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Response to D. M. G. Sutherland's review of **Bailey Stone**, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution: A Global-historical Perspective*.

By Bailey Stone, University of Houston.

My predominant reaction to Donald Sutherland's review of my latest book is one of relief. Here, after all, is another French revolutionary specialist who is fully cognizant of the centrality of diplomacy and war to revolutionary developments! Unhappily, this is not an insight as common as it should be to historians in our field. Hence, I welcome Sutherland's commentary all the more heartily—even as I beg to differ with some of his specific criticisms of my work.

The gravamen of Sutherland's critique appears to be that I “needed to reflect more on the nature of the war and its origins,” since (supposedly) I exaggerated the resemblance between the war which broke out in 1792 and the wars of the *ancien régime*. That is to say, in weighing the relative importance of “continuity” and “discontinuity” in this connection, I excessively played to the former, thereby slighting the more fundamental significance of the latter.

To some degree, this is a charge to which I will readily plead guilty. Insofar as my design in writing *Reinterpreting the French Revolution* was to situate the entire French revolutionary experience in the context of the *longue durée* of post-Renaissance French history and to do so by concentrating upon the long term dialectical interaction between foreign and domestic affairs, I found a certain accentuation of the continuities running from old regime to revolutionary geopolitics to be unavoidable, and, in fact, desirable. At the same time, however, I cannot agree with Sutherland that I depicted the warfare of the 1790s and its ramifications both within and beyond France as merely “more of the same.” The following reflections point, I think, to a somewhat more balanced treatment of the subject.

To begin with, it is quite incorrect to suggest, as Sutherland does, that T. C. W. Blanning's *Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* was the sole source for my discussion of the outbreak of war in 1792.[1] The most cursory glance at the footnotes of my book (pp. 162-67) indicates otherwise. But the larger point here is that, whatever the finer details concerning the evolution of Jacques-Pierre Brissot's thinking on the subject—and I have no desire nor any need to contest Sutherland's pertinent findings--the existing scholarship points to an overall regression from the “new” revolutionary idealism of 1792 to a more traditional pursuit of French geostrategic goals in subsequent years. This is surely the impression one gains from the carefully crafted and richly documented articles of Patricia Chastain Howe and Linda and Marsha Frey and the magisterial two-volume work of Sydney Biro, to go no further.[2] I frankly doubt that scholars of this stature (or, for that matter, Blanning himself) were thinking only of engaging the interest of “general readers” when they published the results of their research. What they were clearly intending to do was to explore the many and fascinating ways in which “old” and “new” diplomatic concerns interacted in the French foreign policy of the revolutionary era.

Secondly, the same impression—that is, of the dynamic interaction of traditional and new-fangled ideological considerations in statist diplomacy and war-making—emerges when one looks elsewhere in revolutionary-era Europe. For example, no one has investigated the evolving attitudes and strategic dealings of Austrian Foreign Minister Franz Maria von Thugut more carefully than Karl A. Roeder, Jr.; Roeder continually points up both Thugut’s “ideological” fears of French-style revolutionism and his refusal to jettison traditional Habsburg strategic objectives.[3] Jeremy Black (whose criticisms of Blanning’s work must surely intrigue Sutherland) stresses in similar fashion the tension between the geostrategic calculations and the counterrevolutionary anxieties of British statesmen such as Pitt and Grenville in 1792-1793.[4] Isabel de Madariaga makes much the same point in discussing the foreign policy of Russia’s Catherine the Great.[5] In the case of France, then, the historian is likely to dilate upon the ways in which idealistic-revolutionary invocations of international brotherhood and harmony gave way over time to old-style assertions of French power on the continent. In reassessing the other European states, however, he or she will (logically enough) emphasize the constant interplay between ideological “counterrevolutionary” fears and long-established strategic/territorial thinking.

Finally, Sutherland is certifiably correct to argue that, from the summer of 1794 on, France would attempt to “export” a “revolutionary, not a constitutional, regime: tribunals of expedited justice, class warfare, indemnities, requisitions, dechristianization, antifederalism, and much else.” That is why I insisted in my book that Austrian Foreign Minister Thugut’s “larger vision of the geostrategic and sociopolitical threat posed to Europe by a French Revolution triumphantly on the march displayed considerable realism; it was not grounded solely in Austria’s specific strategic interests” (p. 217). Similarly, that is why I concurred in Jeremy Black’s judgment that the “conflation” in British minds “of the threat posed by the traditional enemy” with a conviction that “British society and religion were under challenge” was powerful indeed.[6] To be sure, the great international struggle that broke out in 1792 was not just “more of the same.” Yet, even on this point, it would be well to recall that the French endeavor to export revolutionary ideology and to remodel institutions and practices in foreign parts, if perceived everywhere as profoundly novel, was not rejected everywhere with ironclad consistency. In this connection, Robert Holtman has very usefully distinguished between the “nationalism” of those local juridical-social elites prepared to cooperate with the French in implementing revolutionary or reformist measures and the more old-fashioned “patriotism” of those local notables and humbler folk who were in fact resolutely opposed to the application of such reforms.[7]

In closing, I would like to return to the somewhat ironic observation with which I began this response. How refreshing it is, for a change, to be faulted for being insufficiently daring in exploring the ramifications of warfare for France rather than be questioned for focusing on the issue in the first place! Sutherland and I assuredly have our differences where some of the substantive matters discussed on these pages are concerned, but we palpably share something far more meaningful in the end than what divides us: namely, a sensitivity to the crucial importance of the foreign/domestic “dialectic” in France’s revolutionary adventure. I wrote *Reinterpreting the French Revolution* primarily to highlight this issue—both for the “specialist” and, yes (to use Sutherland’s term again), for the “general reader.” It is telling that an increasing number of “revisionists” have recently been arguing along much the same lines in English and Russian revolutionary studies.[8] It is high time, I would say, that our fellow-toilers in the vineyards of French revolutionary scholarship do likewise.

NOTES

[1] T. C. W. Blanning, *Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London and New York: Longman, 1986).

[2] Refer to Patricia Chastain Howe, "Charles-Francois Dumouriez and the Revolutionizing of French Foreign Affairs in 1792," *French Historical Studies* 14 (1986): 367-90; Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, "'The Reign of the Charlatans is Over': The French Revolutionary Attack on Diplomatic Practice," *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993): 706-44; and Sydney Biro, *The German Policy of Revolutionary France: A Study in French Diplomacy During the War of the First Coalition, 1792-1797*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957).

[3] Karl A. Roeder, Jr., *Baron Thugut and Austria's Response to the French Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 131-35, 181-82, 287-88, and 384-85.

[4] See Jeremy Black, *British Foreign Policy in an Age of Revolutions, 1783-1793* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 461-63, 470.

[5] See Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981).

[6] Bailey Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution*, p. 172. Citation is from Black, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 470.

[7] See Robert B. Holtman, *The Napoleonic Revolution* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1967), esp. pp. 179-93. Robert R. Palmer had already said much the same thing in *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America. Vol. 2: The Struggle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964). On the general question of European reactions to revolutionary and Napoleonic reforms, see Owen Connelly, *Napoleon's Satellite Kingdoms* (New York: The Free Press, 1965); Carlo Zaghi, *Napoleone e l'Europa* (Naples: Cymba, 1969); and Heinz O. Sieburg, ed., *Napoleon und Europa* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1971).

[8] See, for examples of this historiographical tendency: Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Theodore H. Von Laue, *Why Lenin? Why Stalin? Why Gorbachev? The Rise and Fall of the Soviet System* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); and Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Bailey Stone
University of Houston
bsstone@mail.uh.edu

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