

NORMAN STONE

ARMY AND EMPIRE

The English political theorist, Michael Oakeshott, made his reputation after the Second World War, in a period when there was much disillusion with the State. British experience of the big state had not been altogether happy. It had greatly grown, and had had the effect, enemies said, of turning people either to proletarians or into functionaries. Oakeshott spoke for a certain school of Conservatives – they became powerful, with Margaret Thatcher a generation later – when he denounced “the rational project”. He meant, the world of the all-wise, all-planning State. It is of course easy to show how the ambitious plans of any powerful state can end up with the Law of Unintended Consequences. Nietzsche said, “what the state has, is stolen; what the state says, is a lie”.

My argument here will be that this is an excessively British, or even an English, view. In modern England, you could say that the state had never been needed for any modernizing project. There had never been a proper Enlightenment in the continental sense. No-one had to persecute obscurantist clergymen or try to stop aristocrats from persecuting serfs, as had to happen in the Austrian Empire. There were of course obscurantist clergymen – the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford protested at railways: “the noise and the people” – and peasants were badly treated, but such things were changed from below, not by the action of an authoritarian government. England, protected by the Channel from invasion, just grew and developed. As Burke said, “we compromise, we reconcile, we balance”. So: no “rational projects”.

In particular, the British did not need to use the army as a force for Enlightenment. Its officer-class was firmly recruited from the aristocracy, or the Protestant-Irish gentry (as with Wellington). Until 1870, the old

system, of buying an officer's commission, prevailed. It did so not for reasons of snobbery, or at least not overwhelmingly for such reasons, but because an officer-corps which had its own money would not be such a charge upon the state's finances, and because the officers would not become Bonapartists, anxious to seize power so that they could augment their own money (as happened in Spanish countries). The British Army remained outside politics. Unlike nearly all other armies, it took its officer corps from the upper classes. In less advanced countries, the army offered a vehicle for social mobility – Spain in the later nineteenth century, or Russia even in 1914 are pre-eminent examples. In the Russian army, educated men avoided the army, except for the Guard regiments. Two-thirds of the officers had had only four years' primary education, and they were expected to travel third-class on the railways.

Oakeshott's view was in fact very English, and not altogether accurate, even as to England. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was indeed something of a rational project – the dissolution of the monasteries involved one third of the land, and caused a profound change in education and arrangements for charity. Scotland, a much poorer country than England, did indeed have an Enlightenment, a famous one. When the British went overseas, they were involved in many rational projects, in India or, again famously, in southern Australia, where Adelaide became a planned, modern city.

You had to carry through rational projects if you found yourself in conditions of backwardness, where the state alone could make progress; and it was here that armies came into their own. I wish, here, to address the relationship of army and empire, in conditions where the armed forces had to take on the work of enlightenment. This covers most of Central Europe and Russia; it also applies to the Ottoman Empire.

In Prussia, Austria and Russia, eighteenth-century military schools developed a practical importance that went far beyond their narrow military functions. They were needed for engineering, for medicine, for map-making or bridge-building. Their concentration upon mathematics was such that it comes no surprise to discover that the originator of non-Euclidian geometry – the origin, if you want, of Relativity – was an Austrian Army captain in Koloszvár, in Transylvania, Farkas Bolyai, who had studied fortress artillery and had to understand the geometry of cross-fire from bastions. In most of continental Europe, universities at that time were fast asleep, in the repetition of outdated religious scholarship (in Salamanca, the

Faculty of Law had only the question left, in 1776, the year in which Adam Smith produced *The Wealth of Nations*: ‘what language do the angels talk?’). The embarrassment was such that the France of Louis XV set up the *Ecole Polytechnique*, militarised to this day, in which engineering was taught to a very high level. In Austria, the *Theresianum* and in Russia the *Yunkerskiye Uchilishcha* had similar functions, though not as specialised. In all cases, boys, not at all of grand origin, would be taken in, given bed and board, and trained to be loyal servants of the dynasty. There is hardly a Russian writer of note in the first half of the nineteenth century who did not pass through a military education – Lermontov, Tolstoy, Griboedov, even Dostoyevsky, although his main experience of the state’s discipline was the execution-squad. In the Ottoman Empire, once the era of westernisation began, with Mahmud II’s elimination of the parasitical Janissaries in 1826, the new model army was the centre of things, and in the event produced the maker of modern Turkey, Kemal Atatürk. He was a characteristic product of the military enlightenment. He lost his father (in Salonica) when very young, and owed everything to the military institutions in which he grew up. In a country like Turkey, lacking the British virtue of teamwork, the army had to carry through reforms which the civilians would never have agreed upon. The ‘spin-off’ from military technology (and medical improvement) has been considerable: a country in which, as one of its principle actresses, Shirin Devrin, complained, you could not have a table made with even legs unless you asked a Greek or Armenian carpenter, now wins prizes for its F16 aircraft.

Armies are, quite often, at the centre of an enlightenment project, of the kind Oakeshott did not at all like. In terms of literacy, educational institutions, infrastructure, they had many things to their credit. If you joined the Imperial Russian army, you ceased to be a serf (as was true of the father of A. A. Denikin, the White commander in 1919) and in most armies, even peasants could reach the top if they were adaptable and astute. The Austrian army is a very good case in point.

At the time of the Bosnian-Croat war a few years ago, I was fascinated to learn the origins of the supposedly Serb “minority” in the *krajina*. The *Militärgrenze*, a great swathe of territory on the Ottoman-Habsburg border, had been settled, in the seventeenth century, by migrants from Ottoman territory. They were known to Emperor Leopold I as ‘Vlachs’, i. e.

Rumanians, and the document concerning them was called *Statuto valachorum*. The deal was of a fairly standard sort, in the circumstances. The local Croat nobility lost its lands to the incomers, who were then expected to defend the Austrian empire. With time, these Orthodox incomers were taken over by the Serbian church, and hence were known as 'Serbs'. The expropriated Croat nobility retired in disgruntlement to Zagreb or Budapest, there to brandish the *gravamina* or grievances which became one of the notorious bores of the Habsburg Monarchy. The *Krajina* Serbs, known to the rest of Europe as 'Croats', fought hard and often in Habsburg wars, and South Slav names – Vukassovitch, Wojnowitsch, Boroevic (who added the noble predicate 'von Bojna') – were all over the Austrian army lists, right up to 1918, when they included even the chief of the air force, Uzelac (who, in 1941, still living in Zagreb, was saved from deportation by the Independent Croatian State because his one-time fellow in the Austro-Hungarian army, Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, happened to be *Deutscher kommandierender General in Agram*).

Similar examples can be cited. One that is striking is the role in Russia of the Tatars. It is not a dimension of Russian history with which we are particularly familiar, but it is an important one. In the British or French armies, Moslems would very often make excellent cavalymen. In the Russian army, Tatars (and men from the Caucasus) accounted for a high proportion of the artillery specialists. They were good mathematicians, and we can assume that they were not drinkers. Graduating from a technical military school, they found their way into the technical services. But they were also respected as a 'progressive' minority. The memoirs of Zaki Validi Togan (*Vospominaniya* vol. 1 [Ufa 1994]) show how it was possible for a young Bashkir to emerge from the steppe and make a career for himself (it was quite a career: he defended Gatchina Palace against General Yudenitch in 1919, fled to Turkey when Lenin refused to allow an independent Bashkiria, became an historian, protested when Turkish historians were expected to prove their people's Aryan origin, fled to Vienna, where was Freud's upstairs neighbour, went to Berlin but got out in 1943, back to Turkey where, after a nationalist demonstration, he was imprisoned; then he resumed his career as historian). The Tatars lost Kazan to Ivan the Terrible in 1552, and lost the Crimea two centuries later, but their presence in Russia was considerable. They were never subjected to serfdom, and many converted (Boris Godunov, the Yusupov family, and many other well-known Russians were of Tatar origin). Not surprisingly, they had a role in the Russian army.

I have so far spoken very positively of armies and their role in 'enlightenment projects'. What goes wrong? The most obvious, in conditions of imperial decline, is that the army is expected to do too much. This happened pre-eminently with the Austro-Hungarian army in 1914. It was expected to 'solve' the South Slav Question, in effect by invading Serbia, were a terrorist movement had been incubating, for the liberation of Bosnia. But the South Slav Question had really got out of control because of domestic politics in Vienna and Budapest. A fairly obvious answer to it was the establishment of a South Slav state under the Habsburgs. But the Hungarian governments would never allow this: even in October 1918, when count Tisza spoke to the Bosnian deputies in Sarajevo, he would not give way and said, with crazy arrogance, 'it may be that we shall be crushed but before then we shall crush you'. The army was then expected to invade Serbia, and in June 1914 Berlin famously gave the go-ahead: if Russia intervened, so be it; the generals all said that war was coming anyway, and the sooner, from Germany's viewpoint, the better. But if Russia intervened, Austria-Hungary would be expected to field most of her army in Galicia; and the army would not then have sufficient force to invade Serbia. The Chief of General Staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, was an ingenious man, and came up with what appeared to be a solution. About a quarter of the army would go against Serbia if war broke out there alone, but would go to Galicia if the Russians intervened. But in 1914 he did not want to go to war with Russia, and sent the extra army (Second) against Serbia, alleging to protesting Germans that the Russian intervention had occurred too late. He said that the railway experts believed that, in the *instradierungstechnisch* circumstances, Second Army must proceed against Serbia, and then turn about for Galicia. This was not really true; as the documents showed, Conrad had ordered the Galician armies to deploy far away from the border, meanwhile hoping that he could knock out Serbia. As things turned out, German protests caused him to change his mind, but Second Army, having done nothing against Serbia after all, did not actually reach Galicia until five weeks had gone by, during which the other Galician armies were badly defeated. These examples of 'imperial overstretch', as Paul Kennedy has called it, could easily be multiplied. The Anglo-French Suez campaign in 1956 is another very good example.

Nowadays, armies do not enjoy an altogether favourable press. The world moved on, and we are now supposed to be proceeding towards universal liberal enlightenment of the type famously stated by Frances

Fukuyama, in his *End of History* (not nearly as bad a book as his critics said). Americans in particular seem to like this kind of optimistic book – an earlier example was W. W. Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* which claimed that industrial revolutions and democracies came about when you saved ten percent of your income. In fact the world has been here before. In the 1860's, progressive optimism prevailed, and there was a sort of Fukuyama 'package'. The American Civil War, the emancipation of the serfs in Russia, the unification of Germany, the Schmerling Constitution in Austria, Napoleon III's free trade agreement with Great Britain were all 'progressive', as then understood. Nowadays, armies go in for 'peace-keeping', and are searching for a role, in a world where a human-rights bureaucracy and assorted non-governmental (or quasi-governmental) organizations attempt to spread enlightenment in backward and warring parts. I am not altogether sure whether this is a very dignified end for a splendid old tradition, but if this is the outcome of an enlightened project, then perhaps it is a fitting one.