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Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron, Eds., *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii + 268 pp.. Index, plates, and notes. £47.50 (hb). ISBN: 0521814324.

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It is well known that national historiographies develop in large part as expressions of, and spurs to, national pride. Yet, in practice, the training of historians to work within a rigid national framework can have the paradoxical effect of downplaying a nation's larger, global influence. Historians of France, for instance, despite their recent interest in colonialism, still pay relatively little attention to the influence of French ideas, art, and institutions beyond France's borders. The French imprint may remain unmistakably present in everything from Latin American philosophy to Romanian administrative law, but French historians give surprisingly little attention to the phenomenon—which belongs, so they are trained to think, to someone else's history.

Edited collections, those unloved stepchildren of contemporary academic publishing, have a useful role to play in redressing this situation. Gather a group of historians of various nations, give them a common subject, and ask each to contribute an essay on its ramifications in their own domain of specialization. In *The People in Arms*, Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron have put together a model of the genre. The focus is on the *levée en masse*—the famous attempt, begun in August 1793, to place the entire French population at the service of the army. As French historians are well aware, both the *levée* itself and the mythology of the "people in arms" that surrounded it had profound effects on subsequent French history. But both policy and mythology had even greater effects beyond France: among other places, in Russia, China, Vietnam, Algeria, and especially Germany. The various essays in the volume illuminate each of these cases and in the process tell a remarkable and important story of how political ideas and practices spread across the globe. They also explore the powerful tensions that lie within the concept of the "people in arms" and link those tensions to fundamental questions about modern political life. At least one of the essays—Michael Geyer's superb account of Germany's decision to surrender to the Allies in 1918 (pp. 124-58)—should be required reading for anyone who teaches a modern history survey course. In helping us understand modern forms of "total war," the book is also surprisingly illuminating on the origins of contemporary terrorism.

"Mainstream" historians often feel tempted to give books like this one a pass because it deals with a subject—war—that has largely become the territory of a specialized cadre of scholars, at least where periods before World War I are concerned. The absurdity of neglecting such a major aspect of human history should be particularly evident today, in the aftermath of the United States' fifth major military operation in twelve years—yet many graduate history curricula continue to do so almost entirely. The neglect has many causes. There is the legacy of the *Annales* school, with its distaste for mere "events" (of the sort that forced Fernand Braudel to draft much of *La Méditerranée* in a German prisoner-of-war camp). There is Marxism's conceptual inability to deal with international as opposed to class conflict, a point Arthur Waldron keenly discusses in his conclusion to *The People in Arms* (pp. 256-62). And there is

also the tendency of many military historians themselves to write on narrow operational questions, to the exclusion of the politics and culture of war. But a book like *The People in Arms* is well suited to rebuild bridges within the profession, for the essays deal less with the operational effectiveness of the *levée en masse* than with its fraught place in modern political culture. Military historians, in fact, may cavil at the book's lack of operational details. Yet Moran and Waldron's approach is justified, for no modern military subject has had as rich a symbolism as the *levée* and in no case has the symbolism counted for so much, relative to events on the battlefield.

The importance of this symbolism showed through in the decree of August 23, 1793, proclaiming a *levée en masse*: "Henceforth, until the enemies have been driven from the territory of the Republic, all the French are in permanent requisition for army service. The young men shall go to battle; the married men shall forge arms and transport provisions; the women shall make tents and clothes, and shall serve in the hospitals; the children shall turn old linen into lint; the old men shall repair to the public places, to stimulate the courage of the warriors and preach the unity of the Republic and the hatred of kings (quoted on p. 14)."

While the authors of the decree obviously had the practical goal of raising the largest army possible, this was not all they intended. The decree is a feverish classical vision of the sort the Jacobins adored. Harking back to the histories of ancient Greece and Rome, it conjures up the image of a virtuous citizenry fusing-- quasi-miraculously--into a single, colossal force, unplagued by faction, disagreement, or difference. As Alan Forrest points out in a lucid and authoritative essay on the 1793 *levée* (pp. 8-32), the National Convention never actually intended for millions of farmers to leave their fields or for millions of young men to rush to the frontiers without proper training, arms, and equipment. France was no Greek *polis*. But the imagery itself had power. It could give courage to an ill-trained army still divided between the regular troops of the ancien régime and revolutionary volunteers, plagued by the desertion of noble officers, and subject to the murderous political oversight which would send no less than three commanders of the Armée du Nord to the guillotine before the end of 1793. It could give inspiration to the militants of the Paris *sections* and the *sociétés populaires* and, beyond them, to the general population.

Most importantly perhaps, it could terrify France's enemies. Already at the battle of Valmy in September 1792, the apparent fervor of revolutionary volunteers had impressed itself upon these enemies to a degree unjustified by actual military developments. When the Prussian army withdrew from Valmy, its advance blocked but its ranks unbroken, the poet Goethe famously declared to its officers: "From here and today there begins a new epoch in the history of the world, and you can say that you were there." [1] What would happen if France, the richest and most populous state in Europe, could now manage a total mobilization of its resources and manpower?

Of all the essays in the book, only Forrest's devotes as much attention to the mechanics of the *levée* as to its mythology. Drawing on his own learned and voluminous work on the revolutionary armies, he traces the history of French conscription from the hated *milice* of the old regime, through the "levy of 300,000" in the spring of 1793 (which helped trigger the revolt in the Vendée), through the *levée en masse*, to the regularization of the draft in the Jourdan Law of September 1798. [2] He reviews the success of the *levée*, which eventually produced an army of 600,000 men--an overwhelming force in the Europe of the 1790's. He also explores the related attempts to mobilize French manufacturing for the war effort, here drawing on Ken Alder's important recent book on the mass production of high-quality armaments. [3] Unfortunately, while Forrest also touches on the iconography of the *levée* and its relationship to the development of French nationalism, in the space allotted him he can only scratch the surface of these large subjects. *The People in Arms* could have used a separate essay, squarely focused on the mythology of the *levée en masse* during the Revolution and Empire, to accompany Forrest's overview.

The subsequent essays in *The People in Arms* concentrate far more on the mythology. Several, indeed, deal solely with the representation, as opposed to the reality, of the "people in arms." Owen Connelly, for instance, provides an informative assessment of the *levée en masse* in French historiography (pp. 33-48), showing how the Jacobin myth of an entire population rushing for the frontiers to die for the fatherland was relayed through the works of republican historians from Jules Michelet to Albert Soboul, before finally dying out (more or less) in the last generation. John Whiteclay Chambers II deals with American views of European conscription at the end of the nineteenth century, focusing on pre-World War I American admiration for Prussia and the way its army of "soldier-citizens" overcame the supposed "despotism" of Napoleon III (pp. 75-99).

Running through the best of the essays--and giving the collection thematic unity--is a set of reflections on the profound tensions and ambiguities inherent in both the *levée en masse* itself and the myths that grew up around it. What does it mean for "the people" to take up arms? Does it mean that the citizens submit to the state, accepting its direction and rules, donning its uniforms, and, if necessary, sacrificing their lives for its vision of the common good? Or, by contrast, does it mean that the state, appealing to the citizens to save it from military defeat, implicitly submits itself to *them*? Does the essence of "popular war" lie in conscription and regimentation or in revolutionary *élan* and insurgency? Does it properly remain within the bounds of military law and discipline, or does it imply the breakdown of military law and discipline in the context of apocalyptic total war? Does the state have the right to compel citizens to risk their lives? Admittedly, these questions point to the looseness with which the editors define the *levée en masse*--a weakness in the volume, to which I will return. Nonetheless, they strike to the heart of modern politics. As Daniel Moran suggests in his brief introduction to the collection (pp. 1-7), the *levée en masse* starkly dramatizes the reciprocal claims that the modern state and modern society place upon each other.

Unfortunately, this point has not received nearly enough consideration from historians of the French Revolution themselves, whose ideological and patriotic convictions (as Connelly suggests) long discouraged many of them from probing too deeply into the *levée's* complexities. For instance, analyses of the revolutionary general will should surely dwell heavily on the fact that the Convention, even while "requisitioning" adult males for military service, insisted on referring to the conscripted soldiers as "volunteers" (p. 26). It is also suggestive that the coming of large-scale mobilization coincided closely with the large-scale violation of conventional laws of war in the repression of the Vendée rebellion. While hardly an example of "genocide," as Reynald Secher has notoriously insisted, the Vendée campaign did approach total war, with villages and food stores destroyed and many thousands of suspected "brigands," including women and children, indiscriminately put to death.[4] Alan Forrest's essay touches suggestively on these points, but French historians still have much work to do on these subjects--and much to learn from related work on other countries of the sort presented here.

Co-editor Daniel Moran's fine essay "Arms and the Concert" (pp. 49-74) turns to the nation which faced the dilemmas of the *levée en masse* most sharply and most revealingly: Germany. On the one hand, German ruling elites of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw in the *levée* everything they considered most horrific and threatening about revolutionary France. Yet in the final stages of the Napoleonic Wars, both Austria and Prussia themselves found it necessary to resort to versions of the *levée* and haltingly embraced its mythology. The Prussian rising of 1813 against Napoleon produced King Frederick William IV's extraordinary edict on the *Landsturm* (Home Guard), which ordered every Prussian to resist the French with every possible weapon and to refuse to obey any and all of the invaders' orders. It produced the volunteer *Freikorps* commanded by Adolf von Lützow, which vowed to fight a war of insurgency. And it was celebrated by the poet Theodor Körner, who, before his death in combat, sang chillingly of the self-immolation of the warrior: "Nur in dem Opfertod reift uns das Glück" ("only in sacrificial death can we achieve full happiness").[5] Moran is particularly interested in the way German liberals struggled with this complex legacy after Napoleon's defeat and the establishment of the Concert of Europe. Most often, they tried to formulate a vision of a people's army that would function as

a purely defensive force for a German republic, thereby reducing the influence of the aristocratic and reactionary officer corps without releasing the genie of total warfare from the bottle into which the Congress of Vienna had untidily stuffed it. But the vision had no more success than German liberalism in general, and Germany emerged from the "long nineteenth century" dominated by an aristocratic, imperial army committed to the cult of the offensive.

John Horne compares French and German representations of the *levée* in a study of the period 1870-1945 (pp. 100-23). He is most illuminating on the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, when Léon Gambetta dramatically crossed German lines in a balloon and proclaimed *la guerre à l'outrance* against the invader, in self-conscious echo of the 1793 *levée*. Meanwhile, the Prussians' horror at the *franc-tireur* partisans who rose up during the war--their fear that a new, revolutionary people's war was beginning--helped convince their leadership to end the war without insisting on unconditional French surrender. A generation later, at the start of World War I, the same horror of the *franc-tireur* led German armies savagely to repress the slightest sign of French or Belgian civilian resistance in a series of atrocities that created the legend of the "hun."

Four years after these atrocities, following the most intense, organized bloodletting yet seen in human history, Germany found itself facing military collapse. The mood of the High Command turned deeply pessimistic, with General Erich Ludendorff seeing a decisive Allied breakthrough as imminent (p. 129). Under the circumstances, the specter of a German *levée en masse* again arose, and the debate about whether to resort to it forms the subject of Michael Geyer's brilliant article "People's War: The German Debate about a *Levée en masse* in October 1918" (pp. 124-58). According to Geyer, German historians themselves have almost entirely ignored this debate. Instead, partly out of a misguided desire to avoid giving credence to the legend of the "stab in the back," they have stressed the long-term causes of Germany's military collapse, and of the Revolution of November 1918. But their silence on the surrender itself has only left the field open for proponents of the legend, while ignoring one of the most fascinating and critical moments in modern German history.

On October 7, 1918, as the threat of military collapse grew overwhelming the newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* published a fiery call for "an insurrection of the people"--a total mobilization of the nation on the model of the *levée en masse*. The call came not from a military figure but, surprisingly, from Walther Rathenau--a leading Jewish industrialist who went on to serve as Foreign Minister of the Weimar Republic. The German Right would later pillory Rathenau (who died at the hands of anti-semitic assassins in 1923) as one of the hands holding the bloody knife of the "stab in the back." Yet in early October 1918, he was the one calling for a popular uprising while Ludendorff and other figures in the High Command were planning surrender. Drawing on considerable new source material, Geyer traces the course of the debate Rathenau launched, showing how some German leaders initially hoped to use the threat of a *levée* as a bluff, so as to elicit better terms from the Allies. But over the course of October, the high command came to believe that the Allies would never offer acceptable terms. German honor, they came to think, could only be saved through an apocalyptic *Endkampf* (final struggle) involving the systematic devastation of occupied French and Belgian territory, and a war to the death in Germany itself. "October 1918 was a turning point in the history of German military thought and practice," Geyer comments (p. 149). By the end of the month, older, aristocratic ideas of limited, chivalric combat had given way almost entirely to a vision of total warfare. As the reactionary officer Joachim von Stülpnagel wrote in the immediate aftermath of the war, in future wars any distinctions between combatants and non-combatants would disappear. "All persons and all things" would become weapons (quoted on p. 148). One's thoughts inevitably turn to the infamous footage of Josef Goebbels, shrieking at Nazi crowds in his Sportpalast speech of 1943: "Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg?" ("do you want total war?")--audio clip at <http://www.webpolitik.de/xinx/a/totus.htm>.

In tracing this evolution, Geyer draws usefully on the German philosopher and jurist Carl Schmitt, who wrote some of the most important theoretical treatments of warfare in the twentieth century and whose

work has particular pertinence for the concept of the "people in arms." Schmitt was a personally repellent figure, who eagerly served the Third Reich and openly proclaimed his anti-semitism. His writing brims with a loathing of liberalism--and for this reason, has subsequently been taken up by critics on the radical left as well as the right.[6] But Schmitt's ideological position helped him see some of the paradoxes and contradictions of liberal politics with merciless clarity, particularly where war was concerned. He noted in several works that the liberal desire to outlaw international conflict has paradoxically helped to destroy the fragile legal structures that had successfully imposed limits on the conduct of warfare throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[7] When war itself came to be defined as criminal, then its perpetrators necessarily became outlaws against whom any and all means, including exterminatory ones, were justified in order to restore peace. In this way, the age of the "ius gentium" gave way to the age of mass insurgency, terrorism, and total war. This context helps explain why calls for the *Endkampf* began with the liberal industrialist Rathenau, and why it was the aristocratic government of Prince Maximilien von Baden which ended up rejecting self-immolation, instead taking the poisoned chalice of the armistice--in Geyer's words, choosing "surrender over the seductions of terror."

In his short book, *Theorie des Partisanen*, Schmitt traced the evolution of the new, insurgent forms of warfare from Napoleonic Europe to Lenin's Russia, Mao's China, Vietnam, and the Algerian War of Independence. Moran and Waldron's book follows exactly the same path, but without always reaching the same conclusions. Both Mark Von Hagen's essay on Russia (pp. 159-188) and Waldron's on China (pp. 189-207) subject the communist revolutions in these countries to a caustic, skeptical eye. They suggest that while the Bolsheviks and Maoists both made ample use of the mythology of the *levée*, they also acted to suppress any trace of popular participation in government, and to subordinate individuals to the power of the state. In Russia, Von Hagen notes, the process was particularly complicated because the Soviets could not make use of the single most powerful idea animating the "people in arms": the idea of the nation.

Waldron's fascinating essay follows the fortunes of French Socialist leader Jean Jaurès's book, *L'armée nouvelle* in China. Originally published in 1910, the book expressed a vision similar to that of Moran's German liberals--of a popular but limited army that would fight purely defensive wars. Translated into Chinese in 1922, it provoked considerable discussion but ultimately failed to have a lasting influence. Chinese leaders repeatedly invoked the mythology of the "people in arms" but, in Waldron's account, refused to trust or foster the idea of participatory citizenship that necessarily lay behind it, instead attempting to impose military discipline on the civilian population. In successive Chinese conceptions of the "citizen soldier," Waldron notes acerbically, from the late Qing to Mao Zedong, the second term always predominated. Mao could speak of the "people in arms" with lyric force: "Several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back" (quoted on p. 204). But he failed to trigger such an uprising in reality, and, in practice, mostly preferred "a carefully indoctrinated and 'mobilized' army and populace" (p. 205).

Greg Lockhart's essay on post-World War II Vietnam (pp. 208-33) and Douglas Porch's on the 1954-62 Algerian War of Independence (pp. 234-55) return to the French sphere of influence. Both also continue the theme of the discrepancy between the myth and the reality of the *levée*. Lockhart explains that the Viet Minh initially failed to effect a popular uprising and only succeeded when they discovered how to combine regular, large-scale military operations with guerrilla warfare and effective propaganda. Modern French historians will find Porch's essay particularly important as it reveals the way in which all three principal forces in the Algerian war--the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), the anti-independence *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS), and the French government--tried to harness the power of the *levée*, while also making use of the myth to demoralize the others. The end result was something of a hall of mirrors in which fear of mass uprisings counted for more than the attempted uprisings themselves.

Surprisingly, Porch concludes that of the three actors only the French government managed to mobilize significant popular forces. But it did so against the OAS to block the group's attempted putsch in 1961—not against the FLN. The OAS itself failed spectacularly. The FLN of course succeeded in its mission of independence but not, Porch argues, because it provoked a mass Muslim uprising. While the Algerians made sensational use of terrorism and enjoyed considerable popular support, they never raised an effective army, especially since the FLN's armed wing remained mostly in Tunisia, cut off from Algerian territory. But the FLN adapted to the situation brilliantly: "They created an army in Tunis not to fight, but to exist as a symbol of the revolution, an armed force that embodied the *levée* of the Algerian people, even if the power of French arms temporarily prevented that popular uprising" (p. 255). Like the Vietnamese before them, in other words, the FLN understood that creating the image of the people in arms in Western public opinion mattered just as much as creating it on the ground—perhaps more so. Porch's essay, like several of the others, suggests that, *pace* Carl Schmitt, modern warfare belongs as much to the propagandist as the partisan.

In their introduction and conclusion, both Moran and Waldron speculate briefly on the future of the *levée en masse* and in doing so inadvertently point up their volume's sole real weakness. Waldron writes that at present, "the Western imagination is transfixed by the vision of something like a *levée en masse* in the Land of Islam—a force that purports to sweep away all opposition before a great rush of aroused, passionate, religiously inspired warriors." But can the *levée en masse* be equated so easily with *jihad*? To have conceptual rigor, "*levée en masse*" cannot be treated as a synonym for "armed mass movement." Moran, Waldron, and their authors might have paid a little more attention to the etymology of the phrase: *levée*—literally a lifting up—implies an active agent doing the lifting. It implies an organized state. The sort of insurgency evoked by Mao or the FLN, namely a spontaneous uprising of the people, or, one led by a popular vanguard or party, is closely related to the experience of 1793, but nonetheless belongs in a separate category (as does the sort of *jihad* demanded by Osama bin Laden). Geyer's German case straddles the boundary between the two, as the proponents of an *Endkampf* saw an initial leading role for the state, but also anticipated the continuation of popular action on its own, after the state's collapse.

Does the *levée en masse* have any sort of future? While Moran and Waldron suggest it does, I find it hard to believe that state-driven mass conscription of the sort pioneered by revolutionary France has any serious place in an era of air power, weapons of mass destruction, and militaries increasingly dependent on high-tech weaponry that demands lengthy and complex training. While some politicians in the West today advocate a return to mass conscription, they do so for purely civic, as opposed to military reasons: to discourage governments from waging war, and to foster a general sense of unity in the citizenry. Insurgent popular warfare of the sort preached by Mao might seem to have more of a future, but if the American campaign in Afghanistan is any indication, lightly armed irregular troops are now at more of a disadvantage than ever against the militaries of developed states (or at least against the United States).

It is no accident that figures who, a generation ago, might have tried to start a popular insurgency, or at least create a simulacrum of one through guerrilla war, now resort to horrifying acts of violence and self-immolation which dramatize both their cause and their desperation, and allow them through their sacrifice to stand for the down-beaten millions who supposedly throng behind them. But this sort of terrorism represents an exact inversion of the original, revolutionary *levée en masse*. The French revolutionaries sought to mobilize masses of men to overcome a small number of individual adversaries—the enemy princes and aristocrats who supposedly kept their own peoples in chains. In the case of contemporary terrorism, it is the attackers who are reduced to a small number of individuals, while the only masses on the scene are the innocent victims. In this *reductio ad absurdum* it might be fairly said that the history of the *levée en masse* has indeed come to an end. But in their stimulating collection, Moran, Waldron, and their colleagues have powerfully illuminated its past career, provided a bridge between the history of war and the history of political culture, and explained how a French phenomenon became a global one.

LIST OF ESSAYS

- Daniel Moran, "Introduction."
- Alan Forrest, "'La patrie en danger': the French revolution and the first *levée en masse*."
- Owen Connelly, "The historiography of the *levée en masse* of 1793."
- Daniel Moran, "Arms and the concert: the nation in arms and the dilemmas of German liberalism."
- John Whiteclay Chambers II, "American views of conscription and the German nation-in-arms in the Franco-Prussian war."
- John Horne, "Defining the enemy: war, law and the *levée en masse* from 1870 to 1945."
- Michael Geyer, "People's war: the German debate about a *levée en masse* in October 1918."
- Mark Von Hagen, "The *levée en masse* from Russian empire to Soviet Union, 1874-1938."
- Arthur Waldron, "From Jaurès to Mao: the *levée en masse* in China."
- Greg Lockhart, "In lieu of the *levée*: mass mobilization in modern Vietnam."
- Douglas Porch, "The inversion of the *levée en masse*: the Algerian war, 1954-1962."
- Arthur Waldron, "Looking backward: the people in arms and the transformation of war."

NOTES

[1] Quoted in T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787-1802* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 78.

[2] See Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and idem, *The Soldiers of the French Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

[3] Ken Alder, *Engineering the Revolution: Arms and Enlightenment in France, 1763-1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[4] Reynald Secher, *Le génocide franco-français: La Vendée-Vengé* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986). For a more balanced and informative view of the war, see Jean-Clément Martin, *La Vendée et la France* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

[5] Theodor Körner, "Bundeslied vor der Schlacht, am Morgen des Gefechts bei Dannenberg" (1813), in *Leier und Schwert* (1814): <http://www.gutenberg2000.de/koerner/leier/leier.htm> .

[6] See Mark Lilla, "Carl Schmitt," in Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), pp. 48-76.

[7] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, ed. and trans. George Schwab (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976); idem, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des jus publicum europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1950); and idem, *Theorie des Partisanen: Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1963).

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