

2.Context:

As the 18th century changed to the 19th century, the big question in Europe was this: what would the French Revolution lead to? Europe's rulers had good reason to be concerned. The social leveling reforms in France had led to the destruction of aristocratic privilege and the execution of a king. If these reforms spread to other countries, the conservative regimes then in power would suffer. And as France made these reforms, such as opening positions of leadership to all men based on talent, the country became more efficient, powerful, and increasingly patriotic. As people at all levels of French society began to feel more of a stake in France's future, the power of the masses was starting to be tapped unlike ever before in history. Napoleon, a minor Corsican aristocrat who rose to be Emperor of France, represented the new confidence in social mobility and individual talent the Revolution had wrought. And although he was a dictator, Napoleon was in many ways very progressive, advancing many of the goals of the Revolution, and rationalizing government and social processes wherever he went. Napoleon represented change.

Nearly all of Europe fell under Napoleon's control, and certainly all of it was forever changed by being ruled by him or fighting against him. Napoleon came closer than anyone else in modern history to conquering Europe. The war he provoked can be thought of as an early kind of "world war". Napoleon's wars echoed in the New World as well, influencing the War of 1812 and Toussaint l'Ouverture's dictatorship in Haiti.

Even as it spread conflict, Napoleon's conquests spread the new ideas and new institutions of the French Revolution throughout Europe. The countries he occupied had versions of the Napoleonic Code imposed on them, forming the legal basis for much of Continental European law today. The liberal ideals of legal equality codified in his law system spread to his opponents to, as reformers like Baron Stein and Hardenberg realized that to compete with France, they had to create a Prussian state that was like France. Thus, Napoleon spread the ideas of the French Revolution even beyond the boundaries of his vast empire.

Napoleon's regime also helped mobilize nationalist movements. In reacting to their French overlords, some previously disunited insular ethnic groups saw reason to organize. In opposing France, these groups built nationalist movements, most notably in Germany. Germany even reacted intellectually, striving to champion Romanticism, a school of thought opposed to the French Enlightenment Rationalism Napoleon was spreading. Interestingly, the Napoleonic Wars fueled the energies of both liberal and conservative opponents: in Spain, a bloody Peninsular War was fought by guerillas who wanted to return a Bourbon to the throne; in Germany people complained that they wanted more self-rule.

The Napoleonic period was an extremely complicated time. Moral right and wrong are hard to distinguish: Napoleon was a dictator, but not a particularly evil one. He encouraged many developments we today consider quite positive. The Napoleonic Wars were instigated by France, but each nation fought to protect and expand its own national interest. The wars were punctuated by constantly shifting alliances. Sometimes Prussia fought France, and sometimes it was neutral. Austria, led by the crafty Metternich, tried to improve relations with France towards the end the Napoleonic era. Russia initially opposed Napoleon, then sided with him, and then turned against him again. The only constant through the fifteen years of Napoleon's rule was the continued enmity between England and France. Instead of a war between irreconcilable values, the Napoleonic Wars were fought with essentially the same motivation driving all sides: greed. The period was typified by "Realism" in diplomacy and war, for all sides were simply trying to win whatever advantages they could.

If anyone won the Napoleonic Wars, it was Britain. Britain emerged in 1815 as a commercial powerhouse with the world's preeminent navy and a large colonial network. British industry might have provoked working-class rebellion if not for the national unity having an enemy like Napoleon provided. Blaming the hard lives of the working class on Napoleon's war mongering, Britain made it through a critical and dangerous time of its young Industrial Revolution.

The Battle of Trafalgar, during which Admiral Nelson lost his life, established Britain's naval supremacy for the rest of the Napoleonic era, and even for the rest of the 19th century. Napoleon, however, still seemed unbeatable on land. His control of Europe was rapidly growing, and if he was not stopped soon, control of the resources of all of Europe would eventually allow him to build a Navy large enough to beat the more skillful British at sea.

Alexander I was an interesting historical character. While Britain remained Napoleon's archenemy, we could well consider Alexander as Napoleon's "foil". Like Napoleon, Alexander controlled a vast territory, and was one of the most powerful forces in Europe. Alexander also considered himself an "enlightened despot". Although a czar in the Russian tradition, he had been educated by a very liberal Swiss tutor, and had a very progressive, modern outlook. He wanted to rationalize and modernize the Russian state, and he surrounded himself with educated advisors for that purpose. He saw himself as Napoleon's rival in Europe, and he was fairly original as monarchs go, advocating an idea of "collective security" for all of Europe, by which all of the powers would work together to make sure no one nation grew too powerful, so it could dominate all the other nations. Thus, he wanted the other nation to ally against whoever was most powerful, at this time France. But his opposition to France was not only based on rational calculations of "collective security", for Alexander was genuinely jealous of Napoleon's power and influence. Furthermore, his anti-Napoleonic stand was sweetened by a British offer to pay Alexander 1.25 million pounds for every 100,000 soldiers he raised to oppose Napoleon. Finally, Alexander wanted what Russian rulers always want: Poland. Poland would serve as a "buffer" between Russia and invasion from Western Europe, and it would allow the czar to extend his influence westward, into central Europe, and thereby gaining power in European affairs.

Why did Alexander ever agree to ally with Napoleon in the Treaty of Tilsit? Napoleon always crafty, managed to appeal to Alexander's ego. He said that he and Alexander were alike, and that while Napoleon's destiny was an empire in Europe, Alexander would be the emperor of the East, ruling Turkey, India, and the like. Together, said Napoleon, nothing could stop them. Napoleon also claimed that Alexander's problems were caused by the "real enemy", Britain. Given his dire straits, Alexander allowed himself to believe Napoleon and signed the treaty.

6. The Continental System (1806-1807):

Summary

After his Navy was destroyed at Trafalgar in 1805, Napoleon realized that if his empire was ever going to be secure, he would have to defeat Britain. With his navy gone, Napoleon knew a direct assault on island was for the time impossible, so he decided to wage economic war against the "nation of shopkeepers", as he called the British. His plan to bring Britain to its knees was called the Continental System. British goods were to be restricted from entering Europe. Napoleon demanded that his empire close its ports from British goods, and he got the Russians, Austrians, and Prussians to cooperate in the Continental System. Without having the European market to buy up its manufactures, Napoleon hoped Britain would undergo a severe depression, hurting the nation's economy and ability to maintain such a powerful navy. Meanwhile, Napoleon was building ships of his own. Napoleon wanted to hobble the British economy and give France a chance to build up its own manufacturing and industry.

The Continental System began in 1806 with Napoleon's Berlin Decree, which banned British ships from entering European ports. Britain, full of savvy traders, made a concerted effort to undermine the Continental System by contracting out its shipments to neutral vessels. Napoleon next issued the Milan Decree in December 1807. This harsh decree, aimed against smuggling, stated that neutral ships that stopped in Britain before landing in Europe were subject to confiscation.

Britain's retaliated through sea power, creating a blockade of all European ships. If Europe wouldn't

actually inflicted some defeats on the French Army, proving that they could be beaten, raising hopes among potential resistance movements in Germany and in Austria.

In September 1808, Napoleon held a meeting of all of his puppet kingdoms at Erfurt, Saxony. His main goal was to try and impress Alexander I, also at Erfurt, with the power and grandeur of the Napoleonic Empire. Napoleon was in the process of creating a Grand Duchy of Warsaw, which he knew would upset Alexander.

In April 1809, Austria rebelled against Napoleonic rule, announcing a "War of Liberation". No one joined them: the German princes were still fighting each other to impress Napoleon, and were not about to fight him. Fighting alone, renegade Austria was defeated at the Battle of Wagram. In October of that year, the Austrians made peace with the French again. Napoleon took some of northern Austria and added it to his new project, the creation of a Grand Duchy of Warsaw.

Commentary

The Continental System represented an attempt at economic warfare. However, the system ended up hurting Napoleon more than it hurt Britain. The British blockade of Europe badly slowed the internal European economy; the ill-sighted imposition of tariffs from country-to-country within Europe also hurt the volume of European trade. Napoleon himself put tariffs on goods coming into France, but didn't let anyone in his empire put tariffs on goods coming from France. Although this did cause an increase in French manufacturing and industry, it also caused a lot of resentment throughout the Empire. Since land transport was so slow, Eastern Europe had major problems getting goods from Western Europe. The continental system also led to the Peninsular War, which sapped French strength, morale, and prestige. In the end, the Continental System damaged France, but not Britain. Britain compensated for the loss of European trade by stepping up its volume of trade with its colonies. Britain's Gross National Product (GNP, a measure of national wealth) actually continued to increase every year under Napoleon's economic sanctions, although the Continental System may have slowed down the rate of growth of Britain's economy.

Why, when many other European countries relished the opportunity to hurt Britain, were the Portuguese so opposed to joining the Continental system? Tiny Portugal was pro-British because it depended on its colonies. Because of Britain's dominance of the seas, Portugal knew that continuing trade relations with its colonies depended on good relations with Britain.

The tactics Napoleon used to install his brother on the throne of Spain were seen as particularly underhanded by much of the Spanish population, resulting in the bloody Peninsular War. Before 1807, the situation in Spain was as follows. The wife of the bumbling Bourbon king of Spain, Charles IV, was having an affair with a member of the court named Manuel de Godoy. Godoy was gaining power, and Ferdinand, the heir to the Spanish throne (known as the Infante), tried to get rid of Godoy. Godoy's loyal followers imprisoned Ferdinand, when suddenly the French army started approaching under the leadership of Murat. Godoy released Ferdinand, the frightened Charles IV abdicated the throne, and, on March 23, 1807, Murat entered Madrid, refusing to recognize Ferdinand as king. Charles then tried to undo his abdication, and chaos broke loose in Spain as Ferdinand's camp fought Godoy's camp. Napoleon convinced Ferdinand to give the throne back to his father, and convinced Charles to abdicate. Then he gave the crown to his brother Joseph Bonaparte, and attempted to impose the Continental System on Spain. Murat became the King of Naples, Joseph's old kingdom, but remained personally insulted that Napoleon didn't give him the Spanish crown.

At Erfurt, Talleyrand secretly told Alexander that Napoleon's empire was over-extended, and that he should simply bide his time until the collapse. Talleyrand's action may be seen as traitorous to Napoleon, and he was probably trying to play both sides, ensuring that he would have a safe place if Napoleonic France were to fall. Or, perhaps Talleyrand saw some need for balance between the European powers and was trying to remedy the extremely unbalanced situation that Napoleon had