

WAS NAPOLEON'S INVASION A REAL THREAT TO RUSSIA TO LOSE ITS NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY?

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Abstract: In this article, the authors try to find the answer to the question of what consequences could have the defeat in the First Patriotic War with Napoleon in 1812. In the search for an answer to this question, the authors conclude that Napoleon's plans in 1812 regarding Russia should be considered as part of his more general plan to create new Europe, where France was to play a leading role. This policy of Napoleon came into direct conflict with Russia's

ally, England, which also nurtured the ideas of continental hegemony. In the eyes of Napoleon, our country possessed an ambivalent essence, synthesizing in itself the West and the East, Europe and Asia, barbarism and civilization. His intentions, therefore, were to simplify the sociocultural space of Russia. For these purposes, it was proposed to separate the western regions of Russia to include them in the Europe project and

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gradually weaken the remaining territory of the state.

Keywords: Napoleon; Alexander I; War of 1812; geopolitics; Indian campaign; Bonaparte; Moscow; Napoleon's plans.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Russian war against the Napoleonic troops in 1812 was called the First Patriotic War in historiography. It acquired such a high status in historical tradition not accidentally. Our country has rather complicated relations with Europe. Close diplomatic ties have developed since the end of the XVI century, from the second half of the brilliant reign of Ivan the Great, when our western neighbors drew attention to the new state as a potential ally in the struggle of Ottoman Turkey. These ties were conceived to reorient the Russian religion from the Orthodox to the Catholic, which was to become a guarantee of readiness to enter an integral part of the Western cultural ecumenical community. After European diplomats realized that Russia would remain faithful to the religion of their ancestors, a massive information war began against all of Russian. Centuries later, Russophobia became a part of the

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European mentality, which even the Petrine transformations aimed at radical Europeanization of the country and its inclusion in the space of cultural, economic and political relations with Europe, could not prevent. European countries often used the services of Russia, especially its magnificent army, but they never considered it a part of their community, regarding us as an exogenous, that is, alien, phenomenon. In a way, the leading sense of Europeans in relation to our country can be called a sense of fear. It was exploited at different times and has not ceased being exploited now. This feeling gave rise to different expectations: from light anxiety due to close proximity to the invasion of barbarian hordes from the east, crushing European education and culture [17; 11; 12]. It is not surprising that in the minds of European politicians of various nationalities, even such odious and not quite Western in essence, like Hitler, ideas were born to eliminate Russian statehood or to divide Russia into several smaller states safe for the European consciousness. Were plans of this kind characteristic of the French emperor Napoleon? The answer to this question determines the purpose of our study, which can be concretized as the

definition of Napoleon's plans for the future of Russia after the end of the Eastern campaign in the context of the specific course of military operations and the historical conditions of their practical implementation.

1.1. General principles of Napoleon's military strategy and their applicability in the territory of Russia.

Napoleon Bonaparte is one of the greatest commanders in the history of humankind. This cliché, beaten up in the world historiography, nevertheless, reflects the real state of affairs. However, we will not enumerate all his great achievements in the military field. Especially, because the purpose of the article is not to write another apology in his address. There are already plenty of them. We will go further than stating his military genius, having the intention to find in victories of Napoleon as a commander a certain average model, a stereotypical scheme of his genius, the widespread use of which allowed him to achieve incredible successes. In fact, for the old feudal Europe the appearance of the Corsican was a daunting challenge, born by the revolutionary storm in France. This storm released a tremendous energy surge of the hitherto

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dormant national potential, generated a huge wave that swept the remnants of the feudal rags in the political, economic and social life of Europe. Napoleon was on the crest of this wave, rising there from the very bottom. Nevertheless, it was not his only talent. During the revolution, many manage to climb up. Rarely is anyone there lingering for a long time. More rarely can be found those who are able to manage the wave itself. Bonaparte was among the latter.

His victorious journey began near Toulon in 1793, when one successful operation ensured a career leap from the rank of major to the rank of brigadier general. In the future, an excellent military education, new principles in the use of artillery, tactical and strategic abilities in managing large masses of troops, and also personal courage and determination contributed to his career. All of this came together and was repeatedly strengthened by exorbitant ambition and desire for power. This forced Napoleon to never rest on his laurels, strive for new military and political frontiers, instantly change old plans for new ones; make decisions that contradict those already adopted, and often lose solid ground of reality

underfoot for the sake of unsubstantiated ambitions.

Until a certain point, such qualities of his personality allowed him to succeed. After Toulon, there was a victorious Italian campaign of 1796-1797, the conquest of Egypt in 1798, the reconquest of Italy in 1800, the conquest of Hanover (1803), the defeat of Austria (1805) and Prussia (1806), the elimination of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation (1806), the establishment of control over Portugal and Spain (1807-1808), the abolition of the Papal state (1809) [10]. In his captures Napoleon almost always applied the same tactic: a swift attack, the mobile movement of troops, the effective use of artillery, the capture of the enemy's capital city, bringing the government of the belligerent to a state of complete deprivation, psychological pressure and coercion to conclude peace on favorable terms [8]. The result of such actions was almost always the separation of the richest and most significant territories from the state with he was at war, the promise of peace, friendship and patronage, the further weakening of his political power by imposing an unfavorable model of cooperation and - or the complete loss of national

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sovereignty, or strict submission to his political will after the opponent's loss of ability to provide worthy resistance.

Up to a point, this tactic was fully justified, as it brought success. The feudal world of old Europe could not effectively counter it, and the Napoleonic wars were a logical continuation of the export of the French revolution. Napoleon turned out to be a complete master in continental Europe, having the opportunity to exert pressure on those states that retained their conditional independence [6].

The Russian Empire, with varying success, participated in almost all of these campaigns against Napoleon, but for the time being there was no war on the territory of Russia. The situation changed in 1812. In June of that year, about half a million French soldiers, as well as troops from other countries, crossed the border of the Russian Empire over the Neman River. Here we are fit to return to the main question of the article and ask, "Did Napoleon's invasion threaten Russia to lose its national sovereignty?" [18].

This question is far from idle. Firstly, some of the states conquered by the French emperor lost their statehood. Some countries did it because of the

redrawing of the political map of Europe, which resulted in their inclusion in other, often artificially created state formations, formed arbitrarily for the convenience of their managing. However, there were those who were added to the territory of France because of gross annexation. Secondly, some of the states that existed before the Napoleonic Wars formally retained their independence, but paid for it with territorial losses and the actual loss of independence in pursuing domestic and especially foreign policy. None of the states against which Napoleon carried out the aggression remained unchanged at the end of the military campaign [19].

It is hard to imagine that Russia could have a different fate. Especially in the context of the attitude, the Europeans had to us. It's rare when the invader does not seek special excuses before the beginning of the war he initiated. When moving an organized front to the western borders of our Fatherland, Europe always had an on-duty justification "to free Western civilization from the threat of barbarians from the East". Under such a "noble" goal, it was not a big problem to gather those who want to profit at someone else's expense, and consider themselves soldiers-associates, holy

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great martyrs. In total, Napoleon managed to attract about 550,000 people who took a direct part in the campaign under his banner [22]. However, how many non-indigenous French were among them is the subject of fierce controversy among historians [23]. If we come to a consolidated opinion, then there were thirty to fifty percent of the total: Austrians, Westphalia, Poles, Bavarians, Italians, Württemberg, Hessians, Dutch, Spaniards, Prussians, Saxons [4].

It would seem that the easiest way to find the answer to this question is to turn to the plans of Napoleon himself. In fact, he could not attack our country without a clear strategy of action! However, historians who are ready to take this path will face serious disappointment: they will not find any specific idea about the fate of Russia in Bonaparte's personal statements. He could say that he was ready to go to Minsk and Smolensk, but in the end, he reached Moscow. Before the war and during the invasion, Napoleon expressed ideas about the territory of the Russian Empire as a potential bridgehead for the seizure of India in order to tear it off from England, but how he planned to do this: crushing Russia or forcing Alexander I to

the union in order to use Russian soldiers for this purpose – there are no references in official documents or in private conversations. Obviously, different goals involved the implementation of different types of strategies, but it seems that the emperor of the French did not have a particular plan. All this can be attributed to the impulsiveness of his character, features of origin, inconsistency of the first results of the campaign with expected, etc. However, even his follower, Adolf Hitler, a German by birth, did not have a complete plan to defeat the USSR, since, the Barbarossa plan is known to imply the advance of German troops to the Volga-Arkhangelsk line, but it did not extend to the further territory of the country. This together with the fragmentary testimonies of Napoleon about the purposes of the campaign of the "Great Army" seemed to have a certain pseudo cultural false mission: to show barbarians their place, to be driven beyond the Ural Range. However, such an emotionally constructed task for more than half a million army looks at least strange. It seems that we will have to think out many plots ourselves.

1.2. Redrawing the political map of Eastern Europe and the problems of organizing the Indian campaign.

Napoleon did not have a clearly defined action plan in Russia. V.M. Bezotosny, referring to the overall feature of the Warlord Emperor, wrote "Each time starting military operations, Napoleon did not associate the leadership of the troops with a plan predefined in detail, based on geographical mathematical calculations <...> The operational action plan was actually drawn up at the last moment and easily changed depending on the circumstances" [5]. However, this does not mean that he did not keep in mind the possible alternatives for Russia. Another question is how to determine them. If the nature of hostilities is chosen as a criterion for their identification, then this will hardly help us. The events of the military campaign proceeded not only in an organized manner, but also spontaneously, and some of them can be said to have a controlled character; while from others it clearly and obviously follows that in the behavior of Napoleon there was a lot of impromptu, improvisation, reactions of a belated nature to those processes that he no longer controlled and initiated. The only

possible way to reconstruct his plans, which will remain on the solid ground of real assessments, is to compare the statements of the French emperor about his intentions regarding Russia with the actions carried out to put them into practice. Therefore now give an opportunity to say to Bonaparte, and then try to understand how these words are supported by a particular implementation. However, there is one methodological difficulty. There are tens of phrases about the goals of the eastern campaign attributed to Napoleon, but there are practically no authentic, that is, taken from his personal writings, letters, speeches. Authentic texts are not connected with his plans; everything that forms our ideas about the emperor's intentions is taken from the memoirs of historical figures with whom he allegedly shared his goals in private conversations.

Historians often cite one of Napoleon's statements shedding light on the goals of a military campaign in Russia. "I will open the campaign by crossing the Neman. I will finish it in Smolensk and Minsk. I will stay there. I will strengthen these two points and organize the State of Lithuania in Vilna where my headquarters will be located...

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We will see which of the two of us will get tired first: I - to support my army at the expense of Russia or Alexander - to feed my army at the expense of his country" [26]. These intentions we learn from the memoirs of Metternich. What does the creation of the state of Lithuania mean? If you put this saying in the context of his other messages or specific actions, then much becomes quite definite. Napoleon intended to create a kaleidoscope of small state entities in Eastern Europe, among which Lithuania was one of the few [13]. In addition to it, according to the sources, plans for the formation of two duchies are clearly visible: Warsaw and Volyn. There are also indications of the creation of a semblance of a state on the territory of Podillia. In addition, there were certain plans for Ukraine, which in Bonaparte's correspondence was understood to mean the Little Russian Left Bank [7]. It is very important that not a single historical document gives us reason to think that Napoleon planned to recreate the Grand Duchy of Lithuania of the 15th century, when it was a country on a vast territory, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Nothing was said or done for the revival of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth known from the history

of the XVI-XVII centuries. Thus, the emperor did not build a powerful buffer from one state, be it Poland or Lithuania, between Central Europe and Russia. All his actions taken several months before the invasion testify to the intention to create a large number of conspiratorial groups sent to the western parts of the Russian Empire for subversive work among the titular non-Russian population [2]. It is difficult to construct an accurate political map of the future Eastern Europe, since Napoleon's plans themselves can be reproduced only bit by bit. Besides, can we say with confidence that all the promises he made to his allies would have been fulfilled exactly? Moreover, who knows how many secret promises to govern some duchy or kingdom were given.

If we admit a hypothetical defeat of Russia in Patriotic War, even more difficulties arise for reconstructing the political fate of the territories inhabited by the Russian-speaking population. They are modern southern Ukraine, the Don land and the territorial core of Great Russia. There is nothing fantastic in assuming that Napoleon had the military potential, so that he could defeat the Russian army in border battles and force Alexander I to make large

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territorial losses in the regions inhabited by Poles, Ukrainians, and the Baltic states. In any case, Napoleon hoped that the loss of the army would make the Russian Emperor be more tractable and he would abandon the acquisitions made during the reign of Catherine the Great. However, it was not so simple with indigenous Russian territories. Did he have any idea to divide Russia into several areas nominally ruled by puppets dependent on him? It is tempting! At least in order to rid Europe of fear of the barbarians. It must be said that, in his writings, created on the island of St. Helena, it is easy to see aggressive Russophobia. However, the intention is the one thing, specific plans and real possibilities is something different.

Among historians, there is no clear opinion on the matter. O.V. Sokolov is convinced that in Russia Napoleon had purely realistic intentions and did not count on more than defeating the enemy army in several border battles, and then implementing plans for the alienation of its territories inherited after the collapse of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth [25]. B.S. Abalikhin and V.A. Dunaevsky drew attention to the fact, that after the start of the military campaign, for the first time, the idea of a

campaign to Moscow was voiced by Bonaparte only on the fifteenth day of the war, which, in their opinion, testifies to the lack of his initial goal to move far deeper into the original Russian territories [1].

However, in historical science there was another quite different idea, according to which Napoleon initially planned a campaign against Moscow, having broader intentions regarding the post-war reconstruction of the Russian Empire. This position is largely based on the memoirs of Abel-François Villemain. There is a passage in them, which he ascribes to Napoleon himself “I will capture Moscow, I will cast him (Alexander) to Asia ... The barbaric peoples are superstitious and have primitive ideas. A terrible blow to the heart of the empire, to Great Moscow, to Holy Moscow, will give me this dumb and blind mass ... This long way is the path to India. Alexander the Great went on his campaign as far as if he had gone from Moscow to reach the Ganges... Suppose now that Moscow is taken, Russia is crushed, the tsar is forced to bow or perished in some palace conspiracy ... Tell me, is it not possible for a great army of Frenchmen and their allies to leave the Ganges after leaving

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Tiflis? It would be enough to touch it with a French sword, so that in India all this piling up of mercantile greatness (of England) would collapse. It will be a gigantic expedition, I agree, but quite feasible in the 19th century. With this blow, the independence of Western Europe and the freedom of the seas will be won” [27]. If you believe the author of the text, then these words Napoleon personally said to him in the spring of 1812, that is, a few months before the start of the campaign. So maybe the emperor of the French skillfully masked his true intentions and initially hoped to crush Russia precisely as a sovereign state?

There is no definite answer, but there is an opportunity to speculate, indicating alternative options. Good prospects for their understanding are given by the geopolitical approach, the most active supporter of which in the historical science of recent years is M.V. Shisterov. The historian draws attention to the numerous evidence of historical documents that Napoleon did not consider Russia, but England, as his main geopolitical adversary. From this position, after the war of 1812, the Russian Empire could be defeated as a sovereign state, or remain with limited

sovereignty, the price of which would be the forced execution of allied obligations to France. When thinking rationally, then at least at the beginning the second option would be more preferable for Napoleon. It promised bright prospects to catch two birds with one stone at once: send the Russian army to conquer India and, taking advantage of the weakening of Russia's military potential, sharply limit its territory and independence in pursuing foreign and domestic policies. Napoleon's "Indian" plans are by no means an invention of modern historians. As early as 1808 in a letter to Alexander I, French Emperor tried to persuade him to Indian adventure "If an army of 50 thousand Russian, French, perhaps even a bit of the Austrians, headed pass Constantinople to Asia and appeared on the Euphrates, then it would make England tremble and plunge it at the feet of the mainland" [20]. Even earlier, as consul, he inspired Paul I to organize the Indian campaign. M.V. Shisterov, relying on a number of historical sources, is convinced that in fact Napoleon's claims in Russia extended far beyond Minsk and Smolensk, not limited to redrawing the map of Eastern Europe. The campaign in Russia had a global geopolitical goal: to cut off Persia

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and India by a blow from England through the Caucasus [24]. From this point of view, the campaign against Moscow does not look like a forced measure caused by the retreat of the Russian armies deep into Russian territory, but by a premeditated action subordinate to far-reaching geopolitical interests. Russia would play the role of a political dwarf or possibly a suicide bomber, if Russophobic inclinations prevailed in the mental nature of Napoleon.

1.3. Factors that influenced the collapse of Napoleon's plans.

We can distinguish the following factors, because of which Napoleon was unable to use his traditional tactics in Russia to implement the plans discussed above. This is, firstly, the presence of the two capitals, secondly, the extent of the territory and, thirdly, the diplomatic miscalculations before the beginning of the campaign.

The factor of "two capitals" forced Napoleon to abandon the usual scenario of his military campaigns built under the decisive and quick capture of the country's main city. Being in front of Russia's borders before making a final decision, he hesitated whether to go

north to Petersburg or to move troops to the central part of the country. As a result, the choice was made in favor of the second option, and the corps of Zh.E. MacDonald was sent to threaten the new capital. In this case, it is precisely about the threats, since those forces were clearly not enough to capture the city, which had reliable protection in the form of combined arms formations of I.N. Essen and the Baltic Fleet, [21]. Napoleon led almost his entire army towards the old capital, where there were neither government agencies, nor the Tsar, nor the bulk of the aristocracy, according to the traditional ideas of the feudal era, more inclined to negotiate with the invaders than common people did. It is hard to imagine that the loss of Moscow could have any military significance for the outcome of the ongoing campaign [9]. Of course, Russian society was shocked by the loss of the capital, which was figuratively revered as the "heart of the Fatherland", but this had a psychological effect rather than a military one. Moreover, Napoleon did not take into account this feature of our national character, mistakenly hoping that a swift blow, a sudden advance inland would undermine the ability of Russian society to resist.

The second factor highlighted by us is the "length of the territory", that proved to be particularly detrimental to the habitual behavior of the French emperor. The capture of the country's main city and the mobility of large military formations were easily feasible in Europe, but in Russia it turned out to be completely impossible [14]. Even a straight line from the river Neman to Moscow stretches to thousand kilometers. Have they ever paved the way in a straight line in Russia? Meanwhile, the army is a huge living organism. It constantly needs, firstly, the transportation of a large amount of provisions, ammunition, uniforms, medicines, fodder for livestock, etc.; secondly, the transportation of the dead, wounded and sick, at times, exceeded that of alive and healthy. As a result, despite tremendous preparations for two years in the territories bordering Russia, the rear service of the Great Army had to stretch its communications not only over a thousand kilometers in length, but also far away from the main movement vectors of the shock combat groups. The accumulated reserves to satisfy all needs were not enough, and the enemy had to build a supply chain in the country where the population density is much less than

in Europe, and cities, as places for support supply bases, were located much farther from each other than European ones. All this over-inflated the rear services staff, requiring more soldiers than usual [15]. The built-in supply lines also needed to be guarded, and garrisons placed in cities to support the work of the rear services and to protect the main lines of army communications. In addition, the war almost immediately took on a national character and the rear services failed to secure supplies for the army [3]. Consequently, more and more troops had to be left in the rear. It is no wonder that Napoleon could bring to the Borodino field only 155 thousand soldiers out of 550 thousand, more than 30 thousand of which he did not dare to send to the battle because of the fear of losing the last reserves [16]. According to experts, Bonaparte had never before commanded an army of more than 200 thousand soldiers. Obviously, for all his genius, he simply could not cope with the management of such a large association of military forces. However, we will not judge him strictly for this: no one had such an experience at that time [28].

Finally, of great importance for the collapse of Napoleon's plans were diplomatic miscalculations made before

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the start of the campaign. Without a doubt, he managed to bring to Russia under his banner the army of almost all the states of central Europe. However, for the most part, their level of combat readiness was not very high. First, due to the reluctance to fight, because they were called up under arms for the sake of fulfilling allied obligations to the French and without any benefit to themselves and the states they represented. The lack fighting spirit was not found only in troops of Italians and Poles. The latter were promised a lot, plus a traditionally hostile attitude towards Russia, with which Poland historically waged constant wars. However, there were two states the assistance of which Napoleon expected very much but in vain. These are Sweden and Turkey. The first was promised Finland, which was lost in 1809 following the results of the Friedrichsham Peace, and the second was not promised anything concrete, because he proceeded from the fact that the Ottoman Empire only had to be pulled into the war with Russia, and then it itself would take everything that it needed. Both of these intentions were not realized in practice. Peace with Turkey, which was a complete surprise for Napoleon, was concluded in May 1812

thanks to the diplomatic genius of Kutuzov. Moreover, the Turks, to the great annoyance of the French emperor did not break it. Sweden, however, preferred to its interests in Finland an interest in acquiring Pomerania from the territory of Prussia. In addition, this moved its allied vector towards Russia, indicating a conflict with Prussia, which, in turn, in 1812 acted as an ally of Napoleon, allocating troops to the invading army.

Thus, of the three historic enemies of Russia: Poland, Turkey, and Sweden, with which we often fought wars in the eighteenth century, and had not settled territorial disputes, only Poland supported Bonaparte. It was a lot, but not enough. Our northern and southern borders in the end proved to be safe, which freed the Russian command of the need to keep large numbers of troops there. They were quickly moved to the central regions of the country, towards the main blow of the "Grand Army". As further events showed, they were not superfluous at all in the central part of Russia.

2. CONCLUSIONS

Napoleon's plans in 1812 for the Eastern campaign should be

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considered as part of his more general plan to create new Europe. The wars of the French emperor were one of the first attempts to create a secular Europe project led by France. For this, the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation was abolished, territorial possessions and the sphere of influence of feudal Prussia and Austria were truncated, and a huge number of small duchies, kingdoms and other puppet states under the French protectorate were created. This policy of Napoleon came into direct conflict with England, which also nurtured the ideas of continental hegemony. Russia, on the one hand, being in allied relations with the British state, and on the other, having its own interests on the European continent, inevitably had to face France in an uncompromising confrontation. In the eyes of Napoleon, our country possessed an ambivalent essence, synthesizing in itself the West and the East, Europe and Asia, barbarism and civilization. Nevertheless, in such a quality, it did not fit into his life picture of the world, could not be evaluated by formal-rational standards, and this caused him mixed feelings about Russia, giving rise to equally controversial plans. In the most general sense, his Russian policy after

the expected victory in the campaign of 1812 can be defined as the desire to simplify the sociocultural space of Russia. According to his ideas, the part that was civilized or contained the potential of "cultivation" should be included in the project Europe in the form of its eastern part. In the western regions of the Russian Empire, it was planned to create several buffer states, which, according to Napoleon's plan, were to be located on the border of civilization (Europe) and barbarism (Asia). Napoleon proceeded from the fact that Russia, deprived of ties with European enlightenment and culture, would gradually cease to exist as a great power. At some stage, its resources could be used in the struggle against England, for example, using it as a bridgehead for organizing an Indian campaign, but then they had to solve the tasks of gradual weakening of its capabilities and, ultimately, crowding it out the Ural ridge.

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