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МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ НАПОЛЕОНОВСКОЙ ЭПОХИ:**ОБЗОР ПРОБЛЕМЫ****Доминик Ливен (Кембридж, Великобритания)*

В статье рассматриваются международные отношения Наполеоновской эпохи с позиции продолжительности во времени и глобальности последствий. В статье также широко интерпретируется понятие «международные отношения», которое рассматривается не только с позиции дипломатии и межгосударственных отношений, но и с позиции оценки войны и источников власти в исследуемой эпохе. Широта анализа в перспективе имеет явные преимущества. Сравнительный подход может открыть новые проблемы и интерпретации. Он также может оспаривать допущения и обогащать дебаты среди специалистов в любой исторической области. Поскольку большинство исторических источников – письменные (и исторические источники о войне, в частности), кроме того еще и национальные и иногда даже националистические, то глобальные перспективы и международные сопоставления вдвойне полезны.

*В статье автор определяет, какие ключевые проблемы и основные тенденции в подробностях необходимо рассказать и выделить для понимания истории. Как и во всех подходах, здесь в широком осмыслении, есть свои проблемы. Даже лучшие сравнения никогда не смогут заменить подробных местных знаний на основе изучения источников. Глобальный анализ неизбежно таит в себе опасность при написании истории в *longue duree* (когда читающему о прошлом в настоящем навязываются повествования, в которых узаконены современные предположения и идеологии). Важный момент для историка, по мнению автора, быть в курсе этих опасностей.*

Наполеоновские войны историки часто называют эпохой революций. Хотя точные границы отличаются, эта эпоха, как правило, включает в себя французскую и (обычно) американскую революции, с одной стороны, и «первую» промышленную революцию, – с другой стороны. Вместе эти революции важны тем, что в это время были созданы основы современности (другими словами, основы либерального капитализма, либерально-демократической идеологии) и грамотные, урбанизированные, богатые массовые общества, которые принимают их, чтобы создать наиболее благоприятную обстановку.

Эпоха революций, как правило, рассматривается в качестве разделительной линии между ранним Новым временем и Современной эпохой. Вопрос напрашивается сам: «Что произошло в эпоху Наполеоновских революций? Эффектный вираж принятых международных отношений или решающий сдвиг в сторону современности и разрыв с прошлым?»

Основной аргумент в данной работе заключается в том, что пока серьезных изменений не произошло в международных отношениях, и особенно в войне, в целом, элементов преемственности больше, чем перемен.

Дальнейший вывод этой статьи состоит в том, что хотя в долгосрочной перспективе силы, порожденные французской и промышленной революциями были значительны и привели к

уничтожению в Европе старого режима, тем не менее, не стоит недооценивать ни сил, а иногда и интеллекта, с которыми старый режим приводит к столкновению этих сил в Наполеоновской эпохе.

Ключевые слова: *Наполеоновская эпоха, французская и промышленная революции, международные отношения, современная эпоха, либерально-демократическая идеология.*

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE NAPOLEONIC ERA: THE LONG VIEW

Abstract

*This paper will look at international relations in the Napoleonic era from a perspective which is both long in time and global in breadth. It will also interpret the words ‘international relations’ rather freely, investigating not just diplomacy and inter-state relations but also warfare and the sources of power in this era. Such broad perspectives have clear advantages. Comparative approaches can open up new issues and interpretations. They can also challenge the assumptions and enrich the debates among specialists in any historical field. Since most history-writing – and the history of war in particular – is still national and sometimes even nationalist, global perspectives and international comparisons are doubly useful. Attempting to determine what were the key issues and fundamental trends within a mass of detail is essential to the telling and understanding of history. Like all approaches, however, the broad sweep has its problems. Even the best comparisons can never replace detailed local knowledge based on mastery of the sources. Global perspectives can be little more than vapid bows to contemporary fashion. They can also feed into an inevitable danger when writing history in the *longue duree*, which is to read the present back into the past and to impose master narratives which legitimize contemporary assumptions and ideologies. The great point, in my opinion, is for the historian to be aware and explicit about these dangers.*

The Napoleonic wars occurred in the middle of what historians often call the era of revolutions¹ [1]. Though precise boundaries differ, this era is generally taken to include the French and (usually) American revolutions on the one hand, and the ‘First’ Industrial Revolution on the other. Together these revolutions are seen to have created the foundations of modernity: in other words liberal capitalism, liberal-democratic ideology and the literate, urbanized, wealthy mass societies which are taken to be its most favorable setting. To put things crudely, the era of revolutions has generally been seen as the dividing-line between the early modern and modern ages. The question therefore more or less asks itself whether the spectacular turn taken by international relations – and in particular by warfare – in the age of Napoleon represents itself a decisive shift towards modernity and break with the past. A basic argument in this paper is that while major changes did occur in international relations and especially in warfare, on the whole the elements of continuity were greater than those of change. A further conclusion of this chapter is that although in the long term the forces unleashed by the French and Industrial revolutions were of immense power and destroyed Europe’s old regime, one should nevertheless not underestimate either the strength or sometimes the intelligence with which the old regime confronted these forces in the Napoleonic era² [2–5].

¹ For a discussion of the term and an attempt to apply it in the global context see: David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c.1760-1840* (Houndmills, 2010).

² On the general issue of the arrival of modernity see Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914* (Oxford, 2004). On international relations see Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics*

Keywords

Napoleonic era, French and Industrial revolutions, international relations, modern ages, liberal-democratic ideology.

The lack of fundamental change is most obvious when one addresses the impact of economic change – in other words the Industrial Revolution – on war and international relations in this era. It is by now a long time since any serious historian has interpreted the French Revolution as the political counterpart of the triumph of the capitalist bourgeoisie in the economic sphere. Economic historians are in any case often now inclined to play down the word ‘revolution’ as regards turn-of-the-century Britain’s economy. They emphasise instead the longer-term development of British trade and consumption, and stress that the really revolutionary shifts in power-generation, communications and industry came in the first half of the nineteenth century³ [6]. Clearly this was true as regards those sectors of industry most closely related to warfare. The basic point about war in the Napoleonic era was that it was pre-industrial and in that sense pre-modern. The Industrial Revolution’s impact on weapons, communications and logistics lay just over the horizon. The horse was still the key to reconnaissance and transport during military campaigns, to moving the guns on the battlefield, and to the cavalry’s pursuit and destruction of a defeated foe⁴ [7–8]. Weapons and equipment had not changed fundamentally in the century before Waterloo. This en-

sured that close-order infantry and cavalry formations remained the key to delivering the shock and the firepower which alone could win battles. Light infantry were growing in importance but the emphasis put on them by some historians can itself reflect ideological assumptions. Far too often the light infantryman is assumed to be the citizen-in-arms. His politically inspired initiative and individualism is juxtaposed to the dumb servility which supposedly kept unwilling conscripts or mercenaries in the closely packed ranks of monarchy’s armies. This is a very dubious description of the hard-bitten light infantry veterans who were the pick of Wellington’s army, let alone of their Russian jaeger equivalents, whose best regiments had honed their skills as light infantrymen during years of campaigning against those masters of the raid and the ambush, the Ottomans⁵ [9].

The debate over the citizen-jaeger belongs to the wider question of the French Revolution’s impact on international relations in the period 1792–1815. Clearly, in the early years of the Revolutionary wars ideology mattered on both sides. Support for the French counter-revolution was, for example, an important element in British strategy. But geopolitics and state interest always took precedence. Britain went to war to keep the French out of the Low Countries, not to destroy

1763-1848 (Oxford, 1994). On warfare see: Roger Chickering and Stig Forster, eds., *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815* (Cambridge, 2010). For an interesting opposite view which stresses the revolutionary nature of Napoleonic-era warfare see: David A. Bell, *The First Total War. Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare* (London, 2007).

³ A recent useful survey of the Industrial Revolution is Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁴ Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon. The Struggle for Europe 1807-1814* (London, 2009), 7-8. Louis Di-Marco, *War Horse: A History of the Military Horse and Rider* (London, 2008).

⁵ Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 114-7. Mark Urban, *Rifles* (London, 2003).

the revolution. Catherine II proclaimed her adherence to the counter-revolutionary cause but defined Russia's role in this crusade as the extinction of Polish nationhood. Prussia made peace with the French republic to secure its share of Poland. Napoleon's murder of the Duc d'Enghien in 1804 caused outrage in many European courts but hard-headed *raison d'état* won out on this occasion too. The rulers of Europe's great powers could not afford to be sentimentalists, at least as regards politics. Even in 1814 none of the continental powers were enthusiastic about restoring the Bourbons. If Alexander I in his heart was committed to toppling Napoleon, this had nothing to do with legitimist sympathies. The tsar simply believed that Napoleon would never for long accept a settlement which would secure allied interests and Europe's peace. Of all the allied leaders, however, Alexander was least enthusiastic about restoring Louis XVIII, above all because he did not believe that the Bourbons would be sufficiently flexible and liberal to survive in power. His preferred option would have been the Duc d'Orleans or Bernadotte as king, or even a conservative republic⁶ [10].

As regards the nature of the war that began in 1792 and lasted with only brief intermissions until 1815, it was to some extent influenced by revolutionary ideology, especially in 1792-4. The thousands of French volunteers who flocked to the colours in the war's early months were unlike

the soldiers of any other European army. This was true in both positive and negative terms: on the one hand enthusiastic commitment to a cause, on the other a lack of basic military skills. By the time one reaches the Napoleonic era, however, the French army in most respects resembled its opponents. Its officers' code of honour and behaviour, not to mention their professional training and 'doctrine', on the whole followed common European norms. Its men were mostly veterans or recruits drawn from the lower orders in a conscription system that generally allowed the well-to-do to avoid service and buy substitutes. Their primary loyalty was to their units and monarch, not to any political cause. Many of them were not ethnic Frenchmen. It is true that discipline in the French army was more relaxed, egalitarian and humane than in the armies which they fought. It is a liberal illusion, however, to imagine that this necessarily made the French army more effective in war. The fierce discipline of the Russian army sustained it under the enormous pressures of the long retreat from the border to Moscow, despite the huge losses suffered at Borodino. On the contrary, the lack of discipline and the marauding tradition inherited from the French revolutionary army contributed mightily to the disintegration of Napoleon's forces on the retreat from Moscow⁷ [11-16].

Of the four main allied armies which finally defeated Napoleon, it was the Prussian which was

⁶ Apart from Schroeder and Lieven, see: Thierry Lentz, *Nouvel Histoire du Premier Empire. III. La France et l'Europe de Napoleon 1804-1814* (Paris, 2007) and Thierry Lentz (ed), *Napoleon et l'Europe* (Paris, 2005).

⁷ Above all see, Ute Planert, 'Innovation or Evolution? The French wars in Military History', ch.3, 69-84 in Chickering and Forster, *War*. On the geopolitical and ideological origins of the wars see: T.C.W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London, 1986). For opposed

views on warfare in the 1790s see Paddy Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France 1789-1802* (London, 1998) and John A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic* (Boulder, 1994). Also T.C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars 1787-1802* (London, 1996). For a balanced view of the evolution of the officer corps see ch.6 of Rafe Blaufarb, *The French Army 1750-1820* (Manchester, 2002).

most radically reformed and furthest from the old regime model by 1815. Military historians have concentrated their attention on the reformed Prussian army because it is rightly seen as the most modern of the allied forces. In particular, the introduction of universal military service and the creation of a remarkable General Staff system and cadre are seen as staking out a path which all European armies were subsequently to follow. The Prussian military effort in 1813-15 was indeed impressive, as was the thoroughgoing mobilisation of Prussia's meagre resources which sustained it and which allowed a relatively small state to regain its place among the great powers. One needs to remember, however, that in the Seven Years War (1756-63) the Prussian war effort and the mobilisation of resources had also been remarkable. A country of five million people had put 5% of its population in arms, had suffered over 160,000 losses, and by stupendous efforts had survived the attack of the three other continental powers, each of which far outmatched Prussia in population, wealth and resources. The contrast is sometimes made between 'total' Napoleonic war and the indecisive and limited nature of eighteenth-century campaigning. In fact there was nothing indecisive or cautious in Frederick II's way of war. Nor was its result of limited significance. Prussia's emergence and survival as a great power between 1740 and 1763 was miraculous and of immense long-term significance. The sense of Prussian identity and pride which sustained the country's resurgence in 1807-15 was partly rooted in memory of the earlier struggle⁸ [17-19].

Despite its impressive efforts in 1813-15, however, Prussia remained the junior and least

powerful member of the allied quartet. On land, the main key to victory was the Russian army, which at all times much outnumbered the Prussian forces and was indeed largely responsible for Prussia's liberation from French occupation. The Russian army had undergone significant professional and technical reforms between 1807 and 1812 which often derived from French models and made it more effective. But the main elements of the army, let alone of Russia's state and society, remained unchanged. William Fuller was the first Western historian to note not merely that the Russian army was still unequivocally 'old regime' but that this was one of its great strengths⁹ [20]. The resilience, high morale and extraordinary powers of resistance of this army owed much to the fact that it was made up of lifelong veteran soldiers who displayed immense loyalty to their regimental home, which itself was a microcosm of the Orthodox fatherland. Given the size of Russia's population a long-service professional army could nevertheless be of sufficient size to make a big impact on the Napoleonic battlefield. Faced with dire emergency in 1812-13 the Russian old regime was also sufficiently legitimate and effective to mobilise the empire's resources for war on an unprecedented scale. Russian grand strategy was intelligently conceived and pursued, with Alexander I exercising effective personal leadership.

It was no coincidence that the most impressive and influential military thinker of the Napoleonic era came from the ranks of the Prussian general staff. Nor is it surprising that a Prussian officer was inclined to see the transformation of war in his era in more radical terms than was the case with his Russian or Austrian counterparts. Part of Clausewitz's attraction for students of war

⁸ On Prussia's Seven Years see Franz Szabo, *The Seven Years War in Europe 1756-1763* (Harlow, 2008) which stresses Prussian ruthlessness and Dennis E. Showalter, *The Wars of Frederick the Great* (Harlow, 1996) which emphasises Prussian

skill and commitment. For a broader political perspective see Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom. The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (London, 2006).

⁹ William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power*.

is precisely the timelessness of his insights. He rose well beyond the confines of his own era, showing great insight into the enormous future potential of the forces unleashed by the Revolution and harnessed by Napoleon. To an extent, Clausewitz spotted the chicken in the egg. In some respects that makes his more conceptual passages better as prophecy than as a comment on the actual campaigns of his day. For those seeking to understand the everyday realities of Napoleonic-era warfare, Antoine de Jomini can sometimes be a better guide. This is not to deny the near-cataclysmic level of the violence which submerged Europe in 1792-1815 and which so impressed Clausewitz. Between 1763 and 1792 there had been no significant warfare in the European heartland. For the next twenty-three years fighting barely ceased, moreover in terms of raw numbers warfare had moved to a new scale. The French mass mobilization of 1792-4 began this trend and the *Loi Jourdain* of 1798 confirmed it. France's enemies were forced to mobilize their manpower to match French numbers. Vast armies made huge casualties from battle, sickness and desertion both inevitable and more tolerable for generals than in the eighteenth century. This had an impact on the tempo with which warfare was conducted. Huge numbers also made inevitable the reorganization of armies into semi-autonomous all-arms corps and divisions. Without this the tactical coordination, movement and strategic direction of the era's huge military machines would have been impossible¹⁰ [21–23].

Nevertheless, it is to the point that Napoleon was ultimately defeated by what one might describe as the European old regime. There were of course many reasons for his downfall. His style of

warfare was best suited to the rich, densely populated lands of western and central Europe where his troops could feed off the land and find many roads down which to march. Napoleon was also more likely to find supporters for the 'enlightened' and 'rational' principles which his empire claimed to embody in Europe's heartland. In both military and political terms he had much greater difficulty in applying his principles of war and governance in Europe's more backward periphery¹¹. The enmity of Britain, perched beyond his reach across the Channel and able to use its financial power to subsidise France's continental enemies was another major impediment to Napoleon's ambitions.

But the key to Napoleon's destruction in 1813-14 was different and simple. For the first time in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars the Romanovs, Habsburgs and Hohenzollerns united against him. As important, the Russian army was already deployed in the theatre of operations when the key campaign of autumn 1813 began. The contrast between 1805 and 1806 when its allies' main armies had already been wholly or partly destroyed before Russia's forces arrived in the field was very important. If at any time between 1792 and 1809 the three eastern great powers had made a similar united effort it is likely that the Napoleonic adventure would have been ended years earlier than was actually the case. Above all, they failed to do because of mutual suspicions. These suspicions had far from disappeared in 1813 but the three dynasties had by then learned the lesson that Napoleon's France was a deadly threat to their status as independent great powers, and perhaps to their survival.

Even so, it took the destruction of Napoleon's army in Russia to provide a breathing space

¹⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, 1976): edition translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Baron Antoine de Jomini, *The Art of War* (London, 1992), a re-print of the 1862 translation with a new introduction by Charles

Messenger. Antoine Jomini, *Precis Politique et Militaire des Campagnes de 1812 a 1814* (Geneve, 1975).

¹¹ MIKE BROERS: both his general book and his book on counter-insurgency

during which Russian armies could advance into central Europe before the beginning of the decisive campaigns which would decide Europe's fate. Without this it would have been impossible to create an effective coalition of the eastern powers, given the extent to which Prussia and Austria had been weakened by 1813. Even after the Russian advance into Central Europe there was nothing fore-ordained about Napoleon's destruction. The campaigns of 1813 could easily have gone in his favour. It took courage and insight for Alexander to seize the moment of French weakness to end the intolerable threat to Russian security represented by Napoleon's domination of Germany. The Russian commitment to the war was far greater in 1812-14 than had been the case in 1805-7, let alone in 1798-1800. In 1813-14 500,000 Russian troops were deployed beyond the empire's borders, an astonishing achievement but also a necessary one if a European coalition was to be created and the still-formidable power of Napoleon's empire was to be broken¹².

To describe the victorious coalition which overthrew Napoleon as the European old regime is both largely true and potentially misleading. 'Old regime' is a vague term which glosses over many differences between the societies and political systems of eighteenth-century Europe's great powers. As a term, 'old regime' is a useful way of underlining that these political systems preceded and were untouched by the great political and economic revolutions which ushered in the modern era. It correctly also stresses that there were both structural and cultural commonalities which united the ruling elites of Europe and set them apart both from the bulk of their own peoples and from ruling elites in the Ottoman Empire or China.

¹² These are all key themes in Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*.

¹³ On Frederick and the Prussian way of war see Dennis Showalter, *Frederick the Great. A Military History* (London, 2012). On Rumiantsev, Suvorov

and Russian warfare against the Ottomans see a useful survey by Christopher Duffy: *Russia's Military Way to the West* (London, 1981). NB the contrast with Lee Kennett, *The French Armies in the Seven Years War* (Durham/NC, 1967). There was to some extent a common aristocratic military culture which reigned across Europe but there was also a world of difference between the mentality, not to mention competence, of Versailles military courtiers such as Soubise and Richelieu who led French armies to disaster in the Seven Years War and, to take but one Prussian example, Friedrich von Seydlitz, Frederick's cavalry commander in the same struggle. Also notable was the highly professional and ruthlessly single-minded leadership which took Russian armies to crushing victories over the Ottomans under the command of Petr Rumiantsev and Aleksandr Suvorov. To describe the carnage of the Russo-Ottoman wars of the second half of the eighteenth century as 'the sport of kings' is absurd. Nor was there any trace of a polite minuet in the aggression, speed and tactical innovation employed by the Russian commanders to achieve total destruction of their foe in these wars. In many ways the key difference to subsequent French efforts in 1792-1815 was that the Russians successfully pursued clearly defined and achievable geopolitical objectives, in this sense making war serve politics in a way preached by Clausewitz but not always practiced by Revolutionary and Napoleonic France¹³ [24-26].

France before 1789 was the core of the European old regime. French culture and the Parisian salons led Europe. Versailles provided a model for all Europe's rulers. Precisely because it was the precursor and model for all subsequent absolutist regimes, by the late eighteenth century the French military-fiscal state was in certain respects out of date and had acquired many barnacles. It had to some extent been overtaken by the great

and Russian warfare against the Ottomans see a useful survey by Christopher Duffy: *Russia's Military Way to the West* (London, 1981). NB the contrast with Lee Kennett, *The French Armies in the Seven Years War* (Durham/NC, 1967).

powers to its east as regards the efficient mobilization of resources for war¹⁴ [27]. Neither Prussia nor Russia, for example, had venal offices. The maze of privileges, customs and exemptions which shackled the mobilization of conscripts and taxes in France was much less in evidence in the rawer societies and newer, more rational and more ruthless military-fiscal systems in the east. One key to the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras is simply that 1789 broke the shackles which had previously inhibited the French state from mobilizing the resources of what was still potentially much the richest and most powerful country in Europe. What the Revolution began, Napoleon completed. For the first time the French state, in the persons of his Gendarmerie, penetrated down to the village level. Napoleonic conscription imposed a much heavier burden on the population than before 1789. This goes far to explain the great upsurge in French power in 1792-1814. It explains why Restoration governments in areas previously ruled by Napoleon admired and preserved the Bonapartist state apparatus. But it is also the reason why after 1814 much of French public opinion welcomed the Bourbons' promise of genuine constitutional and political constraints on the state's power, not to mention the dismantling of Napoleon's system of conscription¹⁵ [28-30].

No one doubts that in both military and administrative terms the French state was much more formidable under Napoleon than in the time

of the last Bourbons. Whether its grand strategy was wiser or more coherent is a different matter. The basic premise of late-Bourbon grand strategy was that France must abandon any dreams of territorial expansion on the European continent and must concentrate its resources on maritime, commercial and colonial competition with Britain. A key pillar of this strategy was to end the centuries-old struggle between the Bourbons and Habsburgs which lay at the root of so many continental entanglements. This was the logic of the Franco-Austrian alliance whose great symbol was the marriage of the Archduchess Marie Antoinette to the future Louis XVI¹⁶ [31-32].

The alliance got off to a bad start by dragging Paris into the Seven Years War on the continent as part of Austria's drive to destroy Prussia and regain Silesia. This was not in France's interests and distracted her from the far more important goal of defending her position outside Europe and on the seas against British power. Had the French army shown reasonable competence it might even so have occupied Hanover and used it as a bargaining chip to regain overseas colonies at the post-war peace conference. Instead France was humiliated both on the continent and on the seas, a disaster from which the already slim popularity of the Austrian alliance never recovered. In fact, however, after 1763 French grand strategy worked well. Resources were increasingly concentrated on the navy which held its own in the war of 1777-83, in the process making a mighty

¹⁴ On the shift in power eastwards see above all Hamish Scott, *The Emergence of the Eastern Powers, 1756-1775* (Cambridge, 2001).

¹⁵ Two works edited by Richard Bonney provide a comparative background to the evolution of the military-fiscal state: *Economic Systems and State Finance* (Oxford, 1995) and *The Rise of the Fiscal State in Europe c 1200-1815* (Oxford, 1999). For a discussion of the political underpinning of military-fiscalism see B.H. Downing, *The Military*

Revolution and Political Change. Origins of Autocracy and Democracy in Early Modern Europe (Princeton, 1992). JANET.

¹⁶ On the evolution of French grand strategy see: Jeremy Black, *From Louis XIV to Napoleon. The Fate of a Great Power* (London, 1999) and Colin Jones, *The Great Nation. France from Louis XV to Napoleon. 1715-1799* (London, 2002).

contribution to American independence and thereby dealing what seemed at the time a major blow to British power. In the 1780s French naval expansion continued and Franco-Spanish naval power equaled that of Britain. With the Netherlands also a French ally during and immediately after the war, British maritime security was under more threat than at any time until the 1930s. Meanwhile France's colonial empire and maritime trade boomed, Saint Domingue (Haiti) being the richest colony of any European state. In the 1780s France's merchant marine was not far behind Britain's in tonnage. In Europe the Austrian alliance continued to underpin French security and continental peace but Paris was careful to give Vienna no backing for its plans to change the status quo in Germany by acquiring Bavaria and confronting Prussia¹⁷ [33–34].

The Revolution undermined this strategy partly because it greatly weakened the navy. It also sparked off revolt in Saint Domingue, which ultimately led to the colony's loss. During the twenty-two years of war between 1792 and 1814 French overseas trade was crippled. The previously booming port of Bordeaux atrophied. Napoleon's hopes to re-build empire and influence overseas crumbled in the face of British naval superiority. First his whole army was lost in Egypt as a result of Nelson's destruction of the French squadron at Aboukir in 1798. The Mediterranean once again became a British lake. Meanwhile British domination of the Atlantic stymied Napoleon's hopes of re-asserting control over Saint Domingue (Haiti) and re-building a French empire in the western hemisphere. Unable to defend the vast Louisiana territory against the British,

Napoleon sold it to the Americans. One key reason for the failure of the entire Napoleonic project was indeed that British sea power locked French imperialism into Europe where the costs of imperial expansion and the obstacles which stood in its way were usually much greater than overseas, and the rewards usually much more meagre¹⁸ [35].

This was not immediately apparent in the era of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. At the very time when the French navy was defeated in battle and its remnants pinned into its harbours, the French army went from victory to victory on the European continent, in the process creating a formal and informal empire which at its apogee stretched as far as Poland and Illyria, and included all Germany, Italy and the Low Countries. The initial lurch towards war in 1792 owed much to domestic French politics with both the Brissotins and the court seeing – diametrically opposite – advantage in international conflict. Once foreign invasion and domestic counter-revolution were defeated expansion to some extent became an end in itself, driven by the army's hunger for sustenance, loot and glory. The incoherence and lack of planning behind French imperialism in this era was an undoubted weakness.

The achievement of the French army in conquering most of Europe by 1809 was spectacular but it was always likely – though not certain – to be ephemeral. Military conquest is only the first stage in the creation of empire. Next and harder comes the task of political consolidation. Lasting imperial institutions and networks have to put down roots and the empire needs to develop a sense of legitimacy among its subjects. Britain itself provided a recent example of how rapidly the acquisition of an empire could turn to dust. After

¹⁷ On European naval competition see Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare 1650-1830* (London, 1999). On the French navy see: Michel Verge-Franceschi, *La Marine Francaise au XVIIIe Siecle* (Paris, 1996).

¹⁸ On the navy during the Revolution see: William S. Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy 1789-1794* (Cambridge, 1994).

driving the French out of most of North America in the Seven Years War British efforts to develop a tighter model of military-fiscal empire alienated its own American colonists and led to the disaster of 1776-83¹⁹. In Napoleon's case he never worked out even in his own head a coherent imperial plan for his conquered territories²⁰ [36]. In the short run his army's depredations and demands angered his subjects and allies. In the longer term the fact that his empire was unequivocally dominated by Frenchmen and designed to serve French interests was always likely to alienate non-French subjects and clients. History was against a would-be continental emperor. It was almost a millennium since the death of Charlemagne, the last man who could make a realistic claim to have united Europe. Europe was not yet a continent of nations in the full modern sense but many states and dynasties had evolved with deep roots in local history, society and vernacular high cultures. Uprooting these local institutions, elites and loyalties would be a mighty challenge²¹.

Above all geopolitics made it far easier for Europeans to create empires outside Europe than within it. That is why Europe's greatest empire-builders tended to be countries on the continent's periphery with easy access to the non-European world. The Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutch, English and Russians all fell into this category. Outside its own continent the European political, fiscal and military machine was often superior to local powers, though frequently this superiority was frequently less a question of better military technology than of deeper pockets and a greater degree

of unity at the European state's core. Naval superiority allowed military forces to be deployed widely and rapidly, and the profits of maritime trade to be creamed off. Europeans could move into the vacuum opened up by the decline of some of the great Asian empires – above all the Moghuls and Safavids – and could exploit local rivalries and conflicts over dynastic succession. Their advance was helped by the fact that most of the states that emerged from the wreckage of the great Asian empires were of limited scale and did not have deep roots in the communities they ruled. Meanwhile on the European continent a would-be emperor faced the challenge of the European balance of power. A number of formidable polities existed whose military-fiscal institutions had been honed as a result of generations of ferocious competition with rivals in which the weak were swallowed or marginalized. Given time, these polities were likely to unite against any power which threatened to dominate the continent. For Napoleon to conquer Germany and Italy, exclude Russian influence from central Europe, and turn Prussia and Austria into French satellites by 1810 was an extraordinary achievement²² [37].

It was, however, at this point that any would-be European emperor would meet his biggest challenge in the form of the two great power-centres on Europe's periphery, namely Britain and Russia. Mobilizing sufficient resources in Europe's core to take on these two power-centres simultaneously was very difficult. Matters were worsened because different forms of power were needed to meet this challenge: naval might against Britain, as distinct from a military-logistical

¹⁹ BRENDAN SIMMS *Three Victories etc?*

²⁰ Geoffrey Ellis, 'The Nature of Napoleonic Imperialism', in Philip Dwyer (ed), *Napoleon and Europe* (Harlow, 2001), 97-135 (NB the comment on page 124).

²¹ The most detailed and balanced account of Napoleon's imperial project is Thierry Lentz's four-volume *Nouvel Histoire du Premier Empire*.

²² On the decline of key Asian empires see chapters 8 and 9 (by Robert Travers and Peter Carey) in Armitage and Subrahmanyam (eds), *Age of Revolutions*.

strength sufficient to penetrate and control the heartland of the Russian state east and south of Moscow. The Russians and British were always likely in time to unite against any would-be European emperor since his power must threaten their security and ambitions. Even if he was willing to accept a precarious balance of power between his European empire and their peripheral ones, neither the Russians nor the British were likely to accept such a status quo for long. For Alexander I the price of peace with Napoleon's empire between 1807 and 1812 included adherence to a continental blockade of British trade which infuriated Russian elites and threatened the economic, financial and fiscal foundations of Russia's position as a great power. Even without the Continental System Russia must in the medium term bankrupt itself if forced to sustain armed forces sufficient to defend the empire against a France which controlled Germany, Italy and Poland. Meanwhile for Napoleon there was a logic in seeking to destroy the last independent continental power before his own faculties and aura were dimmed or his German clients began to stir. To remove Russia from the equation was to destroy London's last hope of a continental ally and maybe bring her to the negotiating table. In more general terms, unless Napoleon could create some version of European empire then France would have lost its century-old struggle with Britain, which at this very moment was consolidating a vastly extensive and wealthy empire outside Europe.

Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 was not doomed to inevitable disaster. Its main premise was that if the Russian field armies could be destroyed then Alexander would be forced to sue for peace since he could never hope to build a new professional army from scratch in war-time. This was probably correct. A further assumption was that if Napoleon offered moderate peace terms then the Russian elites would be unwilling to fight

to the death to regain their empire's Polish provinces. This view also had merit. Napoleon's plans were thwarted by bad luck, by Alexander's strategy of retreat but above all by the moral courage and determination with which Barclay de Tolly pursued this strategy and the skill, discipline and endurance with which the Russian army executed it. Victory backed by moderate peace terms would have enabled Napoleon to re-create a formidable and loyal Polish client-state, and to compensate his Saxon ally by further dismembering Prussia, thus removing any threat from the Hohenzollerns forever. Particularly if rewarded by part of Illyria, Austria could have become reconciled to its position as France's loyal lieutenant, as it was later to accept dependence on Berlin. Then as later its geopolitical ambitions could have been nudged towards the Balkans and against Russia. On this basis French domination of east-central Europe could have been consolidated for a generation at least. Meanwhile French rule might perhaps put down roots west of the Rhine and through the satellite kingdom of Italy in part of the peninsula. No doubt this construction would have fallen apart in time but the Europe which would have emerged from its ruins would probably have looked very different to the continent of 1815 and this might have changed radically Europe's fate in the twentieth century.

Alexander I was right to take the Russian army into central Europe in 1813 to destroy French control over Germany. He was almost certainly right to lead his soldiers on to Paris, correctly believing that peace and stability in Europe would never be secure so long as Napoleon sat on the French throne. But Mikhail Kutuzov (among others) was also correct in warning that the main beneficiary of Napoleon's demise would be Britain. With its historic rival cut down to size, British domination of the seas and of transoceanic empire was unchallenged. The Franco-Spanish-Dutch naval alliance which seemed so dangerous in 1783

had been shattered. The Royal Navy ruled supreme with the world's most formidable ship-building industry, financial system and commercial network to support it. Among the spoils which it had acquired in the course of the wars were key naval bases such as Malta, the Cape and Ceylon. Singapore and Hong Kong were soon to follow. The British had exploited the demise of Asian empires to extend their power. On the whole the decline of these empires was owed far more to local factors than to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. This was not true of the other region into which British power moved massively in this era, namely Latin America, where the Spanish empire imploded as a result of Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian peninsula. A half-hearted attempt at military conquest (at Buenos Aires in 1806) ended ingloriously. In any case Britain's own experience with its North American colonists taught the dangers of attempting to stand in the way of 'white' colonies in revolt. But the informal economic predominance which Britain quickly established across much of Latin America often brought most of empire's benefits without its attendant costs.

The greatest British territorial advance between 1792 and 1815 was in India. Comparisons with French imperialism in Europe are enlightening. Under Richard Wellesley in particular, the British pursued a coherent and planned policy of expansion, partly justified by spurious claims that this was needed to keep the French threat at bay. Napoleon's claims that he was conquering Europe in order to compete with Britain were also largely spurious but somewhat more plausible. British expansion, like French, was partly fuelled by the need of a formidable but expensive army to shift the burden of supporting it on to foreign taxpayers.

British plunder of India fully matched the marauding habits of French troops in Europe. In both cases too, the economies of conquered regions were subordinated to the interests of France and Britain, with dire results for many Indian manufacturers and European merchants. Very different, however, was the historical and geopolitical context of French and British imperialism. Napoleon was forced to seek historical legitimacy by invoking memories of Roman and Carolingian empire. The British moved into the slipstream of the Mughals, for generations maintaining even a semi-fiction that they were ruling some regions in the latter's name. Unlike in Europe, geopolitics ensured that the British had no viable competitors in the sub-continent. The British created a European-style infantry and artillery army on the back of the Indian taxpayer. No Asian cavalry army invading India over the north-west frontier could hope to defeat this force. But geography and logistics ensured that no rival European-style army could reach India by land. Meanwhile the British navy controlled access by sea. By 1815 the revenues of British India were greater than those of Austria or Russia. The locally-funded Indian army became a major factor in extending British power across Asia and into even the Middle East. Indian bases and resources were the springboard for subsequent British intervention in China²³ [38].

Full understanding both of the issues involved and of the consequences of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars requires this grasp of their global context. Apart from anything else, it avoids a distorted view of the era which paints Napoleon as a wicked imperialist and his British enemies as defenders of the principles of freedom. The reality of the wars of 1792 and 1815 was that

²³ On the evolution of the British fiscal-military state in India see the chapters by H.V. Bowen and Rajat Kanta Ray in P.J. Marshall (ed), *The Oxford His-*

tory of the British Empire. The Eighteenth Century (Oxford, 1998). For comparative European statistics see Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 33.

they were struggles between rival predatory imperialists, of which the French, British and Russians merely had the sharpest teeth and largest stomachs. A key result of the wars was to usher in a century-long period of British global imperial predominance. The British Empire was for the most part outside Europe but its fate and Europe's were closely entwined after 1815 as much as in the wars of 1792-1815. The basic point was simple. A small island off the coast of Europe could not hold a huge overseas empire unless the security of its metropole could be achieved on the cheap. This was the glory of the European balance of power in British eyes. The mutual fears and ambitions of the European powers checked each other, in the process guaranteeing that none of them could mobilize the continent's resources against the British heartland or its maritime and commercial supremacy. Victorian Britain paid a price in blood and tax for global empire which was extremely small by historical standards²⁴ [39].

This brings one back to consideration of Europe, and in particular to the post-war settlement agreed at the Congress of Vienna²⁵ [40]. This raises in different form the more general question posed in this piece, namely whether the Age of Revolutions marked a radical shift in international relations. In my opinion, once again, though the changes were significant they were not as radical as is sometimes claimed. It is true that the Congress of Vienna elaborated some important new rules and norms for international relations. The European Concert of Great Powers which the Congress formalized and recognized played a key role in international relations for the next century. Something which one can define as a European system emerged which added up to more than just

a temporary balance of power between Europe's rival states. But some of the solidarity which underlay great-power relations after 1815 was transient, born of exhaustion, bankruptcy and fear that renewed war would bring further revolutions. To an extent the continental leaders in the generation after 1815 were bound together by what one might describe as an anti-democratic peace theory. By no means wrongly, particularly as regards France, they saw revolution and democracy as the inevitable precursor of expansionist foreign policy and international anarchy. But the British never subscribed to this doctrine, partly out of liberal principle and partly because keeping the continental powers divided maximized British influence and security. After the revolution of 1830 France too dropped out of the conservative league. The suppression of the 1848 revolution was the last hurrah of the Holy Alliance, the split between Russia and Austria in the Crimean War its nemesis. Bismarck then took Europe into a new era by showing how the European Old Regime could increase its power, enhance its legitimacy and extend its life by harnessing to its chariot some of the forces released in the Age of Revolutions. But even Bismarck did not change the fundamental nature of European international relations which was rooted in the existence of five competing great powers in a single continent whose security and status ultimately depended on their ability and willingness to defend their interests by military force.

Of course to say this is to set the bar for 'radical change' very high. The era of revolutions could not be expected to abolish European geography or the very nature of international relations, unless of course Napoleon had actually succeeded

²⁴ This is a key theme in John Darwin, *The Empire Project The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830-1970* (Cambridge, 2009).

²⁵ For a comprehensive and valuable new insight into the Congress and its achievements see: Mark Jar-

rett, *The Congress of Vienna and its Legacy* (London, 2013). Paul Schroeder in *Transformation* argues that the Congress represented a fundamental break with the past.

in consolidating his empire's dominion across the continent. In many ways, however, his efforts in this direction seem much less the wave of the future than the last heroic and spectacular effort by France to play the role of La Grande Nation. On the other hand, many of the underlying elements in European geopolitics and international relations revealed in the Napoleonic era re-surfaced in the twentieth century. Germany's efforts to create its empire in Europe also collided with the European balance of power and with the challenge of overcoming the two great British and Russian centers of power which existed on the continent's periphery. Britain's concern to sustain a European balance of power dragged her into two world wars in the twentieth century. The costs of this commitment did much to destroy the global empire which Britain had built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and had consolidated in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era.

Seen from a British perspective the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars were to some extent world wars. If the great battles took place in Europe or within sight of its coasts that is because British sea power contained French imperialism within its own continent. Britain itself, however, brought to the struggle with France the fruits of its domination of global trade and communications. To take but one example: the fact that most British trade already in the 1780s was outside Europe provides a good clue as to the nature of British power and the reasons why Napoleon's Continental System was unlikely to bring Britain to its knees. If the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars were a world war, however, they were not the first world war. That 'honour' goes to the Seven Years War of 1756-63, which is one more reason to

doubt that the wars of 1792-1815 should be seen as marking a radical break with the past. It was the Seven Years War which determined that English civilization would dominate North America and took the first decisive step in establishing British rule over India, with consequences that lasted well beyond the end of Britain's empire. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars confirmed this verdict.

It is true that, unlike the Seven Years War, the Napoleonic Wars had dramatic consequences in Latin America. These included decades of devastating conflict across the continent. In the long run, however, perhaps the most important result of the Napoleonic Wars in South America was that whereas the Spanish empire disintegrated into many states, Portuguese Brazil held together. Above all this was owed to the survival of the Braganza dynasty and of the monarchical state in Brazil in the crucial early decades of the nineteenth century. This was highly contingent and depended on a far from predictable intermingling of events and personalities following Napoleon's invasion of Portugal in 1808 and the flight of the royal family to Brazil. Brazil is still far from reaching its full potential and may never do so, so the long-term implications of South American developments in the early nineteenth century are still unclear²⁶ [41-43].

Beyond question the greatest long-term consequences of the revolutionary era lie in the spread of the democratic ideas that powered the French Revolution. It mattered hugely that the claims of revolutionary ideology were made not in the name of Frenchmen (or indeed just Americans) but of humanity. The revolution in Saint Domingue suggested that these ideas would have

²⁶ On the Spanish empire's collapse see above all: Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, 2006). On the Portuguese empire see: Gabriel Paquette, *Imperial*

Portugal in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions (Cambridge, 2013). Leslie Bethell (ed), *The Independence of Latin America* (Cambridge, 1987) remains a very useful introduction.

global consequences which would surprise and dismay many even of the revolution's sympathizers. By the turn of the twenty-first century the republican values proclaimed in 1789 enjoy something close to global hegemony.

Their struggle to achieve this hegemony was anything but easy or assured. Opposed ideologies and vested interests initially needed to be overcome in nineteenth-century France and Europe. Monarchy in one form or another survived in France until 1870 and dominated Europe until 1918. In 1848 the 'old regime' defeated the attempt to spread the principles of 1789 across Europe. The fact that the French Revolution had unleashed terror and civil war in France, followed by a generation of war in Europe meant that even many who sympathized with some of the principles of 1789 worried deeply about their practical application. Monarchical power, conservative upper houses, and constraints on the franchise were among the many expedients welcomed even by many liberals in the nineteenth century to keep democracy within bounds. If the principles of 1789 appeared to have triumphed in Europe in 1918, the picture in 1940 was very different, not least because the 1930s seemed to call into question the people's commitment to liberty. The subsequent triumph of democracy over both fascism and Soviet communism restored the principles of 1789 to their pedestal.

It remains to be seen whether they will stay there if global power shifts away from the West towards Asia, or if international relations again descend into an abyss similar to the 1930s. The golden age of European liberalism and economic progress were undermined by economic depression and world wars in the early twentieth century. Given the rise of nationalism and competing geopolitical claims in East Asia one cannot rule out the same happening to the Asian miracle. Bringing China with its authoritarian regime and domestic political imperatives into the governing councils of the world may prove just as difficult as was the case with Germany before 1914. Relative American decline has some obvious parallels with Britain's previous experience. A pessimist could point to the great instability caused to seventeenth-century politics by climate change or to the dramatic geopolitical shift caused by the impact of plague on the seventh-century world, among whose consequences was the division of the Mediterranean world between Christianity and Islam. Of course all these fears may prove unfounded but the basic reason for citing them is to reinforce the point that the future is uncertain and that in the past history has seldom moved in straight lines. In that sense Zhou En-Lai's famous comment that it is too early to judge the consequences of the French Revolution remains moot.

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