

# The Concept of Nationalism in the French Revolution and Its Possible Relationship with the Pillnitz Declaration

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## ABSTRACT

The Pillnitz Declaration was a threat to the French Revolution and a threat to the nascent French nation, which inspired the nation to unite against other autocratic monarchies. The victory at the Battle of Valmy was the first victory of the French Revolutionary Army against the alliance of the feudal monarchy. The war greatly stimulated the development of nationalist sentiments within the French nation, based on pride in the French revolutionary nation. The high morale of the French soldiers played a crucial role in the final victory of the battle, and Valmy's victory became a symbol of the French people's struggle for the freedom of the motherland. The French Revolution spawned and fueled the rise of modern nationalism. The period from the issuance of the Pillnitz Declaration to the Battle of Valmy embodies the further emergence of the concept of nationalism. Foreign intervention and war aroused the patriotic enthusiasm of the French nation, established the internal identity of the nation, and since then embarked on a radical, Expansive nationalism.

**Keywords:** Pillnitz Declaration, French Revolution, nationalism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The French revolution, as one of the most important events that happened in modern history, stimulates new ideas and ideologies such as democracy, freedom, nationalism, etc. to spread in Europe. Since the revolution from 1789 to 1791 was generally moderate and calm, the aim of this essay was only to briefly discuss the key events that happened from 1792 to 1794 such as the War in the Vendée, the Battle of Valmy, etc., and the role of nationalism took place through these days.

In this field, Dr. Marie-Cécile Thorat from Sheffield Hallam University is unquestionably an expert with her book *From Valmy to Waterloo, France at War, 1792-1815* [1]. She critically analyzed the problem of the change in French military structure, propaganda, identity, values, the war, and economic status by referencing and analyzing figures and word materials from the first-hand and second-hand documents at that time. For example, in the chapters *Troop Morale and Military Unity* and *From Individual Experience to Collective*

*Identities*. By analyzing the speeches given by politicians such as Saint-Just and Napoleon Bonaparte about morals and patriotism, the memoirs and letters written during the French revolution and figures to prove that the motivation of French revolutionary soldiers fighting with a strong sense of enthusiastic patriotism and belief toward France and French ideologies was a result of revolutionary government's positive intervention toward soldiers' mental health through the ways like government propaganda, political education and the shape of moral values, etc. Undeniably, the book significantly inspired this study on the rise of French nationalism from 1792 to 1794 [1].

On the other hand, there are only a few studies appeared to talk about the born and rise of the proud emotion of the French toward France and the difference between the traditional patriotic emotion and the nationalism ideology formed after the French revolution. The inspiration for this study was come from analyzing a series of nationalism studies from many scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm and the theory of imagined community. There is no doubt that the common understanding of

nationalism was this is a thought formed in recent centuries. Yet patriotism, as a concept strongly related to nationalism, was an ideology formed a few thousand years ago. The difference in multiple perspectives between both ideologies might be worth learning. The French revolution, in this sense, was certainly a remarkable historical period to be focused on. This essay aimed to briefly discuss the rise of French nationalism from 1792 to 1794 and analyze the uniqueness and effects brought to world history by this ideology. To achieve such a goal, a lot of historical figures first handed materials such as the memoirs, speeches, etc. given by the people at that time, and the analysis of the works by various historians as sources will be analyzed and finally inferred to a critical and reasonable conclusion.

## 2. THE REVOLUTION

The bourgeois revolution broke out in France on July 14, 1789, overthrowing the rule of the Bourbon Dynasty. The arrest of Louis XVI sent shockwaves through Europe and had a major impact on other European monarchies. Austria and Prussia jointly issued the Pilnitz Declaration, which called on European monarchs to intervene in the French revolution. On August 27, 1791, Prussian and Austrian signed a military alliance, forming the first anti-French alliance. France formally declared war on Austria in April, and Prussia declared war on France in July. The new republic faced an unprecedented crisis. In addition to coping with the domestic opposition of the royalist party, it also faced the strong attack of the foreign anti-French forces. The legislative assembly declared that "the motherland is in danger", and Jacobin leader Robespierre appealed to the people to promote the revolution only by driving away from the invaders and those in power, to protect the safety of the motherland, to obtain the political rights of the people [2]. Therefore, hatred for the old system, desire for their freedom and rights, and hatred for the invaders all at the same time aroused strong national feelings in the hearts of the people, which gave rise to a strong expression of modern nationalism. This was the moment when resistance to foreign enemies and tyranny were combined, and the words "revolutionary" and "patriot" became synonymous. Baruret described the scene: "All the French had to be conscripted at any time. Young men go to the front to fight; Men make weapons and carry supplies; Women make tents and uniforms and serve in hospitals; Children unpack and wash old clothes; Old men are sent to public places to raise morale, to stir up hatred against the old dynasty, and to proclaim the unity of the Republic." When we revisit these scenes today, we cannot help but be struck by the patriotic fervor of the Revolutionary period. During the Revolution, the Valmy spirit was the best expression of republican patriotism. Verdun is the last fortress in Paris, when the news of the fall of Verdun to Paris, the whole Paris boiling. Danton exclaimed: what we heard was not the sound of urgent artillery, but the trumpets charging the

enemy of the motherland. To defeat and defeat the enemy. On September 20, the French Revolutionary army defeated for the first time the supposedly invincible Prussian army at Valmy, near Verdun. When the Prussian army entered France, it was used to seeing French troops scatter at the attack. But this time, the French revolutionary army fought with great determination and high spirit, standing there calmly facing the enemy. The French Army Group of Moselle under General Du Mourier and army Group of Rhine under General Kellermann, about 60,000 men, were fortified near Valmy on September 19, 1792. An unstable army of volunteers and veterans prevented the Prussians and their Austrian Allies from interfering in the French revolution. They shouted the fervent patriotic slogan "Long live the people! They beat back the Prussians. The Prussian army was routed, routed. For the first time in this battle of spirit and will, the French army defeated the enemy. Valmy's victory reversed the passivity of the French army on the battlefield and made the French army stronger. The victory at Valmy was the first victory of the French revolutionary army against the feudal monarchy. The high morale of the French soldiers played a crucial role in the final victory of the battle, and Valmy's victory became a symbol of the French people's struggle for the freedom of their country. Hayes, a famous American scholar, commented: "Their success is a very important fact in human history. Most of the reason is not the special technological progress in military affairs, but the temperament produced in the hearts of the soldiers and their compatriots [3]. The battle of Valmy is no surprise in military history, but it deserves a place in the history books for the patriotic feeling it represented in the defense of the Republic by the French people to the death. Valmy was not a complete military victory, it was a victory of the national spirit. Inspired by national passion and spirit, the French army withstood the invasion of foreign enemies, demonstrating the power of the people and the power of the revolution. It was an outpouring of patriotism.

The day after Valmy, the victory was billed as "the army of the people defeating the old army". Emboldened by this victory, the Convention, elected by universal suffrage, promptly adopted a resolution establishing a republic, and on 22 September solemnly proclaimed the Republic, the First Republic of France. After this battle, the French army changed its defensive posture and began to expand outwards. As Joquet puts it: "After Valmy, no Frenchman with a gun and a sword could pretend to be a hero, convinced that the ideals he espoused were destined to prevail." Wherever the French troops went, they were warmly welcomed as liberators by the people of Europe. The war was fought on foreign soil. How were the people of the occupied powers treated? Do they want to turn a war of defense into a war of aggression when the French people shout "Long live the Nation" in defense of their motherland? Were they liberators or conquerors? These

problems pose serious challenges for France. Although French revolutionaries, thinkers, and statesmen debated this, it was not difficult to see that, behind the propaganda of revolution and liberation of other nations, a national ambition and desire gradually grew and expanded. History proves that this kind of national ambition and desire was finally manifested in Napoleon's foreign wars and the First Empire. Until the spring of 1789, farmers had been passive observers of events. Even under the vigorous influence of the Enlightenment, they were still confined to their land and did not turn into any political struggle before the revolution. However, the natural disasters of 1788, which directly led to the failure of agricultural production, and the drafting of the petition before the Estates-general assembly, put the peasants on the political stage and became the main force of the 1789 revolution. After the revolution, France confiscated the land of the exiled nobles and sold the land into small pieces. For the poor peasants, they could repay the land by years. Later laws increased the time limit to years. Napoleon continued the peasants' right to the land and gave men and women equal inheritance rights. This "for the broad masses of farmers, the motherland is not an abstract and fuzzy concept, through the connection of the land, they put their motherland closely together, and the longing for land and love made them also to this affection to the motherland, inspire patriotic emotion", these farmers with land, aware of their land and farm it, In the face of threats from European countries, all the peasants were happy to go from the land to the barracks and become protectors of the land. Napoleon introduced a new conscription law in 1803: all men between the ages of 20 and 25 were conscripted. Sacrifice for the motherland is noble and sweet glory, for "glory" formed a national upsurge [3]. According to incomplete statistics, Napoleon conscripted 2.4 million soldiers from 1804 to 1813. Peasants accounted for a large proportion of them, and more importantly, they were willing to be the protectors of the land. To quote Marx, "The army is the glory of the smallholder. It makes him a hero, protecting his newly acquired property from foreign invaders, glorifying his newly acquired national character, pillaging and revolutionizing the world. The uniform is their dress, the war is their poetry..."

To seek a solution to the financial problems, King Louis XVI of France convened a Council of the Third Estate in May 1789, but this led to a more serious confrontation between the clergy, nobles, and the third estate, who were stubbornly defending feudal privileges. The outbreak of the French Revolution immediately caused great panic and hatred of the feudal monarchs in European countries. Louis XVI was forced to support the bourgeoisie to hold the real power. On the surface, he accepted the constitutional monarchy, but secretly he wanted to use foreign forces to suppress domestic revolutionaries. The continuous development of the revolution, especially in 1791 when Louis XVI failed to

escape and was captured, further promoted the intervention and suppression of the French Revolution by the European feudal monarchs [2]. At the same time, the king's flight also aggravated the French people's worries about foreign interference. In particular, the statement left by the king broke the people's illusion of a constitutional monarchy and caused great psychological trauma to the people [3].

In June 1791, Austrian Emperor Leopold II issued the "Padua Proclamation" to appeal to the royal families of various countries to act in concert, inviting the kings to join him in saving the French king and monarchy and restoring the freedom of the French royal family [4]. On August 27, he signed the "Pillnitz Declaration" with King Wilhelm II of Prussia, demanding that Britain, Russia, and other European countries make concerted efforts to intervene in the French Revolution, save the French King in danger, and warned French revolutionaries against further encroachment on the power of Louis XVI [5]. As a result, a hostile situation was formed between revolutionary France and the entire European despotism, and attempts by French revolutionaries to abolish the monarchy or weaken the monarchy were markedly opposed by other European monarchies.

At the same time, the French exiled nobles and priests also took the opportunity to make a move. The Pillnitz Manifesto was a threat to revolution and a threat to the nascent French nation. Although the Pillnitz Declaration stated that Austria would go to war only if all the other European powers also went to war, the French nationals, as well as the Constituent Assembly, understood this declaration as a call for Austria to go to war, even to arm. The danger of foreign intervention and war inspired the patriotic fervor of the French nation. Radical French like Gironde Jacques Pierre Brissot saw it as a sign of invasion and called for war, prompting France to preempt it. Dubois Clonse read a motion on the question of war at the Jacobin Club, stating: "If an autocratic monarch dares to invade our country, the French nation swears that it will not destroy the tyrant, nor plant its banner on the ruins of the autocracy. Never lay down your arms." Robespierre also pointed out: "Leopold should be told that your tolerance for the massing of rebels is a violation of international law. We are not afraid of this, but it is an insult to our country. We urge Disperse them within a certain time limit, otherwise, we will declare war on you in the name of the French nation and in the name of all the people who are hostile to the tyrant" [6].

From an etymological point of view, the word nation originally evolved from the past participle of the Latin word *nasci*, which means to be born. Later, it was further derived as *natio*, which refers to a group of residents with the same place of birth, that is, a group of human beings with a specific geographical area [7]. In the early Middle Ages, *natio villae* was used to denote a kinship group in a village. For example, the nobles of Oxford used the

Natio Regni Angliae in 1258 to denote the kinship group of the Kingdom of England against Henry III's foreign followers. Some scholars believe that around 1400, natio has the meaning of "territory" [8]. From 1500 to the French Revolution, natio began to appear in the local language as a nation and has political implications. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the word nation began to be used to describe people within a country regardless of their ethnicity. By the time of the partition of Poland and the French Revolution, the nation had become synonymous with the country [9]. In general, nation means the whole political organization or nation [10]. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen declares: "The source of all sovereignty is essentially the nation (nation)." The dictionaries published since then have also begun to adopt the political meaning that the nation has already had earlier. Nation means the same blood, Numerous families born in the same country, and living under the same government [11]. It means a certain social community, in which the concept of "collective" or "nation" clearly occupies a central place.

Although Louis XVI and the Conservatives sought to seek refuge in European monarchies, they always adhered to the traditional French concept of monarchy and kingdom. But the radicals had already pitted other autocratic monarchies against France and had further replaced the once arbitrary conception of the kingdom with the idea of a nation and power belonging to the people. France and the French nation, the national community, faced pressure and hostility from external kingdoms. Domestic conservatives hope to use the intervention of external kingdom forces to obliterate the gradually formed concept of nation and restore the original concept of the kingdom. The other faction is completely opposed to it and is trying to get rid of the external kingdom forces that have colluded with the kingship and monarchy, to establish this free, citizen's country as our country. Max Weber once pointed out: "Behind the obvious and ambiguous term 'nation' lies a common purpose, which is rooted in the political sphere." [11]. The term nation eventually evolved into a concept associated with the nation when France and the French national community were formed. The development and evolution of the word nation show that after centuries of evolution, "nation" finally became a political term during the French Revolution. As an ideological tool and a weapon of the struggle for French patriotism and the bourgeoisie, nationalism has an important role in building assets. The class nation-state played a crucial role. In the struggle to safeguard the national interests of the bourgeoisie, overthrow the feudal monarchy, and overthrow autocratic rule, nationalism promotes and reinforces the idea of the nation-state.

Robertsbier, who expressed similar views, severely protested against the actions of the Austrian Emperor Leopold, arguing that his tolerance of the massing of rebels was contrary to international law, an insult to

France, and urged that they be dispersed within a time limit, otherwise, the French nation will declare war on him in the name of all the people who are hostile to the tyrant [11]. This means that from this time onwards, the French nation demands that it is like "the individual manages himself", the nation itself manages the nation. Interestingly, Leopold was accused of violating international law. After 1500, world history entered modern times. With the great geographical discovery, the capitalist mode of production first occurred and developed rapidly in Western Europe, the overseas colonial expansion of Western countries, and the formation of the world market, between the East and the West and between continents, between nations, countries, and regions isolation is broken. The 16th and 17th centuries were also a period of important changes in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. At the beginning of the great changes in modern history, legal philosophers such as Suarez and Grotius conducted a lot of thinking and discussion. The whole world has gradually formed an interconnected, interdependent, and contradictory body in the economic, political, cultural, and other aspects, which has become the basis of a unified and growing international law.

The real state is secular compared to the church, which has the power to control spiritual affairs, and this is because the church and the pope are directly established and authorized by God and are sacred, while the opposite state is constructed by "people". Most of the Enlightenment thinkers discussed and emphasized that man builds the state by transferring some or all of his power, to get rid of the disorder of the state of nature or the hostility between man and man. While Suarez affirmed the equality, freedom, and independence of man in the state of nature, he did not think that the state of nature was purely lawless. This is because "God created man, and man is a rational creature, and even in the state of nature, he can understand natural law with his rationality" [10]. Then this rational man and his companions are the people of God, have a common rational nature, and therefore should not be enemies of each other. Grotius can be regarded as the founder of international law. His thought inherited the classical Greek and Roman thought baptized in the Renaissance, Christian theological thought, and the thought of various schools in the pre-modern and pre-enlightenment period such as Suarez, as well as the early European maritime thought, commercial law, land law, etc. Grotius created a new legal system of world order for Europeans through international law [12]. Since then, this conception of the world with the nation-state as its unit has been different from the lineage of empires in the Middle Ages. These monarchical countries in Europe were often wary and worried about the French Revolution, and the signing of the "Pillnitz Declaration" played a catalytic role in the patriotic enthusiasm of the French nation. In a sense, a sense of coercion, repression, and intervention on the part

of the international community caused the citizens to recognize the irrationality of the actions of these European kingdoms in stark contrast to their intimidation and military might.

With the sudden death of Emperor Leopold in March 1792, Franz II stepped up preparations for war after he succeeded to the throne, and the war against France was imminent. In this situation, the French Legislative Assembly drafted a document setting out France's attitude toward the coming war. "The French nation declares that it will never wage any war for the sake of conquest, and will never use its armed forces against the liberty of any people, this is the article of the Constitution, this is the sanctity with which we connect our happiness with the happiness of all peoples desire, and we shall be faithful to it", according to Geoffrey Best, *The Permanent Revolution; The French Revolution and Its Legacy 1789-1899*. This gave the French revolutionaries political and moral confidence that, in their minds, this war was a war of a defensive, free nation against tyranny, rather than a war of aggression and conquest of the French nation against other nations [13]. The feudal autocratic rule over these nations allowed other nations to gain freedom.

On April 20, 1792, the French Legislative Assembly passed a decree declaring war on the "King of Bohemia and Hungary", France officially declared war on Austria, and the French Revolutionary War officially broke out. This had a huge impact on both France and Europe, so much so that some scholars called it "even more meaningful than the capture of the Bastille" in French and European history event [14]. On September 20, with the high patriotic spirit and nationalist enthusiasm of "defending the republic", the provisionally organized French army unexpectedly defeated the well-trained Prussian army in the Battle of Valmy and reversed the unfavorable situation of the battle.

### **3. THE BATTLE OF VALMY**

The Battle of Valmy, as a significant presentation of the rising French nationalism during the French revolution, was a battle that happened between the French army and the united Prussian, Austrian army, and the Army of Condé, an army formed by the anti-revolutionary aristocrats from France which was also supported by conservative powers such as Prussia, Austria, and United Kingdom. After the outbreak of the French revolution, there was a sense of fear expanding among European aristocrats and monarchs. To maintain the sanctity and power of the monarchy, the European (conservative) powers decided to help the French King Louis XVI regain his absolute power in France before the outbreak of the revolution. Under such background, the Declaration of Pillnitz, a document produced by the European (conservative) powers that advocate they should send troops to intervene in the revolution that

happened in France and state the sanctity of the monarch was inviolable, was established in 1791. Undeniably, the war happened between revolutionary France and other European (conservative power). At the first stage of this war, the French army, generally untrained, kept losing battles at the Rhine border. Till a few days before the battle, the Prussian army had already captured Verdun and threatened the safety of Metz. The French commander soon departed 36,000 troops with 40 cannons to Valmy, combating the 34,000 Prussian troops and cannons [15]. During the battle, François Christophe de Kellermann-the French commander during that battle-took off his hat and waved it while at the same time shouting 'Vive la Nation', which means 'Long Live the Nation', to his troops. The morale of the French troops was immediately mobilized, and they marched bravely to the battlefield while singing patriotic songs such as *La Marseille*. Fearing the French army's high morale, the Prussian army soon retreated. Although this battle only caused 300 French casualties and 200 Prussian casualties, this battle was still the first important triumph of the French army [16]. This battle significantly stimulated the development of nationalism emotion within the French nation based on a sense of pride toward the revolutionary French nation, and the monarchy was immediately replaced by the republic in France two days after the triumph [16].

### **4. CONCLUSION**

Throughout the evolution of French nationalism, we can find that the Great Revolution gave birth to and promoted modern nationalism. In the period from Pillnitz to Valmy, it is mainly reflected in the further generation of nationalism, and the establishment of a kind of national internal identity and political democratization relying on the division of "foreign" and domestic. And has since embarked on a radical and expansionist nationalism. Foreign aggression accelerated the national identity of the French people, especially the army, and this trend continued to develop and intensify and become more concrete in the 19th century, one of the main factors still being the army. More and more civilians are leaving their homes to join the army. As soldiers become socially and physically isolated from their origins, there is greater scope for national identity to be formed through conflict with enemies and contact with foreign countries and peoples. The joy the soldiers felt and expressed when they returned to France, saw French villages, and heard French spoken, was a striking example of this new national identity. After the Declaration of Pillnitz, to repel Prussian and Austrian military intervention in France. To defend the French territory and the revolution, France became important to people's unity consciousness, they realized that against the encroachment of otherness, of all necessary internal community, as a result, a kind of based against a foreign enemy of ethnic identity: "We are all French, should lay aside all differences against the

common enemy." The defeat of the bewildered Prussian army at Valmy did not mean that France had successfully defended the revolution or ended the war. But the nationalist fervor unleashed during the campaign provided the revolution with its most enduring and potent symbol of victory to date. Similarly, it is "rooted in the experience of foreign wars, civil strife, and factional struggle, and gradually becomes paranoid." Helps explain this shift in the phenomenon of radical, expansionist nationalism. Revolutions created nation-states and citizenship, as well as modern images of foreigners. Accompanied by the siege of European feudal reactionary forces, the national passion of the French people has been strongly stimulated. Under the slogan of "liberty, equality, and fraternity", France conquered the feudal forces one by one on the European territory. And then embarked on the road of nationalism of foreign expansion.

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