

NAPOLEON'S STRATEGIC FAILURES

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USAWC CLASS OF 2011

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 15-03-2011		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Napoleon's Strategic Failures				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel John L. Pollock				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Professor Len Fullenkamp Department of National Security and Strategy				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A:L Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Napoleon Bonaparte is generally regarded as a brilliant strategist by students of history. This paper will highlight five strategic areas in which he was clearly lacking. These areas are Strategic Leadership Competencies, Army Strategy, Naval Strategy, Economic Strategy and Team Building. Overall, these areas contributed to his downfall, but his failing was clearly his inability to understand that he could not achieve his strategic goals through military means alone. He failed to comprehend that he should have employed in concert all the elements of power – economics, diplomacy, information, etc, to achieve these ends. Given these lessons, and today's complex world environment, the Army should examine its own education system and consider teaching strategic leadership earlier in an officer's military career.					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 28	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel John L. Pollock
TITLE: Napoleon's Strategic Failures
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 15 March 2010 WORD COUNT: 6,693 PAGES: 28
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Napoleon Bonaparte is generally regarded as a brilliant strategist by students of history. This paper will highlight five strategic areas in which he was clearly lacking. These areas are Strategic Leadership Competencies, Army Strategy, Naval Strategy, Economic Strategy and Team Building. Overall, these areas contributed to his downfall, but his failing was clearly his inability to understand that he could not achieve his strategic goals through military means alone. He failed to comprehend that he should have employed in concert all the elements of power – economics, diplomacy, information, etc, to achieve these ends. Given these lessons, and today's complex world environment, the Army should examine its own education system and consider teaching strategic leadership earlier in an officer's military career.

NAPOLEON'S STRATEGIC FAILURES

Introduction

Napoleon was clearly one of the most outstanding military commanders of the early 19th century. During his time, no other military commander came close to his brilliance when he was commanding and fighting an army in an operational campaign. His eventual operational defeats were, for the most part, caused in the end by his opponents' use of overwhelming men and material that even his brilliance could not overcome. Given his clear operational expertise, his downfall must have been in his failure to formulate and execute his strategy. In order to understand these failures we need to look at five distinct areas that Napoleon failed to execute correctly. These areas are; strategic leadership competencies, army strategy, naval strategy, economic strategy and team building. In addition to these aspects Napoleon's greatest failing may have been his inability to understand that in order to achieve his goals he could not use military force alone. Finally, this paper will examine how well today's Army is teaching strategic leadership.

Strategic Leadership

This first section will cover three strategic leadership competencies in which Napoleon was deficient. These three competencies are; envisioning the future, consensus building, and negotiation. These three leadership competencies are considered by leading military and civilian academics as key competencies for today's strategic leaders.¹

The first strategic competency that Napoleon failed in would be that of „envisioning the future“. This is defined as the ability to establish strategic goals that can

accommodate unexpected events and be able to adjust the means by which a strategic leader is attempting to accomplish his goals. A clear example of Napoleon's inability to do this would be his invasion of Russia in 1812. Once Czar Alexander I decided to no longer abide by Napoleon's Continental System (to economically isolate England) in early 1812, Napoleon decided without resorting to the use of diplomacy to invade Russia and bring them back into the Continental system. His insistence on always using his Army to achieve his objectives clouded his ability to conceive of other ways to achieve his strategic goals, such as diplomatic or economic pressures. Thus, once he began his invasion he committed to a plan to defeat Russia's army. Even when Alexander refused to commit to a pitched battle and began his long retreat through Russia, Napoleon persisted in his plan to attempt to defeat Alexander's Army. During this campaign, Napoleon should have looked to diplomatic or economic measures to bring Russia back into line with the rest of his allies. The final result of this disastrous campaign led to the loss of Napoleon's Grande Army in Russia and put him in a strategic situation from which he could not recover, leading his allies to desert him, and thereafter a crushing defeat.

Napoleon's inability to „envision the future“ is also seen during the 100 days of his return from the Island of Elba up to and through his defeat at Waterloo. His decision to return to France and raise an army in an attempt to defeat a coalition which significantly outnumbered his own forces, showed that he still viewed the military as the only asset that he could use to attempt to meet his strategic objectives. Napoleon's inability to „envision the future“ in both of these examples was a significant factor that led to his eventual demise as the leader of France.

The second strategic competency that Napoleon failed in was that of „consensus building“. This strategic competency focuses on the ability of a strategic leader to work well with the leaders of other organizations and nations in order to meet their common strategic goals. Napoleon was not noted for this ability one example of this is described by Laurent Joffrin in his article, *Napoleon – A Classic Dictator*, “He saw other people as instruments of his visions – and the higher he rose, the greater those visions became.”² A key aspect in this process is to build trust in the other national leaders with whom Napoleon had to deal. As noted by Goodlad this was not something Napoleon was able to do: “His alliance partners never trusted him and the demands that he placed upon them bred a slow burning desire for revenge.”³ The first example of this would be his inability to build a solid foundation with Prussia prior to his invasion of Russia in 1812. This is evidenced by the fact that the Prussian Corps he asked to join his invasion forces changed sides during the campaign and joined forces with the Russians. Another key aspect to „consensus building“ is the ability for a strategic leader to remove any contentious issues within an alliance that will ensure the other parties are committed to the long term strategic goals. Prussia was clearly not convinced by Napoleon to fully support his strategic goals and the Prussian Corps in Russia in 1812 clearly demonstrated this with its actions.

Napoleon’s ego was another detriment to „consensus building.“ Once, prior to a campaign, Napoleon admonished a journalist, “Bear in mind, when writing the narratives of our victories, to speak of me – only of me –always of me, do you understand?,”⁴ This sort of egotism appeared frequently throughout his career, a fact often mentioned by those who worked closely with him. His staff literally could not make key decisions

within his headquarters without his personal approval. A second example that shows his oversized ego was a detriment to his ability to think strategically references his decision to invade Russia. This is seen in Charles Esdaile's book, *Napoleon's Wars* when he refers to Napoleon's decision to invade Russia with the following comment, "...and once more [he] placed personal aggrandizement ahead of strategic calculation. It was to prove a fatal error, and one which would have dramatic effects."⁵ The issue of his ego would continue to plague his decisions after his invasion of Russia and as MacLachlan states, "It is evident that Napoleon lost his Empire in 1814 due to personal failings, especially his grandiose self-image which led him to desire the defeat of Britain instead of constructing long-term realizable goals."⁶ Thus, Napoleon's inability to use the strategic competency of „consensus building“ due to his ego was a serious flaw in his strategic leadership capabilities.

The third strategic competency that Napoleon was lacking in was that of negotiation. The strategic competency of negotiation is the ability to listen to the other side and to not take a personal view of the negotiation. It also entails the ability to compromise on one's position and understand the other party's interests. Napoleon did not have the tendency to compromise during his negotiations with other nations as he always viewed his position as superior to those of his adversary. This is noted by Goodlad when he describes the other nation's leaders' view of Napoleon: "His inability to compromise forced them to conclude that there was no prospect of a lasting settlement and that therefore renewed war was the only course of action."⁷

One of Napoleon's key downfalls in his ability to negotiate was his inability to see the other country's key interests. His focus was clearly always on France and its

interest regardless of how it affected his allies. A clear example of this would be demonstrated in his dialogue with Czar Alexander I over Russian interest in the Balkans. Between 1807 and 1809 the Russians were significantly involved in fighting the Ottoman Empire over the Balkans but Napoleon wanted Russia to keep significant troop concentrations on the border with Austria at the expense of Russia's plans against the Ottoman's. Esdaile notes this also when he states "...Napoleon was desperate for Russian support and in the course of March sent no fewer than eight messages to Alexander begging him to intervene. Typically enough, however, the emperor was seemingly heedless to his partner's interests."⁸ Not only did Napoleon not understand Alexander's interest, he could not treat the other leaders of Europe as equals in his negotiations due to his ego and inability to see others with respect during his negotiations with them. Esdaile also comments on this when discussing the same period of negotiations between France and Russia over the Balkans. "To be asked, then, literally to turn his back on the Balkans came as yet another proof that Alexander was never going to be treated by Napoleon as an equal partner"⁹. Given these examples it is obvious that "Napoleon sought satisfaction not as part of a process of negotiation and conciliation, but as something to be seized. As a result, he wrecked the hopes of those who had hoped for partnership, or at least co-operation, with France."¹⁰ This eventually led to his downfall as coalition after coalition continued to oppose his attempts to dominate Europe.

Army Strategy

In this section we will discuss Napoleon's shortcomings on land. Though most people are thoroughly familiar with Napoleon's later miscalculations such as his disastrous Russian campaign of 1812, he also had other instances earlier in his career

where he miscalculated not only the strength but the intentions of his adversaries on land. In 1800, when he was just 31 years old, he made a miscalculation, which in essence cost him and his Army dearly. This is best described by Digby Smith when he writes:

It is, however at Marengo that we see for the first time the sort of miscalculation that was to lose him that battle on 14 June 1800 to the Austrian General der Cavallerie Baron Michael Friedrich Benedikt Melas, then aged seventy. Lose that battle? Oh yes! In direct contravention of his own oft-trumpeted maxim of „march divided, fight concentrated“, the future Emperor of the French had so underestimated his enemy that he had made considerable detachments from his army, including the nine thousand men of General Desaix's corps of the divisions of Boudet and Monnier.¹¹

In the end, his decision to detach such a large proportion of his troops was due to his belief that his opponent was not planning on fighting. The result was that his forces (minus those that had been detached) were essentially routed and were fleeing the battlefield. If it were not for the swollen river of the Scrivia that prevented Desaix's crossing on his intended march away from Napoleon's forces he would not have been able to arrive late in the day as Napoleon's forces were disintegrating. The late arrival of Desaix in essence allowed the French to win a second battle the same day. This is seen in Desaix's own words when he arrived and stated to Napoleon "This battle is surely lost replied Desaix. But there is time to win another"¹². Following this Desaix ambushed the attacking Austrian forces and won a spectacular victory that Napoleon was able to claim as his, due to Desaix's untimely death during the battle.

Napoleon repeated his underestimation of his opponent several times throughout his career and although it was not always a fatal flaw it often times had disastrous effects. One such example was the battle of Aspern-Essling in 1809.¹³ Contrary to this, there are those examples such as his Russian campaign of 1812 as mentioned earlier

where his underestimation of Czar Alexander's will to resist him resulted in disaster and Leipzig in 1813 where his underestimation was not fatal. This is seen in Napoleon's own words when he states "One good battle will see the end of Alexander's resolution – and his sandcastles as well."¹⁴ Napoleon's underestimation of his opponent can be seen again during his 100 days campaign in 1815 as the allies assembled a significant number of forces quickly to confront his return to power in France.

In addition to this underestimation, Napoleon would often use attrition in battle to defeat his opponent. Typically he would do this whenever he would have numerical superiority over this opponent rather than maneuver so that he could end the battle quickly. Jonathon Riley, in an article entitled, *Napoleon, How Good Was He?*, comments "...[Al]though when he possessed overwhelming strength, as he often did, he chose attrition over maneuver"¹⁵ Thus, although Napoleon often displayed clear operational brilliance on many occasions, he not only strategically underestimated his opponent on numerous occasions but would begin to use attrition as a tactic that he could not afford in the later part of his reign.

A further area where Napoleon's strategy on land came up short, was the implementation of the Continental system that banned European trade with England. More often than not, whenever a nation failed to abide by the Continental system Napoleon would invade that country and occupy it with his troops to enforce the system with his Army.¹⁶ This had the obvious affect of not only turning the populace against France but also the added burden of stretching Napoleon's land forces even further. This was the case in Portugal in November of 1807 as noted in an article by Graham Goodlad when he states: "Portugal's refusal to co-operate with the trade embargo drew

Napoleon into the Peninsular War.”¹⁷, followed closely by his occupation of Spain in February of 1808. Both of these endeavors would use up significant resources in finances, men and material with little impact on the actual enforcement of the Continental System. Ironically, Napoleon himself noted that Spain would be a significantly difficult place to occupy when he observed, “... the patient character of this nation, the arrogance and superstition that prevail over it, and the resources offered by its great size make Spain formidable when pushed hard on its own soil”¹⁸ He repeated this same technique of invading states that failed to remain true to the Continental System in 1810 when he annexed Holland to stop the flow of British goods through their ports and finally in his biggest miscalculation during this invasion of Russia in 1812.¹⁹ This strategic failure coupled with his tendency to underestimate his opponent contributed to his eventual downfall.

Naval Strategy

This section will discuss Napoleon’s inability to successfully use his nation’s naval forces to attain his national goals. The first example of where he failed strategically in his naval strategy concerns his selection of the commander to lead his naval forces in the cross channel invasion of England, which he had planned for in 1804/5. His selection of Vice Admiral Pierre-Charles Villeneuve, over many other more senior and experienced commanders, is puzzling and ultimately led to the failure of his endeavor to invade England. The only thing noteworthy that Vice Admiral Villeneuve had done thus far to date in his career was to be present at the battle of the Nile when the French fleet had been destroyed and from which disaster he was able to escape with several of his ships. This inexplicable choice by Napoleon is aptly described by Smith when he states, “He was chosen over Vice Admiral Francois-Etienne Rosily. It

seems that even at the point of selection, Napoleon had misgivings about the qualities of his chosen commander.”²⁰

Villeneuve was shown to be clearly incapable of commanding the naval forces of Napoleon on 22 July 1805 when he was defeated by a British naval force of 15 ships of the line while he commanded 20. Villeneuve failed again in August when he left port with 24 ships of the line and as soon as he saw British fleet on the horizon he sailed back to port. Villeneuve was eventually bottled up in port by the British fleet.

Napoleon’s reaction to this turn of events and his faith in Villeneuve is seen when he states: “I believe that Villeneuve has not enough in him to command a frigate. He has no decision and no moral courage.”²¹ In a more general statement about his naval leadership he also states, “If with thirty ships my admirals fear to attack twenty-four British, we may as well give up all hope of a navy.”²²

Another example of Napoleon’s strategic naval failures was his obsession with invading Ireland as a way to get at England. There had been numerous occasions where France had tried to foster a rebellion against England and all had failed.²³ Once in August of 1798 they had actually managed to land troops but that too had failed. Then in September of 1804 Napoleon came up with another plan to invade Ireland with 16,000 men. Later that month he sent a letter to his Chief of Staff, Alexander Berthier further defining the plan and commenting that, “The expedition to Ireland will take place”²⁴. He wanted this to happen at the same time as he invaded England. This would take additional resources away from his Navy which were needed to clear the English Channel of British ships for his primary invasion of England. Why he insisted on

focusing on this Irish adventure is unsure but for the same reasons neither the invasion of Ireland nor England took place.

Even as late as 1813 Napoleon seems to have understood that he needed a strong Navy to be successful but failed in his ability to create one. During this time he instituted a building campaign for ships-of-the-line in almost every port that he controlled in Europe. By 1813 he had 64 ships-of-the-line and a building program started that would add another 40 ships to the Navy by September 1814. Given the shortage in resources this was a major investment in financial resources for France. The flaw in this program was centered on the manning and training of this force. In order to man this fleet he would need to use his current cadre of naval gunners to form a core of trained experts to train the recruits for these additional ships. Instead of doing this he took the majority of this cadre and incorporated them into the Army as infantry during his land campaigns of 1813, in which most of them were lost at Leipzig. Furthermore, even if he had kept his skilled gunners out of the Army, any effort to train ships and crews at sea would have been stymied by Great Britain's naval dominance of France's coastal waters. These examples of strategic failures in the realm of naval strategy clearly hindered France and led to the eventual downfall of Napoleon and his Empire.

Economic Strategy

In the realm of economics Napoleon's overall strategy was flawed from both the internal and external perspectives. Napoleon's internal policies were constantly causing disruption of the economies of Europe and thus fostering much ill will towards France throughout the populace. One such example was his dealing with the state of Cleve-Berg a minor German state within Napoleon's „Confederation of the Rhine“. In 1808 Napoleon assumed direct control over this small state and began to administer the

affairs of the state. As the Emperor of France assuming personal control over a small state in Europe was well below his scope of responsibilities and his following actions in reference to this state will show he spent much of his time dealing with details that should have been left to others, not to mention how detrimental his actions were to the economy. The Cleve-Berg economy depended on a lucrative textile industry that exported most of its products to France. In 1807, Napoleon instituted importation bans on many goods and extremely high tariffs or taxes on all Cleve-Berg textile products that were bound for France. His intended effect here was the virtual killing of the textile industry in Cleve-Berg. Early on, when these policies were first introduced a delegation from Cleve-Berg travelled to Paris and asked for an audience to see Napoleon to plead their case. In this first visit he heard them but did nothing to rectify the situation. A second visit was later rebuffed without an audience. Following this, Napoleon instituted the Turin decree, which banned all cotton goods (except for French goods) from going to the Kingdom of Italy.²⁵

These policies and actions by Napoleon resulted in a disgruntled and hostile populace in Cleve-Berg. As the populace began to dislike French rule Napoleon instituted other policies such as searches of houses for banned British goods that were seeping through Napoleon's Continental System and reprisals against anyone caught with these goods. This led young men to refuse to answer the call for conscription into Napoleon's Army. Napoleon's reaction to this was to lock up the parents of young men until they returned to answer the call. These policies were clearly disrupting to the economics of Europe and led to much disruption and a hostile people that would not willingly support Napoleon's policies or plans. Smith aptly describes this when he

states, "Within seven years, Napoleon's futile economic master plans and ever growing needs for military manpower had resulted in a state of social misery and economic ruin."²⁶ This in turn led to many of his satellite states to rebel against the Emperor's rule, which caused a further drain of resources. Matthew MacLachlan discusses the same concept when referring to the satellite states as „outer Empire“, in his article Napoleon and Empire, "Perhaps the most significant factor was popular resistance to French presence in the „outer Empire“...The „outer Empire“, however, has often been described as in a constant state of „traumatic disruption“, with administrative collapses, rebellion and passive resistance being rife."²⁷

Napoleon's internal policies were clearly geared towards making France's economy better and degrading those of the rest of Europe. Given France's limited resources, a protracted war with England, well-endowed with abundant resources from her colonies, could hope to succeed only if the rest of Europe would comply willingly and enthusiastically with Napoleon's Continental System. Unfortunately for Napoleon, his policies continued to alienate the rest of Europe. Another example of his economic policies impacting the internal economies of Europe was the significant rise in prices for such items as coffee, saffron, spices and sugar. These along with others led to the eventual destruction of trade in many Italian ports such as Genoa, Trieste and Venice and fostered illegal trade in banned British goods. Smith highlights this when he states "Napoleon biased the economic mechanisms of his mainland European empire in favor of France, at the expense of his vassal European „colonies“..."²⁸ Thus, Napoleon's grand strategy was flawed as it did not support his economic strategy of using the

Continental System to isolate England as the very people he expected to support it were being alienated.

The Continental System was initially instituted in November of 1806 by the decree of Berlin and was intended to cut England off from the rest of Europe economically, thus bringing England to ruin which would allow Napoleon to dominate England as well as the rest of mainland Europe. The impacts of this system were varied and although they did cause some significant problems for England in the first couple of years the decree was in force it did not have the desired affect that Napoleon had hoped for.²⁹ One such result is noted by Charles Esdaile, "...Napoleon had, of course, disregarded the interests of Europe as a whole, but even in France his actions had a negative effect. Speculation in colonial imports having become rife, the result was general ruin, with French merchants undercut by the new imports..."³⁰ Smith highlights another such example of how detrimental the Continental System was to Europe:

This relentless struggle to stop the importation of goods that everybody in Europe wanted was unrealistic, indeed doomed to failure from the start. His draconian measures alienated more and more people and ruined more and more sections of the continent's commerce. He must surely have quickly recognized that if he forced Europe to abandon her traditional commerce, he would have to provide adequate, mutually lucrative alternatives to his vassal states; he had none.³¹

Often the Continental System was bypassed by the traders throughout the continent. One such example was in Russia as much of the British contraband flowed through its" ports (as Russian officials seemingly allowed this to take place) and then into the rest of the Europe where these goods found enthusiastic customers. When Napoleon finally retaliated for Russia"s violation of the blockade he refused to buy any more timber from Russia. The end result was that the timber was sold to middlemen in

Germany who then sold it in turn to the French.³² Thus, Napoleon's continental blockade was essentially simply bypassed. This was done in almost all the sectors of the economy and thus made the Continental System not only ineffective but caused Napoleon to divert large amount of resources to attempt to police a system that could not be effectively managed without the people's support.

When the final break with Russia came in December of 1810 it was primarily due to French policies and according to the French ambassador to Russia "The Russians, he said, had legitimate economic grievances, ... and that almost every action taken by Napoleon since the summer of 1809 had in some respect been detrimental to Russia's interests."³³ Napoleon's reaction to his ambassador was to claim that he had been fooled by the Russian's. In essence, though it was Napoleon who had failed to understand the impact that his continental system was having on European economy and France itself. One of the major importers of French produce was England herself and with the blockade, the French lost the ability to sell much of this produce to England and thus the blockade had an immediate negative impact on France herself.

Even in 1810 Napoleon knew that his Continental System was flawed as can be seen by his own words when he wrote, "The colonial produce placed on the market in Leipzig fair was conveyed in seven hundred carts from Russia; which means that today the whole trade in colonial produce goes through Russia..."³⁴ Seemingly unbeknownst to Napoleon, however, the import of banned colonial goods into the continent were not only coming through Russia. As noted by Esdaile "...Britain circumvented the Blockade by developing new markets and undercover links with the Continent..."³⁵ Even so, Napoleon continued to attempt to convince those in France as late as 1811 that all was

well. This can be seen in his address to the French Chamber of commerce when he said, "The Bank of France is full of silver; the Bank of England has none. Since the peace of Tilsit, I have received more than a thousand million francs in indemnities.

Austria is bankrupt. England and Russia will soon follow suit. I alone have money!"³⁶

In the end Napoleon was forced to admit defeat in this „trade war“ with England. Smith sums this up succinctly, "The trade war was just like the land war; it was a case of who could – and would – stand the hard pounding longest before buckling financially. In the event, Britain's creditworthiness with international financial institutions won the day."³⁷

Corruption was another constant drain on Napoleon's economic strategy. There are numerous cases where corrupt officials caused much of the economic woes that were to beset his empire. One such example was a former school friend of Napoleon Louis-Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne who was a lawyer and diplomat that had lost his former French post in Egypt due to some shady dealings that came to light. Placed in a new post by Napoleon as the French Envoy to Hamburg he continued his corrupt ways as evidenced by a letter that Napoleon writes to the minister of police in Hamburg reference his activities "...I will make him disgorge everything he has stolen from that city"³⁸ On the surface, it would seem that Napoleon was cracking down on this corruption but in the end many cases just like this one were overlooked. Thus the constant drain of corruption such as this one continued to be a re-occurring drain on the resources of an already overstretched economic strategy.

Overall, the economic strategies that Napoleon instituted inside the continent with tariffs and bans and the Continental System itself, were negatively impacted by the corruption and his inability to manage a complex economic system. An excellent way to

describe Napoleon's policies towards the rest of Europe was to consider the other nations as colonies of France. Michael Broers aptly describes this in his article Napoleon's Empire, "In both economic and cultural terms, the Napoleonic empire operated much more like a colonial empire ... by deliberately directing the resources of the non-French peoples it controlled towards the imperial centre."³⁹ This would eventually be the one of the most influential factor that hindered his ability to meet his national goals.

Team Building

Although not a normal area that most see as part of the realm of strategy, the ability to choose the right team to facilitate one's National Strategy is, if not the most important, definitely one of the most important abilities for a great strategist. Given this, Napoleon was clearly lacking in his ability to select and utilize those around him to affect a strategy that would make him and France successful. There are two specific aspects in this regard that Napoleon did not do well in. First and foremost was his selection of family members to important posts throughout the Empire. Secondly, and not as significant, was his selection of military personnel for specific jobs. In this area a clear example happened during the 100 days campaign in 1815 when he returned to France to reclaim his throne. This example was his decision to place Marshall Louis-Nicolas Davout in Paris as the Minister of War. Davout was highly regarded as Napoleon's best operational commander that he had left to him during this campaign. What he might have contributed to the Waterloo campaign is in the realm of the „what if“ and not within the scope of this paper. Although it is evident that Napoleon did have a need for raising more troops it seems in this case he overreacted to his future strategic needs over his immediate operational needs.

In regards to the aspect of selecting family members as key leaders in his empire, Napoleon made several key decisions which were to create much consternation and difficulties for him as a leader and for the nation itself. One author phrased this same thought when he observed, "By granting his four brothers ... thrones across the continent, Napoleon sought to strengthen his monarchy but instead weakened it."⁴⁰ The first of these would be his selection of his brother Jerome to take the throne of the newly created puppet-state of Westphalia. In 1809, Westphalia was invaded by Duke Friedrich of Brunswick with Austrian support. Since Napoleon was focused on Spain he relied on his brother to deal with this issue and Jerome reluctantly took to the field in command of the Grande Armée's X Corps. Even with his attention focused on Spain Napoleon sent Jerome several letters giving him advice on how to conduct his campaign, yet Jerome seemingly ignored this advice and as a result continued to make blundering mistakes that Napoleon persisted to point out in a flurry of letters from April through late July of 1809. One such berating example can be seen in the following letter sent on 25 July, "You are a spoilt young fellow, although you are full of fine natural qualities. I very much fear it is hopeless to expect anything of you."⁴¹ Even in victory Jerome and his generals bungled their jobs as Friedrich was able to defeat French forces under Jerome's Chief of Staff at Oelpe. This in turn allowed Friedrich and his Army to be evacuated by the British by sea from the Weser estuary. Fortunately for Jerome this happened on 1 August just after his last berating letter from his brother. The example of selecting a marginal if not incompetent relative to take charge of a certain area does not stop with Westphalia.

As mentioned earlier Napoleon decided in February 1808, to occupy Spain and place his other brother Joseph on the throne to manage the country. This turned out to be another example of placing an incompetent member of his immediate family in a position of power that would in the end distract Napoleon from his other duties as Emperor of France. Smith highlights this aspect when he states “By replacing the legitimate King of Spain with his brother Joseph, he knew that all his wishes would be compliantly – if inefficiently – put into action.”⁴² Given how difficult the occupation of Spain became and how much resistance Joseph faced there, it seems that Napoleon could have picked a more „efficient“ steward of his wishes. If instead we commit to the idea that Napoleon could not have known how difficult the occupation of Spain would be and therefore his selection was prudent at the time, then Napoleon was once again guilty of underestimating his enemy (the people of Spain and the British that aided them). Given both of these examples it is clear that Napoleon chose to select individuals for high government positions based on family considerations and not their abilities. As a result, he had to take much of his precious time to assist in the management of their affairs while ignoring those within France and elsewhere that needed his individual attention.

Greatest Failing

In addition to all of these aspects, it may be said that Napoleon’s greatest fault was his inability to understand that he could not rely on military means alone to achieve his objectives. Even with successive brilliant operational victories he could not tie these into strategic victory due to his inability to affectively wield the economic and diplomatic tools of power. Napoleon’s lack of familiarity in these two areas was evident throughout his reign. As noted by MacLachlan, Napoleon’s inexperience was the key to his

downfall, “But in what ways can the decline of his Empire be attributed to his own personal faults? The answer lies in his inexperience – he failed to create a set of realistic long-term goals [economic and diplomatic] and so could not fulfill the policy aims established in the 1790s.”⁴³ His inexperience in the economic aspects of his reign has been discussed earlier in regards to the Continental System. The same may be said of his treatment of the „outer“ empire as mere colonies, rather than respected members of the greater French Empire. Although touched on several times previously, the aspect of diplomacy needs further emphasis as it was in the end the primary cause for his downfall.

Ironically, it seems that Napoleon knew that he had to use more than just the military means to achieve his strategic goals. He once noted the following in reference to Alexander the Great’s diplomatic achievements:

What I love about Alexander... is not the campaigns themselves... but his political means. He left behind, at age thirty-three, an immense, well-established empire that the generals divided amongst themselves. He had the art of making conquered people love him. He showed himself to be at one and the same time a great warrior, politician, and lawgiver.⁴⁴

Given the earlier description of how the outer empire felt towards Napoleonic rule it is clearly evident that Napoleon did not have the ability to make the conquered people love him. Furthermore, in Napoleon’s mind, military power was the primary tool of diplomacy. Given his successes on the battlefield it was one he was all too willing to turn towards when his inexperience in diplomacy seemed to fail. This is clearly the case leading up to his invasion of Russia as the following passage describes, “He did not respond positively to Russian diplomatic approaches the following spring, but assembled a powerful coalition against Russia and attacked in 1812, ...”⁴⁵

Diplomatically he was clearly focused on destroying the balance of power politics that had been so prevalent in European international relations up to that time. Jeremy Black simply states this premise, “Napoleon sought not to adjust balance of power politics but to abolish them.”⁴⁶ This in turn led the other nations to continuously form coalitions against Napoleon as he consistently ignored former peace treaties and resumed military action to attempt to achieve his strategic goal of hegemony over Europe. In essence, he did not want to allow any one nation to have any semblance of power that could challenge his ideas or goals. In the end his inexperience in the realm of diplomacy must be considered his greatest failing as it ultimately led to his downfall regardless of his military prowess on the battlefield.⁴⁷

Today’s Army

Understanding all of the above gives us a better appreciation of Napoleon’s shortcomings as a strategic leader. With this in mind, what insights or observations can be drawn that may be of value to the education of today’s Army leaders? Most important, the Army should focus on the development of three essential strategic leader competencies: envisioning the future, consensus building, and negotiations. Shortcomings, or abject failures in one or more of these areas at various times accounted for Napoleon’s failure to achieve his strategic objectives, while explaining his ultimate downfall.

The Army waits until far too late in an officer’s career to begin planting the seeds of strategic leadership competencies. Although the Army War College does spend significant time on this subject, leaders today have an impact on the strategic environment much earlier in their careers than senior Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels. This is seen time and time again as our Captains and Field Grade officers interact on

the world scene with interagency personnel and people of other nations (continuously covered by the media) and can have instantaneous impacts on the strategic situation in a theater of operations. Waiting to do this at the Army War College is too late in an officer's career in today's environment.

Strategic Leadership competencies should be incrementally introduced starting around the fourth or fifth year of service, for example at the Captains Career Course, with the introduction of how important strategic leadership is to our Army and the Nation. Fundamental concepts and an appreciation of their value can then be further developed with our Field Grade officers at Intermediate Level Education (ILE) at Leavenworth. The current ILE curriculum does have a part in the core course that discusses strategy but it does not specifically address strategic leadership. The curriculum does not have to be extensive and as detailed as the Army War College curriculum, but it should cover the three key strategic competencies of envisioning the future, consensus building and negotiation. These three competencies form the core of what strategic leaders should understand and can be the downfall of a strategic leader, as seen in the case of Napoleon, if not properly understood. Currently ILE does not delve into this level of strategic thought as its primary focus is still at the operational level.

In light of this, I believe that although Napoleon was at the strategic level of leadership, today's environment is different and calls for us to begin teaching these skills at an earlier time in an officer's career. Engaging Captains in the Captains Career Course and then further development of our Field Grades at ILE will start the process of developing our future strategic leaders earlier in their education process and may very

well lead to strategic successes earlier in our operations in our continuously increasing global environment.

Conclusion

As described Napoleon was a brilliant military operational leader during his reign of power in France. Even so he was unable to secure strategic victory due to his failings in the strategic leadership competencies of; envisioning the future, consensus building and negotiation. These faults coupled with his miscalculations in the areas of Army strategy, naval strategy, economic strategy and team building made his efforts to achieve his strategic objectives ultimately unsuccessful. First and foremost his greatest failing was his inability to understand that in order to achieve his goals he could not use military force alone. He had to use the other elements of national power of economics and diplomacy. Unfortunately for him his inexperience in these two areas would lead to mistakes that he could not overcome in the face of numerous coalitions against his rule. In today's Army we must learn from his failings and ensure that we begin to cultivate our officers in their strategic leadership capabilities earlier in their careers. Today's ever changing; interrelated and complex world environment will require future strategic leaders that are adept at the strategic leadership competencies.

Endnotes

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³ Graham Goodlad, (2009) „*Napoleon at War: Secrets of Success, Seeds of Failure?*“, History Review, 65; 7.

⁴ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 96.

- ⁵ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 402.
- ⁶ Matthew MacLachlan, (2007) „*Napoleon and Empire*’, History Review, 59; 14-15.
- ⁷ Graham Goodlad, (2009) „*Napoleon at War: Secrets of Success, Seeds of Failure?*”, History Review, 65; 7.
- ⁸ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 402.
- ⁹ Ibid., 403.
- ¹⁰ Jeremy Black, (1998) „*Napoleon's impact on International Relations*”, History Today, 48, 2; 47.
- ¹¹ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 42.
- ¹² Ibid., 44.
- ¹³ In the battle of Aspern-Essling, Napoleon underestimated the strength and determination of the Austrian Army under Archduke Charles on 21-22 May 1809. He crossed the Danube with only part of his Army and was attacked by superior Austrian forces and after two days of bitter fighting was forced to retire back across the Danube.
- ¹⁴ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 81.
- ¹⁵ Jonathon Riley, (2007) „How Good Was Napoleon?”, History Today, 55, 7; 37.
- ¹⁶ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 319-326.
- ¹⁷ Graham Goodlad, (2009) „*Napoleon at War: Secrets of Success, Seeds of Failure?*”, History Review, 65; 7.
- ¹⁸ Jay Luvaas, *Napoleon on the Art of War* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1999), 81.
- ¹⁹ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 71.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 55.
- ²¹ Ibid., 57.
- ²² Ibid. 56.
- ²³ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 49.
- ²⁴ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 54.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 63.

- ²⁶ Ibid., 64.
- ²⁷ Matthew MacLachlan, (2007) „Napoleon and Empire“, History Review, 59; 14-15.
- ²⁸ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 81.
- ²⁹ Charles Esdaile, (2008) „De-Constructing the French Wars: Napoleon as an Anti-Strategist“, Journal of Strategic Studies, 31; 4, 532.
- ³⁰ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 424.
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- ³² Ibid., 62.
- ³³ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 436.
- ³⁴ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 65.
- ³⁵ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008), 318.
- ³⁶ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 85.
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- ³⁸ Ibid., 41.
- ³⁹ Michael Broers, (2006) „*Napoleon's Empire: From enlightened absolutism to colonial imperialism*“, History Review, 55; 42.
- ⁴⁰ Philip Mansel, (1998) „*Napoleon the Kingmaker*“, History Today, 48, 3; 39.
- ⁴¹ Digby Smith, *The Decline and Fall of Napoleon's Empire* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 90.
- ⁴² Ibid., 93.
- ⁴³ Matthew MacLachlan, (2007) „*Napoleon and Empire*“, History Review, 59; 14.
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- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 51.