

Fall of Napoleon Activity



1: The Continental System

In November 1806, Napoleon set up a blockade—a forcible closing of ports—to prevent all trade and communication between Great Britain and other European nations. Napoleon called this policy the Continental System because it was supposed to make continental Europe more self-sufficient. Napoleon also intended it to destroy Great Britain's commercial and industrial economy.

Napoleon's blockade, however, was not nearly tight enough. Aided by the British, smugglers managed to bring cargo from Britain into Europe. At times, Napoleon's allies also disregarded the blockade. Even members of Napoleon's family defied the policy, including his brother, Louis, whom he had made king of Holland. While the blockade weakened British trade, it did not destroy it. In addition, Britain responded with its own blockade. And because the British had a stronger navy, they were better able than the French to make the blockade work. So, ultimately, the Continental System was a failure in that it did not destroy Britain's commerce and because many of Napoleon's allies disregarded it.



2: Invasion of Russia

Napoleon's most disastrous mistake of all came in 1812. Even though Russian Czar Alexander I had become Napoleon's ally, the Russian czar refused to stop selling grain to Britain. In addition, the French and Russian rulers suspected each other of having competing designs on Poland. Because of this breakdown in their alliance, Napoleon decided to invade Russia.

In June 1812, Napoleon and his Grand Army of more than 420,000 soldiers marched into Russia. As Napoleon advanced, Alexander pulled back his troops, refusing to be lured into an unequal battle. On this retreat, the Russians practiced a **scorched-earth policy**. This involved burning grain fields and slaughtering livestock so as to leave nothing for the enemy to eat.

On September 7, 1812, the two armies finally clashed in the Battle of Borodino. After several hours of indecisive fighting, the Russians fell back, allowing Napoleon to move on Moscow. When Napoleon entered Moscow seven days later, the city was in flames. Rather than surrender Russia's "holy city" to the French, Alexander had destroyed it. Napoleon stayed in the ruined city until the middle of October, when he decided to turn back toward France.

As the snows—and the temperature—began to fall in early November, Russian raiders mercilessly attacked Napoleon's ragged, retreating army. Many soldiers were killed in these clashes or died of their wounds. Still more dropped in their tracks from exhaustion, hunger, and cold. Finally, in the middle of December, the last survivors straggled out of Russia. The retreat from Moscow had devastated the Grand Army—only 10,000 soldiers were left to fight.



3: Napoleon's Downfall

Napoleon's enemies were quick to take advantage of his weakness. Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Sweden joined forces against him. All of the main powers of Europe were now at war with France.

In only a few months, Napoleon managed to raise another army. However, most of his troops were untrained and ill prepared for battle. He faced the allied armies of the European powers outside the German city of Leipzig (LYP•sihg) in October 1813. The allied forces easily defeated his inexperienced army and French resistance crumbled quickly. By January of 1814, the allied armies were pushing steadily toward Paris. Some two months later, King Frederick William III of Prussia and Czar Alexander I of Russia led their troops in a triumphant parade through the French capital.

Napoleon wanted to fight on, but his generals refused. In April 1814, he accepted the terms of surrender and gave up his throne. The victors gave Napoleon a small pension and exiled, or banished, him to Elba, a tiny island off the Italian coast. The allies expected no further trouble from Napoleon, but they were wrong.



4: The Hundred Days

Louis XVI's brother assumed the throne as Louis XVIII. (The executed king's son, Louis XVII, had died in prison in 1795.) However, the new king quickly became unpopular among his subjects, especially the peasants. They suspected him of wanting to undo the Revolution's land reforms. The news of Louis's troubles was all the incentive Napoleon needed to try to regain power. He escaped from Elba and, on March 1, 1815, landed in France. Joyous crowds welcomed him on the march to Paris. And thousands of volunteers swelled the ranks of his army. Within days, Napoleon was again emperor of France.

In response, the European allies quickly marshaled their armies. The British army, led by the Duke of Wellington, prepared for battle near the village of **Waterloo** in Belgium (called the Battle of Waterloo). On June 18, 1815, Napoleon attacked. The British army defended its ground all day. Late in the afternoon, the Prussian army arrived. Together, the British and the Prussian forces attacked the French. Two days later, Napoleon's exhausted troops gave way, and the British and Prussian forces chased them from the field. This defeat ended Napoleon's last bid for power, called the **Hundred Days**.

Taking no chances this time, the British shipped Napoleon to **St. Helena**, a remote island in the South Atlantic. There, he lived in lonely exile for six years, writing his memoirs. He died in 1821 of a stomach ailment, perhaps cancer.

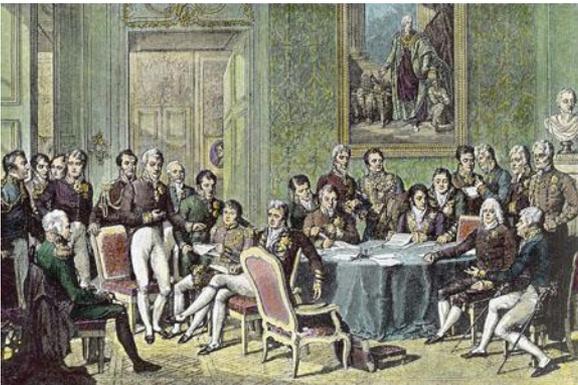


5: Congress of Vienna

European heads of government were looking to establish long-lasting peace and stability on the continent after the defeat of Napoleon. They had a goal of the new European order—one of collective security and stability for the entire continent. A series of meetings in Vienna, known as the **Congress of Vienna**, were called to set up policies to achieve this goal. Originally, the Congress of Vienna was scheduled to last for four weeks. Instead, it went on for eight months.

Most of the decisions made in Vienna during the winter of 1814–1815 were made in secret among representatives of the five “great powers”—Russia, Prussia, Austria, Great Britain, and France.

1. At the Congress, they wanted to prevent future French aggression by surrounding France with strong countries. They did this by returning France back to its borders from 1792.
2. They wanted to restore a balance of power, so that no country would be a threat to others. As a result, France remained a major but diminished European power. Also, no country in Europe could easily overpower another.
3. Third, he wanted to restore Europe’s royal families to the thrones they had held before Napoleon’s conquests. The ruling families of France, Spain, and several states in Italy and Central Europe regained their thrones. The participants in the Congress of Vienna believed that the return of the former monarchs would stabilize political relations among the nations.



6: Napoleon's Legacy

Positive Impact	Negative Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Napoleonic Code<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Before this code, many feudal and royal laws in France were contradictory in some cases and confusing for people• Expanded the right to own property• Many countries adopted almost identical codes• Law much more clear and accessible• Elimination of exemptions and privileges• Centralized French government• Expanded suffrage rights (though they were still limited)• Greater property rights for French citizens• Expanded education for many French citizens• Introduced the Metric system to France	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Left France bankrupt, and her overseas colonies lost• 17 years of wars• 6 million people dead throughout Europe• Got rid of the French Republic• Considered a tyrant by many Frenchmen• Strict censorship, controlling aspect of the press, books, theater, and art

Political Changes in France

Ruler	Date	Government
Louis XVI	1789	Absolute monarchy
French Revolution 1789-1799		
People of France	1792-1804	1st French Republic
Napoleon Bonaparte	1804-1814	1st French Empire
Restoration of Bourbons	1814-1823	Constitutional monarchy
Reign of Charles X	1824-1830	Absolute Royal Power
Revolution of 1830		
Louis Philippe	1830-1848	Constitutional monarchy
Revolution of 1848		
People of France	1848-1852	2nd French Republic
Napoleon III	1852-1870	2nd French Empire
Conflict with Prussia		
People of France	1871-1940	3rd French Republic
World War II—Germany occupation (Vichy France)		
People of France	1946-1958	4th French Republic
People of France	1958-present	5th French Republic