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Military Service as a Strategy for Surviving Revolution: The Case of Maximien Lamarque

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During the height of revolutionary terror in June 1794, a young Jacobin captain of grenadiers named Jean-Maximilien (or Maximien) Lamarque – later famous as the general and politician whose death from cholera provoked the riot featured in *Les Misérables* – was experiencing his first taste of military glory with the Army of the Western Pyrenees. From the "camp of *sans-culottes*" near Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Lamarque's battalion began to advance across the border into Spain. The next month (July), as the Convention began to turn against Robespierre, the French army – under newly elected generals Bon-Adrien Jeannot de Moncey and Henri-François Delaborde – undertook a campaign that led to the conquest of Vera, Biriatu, and Irun, in northwestern Spain. By 9 Thermidor, as Robespierre awaited execution, Maximien was comfortably ensconced in a Capuchin *convento* in Vera. In a letter to his sister Désirée back home in the village of Saint-Sever in the Landes, the young captain could not disguise his glee: "I find it funny, my dear Désirée, to write to you from the Convent of Berra [*sic*], ... Ah such good people are the Capuchins. In our triumphant marches may we always fall on their kitchens!"[1] While the Jacobin politician Robespierre faced the guillotine, the Jacobin officer remained safe from revolutionary terror, in the pantry of a Spanish monastery.

As this anecdote suggests, for minor officers such as Lamarque, military service was one strategy (whether conscious or not) for surviving revolution, during a time when it was at least as important to avoid making enemies as it was to cultivate allies. Of course, war was physically very risky. However, for those who survived battle, injury, and/or disease on campaign, it could also serve as a means of avoiding the perils of political conflict and regime change across the revolutionary era.[2] To be sure, this strategy's relative success varied significantly with social origin, rank, geography (of regional origin as well as military front), and sheer luck. In general, it seems to have worked better for newer, lower-level officers on secondary fronts, rather than top-tier generals, especially in the Army of the North, during the tumultuous early months of the

[1] Maximien, Berra [Vera], 9 Thermidor [27 July 1794], to Désirée, Saint-Sever, Archives Nationales (hereafter, AN), 566 AP 2. On this campaign, see also Citoyen B****** [Beaulac], *Mémoires sur la dernière guerre entre la France et l'Espagne* (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1801).

[2] As Samuel Scott long ago noted, "The departure of most regular units for the front withdrew them from civilian disputes and virtually eliminated their police functions in the interior, duties which were often objectionable to the soldiers and almost always unpopular with citizens." Samuel F. Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution: The Role and Development of the Line Army* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 168.

revolutionary wars. Paradoxically, those officers who were motivated by revolutionary patriotism, rather than opportunistic ambition, fared better than "political generals" in surviving regime change with their lives and positions intact.[3] While it was impossible to escape politics entirely, especially when the representatives-on-mission sent by the Convention to survey the army were present,[4] for some minor officers such as Lamarque, military service enabled them to evade revolutionary terror while still defending revolutionary idealism.

Although it was exceedingly common, this particular strategy for surviving revolution has not received the attention it deserves, perhaps because of the division in historiography between the French Revolution, on the one hand, and the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, on the other. Even those scholars who have illuminated the interrelationship between the army and civilian society in first facilitating and then ending the Revolution have only touched on the career trajectories of ordinary military men, beyond well-known "political generals" such as Charles-François Dumouriez, Louis-Lazare Hoche, Jean-Baptiste Jules Bernadotte, or Napoleon Bonaparte.[5] Aside from a few exceptions – most recently, Tom Dodman, in an excellent article in the *Journal of Modern History* on "ordinary radicalization" of a typical citizen-soldier exemplified by a volunteer named Joseph-Louis-Gabriel Noël – most scholars of the period have tended to separate the experience of revolution from that of warfare.[6] But for many ordinary officers and soldiers, the two were integrally connected. Of course, military service differed in fundamental ways from other, more obviously political tactics and networks for navigating revolution. However, alongside and perhaps even more than other strategies, it was an exceedingly common and frequently successful means of traversing a period of tremendous change.

In the case of Lamarque, his physical distance from national and local politics during the Terror of 1793–1794, when he was stationed in Spain as part of the Army of the Western Pyrenees,

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[3] According to the authoritative data of Georges Six, 55 generals were executed under the Convention, compared to 230 killed in action or due to wounds throughout the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (*Les généraux de la Révolution et de l'Empire* [Paris: Bernard Giovanangeli Éditeur, 2002 [1947]). It was even more dangerous to be a deputy. According to Michel Biard, between 1793 and 1799, 96 deputies were killed, three-fourths of them between the summer of 1793 and the summer of 1794 (*La liberté ou la mort: Mourir en député, 1792–1795* [Paris: Tallandier, 2015]). I am grateful to Howard Brown for steering me to these figures. For additional detail on the officers of the Army of the North, see John A. Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791–1794* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996 [1984]).

[4] On the representatives-on-mission, see Michel Biard, *Missionnaires de la République: Les représentants du peuple en mission, 1793-1795* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2015 [2002]).

[5] See, for example: Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution*; Lynn, *Bayonets of the* Republic; Jean-Paul Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution: From Citizen-Soldiers to Instruments of Power*, trans. R. R. Palmer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Howard G. Brown, *War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State: Politics and Army Administration in France, 1791–1799* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Howard G. Brown, *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice, and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); and David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), esp. 189, where he defines a political general as "one who unapologetically placed his own interests ahead of ideology and campaigned for political influence in Paris as vigorously as he did for enemy territory."

[6] Thomas Dodman, "Ordinary Radicalization: Becoming a Citizen-Solder during the French Revolution," *The Journal of Modern History* 94, no. 4 (Dec. 2022): 751–89. See also the work of Alan Forrest, e.g., *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2002).

certainly enabled him to avoid the violence that threatened revolutionary patriots such as himself during the Thermidorian reaction against Jacobinism. At the same time, his service in the military enabled him to make numerous contacts – including General Moncey; General Jean-Victor-Marie Moreau, later rival to Napoleon; and Napoleon's own brother Joseph – who helped him to survive and even thrive across numerous subsequent regime changes. Ultimately, these networks got him into trouble, when – as a result of the assignment he was given by Napoleon to suppress a royalist revolt in the Vendée during the Hundred Days – he was exiled to the Netherlands along with many Conventionnels and/or Bonapartists at the beginning of the Restoration. In exile and after his return to France in the 1820s, these contacts helped him to reinvent himself as a liberal politician, hero to *Les Misérables*. By surveying the trajectory of Lamarque's career across the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and especially during the most treacherous period of terror and reaction between 1793 and 1795, this essay will argue that, in spite of its inherent dangers, military service could prove to be a very effective strategy for traversing political as well as personal turmoil in the Age of Revolutions.

Maximien Lamarque was born in 1770, a year after Napoleon Bonaparte, to a bourgeois family in rural southwestern France. Educated first in the local seminary and then at boarding school in the nearby town of Agen, he came of age with the Revolution of 1789, when his father, Pierre-Joseph, a *procureur du roi*, was elected to represent the Third Estate in the Estates General. After joining the local National Guard, in the summer of 1790 Lamarque *fils* followed his father to Paris, where he stayed for over a year, regularly visiting both the National Assembly and the Jacobin Club. As a result of this experience, he became a diehard revolutionary. After returning home to Saint-Sever sometime in 1792, Lamarque volunteered for the army. Enlisting as an ordinary soldier, he was quickly promoted, first to lieutenant, then to captain of grenadiers, and regularly up the ranks. Aside from a few brief leaves, he remained on campaign throughout the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, serving in theaters all across the Continent, from the Holy Roman Empire to the Kingdom of Naples, from the coast of northern France (with the Army of England) to Catalonia. With the fall of the Empire and return of the monarchy in 1814, he was put on inactive status; after Napoleon's return in the spring of 1815, he was ordered to command the Army of the Loire against a royalist revolt in the Vendée. Across over two decades of war, Lamarque did not always attain the "glory" or recognition he desired. However, his military service did enable him to avoid revolutionary conflict and survive regime change, while also providing him with a network of patrons and comrades who consistently supported him through some of his darkest hours, especially after the death of his wife following the birth of his only child in 1799, and during his exile from France between 1816 and 1818.[7]

To understand how military service enabled Lamarque's survival, the best example is certainly his first campaign, in Spain in 1793–1795. Part of the mass of volunteers who enlisted following the declaration of war with Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom in April 1793, Lamarque joined the 4th Battalion of the Landes of the Army of the Western Pyrenees, under then Captain Moncey, later Marshal of the Empire. Among his fellow non-commissioned

[7] All biographical details in this essay are based on Lamarque's correspondence, in AN, 566 AP 1-30, and Archives Départementales des Landes (hereafter ADL) 87 J 1-34. Here and elsewhere, my effort to interpret his life in the context of the Age of Revolutions differs in significant ways from the lone biography of him, in French: Gonzague Espinosa-Dassonneville, *Le Général Lamarque, ou la Gloire inachevée* (Saint-Macaire: Mémoring Editions, 2021).

officers were several other natives of his hometown of Saint-Sever. These troops were monitored by a representative-on-mission, Pierre-Anselme Garrau, deputy from the Gironde, who (aside from a brief tour in the Vendée between late 1793 and early 1794) remained with the Army of the Western Pyrenees through much of its campaign in Spain, overseeing requisitions and logistics. Well regarded by this Army's troops, Garrau – who later served Napoleon as an army inspector in Italy, Poland, and Spain – remained a patron and friend of Lamarque's for decades afterward.[8]

After training in Bayonne, Lamarque's battalion engaged the Spanish. In the fall of 1793, as the revolutionary government turned to terror to defend itself against counter-revolutionaries, Lamarque experienced battle for the first time: according to a letter to his family dated 1 October, in a skirmish near the French village of Ascain, he had suffered a minor injury, but was now safe and healthy. Less than a week later, he added that, even though a change in the *état-major* had postponed another attack against the Spanish, "we are happy here like monks; Good and Beautiful lodging, Good bed, Good sleep and especially Beautiful mood and Good things. Ah! The Good trade [*métier*] of war."[9] Over the winter of 1793–1794, as civil war raged across the rest of France, including in Saint-Sever (renamed Mont-Adour), where at least 20 people were executed by guillotine,[10] Lamarque suffered only from boredom and hunger while in garrison at Urrugne, right across the Bidassoa River from Spain. In another skirmish with the Spanish in late February, Lamarque was injured during a bayonet charge by a bomb blast that "tickled" his shoulder enough to make him fall into his commander's arms, but he reassured his sister, who had feared him dead, "Certainly, it takes a little bit more than that to level a Captain of grenadiers."[11] While his family at home struggled to navigate intense religious and political conflict, Lamarque was concerned only with military duty.

Finally, as spring turned to summer and revolutionary terror reached its paroxysm at home, Lamarque had his first taste of "glory." As the Convention began to turn against Robespierre, the French launched a series of attacks on the Spanish in the western Pyrenees. On 9 Thermidor, Maximien was at the Capuchin convent in Vera, awaiting orders for another attack, toward San-Sebastián.[12] Five days later, alongside representative-on-mission Garrau, he led the "most glorious episode" of this campaign, the siege of Fontarabie (Hondarribia in Basque; Fentuerrabia in Spanish), a walled town on the Spanish coast. His victory there paved the way for the occupation of San Sebastián.[13] Coinciding with the fall of Robespierre, news of which was

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[8] [Beaulac], *Mémoires sur la dernière guerre entre la France et l'Espagne*; B. C., "Le Recrutement dans les Landes de 1789 à 1798," Part V, "Levées de 1793," *Revue d'histoire rédigée à l'État-Major de l'Armée (Section Historique)*, vol. 41 (Jan.-Mars 1911): 46–51; and Jacques Reix, *Pierre-Anselme GARRAU: Législateur et Conventionnel Foyen, 1762-1829* (Port-Sainte-Foy: Collection les Amis de Sainte Foy et sa Région, 1991).

[9] Maximien, Ascain, to Désirée, Saint-Sever, 6 Oct. 1793, AN, 566 AP/2.

[10] On revolutionary terror in Saint-Sever, see Michel Péronnet and Maurice Goubelle, *La Révolution dans le départment des Landes, 1789-1799* (Le Coteau: Éditions Horvath, 1989), 116–17.

[11] Maximien, Orogne [sic], to Désirée, Saint-Sever, Ventôse an 2 [Feb.-March 1794], AN, 566 AP 2.

[12] Maximien, Chauvin, 1 Thermidor [19 July 1794], and Berra [Vera], 9 Thermidor [27 July 1794], to Désirée, Saint-Sever, AN, 566 AP 2. On this campaign, see also Beaulac, *Mémoires sur la dernière guerre entre la France et l'Espagne*.

[13] Beaulac, *Mémoires sur la dernière guerre entre la France et l'Espagne*, 113–20; Ch. Blanc, "Le général Lamarque, soldat gascon," excerpt from *Bulletin de la Société de Borda* (Aire-sur-l'Adour: Imprimerie CASTAY,

shared with the Army of the Western Pyrenees by representatives-on-mission on 8 August, the successful campaign in northwestern Spain served to stabilize the revolutionary government, at least temporarily.[14]

Demonstrating that military service could, at times, be politically as well as physically dangerous, the republican victory at Fontarabie almost derailed the career of young Captain Lamarque. Angry that they had not been consulted before the attack, the two other representatives-on-mission in the western Pyrenees, Jacques Pinet and Jacques-Marie Cavaignac, ordered his arrest. However, within a few hours, fearing repudiation by the government in the wake of the coup against Robespierre, these representatives invited Lamarque himself to deliver to the Convention the five flags captured from the enemy, with a letter praising his "proofs of courage and of intelligence." This change of heart was certainly due to the intervention of Garrau, who proved to be a powerful political protector.[15] On 21 Thermidor (8 August), the young captain was welcomed in the meeting hall of the Convention, where the news of the siege of Fontarabie had been received with lively applause and repeated exclamations of "*Vive la République*!" After Lamarque presented the five flags taken from the "Spanish slaves," the Convention awarded him an "honorable mention" and promoted him to the rank of chef de bataillon.[16] Seemingly oblivious to the fact that his military prowess at Fontarabie had enabled him to avoid persecution during the reaction against Jacobinism, Lamarque later remembered this appearance before the Thermidorian Convention as one of the highlights of his life.[17]

During the dangerous period of 1793–1795, by channeling his Jacobinism into military service, Lamarque managed to avoid arrest or worse and to launch himself into a reputable – and, ultimately, lucrative – career as an officer. To be sure, this career was not without risk. Over the next two decades, Lamarque was involved in a number of battles, sieges, and counter-insurgency operations, in which he easily could have been harmed. In late 1801, he also narrowly missed

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1970), 4–5; report from the general in chief of the Army of the Western Pyrenees to the Committee of Public Safety, Irun, 15 Thermidor An II, in *Archives parlementaires*, série 1, t. XCIV, p. 355.

[14] Report by Bertrand Barère to the Convention on the campaign in northwestern Spain, 21 Thermidor An II (8 Aug. 1794), *Archives parlementaires*, série 1, t. XCIV, p. 352.

[15] Letter from representatives-on-mission to the Army of the Western Pyrenees [Pinet, Cavaignac, and Garrau] to Committee of Public Safety, Fontarabie, 15 Thermidor An II (2 Aug. 1794), in *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public, avec la correspondance officielle des représentants en mission et le registre du conseil exécutif provisoire*, ed. F.-A. Aulard (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1889-1951), 15: 613–16; Léon Dufour, "Le général Comte Lamarque," excerpt now in ADL, 1 F 982 (Léon Dufour Papers: Lamarque (Général), 1790–1896), 36; Blanc, "Le général Lamarque, soldat gascon," 5; and Espinosa-Dassonneville, *Le Général Lamarque*, 72–76.

[16] Report on the appearance of Lamarque before the National Convention, 21 Thermidor An II (8 Aug. 1794), *Archives parlementaires*, série 1, t. XCIV, 356–357. See also *Journal du Soir*, 8 Aug. 1794, and EXTRAIT DU PROCES-VERBAL DE LA CONVENTION NATIONALE, 22 Thermidor, an 2, with letter from BUREAU DU PERSONNEL DES OFFICIERS GÉNÉRAUX, Commission de l'Organisation et du Mouvement des Armées de terre, to Citoyen Lamarque Capne des Grenadiers du 4e Bataillon des Volontaires des Landes; service letter from the Convention, 24 Thermidor an 2, and certificate of good conduct signed by general in chief, to the Quartier-Général de Chauvin-Dragon, 12 fructidor an 2 [29 Aug. 1794], all in ADL, 87 J 5 (Armée des Pyrénées Occidentales).

[17] *Mémoires et souvenirs du Général Maximien Lamarque, publiés par sa famille*, 3 vols. (Paris: H. Fournier Jeune, Libraire, 1835-1836), 1: 405–406.

being sent to Saint-Domingue, where he almost certainly would have met his demise. However, until 1815, a military career enabled him to traverse a number of regime changes, unscathed.

Like the other revolutionary-era figures discussed in this Salon, Lamarque depended on a number of different types of networks over the course of his life – including family, marriage, political clubs and factions, newspaper and book publishing, and government connections. Arguably, though, it was the network he developed through military service that most contributed to his survival – not just literal, but also political and economic – across the Age of Revolutions. Lamarque's military service embedded him in a wide network of fellow officers and Napoleonic officials, which provided him with patronage, comradery, and support.

In his military network, some of Lamarque's most important and enduring connections dated from his first months in the army, with the 4th battalion of the Landes in the Army of the Western Pyrenees. His first commander, Captain Moncey, continued to select Lamarque to serve under him in future posts, including Bayonne from 1795–1798, the Holy Roman Empire in 1800, and Spain after 1808. The representative-on-mission sent to oversee the Army of the Western Pyrenees in 1793, Garrau, likewise remained a supporter and friend, across the revolutionary and Napoleonic period, when they overlapped again in Spain, and into the Restoration, when Garrau was also exiled from France, as a regicide, in Wiesbaden (Nassau).

Beginning in the late 1790s, Lamarque served several other generals who ensured his survival across the Directory, Consulate, and Empire. At the end of 1799, he was chosen to join the Army of the Rhine by Moreau, who declined an invitation by Sieyès to overthrow the Directory before the coup by Bonaparte, thereby attracting the enmity of the new Consul. Somehow, this connection did not hurt Lamarque. Under the Consulate and then the Empire, he was hand-selected – and regularly promoted – by some of the most important Napoleonic marshals, including Charles-Pierre Augereau, Jacques Macdonald, André Masséna, Joachim Murat, and Louis-Gabriel Suchet. During this period, Lamarque also made a number of contacts in the Napoleonic administration, particularly Jean-Jacques-Régis de Cambacérès (Second Consul, then Arch-Chancellor and architect of the Napoleonic Code) and his secretary, Jean-Olivier Lavollée. Perhaps most significant for the trajectory of his life was his connection to Napoleon's brother Joseph who, first as King of Naples and then as King of Spain, appreciated his role in countering insurgency and, during the Hundred Days, encouraged the Emperor to select Lamarque as commander of the Army of the Loire. With the exception of the Battle of Wagram – after which he was praised by the Emperor himself, promoted to lieutenant-general, and named a baron – Lamarque did not always attain the "glory" he desired from his military service. Nonetheless, his service garnered him a network of military and civilian connections, at the highest levels of the Napoleonic Empire, which provided him with security, status, companionship, and money.

Following the downfall of the Empire, some of these connections, of course, became liabilities. As a result of his military service, particularly in the Vendée in 1815, Lamarque fell from official grace during the First and especially the Second Restoration.[18] Although he claimed not to have

[18] Blanc, "Le général Lamarque, soldat gascon," 9–10. See also Dufour, "Le général Comte Lamarque," 42, and request for title of count (1814) in personnel file, Service Historique de la Défense (Vincennes), GR 7 YD 407.

supported the return of Napoleon until he was ordered to re-mobilize in late March 1815, he was included on the list of *proscrits* of July 24, 1815, and forced to leave the country. As he prepared to depart for the Netherlands in December 1815, he lamented to a new friend in Paris, Mademoiselle Sauvan, "It is atrocious to leave one's country when one has fought for it for 23 years; it is horrible to go begging an asylum in the nations that one had previously conquered."[19]

However, throughout his three-year exile, Lamarque continued to be sustained by the network of friends and supporters he had developed during his career in the military. While in exile, first in Brussels and then in Amsterdam, he corresponded regularly with Garrau. He also remained in frequent contact with Cambacérès, in whose home he spent almost every evening when they were both in Brussels and (briefly in the spring of 1816) Amsterdam, and with Lavollée, who encouraged him to write a pamphlet defending his conduct in the Vendée, which helped to rehabilitate his reputation and secure his amnesty in late 1818.

As Lamarque's three-year exile in the Netherlands suggests, there were significant costs to his revolutionary-era "survival strategy" of military service. These costs are glimpsed throughout his correspondence with his family in Saint-Sever. In response to their complaints about his long absences, he often admitted that he would prefer to be home with them, but was driven by duty to his country. As he wrote to his sister in December 1793, from Bayonne with the Army of the Western Pyrenees, "I assure you that I have a Strong wish to come to St. Sever; but when Duty calls all Desires must be hushed; we belong to the *patrie* above our families, our fathers, even ourselves."[20] For Lamarque, military service was an *état*, or vocation.

In the end, the costs of military service served Lamarque in his second career in politics. In his campaign for election to the Chamber of Deputies in 1828, he emphasized his long devotion to the nation: "Departing at a young age to defend our frontiers, I attached myself to the *patrie* by reason of the blood I spilled for her." Touting his sacrifices for his country, he argued, "My past life is a sure guarantee of my life to come."[21] This argument proved effective, launching him into a political career and enabling him to survive across yet another regime change into the July Monarchy.

The case of Maximien Lamarque highlights how, for at least some republican, even Jacobin, activists, military service was an effective strategy for surviving – and even thriving – amidst revolution. In contrast to Tom Dodman's *transfuge* Gabriel Noël, who struggled to "pass" as a revolutionary during his time in the army, Maximien Lamarque wholeheartedly supported both republicanism and the Empire (if not always Napoleon per se).[22] An idealist as well as a careerist, he saw military service as a vocation – one that served not just his interest, but also his country's. In the end, this vocation required significant sacrifice and wrought emotional damage

[19] Letter III to Mlle. [Sauvan], Libourne, 27 Dec. 1815, in *Mémoires et souvenirs du Général Maximien Lamarque*, 2: 262–65.
[20] Maximien, Bayonne, to Désirée, Saint-Sever, 7 Nov. 1793; Maximien, Ascain, to Désirée, Saint-Sever, 25 Nov. and 3 Dec. 1793, all in A.N., 566 AP/2.
[21] Printed letter from Général Lamarque to Messieurs the Electors of the 7th College, Paris, 15 April 1828, ADL, 87 J 15.
[22] Dodman, "Ordinary Radicalization."

on Lamarque and his family during his long years on campaign and especially during his exile, when he suffered serious disillusionment. But across much of his life, Lamarque's military activities and connections continued to serve him as a tool for surviving and promoting revolution. Bridging the artificial separation of the French Revolution and the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in historiography, Lamarque's story serves to remind us of the tight interconnection between revolutionary politics and military service, beginning in the 1790s. It also illuminates the wide variety of networks – not just ideological or economic, but also vocational and geographical – employed by revolutionaries to navigate the political winds of the Age of Revolutions.

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