

to relinquish the throne, to leave France and even to give up his life for the good of his country.

In a bout of depression Napoleon attempted to take his own life. He took a potion of poison prepared during the retreat from Moscow. Napoleon had kept the poison but it had lost its potency and, when swallowed, all it induced was a severe bout of vomiting. He recovered and was reconciled to his fate, which was settled by the Treaty of Fontainebleau. Through the mediation of Tsar Alexander I, Napoleon was granted the sovereignty of Elba, a small island off the north-west Italian coast (see the map on page 4), and a pension. He reached the island on 4 May 1814.

### The Hundred Days campaign 1815

Following Napoleon's abdication, and the restoration of the monarchy, discussions took place to determine a peace settlement with France. These were agreed at the first Treaty of Paris on 30 May 1814. The terms were very lenient:

- France was restored to its frontiers of 1792.
- A number of French colonies that had been captured were restored.
- There was to be no indemnity or army of occupation.
- Looted art treasures did not have to be returned.

The wider issue of producing a territorial settlement in Europe was not as easily achieved. When the great powers met in the Congress of Vienna in the autumn of 1814 there were real tensions, mostly over the redrawing of the map of Europe, and especially the future of Poland. The Tsar wanted all of Poland with compensation for Prussia. Matters became so acrimonious that Britain and Austria, encouraged by the restored Bourbon government of France, made a secret alliance against Prussia and Russia. Napoleon followed the negotiations in Vienna carefully and aware of the deep divisions among the allies, sensed an opportunity to recover his throne. Devastated at having been exiled without his wife and son, he was also angry that the pension promised him by the allies had not been paid.

Sensing an opportunity to split the allies and recover his throne, Napoleon escaped exile on Elba and landed in southern France on 1 March 1815. This marked the start of the 'Hundred Days' campaign. This proved to be Napoleon's last dramatic gamble to recover his throne. He proclaimed: 'The eagle will fly from steeple to steeple until it reaches the towers of Notre Dame.' Napoleon offered to negotiate separately with Austria and Britain, in order to break up the alliance. Both rejected his offer, declared him an outlaw and aligned themselves with Prussia and Russia against him.

### The Battle of Waterloo 1815

As Napoleon marched north to Paris, many of his former soldiers and generals rejoined him. The recently restored Bourbon monarchy fled from the city. Napoleon realised that he would

**Key question**  
Why did Napoleon decide to return to France and seize power?

First Treaty of Paris:  
30 May 1814  
Napoleon landed in  
France – start of the  
Hundred Days:  
1 March 1815

Key dates

**Key question**  
Why was the Battle of Waterloo so decisive?

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need to make political concessions and offer some liberal guarantees. He did this through the *Acte Additionnel*, which was drafted by one of his most persistent critics, the liberal-minded Benjamin Constant. Constant agreed to serve Napoleon and the *Acte* was approved by a plebiscite, albeit with a very low turnout of only 20 per cent of the electorate. Napoleon raised an army of 125,000 men. He realised that a quick victory over the allies was needed in order to unite France behind him and to reassert his authority over the country. His immediate targets were the two allied armies in Belgium under Wellington and the Prussian General, Blucher, before they could combine with significant numbers of Austrian and Russian forces heading towards France. Napoleon issued what was to be his last Order of the Day on 14 June 1815: 'Soldiers ... the allies have begun the most unjust of aggressions. Let us march to meet them ... for every Frenchman with a heart, the moment has come to conquer or perish.'

On 18 June 1815 one of the decisive battles in modern European history was fought near the Belgian village of Waterloo. Napoleon had a slight numerical advantage over Wellington, 72,000 men to 68,000. The outcome of this evenly balanced struggle was ultimately determined in favour of the allies by the arrival of the Prussians. As Wellington said the next day 'it was a damned close thing – the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life'. Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, in effect, marked the end of the Napoleonic era and extinguished any realistic attempt he might have had of retaining his throne.

### Napoleon's second abdication 1815

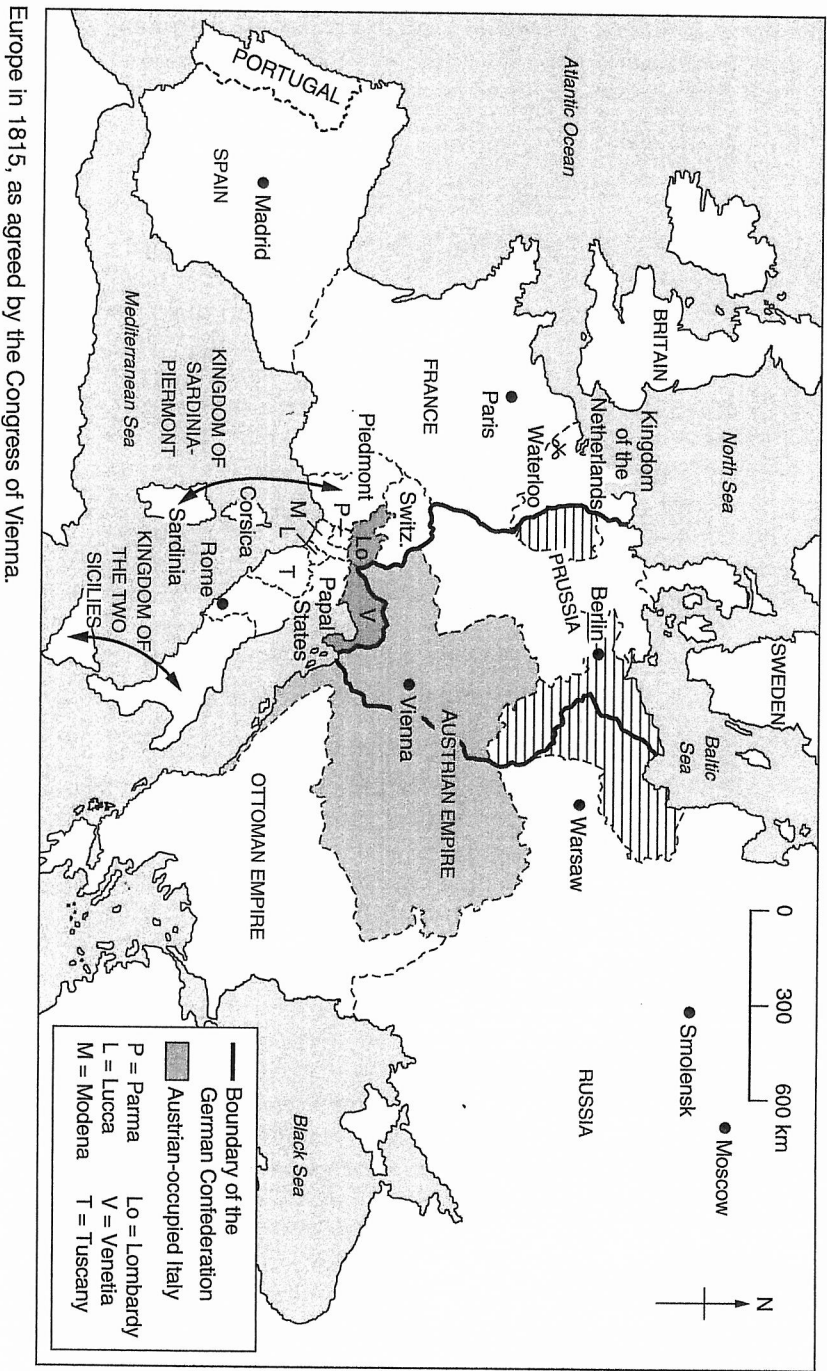
Following his defeat, an undaunted Napoleon at once began planning a new campaign. There was very little enthusiasm among the French army or the French population for continuing the war. Without political or popular support, Napoleon had no option but to agree to demands for his second abdication. His proposal that a **Regency** should be set up for Napoleon II, his young son, was ignored. On 8 July, Louis XVIII made his second entry into Paris. After Napoleon's final abdication on 22 June 1815 and subsequent exile, the second Treaty of Paris (November 1815) reduced the frontiers of France still further, to those of 1790. The First Empire was ended. Napoleon's fate was to be exiled to the tiny island of St Helena, one of the most remote parts of the British Empire. He arrived on the island on 17 October 1815 and remained there until his death on 5 May 1821.

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### The end of the Napoleonic Empire

There remained the problem of the territories of the French Empire and of the satellite states. Each of the allies had different views on what should be done and great power unity was constantly threatened by suspicion and disagreement. After lengthy deliberations at the Congress of Vienna, a treaty was signed on 9 June 1815. It was accepted by all the allies that France needed to be contained within its revised frontiers, and that this could be best done by surrounding it with a ring of

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Europe in 1815, as agreed by the Congress of Vienna.

buffer states – not the weak and feeble neighbours who had collapsed in 1792–3, but strong, potentially hostile states which would prevent any future French aggression. The following changes were made:

- Austrian influence was restored in northern Italy (in Lombardy and Venice).
- A newly strengthened kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont (including Nice, Genoa and Savoy) guarded the south-east frontier with France.
- To the north, Belgium was united with an independent Holland behind a fortified frontier.
- In the east, Switzerland's guaranteed independence barred the way, as did the Rhineland, now a part of Prussia.

In this way the frontiers that France had threatened most often during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were blocked off.

As far as the former satellite states were concerned the settlement agreed was generally, though not completely a conservative one. The following decisions were agreed:

- In Italy, Naples was returned to Bourbon rule and the other states were restored to their pre-1796 boundaries and mostly to their former ruling families.
- The Papal States were returned to the Pope.
- In Germany, Napoleon's suppression of a large number of minor German states was confirmed and 41 (later reduced to 38) sovereign states were brought together in a new German Confederation, whose borders were not dissimilar to those of the old Holy Roman Empire.
- Russia acquired most of Poland.
- Spain was returned to Bourbon rule.

The map of Europe once again looked much the same as it had done in the eighteenth century, before the French wars. Geographically, Napoleonic Europe had disappeared.

### 3 | Factors in Explaining Napoleon's Decline and Fall 1808–15

Key question  
How did the *Grande Armée* change after 1807?

#### The changing nature of the *Grande Armée* and warfare

There were changes in the military organisation and methods of warfare of both Napoleon and his enemies after 1807. In that year the *Grande Armée* was still strong enough to defeat all who stood in its way, Austrians, Prussians or Russians. Yet in a number of ways it was undergoing change:

- It had lost many of its experienced and disciplined troops and, although new recruits were available to fill the gaps, they went into battle untrained and often unreliable.
- The French army had been created as a national army, but, by 1807, its character had changed. It had become increasingly cosmopolitan. Two-thirds of the men were either non-French

troops from the annexed territories or foreign auxiliaries from the satellite states of the Grand Empire.

- Napoleon's earlier tactics of attack by mixed columns of infantry and skirmishers were no longer so successful. This was because high casualty levels resulted in poor quality replacement conscripts who were unable to deploy these tactics.
- After 1807, Napoleon, like his predecessors, resorted to crude attack columns, lines of infantry thrown at enemy lines with little concern for casualty rates. His tactical options were increasingly limited and he began to rely much more on sustained artillery barrages.
- As Napoleon's armies became larger – over 600,000 crossed the Niemen into Russia with him in 1812 – they were more difficult to manoeuvre and to supply.

His later campaigns had, therefore, to depend much less on the surprise elements of speed and mobility than before, and his battles to rely much more on the sheer brute force of artillery barrages or the weight of numbers storming the enemy lines in a massed charge of cavalry or infantry. His later victories were much costlier in men than the earlier ones. For example, 30,000 were lost at Wagram in 1809 compared with the 8000 lost at Austerlitz in 1805. French losses overall in the Austrian campaign of 1809 were almost equal to those of the enemy.

### **Military improvements among the allies**

For as long as the rest of Europe continued to employ old-fashioned methods Napoleon's new-style armies had been invincible. This situation did not last. His enemies learnt to play Napoleon at his own game. They made a number of important changes to enable them to defeat Napoleon:

- Copying Napoleon's tactics, his enemies became more flexible in their approach and developed their artillery to match his.
- They increased the size of their armies to equal or exceed his.
- Prussia and Austria, after their disastrous defeats, replaced their old foreign mercenary armies with new national ones, designed to have a new structure, armaments and equipment in accordance with the new methods of warfare.
- New methods were adopted to pin Napoleon down to a more defensive style of warfare, by denying him the opportunity to force an early and potentially decisive battle.
- Greater co-operation among the allies enabled them to field a combined force of superior manpower to Napoleon.

### **The Peninsular War and invasion of Russia**

To some extent, Napoleon contributed to his own downfall by the disastrous 'mistakes' of the Spanish and Russian campaigns. These were embarked upon by Napoleon through his determination to force both countries to implement the

← **Key question**  
What did Napoleon's enemies do to improve their armies?

← **Key question**  
How did the campaigns in Spain and Russia weaken Napoleon?

## Napoleon and Europe: Decline and Fall c1810–15 | 145

Continental Blockade against Britain. In both Spain and Russia he failed to grasp the following factors:

- He grossly underestimated the sheer size of the country he was hoping to conquer, and was ill-informed about both the terrain and the climate he would encounter.
- Accustomed to allowing his armies to 'live off the land' in countries they were campaigning in, he wrongly expected they could do so in Spain and Russia. In Spain *guerrilla* fighters, and in Russia scorched earth policies, produced unexpected difficulties for the French troops to supply themselves with food.

The impacts of both these campaigns on the French army and economy were enormous in the following ways:

- The 'Spanish ulcer' eventually cost Napoleon about 300,000 men and 3000 million francs in gold, and brought the first serious defeats for his armies.
- In Russia, matters were even worse: over 500,000 men dead, missing or taken prisoner, and 200,000 trained horses and 1000 guns lost – all in the course of a campaign lasting only six months.
- This enormous loss of experienced officers and men weakened the French army, especially the cavalry, for future campaigns, leaving it over-dependent on new levies of raw recruits.
- The disasters of 1812 and the defeats in the Peninsular War shattered Napoleon's reputation for military invincibility, and encouraged his enemies to renew their efforts to defeat him.

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Why question  
Why did Napoleon's  
leadership contribute  
to his downfall?

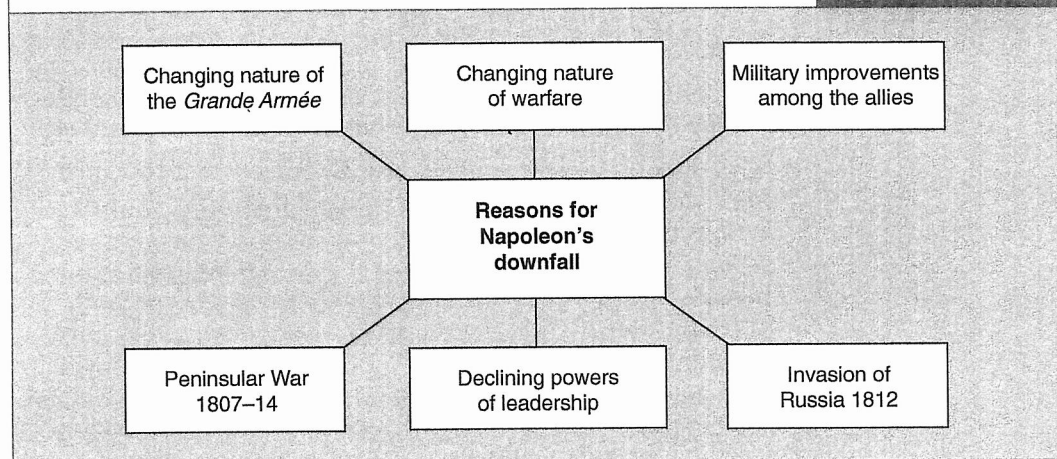
### Qualities of leadership

It was a weakness in Napoleon's command structure that he did not take his senior officers into his confidence when on campaign, nor allow them any independence of action. He retained all power and all decision making in his own hands. It was an entirely personal leadership. In the early campaigns, when his army was still quite small, this did not matter a great deal; but as armies became larger – already in 1806 Napoleon was at the head of an army at Jena of about 165,000 men – personal control over the entire field of operations became more difficult to achieve. Even then, Napoleon did not establish a permanent staff to share the command. He continued to tell his marshals what to do, and they continued to do it. As one of them remarked, 'the Emperor needs neither advice nor plans of campaign ... our duty is just to obey'. The consequence of such an approach was seen in Spain. After Napoleon left in 1809, his senior staff proved quite unable to cope.

By 1814, Napoleon's early self-confidence and determination had degenerated into supreme egoism, obstinacy and an unwillingness to face facts – a fatal combination for a commander about to meet for the first time a united enemy able to deploy a numerically superior combined force. The wars had become a

case of France against the rest, with the result that Napoleon was faced with odds that even he could not prevail against. As Charles Esdaile concludes, the major European powers decided to fight fire with fire by reforming their armies: 'France was confronted with new "nations-in-arms" at a time when, thanks to Napoleon, she had ceased to be one herself.'

Summary diagram: Factors in explaining Napoleon's decline and fall 1808–15



#### 4 | The Key Debate

Since the end of the Second World War, a dominant theme in European affairs has been the slow and steady progress made towards greater integration between the various countries. In 2009 there were 27 member countries in European Union plus other applicants waiting in the wings. Napoleon claimed while in exile he had intended to create a united Europe where all the people were bound together, '... everyone who travelled would have everywhere found himself in one common country'. Were these musings from exile merely empty rhetoric or was there some substance to them? A question that has been considered by many historians is:

Was Napoleon's relationship with Europe that of conqueror or unifier?

##### Paul W. Schroeder

In his book *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848*, Schroeder seeks to place the Napoleonic era within a wider context of developments that were occurring in Europe between roughly the mid-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. Schroeder is very critical of Napoleon's rule, particularly his incessant obsession with war and the acquisition of land through conquest. His firm belief is that the Empire was very much 'colonial in nature' and was designed to subjugate the territories

to French interests. According to Schroeder Napoleon's colonial system was never intended as a first step towards creating some sort of federal or integrated Europe. Napoleon, he argued, conquered simply for the sake of conquering and his colonial system had 'no underlying purpose at all'.

### **Charles Esdaile**

Esdaile has produced a number of works devoted to the military aspects of Napoleon's rule. To an extent he echoes Schroeder's evaluation by arguing that the Napoleonic Empire was 'bent on nothing more than exploitation'. When confronted by a country which possessed 'unbridled militarism' and the resources to support this in creating 'a colonial Empire in Europe', the other European powers resisted force with force. Esdaile argues that despite Napoleon's views produced in exile, it would be unwise to take the emperor's claims at face value. All that can be said for certain of his dreams of creating a new European order is, '... they were never realised'.

### **Clive Emsley**

Emsley in his book *Napoleon* (2003), points out that at the Congress of Vienna, while the overwhelming aim of the victorious allies was to prevent a resurgent France from once again threatening the peace of Europe, not all of the changes made during the Empire were dismantled. He notes that there was no attempt to re-establish the hundreds of tiny states that had existed in Germany in 1789, and that the Napoleonic reorganisation was maintained to a degree. There was also a measure of continuity with the Napoleonic era into the post-1815 period in Italy and Poland, where many of the administrative and legal reforms introduced during the Empire were retained. Emsley argues that it is possible to assert that Napoleon, 'aspired to creating a pacific and pacified, united states of Europe, though it seems extremely doubtful that he ever possessed a considered plan as such'.

### **R.S. Alexander**

According to Alexander when history is viewed from the perspective of the other great European powers then Napoleon does clearly appear to be a Conqueror. This is particularly the case when the plight of less powerful people in European and non-European states is examined. Yet, Alexander argues, it is hard to see in Napoleon nothing but the Conqueror. There was a system at the heart of the Empire that went well beyond despoliation. The issue is, did this make Napoleon a unifier, at least in intention? The answer according to Alexander is that alongside 'France first' came the introduction of the Napoleonic model, with his aspiration that in the long run it would improve the lives of the majority. The Napoleonic model did prove to be a catalyst for the emergence of the modern state in much of Europe, which to some extent has brought unity through 'a shared perception of common interest'.