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# David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*

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replace it. Regarding the coming *nomos*, as we have seen, Schmitt offered three options. The first was some genuinely universal system, a world government in fact if not in name. He mentions the possibility several times, but offers no specifics: this is clearly not his favorite choice. The option that would entail the least change from historical experience would be an augmented version of maritime hegemony. Under this option, some power, probably the United States would do pretty much what the Britain of Queen Victoria's day did, but with the addition of air power. The third possibility, and perhaps the one Schmitt finds most congenial, would be a plurality of international systems. This is what today we would call "multipolarity."

At least in this book, Schmitt offers few clues about which possibility is the most likely. In a way, this is to be welcomed. Schmitt's brand of jurisprudence is not to everybody's taste, but at least it is not *bossy*, unlike the legal theory that attends early 21<sup>st</sup> century transnationalism. Actually, the problem with it is that it is too willing, even eager, to be bossed. Perhaps anyone who consults Schmitt about the creation of a new *nomos* should come away with this useful piece of advice: to name is to take.

John J. Reilly

**David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005.**

The image of the "Reign of Terror" during the French Revolution has captured the imagination of many historians and has been the backdrop in works such as the *Scarlet Pimpernel*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Scaramouche*. Rarely, has a comparatively brief period (September, 1793—August, 1794) been so discussed and examined. Visions of

bloodthirsty, crazed mobs calling for the death of “enemies of the Revolution” have captured the imagination of ensuing posterity.

As is the case of many controversial events, the factual basis for these events is more complicated than expected. The victims were not just aristocrats or non-juror clergy (clergy who refused to take an oath to the Civil Constitution and National Assembly over the pope) but people from all walks of life who fell afoul of the ruling factions, which were constantly changing in the whirlwind of factional infighting. Although some 300,000 were detained during this period, the great majority were ultimately released. Tens of thousands though did perish, not only through “Madame Guillotine” and summary executions. Also, as the book makes clear, the Terror was not limited to Paris but took place throughout the country.

The book basically chronicles the period between the foiled flight of the royal family in June, 1791 to the taking of power of the distinctly non-revolutionary Directory in November, 1795. As has been said of revolutions in general and the French Revolution in particular, they devoured their own. In no ways is this more obvious than in the 12 months or so that constitute the Reign of Terror.

Through exhaustive research (albeit almost entirely primary and secondary in nature), the writer examines the causes of this phenomenon and shows that that it was not a mindless orgy of senseless violence but the outcome of a number of factors. Why would a movement dedicated to liberty, equality, and fraternity turn on itself? The rationale taken from Rousseau and supported by the Jacobin movement and other radicals proclaimed that to challenge the revolutionary government was to challenge the will of the people in which all civic virtue resided. To challenge one

was to challenge all. In this dogmatic and fundamentalist fashion, all who questioned the Revolution (as interpreted by its ruling faction as a tool against opposing factions) were counter-Revolutionary and therefore against the nation.

Another factor was the periodic shortages in various commodities. Prices doubled or tripled in essential foodstuffs such as bread in Paris and other cities. Meat, sugar, eggs, butter, and other basic necessities saw spot shortages in Paris and elsewhere during the period of 1792-1795 with occasional instances of near famine and starvation. In this atmosphere, it was not difficult for various factions to stir up violence.

External threats were also used to whip up mobs culminating in the Reign of Terror. From the summer of 1792, Austrian and Prussian forces had attacked Northeast France and the British had invaded Corsica and attacked the Southeast. They were encouraged by aristocrats who had left France as well as by other emigrants. Although the attacks had been pushed back, a feeling of paranoia had become rampant. Rebellion by pro-clerical and pro-royalist elements especially in the south and west facilitated this feeling.

In addition, the authorities could not count on a unified nation. As Andress makes clear, the speakers of central French were probably a minority. Bretons, Alsatians, Basques, Flamandes, Corsicans, Provençals (close to Catalan Spanish) composed close to one quarter of the population, and French was not their first language. In addition, the central French was not spoken by the Languedoc speakers in the south. Therefore, the committee of Public Safety which administered the Terror used this disunity to forward the sense of vulnerability.

The author does a good job of differentiating the various factions which rose and fell with bewildering rapidity

during this period. History has signaled out two groups which represented “moderate” and “radical” factions—the Girondists and Jacobins. In fact, as the book details, there were a number of factions to the right and left of both these factions. The Girondists were anti-royalist and pro-revolutionary during the early stages but were eventually outflanked by the more militant Jacobins who pushed for violent actions against all enemies. The Jacobins controlled the central government in Paris from May, 1793 to August, 1794, and instituted the Terror. However, even within the Jacobins, there were factions. It was a group of disgruntled Jacobins and other fearful former radicals who gathered together to overthrow the progenitors of the Reign of Terror, Robespierre and Saint-Just, at the end of July. In reaction, the Jacobins were soon overthrown as they had overthrown the Girondists. After a counter White Terror in 1794-1795, the Revolution essentially ended in November, 1795.

Given the bewildering number of characters, factions, and events, the author does an admirable job of narration. Nonetheless, without an attached glossary, cast of characters, complete chronology of events (1770 to the end of 1795) and maps which show revolutionary and anti-revolutionary outbreaks, the lay reader would be hopelessly lost. These ancillary contributions by the author, in addition to the comprehensive index, serve the reader well. They should be consulted when reading the chapters.

Although this is not a work based on original research, it is well-written and informative. With the caveat mentioned in the previous paragraph, the non-specialist as well as the specialist should derive benefit from the book. Although popular rather than scholarly on purpose, it would be a useful additional text for a college course that dealt with French Revolution.

Norman C. Rothman