

# The altered state and the state of nature—the French Revolution and international politics

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**Abstract.** The case of the French Revolution supports the proposition that principles of political legitimacy which shape state identities are linked to domestic social structures, and help determine the resources states mobilize in international competition. To the degree that they are shared across states, legitimacy principles also shape international society. The enactment of a deviant principle of legitimacy by a major power will have systemic consequences because it undermines the existing rules of the game; it may have transformative effects if the efficacy of the new principle is demonstrated in competition. Closer attention should be paid to the complex manner in which new principles interact with existing rules of international society.

## Introduction

The historian Alfred Cobban writes that '[t]he example of the French Revolution suggests that the principle of popular sovereignty, pushed to the extreme limit, is by itself capable of producing an unbridgeable gap between a State and the rest of the world.'<sup>1</sup> He argues that the French Revolution set in motion a new pattern of state egoism; for a time this made international relations more like the 'state of nature' which serves as a starting point for realist thinking about international politics. Cobban's remarks reinforce the constructivist insight that 'anarchy is what states make of it', though in the case of the French Revolution a change in actor identity made anarchy more violent rather than more benign.<sup>2</sup> The European old regime rested on the foundation of dynastic legitimacy; the French Revolution, with its alternative legitimating principle of popular sovereignty, undermined this foundation and ushered in the modern international system.

International relations theorists today tend to overlook the French Revolution's importance to the evolution of the international system, largely because of the way in which structure is understood in neorealist international relations theory (i.e. as a distribution of material capabilities); the characteristics of the actors do not influence the system's structure. Further, for neorealists the continuities of anarchy are

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Cobban, *In Search of Humanity: the Role of the Enlightenment in Modern History* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it', *International Organization*, 46 (1992), pp. 391–425; also see Michael N. Barnett, 'Identity and Alliances in the Middle East', in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

unassailable by the movement of history. ‘English School’ theorists take a more historical view. David Armstrong argues that the Revolution challenged and destabilized the ‘Westphalian Order’, but also that it was constrained and socialized by that order.<sup>3</sup> Armstrong draws on the work of Hedley Bull, who argued that the French Revolution reintroduced universalistic and ideological struggles into the international system, in a manner unknown since the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>4</sup> James Mayall tempers Bull’s insights by citing the modernizing impact of the Revolution, arguing that it not only shaped and accelerated the development of nationalism and totalitarianism, but also that it sustained and developed the Atlantic constitutional tradition.<sup>5</sup>

The English School theorists have painted the international impact of the French Revolution in broad brushstrokes of considerable historical sweep. In contrast, this article focuses on the European international system immediately prior to, and after, the Revolution in order to theorize about the dynamics of structural change at its inception. My theoretical concerns are: first, how did the identities of the actors shape the international system’s structure; and secondly, how did the introduction of a radically alternative conception of political legitimacy influence the dynamics of the system? Stephen Walt has noted that the French Revolution altered ‘the balance of threat’, thus causing a European-wide war. I argue that the climate of threat was generated not simply by misperception or by changes in the material balance of power, but rather by the fact that the French articulation of popular sovereignty took on a holistic, messianic, and universalist rather than a more liberal, constitutional, and constrained form. The international climate contributed substantially to this radicalization of revolutionary ideas.

The usefulness of revisiting this historically well-trod ground lies in the lessons to be gleaned for international relations theory. In particular, tentative conclusions may be drawn about the ways in which the international environment might shape the policies and outlook of governments (for example, Islamic states) with conceptions of legitimacy distinct from the international norm (liberal democracy).

### **Political legitimacy and system structure**

Two main theoretical propositions animate this article: (1) the principles of political legitimacy constituting actor identities shape the international system’s structure; and (2) the introduction of a new concept of legitimacy, explicitly challenging old forms, may have systemic effects. Legitimacy is that realm of discourse articulating who has the right to rule and for what reasons. It is necessary to almost all political authority and thus to political power. Actor identities are shaped by principles of political legitimacy, and those principles help shape interaction among actors. These propositions are not meant to exclude the impact of other elements on state identity. Rather, I highlight the legitimacy factor because it has been neglected in international relations theorizing while the historical evidence suggests its significance.

<sup>3</sup> David Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), ch. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> James Mayall, ‘1789 and the Liberal Theory of International Society’, *Review of International Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 297–307.

For the great powers of the 18th century, legitimacy was dynastic—the ruling dynasty held the right to rule by blood, backed by divine sanction. Further, a stratified social order based on birth into a particular estate (nobility, clergy, or commons) underpinned all European monarchies. The monarch's relationship with the nobility and the clergy, especially, both facilitated and constrained resource mobilization (tax collection, revenue from trade, collection of compensations in alliance politics, etc.).<sup>6</sup> Though particular bargains between monarchs and estates, and the resources thereby mustered, varied from state to state, the underlying social structure of stratified orders prevailed through most of Europe. Thus we can posit a system-wide framework of shared knowledge about legitimacy and the social context in which legitimate rule was exercised.

The most elementary way in which these shared social structures shaped interstate relations was by delimiting the resources available to a monarch, most importantly for making various alliance commitments and engaging in warfare. Further, the old regime conceptions of legitimacy included expectations about monarchical behaviour in international as well as domestic affairs. In international relations theory, constructivist analysis focuses on the discursive construction of state identity in order to answer questions about the constitution of state capability and interest.<sup>7</sup> If distribution of capability, or even distribution of interests, are seen as key structural features of the system, then it is reasonable to posit that the content and meaning of capability and interest shape the structure of the system. For example, because of the stratified society underpinning the old regime, 18th century statesmen arguably had stronger interests in prestige and honour than found in international politics today. Thus a key system dynamic was not simply competition for material power, but competition for prestige as well. Modes of social organization and legitimation shape state interests and help determine the substance of competition between them.

The articulation and enactment of a new form of political legitimacy by the revolutionary French altered the system. The source of the change was the introduction of a heterogeneous element into a relatively homogeneous system. Kyong-Won Kim, and more recently Fred Halliday, have both focused on homogeneity vs. heterogeneity as systemic variables. Kim argues that ‘... as a result of the Revolution, international relations in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century were deprived of both ideological homogeneity and multipolarity of power ...’<sup>8</sup> Halliday notes that the very idea of international society is based on an assumption of ‘inter-societal and inter-state homology, in domestic values and organisation, i.e. on what has been termed “homogeneity” ...’<sup>9</sup> Halliday explicitly links homogeneity to homology in domestic structure; I apply Halliday's insight to the case at hand. Further, I argue that the international context may decisively shape the trajectory of a revolutionary state, and that a hostile environment leads to the accentuation of the

<sup>6</sup> See Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday, 1955); and William Doyle, *The Old European Order 1660–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy is what states make of it’; and Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Kyung-Won Kim, *Revolution and International System* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. xix.

<sup>9</sup> Fred Halliday, ‘International Society as Homogeneity: Burke, Marx, Fukuyama’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 21:3 (1992), p. 435.

differences between that state and the old system, making the differences seem insurmountable. In turn, however, if the revolutionary state performs well in international competition—as France arguably did—the heterogeneous element also becomes a model to be emulated.

The French enactment of popular sovereignty was rooted in Enlightenment thought, but in practice it took on a distinctive form: neither liberal nor pluralistic, but rather holistic, founded on a Rousseauian conception of General Will as a unity rather than a representation of a plurality of interests. The context of the European wars facilitated the selection of the holistic over a more moderate, pluralistic form of popular sovereignty (which in France would have been constitutional monarchy). This had crucial implications for both domestic and foreign policy, and it introduced a new template of statehood—nation-statehood—into the game of international relations. This template came to form a part of the fabric of international relations.

The French articulation of popular sovereignty made the French state powerful enough to pursue imperial aspirations, breaking the will of a series of coalitions lined up against it. According to the revolutionary French the principles underpinning the idea of popular sovereignty—of the rights of man, liberty, equality, and the rule of reason—were antithetical to the principles underpinning the old regime. Whatever the pretensions of ‘Enlightened Absolutism’, the manner and context in which the revolutionary French put Enlightenment ideas into practice made the ideas threatening to the system as a whole. Thus there were two dynamics set off by the enactment of popular sovereignty in France: a strengthening of the state and the generation of a new model to be emulated by others; and secondly, a direct engagement with, and challenge to, the legitimating foundations of the old regime. This significantly heightened the security dilemma in Europe after the French Revolution, both between states and within them; in many states domestic politics were destabilized as factions polarized according to their attitudes toward revolutionary ideas.

The transformative role of ideas in the period of the French Revolution can thus be characterized in at least four ways: (1) revolutionary ideas directly challenged the legitimacy of dynastic, monarchical regimes, and of the treaties and agreements between those regimes and old regime France; (2) revolutionary ideas ultimately strengthened the French state by facilitating a new level of social mobilization for warfare; (3) the demonstration effects of the mobilizing power of popular sovereignty and nationalism invited emulation, but emulation of a technique rooted in popular sovereignty and nationalism would also challenge the legitimacy of dynastic regimes (both from within and from without); and (4) the example of revolutionary France inspired imitators seeking not just military mobilization but republican revolution elsewhere. In all these dimensions, the rules of the game of European international politics were deeply disrupted and, despite the efforts of the Vienna Congress to generate a new *status quo* equilibrium which would check the disruptive spread of ‘liberal’ ideas, ultimately transformed.

The French Revolution accelerated the shift in the European system from the dynastic territorial states to the nation-state as the dominant model of political order.<sup>10</sup> Further, since the French Revolution demonstrated how the principle of

<sup>10</sup> See J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin, ‘Changing Norms and the Rules of Sovereignty’, *International Organization*, 48 (Winter 1994), pp. 107–130; and Rodney Bruce Hall, *Territorial and National Sovereigns: National Collective Identity and the Transformation of the International System*, 1996 Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

popular sovereignty could enhance state mobilization capacity, war could now become more destructive than before, especially when linked to messianic and imperialistic, rather than concrete territorial, objectives. It was a compelling example of both the dangers and the potentialities of nationalism harnessed to democratic populism. Emulation did not ensue immediately—some reasons why are touched on below—but the template generated in the Revolution proved durable and compelling.

### **Neorealist International Relations theory and the French Revolution**

Neo- or structural realists, with some exceptions, tend to be materialist in orientation, focusing on power but either denying or failing to explore the possibility that ideas may have some role in constituting power. Thus neorealists may not see the point in exploring the impact of political legitimacy on system structure. The concept of legitimacy gets lumped in with culture and ideology, neither of which bear much analytical weight. Even when realists recognize the historical importance of culture and ideology, as in Barry Posen's analysis of the French mass army and in Stephen Walt's historical account of the French Revolution, the limits imposed by structural realism on the use of culture and ideology as explanatory variables are quite strict.<sup>11</sup> For Posen, and arguably for Walt as well, ideology is merely a tool of a rational, instrumental state engaged in military competition. It follows that while the French domestic context may have been altered, and that such a transformation may be understood in cultural and ideological terms, the international realm nevertheless remained governed by the same rules as before, rules driving states to compete for power.

In contrast, I first argue that ideas about political legitimacy are not merely instruments of state power but also constitutive of state power and state identity. Indeed, the rational, instrumental state which Posen credits with using nationalism as a tool of mobilization may not have evolved at all without the impetus of Enlightenment ideas. After all, it was Enlightenment thought, not the conservative norms legitimating dynastic monarchy, which enshrined Reason (rather than tradition) as the governing principle of social order. Although monarchs attempted to rationalize their administrations by pursuing 'Enlightened Absolutism', such efforts generally failed to dislodge the privileged positions of the aristocracy and clergy, and thus rendered rationalization of administration incomplete.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, a revolution in conceptions of what constitutes political legitimacy—especially within one of the great powers—may precipitate a change in the rules of the game internationally. In practice, the strands of Enlightenment political thought concerned with historicity and progress towards the realization of the rights of man and the rule of reason inspired the revolutionary French in an attempt to structurally alter not just their own state but all of Europe. They did not succeed as

<sup>11</sup> Barry Posen, 'Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power', *International Security*, 18 (Fall 1993), pp. 80–124; Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), ch. 2.

<sup>12</sup> See Hilton L. Root, *The Fountain of Privilege* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), esp. chs. 3 and 4.

intended, but rather in an unintended way: the Revolution laid the groundwork for a states system made up of nation-states rather than dynastic states. Structural realism overlooks this development since the character of the units is not supposed to matter for the structure of the system.<sup>13</sup>

In an extension and modification of neorealist theory, Stephen Walt presents a general explanation, based on his balance of threat theory, for why revolutions cause war.<sup>14</sup> According to Walt, revolutions create windows of opportunity for increased security competition, new conflicts of interest, spirals of suspicion, and perceptions of offensive advantage; these factors all can heighten the level of threat, and thus lead to an increased likelihood of war. While Walt's narrative account of the French Revolution attends to ideology, perception, and the subjective nature of threats, such historical observations do not mar his commitment to neorealist theory.<sup>15</sup> As Michael Barnett has already noted in reference to Walt's earlier work on alliances, a tension exists in *Revolution and War* between the case studies and the theoretical conclusions drawn from them.<sup>16</sup> In discussing perceptions of intent (the critical variable in assessing the balance of threat), Walt notes:

These cases confirm that spirals of suspicion can arise from several distinct sources. The most obvious source is ideology: if the worldview of a revolutionary movement stipulates that certain regimes are inherently hostile, the new regime is likely to interpret the behaviour of foreign powers in the worst possible light.<sup>17</sup>

In this account ideology appears central to threat perception. However, a few pages later Walt appears to debunk his own insight in a challenge to what he calls 'critical theory'—apparently any theory attentive to the role of ideas. He argues that critical theory would 'anticipate both dramatic and enduring change, even in the face of strong external pressures', because of revolutionary changes in state identity. In contrast, he asserts:

Although each of these revolutions featured dramatic changes in discourse and each regime made idealistic claims about its own conduct, their utopian visions soon gave way to the familiar principles of realpolitik. Irrespective of their ideological pretensions, each of these states fought wars, formed alliances, made diplomatic compromises, signed treaties of commerce, and in general conformed to most (if not all) norms of international conduct, while continuing to espouse revolutionary doctrines of one sort or another.<sup>18</sup>

By Walt's account, ideology is important in generating threatening intentions and mutual misunderstanding, but unimportant in altering the fundamental fact of competition in anarchy. This implicit agreement with the classic realist tenet that there is no fundamental difference between war and peace in the international system begs the question as to what systemic significance we should attribute to variations in the balance of threat, insofar as ultimately, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

However these tensions are resolved, Walt does not do justice to 'critical theory' in assuming that it would automatically expect international relations to be about

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), ch. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Walt, *Revolution*, ch. 2; also see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Walt, *Revolution*, chs. 2 and 7.

<sup>16</sup> Barnett, 'Identity and Alliances in the Middle East', p. 406.

<sup>17</sup> Walt, *Revolution*, p. 334.

<sup>18</sup> Walt, *Revolution*, p. 341.

something other than war, alliances, trade, and so on. The point of contention is how such phenomena are to be understood and explained. The theoretical conclusions to be drawn from the French case indicate that principles of political legitimacy and conceptual frameworks shaping group identity and cohesion are not just salient for understanding peace and cooperation, but the conduct of war as well. Further, the indisputable fact that the French abandoned much of their idealism in the course of the wars does not warrant the more general conclusion that ‘ideology’ was inconsequential.<sup>19</sup> Betrayal or abandonment of revolutionary ideology may constitute evidence that such ideology did not guide behaviour at that particular time, but it does not follow that *no* ideology guided the behaviour, nor that an earlier articulation of revolutionary ideology had no consequences, intended or unintended. Although the French lost much of their messianic utopianism in the course of the wars, core revolutionary conceptions of popular sovereignty, liberty, equality, and promotion based on merit rather than rank endured—especially and significantly in the army.

The difference made by revolutionary ideas is significant enough to be analysed from a systemic perspective. Popular sovereignty in France heightened the ‘balance of threat’ in Europe by challenging the existing homogeneity of dynastic regimes and introducing a new form of legitimacy, experimented with on an unprecedented scale.<sup>20</sup> A deeper assessment of the dynamics of threat perception would surely profit from asking whether states have diverging or congruent conceptions of political legitimacy. A constructivist-inspired interpretation of the French Revolution and ensuing European wars should yield insight into the role of ideas in shaping the balance of threat. Further, such an exercise supports the ‘English School’s’ attentiveness to history and historical development, as pitted against realism’s emphasis on continuity.

### The *Ancien Régime* as international system

Eighteenth century international politics was not constrained primarily by the rule of international law or by some overarching sense of international community (though these did exist),<sup>21</sup> but rather by the internal constraints faced by dynastic monarchies and the systemic rules which enabled ‘power politics’ to take place in conjunction with these constraints. Thus homology in domestic structure also constituted the basis of shared norms, rules, and understandings about the conduct of inter-dynastic relations. William Doyle writes that ‘[e]very state in Europe except certain Swiss cantons recognized the existence of a nobility, a social group enjoying some form of legally established hereditary superiority’, and though the privileges of such status varied, ‘sword-bearing, coats of arms, and special standing at law were universal’.<sup>22</sup> Monarchs were bound by various intermediary bodies besides nobility,

<sup>19</sup> See Trygve R. Tholfsen, *Ideology and Revolution in Modern Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), chs. 1 and 5–7; and Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 1.

<sup>20</sup> On balance of threat see Walt, *Origins*, ch. 2.

<sup>21</sup> See Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order*.

<sup>22</sup> Doyle, *Old European Order*, pp. 73 and 74.

including parlements, clergy, towns, lawcourts, and guilds.<sup>23</sup> European thinkers and statesmen throughout the 18th century emphasized the contrast between European monarchy and ‘Oriental despotism’ by observing that the nobility, clergy, law-courts, guilds, and some bourgeois held significant legal rights and exemptions checking the monarch’s power.<sup>24</sup> In such an equation, the nobility had special stature as guardians of monarchical legitimacy. In Montesquieu’s words:

The most natural, intermediate, and subordinate power is that of the nobility. This in some measure seems to be essential to a monarchy, whose fundamental maxim is, no monarch, no nobility; no nobility, no monarch; but there may be a despotic prince . . . Abolish the privileges of the lords, the clergy and cities in a monarchy, *and you will soon have a popular state, or else a despotic government.*<sup>25</sup>

Constraints on state power were constraints on warmaking capacity. While war was a major part of pre-revolutionary European politics, it was limited by the resources available to dynastic monarchs; after the battles of the Reformation these resources no longer included the power of a ‘nation’ responding to a universalistic call. Kim argues that the materialistic, non-ideological outlook of 18th century monarchs limited their interests and objectives.<sup>26</sup> Grappling with privileges and exemptions was an essential part of this ‘materialistic’ outlook.<sup>27</sup>

What were the international rules of the game? To say that the interests and objectives of monarchs ruled the day is an empty proposition; we ought to look at their content and meaning. William Doyle lists the ends of old regime diplomacy and war as: dynasticism, glory and prestige, balance of power (nebulously defined by its contemporary proponents), expansion of trade, and *raison d’état*.<sup>28</sup> Paul Schroeder expands on this, summarizing the system’s rules under the following headings: ‘compensations; indemnities; alliances as instruments for accruing power and capability; *raison d’état*; honour and prestige; Europe as a family of states; and finally, the principle or goal of balance of power itself’.<sup>29</sup>

The crux of the system was the doctrine of *raison d’état*, but the substance and meaning of *raison d’état* in the 18th century differed essentially from its articulation in the 19th and 20th centuries. Schroeder notes that:

The motive and rule of all action was to advance the interests of the state—meaning first of all its power, security, and wealth, but also, almost equally, its monarch’s honour and prestige (*consideration*) and rank among other princes. Reason of state thus closely linked the state with its monarch and dynasty, but not with its people or nationality; that link was only beginning to emerge in some countries. Louis XIV’s idea of the state as dynastic patrimony (*L’état, c’est moi*) still prevailed in much of Europe . . .<sup>30</sup>

The link between *raison d’état* and the people or nation, much as it occupies Enlightenment *discourse*, only begins to emerge in modern European *practice* with

<sup>23</sup> Doyle, *Old European Order*, p. 224.

<sup>24</sup> George Rudé, *Revolutionary Europe 1783–1815* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), ch. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Vol. 1, Book II, ch. 4, translated by Thomas Nugent (New York: Hafner, 1949), p. 16, emphasis mine.

<sup>26</sup> Kim, *Revolution*, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> T. C. W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London: Longman, 1986), p. 85.

<sup>28</sup> Doyle, *Old European Order*, pp. 265–66.

<sup>29</sup> Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Schroeder, *Transformation*, p. 8.



the French Revolution. Prior to that, the relationship between state and nation was distinct rather than fused; the state meant the monarchical apparatus, the nation meant those who were governed by that apparatus.<sup>31</sup> Further, it was generally assumed that republican forms of authority tended toward instability and were only appropriate to small, mostly urban enclaves; republics were not and could not be considered significant players in great power politics.<sup>32</sup> Implicit in the rules of the game, then, were ideas about the identities of the major players—their constitutions were monarchical and dynastic rather than republican.

The balance of power was understood in such a way that compensations in territory, wealth, or prestige, were considered a *monarchical* right—they extended the monarch's holdings. Thus not only territorial extent but also prestige and wealth were part of the 'balancing' equation, and the balancing agents were dynasts, not nation-states. Neither contiguity nor national homogeneity were major priorities of 18th century monarchs, though territorial gains figured significantly.<sup>33</sup> But there were other means of righting perceived imbalances, including money, titles, and prestige.

Compensation could take a number of forms but, as Schroeder points out, 'One's own state must have compensations for gains made by any other state important to oneself; failure to get this signified defeat'. Indemnities meant that one's services as an ally, or the losses one accrued in assisting an ally, needed to be paid for. The idea of alliances as instruments for aggrandizement thus had some specific 18th century implications.

The reigning assumption was that the ally which was directly attacked or which chose to launch the war, as the principal, was expected to bear the brunt of the fighting. Its ally, the auxiliary, was obliged to render only the services specified in the alliance treaty, and was entitled to appropriate compensations and indemnities; if it did not receive them, its alliance obligations lapsed. This understanding naturally promoted the evasions of alliance commitments and sudden reversals of alliances for which the eighteenth-century was famous.<sup>34</sup>

In such a system, an ally was really just a different sort of adversary. This had significant implications for the anti-French coalitions, which could not agree on a guiding principle to give cohesion to their alliances.<sup>35</sup> The French, on the other hand, had discovered the imperfect but still superior cohesive potential of nationalism, merit-based promotions, and fraternal equality.

How were the systemic rules linked to the internal constraints on state power? Compensations, indemnities, and the struggle for aggrandizement reflected dynastic monarchs' chronic need for finances.<sup>36</sup> Resource mobilization was constrained internally by noble and clerical exemption and privilege, and thus monarchs frequently sought compensation externally. Concern with rank and prestige reflected the continued salience of orders and nobility; rank determined opportunity. Reason of

<sup>31</sup> Cobban, *In Search*, p. 203.

<sup>32</sup> Andreas Osiander, *The States-System of Europe 1640–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 208.

<sup>33</sup> Doyle, *Old European Order*, pp. 221–222.

<sup>34</sup> Schroeder, *Transformation*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>35</sup> R. H. Lord, *The Second Partition of Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1915), pp. 267–281; and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 122.

<sup>36</sup> Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p. 85.

state and balance of power as guiding principles were both assertions of the drive by European monarchs to disentangle themselves from the imperial and universalistic claims of Empire and Church. The development of a natural law (rather than divine law) basis for a law of nations supported this focus on reason of state.<sup>37</sup> Finally, territorial ambitions in the 18th century balance of power can be linked to the estates-based social order in which land was the primary source of wealth. This was a different sort of territoriality than that of nationalism. Clearly, both reason of state and balance of power have come to mean different things in a world of nation-states, and this observation reinforces the need to flesh out the substantive meaning to the terms sovereignty and national interest.

Albert Sorel sees the pre-revolutionary 18th century system as hopelessly corrupt and devious and denies that the French altered this; Paul Schroeder sees it as dangerous and self-destructive because it rendered some of the key players unable to provide for their security, and precluded a collective understanding of what would constitute a stable peace or an acceptable balance.<sup>38</sup> In both these views, the French Revolution was not responsible for the destruction of the old regime; the demise of the system was caused by competition inherent in old regime international politics. From this perspective, the collapse of the French state and ensuing social revolution could simply be seen as a symptom of destructive 18th century competition—one symptom among many.

But French mobilization for war both exposed the weaknesses in the existing system, and exploited them with the introduction of a new element: popular sovereignty harnessed by a large state mobilizing for war. It was in terms of the particular mix of popular sovereignty and European war, and not because of the idea of popular sovereignty in and of itself, that Cobban's 'unbridgeable gap' was created between France and the rest of the world.<sup>39</sup>

### **The altered state and the state of nature: the *Ancien Régime* undermined**

How did the French Revolution manage to produce a 'massive surge' in the power of the French state?<sup>40</sup> According to Furet, 'in democratic culture—the real innovation of the French Revolution—and in the transfer of legitimacy—its very essence—the traditional image of absolute power was somehow reconstituted'.<sup>41</sup> But the Revolution also betrayed its democratic ideals, even though the surge in power would not have been possible without them. In a profound and violent way, the French revolution reconstituted shared understandings of what was possible in politics.

<sup>37</sup> See Francis Stephen Ruddy, *International Law in the Enlightenment* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana, 1975), pp. 13–38.

<sup>38</sup> Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, 15th edn. (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1919), vol. 1, p. 8; Schroeder, *Transformation*.

<sup>39</sup> See note #1.

<sup>40</sup> T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, translated by Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, c. 1978), p. 77.

Military expansion spread these new conceptions widely even where it failed to enact them; soldiers spread ideas among occupied populations.<sup>42</sup>

Initially, however, it appeared as if France's revolution would weaken her and leave her ripe for predatory 18th century struggles.<sup>43</sup> The Duke of Leeds, foreign secretary under Pitt, wrote after the fall of the Bastille:

I defy the ablest heads in England to have planned, or its whole Wealth to have purchased, a Situation so fatal to its Rival, as that to which France is now reduced by her own intestine Commotions.<sup>44</sup>

The noble émigrés fleeing to European capitals agitated for immediate war, promising that the new regime was weak and would easily tumble. This was crucial to establishing the climate of predatory hostility, especially in Prussia and also, though more hesitantly, in Austria.

On the French side misperception also prevailed, for as Blanning notes the emerging leaders of the Revolution assumed that the old regime powers were 'teetering on the brink of collapse and that one tap on the door would demolish the whole edifice . . .'<sup>45</sup> In a classic case of paper tiger syndrome, the French were simultaneously over-optimistic about old regime weakness and over-pessimistic about old regime hostility.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the ideological divisions between revolutionary France and old regime Europe produced, not ideological war, but profound misperception which facilitated a slide into war. The war then 'revolutionized the revolution', and supported the nationalist and populist aspects of the Revolution against moderating influences.

Though they did not topple as easily as some revolutionaries hoped they would, the European powers did show themselves incapable of forming a stable coalition against French expansion, precisely because of the way 18th century international politics operated. Allies jealously guarded against one party gaining more than the other, even before the imagined spoils were conquered. Nor were they able to settle on common war aims.<sup>47</sup> The environment was ripe for defections and, unlike Louis XVI, the revolutionaries were now able to exploit the weaknesses in the international system. Because the revolutionary French embarked on an expansionist path by first declaring war on Austria, the most traditional of rivals, many scholars (especially realists) have denied the importance of ideology.<sup>48</sup> Were not the French simply playing the old power political game? But this was power politics on a new scale; the French were shedding old constraints and, by attempting to institute popular sovereignty and espousing a universalistic cause, remaking the image of Europe from a society of dynastic states to something more like a state of nature. This was

<sup>42</sup> See Blanning, *French Revolution in Germany*; and Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>43</sup> Sorel, *L'Europe*, vol. 1; Blanning, *Origins*, ch. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Blanning, *Origins*, p. 132.

<sup>45</sup> Blanning, *Origins*, p. 74.

<sup>46</sup> Blanning, *Origins*, ch. 3; Walt, *Revolution and War*, ch. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Schroeder, *Transformation*, chs. 3–4; Blanning, *Origins*; Lord, *Second Partition*, ch. 11.

<sup>48</sup> But see William H. Sewell, Jr., 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in T. C. W. Blanning (ed.), *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

done through the dual mechanism of what Anne Sa'adah has called 'exclusionary politics' at home and mobilization against foreign enemies abroad.<sup>49</sup>

The Revolution was not born radical. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) lays out the doctrine of inherent equality, disavows aristocratic privilege and restricts the powers of the king, declaring that sovereignty lies in the nation.<sup>50</sup> But it describes a constitutional monarchy, because the initial and more moderate reformers themselves subscribed to the common understanding that republicanism was only suitable for small states; they focused instead on the English model.<sup>51</sup> The moderates were not long in power. Simon Schama captures the essence of the domestic rift:

Mounier and the 'English' party were heirs to Montesquieu and, behind that, an Aristotelian tradition of seeing in diversity, divisions and balances a satisfying equilibrium. Their opponents, whether arguing from neoclassical rigour or from Rousseau-like consistency, were holists. For them, the *patrie* was indivisible, and they responded to charges that they were creating a new despotism of the many by retorting that the new, single sovereignty was a morally reborn animal that could have nothing in common with the impurities of the old.<sup>52</sup>

Higonnet suggests that the French bourgeoisie could have allied with reform-minded nobility and taken the Revolution on a moderate course. In fact, this is how things started. But in Higonnet's words: '... when the entente broke down in the autumn of 1791, the Revolutionary bourgeoisie, true to its communitarian principles, altered its course and gradually sacrificed the rights of nobles in an opportunistic effort to please the crowd.'<sup>53</sup>

By confiscating church lands and routing the nobility and its property, the pre-thermidorian revolution cleared away significant restraints on state power. But these were also the old sinews of state power; what was to replace them? The state was reconceived as the nation, the people, the *patrie*. The process of reconstituting the state was difficult and complex; the early struggles to put an effective army in the field are but one example of these difficulties.<sup>54</sup> But the victory of the holist perspective on popular sovereignty had significant impact on how France conducted her foreign affairs, not only because it perpetuated a contentious and unstable pattern in domestic politics—what Sutherland has called the 'politics of insurrection'<sup>55</sup>—but also because it shaped how the French viewed themselves *vis à vis* other European states. As Rousseau had argued and key revolutionary leaders came to believe, the general will had to be one will, not the balance of many

<sup>49</sup> Anne Sa'adah, *The Shaping of Liberal Politics in Revolutionary France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 13–19; Mona Ozouf, 'War and Terror in French Revolutionary Discourse, 1792–1794,' *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), pp. 579–97.

<sup>50</sup> D. M. G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 119; Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1989), ch. 8; Patrice Higonnet, *Class, Ideology, and the Rights of Nobles During the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Schama, *Citizens*, p. 444.

<sup>53</sup> Higonnet, *Rights of Nobles*, p. 258; also see Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963), pp. 106–107.

<sup>54</sup> See Jean-Paul Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution*, translated by R. R. Palmer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); and John Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

<sup>55</sup> Sutherland, *France*, p. 192ff.

individual wills, or interests. Leaders had to speak for the whole people, and if they did not, they had to be removed from power. Public good and public virtue were to dominate over private interest. Such a system had no mechanisms for integrating opposing interests. Those in opposition were against the public good. French revolutionary practice displayed a persistent aversion to ‘factionalism’ of any sort, and this inhibited the formation of parties and made the idea of a loyal opposition impossible.<sup>56</sup>

The holistic turn made one political issue paramount: Who spoke for the people? Who articulated the general will? Politics became a struggle to be the voice of the people—a struggle carried out by means of oratory and, increasingly, insurgency and terror. Furet notes:

... even during the apparently ‘institutional’ phase of the Revolution, when France had a rather widely accepted Constitution, every leader—from Lafayette to Robespierre—and every group took the risk of extending the Revolution in order to eliminate all competitors instead of uniting them to build new national institutions.<sup>57</sup>

But opposition could not be eliminated. Economic difficulties inherited from the old regime and intensified by revolutionary upheaval raised discontent, whether it was popular concern about the price of bread, sympathy with the plight of the clergy, or liberal concern with property rights and the inflationary spirals brought on by the printing of *assignats* (paper money). Counter-revolution was endemic, especially as moderate reforms foundered and the revolution became radicalized.

Since a number of articulate, enlightened nobles had put their weight on the scales of moderate constitutional reform, the progressive vilification of the aristocracy made moderate reforms increasingly difficult to legislate and legitimate.<sup>58</sup> Once the people, or the revolutionary ‘crowd’, was mobilized it was difficult to put the genie back into the bottle, though successive Assemblies tried their best. No matter how much political capital a particular cadre was able to derive from the masses, or *sans culottes*, it was always an uneasy and volatile relationship that threatened to slip from the ruling group’s control. Furet notes that ‘[l]egitimacy (and victory) . . . belonged to those who symbolically embodied the people’s will and were able to monopolize the appeal to it.’<sup>59</sup> The institution building critical to the sustained enactment and maintenance of revolutionary legislation came later, with the Directory and Napoleon. This marked the end of revolutionary politics in that the state reasserted itself over the nation. But by the time this had happened, the state was entirely reconstituted; the representatives of the intermediary bodies which had simultaneously checked state power and legitimated monarchical authority were exiled or wiped out.

Mobilization for war shaped, and was shaped by revolutionary politics. In 1791 Brissot’s faction in the National Assembly succeeded in explicitly linking the fear of counter-revolutionary activity sparked by Louis XVI’s flight to Varennes with émigré agitation, and in posing war as the solution to both problems.<sup>60</sup> The French

<sup>56</sup> Lynn Hunt, D. Lansky, P. Hanson, ‘The Failure of the Liberal Republic in France, 1795–1799’, *Journal of Modern History*, 51 (1979):734–59.

<sup>57</sup> Furet, *Interpreting*, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> Schama, *Citizens*, p. 293; Higonnet, *Rights of Nobles*, ch. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Furet, *Interpreting*, p. 48.

<sup>60</sup> Blanning, *Origins*, p. 99.

nation was visualized as a republic of virtuous citizen-soldiers charged with fighting enemies at home and abroad. But such a republic could not fight limited wars for limited aims. Just as revolutionary leaders either embodied the general will or failed to do so, in which case they were traitors, the Republic of Virtue could only fight for total victory or total defeat. There was no way to accommodate or recognize the legitimacy of opposing interests, or interests of outside powers; opposition was by definition illegitimate. As Furet puts it:

The term ‘democratic politics’ does not refer here to a set of rules or procedures designed to organise, on the basis of election results, the functioning of authority. Rather, it designates a system of beliefs that constitutes the new legitimacy born of the Revolution, and according to which the ‘people’, in order to establish the liberty and equality that are the objectives of collective action, *must break its enemies’ resistance*.<sup>61</sup>

Consequently, the values of the Revolution ‘were at stake in every conflict’,<sup>62</sup> including foreign wars. Populist modes of legitimation left the status of all treaties adhered to by monarchical France uncertain, since all princes were viewed as illegitimate and subject to revolutionary challenge from their own peoples, perhaps aided by the enlightened French.<sup>63</sup>

The power of nobility and clergy, and other ‘feudal’ institutions and laws may have been eroding already under Enlightened despotism,<sup>64</sup> but in Blanning’s view the feudal order, epitomized by the German principalities, was decimated by the French. ‘Far from being the gale which blew away the desiccated feudal leaves . . . the French Revolution is better likened to a chain-saw, which felled an ancient, gnarled, but still flourishing oak.’<sup>65</sup> Whether or not France can be blamed for the destruction of international law in the 18th century (contemporary critics of the revolution certainly thought so), the old regime was subject to unprecedented pressure from revolutionary France. French mobilization was made possible by the unleashing of the idea of popular sovereignty and the revolutionary political dynamics that ensued. Without that principle, it would have been impossible to legitimate and execute the mass dispossession of nobility and clergy as constitutive orders of the state (as it was, the assault on the clergy in particular posed severe domestic problems), nor would it have been possible to mobilize such a large army.

As the wars progressed, liberation of peoples and ‘sister republics’ gave way to direct administration with the co-optation of local elites and, increasingly, annexation. The inability of the Convention to resolve economic crises at home made conquered (‘liberated’) territories ripe targets for economic exploitation. After the final overthrow of the monarchy and the declaration of a Republic in September 1792, a period of terror and revolutionary dictatorship ensued, which ‘. . . helped galvanize the war effort and save France, at the cost of raising the ideological stakes of the struggle and making it more difficult for France to end the conflict and easier and more tempting to expand it.’<sup>66</sup> Though initial French victories were more

<sup>61</sup> Furet, *Interpreting*, p. 27; my emphasis.

<sup>62</sup> Furet, *Interpreting*, p. 29.

<sup>63</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution from its Origins to 1793* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 196–7.

<sup>64</sup> See Rudé, *Revolutionary Europe*, ch. 2; DeTocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, p. 57.

<sup>65</sup> Blanning, *French Revolution in Germany*, p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Schroeder, *Transformation*, p. 103.

attributable to allied incompetence and hesitation than French skill, the internal mobilization of 1793, accompanied by the height of the Terror, sent the French on the road to real victories. According to Schroeder, 'late 1793 marked a point where France surpassed its rivals in its ability to recruit and train large masses of men and organize its economy for war.'<sup>67</sup> As Schama observes: 'Militarized nationalism was not, in some accidental way, the unintended consequence of the French Revolution: it was its heart and soul.'<sup>68</sup>

The French revitalized the classical concept of citizen warfare but gave it a new basis in the idea that citizens were fighting for the universal values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The *levée en masse* of 1793, though unevenly implemented and widely resisted, vastly increased the manpower available to the army.<sup>69</sup> While most authors acknowledge that the French revolutionary armies revolutionized warfare in general, John Lynn's study of the Army of the North leads him to conclude that the *combat effectiveness* of French troops was the critical factor. This effectiveness rested on the motivation of the soldier, motivation based on a new sense of purpose. 'A transformation of the nature of the government had widely redefined the relationship of the soldier to the people.'<sup>70</sup> Although resistance and desertion remained endemic, revolutionary principles got through to the army, and the taste of victory solidified those principles. The army's success, argues Schroeder, 'made some revolutionary ideals (fraternity, nationalism, social equality, careers open to talents, and sacrifice for the general will) take root more deeply and durably in the new army than anywhere else in French political and social life.' Further, it 'promoted a strong vested interest in continued war.' Such an interest became a national one, because the revolutionary governments had failed to reorganize the national economy enough to sustain a prolonged war drive. 'Yet one regime after another relied on [the army] not only for security against foreign and domestic enemies, but even more for the contributions and loot from abroad to sustain it financially at home.'<sup>71</sup>

After Robespierre fell from power in July of 1794, the purposes of the government and those of the army became increasingly divergent. The inability of the Directory to control its generals, in particular the spectacularly successful Napoleon in Italy, set the pattern for the immediate future. As Napoleon's coup demonstrated, the French state was now constituted more by the army than by any other institution. These developments made the construction of a stable peace ultimately dependent on complete defeat of France, and revolutionary principles came to be seen as warlike and destabilizing. From this perspective, Napoleon was an extension rather than a perversion of the Revolution.<sup>72</sup> Though he perverted its democratic ideals, and to some degree succeeded in restoring the concept of noble orders if not many of the actual noble families, he effectively tapped the Revolution's martial spirit and France's newly-mobilized resources.

Despite the understandable temptation to lump the revolutionary French in with other practitioners of power politics, the French introduced a new dimension into

<sup>67</sup> Schroeder, *Transformation*, p. 137.

<sup>68</sup> Schama, *Citizens*, p. 858.

<sup>69</sup> Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution*; Lynn, *Bayonets*; also see Posen, 'Mass Army'.

<sup>70</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets*, p. 64.

<sup>71</sup> Schroeder, *Transformation*, pp. 137–8.

<sup>72</sup> This is Georges Lefebvre's basic thesis in *Napoleon from 18 Brumaire to Tilsit, 1799–1807*, translated by Henry F. Stockhold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), introduction.

power politics—popular sovereignty. That dimension extended the scope and intensity of power politics at home and power politics between states. Once Napoleon took the reins, the forces unleashed in the French articulation of popular sovereignty were harnessed to imperialist ends. But the idea of popular sovereignty, with its corollaries of natural equality and the rights of man, was critical to the processes of wartime mobilization and concomitant reconstitution of the French state. Under Napoleon the state regained control over the people, and became instrumental in mobilizing nationalist sentiment for the purposes of *realpolitik*, as Barry Posen convincingly argues.<sup>73</sup> But Napoleon only rode the wave, he did not invent it. No instrumental agent invented revolutionary power; it was the product of the particular conjunction of circumstances just described.

### European reverberations

For Edmund Burke, good European governments existed in organic symbiosis with a broader European culture:

Nothing is more certain than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners and with civilization have, in this European world of ours, depended upon two principles and were, indeed, the result of both combined: I mean the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion. The nobility and the clergy . . . kept learning in existence, even in the midst of arms and confusions, and whilst governments were rather in their causes than formed.<sup>74</sup>

By annihilating the nobility and undermining the clergy, the French Revolution removed—in one large and important state—the constraints on state power which Burke found so civilizing.

The argument that the French Revolution swept away intermediary bodies and thereby enhanced state power is hardly novel; it has a lineage in Marxist interpretations of the French revolution, and has been taken up by historical sociologists such as Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly.<sup>75</sup> But the significance of this development for international relations remains understudied. Reconstitution of the legitimating foundations and structure of the French state, from a monarchy rooted in an Estates system to popular sovereignty, also entailed a reconstitution of the purposes of the state. Reconstitution of state purpose in turn altered the overall balance of threat. The idea that the state and the nation should become wedded in one general will (and ‘national interest’), and that it alone had the power to command absolute allegiance, was re-invented in this period.<sup>76</sup> By altering traditional ideas of what the state was, and was capable of, the revolution also lent

<sup>73</sup> Posen, ‘Mass army’.

<sup>74</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, edited by J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> For a good historiographical summary see Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, ch. 1. On state power see Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Skocpol and Kestenbaum, ‘Mars Unshackled’, and Charles Tilly, ‘State and Counterrevolution in France’, both in Ferenc Fehér (ed.), *The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>76</sup> See Baker, *Inventing*, ch. 9.



significant weight to the idea that international politics was a state of nature. The only pre-revolutionary set of wars within the European system that compare in scope and destructiveness were the post-Reformation wars of religion. Indeed, the universalistic discourse of the religious wars and that of the French revolutionaries bear comparison.<sup>77</sup>

Arguably, then, it took the French Revolution to fully bring the ‘state of nature’ concept to fruition within the post-Reformation European states system (relations with non-European peoples can be characterized differently, and may conform more frequently to the state of nature analogy). Nasty as 18th century wars were, they were not generally plagued with a player who denied the legitimate existence of the others. The pre-revolutionary game was more constrained and rule-bound than it became in the 19th century, with nation-states throwing themselves at each other in zero-sum crusades. Georges Lefebvre’s comment on the Austrian Archduke’s conduct of the War of 1809 captures the distinction:

Archduke Charles had great qualities, such as diligence, prudence, and coolness; but he was more effective in defence than attack, and too much wedded to traditional strategy which treated war as, in Niebuhr’s phrase, ‘a game of chess’, and aimed not at destroying the enemy but merely at conquering a geographical objective . . .<sup>78</sup>

The mutation of the popular sovereignty principle into militarized nationalism and imperialism taught an important lesson to European statesmen about how societies could be mobilized for war. Scharnhorst, who by 1806 had emerged as a leading proponent of military reform in a humiliated Prussia, had argued as early as 1796 that ‘we shall be victorious when one learns to appeal, like the Jacobins, to the spirit of the people.’<sup>79</sup> None of these attempts proved immediately viable. Efforts to emulate French military innovations in Austria and Prussia were limited by the constraints of political legitimacy in those states—they could not afford to unleash the popular will and still survive in their existing forms, especially the multinational Austrian empire. Nevertheless, revolutionary ideas penetrated the system, though neither in accordance with France’s initial revolutionary intent, nor in accordance with Napoleonic pretensions to graft dynasticism and empire onto revolutionary populism.

The solidification of the structure of the European states system into a few great powers was spurred along, Gunther Rothenberg argues, by the revolutionary innovations in mobilization and by the European-wide effort to defeat Napoleon: ‘. . . the increased reliance on mass armies, supplied by the production of mass industry, led to a progressive concentration of military power in a few major states.’<sup>80</sup> This consolidation was accompanied by a change in the rules of international politics, which Paul Schroeder’s work details. The great powers became more interested in the preservation of intermediary states, in attempting to settle disputes peacefully through the concert system, and in a more consciously equilibrated balance of power, rather than the old aggrandizing, purely competitive

<sup>77</sup> See Jeremy Black, *British Foreign Policy in an Age of Revolutions 1783–1793* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 527; and James Mayall, ‘1789’.

<sup>78</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *Napoleon, from Tilsit to Waterloo*, translated by J. E. Anderson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 54.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 190.

<sup>80</sup> Rothenberg, *Art of Warfare*, p. 165.

notion. Because of their negative experience with attempting to hold together an anti-French coalition, European statesmen came, for a time, to consciously adopt a systemic view, and to articulate the conditions for a stable European peace.<sup>81</sup>

Statesmen in Austria and Russia, in a conservative backlash, also came to fear the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment as the cause of the collapse of the European system; in some ways they were right. A conservative realism based on Concert diplomacy came to supplement the failed cohesiveness of dynastic legitimacy and shared European civilization so important to Burke. Dynastic legitimacy and common culture had proven insufficient to check revolutionary and Napoleonic France; perhaps a more coherent international institution like the Concert would do the trick instead.

On the other hand, one of the most enduring and problematic legacies of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars was the acceleration of nationalism. In particular, the Revolution gave decisive impetus to the idea that nation should be wedded to state, and that this was, as Max Weber has argued, the highest repository of collective value. National self-assertion could thus be seen as an end in itself; resulting in an international 'state of nature'. This emerging trend undermined the achievements of the Concert of Europe; it certainly outlived them. Lefebvre writes:

. . . it was natural that the diplomats of the *Ancien Régime* should be proud of their work, since they had divided the various lands and 'souls', according to their cherished principle of equilibrium. For that very reason, the work of the congress ran counter to the new European tendencies, for it completely ignored the feelings of nationality which the revolutionary wars had aroused.<sup>82</sup>

That much of European nationalist feeling emerged as a reaction to French occupation does not invalidate the argument that France provided both the negative impetus (occupation) and the basic outlines of a model—nationalism wedded to the state—through which reaction could be articulated.

The French Revolution also demonstrated the virtues and vices of state centralization by achieving an entirely new level of centralization, a level which ironically surpassed that achieved by French 'absolutism'. While the rationalization of administrative structures was already well underway in many enlightened monarchies, the revolution and Napoleonic rule greatly accelerated the process.<sup>83</sup> Centralization was spurred on by the eradication of intermediary noble and clerical bodies, as it became increasingly evident that eroding the power of corporate estates could enhance the wealth and power of the state. The French were a model to be emulated in this respect, and where they had conquered, they left a template on which to base newly-centralized regimes.

Thus we return to Furet's insight that democratic politics, articulated in the French version of popular sovereignty, brought about a new form of absolute power. This in turn made international relations, in the ensuing wars, more like a state of nature. The restructuring of international politics in the Concert involved conscious resistance to the new form of political legitimacy that had so disrupted the old order, and to the problematic elements in the 18th century international system which had failed to respond adequately to French expansion. Yet while they worked

<sup>81</sup> Schroeder, *Transformation*; Osiander, *States-System*.

<sup>82</sup> Lefebvre, *Napoleon, from Tilsit to Waterloo*, p. 357.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Tilly, 'State and Counter-revolution in France'.

to curb 'revolutionary' ideas and establish a stable equilibrium, leaders were at the same time grasping their significance, especially for the conduct of war.

## Conclusion

The surge in power brought on by the Revolution was not simply the result of intentional *realpolitik*; it was a consequence of the deployment of Enlightenment ideas in the socio-political context of late 18th-century France, and within the broader context of 18th century dynastic competition. There was no 'rational actor' to guide this process through its early stages, let alone engineer the results; neo-realist explanations for the revolutionary surge in power are weakened in this case by their view of the state as an instrumental agent. The international context of predation and misperception honed revolutionary ideas into their holistic, messianic, universalist form, heightening the level of threat in Europe. New possibilities also nested within that threat. European allies, though slow in mobilizing, nevertheless pushed back French hegemonic pretensions. But at the level of discourse and future example the dual legacy of nationalism and universalism proved far more durable than French hegemony itself.

In stressing the continuities of anarchic competition, neorealism tends to short-circuit our ability to interpret historical transformations. Walt's modification of neo-realism emphasizes how human intentions shape threat perception. But it is an open question whether the analytical framework of neorealism can, with logical consistency, accommodate the notion of human intentions (and concomitant ideas of human subjectivity and inter-subjectivity) so integral to the balance of threat idea, while still retaining its emphasis on the ultimate, objective continuities of anarchic competition.

The case studied here supports and develops the proposition that principles of political legitimacy which help constitute state identities are linked to domestic social structures, and that this socio-political complex determines the resources a state may mobilize in its interactions with others. To the degree that they are shared, such principles also determine the degree to which states recognize and understand each others' identities and interests, thereby shaping the rules of international interaction. Whether or not international conflict takes place within a common social framework can mean the difference between limited war for limited aims, or unlimited war for unlimited aims.

A broader lesson to be drawn from this case is that while states or political groups which articulate deviant conceptions of political legitimacy generate opportunities for heightened conflict,<sup>84</sup> whether this potential is actualized depends critically on the existing 'rules of the game', which shape how other states respond. The logic of an idea is rarely realizable in only one pattern. There are at least two ways to dismiss 'ideology'—either by denying its significance, or by characterizing it as monolithic and prone to a single sweeping interpretation. Both approaches are mistaken, in my view. Enlightenment ideas were enacted in a variety of ways in the 18th century; the French pursued one path among many. A predatory climate may channel ideology

<sup>84</sup> Walt, *Revolution and War*, conclusion.

down a more divisive, exclusionist path than might otherwise be taken. Such a lesson could be applied to the contemporary international community's treatment of Islamic regimes, for example; the tendency to dismiss 'fundamentalism' as a monolithic ideology is just as erroneous as the tendency to discount its importance. Whether or not regimes which seek to carve out alternative conceptions of political identity and legitimacy in an international system currently dominated by democratic capitalist powers will foment a 'clash of civilizations' à la Samuel Huntington, the ideological nature of such challenges should not be written off, as it may substantially shape the actors' responses to conflict, as well as determining the degree of mutual misperception which arises when two parties fail—or even refuse—to understand each others' identities and interests. Mutual understanding may not automatically lead to peace, but mutual blindness and hostility may increase the likelihood and intensity of collision.