the *chouannerie* were mentioned: to bring a fatal blow to those who are responsible for that ‘cancer’. Carnot thus once again justified the expedition to Ireland with his great hatred for England and his mission to bring the country down for good.³⁰

On 19 July 1796, more than five months after the arrival of Tone in Paris, the Directory issued its official instructions to General Hoche for the expedition to Ireland. The rhetoric that the Directory used to describe its reasons for the expedition shows the ways in which they justified it. More than in the earlier deliberations of the Directory and letters to Hoche, the focus is on Republican ideals and on the plan for Ireland once the invasion of French troops had succeeded and the Irish Revolution had been set in motion. It starts with the claim that the Directory wanted Hoche to liberate Ireland: ‘C'est à vous que la République française remet le soin de rendre la liberté à un peuple généreux qui la désire et qui est impatient de secouer le joug tyrannique de l'Angleterre.’³¹ Hoche was informed that the inhabitants of Ireland strongly desired to live under a republic government, and that he was to strengthen that desire with all means. The goal was a permanent alliance between France and Ireland, which would be more likely when their government system resembled the French system. But the order also stated clearly that, at least in the beginning, Irish government should be subject to the French Republic, and that government agents should consult with

²⁹ Debidour, *Recueil Tome 2*, pp. 660-662. Translation: to render a generous country, ripe for a revolution, the liberty and independence it calls for’

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 688-689. Translation: ‘the downfall of the most irreconcilable and most dangerous of enemies’

³¹ A. Debidour, *Recueil des actes du Directoire exécutif: procès-verbaux, arrêtes, instructions, lettres et actes divers, Tome 3* (Paris 1913), p. 140. Translation: ‘The French Republic hands over the care to you to restore the liberty of a generous people, who longs for it (liberty) and who is impatient to shake off the tyrannical yoke of England.’

Hoche on all occasions, and could not act without his specific order.’³² The letter then turned more towards the benefits of a successful invasion for France: the Directory assumed that the Irish would compensate them for their ‘sacrifices’ through hostility to England, their ‘ennemi commun’ and that Ireland would grant French commerce all the advantages that Ireland could provide.³³ Moreover, Hoche’s efforts should be directed towards ‘donner à la nation irlandaise un chef du pays bien disposé en faveur de la France et bien connu comme ennemi passionné de l’Angleterre.’³⁴ He should also avoid religious conflict as much as possible, and should the Catholics abandon their faith, they should be kept from adopting Anglicanism or Presbyterianism, which would ‘bring them closer to the English.’³⁵ This clearly shows that the French supported the Irish rebels, but they needed certainty that Ireland would become their ally against England, instead of a properly independent state with no allegiance to France.

However, in the event that the English began to prevail, the Directory wanted to avoid surrender to England at any cost. Instead, Hoche was instructed to separate his forces, start a *chouannerie* and resist until France sent reinforcements. Carnot’s idea of making Ireland the English Vendée had thus not been totally removed from the official strategy; but it was only seen as a last option, a plan B, in case the invasion and insurrection failed. On the other hand, if the Irish revolution succeeded and a republic was assured, the Directory authorized Hoche to invade England, with reinforcements that the Irish troops could provide.³⁶

The Republican ideals of liberation and relief from an (English) monarchy that oppressed the people of Ireland were primarily used as the justification for this expedition, and the instructions contain detailed plans for Hoche to ensure a transition to a republican system. But the expedition was primarily justified by showing the advantages of Irish

³² Debidour, *Recueil Tome 3*, p. 141.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143. Translation: ‘supplying the nation with a head of state that is favourable towards France and known to be a passionate enemy of England’

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

independence from England for the French Republic: the weakening of England, especially its military forces; the creation of a strong ally so close to England; and a base from which France could invade England. Moreover, they intended to create chaos and civil war if their initial plan did not work, by starting a *chouannerie*.

2.3 A chaotic expedition and its aftermath

Tone mentioned several victories of the French army in the end of June, on the Italian front, in his diary, along with the spoils it brought.³⁷ As Elliott states, the Italian campaign changed the Directory's war strategy: it made the southern and eastern armies more important, and it fuelled an already existing strong rivalry between General Hoche and the general of the Italian mission, Napoleon Bonaparte. Hoche was determined to make Ireland his glorious victory, as Italy had been Bonaparte's.

But the Directory's attention – and with that, most of the troops – had turned away from the Irish expedition after Austria broke the armistice in July and marched into the Rhineland. The preparations for the Irish expedition were frustrated by lack of finance, supplies, and sailors.³⁸ This changed with the arrival in Paris of Lord Malmesbury, ambassador from England, who had come to negotiate peace. On 23 October 1796 the Directory instructed Minister Delacroix to prepare himself for these negotiations and gave him all necessary powers to conclude a treaty.³⁹ This might seem as another sign that the Directory had lost confidence in the Irish expedition; but as Elliott argues, it is more likely that this triggered the Directory to speed up the preparations for an invasion. 'We must humble the pretensions of this envoy of [Prime Minister] Pitt's', wrote Minister of the Navy, Truguet to Hoche, 'by opening our discussions with the words – twenty-thousand men are in

³⁷ WTWT *ii*, 'Diary 14-23 June', p. 209.

³⁸ EP, pp. 94, 103.

³⁹ AD/CP/A/590, fol. 42. 'Extrait Des Registres des Délibérations du Directoire Executif' 23 October 1796.

Ireland.⁴⁰ With a successful invasion of Ireland as a pressure tool, England would have been forced to make peace on French terms. The way in which the Directory justified, after a period of apparent disinterest, the acceleration of Irish preparations adds an extra layer to their variety of justifications: now the expedition could be used as a means to negotiate peace with England on advantageous terms.

After weeks of indecisiveness and problems with the preparations, Hoche's expedition embarked from Brest on 16 December 1796 with 14,450 troops – including Tone, in the rank of 'chef de brigade'⁴¹– leaving instructions for General Hédouville to prepare reinforcements of the same number. Hoche's expedition became a complete failure due to a lack of communication between ships and extreme weather conditions. Hoche became separated of the rest of the fleet, which arrived at Bantry Bay, in the south-west of Ireland, on 21 December; but the naval commander, Bouvet, refused to land due to storm. Added to this was a lack of support or recognition from the Irish people for the ships that had entered Bantry Bay; while the sailors were expecting to be hailed in by the Irish as liberators, there was no sign of enthusiasm from the local population. Hoche never even made it to the Irish coast, and returned to France on 31 December, having learnt of the failed mission in Bantry.⁴²

To make matters even worse, a new mission was sent to Bristol on the west coast of England, with 'troublemakers' on board that Carnot had foreseen as a driving force for a *chouannerie*, such as prisoners and a troublesome regiment from the Ile d'Oléron. Elliott sees this expedition as 'something of a mystery', since the Directory had already shut down Hédouville's preparations for another expedition.⁴³ But it is possible that this was to be a new version of the 'Plan B' of Carnot, to sow chaos in England and start a new *chouannerie*, as

⁴⁰ EP, p. 104 (quoting Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime, I Mi 61/148/1956, Truguet to Hoche, 15 October 1796).

⁴¹ WTWT ii, 'Extract from the register of the Executive Directory, 21 July 1796'.

⁴² EP, pp. 111-113

⁴³ EP, pp. 116-117.

laid out in instructions written by Carnot himself.⁴⁴ This expedition failed as well and led to heavy criticism of the Directory in France, which isolated Carnot from its councils.

The Irish expeditions had severely weakened the French navy and the French councils that were supposed to be consulted on these expeditions were outraged that they were kept in the dark. Moreover, the Irish had not risen when French forces approached Bantry Bay, which was taken as proof that the Irish agents, such as Tone and Duckett, had exaggerated the republicanism and desire for independence in Ireland and could no longer be trusted. Therefore, the decision of the Directory to support Ireland again in 1798 was an unlikely outcome. The next chapter will analyse how the French government justified this second military expedition.

⁴⁴ Service Historique de la Défense, GR11/B/1, fol. 70, 'Instruction pour l'établissement d'une chouannerie en Angleterre'.

Chapter 3: A second chance for Ireland

3.1: New priorities in French war strategy

After the initial devastation over the failed expedition, Tone pulled himself together and started making plans for his future. His wife and children had arrived in Hamburg and he wished to settle in Nanterre, in order to stay close to Paris and keep the communication lines open with the Directory. In his diary he described a meeting with General Hoche, who had just been named command of the Army of Sambre and Meuse. Tone saw this as the decisive sign that another expedition to Ireland was not likely to take place in the foreseeable future. However, Hoche told Tone that support for Ireland had not disappeared, but rather lack of money and the damage done to the fleet during the first expedition had led to the suspension of another expedition. The Directory had employed Hoche and the troops of the Irish forces elsewhere in the meantime, but he wanted to return as soon as preparations for another expedition were to resume. However, the Directory had its focus on other matters at this time; as Tone mentioned in his diary, Bonaparte had defeated Austria again at Rivoli in northern Italy. Tone hoped this might lead to a peace with 'the Emperor' which would make it easier to focus on England.¹ Indeed, Bonaparte negotiated the preliminaries of a peace treaty with Austria, which were accepted on 18 April 1797. Together with the successful Italian campaign of Bonaparte and the establishment of the Batavian Republic, England was left as the only member of the First Coalition still at war with France.²

Meanwhile, Hoche did not abandon the Irish cause, and Bonaparte's victories fuelled their rivalry and Hoche's yearning for a triumphant expedition. The Directory however was holding back on support for another operation. In the end of May 1797 Hoche met Lewins, a

¹ WTWT *iii*, Diary 31 January 1797, pp. 13-17.

² Doyle, *The Oxford History*, p. 214.

United Irishmen agent.³ While the failed expedition to Ireland and the lukewarm reception of French ships by the Irish had discouraged the French government, it had caused an upsurge in enthusiasm for the United Irishmen, whose membership tripled in the beginning of 1797, and Lewins was chosen to go to Hamburg and re-open communications with France.⁴ Hoche then sent his adjutant-general Simon to Paris to press the Directory and the Minister of Navy on the Irish cause.⁵ Simon wrote to Hoche on 7 June 1797 that the Directory was still willing to send support to the Irish, but that there was no sign of any preparations being considered.

Simon had met with Carnot, who had responded verbally to him on a letter from Hoche. The Directory would not expose any ships or considerable troops to the English, who were ‘absolument maitres de la mer’. According to Carnot, there was an agreement with the Batavian Republic to make available as many troops and arms as they could spare, and Hoche would be in charge of arranging this; a big expedition however, was not on the table at that moment. In the peace negotiations with England the interests of Ireland would be stipulated and directed towards the wishes of the Irish population, but the legislative council could not recognize Ireland as an independent state before the independence was established. The Directory told Hoche to do everything that he deemed right for the Irish cause and to consult with the Batavian Republic.⁶ Clearly, the Directory did not wish to take any more responsibility on the matter and although they did not prevent the Batavian Republic and Hoche from collaborating, they would not guarantee any support. This was further confirmed by an official statement from the Directory to Hoche two days later, in which they offered their help to Ireland but without a plan for an actual expedition: ‘Notre intérêt est de les voir proclamer l'indépendance de leur île ... mais sans garantie de notre part ... Nous n'avons

³ AN/AF/IV/1671/2, fol. 158-160, Memoir given by Lewins to Hoche on 31 May 1797, confirmation of meeting between Lewins and Hoche.

⁴ EP, p. 123, 130.

⁵ WTWT *iii*, ‘Diary 12 June/14 July 1797’, pp. 91-92.

⁶ AN/AF/IV/1671/2, fol. 40, Letter from Simon to Hoche, 7 June 1797.

contracté aucun engagement de maintenir leur nouvel état politique, dans la crainte de nuire au rétablissement de la paix.⁷

Hoche presented the information given by Simon as positive news to Tone and Lewins – or at least, Tone interpreted it as positive.⁸ In reality, the Directory withdrew from any commitment to Ireland, and let the Dutch take responsibility instead; they were too occupied with trying to make peace with the English. On 1 June 1797 an official note from Westminster on behalf of the Crown asked France to enter peace negotiations.⁹ These took place in Lille during the summer of 1797, from 17 June until 21 September. The Dutch government subsequently delayed their plans for an Irish expedition until they knew the outcome of these negotiations.¹⁰ Meanwhile, a *coup* within the Directory had taken place to get rid of Carnot and Barthélemy, who had just joined the Directory; the three other Directors, Barras, La Revellière and Reubell, saw the rise of royalists within the legislative assemblies as a threat to the Republic while Carnot and Barthélemy were willing to compromise with them.¹¹ On the night of 3 September Barthélemy was arrested and Carnot, who had been warned, fled to Germany.¹² Carnot had always been one of the biggest advocates of an expedition to Ireland and was, together with General Hoche, one of the most informed politicians on the situation there. The final blow to this expedition came with the sudden death, of consumption, of General Hoche on 19 September 1797.¹³

At the same time, the peace negotiations between England and France had come to nothing: ‘nous devons regarder les négociations comme absolument rompues’, stated the

⁷ WTWT *iii*, p. 92, footnote 1 (quoting Archives de la Guerre, Marine BB⁴ 103) Translation: ‘It is our interest to see them declare independence of their island ... but without guarantee on our part ... we have made no agreement to sustain their new political status for fear of damaging the re-establishment of peace.’

⁸ WTWT *iii*, ‘Diary 12 June/14 July 1797’, p. 92.

⁹ AD/CP/A/590, fol. 339, ‘Official Note from Westminster’, 1 June 1797.

¹⁰ EP, p. 157.

¹¹ Lyons, *France*, pp. 48-51.

¹² Dupre, *Lazare*, p. 245-247.

¹³ WTWT *iii*, ‘Diary 19/22 September 1797’, p. 151.

newly appointed minister of External Relations, Talleyrand.¹⁴ On 29 September 1797 the Directory officially declared the negotiations over. Tone saw this as ‘excellent news’, because it meant a continuation of war against England.¹⁵ And it is true that the Directory justified their lack of support for an Irish expedition by pointing towards the peace negotiations. But the promotion of the Irish cause suffered a painful blow by Carnot’s removal from power and the loss of Hoche, who was the driving force behind a second expedition.

3.2: Against all odds: a second expedition to Ireland

Hoche’s death and Carnot’s dismissal were serious inconveniences to the Irish negotiators in Paris, since their successors, Director Barras and General Bonaparte, were uninformed about the Irish cause and had not nearly as much personal attachment to it as Hoche. Despite all these setbacks, the Directory decided to launch another expedition in the summer of 1798. This time it was easier to justify the decision, because the circumstances were now as France hoped they would have been in 1796: Ireland had rebelled on its own, and France could now support a revolution, instead of starting one.

In a letter to Barras on 25 September 1797, Lewins (who had, by then, become the official ambassador for the United Irishmen in Paris) asked for assurance that the promises to the United Irishmen that Hoche made – 10,000 men, arms and ammunition to be ready by the end of October – would be honoured. Barras responded that they were as determined as ever to ‘rescue’ the Irish: but that they had to wait until spring. He promised Lewins that once a definite peace with Austria had been concluded, they could ‘compter sur votre independance’.¹⁶ No document clearly sets out why the Directory continued preparing for an

¹⁴ AD/CP/A/592, fol. 28, Minister of External Relations Talleyrand to Minister Plenipotentiaire of France Bonnier. Translation: ‘We must regard the negotiations as completely broken off’

¹⁵ WTWT *iii*, ‘Diary 19/22 September 1797’, p. 152.

¹⁶ AN/AF/IV/1671/2, fol.46, Letter from Lewins to Barras, 25 Sept. 1797. Translation: count on your independence.

Irish expedition – although the failure of peace negotiations with England combined with the peace treaty with Austria a month later, can be seen on its own as a justification: England was once again the only French enemy left. However, after Hoche’s death, the plan for Irish support was to be completely incorporated into the war strategy against England. Following the communication between Lewins and Barras, the only extant communication regarding Ireland was from Tone, who discussed plans with the Dutch general Daendels, responsible for the preparations that were still ongoing in the Batavian Republic. Tone was also introduced to Talleyrand and the new Minister of War, Schérer, and later Bonaparte as well, who was made commander of the new *Armée de l’Angleterre* – something Tone saw as very positive.¹⁷ At the same time, the pressure from Ireland increased with the arrival of several United Irishmen in Paris, including the founder of Dublin’s United Irishmen, James Napper Tandy.¹⁸ These Irishmen insisted fiercely on the strength of rebelliousness in Ireland; they understated the military needs of the United Irishmen, and exaggerated the revolutionary capabilities of the Irish people. Moreover, Tandy expected to assume natural leadership in the negotiations, and tried to obstruct Tone and Lewins’ efforts.¹⁹

A letter at the end of 1797 gives more clarity on the justifications used for the expedition. Barras used stronger language to confirm that they were working on the expedition, saying that it would be executed in spring with the ‘grandissimes moyens’, and he clearly stated that the goal of the expedition was not a conquest, but the overthrow of English government and independence for Ireland. However, Barras emphasized that English defeat was the priority, although the Directory would give the United Irishmen all the means to take action themselves.²⁰ These justifications correspond to the absence of documents referring

¹⁷ WTWT ii, ‘Diary 30 September/29 November, 21/23 December 1797’, pp.176-177, 185.

¹⁸ AD/CP/A/592, fol. 65, Letter from the Minister of External Relations to the Minister of Police, 20 October 1797.

¹⁹ EP, pp. 170-171.

²⁰ AN/AF/IV/1671/2, fol. 176, Verbal response from Barras to Lewins, end of 1797. Translation: Greatest means.

directly to Ireland, instead of to an English expedition: England was seen as a priority, and the Irish independence as a sideshow, for which they would provide some means, but for which the actions were the Irishmen's own responsibility.

However, right after this promise of a great English expedition in April, the Directory radically changed course by allowing Bonaparte to take his forces to Egypt. In the beginning of January 1798, Bonaparte was still busy with organizing the *armée d'Angleterre*, raising money, artillery and men.²¹ On 26 January however, Talleyrand and Bonaparte met and first discussed the idea of a conquest of Egypt. Between 8 and 20 February, Bonaparte inspected the troops destined for an English invasion, and on 23 February Bonaparte presented the Directory with a memorandum stating that the invasion of England was almost impossible, and that either an expedition to the East or a conclusion of peace with England would be better possibilities. On 5 March, the Directory agreed to entrust Bonaparte with an expedition to Egypt, and on 12 April the '*armée d'Orient*' was created, commanded by Bonaparte – he sailed on 19 May.²² In a report to the Directory, Bonaparte proposed to embark on the mission with 20,000 to 25,000 men and 2,000 to 3,000 cavalry.²³ How could the Directory justify launching an expedition to Ireland, when all France's military resources, troops and generals were sent to Egypt?

On 16 June 1798, Tone had lost all faith in an expedition to England or Ireland ever happening.²⁴ But only two days later, the French papers spread news of the death of one of the United Irishmen leaders, Lord FitzGerald, and of several insurrections. It seems that only by then, the Directory received the news of an Irish rebellion, while in fact the rebellion had already started in Ireland at the end of May, after Lord FitzGerald, United Irishmen's military

²¹ La Fondation, *Napoleon Tome II*, Letter to Ramel de Nogaret, Ministre des Finances 8 janvier 1798, no.2294; Letter to Schérer, Ministre de la Guerre, 9 January 1798, no.2295, p. 25-26.

²² *Ibid.*, Letter to the Directory, 23 February 1798, no.2315, p. 37-39; Letter to the Directory on board of 'L'Orient', no.2496, p. 129; Chronology p. 1179-1181.

²³ *Ibid.*, Letter to the Directory, 5 March 1798, no.2322, p. 42.

²⁴ WTWT *iii*, 'Diary 16 June 1798', p. 298.

leaders, and several other United Irishmen leaders had been arrested on 19 and 20 May. Initially, the Irish and English governments were astonished by the ferocity of the rebel forces, but after English reinforcements were sent, they were able to suppress the rebellion by the middle of June.²⁵ The moment the news arrived in Paris, an appeal for help was made by a group of United Irishmen in Paris to the French Minister of External Relations.²⁶ There are no documents from the Directory with instructions to generals in the same way as the instructions to General Hoche were written down for the first expedition. But in an address of the legislative council of the Directory on the Irish cause, July 14, the same rhetoric is used as then:

Tous les hommes libres, tous ceux qui veulent le devenir sont nos frères; mais ils le sont bien plus particulièrement encore ceux dont les efforts se dirigent contre un gouvernement orgueilleux et perfide ... L'Irlande ne donne pas seulement un grand et vertueux exemple de plus aux nations: elle combat encore pour l'Europe entière.²⁷

The address stated that the Directory already knew what to do, that the circumstances forced them to act, but that they were allowed to form their plans in secret. The secrecy corresponds to a lack of documents explicitly stating an expedition to Ireland. One letter described the state of the troops in Brest and LaRochelle 'pour des expéditions secrètes' and 'expéditions que vous avez déterminés'.²⁸ The address reveals how the Directory justified the second expedition: because they needed to help their Irish brothers, who had been brave enough to stand up to their enemy; and because that enemy was England, the greatest enemy of the French and – according to them – of all of Europe. It is another example of how the Directory blended their hatred for England with the Republican ideal of liberty and independence for

²⁵ EP, pp. 201-207.

²⁶ AD/CP/A/592, fol. 227, 'The Address of a Number of United Irishmen ... to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic', 21 June 1798.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 191, 'Conseil des cinq cents – Corps Legaslitif,' 14 July 1798. Translation: All free men and men who want to become free are our brothers: but they are more so when their efforts concentrate on an arrogant and treacherous country... Ireland does not only set a great and virtuous example for other nations: she fights for the whole of Europe, for the human cause.

²⁸ AN/AF/III/149, fol.98-99, Report from the Ministry of War to the Directory, 16 August 1798. Translation: Secret expeditions, expeditions as you have determined

Ireland. But the justification can also be concluded from the two years of negotiations between the United Irishmen and France: the idea of succeeding where the last expedition had gone wrong and the ongoing preparations, partly delegated to the Batavian Republic, that kept the idea of an Irish expedition in the back of the Directory's mind, even though Napoleon's plan for Egypt had been approved. And then the Irish themselves, who finally met the most important condition for French aid: they had risen on their own, and now France could help them to win.

3.3: The Republic of Connacht

The Directory had initiated plans for the second expedition in the end of June. An expeditionary force of 8,000 would sail to Ireland under General Hardy, and while it was being prepared, two smaller forces would in the meantime sail under General Rey from Dunkirk and General Humbert from Rochefort. The rush to help the Irish in their rebellion was significantly slowed down by a lack of money, supplies and men.²⁹ Only Humbert had worked out a way to raise enough money and supplies and he sailed to Ireland on 5 August with a small force of 1,019 men – a move the Directory applauded, but which was criticized by other generals as it undermined the strategy of a three-way strike.³⁰ On 22 August Humbert and his forces reached Killala Bay in Connacht, and took the town of Killala, while the Irish were welcoming the French with open arms.³¹ 'The people will join us in myriads, they throw themselves on their knees as we pass along and extend their arms for our success. We will be masters of Connaught in a few days', wrote Tone's brother Matthew, who served with Humbert.³² The French forces recruited around 500 to 700 Irishmen (although another account

²⁹ SHD/GR/11/B/2, fol.49, 'Souvenirs de ma vie militaire'

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 50.

³¹ EP, p. 224.

³² WTWT, *iii*, p. 329, 'Matthew Tone to Mathilda Tone', 23 August 1798.

speaks of 1500)³³, and according to major-general Muller, they seemed to have shared in their spirit of republicanism: ‘un cri general de vive la république francoise s’en fait entendre parmi nos troupes. Les Irlandois y on répondu par leur cri de liberté Erin Go Brah!’³⁴ On the 26th Humbert and his French and Irish rebel forces marched to Castlebar, defended by Irish forces, and won the Battle of Castlebar.

An important fact is that the French then established a government, a ‘Republic of Connacht’. An official declaration describes of a government of 12 members, agreed upon by the French army command, with an Irish President, John Moore.³⁵ The fact that they established a Republic of Connacht, instead of just occupying the area and waiting for reinforcements, adheres to the way in which the expedition had been justified: they wanted to liberate the Irish and help them establish a republic, just as they had done in other sister republics. The Republic of Connacht was a staging post, from which the republic was to be spread to all of Ireland, to achieve a Republic of Ireland.

After Humbert’s embarkment, extra efforts were made towards sending reinforcements, possible to cover up failures in the Egyptian expedition.³⁶ On the 18th of September General Kilmaine, who had become the commander of the *Armée d’Angleterre* after Bonaparte left for Egypt, wrote to the Directory that an acceleration of the Irish mission might be ‘un moyen de rémédier au malheur arrive dans la méditerranée.’³⁷ However, this hope was in vain: Humbert had already been defeated at the battle of Ballinamuck on the 8th of September and the reinforcements that were sent withdrew after hearing of Humbert’s defeat, or were defeated by the English fleet. Tone, now ranked as adjutant-general, was part

³³ SHD/GR/11/B/2, fol. 21, letter from Leonard Muller to the Minister of War, 10 September 1798.

³⁴ SHD/GR/11/B/2, fol. 21, Translation: Outbursts of ‘Long live the French Republic was to be heard amidst our troupes. The Irish responded with their cry of liberty ‘Ireland until the End’!

³⁵ SHD/GR/11/B/2, fol. 66-67.

³⁶ J. Bertaud, ‘Forgotten Soldiers: The Expedition of General Humbert to Ireland in 1798’ in Gough and Dickson, *Ireland and the French Revolution*, p. 227.

³⁷ SHD/GR/11/B, fol. 2, 18 Sept. 1798, letter from General Kilmaine to President of the Directory. Translation: ‘a means to compensate for the misfortune in the Meditaranean.’

of General Bompard's force, which was defeated and captured by an English squadron under Admiral Warren off Lough Swilly. Tone was captured and sent off to Dublin, where he committed suicide after he was sentenced to death by public hanging.³⁸

The question has been asked why the Directory persisted in the idea of an attack on England or Ireland: not only had a previous, much larger expedition failed, Bonaparte had also advised against it, the Dutch were no longer on board and most of the French forces were far away in the Mediterranean. Elliott sees it as a serious misconception on the Directory's part of the rebelliousness in Ireland.³⁹ It is true that while Tone had been careful the first time around to insist that the Irish would only rise when France had invaded, the second time there was a new group of United Irishmen in Paris that greatly exaggerated the strength of their rebel movement in Ireland. Combined with the news of insurrection in Ireland, this proved to be enough incentive for the Directory to help them. They could justify the small forces and lack of preparations because of the prospect they envisioned of Ireland: that there was a full-blown revolution underway already, and France would merely bring reinforcements. Once the Irish expedition seemed a success, and the Egyptian mission suffered defeat, Ireland became even more important for the Directory. The Republican ideals of liberating Ireland and establishing a republican government might have been implemented for a short time in Connacht, but ultimately war strategy and the prospect of an easy victory were guiding the Directory's justifications for this expedition.

³⁸ WTWT *iii*, pp. 354-358, The Londonderry Journal, 23 October /6 November 1798.

³⁹ EP, p. 235.

Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the decision-making process behind, and justifications given for the two Irish expeditions of 1796 and 1798 within the French political context. While the historical debate on these cases simply places them within the French war strategy at that time, this thesis shows that it is a more complex story. The Irish cause became part of war strategy, but only so because certain players within the government and army became attached to the idea of an Irish invasion. The driving force was the wish to defeat the English, combined with the timing of war and peace on the continent. Moreover, the Directory did not justify the support out of tactical reasons only: the republicanism of the United Irishmen and the sense that the Irish people were oppressed, also prominently featured in their justifications.

The rhetoric used in the decision-making process leading up to the first expedition, starting with Adet's letter and ending with Hoche's instructions, is a combination of Republican ideals of liberty of the Irish people from oppression and independence from the *ancien regime* of English rule, with the strategic value of Ireland as a weapon against the great enemy, England. The Directory's aim was to establish a republican system of government in Ireland, but not without France gaining advantage and a base to launch a further attack on England. Republicanism and war strategy against England were thus intertwined.

However, the *chouannerie* strategy shows that Republican ideals were ultimately not the priority for the promoters of the Irish expedition, Carnot and Hoche. The use of this form of warfare is directly connected to their anglophobia: both had been deeply involved in the Vendée civil war and carried great resentment against the English support of the *chouannerie*. Even though Tone insisted that a *chouannerie*-styled invasion would be a bad idea, the

strategy continued to be developed alongside grander plans for an Irish expedition. Its ultimate incorporation into the instructions for Hoche, as a 'Plan B' in case the battles against Irish or English forces were lost, shows that Carnot could not let go of this plan, even when strongly advised against it. This was confirmed by the short-lived expedition under the command of General Tate to England, with hundreds of brigands aboard. Instigating a rebellion and winning independence in Ireland might not have worked, but creating chaos in England was clearly seen as a viable alternative. The plan for creating total chaos and civil war in Ireland somewhat undermines the case that the expedition was intended to liberate the Irish people and establish a republican form of government in Ireland.

After the Irish expedition of 1796 had failed, a new mission seemed unlikely. How could the Directory justify losing men and material to a people that had not welcomed the French to their land? The political circumstances in 1797 and the beginning of 1798 seemed to make another expedition even more unlikely: serious peace negotiations with England, a *coup* that ended Carnot's career and the death of Hoche, which meant that two of the key promoters of the Irish cause were eliminated. The green light for Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt meant that Ireland was no longer seen as a useful arena of French war strategy against England: defeat of the enemy was to be accomplished in their far-flung colonies. With a great part of the army thousands of miles away, the only justification for a new Irish expedition could be that Ireland had risen on its own. When that happened, the French Directory reached back to the rhetoric of the 1796 expedition by combining the republican ideal of liberty and fraternity with the aim to defeat England. The establishment of the Republic of Connacht shows that there was an attempt (with a tinge of *hubris*) to establish a republican system in Ireland, and that the republican rhetoric was not entirely for show.

The justifications for the two expeditions thus varied greatly. In 1796, it was the personal hatred against England of Carnot and Hoche that accelerated the expedition, which

was justified by a combination of republican idealism and the prospect of English defeat. The 1798 attempt was justified by the news of an insurrection in Ireland, which suited the general policy of France to only support revolutions that had already started. In both cases however the political context and timing were of great importance. In 1796, an armistice on the continent provided the Directory with some breathing space and allowed them to go forward with the expedition. In 1798, the political circumstances were completely against the Irish cause, and the Irish rebellion was the only possible justification for another expedition. All in all, the Irish expeditions could not be seen as a structural part of French war strategy, but were born out of a combination of political will, personal incentives and timing. However, republicanism was part of the justification. The Directory's task was not only to re-establish order in the country, but they had to do so on Republican terms. The rhetoric used in the justifications for the Irish expeditions, and the aim to establish an Irish republic, not just conquer it, are proof of this mind-set. In this sense, a successful invasion of Ireland might have led to an Irish sister-republic. However, the prominence of French interests in the event of an Irish revolution - such as the defeat of the English enemy - in the justifications, bring nuance to that view, as well as the *chouannerie* strategy. France might have been the 'natural ally' of the Irish, but only because France was the natural enemy of England.

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