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The French Revolutionary Wars: 1787-1802, by T. C. W. Blanning, is a superb work of historiography. Far more ambitious than its modest title suggests, it is a history of the French Revolution as well as a military and diplomatic history of Europe from 1787 to 1802. Blanning enriches our understanding of the Revolution by placing it in its European context, by showing how it affected and was affected by France's neighbors. He is especially well placed to take on this task. Not only has he written extensively on the French Revolution; he has written a book on Mainz under the Old Regime and the revolutionary republic, another on the French occupation of the Rhineland, and two biographies of the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II.[1] He is one of the few historians who can move comfortably from France to Germany to the vast Habsburg empire stretching from Belgium to the Balkans, and he has filled in the remaining gaps with extraordinarily vast reading. Among the thousand or so footnotes in *The French Revolutionary Wars* are references to works in German, Italian, Spanish, and Russian, as well as French and English. Yet this book is more than a *tour de force* of erudition. It is a richly textured, engaging narrative punctuated by cogent, often brilliant analysis.

Blanning begins by arguing that French defeat in the Seven Years' War (1756-63) stimulated reforms in the army which are normally associated with the Revolution: the breaking up of armies into smaller, more flexible divisions; the use of columns in addition to lines; an increasing reliance on light troops; and the use of artillery. More controversial, however, were the reforms introduced in 1787 and 1788, which slashed the number of officers in an army that was, in Blanning's words, "absurdly over-officered" (p. 19). These reforms, coinciding with the revolt of the *parlements*, added fuel to the fire of the aristocratic revolution by alienating many of its leaders, who were not only *parlementaires* but army officers. They guaranteed that the army would not serve the king when he needed it to suppress the insurrection in Paris in July 1789, and indeed pushed the officers to make common cause with the Third Estate. Thus Blanning provocatively but convincingly claims, "In part at least, the French Revolution was a military coup" (p. 28). In addition to the hated military reforms, Blanning argues that an unpopular alliance with Austria contributed to the discrediting of the monarchy and that, more directly, the crown lost its legitimacy when it failed, ostensibly due to bankruptcy, to respond to the Prussian invasion of the United Provinces and the suppression of the pro-French Dutch Patriots in 1787.

The narrative continues with an account of the first two years of the Revolution, when Russia, Prussia and Austria were preoccupied with Poland–which they would soon partition out of existence–and therefore relatively uninterested in developments in France, despite some occasional counter-revolutionary sabre- rattling. Yet this period of "deceptive isolation from the European states-system" (p. 42) ended in the spring of 1792, when an unlikely coalition of Girondins and monarchists (including the king himself) provoked war against the equally unlikely coalition of Prussia and Austria, countries which had been at war for more than fifty years. Blanning tells the dreadful story of war and revolution from September 1792, when thousands of suspected traitors were butchered in Parisian prisons, to August 1793, when the revolutionary Convention declared "total war" against external and internal enemies alike. He describes the terrible process by which the war escalated both beyond and within French

borders: republican victories in the autumn of 1792 brought Britain and the Dutch Republic into the war. To fight against this growing coalition, the revolutionary government was forced to adopt conscription, and conscription, more than any other single issue, provoked and fuelled the revolt of the *Vendee* and the civil war which according to Blanning killed some 400,000 people.

The author goes on to describe the spectacular series of revolutionary victories from August 1793 to the spring of 1795, by which time France had nearly reached its "natural frontiers" through the conquest of Belgium, the Dutch Republic, and most of the left bank of the Rhine. He explains these victories largely in terms of French numerical superiority, but also emphasizes the government's power to requisition vast quantities of arms and to execute commanders judged insufficiently aggressive on the battlefield. In addition to indigenous factors, Blanning cites the allies' infighting and lack of commitment to the war with France as crucial to French victory. Next Blanning describes the war under the Directory government, when the post-Terror regime made an official policy of "nourish[ing] war by war" and making the armies live off the land they invaded. This policy entailed the "pillaging of Europe", as the French looted everything from grain and clothing to gold, art treasures, and rare books and manuscripts. It gave the lie to any liberationist rhetoric and guaranteed repeated resistance and uprisings from Belgium to Calabria. Following a rich description of the naval conflict between Britain and France, Blanning ends the story of the revolutionary wars with an account of the War of the Second Coalition (1799-1802), in which France faced a massive alliance that in the author's view was bound to fall apart under the weight of mistrust and conflicting interests.

Central to *The French Revolutionary Wars* is the notion of the primacy of foreign policy. Blanning sees foreign policy in general and war in particular as decisive both in causing the Revolution and determining its trajectory. He is careful to avoid reductionism, i.e. the dismissal of the complexity of causal factors in favor of a single preferred cause, and gives credit to a variety of factors–from economics and social strains to revolutionary political culture–but his main emphasis is on foreign affairs. He observes that the monarchy's failure to respond to the Prussian invasion of the Dutch Republic in 1787 was crucial to its de-legitimation and downfall and that "virtually all of the great *journees*–10 August 1792, the September Massacres [1792], 31 May and 2 June 1793 and 18-19 Brumaire [Year VIII]– were essentially responses to failure in war" (p. 269). Yet though Blanning cites Francois Furet's claim that "the war conducted the Revolution far more than the Revolution conducted the war" (p. 267), he gives ample evidence of the Revolution conducting the war as well. Indeed, he suggests that the war was largely provoked by domestic politics. He notes that after the Champs de Mars massacre in July 1792 the "lid" had been "cram[med] ... back on the popular cauldron", but only "[f]or the time being." He continues:

> To create a brew so explosive that no amount of legislative weight could contain its pressure, an issue even more combustible than the royal flight was needed. The aftermath of [the king's abortive flight to] Varennes [in June 1791] made it clear that it could not be domestic in origin. If the attempted flight of the king could not finally delegitimate the monarchy, then only the gravest charge that can be made against a sovereign would suffice–high treason. For that, war was needed (pp. 55-6).

Moreover, Blanning gives evidence of the revolution conducting the war during the Directory. He notes that after the coup d'etat of 30 Prairial (18 June 1799) the neo-Jacobin Directory was under pressure to show its zeal against France's enemies and consequently ordered a premature military offensive, led by General Barthelemy-Catherine Joubert, in northern Italy. He explains the humiliating French loss at the battle of Novi (15 August 1799) in terms of "Joubert's ill-timed initiative, determined more by domestic politics than military considerations..." (pp. 251-2).

Indeed, the evidence Blanning presents suggests a dialectical relationship between foreign and domestic policy, one in which real threats from abroad have an impact on domestic politics, and in which imaginary foreign threats and conflicts are fabricated for use by domestic politicians, with real international consequences. In this scenario foreign policy is certainly important, indeed crucial to an understanding of the whole picture–and for this reason Blanning's study is invaluable–but whether it has "primacy" is questionable.

Blanning's claims about the primacy of foreign policy, moreover, are at least potentially at odds with his revisionist sympathies. Blanning cites Francois Furet and Simon Schama approvingly, and his verdict on the Revolution is correspondingly harsh. The government of the Terror was "a regime that can only

be described as criminal" (p. 137). Even in the summer of 1793, before Terror had become "the order of the day", the revolutionaries had committed unspeakable atrocities in the "pacification" of the Vendee, and in August, in the midst of "wild excitement" and "nihilism" the National Convention issued a declaration of "total war" reminiscent, in the author's mind, of a similar declaration by the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels in the winter of 1943 (p. 101). Yet by emphasizing the extent to which foreign affairs in general and war in particular determined the course of events in France, Blanning inadvertently suggests mitigating circumstances for the revolutionary crimes. This paradox is most dramatically illustrated his account of the September prison massacres of 1792. Here Blanning describes the fear which gripped Parisians at the news of the fall of Verdun and the allied invasion of France. He notes that this fear was compounded by the Brunswick manifesto of 25 July, which had threatened collective punishment of Paris should the Tuileries palace be attacked or the king or royal family harmed (the Tuileries were attacked on 10 August and the king subsequently imprisoned with his family). To be sure, Blanning's goal could not be further from excusing the heinous acts which took place over those five infamous days in September. Yet when he writes, "Never has there been a revolution so paranoid," and then lists the reasons why it had cause to be fearful (p. 72), he simultaneously denounces the revolutionaries and offers an opportunity for their defenders.

Moreover, Blanning's emphasis on the treasonous flight of General Charles-Francois du Perier Dumouriez to the Austrians in April 1793 as an explanation of the proscription of the Girondins and the "lurch by the Revolution to the left" (p. 99), suggests that the events of the war were decisive in the drift toward the Terror. Paradoxically, then, the logic of the "primacy of foreign policy" theory puts Blanning uncomfortably close to the long list of apologists for the Terror from Albert Mathiez to Albert Soboul. Of course, *tout comprendre n'est pas tout pardonner*, and besides, history is more than simply assigning blame and conferring praise retrospectively. But Blanning's convictions about the "criminal" nature of the Terror lead to an understandable desire to discount any potentially exculpating factors such as the war. In other words, as a revisionist Blanning is not surprisingly unwilling to adopt the position that the Terror was "an aberration, an emergency response to the threat of foreign invasion and counter-revolution" (pp. 137-38). Yet his convictions about the primacy of foreign policy prevent him from endorsing Simon Schama's claim that the Terror was "merely 1789 with a higher body count" (p. 138). Blanning concludes: "However flaccid it may sound, the most satisfactory conclusion seems to be that the Terror was latent in revolutionary ideology but needed the strains of war to be activated" (p. 139). This position is hazardously close to being tautological. It may be correct, but its veracity cannot be demonstrated empirically.

A similar tension is evident in Blanning's discussion of the importance of the alleged elan of the French revolutionary soldiers. In some places Blanning criticizes the notion that as "citizen-soldiers" French troops were equipped with a patriotic spirit or elan and a special sense of mission which enabled them to fight more courageously and more successfully than their counterparts in the allied forces. He notes that the myth of elan corresponds to revolutionary rhetoric and should not be taken at face value. He points out that the revolutionary soldiers sometimes lost, and that to suggest that they lost because they had less elan on some days than others would be begging the question. In explaining French victories, then, other more mundane factors, such as the number of soldiers in the field and the size, number and quality of their weapons, must take precedence over abstract assumptions about elan (pp. 119-21). Yet elsewhere Blanning resorts to the very principle he has called into question. When explaining Napoleon's victory at Lodi (May 1796) he writes, "It was now that the special vigour and elan of the revolutionary officers noted earlier came into play" (pp. 145-46). He cites the Prussian General and famous military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz, who emphasized Napoleon's "enthusiasm", defined as "an elevation of spirit and feeling above calculation", and claimed that the victory at Lodi "inspired tremendous enthusiasm in all the friends of France and its general" (p. 147). Clausewitz appears frequently throughout the book in support of Blanning's claims about the social and psychological elements of war which other strategists have reduced to rational calculation. Yet Clausewitz, for all his insight, was a product of his age, and Blanning might have historicized his assumptions about enthusiasm, spirit, and feeling–all rough equivalents of elan–by connecting them to contemporary currents in romanticism. In the process he might have strengthened his claims about the importance of numbers of troops, the size and quality of the weaponry, and the state apparatus that stood

behind the war effort.

Paradoxically, quandaries such as those discussed above result from one of the great virtues of Blanning's book: namely, its aversion to reductionism. Blanning includes an impressive quantity of possible causes for the events and phenomena he endeavors to explain. He is careful to establish a hierarchy of causes, and occasionally resorts to the distinction, famously posited by the seventeenth and eighteenth-century German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, between necessary and sufficient causes. Yet the sheer number of causes gives the impression that the events and phenomena in question are overdetermined. Of course, this is not Blanning's problem alone. Historians primarily concerned with causation are inevitably forced to steer between the Scylla of reductionism and the Charybdis of overdetermination. In *The French Revolutionary Wars* Blanning steers skillfully. More important, this book reminds historians that the French Revolution was not merely about France, but about Europe, and offers the type of pan-European treatment of the Revolution that academic specialization along national lines has made into a scarce commodity.

[1]. T. C. W. Blanning. *Joseph II and Enlightened Despotism* (London, 1970); *Reform and Revolution in Mainz, 1743-1803* (London, 1974); *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland, 1792-1802* (Oxford, 1983); *The French Revolution: Aristocrats versus Bourgeois?* (Houndmills, 1987); *Joseph II* (London:, 1994); and ed., *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution* (Chicago, 1996).

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