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**David A. Bell**, *The First Total War. Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; London: Bloomsbury, 2007. x + 420 pp. \$27.00, £20.00 (hb.) ISBN 978-0-618-34965-4 (US); ISBN 978-0-74757719-5 (UK).

Response Essay by David A. Bell, The Johns Hopkins University, to the Review Essays of his book by Jeremy D. Popkin, Annie Jourdan, Jeremy Black, and Howard G. Brown.

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Readers of the preceding four essays may well have formed the impression that in this Forum battle lines have been drawn across the across the Atlantic. An American historian has written a book about the culture of war in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe. Two other American historians have written appreciative reviews of it. Two European historians have written scathingly negative reviews of it. I would not be so presumptuous as to think that *The First Total War* is featuring in some sort of transcontinental *Historikerstreit*, but the temptation to see contending European and American schools of thought at work here is a strong one.

Unfortunately, this is not the case. If the differences on view in this Forum had really arisen out of contending schools, it would make for an intellectually fruitful debate, of the sort that H-France has become justly known for (and I am grateful to its editors for choosing my book as the subject of this Forum). However, the battle lines here are for the most part tediously familiar. In the case of Annie Jourdan, they are, at least in part, political. She seems to have confused me with Simon Schama and thinks that she needs to defend the French Revolution against a supposed conservative onslaught of mine. As for Jeremy Black, what is at stake, in the end, is academic turf. Is it permissible for a historian of political culture such as myself to say anything about the history of war without making a lifetime study of the subject in its nearly infinite permutations? The really unfortunate thing is that both these historians seem to have taken their stances by reflex, and as a result, unlike Jeremy Popkin and Howard Brown, have not only failed to engage with the book's central arguments but do not even acknowledge these arguments. Instead, they both fall back on *ex cathedra* pronouncements that reek unpleasantly of condescension. Well, they have no cause for complaint if I in turn dispense with false *politesse*. I will answer their critiques first (at length, I am afraid), and then turn to the thoughtful and generous reviews written by Popkin and Brown.

Annie Jourdan, livid at what she strangely perceives as my attack on the Revolution, consistently misrepresents and occasionally misquotes my book. In one crucial regard, she also adopts a strategy that is frankly deceptive. This consists, first, of giving a distorted and truncated summary of my arguments and then claiming, on this basis, that my book does little more than repeat the thesis of Jean-Yves Guimar's recent study *L'invention de la guerre totale*.<sup>[1]</sup> Jourdan says a good many derogatory things about my work in her review ("cliché... overstated, hyperbolic," plus the fact that I write well, which she seems to consider a grievous offense). But her insinuations as to my use of Guimar amount to the most severe charge, so in my response to her protracted *cahier de doléances*, let me start here.

I have learned a great deal from Jean-Yves Guimar and acknowledge his book fully in the pages of *The First Total War*. While I spend little time in my book discussing other historians, I mention Guimar prominently in the introduction (e.g. pp. 8-9) and cite him copiously in the notes. I might also mention that two years ago on H-France I published a long, sympathetic review of *L'invention de la guerre totale* that was one of the first substantive accounts of the book to appear anywhere (for this reason, Jourdan's claim that it has since become a "standard reference" is rather ironic).<sup>[2]</sup> In any case, my debt to Guimar is clear to see, and Jourdan is unjustified to imply that I am concealing it ("for historians who

are not familiar with Guiomar's book, the way Bell presents his analyses and approach might seem original").

But do I really do nothing more than repeat Guiomar's arguments? Readers need only turn to the reviews by Popkin and Brown to see what Jourdan has left out. Guiomar's book begins with France's declaration of war in 1792 and proceeds from there. He sees "total war" as developing out of the conflict itself and pays little attention to the broader cultural context—that is not his purpose. By contrast, my book opens with a portrait of warfare under the Old Regime and then devotes two long chapters to the way understandings of war and peace changed in the Enlightenment and the early years of the French Revolution (Jourdan barely even mentions this long section). It is only more than a third of the way into the book that I turn to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. I proceed in this manner because I see the latter conflicts as fundamentally shaped by the earlier debates. When war ceased to be considered an ordinary part of the social order and became imagined as something either horrifically or (for some) sublimely exceptional, then the restraints that had accompanied European conflicts in the earlier part of the eighteenth century could be discarded. Enemies could come to be seen as embodying a new sort of existential threat, and this perception could drive a true radicalization of warfare, in which the contending powers found it increasingly difficult to pull back or to recognize their opponents as honorable adversaries. As a result, despite many attempts to end the slaughter, they threw ever greater resources into the fight, until eventually one side, exhausted, was defeated and overthrown. It is this broad story, I argue, that deserves the title of "the first total war." It has (freely acknowledged) points in common with Guiomar's analysis, but in its emphasis on the cultural background, it is fundamentally different.

This is just one distinction, if the most important, that Jourdan misses in my book. But throughout, she is so mistakenly certain as to what I am saying that she cannot even read my prose correctly. For instance, she castigates me for repeatedly characterizing the revolutionary and Napoleonic period as "an era of apocalyptic conflict." She quotes these words, and adds scoffingly that I use the adjective "apocalyptic" "on pp. 2, 4, 5, 7 and 316." Actually, the word appears on ten other pages as well (if not, in fact, on page 2), but Jourdan seems to have missed this, perhaps because the other uses mostly come in the book's middle chapters. The important point, though, is that in all but one case, I did not use the word "apocalyptic" to describe the era itself, but rather the *perceptions* expressed at the time. The phrase Jourdan quotes reads, more fully: "*the widespread conviction that an era of apocalyptic conflict had begun*" (p. 1—my italics). Does she not see the difference? I do say, when summarizing the enormous toll of death and destruction that Europe paid between 1792 and 1815, that it "deserves the adjective 'apocalyptic'" (p. 7), and I stand by this judgment. But, as my overall usage suggests, the book is concerned principally with how people came to understand and speak about war in new ways and the consequences of these changes. It is, in short, a work of cultural history, despite Jourdan's claim that I have left culture out. But Jourdan seems to have made no effort to understand my approach. In another instance, she writes that "for Bell, war is total when the military imposes its values on the civil society and 'harnessed entire societies to a single, military purpose.'" The passage in question actually reads: "*...concerted political attempts to harness entire societies [...]* to a single, military purpose" (p. 9—again, my italics), which obviously changes the meaning. In short, Jourdan fundamentally misrepresents what I am trying to do.

What Jourdan *thinks* I am trying to do is something very different: slandering the French Revolution. "The moral of Bell's story" she concludes, "is that the French Revolution was above all bloody, and it destroyed a far better aristocratic system and initiated the modern total war. Here can be discerned the new conservatism Schama announced in 1989...." To anyone who has ever heard me speak about Schama's *Citizens* or read my many writings on the French Revolution, this statement will seem simply bizarre. Significantly, Jourdan cannot actually find any passages to quote condemning the Revolution but can only point to my alleged nostalgia for the Old Regime's officer corps and my emphasis on "the bloody scenes" (I would be interested to see how a historian might write about French Revolutionary

warfare *without* dwelling on “bloody scenes”). It is worth noting that my one reference to Simon Schama in *The First Total War* is hardly favourable. In my chapter on the Vendée, I point out that his *Citizens* uncritically repeats allegations by Reynald Secher as to the “genocide” in the region in the 1790’s (pp. 157-8). By contrast, my own conclusions on the Vendée are guided mostly by the work of Jean-Clément Martin—hardly an exemplar of Schamaesque conservatism!<sup>[3]</sup> Of course the Vendée was a theatre of horrors. But if saying this makes me a conservative, then it makes every serious historian of the Revolution one as well. Similarly, to point out that Old Regime warfare was less murderous and destructive than what followed hardly means I oppose the French Revolution and everything it stands for.

Having tagged me as conservative, Jourdan then goes on to castigate me for making use of the ultra-conservative Carl Schmitt. “Schmitt was a Nazi theorist,” she writes, “and wrote in a context different from the revolutionary one, creating concepts then unknown to the revolutionaries.” Well, yes. I was not aware that it is a mistake to discuss an event using concepts unknown to its actors. I thought this was actually a routine element of historical interpretation. (Should we discuss the ancient Etruscans using only ancient Etruscan concepts?) Carl Schmitt was a dreadful man who wrote many repulsive things, but his very hostility to liberal society and to the traditions of the Enlightenment gave him some exceptionally keen insights into them, which is why he has been so widely read in recent years by people who consider his politics abhorrent. And while Schmitt did indeed write in a context very different from the Revolution, he thought very carefully about the early modern and Napoleonic eras, as shown in his books *The Nomos of the Earth* and *The Theory of the Partisan*.<sup>[4]</sup> Jourdan, by contrast, suggests approaching the period through the lens of her compatriot Johan Huizinga and his book *Homo Ludens*. I admire Huizinga and his elegiac writings, but I find Jourdan’s suggestions here singularly unconvincing. Using Huizinga’s terms, she suggests that modernity begins with “the emergence of puerilism and the fading of play...” and adds that the period under debate remained pre-modern because Napoleon cheated, and “cheating is still a game, whereas puerilism consists of breaking the game.” Even if we accept Jourdan’s view of Napoleon, I would find it very hard to believe that Robespierre and Saint-Just were just “cheating” or saw themselves in any meaningful sense as playing a game. On the other hand, even in the twentieth century, it is easy to find examples of international conflict being treated as a form of play, whether it is the actions of officers trying to hold onto their martial ideals in World War I, or the United States and the Soviet Union engaging in what is usually called the “game of espionage.”

This point brings me to the most substantial and serious criticism offered by Jourdan, although it too comes bound up with serious misrepresentations. It concerns my argument for the modernity of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. “Why,” Jourdan asks, “should the Terror and the culture of war be automatically an anticipation of the hell of totalitarianism instead of the last expression of a tradition of absolutist intolerance?” This is one misrepresentation, since I never employ the word “totalitarianism” in the book. Jourdan is the one conflating “totalitarianism” and “total war,” not I. But otherwise, the question is a good one. After all, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars *were* far less destructive than the worldwide conflicts that followed the industrial revolution and were fought with weapons that Louis XIV would have found mostly familiar. My answer is that “total war” is a concept that makes most sense when defined in terms of politics rather than economics and technology. Roger Chickering, who has written widely on the subject, has pointed to the almost-insuperable difficulties of measuring mobilization and destructiveness in such a way as to distinguish clearly between “total” wars and less-than-total ones. In some ways, he suggests, even the final stages of World War II could be seen as less than total.<sup>[5]</sup> Jean-Yves Guimar, meanwhile, has shown that it is civilian politicians, not military leaders, who have mostly deployed the concept of “total war” and less to describe actual conflicts than to call for an even greater degree of mobilization and commitment.<sup>[6]</sup> For these reasons, despite the fact that industrialization made possible much greater degrees of violence, I argue that the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, thanks to the process of radicalization that I described above, deserve the label of “the first total war.” By the same token, they differ from earlier conflicts driven by absolutist intolerance, despite the often horrific levels of destruction that accompanied these. (It is on this point,

incidentally, that Jourdan misquotes my statement about “concerted political attempts to harness entire societies....”)

The question of modernity and total war also lies behind the last two criticisms of Jourdan’s that I need to answer. First, she accuses me of contradicting myself by defining total war as a confusion of military and civilian spheres but then arguing that an increasing cleavage between the two took place. My point is actually the following. Until the end of the Old Regime, most Western Europeans did not see “civilian” and “military” spheres as opposites. One telling piece of evidence is the fact that the word “civilian” did not exist in its modern meaning, in either French or English, until the end of the eighteenth century (see my discussion on p. 11). But as the idea of a fully professional military arose and then, as the possibility of a military coup appeared at the start of the Revolution, the distinction started to appear. And at that point there also arose the idea (obviously unthinkable beforehand) that “civilian” society might be militarized—that the values and practices of the one sphere could be imposed on the other. This is the idea that animates both modern militarism and visions of total war, and it depends precisely on the idea that a distinction between military and civilian spheres has come into being but is then forcibly collapsed. A boundary line, after all, can only be transgressed once it has been recognized in the first place.

Secondly, Jourdan argues against the modernity of the period by pointing out that the radicalization of warfare between 1792 and 1815 was hardly continuous and that French society “was not fully militarized.” How, she asks, can these wars be called “total” when various figures in France continued to favor peace throughout, and when Napoleon tried several times to make lasting peace settlements (such as at Tilsit)? “For [Bell],” she writes dismissively, “pacifism seems to be a privilege of the Old Regime and of the Enlightenment.” She adds that I am mistaken to characterize imperial society as militaristic. Again, Jourdan seems to have skipped blithely over long sections of my book, and at the risk of dragging out this response to her even further, let me quote two germane passages: “the Consulate was...torn between the militarism that Napoleon had ridden to power and his sincere ambition to forge an explicitly ‘civilian’ regime” (p. 228); “Napoleon posed not simply as a glorious conqueror but also as a peacemaker.... The echoes of the Enlightenment language of peace and progress were unmistakable” (p. 230). As these quotations suggest, *The First Total War* does not in fact ignore the attempts under the Directory, Consulate, and Empire to make peace and establish an enduring civilian regime. I simply argue that these attempts failed. Ultimately, they could not overcome the logic of militarism and total war, and on this point I cannot do better than quote the famous saying of Napoleon that Howard Brown quotes in his review: “My power is dependent on my glory, and my glory on my victories. My power would fall if I did not base it on still more glory and still more victories.”

One last point. To see fully the perspective from which Annie Jourdan is arguing, I would advise readers to consult her own 2002 article “Napoléon et la paix universelle: Utopie et réalité.”[7] In it, she draws heavily on after-the-fact, self-serving Napoleonic sources such as the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* to claim that Napoleon was, in important ways, a man of peace, inspired by the utopian pacifism of the abbé Saint-Pierre. I must confess I found the argument distinctly far-fetched when I first read it and barely mentioned the article in my book. Our differences on this point do, however, suggest another possible reason for the exceptional hostility of Jourdan’s review. But at least on the subject of Napoleon, unlike that of the French Revolution, the difference between us is real, rather than a product of her misreadings.

Turning from Annie Jourdan’s review to Jeremy Black’s I find myself lectured not for my counter-revolutionary tendencies but for my insufficient understanding of military history. I can appreciate why Black might feel qualified to deliver this particular lesson. After all, I have written a mere three books, of which only the latest addresses military questions. By contrast, according to the Library of Congress Catalog, Black has single-authored no fewer than 71 books and edited or co-edited a further 19, most of them on early modern military history (as Hugh Grant lamented to Andie MacDowell in *Four Weddings*

*and a Funeral*, in a slightly different context: “I don’t know what I have been doing with my time”).[8] Perhaps I should simply retreat in the face of these vastly superior numbers. Except that Jeremy Black, by writing so many millions of words on the same subject, seems to have forgotten how to see things from perspectives other than his own. Nor does his prodigious output seem to have left him much time to read carefully. His short and dismissive review barely even mentions, let alone confronts, the central arguments of my book.

Black does make one substantive criticism of *The First Total War*: namely that I have adopted an outmoded and discredited thesis, according to which the French Revolution marked a decisive break in patterns of European warfare. The current accepted wisdom on the subject, he suggests, instead stresses “continuity with ancien regime conflict.” I am, of course, very aware of the recent work that makes this argument and cite a great deal of it in my bibliography (including several titles by Jeremy Black—if not, I regret to say, all 90). But as I did not want to include historiographical quarrels in my book, I did not lay out explicitly why I disagreed with this approach. Let me do so now, focusing on the book that has had the greatest influence in making the case for continuity and which Black himself cites in his review: Paul Schroeder’s *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848*. [9]

This book is an imposing and justly admired piece of scholarship. I drew on it heavily in writing *The First Total War*. But how convincing is its argument that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars represented essentially an intensification of earlier corrosive and unstable patterns in international relations? The problem is that Schroeder sees military and diplomatic history as the story of attempts to solve what he calls “the permanent, structural problems of international politics.” [10] He takes for granted that most European statesmen have always had peace and stability as their principal goals (that they wanted “a solution to war”). He therefore assumes that since both the periods before and after 1789 were characterized by virtually continuous warfare, they were essentially similar: periods when statesmen “failed” to stabilize the “international system.” [11] He is so convinced that the basic problems and rules of international relations are timeless that he has elsewhere forthrightly condemned Napoleon Bonaparte as a “criminal,” a statement I find jarring. [12] (Should we put him posthumously on trial? Perhaps with Attila in the next courtroom?).

Schroeder does not really consider the possibility that, in an age when most European statesmen belonged to hereditary nobilities that still defined themselves, ultimately, in terms of military service, these statesmen might have actually seen perpetual peace as undesirable. They might have sought only to limit the destructive effects of war—not end it forever. This is the case I argue in my book, and it is not, *pace* Black, an attempt to return to outmoded theories. It is an attempt to apply to the history of war the methods of cultural history—which is to say, to understand how actors functioned and thought in a cultural system very different from our own. If we apply these methods, and admit the possibility that pre-revolutionary statesmen did not in fact want the problem of war “solved” in the way Schroeder assumes statesmen *always* want it solved, then the argument for continuity becomes much less convincing. Because in this case, what matters is less the frequency of war both before and after 1792 than the way wars were fought. In other words, the differences in the scale, intensity, and political consequences of war after 1792 assume preeminent importance.

In my book, I summarize these differences as follows (see esp. p. 7). More than a fifth of all the major battles fought in Europe between 1490 and 1815 took place just in the twenty-five years after 1790. Before 1790, only a handful of battles had involved more than 100,000 combatants. In 1809, the battle of Wagram, the largest yet seen in the gunpowder age, involved 300,000. Four years later, the battle of Leipzig drew 500,000, with fully 150,000 of them killed or wounded. The wars brought about significant alterations in the territory, or the political system, of every single European state, and total death tolls exceeded anything seen in the previous century. Schroeder, in one of his less convincing moves, tries to mask these changes by arguing that “overall, the ratio of battlefield deaths to the total population of Europe was about seven times as great in the eighteenth as in the nineteenth

century.”[13] Except that by his own evidence, the actual *number* of eighteenth-century battlefield deaths amounted to less than 24,000 a year for the entire continent—a level that statesmen might well have considered acceptable. And he also omits the period 1792-1815 from his calculations (although without saying so in the book itself).[14]

Black himself raises a particularly curious example to prove the point of continuity and to play down the novelty of 1792-1815, namely that Prussia remained at peace with France between 1795 and 1806. Of course, the fact that Germany remained at peace with the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1941 does not make World War II any less of a total war. But surely the most remarkable thing about Franco-Prussian conflict in the longer period from 1792 to 1815 was not the long peace Black mentions, but how it ended (see my discussion on pp. 238-40). In 1806, in less time than it would take the Wehrmacht to conquer France in 1940, Napoleon utterly crushed Prussia. Of the 171,000 soldiers King Friedrich Wilhelm had at his disposal at the end of the summer, 25,000 were dead or wounded, and 140,000 taken prisoner by mid-autumn 96 percent. In the draconian peace settlement that eventually followed, Prussia lost fully half its territory and subjects, was forced to pay massive reparations, and saw its army reduced to a token force of 42,000. Clausewitz was only the most famous Prussian officer to lament the unprecedented scope of this defeat. Nothing in the eighteenth century before 1792 compares with it. In short, I simply do not agree with Jeremy Black’s argument for continuity. If it has indeed become the conventional wisdom among military historians, then it needs to be overthrown.

Black’s other criticisms are more trivial. He calls my characterization of the relationship between “mainstream” and military history myopic, to which I will simply reply by noting that in a recent issue of *The American Historical Review*, flagship journal of the profession in the United States, only 15 of 194 new books of history under review could count as military history. For those who are interested, I have written on this question at greater length in a recent article.[15] Black also says that the evidence of war in the 1820s “should undermine any sense that Napoleonic conflict had transformed warfare and brought forward modernity.” I am hardly unaware of the changes that came about in the 1820s. As I write in my epilogue: “after 1815...the sort of war [Napoleon] embodied fell into eclipse” (p. 307). But to say that warfare had not been massively transformed because of this eclipse is like saying that because Napoleon crowned himself emperor in Notre Dame, the French Revolution had done nothing to transform French politics. As for Black’s point that apocalyptic violence occurred in human history well before the French Revolution, I can only say, once again, that I never argued otherwise. (On p. 8, I acknowledge the wholly obvious fact that many examples of unrestrained, and even exterminatory, warfare occurred long before the eighteenth century.) As I have already pointed out, I define a “total war” as one that involves a process of radical politicization, through which powers attempt to harness all the inhabitants and resources of their societies to achieve the complete destruction of the enemy. I do not see this concept as applicable to pre-modern peasant empires.

Finally, in a (literally) Parthian shot, Black brings up Nader Shah, among others, so as to argue that no comprehensive history of modern warfare should limit itself simply to the West. Again, of course! But I was not trying to write such a comprehensive history. I was trying to fill in one important, European part of the puzzle. I will leave this larger project to Black himself—plus another task he faults me for not accomplishing in my earlier book, *The Cult of the Nation in France*, namely offering a complete account of the “nature of identity.”

Moving on from Black and Jourdan to Jeremy Popkin makes for quite a difference. Although readers of this Forum will not learn about the principal arguments of my book from Jourdan or Black’s accounts, to do so, they need look no further than Popkin’s careful, thorough, and judicious summary. Unlike Jourdan, Popkin realizes quite well that my account of Old Regime warfare is not an exercise in nostalgia. Unlike Black, he understands that I am not simply trying to revive an outdated account of early modern warfare. I am particularly grateful for his discussions of my chapters on the Enlightenment and the early Revolution, which Jourdan and Black ignore. Finally, Popkin recognizes,

and takes seriously, the extent to which I wrote the book with present-day events in mind—that is to say, the way I was attempting to trace the origins of patterns of thought and behavior that continue to have important, devastating effects. I am delighted at his conclusion that my book shows how comparisons between the present and the past can “generate new perspectives” on both.

To be sure, a “present-day” approach also has drawbacks. For one thing, it can lead the historian, in judging an event, to put excessive stress on the long-term consequences as opposed to the immediate context. In my chapter on early Revolutionary debates, for instance, I found it difficult to read the arguments of the radicals in the Constituent Assembly without thinking of the uses to which such arguments would later be put. I think Popkin is fair to criticize me here for underestimating the degree to which concerted opposition from the right forced the radicals into the stance they took. Similarly, a present-day approach can create expectations that exact parallels will be established and “lessons” drawn—and my book begins precisely with a set of parallels between the revolutionary era and our own. True, after this initial rhetorical flourish, I do step back from any notion that the parallels are exact, let alone that the revolutionary era can offer us any easy solutions to our current difficulties (if only it could!). I do not see the Iraq War and the “war on terror” as reenactments of revolutionary and Napoleonic events, although the American experience in Iraq has important features in common with guerrilla conflicts that go straight back to the Spanish War of Independence of 1808-14. But Jeremy Popkin is still quite right to underline the differences. For the record, I do think that in some important respects American public attitudes have come to resemble those of the older period. We can see it not in a desire for yet more military adventurism, which the Iraqi misadventure has scotched for the moment, but rather in the widespread sense that the United States faces an existential threat, despite much evidence that terrorist networks like Al Qaeda do not live up to their nightmare image in the American media. See, for instance, the sober evaluation of political scientist John Mueller, who points out that even the horrendous death toll of 9/11 was very low by the historical standards of warfare, as opposed to the historical standards of mass murder.[16] And if the nature of the terrorist threat changes and something like another 9/11 or worse does occur, I think the American public’s current attitude of caution could quickly disappear.

Jeremy Popkin also has interesting questions to ask about the extent to which the conflicts of 1792-1815 resembled twentieth-century total wars, the significance of the “long peace” that followed 1815, and the extent of militarism in modern European society. On the first of these, I will not repeat the points I have already made above in my responses to Jourdan and Black but simply add that while the human toll of the revolutionary-era conflicts was certainly smaller in absolute terms, and possibly in relative ones as well (the evidence is too fragmentary to know for sure), it was nonetheless perceived at the time as devastating. As Carl von Clausewitz so starkly put it in 1812, “the present war is the war of all against all.”[17] On the nineteenth-century “long peace,” as I argue in my epilogue, I think there are important distinctions to be made between the “regime of restraint” that prevailed before 1792 and the one that arose after 1815. In the first case, the restraints were effectively built into the training and attitudes of the aristocrats who ruled most European states and ran most European armies. In the second case, as none other than Paul Schroeder has argued (here I agree with him), the restraints were imposed, deliberately, by the great powers acting in concert with each other, precisely because of the dreadful, scarring experiences of what had occurred during the Revolution and Empire. The system established in 1814-15 did prove remarkably successful, but when the collaboration between the great powers collapsed, the stage was set for a resumption of total war, on an even more horrific scale than before.

On the issue of militarism, I have to disagree with Jeremy Popkin. The fact that successful military coups have been rare in modern European history hardly means that militarism has had little importance. Yes, the Dreyfus Affair ended in “the disgrace of the misbehaving generals,” but the mere fact that the army could assume the political importance it did at the time, by posing as morally superior to a corrupt Republic, is itself significant. As I point out in the book, in Old Regime Europe it would have been inconceivable for armed forces to play such a role, even with the examples of Caesar and

praetorianism at the heart of the classical curriculum. Armed forces existed to serve the prince. In modern times, by contrast, armed forces have set themselves up as independent political forces in many European states that never experienced actual coups (to say nothing of Latin America). In many states around the world, notably the United States, a successful military record has long been seen as a qualification for civilian office.

Turning to Howard Brown's generous essay, a different set of questions arise. I am, of course, grateful to Brown for the kind things he says about my book. I am also obliged to him for the alternate perspective he suggests—one that would put greater stress “on the personal and political calculations of warmongers.” Brown himself, in his own books, offers a distinguished example of how to view French history of this period through a prism that gives full weight to political calculations, and I have learned a great amount from them.

It is certainly true that in order to tell a cohesive story, and to keep my book a reasonable length, I ended up giving less weight to such calculations than they deserve. I do hope, however, that the story I tell is compatible with a closer consideration of them and might even illuminate them by sketching out the discursive context in which they were made. Take, for instance, the question of war “as a source of domestic political legitimacy,” as Brown puts it, particularly during the Directory and Consulate. The question is *why* war served such a legitimating purpose. To be sure, victory has burnished political popularity from the days of Caesar to those of George W. Bush. Yet for a time in the eighteenth century, peace established its own claims as a source of legitimacy. Louis XV, as Thomas Kaiser has noted, strove to present himself as a “roi de paix,” and in 1790 the Constituent Assembly issued its so-called “Declaration of Peace to the World,” which I examine in my book.[18] For a long period, French revolutionary politicians found it politically inexpedient to defend war for its own sake. But during the Directory, a distinct shift took place. As one of Bonaparte's tame journalists wrote, revealingly, in 1797: “This overly insulted Constituent Assembly...decreed that the French Nation renounced all conquests. This idea seemed sublime at first glance, but it was in fact dictated more by false philanthropy than by an enlightened love of humanity. The conquests of a free people improve the lot of the vanquished, lessen the power of kings, and increase the extent of enlightenment.” The writer went on to grant Bonaparte “the double glory of conqueror and benefactor of peoples.”[19] Once war could be glorified in this manner, it became easier for the French regime to legitimize itself by reference to its conquests. Cultural change and political calculation went hand-in-hand.

A similar, if very broad, question concerns why the wars continued, and indeed intensified, long after Napoleon had secured his throne and eliminated immediate threats to French security. If he had moderated his demands, might he not have in fact brought about a lasting peace? As Brown rightly points out, despite the apocalyptic vision of Napoleon found in allied propaganda, the allies mostly did not insist on “total victory” until very late in the game. Brown therefore suggests looking more closely at the political and personal calculations and particularly the way Napoleon's own insecurity pushed him towards the chimera of total victory, ultimately forcing the allies to adopt the same goal. This perspective is a useful one, which does indeed “cast a refracting light on the ‘dynamism and logic’ of these wars.”

I would stress, however, that Napoleon's doubts as to his own legitimacy amounted to considerably more than just personal insecurity. He understood quite well that while European sovereigns were ready to sign treaties with him, and even marry their daughters to him, a significant part of public opinion in the allied countries continued to condemn him as a usurper—the “Corsican Ogre,” even the Antichrist. He may have been wrong, in 1803, to see the British government's failure to suppress the vitriolic attacks on him in the British press as a deliberate provocation and affront, but he quite rightly perceived that the British nation did not treat him as it had treated Louis XVI. What was at issue was not simply political legitimacy but the question of whether the relationship of “honorable adversaries” that had characterized warfare to a great extent before 1789 could be reestablished. I argue in *The First Total*

*War* that despite efforts on both sides, it could not. And as a result, after every peace settlement (Amiens, Tilsit, etc.), every unresolved or contested issue continued to generate enormous suspicion and hostility and therefore to feed the feeling that only “total victory” could guard against the ever-lurking possibility of “total defeat.” This is the logic and dynamism to which I refer. It does not mean that the wars *inevitably* continued and intensified until the final French defeat. But it does suggest that this denouement was very difficult to avoid. We must give political and personal calculations their due, while also keeping in mind the way that the prevalent fear, suspicion, and hostility actively shaped the way the calculations were made.

In concluding this response, I would like once again to thank the editors of H-France for choosing my book as a subject of this Forum and the four reviewers for their comments. As has often been remarked, having a book reviewed provides a fascinating, if sometimes dispiriting, lesson in the nature of both writing and reading. It shows authors that no matter how clearly they think they may have made their points, in fact they have always left behind untidy loose ends of ambiguity, which readers will seize and braid into interpretations of their own making. No book ever belongs entirely to its author for it takes a different shape in every reader’s mind. And never has this point come home to me more forcefully than in reading these four reviews, which seem to be of two, perhaps three, entirely different books. I can only hope that the readers of this Forum will find it useful, in trying to comprehend the terrible events of 1792-1815, to compare these different accounts and my own attempts to reassert my *droits d’auteur*.

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#### NOTES

[1] Jean-Yves Guïomar, *L’invention de la guerre totale: XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Le Félin, 2004).

[2] <http://www.h-france.net/vol5reviews/bell4.html>.

[3] Above all, *La Vendée et la France* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

[4] Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1997); and Carl Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen: Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1963).

[5] Roger Chickering, “Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept,” in Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster, eds., *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914* (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1999), pp. 13–28.

[6] See Guïomar, *L’invention de la guerre totale* p. 302.

[7] Annie Jourdan, “Napoléon et la paix universelle: Utopie et réalité,” in J.-C. Martin, ed., *Napoléon et l’Europe* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002), pp. 55–69.

[8] Some of these books may actually be the same ones published under different titles. I certainly hope so.

[9] Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 577.

[11] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[12] Paul W. Schroeder, "Napoleon's Foreign Policy: A Criminal Enterprise," *Journal of Military History*, vol. 54, no. 2 (1990): 147-62.

[13] Schroeder, *Transformation*, p. vii.

[14] Schroeder does not present this evidence in his book but in a separate article, "The Nineteenth-Century International System: Changes in the Structure," *World Politics*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1986): 1-26.

[15] David A. Bell, "Casualty of War: Military History Bites the Dust," *The New Republic*, May 7, 2007.

[16] John Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

[17] Carl von Clausewitz, "Bekanntnisdenschrift," in idem, *Schriften -- Aufsätze -- Studien -- Briefe*, ed. Werner Hahlweg, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 682-751, quote from vol. 1, p. 750.

[18] Thomas E. Kaiser, "Louis le Bien-Aimé and the Rhetoric of the Royal Body," in Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg, eds., *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 131-61.

[19] "Réflexions sur la paix et la guerre, par Leussière, rédacteur de la Sentinelle et ci-devant collaborateur de *l'Orateur Plébéien*," in *Le courrier de l'armée d'Italie, ou le patriote français à Milan*, no. 47, October 21, 1797, p. 202. My translation.

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