

### **National Pride and Republican *grandezza*: Brissot's New Language for International Politics in the French Revolution**

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Following his election in September 1791, Jacques-Pierre Brissot waged a relentless campaign for war in France's newly established Legislative Assembly. Together with a small group of parliamentarians, the young revolutionary pushed for the government to adopt an uncompromising policy towards those who contested the legitimacy of the Revolution. He claimed that noble *émigrés* and German princes were plotting to overthrow the Constitution, and French representatives had to uphold national honor by confronting them.<sup>1</sup> In speeches delivered over the course of several months, he insisted on the need to adopt a new foreign policy aligned with revolutionary principles. Brissot called for replacing the traditional intrigue and duplicity of diplomatic affairs with transparency, intransigence and the ideals of political liberty and national sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> At the Jacobins, he went further, suggesting that war would have positive "regenerative" effects at home: it would expose the country's "traitors" and it would promote a spirit of industry, frugality and sacrifice that were the basis for republican virtue.<sup>3</sup>

This campaign was notoriously effective. It brought together revolutionaries who would later become known as the Girondins and it played a decisive role in pushing France to declare war on Austria in April 1792. The campaign, however, contradicted earlier expectations of what would be the Revolution's foreign policy.

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<sup>1</sup> In his first parliamentary speech on October 20, 1791, Brissot insisted that noble *émigrés* would never accept France's new regime: "Leur cœur est endurci dès leur naissance; ils se croient et se croiront toujours les souverains nés du peuple, et chercheront toujours à le ramener au joug." *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. 34 (Paris, 1890), 310.

<sup>2</sup> In a speech on December 29, 1791, he triumphantly announced: "La Révolution française a bouleversé toute la diplomatie." *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. 36 (Paris, 1891), 602. See also his speech on January 17, 1792. *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. 37 (Paris, 1891), 466.

<sup>3</sup> Brissot delivered three significant speeches on foreign policy at the Jacobin club, on December 15, December 30, 1791 and January 20, 1792. I discuss these in further detail below.

Many revolutionaries believed that belligerent and competitive “reason of state” was a hallmark of *ancien régime* politics and they expected 1789 to usher in a new era of pacific international relations.<sup>4</sup> The decree of May 1790, in which the National Assembly renounced all wars of conquest, had appeared to confirm this. Crucially, Brissot himself shared the cosmopolitan outlook associated with Enlightenment philosophy and he aligned himself with Thomas Paine’s critique of the “system of war”, declaring that “universal fraternity” was the inevitable product of political liberty.<sup>5</sup>

With this in mind, historians usually interpret the campaign for war as a cynical strategy by Brissot and his allies to undermine the monarchy and gain political influence.<sup>6</sup> Having failed to topple the King after Varennes, Brissot used the pretext of military conflict to uncover Louis XVI’s true intentions, with the hope of ultimately deposing him – a reading supported by later claims to that effect.<sup>7</sup> An important aspect of this campaign was the construction of a foreign plot supposedly engineered by an “Austrian committee” led by Marie-Antoinette. Scholars argue that it was by ruthlessly exploiting fears of such a conspiracy that the Brissotins were able to persuade a largely monarchist chamber to vote for war.<sup>8</sup> Traditional accounts of Brissot’s pre-revolutionary life, and more generally of his character, further emphasize the resentment that motivated his anti-establishment politics.<sup>9</sup> According to these accounts, the push for war can be understood as a product of Brissot’s earlier experience as a “victim of arbitrary government.”<sup>10</sup> Because this explanation of his

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<sup>4</sup> István Hont, “The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind: ‘Nation-State’ and ‘Nationalism’ in Historical Perspective,” in *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 510.

<sup>5</sup> See my discussion below of Brissot’s *Nouveau voyage dans les États-Unis de l’Amérique Septentrionale, fait en 1788* (Paris, 1791).

<sup>6</sup> For François Furet, the war was used as a “detour” to turn France into a republic, while Tim Blanning argues that the Brissotins pushed for war “chiefly for the purpose of obtaining political power.” This position is shared by Frank Attar. François Furet, “Les Girondins et la guerre: les débuts de l’Assemblée législative,” in *La Gironde et les Girondins*, François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds. (Paris, 1991), 199; Tim Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London, 1986), 123; Frank Attar, *La Révolution française déclare la guerre à l’Europe, 1792: l’embrasement de l’Europe à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Bruxelles, 1992); Frank Attar, *Aux armes, citoyens!: Naissance et fonctions du bellicisme révolutionnaire* (Paris, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *Mémoires (1754-1793)*, ed. Claude Perroud, vol. 2 (1784-1793) (Paris, 1912), 251.

<sup>8</sup> According to Thomas Kaiser, the Legislative Assembly supported war, in part, because Brissot and his allies were able to present Austria as a “credible threat.” Thomas Kaiser, “La fin du renversement des alliances: la France, l’Autriche et la déclaration de guerre du 20 avril 1792,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 351 (2008): 77-98. See also Thomas Kaiser, “From the Austrian Committee to the Foreign Plot: Marie-Antoinette, Austrophobia, and the Terror,” *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 4 (2003): 579-617; Thomas E. Kaiser, “Who’s Afraid of Marie-Antoinette?: Diplomacy, Austrophobia and the Queen,” *French History* 14 (2000): 241-71.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Darnton called attention to Brissot’s pre-revolutionary links to political pornographers in a controversial early piece on this subject. Frederick A. de Luna and Simon Burrows have, however, challenged aspects of this account of Brissot’s character. Robert Darnton, “The Grub Street Style of Revolution: J.-P. Brissot, Police Spy,” *The Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 3 (January 1968): 301; Frederick A. de Luna, “The Dean Street Style of Revolution: J.-P. Brissot, Jeune Philosophe,” *French Historical Studies* 17, no. 1 (April 1, 1991): 159-90; Simon Burrows, “The Innocence of Jacques-Pierre Brissot,” *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 843-71.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Burrows, “The Innocence of Jacques-Pierre Brissot,” 870.

motives is persuasive, historians have tended to overlook the original arguments Brissot developed during this campaign.<sup>11</sup>

Brissot was not the first to appeal to national honor in formulating foreign policy after 1789. Although the language of honor was associated with the *ancien régime*, it continued to shape evaluations of French politics in general, and of the Bourbon monarchy in particular, during the revolutionary period. Hamish Scott has argued that Brissot thus redeployed, to his own ends, a virtue previously associated with aristocratic and monarchical power.<sup>12</sup> But what was distinctive about Brissot's campaign, and of the foreign policy he advocated, was that he connected national honor to the values of political liberty, popular sovereignty and cosmopolitan peace.<sup>13</sup> While others before him had supported the idea of spreading the Revolution abroad, none had done so in the context of making an argument for war.<sup>14</sup> The specific way in which Brissot did this involved a rearticulation of republican ideas about international relations.

In public addresses during the campaign for war, Brissot employed what he called "the language of free men" and made the case for a new type of republican *grandezza*: a foreign policy linking French national honor to the emancipation of foreign peoples.<sup>15</sup> *Grandezza*, or glory, was a civic humanist notion associated with aggression and imperial expansion.<sup>16</sup> Although Brissot did not use the term himself, he sought to invigorate French patriotism by tying national glory to the promotion of universal ideals, thereby transforming classical republican *grandezza* from a policy defined by territorial expansion, into one concerned with political change and the spread of ideas. In articulating this political vision, he took inspiration from America, where the War of Independence had been the catalyst for social and political transformation.<sup>17</sup> In the heated parliamentary debates of 1791-92, Brissot nonetheless

<sup>11</sup> It would be an exaggeration to say that these arguments have been completely ignored. See Goetz-Bernstein's classic study and, more recently, Marc Belissa's work. Hans Alfred Goetz-Bernstein, *La diplomatie de la Gironde: Jacques-Pierre Brissot* (Paris, 1912); Marc Belissa, *Fraternité universelle et intérêt national (1713-1795): les cosmopolitiques du droit des gens* (Paris, 1998), 254-302.

<sup>12</sup> Hamish Scott, "A Model of Conduct from the Age of Chivalry?: Honour, International Decline and the End of the Bourbon Monarchy," in *The Crisis of the Absolute Monarchy: France from Old Regime to Revolution; British Academy*, Julian Swann and Joël Félix, eds. (Oxford, 2013), 181-204. Belissa makes a similar point in "'L'honneur est à Coblençe!': L'honneur national dans les débats sur la guerre," in *Penser et vivre l'honneur à l'époque moderne: actes du colloque organisé à Metz par le CLURH (Centre régional universitaire lorrain d'histoire), 20-22 novembre 2008*, Hervé Drévilion and Diego Venturino, eds. (Rennes, 2011), 151-60.

<sup>13</sup> Gary Savage argues that Brissot's campaign drew on the "unstable mix of cosmopolitanism and nationalism" that had characterized the foreign policy of the "old regime operator" Claude-Charles de Peyssonnel. Gary Savage, "Foreign Policy and Political Culture in Later Eighteenth-Century France," in *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century*, Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms, eds. (Cambridge, 2007), 304-24, esp. 312-316.

<sup>14</sup> Camille Desmoulins and Lafayette had called for the creation of an international federation of "free peoples" as early as 1789-90, following the Belgian revolt. Jeremy J. Whiteman, *Reform, Revolution and French Global Policy, 1787-1791* (Aldershot, 2003), 108.

<sup>15</sup> The above quote is from Brissot's October 1791 speech to the Legislative Assembly. *Archives Parlementaires*, 1890, 34:313.

<sup>16</sup> These were policies that Machiavelli had famously endorsed as a legitimate national and republican aim. John Pocock, "Nicolo Machiavelli and the Imperial Republic," in *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 3: *The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge, 2003), 203-35; David Armitage, "Empire and Liberty: A Republican Dilemma," in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, Martin Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, eds., vol. 2 (Cambridge, 2002), 29-46.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Serna, "Le pari politique de Brissot ou lorsque le Patriote Français, l'Abolitionniste Anglais et le Citoyen Américain sont unis en une seule figure de la liberté républicaine," *La Révolution française [online]*, no. 5 (2013), lrf.revues.org/1021. See also Antonino De Francesco, "The American Origins of

had to contend with a political majority that still supported the monarchy. He therefore remained elusive about his desire for constitutional change and left open the possibility that the King could play a role in France's new diplomacy. By turning to the rhetoric of pride and glory, he appealed to prejudices associated with the competitive power system of eighteenth-century 'national' monarchies. In other words, while the campaign for war may have been motivated by republican aspirations, Brissot's new language for international politics was shaped by the need to negotiate with prevailing opinions.

Scholars have been inclined not to take seriously the more philosophical content of Brissot's argument for war, emphasizing instead his cynical motives or the significance of Austrophobia. Whether or not it was the most important factor in persuading legislators to join his cause, Brissot's new way of speaking about foreign affairs represented an important development in revolutionary political discourse. The declaration of war of April 1792 marked a turning point in the radicalization of the Revolution, and later articulations of French foreign policy, by the Jacobins or by Napoléon, would also appeal to revolutionary principles to justify military aggression.<sup>18</sup> Understanding at a discursive level how the cosmopolitanism of 1790 turned into the nationalism of 1792 – or how the rhetoric of fraternal peace became that of fraternal war – can provide critical insights into the 'ideological' belligerence that characterized French external policy into the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

This article hopes to illuminate part of this process by examining Brissot's political language over this critical period.<sup>20</sup> It explores the way this language built on and adapted his earlier pronouncements on international affairs and compares his ideas to those of other republican thinkers. By way of a contextual reading of his political thinking, it seeks to make sense of Brissot's apparent allegiance to both nationalist and cosmopolitan conceptions of the international order. This study does not claim that this aspect of his rhetoric was the decisive factor in pushing France to war, nor that Brissot was as singular a thinker as Sieyès or Condorcet. Rather, by appraising the shifting nature of his discourse, it looks to make sense of the notions of virtue, pride and patriotism and their development in the course of the Revolution. A history of this nature is concerned with how moral and philosophical claims are taken up by political actors with their own short-term agendas. It also strives to understand the way in which these claims are translated into political argument and how they become transformed along the way: to examine ideas not simply in context, but in *praxis*. In this way, this article hopes to shed light on the fate of republican ideas in

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the French Revolutionary Wars," in *Republics at War, 1776-1840: Revolutions, Conflicts, and Geopolitics in Europe and the Atlantic World*, Pierre Serna, Antonino De Francesco and Judith Miller, eds. (Basingstoke, 2013), 27-45.

<sup>18</sup> David Armstrong provides a useful introduction to the question of the relationship between revolutionary principles and the wars of the period 1792-1815, a topic historians have long discussed and debated. David Armstrong, "State and Nation the French Revolution," in *Revolution and World Order: The Revolutionary State in International Society* (Oxford, 1993), 79-112.

<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that historical understanding of the more practical and immediate causes of the French declaration of war is unimportant. Rather, that aside from these causes, innovations in the use of political ideas and argument can offer other, equally compelling insights about the shape and nature of revolutionary events.

<sup>20</sup> A full account of the discourse of the campaign for war would involve an analysis of the writings and speeches of other pro-war revolutionaries, including both Brissotins and Fayetteistes. This lies beyond the scope of this article.

the period before the first Republic was established, an area of enquiry that, according to one French historian, “is still poorly understood.”<sup>21</sup>

*The Quakers, “Universal Fraternity” and French Liberty*

Before the Revolution, Brissot was an aspiring man of letters. He wrote works on the reform of criminal law and on the right of property, was shortly imprisoned in the Bastille in 1784 for publishing controversial material and spent some time abroad, most notably in London where he met prominent British abolitionists, and later in America.<sup>22</sup> He became an advocate for republican politics through the influence of the Genevan financier Etienne Clavière. Together they coauthored several works in which they maintained that certain types of commerce were compatible with republican virtue, against the views of classical republicans.<sup>23</sup> Brissot and Clavière recognized that mercantilism and trade in luxury goods promoted privilege and venality, but they argued that free economic exchange based on equal status and mutual need encouraged industriousness, frugality and fraternity.<sup>24</sup> Whatever else might be said about his character, Brissot’s pre-revolutionary politics were characterized by a critique of social inequality and advocacy of causes associated with political liberty.<sup>25</sup>

Brissot did not compose works dealing specifically with international relations before the summer of 1791, but he did write about war and republican virtue in the account of his travels to the United States published in April 1791.<sup>26</sup> This account was composed of letters to Clavière and it was Brissot’s only printed work after 1789 not responding to domestic events. It thus offers important insights into his political thinking prior to the King’s flight. Brissot intended this work to be a study of “men who had just acquired their liberty,” one from which he hoped the French would learn

<sup>21</sup> Ruth Scurr, “Pierre-Louis Roederer and the Debate on Forms of Government in Revolutionary France,” *Political Studies* 52, no. 2 (2004): 252.

<sup>22</sup> For further details about his pre-revolutionary life, see Eloise Ellery’s classic work *Brissot de Warville: A Study in the History of the French Revolution* (Boston, 1915).

<sup>23</sup> Many of these works were published under Brissot’s name, but they bore the stamp of Clavière’s influence. They included *Le Philadelphien à Genève: ou, Lettres d’un Américain sur la dernière révolution de Genève, sa constitution nouvelle, l’émigration en Irlande, &c. pouvant servir de tableau politique de Genève jusqu’en 1784* (Dublin, 1783); *Point de banqueroute; ou, Lettres à un créancier de l’état, sur l’impossibilité de la banqueroute nationale & sur les moyens de ramener le crédit & la paix* (London, 1787); *De la France et des États-Unis, ou de l’importance de la révolution de l’Amérique pour le bonheur de la France: Des rapports de ce Royaume et des États-Unis, des avantages réciproques qu’ils peuvent retirer de leurs liaisons de commerce, et enfin de la situation actuelle des États-Unis* (Paris, 1788); *Observations d’un républicain sur les divers systèmes d’administrations provinciales, particulièrement sur ceux de MM. Turgot & Necker, & sur le bien qu’on peut en espérer dans les gouvernements monarchiques* (Lausanne, 1788).

<sup>24</sup> Richard Whatmore has traced the development of this republican version of political economy. See “Étienne Clavière’s revolutionary political economy, 1788-1793,” *History of European Ideas* 22, no. 5-6 (1996): 351-68; *Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say’s Political Economy* (Oxford, 2000), 77-82; “Adam Smith’s role in the French Revolution,” *Past and Present* 175, no. 1 (2002): 65-89; “Ancients versus Moderns?: Political Economy in France, 1762-1814,” in *Gimon Conference on French Political Economy* (2004); “War, Trade and Empire: the Dilemmas of French Liberal Political Economy, 1780-1816,” in *French Liberalism: From Montesquieu to the Present*, Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt, eds. (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Despite her narrow focus, Leonore Loft details Brissot’s views on these issues in *Passion, Politics and Philosophie: Rediscovering J.-P. Brissot* (Westport, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> The initial reasons for Brissot’s visit, three years earlier, were apparently more financial than political. Annie Jourdan, “A Tale of Three Patriots in a Revolutionary World: Théophile Cazenove, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, and Joel Barlow (1788–1811),” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10, no. 2 (2012): 364.

the “secret of preserving it.”<sup>27</sup> As it turned out, this secret was rather straightforward: it was popular *mores* (“les mœurs”), or as Joel Barlow put it in the English translation of the text, “the morals of the people.” Brissot argued that liberty could not survive without private “morals,” since they were the basis of and condition for public virtue.<sup>28</sup> Following their independence, he claimed that the Americans had retained their liberty because they had cultivated the republican virtues of simplicity, industriousness and frugality. In turn, Brissot insisted that, to guarantee the success of the Revolution, the French needed to emulate American *mores* and renounce luxury and frivolity.<sup>29</sup>

In his letters Brissot detailed various aspects of people’s lives in that “free country.”<sup>30</sup> He reserved special praise for the Society of Friends, or the Christian movement also known as the Quakers, for their morals and for the “simplicity of [their] worship.”<sup>31</sup> For our purposes, Brissot’s most interesting remarks touch on the Quakers’ refusal to take up arms. Whilst he commended “their humane principles,” he condemned their decision to remain neutral and not join “their brethren [who] were fighting for independence.” As Brissot explained, “resistance to oppression” was a “sacred and divine principle” and the Quakers should have done more to support the Patriots.<sup>32</sup> In a postscript added in 1790, Brissot contrasted the Quakers’ ideals with revolutionary values. He wrote that “the spirit of that society agrees with the spirit of French liberty.” However, while his compatriots were “striving for the same object” as the Quakers, “universal fraternity,” the Quakers hoped to achieve this “by gentleness,” whereas the French relied on “resistance.” France was “armed from North to South,” Brissot wrote, because it needed to defend itself from “the terror of despotism” and he explained that “their means are those of a society, ours those of a powerful nation.”<sup>33</sup> In these remarks, Brissot suggested the Quakers and French revolutionaries shared a common interest in international peace, but he emphasized the contrasting, if not contradictory, “means” they employed to promote this.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that while he was committed to universal concord, he was prepared to justify the use of force in support of this principle.

It is worth putting Brissot’s remarks into context. The goal of promoting “universal fraternity” was widely shared by French revolutionaries at the time, and it certainly inspired Volney’s proposal in May 1790 that France renounce all wars of

<sup>27</sup> Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *New Travels in the United States of America*, trans. Joel Barlow (London, 1792), ix–x.

<sup>28</sup> “Without private virtue, there can be no public virtue, no public spirit, no liberty.” *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>29</sup> See Brissot’s comments throughout the preface. *Ibid.*, i–xliii.

<sup>30</sup> He made observations on the towns he visited, which included Boston, New York and Philadelphia. He also commented on American public finances, health provisions for the poor and the condition of Black Americans slaves.

<sup>31</sup> Brissot, *New Travels*, 199. Brissot described the Quakers as exemplary models of simplicity and virtue. He even wrote that spreading their society to France would better his fellow-citizens: “their example might serve to regenerate our manners; without which,” he continued, “we cannot certainly preserve our liberty for a long time.” *Ibid.*, 376, 390–395, 417–418. Brissot’s comments were partly motivated by a desire to challenge Chastellux’s account of the Quakers. Loft, *Passion, Politics, and Philosophie*, 219–21.

<sup>32</sup> Though Brissot admitted that “it was wrong to persecute them so violently for their pacific neutrality.” Brissot, *New Travels*, 414–15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 418–20.

<sup>34</sup> His views on France are perhaps surprising, as the country was not on the brink of war in 1790. This suggests Brissot was concerned with the threat of counter-revolution at an early stage.

conquest.<sup>35</sup> It was also typical of the Enlightenment mainstream before 1789. As it was then conceived, adhering to the ideal of universal fraternity assumed taking a side on the question of individuals' natural sociability, a question which was "the great ideological divide of the eighteenth century."<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, there were those who followed Thomas Hobbes and who saw individuals in their natural state as amoral and asocial; that is, creatures without a natural aptitude or desire for social existence. For them, society and the state were artificial constructs that reigned individuals in and brought them to live together for their mutual benefit. Following this line of thinking, universal fraternity was a fantastic notion. Natural sociability, in contrast, could be understood in a number of ways, including the idea that individuals had an innate capacity for moral reasoning or moral sympathy, or that society was the natural product of reciprocal need. In practice, partisans of natural sociability often stressed that all that politics had to do was sustain and promote men's sociable inclinations towards one another.<sup>37</sup> This view made it possible to think that societies could develop bonds of amity that would guarantee a more peaceful international order.<sup>38</sup>

As a supporter of "universal fraternity" Brissot readily adhered to the notion of natural sociability. His political outlook was accordingly shaped by the idea that social and political reform could help bring about a natural moral order. Brissot's thinking on this subject was influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine, the English-American activist who would become one his closest allies during the Revolution.<sup>39</sup> Paine's political philosophy was founded on the principle of natural sociability. According to him, government was "but a necessary evil" and it was tasked with guaranteeing the conditions in which natural sociability could flourish.<sup>40</sup> In the *Rights of Man*, he built on these claims and put forward a scathing critique of Europe's international power system, arguing that war and competition served the interests of governments at the expense of society.<sup>41</sup> He also argued that France and America were restoring "the natural order of things," and he predicted that they would inevitably seek to form a "confederation of nations" with the ultimate aim of abolishing "the system of war."<sup>42</sup>

Brissot repeated many of Paine's ideas in *Nouveau voyage dans les États-Unis de l'Amérique*. In the preface, he wrote that a virtuous people had little need for

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the politics that informed Volney's proposals, see Alexander Cook, "The Great Society of the Human Species": Volney and the Global Politics of Revolutionary France," *Intellectual History Review* 23, no. 3 (September 24, 2012): 309-28.

<sup>36</sup> István Hont, "Introduction," in *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 142.

<sup>37</sup> On the background to these discussions and their wider significance in eighteenth-century political thought, see *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> The reference study on natural sociability and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century understandings of international relations is Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Brissot met Paine in 1787 and his views were especially influenced by *Common Sense* (1776), a pamphlet he apparently "never tired of praising," as well as the first part of the *Rights of Man*, which he enthusiastically received, writing that it exhibited "excellent reasoning." Part one of the *Rights of Man* was published in March, 1791, right before Brissot's *Nouveau voyages*. Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976), 236; Brissot, *New Travels*, xxxi.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Paine, "Common Sense," in *Political Writings*, ed. Bruce Kuklick, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge, 2000), 3-5.

<sup>41</sup> "War is the common harvest of all those who participate in the division and expenditure of public money, in all countries. It is the art of conquering at home." Thomas Paine, "Rights of Man, Part I," in *Political Writings*, ed. Bruce Kuklick, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge, 2000), 94.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-53.

government, which was “the reason why liberty in America is safely carried to so high a degree that it borders on a state of nature, and why the government has so little force.” Amongst the virtues enjoyed by American citizens, one of the most noble was “universal fraternity,” a virtue that compelled them “to abjure ... prejudices [against foreign nations]” and “reject every idea of war.” This, he argued, opened “the way to a universal confederation of the human race.”<sup>43</sup> In Brissot’s conception, American society thus displayed all the benefits that accrued from surrendering to individuals’ natural moral abilities – or, put another way, to their natural sociability – and he presented this outcome as advancing the cause of international concord.

Brissot’s arcadian perspective on American society was arguably more fiction than fact, but it offers some important clues as to his thinking about international politics. He spoke of universal fraternity as contributing to the union “of the human race,” with no mention of a federation of states or governments. In this respect, the utopian vision he conjured up was the dream of a world without states: an anti-political vision that pushed one step further the international alliance promoted by Paine. *Contra* Hobbes, Brissot’s cosmopolitan republicanism supported the idea of a return to the state of nature, a return to the state of peace, liberty and fraternity that had characterized pre-political life between men.<sup>44</sup> When Brissot wrote that France relied on “resistance” rather than “gentleness” to achieve this end, it nevertheless indicated he thought the road to peace would require more than just well intentioned pacifism. If French patriots, like their American counterparts before them, were faced with enemies who challenged their newfound authority, it implied they would be entirely justified in fighting them. The case for armed resistance at home could thus become an argument for just war.

#### *The King’s Flight, Patriotic Virtue and Republican grandezza*

After spending two years campaigning on the margins of power, the flight to Varennes gave Brissot the opportunity to become a more prominent and influential political figure.<sup>45</sup> This episode was the catalyst for a short-lived debate on France’s form of government in which he, along with others, campaigned for the abolition of hereditary monarchy. Although this campaign failed, Brissot took advantage of the uncertainties surrounding the King’s fate to push for a republican constitution. Brissot argued, following Paine and Condorcet, that France could become a republic by integrating the head of state into its elective, representative system.<sup>46</sup> Establishing a republic had to mean abolishing hereditary rule, but it did not necessarily entail the end of monarchical government, “since one can [have] a monarchy without a hereditary king.”<sup>47</sup> Notwithstanding these constitutional issues, the immediate

<sup>43</sup> Brissot, *New Travels*, xxvi-xxviii. He also agreed with Paine that “the less active and powerful the government, the more active, powerful, and happy is the society.” *Ibid.*, xxxi.

<sup>44</sup> Patrice Gueniffey argues that a similar type of utopianism typified Girondins politics more generally. “Brissot,” in *La Gironde et les Girondins*, François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds (Paris, 1991), 456; “Cordeliers and Girondins: The Prehistory of the Republic?,” in *The Invention of the Modern Republic*, Biancamaria Fontana, ed. (Cambridge, 1994), 105.

<sup>45</sup> Aside from editing the newspaper *Le patriote français*, Brissot was involved in the Paris Assembly in the early years of the Revolution. He had also become embroiled in debates on slavery in the French colonies and on financial and ministerial matters. Gary Kates, *The Cercle Social, the Girondins, and the French Revolution* (Princeton, 1985), 34-35; Gueniffey, “Brissot,” 450-51; Michael Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes: An Eighteenth-Century Emblem in the French Revolution* (Princeton, 2008), 316-35.

<sup>46</sup> He wrote that the French constitution was, in fact, already “five-sixths” republican. Jacques-Pierre Brissot, “Ma profession de foi sur la monarchie et sur le républicanisme,” in *Recueil de quelques écrits, principalement extraits du “Patriote français”* (Paris, 1791), 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

question facing French representatives after Varennes was whether Louis XVI had been responsible for fleeing his throne and whether he should be tried for this. It was this question that Brissot was asked to address at the Jacobins on July 10, 1791, in what would turn out to be one of his most rousing speeches, one which was then promptly printed, circulated and, not long after, translated into English.<sup>48</sup>

Brissot began this speech with a tirade against the principle of royal inviolability, insisting that it contradicted the spirit of France's new constitution. He claimed that French deputies had a choice either to "adopt the constitution, or the absolute sacredness of the King ... either the glory, or the reproach of France."<sup>49</sup> He proceeded to make his most belligerent remarks to date. To those who feared that trying the King would attract the wrath of foreign powers, he countered:

Here, gentlemen, even the numbers are on the side of liberty...: France alone contains more armed citizens than all Europe can vomit out against her of mercenary soldiers.... Which soldiers of tyrants can long face up to the soldiers of liberty? The soldiers of tyrants have more discipline than courage, more fear than devotion.... The soldier of liberty fears neither tiredness, nor danger, nor hunger, nor lack of money.... Let that patriotic army be destroyed, another immediately rises out of its ashes. It is because under that liberty, every man is a soldier.<sup>50</sup>

In support of this zealous defense of patriotic virtue, Brissot cited the example of the American War of Independence. He also claimed in this address that international public opinion was on the side of the Revolution, that France could count on the support of the American and English peoples and that foreign, invading armies would convert to revolutionary principles once they crossed the border into France.<sup>51</sup> After discussing the respective positions of other European states, he summed up his views: "Our true enemies, gentlemen, are not foreigners, but truly those who make use of their name to frighten people; our enemies are those who, though they despise each other, come together to dishonour and break up the nation."<sup>52</sup>

In the charged political atmosphere that was the Jacobins, these were bold, provocative statements.<sup>53</sup> Brissot argued that revolutionary principles could be the source of intense sentiments of national pride, sentiments directed at enemies of the Revolution both within and outside France. This made it all too clear what French 'resistance' would entail: it would invigorate martial republican virtues among the people, and thus contribute to the reform of popular *mores* that Brissot had long

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<sup>48</sup> This speech is included in the record of proceedings at the Jacobins, edited by François Aulard. *La Société des Jacobins. Recueil de documents pour l'histoire du Club des Jacobins de Paris*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1891), 608-26. It was printed separately as *Discours sur la question de savoir si le roi peut être jugé, prononcé à l'Assemblée des amis de la constitution, dans la séance du 10 juillet 1791* (Paris, 1791). The address was translated into English by a French teacher in America. *A Discourse upon the Question, Whether the King Shall Be Tried? Delivered before the Society of the Friends of the Constitution, at Paris, at a Meeting, July 10th, 1791*, trans. Paul Nancrede (Boston, 1791).

<sup>49</sup> Brissot, *A Discourse upon the Question*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-29.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>53</sup> One audience member described Brissot's rhetoric as "energetic and eloquent." Pierre-Joseph Chenaux, "Opinion de M. Chenaux sur la question de savoir qu'est-ce que les législateurs ont à faire dans les circonstances où ils se trouvent," in *La Société des Jacobins*, ed. François Aulard, vol. 3 (Paris, 1892), 10.

advocated. In this speech, he also insisted that those who failed to take a stand against foreign powers, and who cautioned against scrutinizing the King's behavior, were unpatriotic. While others before him had framed French foreign policy in the language of national honor, Brissot brought this language together with the fraternal discourse of revolutionary internationalism.<sup>54</sup> As he presented it, the French people were the torchbearers of principles to which all nations aspired. This meant that the French nation could speak for the interests of other peoples and promoting French patriotism would instigate fervor for universal justice. Although other Jacobins were committed to national defense, none made a case for war in these terms.<sup>55</sup>

This articulation of republican virtues posed the basic framework that would inspire Brissot's later campaign for war in the Legislative Assembly. His speech exploited the fears and anxieties of his audience, and Brissot's confident report of France's moral and military superiority displayed the recklessness of a politician looking to gain influence. The clear-cut opposition he invoked between liberty and despotism pointed towards his longstanding discontent with monarchical and aristocratic privilege. More importantly, Brissot disregarded the traditional foreign policy problem facing republican states: preserving liberty at home or pursuing the glory of conquest and military expansion.<sup>56</sup> Brissot implied in his speech that revolutionary France would not have to face this classic problem. In fact, he appeared to think that it could aspire to both liberty and *grandezza*. This suggestion was not without obvious risks, however, and a number of thinkers before him had been concerned with outlining specific provisions that made republican liberty possible in a divided international order. Brissot was not overly concerned with what these provisions might be; yet these had been salient aspects of the thought of one of the most important republican theorists of the period, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his political writings, Rousseau had sought to highlight the dangers of passionate republican patriotism. The remedies he proposed to contain it offer an illuminating alternative to Brissot's hubristic conceptions.

Rousseau's political thought was fundamentally concerned with the problem of human pride (*amour-propre*).<sup>57</sup> Like Hobbes, he dismissed the idea of natural sociability and he was skeptical about humans' capacity for virtue in modern society. In the *Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau outlined how a just political order should be governed, arguing that a republic was possible only under a stringent set of social and economic conditions. He thought a republic had to be staunchly patriotic, but that it had to sustain a love of country that was more self-love (*amour-de-soi*) than self-pride. In practice, this meant adopting an isolationist approach to international affairs

<sup>54</sup> Paine had highlighted the importance of national honor in a republican proclamation published on July 1, 1791, but he did not link this to revolutionary internationalism: "the grandeur of nations consists, not, as kings pretend, in the splendour of thrones, but in a conspicuous sense of their own dignity." Thomas Paine, "The Republican Proclamation," in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Moncure Conway, vol. 3 (London, 1895), 3.

<sup>55</sup> The Jacobins were divided on whether the King should be tried, but no one raised the possibility of war and of its virtues in the same way as Brissot. For an example of a Jacobin who supported the monarchy, see the letter by Couedic, printed on July 3, 1791. "Aux amis de la constitution contre les Machiavels et les Cromwells modernes sur la question de savoir quelle sera la conduite de l'Assemblée Nationale envers le Roi, par P. Couedic, membre de la Société des amis de la constitution, séante aux Jacobins à Paris," in *La Société des Jacobins*, ed. François Aulard, vol. 2 (Paris, 1891), 579-84. For the case made by the other side, see "Opinion de M. Chenaux."

<sup>56</sup> Armitage, "Empire and Liberty: A Republican Dilemma," 29.

<sup>57</sup> Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (Oxford, 2008); Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, 2007), 229-34.

and refraining from engaging in either foreign trade or war.<sup>58</sup> Rousseau returned to these questions in *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1782), in which he explored the idea of sustaining republican government in a large country. Here, he warned that *grandezza* was the scourge of republican politics: “Greatness of nations! Size of states! The first and principal source of the miseries of humankind, and above all of the countless calamities that sap and destroy politically organised peoples.”<sup>59</sup>

Rousseau argued that republican patriotism needed strong institutional checks if it was to avoid descending into self-destructive glory. These checks included a local, federal style of government, a patriotic education system and a civil religion with a simple set of dogmas.<sup>60</sup> These were the key to containing the *amour-propre* that corrupted the individual and collective virtues of a political community. In contrast to Rousseau, the young Brissot was largely uninterested in the intricacies of the human soul or in the institutional structures required to hold together a just, orderly republican state. Brissot, not so much a philosopher as a propagandist, was also less of a moral skeptic than Rousseau. Relying on natural sociability, he was inspired to incorporate universal Christian ideals into a republican doctrine of cosmopolitan justice, something Rousseau would have found deeply objectionable.<sup>61</sup> In the vision he conjured up at the Jacobins in July, 1791, Brissot relied on this doctrine to justify France’s moral preeminence over its purported enemies. With a rhetoric praising the virtue of national pride alongside universal fraternity, the pursuit of an emancipatory *grandezza* was the obvious course to follow for Brissot’s ‘universal’ nation.

#### *The Push for War and the “Language of Free Men”*

Despite a turbulent summer, Louis XVI remained in place as head of state, and so did the system of hereditary royalty. France adopted its first constitution in September 1791 and it established a constitutional monarchy with a single legislative chamber. Having decreed that previous deputies were ineligible for re-election, the assembly was composed entirely of new delegates, including Brissot, who was elected as a representative for Paris. His first parliamentary speech on October 20, 1791 officially dealt with the question of the *émigrés*, but it marked the beginning of the campaign for war. Although a number of other deputies would join him and make equally impassioned speeches in the assembly, Brissot has been singled out by contemporaries and by historians as the pivotal figure in this campaign, devising what the historian H.-A. Goetz-Bernstein once called “the Girondins’ diplomacy.”<sup>62</sup>

Brissot’s October speech took up the combative tone of his July intervention. He argued that noble *émigrés* were counter-revolutionaries who were plotting to overthrow France’s constitution with the support of foreign princes and courts. He maintained that French representatives had to ensure that the constitution was

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<sup>58</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Social Contract,” in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, 1997), 76. On this question, see Pierre Hassner, “Rousseau and the Theory and Practice of International Relations,” in *The Legacy of Rousseau*, Clifford Orwin and Nathan Tarcov, eds (Chicago, 1997), 200-19.

<sup>59</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Considerations on the Government of Poland,” in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, 1997), 193.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 189, 193; Rousseau, “The Social Contract,” 150.

<sup>61</sup> Rousseau argued that Christian morality, or what he also called the “religion of man,” contradicted the patriotic allegiance that was required of republican citizens. Rousseau, “The Social Contract,” 147.

<sup>62</sup> Goetz-Bernstein, *La diplomatie de la Gironde*.

respected, as it was the guarantee of the country's political liberty.<sup>63</sup> He insisted foreign powers had to recognize the constitution, make peace with France and drop their support for the *émigrés*, or refuse to accept the new government and prepare for war.<sup>64</sup> Once again appealing to national honor, Brissot declared French deputies had to finally speak "the language of free men to foreign powers" and that they should "avenge their glory, or be condemned to eternal disgrace."<sup>65</sup> He concluded this speech with rousing words, fomenting sentiments of French nationalism.<sup>66</sup> The country's new representatives were enthralled by his rhetoric, and the parliamentary record notes that Brissot walked back to his seat under the applause of the chamber and that "several minutes went by before calm was restored."<sup>67</sup> Brissot had found a winning formula for stirring the assembly: an aggressive and intransigent language directed at foreign princes and courts. In the months that followed, he and his supporters would rely on similarly uncompromising words to argue for war, exploiting the threat of foreign (and increasingly Austrian) conspiracy, and heightening their belligerence at every turn.<sup>68</sup>

While in the summer Brissot made the case for patriotic defense in the context of a critique of hereditary power, he now had to contend with a chamber still largely in favor of monarchical rule. He therefore remained cautious about explicitly linking the foreign threat to Louis XVI. The campaign for war also raised the obvious question of whether it would reinforce executive authority, and thereby strengthen the power of the King. Robespierre was among those who warned of this danger, arguing that war would give the King a chance to take control of the country and "betray" the Revolution.<sup>69</sup> This danger became increasingly apparent following the King's speech at the Legislative Assembly on December 14, 1791, in which he announced that he would give foreign powers a month to disperse the *émigrés*, after which measures would be taken to prepare for war.<sup>70</sup> The Feuillants, and most of the chamber, enthusiastically received his address, and cries of "Long live the King of the French!" were called out after he finished speaking.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>63</sup> "Vous devez faire respecter la constitution par les rebelles, et surtout par leurs chefs, ou bien elle tombera par le mépris ... la constitution est achevée; nous avons tous juré de la maintenir; les chefs des rebelles doivent donc aussi s'agenouiller devant elle, ou ils doivent être ci jamais proscrits. Tout milieu serait un parjure, toute mollesse un crime; car vous avez juré la constitution ou la mort." *Archives Parlementaires*, 1890, 34:311.

<sup>64</sup> "Deux partis sont ouverts aux puissances étrangères: ou elles rendront hommage à votre constitution nouvelle, ou elles refuseront de la reconnaître...." *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>65</sup> In light of the Pillnitz declaration, he urged France's Minister for Foreign Affairs to outline the country's relationship to other European powers, as well as these powers' positions towards France. *Ibid.*, 313, 315.

<sup>66</sup> "Il est temps d'effacer l'avilissement où, soit par insouciance, soit par pusillanimité, on a plongé la France; il est temps de lui donner l'attitude imposante qui convient à une grande nation, de la replacer au rang qu'elle doit occuper parmi les puissances de faire respecter, et dans la personne de ses représentants et dans celle de simples citoyens, le droit des gens et la dignité d'hommes qui sont membres d'une association libre; enfin de forcer les puissances à respecter les décrets qu'elle rend contre les émigrants et les rebelles." *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>68</sup> A few days later, Condorcet presented the issue in very similar terms: "Notre gouvernement nous a fait dévorer trop d'outrages.... Que le nom français soit respecté, qu'on rende enfin justice au peuple généreux que nous représentons, et c'est alors seulement que, sans le trahir, il pourra nous être permis de pardonner en son nom." *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>69</sup> Maximilien Robespierre, *Œuvres complètes de Maximilien Robespierre*, vol. 8 (Paris, 1910), 37.

<sup>70</sup> *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 36:110.

<sup>71</sup> The parliamentary record notes that: "les applaudissements se prolongent pendant plusieurs minutes. Plusieurs membres font entendre dans l'Assemblée le cri de: vive le roi des Français! Ce cri est répété

Despite the political risks, Brissot made few concessions to Robespierre's fears. Reversing the latter's predictions, he argued at the Jacobins that war would test the King's resolve and "purge [the people] of the vices of despotism." He also provocatively claimed that the country's salvation required "great treasons."<sup>72</sup> This can be taken as evidence Brissot was considerably more confident than Robespierre in the regenerative effects of war. He brushed aside reservations about increasing royal power and argued that war would unite the executive to the legislative, and by extension the King to the people.<sup>73</sup> Brissot insisted armed conflict would in this way resolve the question of whether the King could be a true representative, and therefore if France could remain a constitutional monarchy whilst republican virtue took hold of the nation. As he announced in one of his speeches, "if [the King] is a patriot, we will cherish him; if he is not, the *patrie* will soon come down against him."<sup>74</sup>

It must be emphasized that the campaign for war was also a visible attempt to win over the Jacobins, which was not yet controlled by Robespierre and his allies. In several speeches at the club, Brissot repeated the points he made in the Legislative Assembly, but he also went further in exulting revolutionary patriotism, hoping to gain traction with the more radical supporters of the Revolution.<sup>75</sup> He maintained, for instance, that a war for liberty would purify "souls," as it had in America.<sup>76</sup> Brissot also insisted that an army fighting for the cause of liberty, or what he called a "crusade ... for universal liberty," would be inherently virtuous because France's "citizen-soldiers" were committed to revolutionary principles and they would behave like no other army had before them.<sup>77</sup> He argued that French soldiers would be welcomed with open arms by the Dutch and the Flemish, since they were hoping to launch revolutions of their own.<sup>78</sup> Once again, Brissot claimed that French *grandezza* could be reconciled with revolutionary values because France's glory lay in the international diffusion of political liberty.

While Brissot campaigned for war in these terms, other Jacobins stressed the virtues of patriotism in the language of classical republicanism and they cautioned against waging war. Robespierre endorsed taking defensive steps to protect the Revolution and argued that the focus should be on France's internal enemies. He castigated Brissot's fervor for revolutionary expansion, famously declaring that "no

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par les tribunes et par un grand nombre de citoyens qui s'étaient introduits dans la salle à la suite du roi et qui s'étaient placés dans l'extrémité de la partie droite. Les tribunes des deux extrémités de la salle et les membres de l'Assemblée placés à l'extrémité gauche ont gardé le plus profond silence." Ibid., 110-111.

<sup>72</sup> Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *Discours sur la nécessité de déclarer la guerre aux princes allemands qui protègent les émigrés, prononcé le 15 décembre à la société* (Paris, 1791), 3; *Second discours de J. P. Brissot sur la nécessité de faire la guerre aux princes allemands* (Paris, 1791), 15.

<sup>73</sup> On this issue, see especially his first speech at the Legislative Assembly, on October 20, 1791. *Archives Parlementaires*, 1890, 34:309-17.

<sup>74</sup> Brissot, *Discours prononcé le 15 décembre*, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Belissa highlights that Brissot employed a different discourse depending on whether his audience was the Legislative Assembly, the Jacobins or business circles. This point does not contradict the overall argument of this article, although it is important to appreciate that Brissot did not have the same objectives in addressing these different people. Belissa, *Fraternité universelle et intérêt national*, 300.

<sup>76</sup> Brissot, *Discours prononcé le 15 décembre*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> In support of this argument, Brissot contrasted French soldiers with those of imperial Rome. Brissot, *Second discours*, 16-17. (The crusade remark can be found in the same speech, 27.) Condorcet made a similar point the day before in the Legislative Assembly: "[La France] présentera au monde le spectacle nouveau d'une nation vraiment libre soumise aux règles de la justice, au milieu des orages de la guerre, et respectant partout, en tout temps à l'égard de tous les hommes, les droits qui sont les mêmes pour tous." *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 36:618.

<sup>78</sup> Brissot, *Second discours*, 27.

one likes armed missionaries.”<sup>79</sup> This critique mirrored Rousseau’s concern with the dangers of *grandezza*. Like the Genevan philosopher, Robespierre warned against relying on national pride to bolster patriotism.<sup>80</sup> Brissot’s platform can also be distinguished from the policy of republicans who supported straightforward military conquest. The Prussian-born revolutionary Anacharsis Cloots, for instance, argued France could become a “universal republic” by using war as a means of territorial expansion, and that it should first conquer the Rhine and the Alps before taking over the whole of Europe.<sup>81</sup> Brissot did not argue for war for the purpose of gaining territory, at least not explicitly, but his position was in a sense halfway between Cloots’s aggressive imperialism and Robespierre’s defensive patriotism. Whilst he supported spreading the Revolution abroad, he laid stress on the expansion of its principles, rather than of its territory: his republican *grandezza* was predicated on the greatness of revolutionary ideas, not on military conquest. Brissot, in other words, aspired not to Machiavelli’s *grandezza*, but to a modern, ‘ideological’ type of political greatness.

Aside from associating it to revolutionary principles in general, Brissot also specifically connected national honor to the French Constitution. He claimed in his speeches that it was the guarantee of French liberty, which in turn was the basis for national honor.<sup>82</sup> Brissot thus developed the idea that national sovereignty, of which the constitution was the product, could inspire sentiments of pride and dignity, and that the principle of self-governance could in and of itself compel national *amour-propre*. He did not, however, think of self-governance in merely domestic terms; he considered it to be an evaluative principle applicable to international affairs.<sup>83</sup> Brissot drew a clear line between states where the people were sovereign and where they were not (i.e. between nations that were free and nations that were oppressed). It was this compelling opposition between liberty and tyranny, rather than a more specific distinction between forms of governments, that allowed Brissot to transpose the moral framework of the Revolution’s politics onto the international order, laying the ground for a new language of diplomatic affairs.

Whilst France was the “custodian” of universal liberty and the French “should be the brothers of all men,” the government had to look to form an international

<sup>79</sup> Speech at the Jacobins on January 2, 1792. Robespierre, *Œuvres complètes*, 8:81.

<sup>80</sup> He criticized, in particular, Brissot’s appeal to uphold the “honour of the French name.” *Ibid.*, 85. Belissa briefly discusses Robespierre’s critique of national honor in “L’honneur national dans les débats sur la guerre,” 157. The reference study of Robespierre’s views in this period nonetheless remains Georges Michon, *Robespierre et la guerre révolutionnaire, 1791-1792* (Paris, 1937). For arguments by another Jacobin with classical republican ideas, see Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varenne, *Discours sur les émigrations prononcé à la Société des amis de la Constitution, séante aux Jacobins, etc.* (Paris, 1791); *Discours sur cette question: comment doit-on faire la guerre, au cas qu’il faille la déclarer?* (Paris, 1791).

<sup>81</sup> Speech at the Jacobins on January 1, 1792. Anacharsis Cloots, *Oeuvres, vol. 3: Écrits et discours de la période révolutionnaire* (Paris, 1980), 301. On Cloots’s political thought more generally, see Alexander Bevilacqua, “Conceiving the Republic of Mankind: The Political Thought of Anacharsis Cloots,” *History of European Ideas* 38, no. 4 (2012): 550-69.

<sup>82</sup> At the end of his October speech at the Legislative Assembly, Brissot explained that other powers needed to respect and recognize the French constitution because: “sans cette sûreté vous exposez la nation à une ruine certaine, sans cette dignité vous compromettez son honneur et sa liberté; car, qui ne se respecte pas, qui ne se fait pas respecter, cesse bientôt d’être libre.” *Archives Parlementaires*, 1890, 34:316. See also *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 36:603; *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 37:465.

<sup>83</sup> Brissot could therefore be said to have applied a republican conception of liberty to international politics. On this definition of republican liberty, see Quentin Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, eds (Cambridge, 1993), 293-309.

alliance with other “free peoples.”<sup>84</sup> To be more exact, Brissot argued that a “holy confederation of free peoples” would “naturally” be established, as other emancipated nations would instinctively be persuaded to join France’s cause.<sup>85</sup> Scholarly focus on the language of foreign conspiracy, however important this was in stirring up French nationalism, had diverted attention from this realignment of international relations that Brissot hoped would be affected by military conflict. He insisted a coalition between France, England and America would emerge in the event of war, and this coalition would have the means to impose peace on a global scale.<sup>86</sup> In a similar way to Paine, Brissot looked to the inevitable coming together of ‘free’ nations, governed by representative governments of one kind or another. Brissot thus promoted the idea of a new international system defined by the spirit of modern, Anglophile liberty, at the same time as he attacked the schemes of a so-called “Austrian Committee.”<sup>87</sup> For him, it was less governments’ constitutional designs than their opposition to political despotism that determined their common interests and fellow feelings. The vision of a new world order that he advocated involved neither imperial expansion, *à la* Cloots, nor an alliance of republics against monarchies. Brissot appealed to a broad, even vague conception of what constituted a just political order in pushing for war, but it was a simple one, and manifestly appealing.<sup>88</sup>

Brissot’s new language for international politics ultimately operated on two fronts. On the one hand, he made the case for a new diplomatic practice that did away with the manners and protocols of courtly negotiations. For Brissot, an emancipated nation could not and should not speak the diplomatic language of despots and tyrants: the Revolution had to adopt a republican transparency and plain-spokenness suited to its new political culture. In addition to this, Brissot offered the prospect of reconciling national defense with individual rights and universal fraternity. A new sense of dignity and patriotic virtue would emanate out of these cosmopolitan ideals and their diffusion, thus allowing France to once again become a “great nation.” For those sitting both left and right in the Legislative Assembly, this was no doubt an appealing prospect. If Brissot looked to bring an end to the monarchy with this scheme, he did not divulge this publicly. In the last significant speech he gave to the Jacobins in the winter of 1791-92, he insisted that a “great nation” needed to be concerned with only two things: “principles and force.” A few moments later, he proceeded to say that, while the King should be watched and scrutinized in his actions as head of state, the

<sup>84</sup> *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 36:607; *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 37:469.

<sup>85</sup> “Oui, sans doute, il se formera naturellement entre tous les peuples libres une confédération sainte, qui doit être l’effroi des tyrans.” *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 36:606. Brissot, however, insisted that this confederation would be nothing like *ancien régime* alliances, as these went against the “principle of universal fraternity.” *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 37:469.

<sup>86</sup> “... que la France et l’Angleterre s’unissent, qu’elles s’unissent avec l’Amérique, et l’Amérique et la liberté comme la paix, couvriront bientôt toute la terre.” *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 37:470.

<sup>87</sup> It bears emphasizing that Brissot had long praised the virtues associated with the political tradition of English republicanism. Though he more often celebrated the new American states, where English liberty had migrated, he was sanguine about the prospects of reform in England itself. See his comments on January 17, 1792: “Le peuple anglais fait des vœux pour nos succès; ce seront un jour les siens; il le fait, il le voit dans l’avenir ...” *Ibid.*, 470.

<sup>88</sup> If the French Revolution can be understood as a “war of independence against the Versailles monarchy,” as one historian has recently argued, then it is also the case that in Brissot’s political rhetoric it became a war of independence against European despotism in general, and against the despotism of the existing diplomatic and international political system in particular. Pierre Serna, “Every Revolution Is a War of Independence,” trans. Alexis Pernsteiner, in *French Revolution in Global Perspective*, Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt and William Max Nelson, eds. (Ithaca, 2013), 180.

French Constitution should remain unchanged.<sup>89</sup> Although these remarks do not have to be taken at face value, they tell us something about what Brissot wanted his audience to take home: what mattered in politics was not the will of the monarch, but the dignity of the nation.

### *Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the French Revolution*

The idea that nationalism finds its origins in the French Revolution was once a mainstay of historical scholarship.<sup>90</sup> More recently, historians have recognized that the Jacobins were in fact anti-nationalists and that the French idea of the nation, as well as the use of “nationalist” rhetoric in times of conflict, pre-dated the Revolution.<sup>91</sup> In line with these reevaluations, Marc Belissa has claimed that two “opposing systems” emerged out of eighteenth-century politics: the principle of the nation-state and the cosmopolitan “law of nations.”<sup>92</sup> Whilst this opposition typified many philosophical debates in this period, my contention is that it did not exemplify the politics of the Revolution, or at least not the foreign policy advocated by Brissot in the winter of 1791-92. France’s declaration of war was instead secured on the back of a political discourse in which these two “opposing systems” were brought together. Brissot was the most vocal exponent of this original language for international politics, pushing for war while at the same time claiming nations were naturally disposed to sentiments of peace and fraternity.<sup>93</sup> He harnessed Christian cosmopolitan ideals to devise an aggressive, nationalistic foreign policy based on the radical opposition between liberty and despotism. A detailed account of his rhetoric shows that this discourse remained theoretically coherent inasmuch as France was considered the “custodian” of universal liberty. However flawed, this idea made it possible to think of the French nation as being at the vanguard of cosmopolitan justice.<sup>94</sup> It turned revolutionary internationalism into a belligerent *grandezza*, laid the

<sup>89</sup> “... cette constitution est jurée, il faut lui obéir: elle met dans la main du roi la direction de l’armée; elle doit y rester, mais en la surveillant, mais en éclairant tous ses faits.” Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *Troisième discours de J. P. Brissot, député, sur la nécessité de faire la guerre* (Paris, 1792), 11.

<sup>90</sup> See, for instance, Clive Emsley, “Nationalist Rhetoric and National Sentiment in Revolutionary France,” in *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, Otto Dann and John Dinwiddy, eds. (London, 1988), 39-52. A recent, though less historically contextualized, reformulation of this argument can be found in Chimène Keitner, *The Paradoxes of Nationalism the French Revolution and Its Meaning for Contemporary Nation Building* (Albany, 2007).

<sup>91</sup> Hont, “The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind”; Florence Gauthier, *Triomphe et mort du droit naturel en Révolution 1789-1795-1802* (Paris, 1992); David Avrom Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

<sup>92</sup> Belissa argues that the first system established a new authority upholding national interests, in which the “nation-state” expressed “national power.” The second system focused on promoting international concord and perpetual peace and it found its expression in the thought of Robespierre, Saint-Just and Kant. Belissa, *Fraternité universelle et intérêt national*, 439-40.

<sup>93</sup> The final wording of France’s declaration of war reflected the influence of this discourse, as the Legislative Assembly decreed “que la guerre qu’elle est forcée de soutenir n’est point une guerre de nation à nation, mais la juste défense d’un peuple libre contre l’injuste agression d’un roi ... que les Français ne confondront jamais leurs frères avec leurs véritables ennemis; qu’ils ne négligeront rien pour adoucir le fléau de la guerre, pour ménager et conserver les propriétés, et pour faire retomber sur ceux-là seuls qui se liguèrent contre sa liberté, tous les malheurs inséparables de la guerre...” *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. 42 (Paris, 1893), 218.

<sup>94</sup> This reading of the Revolution’s foreign policy was taken up by at least one of the deputies Brissot wanted to convince, Mathieu Depère. See the foreign policy plan he submitted in January, 1792, which he argued would pave the way for “perpetual peace.” *Archives Parlementaires*, 1891, 37:417-19. The idea of an international federation of “free states,” led by France, also informed Kant’s later writings on international relations; see Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” in *Political Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge, 1991), 93-130, esp. 104.

grounds for the regeneration of French *mores* and forced the King to finally take sides. In this context, one might say that Brissot's lasting legacy to the Revolution was a powerful synthesis of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, of 'reason of state' politics and the ideology of rights, liberty and universal fraternity, a synthesis that paved the way for the 'emancipatory' imperialism of later revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.