

# **Victory by Retreat? Planning, Implementation and Results of the Russian Defensive Strategy against Napoleon (1810-12)**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Napoleon's invasion of Russia (1812) is one of the best-studied military campaigns in history. In the vast scholarly literature, probably the most neglected topic is the Russian strategy. This paper aims to focus on that. In particular, it raises and tries to answer three questions: why did the Russians adopt a defensive strategy against Napoleon, how consistently did they follow it, and, most importantly, how far was the defensive strategy responsible for the defeat and destruction of the *Grande Armée*? It also discusses the role of the key planners of the strategy (Tsar Alexander I, Barclay de Tolly, Karl von Pfuhl, and a few others), and the almost universal opposition to this strategy in Russia.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Russian defensive strategy, scorched-earth policy, retreat, Tsar Alexander I, Barclay de Tolly

## **INTRODUCTION**

Napoleon's invasion of Russia (1812) is one of the best-studied military campaigns in history. The most dealt with topic probably is why Napoleon suffered such a catastrophic defeat. Traditionally, English-language studies about strategies focused on French strategic blunders. Relatively few works have dealt with the Russian strategy. Recently, Dominic Lieven stressed on the Russian strategy in his excellent work, *'Russia against Napoleon'* (2009). Alexander Mikaberidze also discussed it in his *'The Battle of Borodino'* (2007). These works try to fill an important gap in the campaign's history and also in the broader question of the campaign's importance in Napoleon's downfall. [1]

The focus of this paper is precisely to discuss the Russian strategy (or, strategies). In particular, it deals with three questions: why did Russia pursue a defensive strategy against Napoleon? How consistent were they in following it? And, most importantly, how far was the Russian defensive strategy responsible in the weakening and ultimately destroying the *Grande Armée*?

Any discussion of the Russian strategy of 1812 should begin in 1810, as that was when planning for war started. The Treaty of Tilsit (1807) was always regarded as humiliating by the Russian elites, and subsequent differences regarding the Russian fear of the possible restoration of Poland by Napoleon, unhelpful behavior of the Russians during the Franco-Austrian war (1809), and Napoleon giving part of Austrian Galicia to his puppet state Grand Duchy of Warsaw caused relations to deteriorate. Continental Blockade caused severe economic hardship in Russia. By early 1810 it became clear that a war between Napoleonic France and Russia in near future is likely. [2]

## **1810-12: FORMULATING THE DEFENSIVE STRATEGY**

In March, 1810, the new Russian war minister, Michael Andreas Barclay de Tolly submitted a memorandum to Tsar Alexander I, titled 'The Defense of Russia's Western Frontiers', which can be called the first blueprint of the Russian defensive strategy. Barclay stated that due to lack of natural barriers like mountains, Russia's western border is poorly defended. In the event of a massive enemy invasion, Russian army must retreat across Belorussia and Lithuania, avoiding major battles and adopting a 'scorched-earth' policy, denying the enemy any resource. The main Russian army must withdraw to a previously chosen fortified place on the rivers Dvina or Dnieper. At this time, other Russian armies would strike on the enemy army's flanks and rear. Barclay thought the invasion would probably be on south-eastwards (Kiev), but he didn't rule out an invasion towards the north-east (Livonia) as well. He said the least possibility was of an enemy advance towards

the center (Smolensk to Moscow). Of Russia's total available troops (twenty-three divisions), eight must be maintained to guard borders with Sweden, the Ottoman empire, and Persia. Among the rest of the fifteen divisions (roughly 200,000 men), seven should be deployed in the southern side, four in the northern side, and four in the center. [3]

This was the basis of the defensive strategy, later planned more elaborately. In the two years that passed between this memo and Napoleon's invasion, both defensive and offensive strategies were discussed widely. In fact, most Russian politicians and military officers were in favor of an offensive strategy. The crux of it was that the Russian army would make a pre-emptive strike into the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. The Prussians wanted it, as otherwise they could not rebel against the French domination imposed on them after the defeat in the Battle of Jena (1806). The Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm III urged Tsar Alexander to do that and restore the Polish kingdom under a Polish monarch, to mobilize Polish support against Napoleon. [4] Alexander himself had such plans. Through his old Polish friend (also former foreign minister of Russia) Prince Adam Czartoryski, he sent secret messages to Prince Józef Poniatowski, army chief of the Grand Duchy and the son of the last king of Poland. Poniatowski, loyal to Napoleon, rejected the proposals. Of course, with the memory of the partition still fresh, Poles preferred restoration of their kingdom under Napoleon much more than the 'protection' of the Russians or Prussians. Alexander also knew that the Russian elites would never accept a restored Polish kingdom with anybody but the Russian tsar at its helm. [5] The offensive strategy got support from almost every senior Russian general at one point of time or other, including Barclay. [6]

The chief danger of a purely defensive strategy is that initially it gives the invader a free hand. It was very difficult to predict where Napoleon would attack. In the 1810 memo, Barclay thought it least likely that the invasion would be towards Smolensk-Moscow, in 1812 that was exactly what happened. Most importantly, Napoleon could have ended the 1812 campaign by capturing Belorussia and Lithuania almost without any fighting (due to Russian retreat), restore Poland, and then prepare another, massive invasion in 1813. If he did that, Russia would almost certainly have been defeated. [7] Last but not the least, popular generals like Pyotr Bagration, and ordinary soldiers (and the people at large) simply could not fathom out why they should concede hundreds of miles of territory without any fighting! [8]

Despite all this, ultimately a purely defensive strategy was adopted. The chief architect of it was the Prussian military officer Karl Ludwig von Pfühl, who, like many of his countrymen, joined the Russian service after Jena. His plan centered on a fortified camp in a place called Drissa, at the river Dvina. The place was chosen by Pfühl's assistant, Ludwig von Wolzogen. Pfühl's plan was like this: in front of an invasion, the main Russian army would retreat, adopting a scorched-earth policy. By the time the Russians would fall back on their supply base in Drissa, the French army would be exhausted from hunger and fatigue. Their numbers would be greatly reduced. Then either the main Russian army would defeat them in Drissa, or other armies would attack them at their rear. Construction of field fortifications in Drissa started in late 1811. Another planned fortress at the river Dvina (in Düna) was not finished by the time of the invasion, so Drissa became the center of Russian defense. [9]

Pfühl's plan was accepted by Alexander. By 1811, he decided on a defensive strategy. In May, 1811, he informed the Prussian king about his decision. In August of that year, he told the Austrian minister Count de Saint-Julien about it. He expected the war to be long, lasting for years. [10]

There were various reasons why the defensive strategy ultimately prevailed. First of all, there were historical and contemporary examples. Everyone knew what happened a century ago: Swedish king Charles XII advanced deep into Russian interior, and then was defeated in the Battle of Poltava (1709). In the ongoing war in Spain, Wellington's forces succeeded against Napoleon with the strategy of retreat, scorched-earth policy, waging a long-drawn defensive war, using field fortifications, and *guerilla* warfare. The hitherto invincible Napoleon got stuck in Spain. That idea was definitely appealing to Alexander and his advisors. [11]

There were also important military-logistical factors behind adopting a defensive strategy. To win a pitched battle, one must have a good light infantry. In a pitched battle against the greatest military genius of the time, Russian infantry did not have a chance. Despite the reforms done by the war minister Aleksey Arakcheyev since the debacle at Austerlitz (1805), both Russian infantry and artillery were no match for Napoleon's forces. Russian muskets were of poor quality. There were shortages of ammunition. Without importing 101,000 muskets from Britain, it would have been very difficult for the Russians to fight the war. The Russian artillery suffered from lack of ammunition in the Battle of Borodino. Technology used in the main arms factory in Tula was backward, shortage of skilled labor was acute in the weapons manufacturing sector. [12] The main reason behind this was the tottering financial condition of Russia. Due to the Continental Blockade, trade was suffering, inflation was soaring, the value of the 'paper ruble' was collapsing, and the government was under heavy debt. The tsarist government managed to sustain the enormous cost of the 1812 war with requisitioning and voluntary contributions. [13]

Shortage of manpower was there even in the military itself. Three armies were there to face Napoleon, the 'First Army' of Barclay (around 136,000 men), the 'Second Army' of Bagration (around 57,000 men), and the 'Third Army' of Aleksandr Tormasov (around 48,000 men), which was deployed in the south-east to resist

any invasion towards Kiev. Even the combined forces of the three armies were about half the strength of the first wave of the *Grande Armée* (around 449,000 men). Most troops from the army reserves were inserted into the main force of the First and Second armies. After the beginning of the war, roughly one million men (mostly serfs) joined the army or the militia. But most of them had only basic military training, and was not used in actual fighting. Most importantly, there was an acute shortage of educated, skilled staff officers. In any case, the annihilation of the First and Second armies was certain in a big, pitched battle against Napoleon, which would have meant the end of the war and total collapse of Russia. [14]

On the other hand, Russian cavalry was superior to the French. Horse was abundant in the Russian steppes. Particularly the regular light cavalry and the Cossack regiments were very good for speedy retreat, harassing the enemy, and skirmishes. Russian horse artillery was also good and mobile enough for this kind of warfare. [15]

Napoleon's style of warfare depended on rapid marches, maneuvering the enemy, and gaining decisive victory in big battles. They also depended heavily on foraging, which was easy in the densely populated, agriculturally prosperous regions of western and central Europe. The Russians faced it earlier, in Austerlitz and in Friedland (1807), and learnt their lesson. They planned to wage a war exactly contrary to Napoleon's style: avoiding pitched battles, scorched-earth, forcing the invaders to forage in barren, sparsely populated Lithuania and Belorussia, and a long-drawn defensive campaign.

Russians planned their strategy based on Napoleon's motivations, planning, war aims, and strategy. One important source of that was the Russian espionage network in France. The two people at the center of it were Karl von Nesselrode (later long-term foreign minister) and Aleksandr Chernyshev (later long-term war minister). Officially Nesselrode was the deputy head of the Russian embassy in Paris, and Chernyshev a military attaché of the tsar. But they were spymasters as well. They gathered information, purchased secret documents, and sent them to St. Petersburg. Their reports went into the details of Napoleon's planning and strategy. In one memo purchased by Nesselrode in March, 1810, Napoleon's foreign minister, Jean-Baptiste de Champagny, advocated invasion of Russia, restoration of Poland, and the destruction of Prussia. [16] Chernyshev gathered information about French military preparations, planning, and strategy. In the last memo sent to Barclay before the war, he advocated adopting the defensive strategy of Fabius, the Roman general who wore the forces of Hannibal down during the Second Punic War (218-201 BC), and also the similar strategy of Wellington in Spain. Chernyshev stressed that Napoleon wanted pitched battles, and quick victories in at most a one-year campaign. Thus, he advocated a long defensive war as the only way Russia could defeat Napoleon. [17]

These secret documents greatly influenced the Russian strategy. The head of the Russian military intelligence, Pyotr Chuikov, in a memo written in April, 1812, advocated the same strategy of Fabius and Wellington. He stressed on the survival of the army much more than saving a few provinces, as the destruction of the army would result in the destruction of the Russian empire. [18] Unlike von Pfuhl, Chuikov did not make his plan based on the Drissa camp. His plan was more of a general defensive strategy. Most importantly, Chuikov had access to the secret documents, and knew that even the first wave of the *Grande Armée* would be about 449,000 strong. A force this large could easily overwhelm Drissa, destroy both First and the Second armies, march into the Russian heartland, and occupy Moscow and St. Petersburg. Only the survival of the army could save Russia. [19] Fyodor Rostopchin, the military governor of Moscow, wrote to Alexander, "If unfortunate circumstances forced us to decide on retreat in the face of a victorious enemy, even in that case the Russian emperor will be menacing in Moscow, terrifying in Kazan and invincible in Tobolsk". [20] It is clear that they wanted to use the vast expanse of Russia to their advantage.

Last but not of least importance, Tsar Alexander's personality also played a big role in choosing the defensive strategy. He was sensitive, idealistic, and extremely reluctant to be seen as aggressor. He never forgot the role his mistakes played in the humiliating defeat at Austerlitz, so he became much more cautious this time. [21]

## **RETREAT: BARCLAY'S SUCCESSFUL DEFENSIVE STRATEGY**

Napoleon crossed the river Niemen on June 24, beginning the invasion. His troops were suffering from hunger, diseases, and exhaustion even before they entered into the Russian empire. Many soldiers from Spain, Portugal or Italy came marching across whole Europe, and food and fodder were scarce in sparsely populated Poland and East Prussia. In the first five weeks of the campaign, the *Grande Armée* lost roughly one-third of their troops, mostly due to starvation, diseases like typhus, and desertion. Loss of horses was also devastating. The problem was that the army was marching much quicker than the supply columns in the rear could cope up to. As distance increased day by day, the soldiers (especially the rearguard) were suffering from starvation. Though this was a common problem for all armies before the advent of the railroads, here it became severe because of the Russian scorched-earth policy. Since the 1790s, Napoleon's army depended heavily on foraging, which often meant nothing but plunder. This strategy did not work in barren, forested, sparsely populated Lithuania, aggravated by the Russian scorched-earth policy. The stragglers and deserters engaged in vicious

plunder, and clashes broke out between them and the local peasantry. [22] Clearly, Russian strategy of wearing the enemy down was working, but it was also the result of disorder in the multi-national *Grande Armée*.

At the beginning of the invasion, Tsar Alexander was in Vilna, headquarters of the First Army of Barclay. Alexander supported Barclay's policy of retreat, which started in a disciplined manner. Their initial target was to withdraw to the camp in Drissa. But this plan did not work because of two reasons. First, the vulnerability of the camp became clear when the army, along with the emperor, reached Drissa. The camp could easily be surrounded and destroyed by the French. It was built in a hurry, with neither Barclay, nor Alexander, and not even Pfühl visiting it earlier. [23] Secondly, as the defensive strategy left the initiative in Napoleon's hands, he could simply bypass Drissa. Russian spies were bringing information about Napoleon's plans. Paul Grabbe, formerly a Russian military attaché, visited the French camp on a diplomatic mission, and informed Barclay that Napoleon had no intention to attack Drissa. Instead, he was marching well to the south, towards Vitebsk and Smolensk. [24] Facing this situation, the First Army had to abandon Drissa (July 17) and retreat towards Vitebsk. On July 19, Alexander left the army and started for Moscow. Although Pfühl became discredited, his general defensive strategy was maintained.

At the beginning, Napoleon expected a big battle for Vilna, thereby destroying the Russian army. Marquis de Caulaincourt, the former French envoy at St. Petersburg, and now in the campaign with Napoleon, wrote in his memoir about Napoleon's disappointment when he found Vilna abandoned by the Russian army. [25] Now his target was to prevent Bagration's Second Army to join forces with Barclay, and destroy them separately. Bagration's army was well to the south and needed weeks to join the First Army. In July, Bagration failed in his attempt to join Barclay near Mogilev. In the Battle of Saltanovka (July 23), the famed First Corps of Marshal Davout defeated Bagration and prevented the joining. [26]

An important part of the Russian defensive strategy was to inflict damage on the enemy in skirmishes. Their cavalry, superior to the French in quality even during the first phase of the campaign, was best suited for this. In the Battle of Mir (July 8-10), regular light cavalry led by Illarion Vasilichikov and Don Cossacks led by Matvei Platov defeated the Polish lancer regiments. This marked the beginning of the Cossacks harassing and damaging the *Grande Armée*, to recur many times later in 1812. [27]

Barclay reached Vitebsk on July 23, waiting for Bagration so that they could give battle to the French. In the Battle of Ostrovno (July 25), French forces under Joachim Murat defeated the Russians, led by Count Ostermann-Tolstoy. Even when the news of Bagration's defeat in Mogilev came, Barclay wanted to make a stand in Vitebsk, but was persuaded to withdraw by his chief of staff Aleksey Yermolov and other officers. [28] Their retreat was protected by the Russian rearguard commanders Pyotr Konovnitsyn and Peter von der Pahlen in the Battle of Vitebsk (July 26-27), which the Russians lost, but helped the main body of the First Army to escape safely. It was a close shave for the Russians, as Napoleon missed the opportunity to annihilate a significant portion of the First Army by not pressing hard on July 27, expecting the Russians to fight next day. As usual, the Russian retreat under Konovnitsyn was very orderly and disciplined, admitted even by the French generals, in stark contrast to the disordered state of the *Grande Armée*. [29]

Abandoning Vitebsk, Barclay retreated for Smolensk. Bagration finally succeeded in crossing the river Dnieper and joining Barclay in Smolensk on August 2. By that time, the strategy of retreat started bearing fruit. Napoleon's main force had been reduced to about 185,000, not only because of deaths and desertions, but also for the fact that he needed to put men behind to operate garrison centers and supply bases, and also to 'govern' occupied territories. Still, his remaining forces were much superior to the Russians in quality. Barclay was unwilling to give battle in Smolensk, but had to bow down to the wishes of the soldiers, almost all senior generals like Bagration, and above all, the tsar himself. Soldiers were frustrated of giving away ground to the French without fighting. Moreover, defending Smolensk, a Russian city, was much more important to them than defending the territories that they retreated from in the last one month, as those lands were previously Polish, and conquered by Russia not very long ago. But when they reached Smolensk, they realized now they were fighting in and for the Russian soil. Ivan Paskevich, an officer in Bagration's army, wrote, "now we were fighting in old Russia, as every birch-tree standing by the side of the road reminded us." [30]

What the generals wanted was to attack the French, not waiting for their attack in a strong defensive position. Yermolov articulated the reasons behind his support for an offensive in a letter to Alexander. He wrote, Smolensk could not be defended for long because it had no strong defensive positions or huge supply magazines. So, attacking the French would be better than waiting for their attack. Yermolov also believed, incorrectly, that Napoleon's army had become weak and very dispersed by then. [31]

Apart from the military reasons, there were political factors as well. Alexander, despite his support for Barclay's strategy, realized the anger and frustration of the elites (and people at large) at continuous retreat. Giving more ground would have been politically suicidal. He never forgot the assassination of his father, the unpopular Tsar Paul (1801), and knew he could face aristocratic conspiracy. He himself urged Barclay to fight at Smolensk. [32]

Barclay was almost alone in his opposition to an offensive. He knew the *Grande Armée* was still superior in quality, and in a pitched battle they could destroy both Russian armies, and then march unopposed

towards Moscow to compel Alexander to surrender. Future proved him correct, and his opponents wrong, as admitted in the Russian official history of the war written by General Bogdanovich. [33]

From the beginning, factionalism, intrigue, and selfishness of the commanders hampered the Russian war effort. It should be mentioned here as it had negative implications for the strategy as well. There were roughly two groups, 'Russian' and 'German'. Most ethnic Russian generals and the Russian aristocracy supported a bellicose, offensive strategy. They were resentful and suspicious of the 'Germans'. Most Germans belonged to the Baltic German nobility, who could date their origins back to the medieval Teutonic Knights. Generally better educated than most Russian nobles, they held high offices in the Russian military and civil administration. Moreover, many Prussian soldiers and officers joined the Russian service after the debacle at Jena. Barclay himself was of Scottish origin, and he was regarded as a Baltic German. As Napoleon advanced deeper into the Russian territory, resentment grew towards the 'foreigners' as supposedly cowards, and even traitors. Popular Russian generals like Bagration and Yermolov despised Barclay. [34] Factionalism was not limited to infighting between groups, but individuals as well. Senior generals like Mikhail Kutuzov, Levin von Bennigsen, Yermolov and others were all prone to intrigue, and putting personal ambitions over national interest. This caused chaos, confusion, and jeopardized the Russian strategy.

Under pressure from all sides, Barclay agreed reluctantly to attack the French in the meeting of the war council (August 6) and marched towards Rudnia and Vitebsk next day. But not having a clear idea about the French position, combined with his doubts about the effectiveness of the offensive itself, made it a failure. He also believed, wrongly, that Napoleon was planning to outflank them and cut his communications to Moscow. In reality, Napoleon wanted a pitched battle to crush the Russian army. He seized the advantage of the chaotic and indecisive Russian attitude. In a skirmish at Krasny (August 14-15), French forces under Murat and Marshal Ney defeated two Russian detachments, inflicting heavy losses, but failed to destroy them before they took shelter in Smolensk. Napoleon wasted the next day, giving time to Barclay and Bagration to return to defend Smolensk. [35]

The Battle of Smolensk (August 16-18) was the first major battle in the 1812 campaign. Napoleon inflicted heavy damage to both the Russians and his own forces to storm the city, but failed to breach the city walls on August 17. About 10,000 Russian troops were killed or wounded, and most of the old city was in ablaze due to artillery fire. That night, Barclay, probably in his most brilliant, insightful, and controversial decision during the war, ordered retreat again. He correctly deduced the situation, as the French succeeded in entering the city on the next day, and would certainly have destroyed a significant part of the Russian army. Barclay took this decision in front of almost universal opposition of his generals, including Grand Duke Constantine, the tsar's brother. Soldiers, frustrated and angry at retreat after retreat, pejoratively nicknamed him 'Boltai da Tol'ko' (nothing but chatter). Accusations of incompetence, cowardice, and even treachery arose. Barclay sacrificed his own career and prestige to save the army and the empire. Alexander had no other choice but to replace him as commander-in-chief with old, popular, ethnic Russian general Mikhail Kutuzov, though Barclay remained the head of the First Army. Despised by his contemporaries, history vindicated him, along with his defensive strategy. [36]

Unhappy, grumbling soldiers started their retreat from Smolensk at the night of August 18. Bagration's Second Army was ordered by Barclay to block a crucial road towards Lubino (and finally, Moscow), so that the First Army could escape without being caught by the French. Many units of the First Army lost their way at night in the forest outside Smolensk. When they reached the road, Second Army was gone. By that time, Bagration was openly refusing to obey Barclay's orders. A large part of the First Army got into the paths of the French, led by Marshal Ney and Jean-Andoche Junot. In the ensuing battle at Valutino (August 19), Barclay led the troops himself and succeeded in retreating over the river Dnieper. Barclay's courage and leadership, Junot's inactivity (probably because of mental illness), and sheer luck saved the army from disaster. Napoleon lost another golden chance to cripple the Russian war effort. [37]

At this point, the best thing for Napoleon to do was to halt. Most of his senior advisors and generals advised him so. He could rebuild the already greatly diminished *Grande Armée*, establish supply bases in Lithuania and Belorussia, and most importantly, restore the Polish kingdom with Poniatowski's aid, then launch another, more vigorous campaign along with the Poles in 1813. Moreover, he should not have marched further into Russia while the war in Spain was turning against him. But Napoleon decided to march towards Moscow. That was consistent with his war aim: to destroy the Russian army and compel Alexander to bow down. Grabbing Russian territory was not his aim. Establishing supply bases was difficult in forested, war-torn Lithuania. By next year, Russians could raise a much bigger force, and call other armies from other fronts to attack the French. That would have turned the campaign into a long war (another Spain), the last thing that Napoleon wanted. Time was with him, he could campaign in Russia for at least next two months. Moscow was not very far from Smolensk, and Napoleon knew Russians would not give up Moscow without a major battle, where he could have the chance to annihilate them. With that calculation in mind, and certain about eventual victory, he decided to advance. [38] From his perspective, he was right, but he did not realize how far the

Russian defensive strategy and scorched-earth policy could go. From this point of view, the eventual defeat of Napoleon was mostly the credit of the Russian strategy of luring and entrapping his forces, not his own blunder.

One front where Karl von Pfühl's strategy worked exactly as planned was the northern side. A part of the *Grande Armée* was sent towards Livonia and Novgorod (ultimately St. Petersburg). Attempts to storm the fortress of Riga failed mainly due to the lack of heavy siege artillery. In a battle in Polotsk (August 17), Peter von Wittgenstein's army was defeated by the French, led by marshals Oudinot and Saint-Cyr; but they managed to retreat into a strong defensive position in a place called Sivoshin, just behind Polotsk, and with abundant supply of food and fodder. On the other hand, the invading armies there gradually disintegrated due to lack of supply. Though it certainly vindicated Pfühl's strategy, but we should also remember that there the invading forces were not that strong or numerous, unlike Napoleon's main force. [39]

In south, the Austrian force led by Prince Schwarzenberg forced Tormasov's Third Army to retreat towards Kiev. But they did not push hard, mainly because of secret diplomatic understandings between Russia and Austria. At the same time, Admiral Pavel Chichagov's 'Army of the Danube' was returning victorious from the Russo-Turkish War (1806-12) to join Tormasov, and then to attack Napoleon's rear. This was exactly the plan of the initial defensive strategy, but it could not happen until November, when Napoleon was in retreat. [40]

### **BORODINO: FAILURE OF THE OFFENSIVE STRATEGY**

While the Russians were succeeding in peripheral fronts, Napoleon's main army was marching towards Moscow. Appointment of popular, ethnic Russian Kutuzov as the commander-in-chief was a great morale booster for the soldiers, who hoped their new commander would certainly not give ground to the invaders. In reality, Kutuzov followed more or less the same strategy of Barclay. In particular, at the later phase of the war, Kutuzov's strategy turned extremely cautious and defensive.

As Napoleon realized correctly, Moscow could not be abandoned without a major battle. A place was chosen in the village of Borodino, seventy miles west of Moscow, to make the Russian stand. As the great future military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, that time a Prussian officer in Russian service, wrote, Borodino was not a strong defensive position. In fact, in the vast Russian plains such positions were rare. [41] Earthen field fortifications were built hurriedly in a few days before the battle. Naturally, both armies had to fight a deadly pitched battle.

The Battle of Borodino (August 7) was the deadliest single-day battle in the history of the Napoleonic Wars. The number of soldiers who fought in Borodino has been heavily disputed by historians. Most probably, 130,000 men of the *Grande Armée* fought about 125,000 Russians. This Russian figure excludes 31,000 militiamen, who had little military training and was not used in actual combat. [42] Napoleon emerged victorious, but it was a costly victory. At the end of the day, there were about 35,000 French casualties against around 45,000 Russian ones. In particular, Bagration's Second Army was almost destroyed, with only 16,000 men left. Casualties included many senior officers, most importantly Bagration himself. [43]

This proved beyond any doubt the futility of a pitched battle against the French, and in general the offensive strategy. Napoleon refused to deploy his most elite force, the Imperial Guards, to chase and destroy the Russian army at the end of the day. Since that day, there has been a debate regarding whether he lost a golden opportunity to finish the Russians off and thereby win the war. According to most historians, including the official Russian historian of the war, General Bogdanovich, it was a major mistake on his part. [44] Kutuzov and other Russian generals made a lot of tactical mistakes which resulted in greater Russian casualties. For example, they did not put even their reserve units beyond the range of Napoleon's artillery. Russians also suffered from lack of ammunition, even though they had more guns (624 against 587). Also, Kutuzov deployed most troops on his right flank, and sent troops very late from there to the vulnerable left flank, where the French attacks concentrated. [45]

Next day, Kutuzov had to order retreat towards Moscow. Retreats are always risky, and can cause collapse of discipline, but in general, the Russian retreats in 1812 were disciplined and orderly, as noted by the military theorist Antoine-Henri Jomini, who fought on the French side. That was mainly thanks to their excellent light cavalry. [46] But this time, the Russian retreat became disorganized. There was a general fear about the impending fall of Moscow. Kutuzov remained defiant in attitude, and that sustained the morale of the troops. He even claimed victory in his initial report to Alexander after the battle. [47] The war council in Fili (September 13) decided to abandon Moscow, as it became clear that taking a last stand in front of Moscow would certainly result in the total destruction of the Russian army. Kutuzov, supported by Barclay, made the hardest, and most brilliant decision of the 1812 campaign, to make the ultimate sacrifice. That was done against the wish of most generals like Bennigsen and Yermolov. That decision certainly made Napoleon's 'victory' a hollow one, and largely contributed to his ultimate defeat.

### **NAPOLÉON IN MOSCOW: FRENCH BLUNDER OR RUSSIAN STRATEGY?**

The army and Moscow's governor Rostopchin arranged the hasty, disordered evacuation of the inhabitants of Moscow within a few days. Russian army was in danger of being attacked by the French, but the rearguard commander Mikhail Miloradovich saved it. He wrote to the French vanguard commander Murat, asking one-day truce to give the Russian army safe passage, threatening street by street fight if refused. War-weary tired Murat accepted it. Scorched-earth policy was followed as much as possible. Moscow was a huge military supply base, full of military equipment. Some were evacuated safely, but most had to be burnt in order to keep them out of Napoleon's hands. About five million rubles' worth of military materials were destroyed, a major loss considering the precarious situation of Russian arms production. [48]

Rostopchin had said earlier if Napoleon conquered Moscow, he would find it in ashes. At the night of September 15, the very day Napoleon entered Moscow, Russians set fire in the city on Rostopchin's order. For six days, the fire raged on, destroying most buildings of the city. Rostopchin also removed fire-fighting equipment of the city. This biggest incident of scorched-earth that the Russians followed in 1812 had two-fold significance. First, it made the *Grande Armée*'s already poor supply situation worse, demoralizing them further. Second, as people blamed the French for the fire, frustration turned into anger, boosting people's morale. [49] Meanwhile, Kutuzov retreated south-west into a place called Tarutino near Kaluga, from where he could shield the important arms-production factories in Tula, and rebuild his army. From fertile, agricultural southern Russia, they could get abundant supplies of food and fodder.

The one month Napoleon stayed in Moscow was the most crucial time of the campaign. It was the ultimate test of the Russian defensive strategy. At that time, most people were in uproar and thought all was lost, but wiser minds understood that, in fact, they were winning. Barclay told the soldiers, "The long retreat had denied any successes to the enemy and would lead to his ruin, since he had fallen into a trap which had been prepared for him and would cause his destruction." [50] One major fear was that Alexander might lose his nerve, and make peace with Napoleon. But Alexander, not generally known for his steely mind, showed firm resolve about not negotiating. He told Robert Wilson, a British emissary in Russia, about his resolve to not negotiate as long as a single enemy soldier remained in Russian soil. [51] He was able to say that only because Napoleon conquered Moscow, but failed to destroy the army, so in reality, they were not defeated. And that was possible only because of the defensive strategy that the leaders pursued despite almost universal opposition.

In that crucial one month, Russians rebuilt their army. Many wounded soldiers recovered, new recruits joined. A militia was created, comprising about a million people, mostly serfs. Huge supplies of food, fodder for horses, clothes, winter gear, and weapons were coming from the provinces to Tarutino, preparing for the winter campaign. At the same time, the *Grande Armée* was collapsing slowly. In the burnt city of Moscow, resources were scarce. Soldiers were suffering from lack of food and other basic necessities, while they engaged in plundering the depopulated city. Foraging became increasingly difficult, as the soldiers were often ambushed by the Russians, or returned empty-handed losing their horses. In all, Napoleon lost about 15,000 soldiers while in Moscow. The loss of horses was the most significant. Without horses, the French cavalry became very weak. During their retreat, this was the chief reason why they suffered so much from starvation, and became vulnerable to constant Cossack harassment. [52]

Staying in Moscow for a month is usually regarded as the biggest blunder made by Napoleon in 1812. If he departed within a fortnight, his army would not have suffered so much as they did during the retreat. He realized that his advisor Caulaincourt was right about his opposition towards invading Russia, and he himself was wrong. But stubbornness prevented him from admitting that. He was clumsy and careless even about sending wounded soldiers to home. Instead, he was calling for reinforcements. Marshal Victor came in September with about 33,000 fresh troops and was stationed in Smolensk. [53]

During this one month, Kutuzov was strangely inactive. Russians were getting frustrated about his impassivity. Yes, Kutuzov knew his troops needed rest and huge resources to resume fighting. But this inaction was also strategic, at least Kutuzov later called it so. He told a captured French officer Viscount de Puybusque that he wanted Napoleon to remain in Moscow as long as possible so that his army could be trapped and destroyed. [54] This was precisely the intended outcome of the defensive policy. But this particular claim of Kutuzov should be taken with a pinch of salt, due to his record of mountebankism. In fact, when he got the news of Napoleon's departure from Moscow, he wept and said, "God, my creator, at last you have heard our prayers, and from this moment Russia is saved." [55] So, how far the Russian strategy contributed to Napoleon's disastrous stay is doubtful.

One thing that was not part of any pre-determined strategy but played a crucial role was partisan warfare. Partisan leader (also famous poet) Denis Davydov appealed to Kutuzov before the Battle of Borodino and got his permission to wage partisan attacks on the French with his detachments. Besides Davydov, many other partisan leaders took part in ambushing and harassing the French (particularly isolated groups) and depleted their number and resources. They included the infamous, murderous Alexander Figner and the later chief of the Russian security police Alexander von Benckendorff. There were also spontaneous peasant fighting against the French. Though not of the same standard of the Spanish *guerrilla*, they were particularly important

for a country where serfdom was the basis of economy. Napoleon did not proclaim the abolition of serfdom in Russia, unlike in many other countries, but still it was a matter of concern and fear for the Russian ruling class. [56]

Nearest to Tarutino was Murat's corps. Alexander and senior generals were urging Kutuzov to attack this isolated, vulnerable corps, but Kutuzov hesitated. Finally, he ordered the attack on October 18. In the Battle of Vinkovo, Murat lost about 3,000 soldiers and many cannons. The loss could have been much bigger, but lack of coordination among Russian generals, mutual rivalry, and most importantly, Kutuzov's refusal to reinforce the army helped most of Murat's 25,000 troops escape. [57] Here, Kutuzov's too cautious strategy was responsible for not having a bigger victory. Though it had its effect, Napoleon decided to leave Moscow on the next day.

#### **LAST PHASE: KUTUZOV'S ULTRA-DEFENSIVE STRATEGY**

*Grande Armée's* disorganized retreat started with about 108,000 men, few horses and artillery, and huge pile of loot from Moscow. Count de Ségur commented the army "resembled a horde of Tatars after a successful invasion." [58] Though the war was already lost, Napoleon could still have saved his army if he marched through Old Kaluga Road. He could have outmaneuvered Kutuzov's forces in Tarutino, then destroy their main supply base in Kaluga and the arms factories in Tula. In that way, the Russian army would not be in any condition to chase his forces. Then he could have withdrawn through a relatively good, less devastated road to Smolensk, his major supply base. In fact, he started in that way. Kutuzov's infantry was still much weaker than his, and he could have defeated them by pushing hard. Kutuzov realized the danger and sent Dmitry Dokhturov's forces to the village of Maloyaroslavets to block their advance. In the ensuing Battle of Maloyaroslavets (October 24), the Russians, led by Dokhturov and Nikolai Raevsky fought Prince Eugène and Marshal Davout's troops. It was a tactical victory for the French, as they held their ground and Kutuzov decided to withdraw next day. But Napoleon himself ordered retreat. He realized that he could not advance without a new Borodino. He returned to the devastated path through which he came, thus Kutuzov gained a strategic victory. [59] Both generals' decisions were fateful for the survival and destruction of their respective armies.

Kutuzov's defensive strategy became increasingly unpopular to almost all his generals. He justified his policy with the fact that the infantry was still not strong enough, and most of the supplies from the provinces had not yet arrived in Tarutino when he started his march. He knew that he was responsible for the survival of his army, so he did not take the risk of a pitched battle. Instead, he relied on constant harassing the French with the Cossacks, depriving them of food and sleep, and the upcoming Russian winter to destroy the enemy. [60]

Perhaps the military reasons were not all that mattered. There could be a hidden political calculation. Kutuzov told the British emissary Robert Wilson that he preferred to give Napoleon a 'golden bridge', adding, "I am by no means sure that the total destruction of the Emperor Napoleon and his army would be such a benefit to the world; his succession would not fall to Russia or any other continental power, but to that which commands the sea, and whose domination would then be intolerable." [61] This was the view of the group which Caulaincourt called 'Old Russians', led by the foreign minister Nikolai Rumiantsev, and Kutuzov shared their hostility towards Britain.

Another factor that hampered the Russian strategy was continued feud and chaos in the headquarters. Kutuzov and his chief of staff Bennigsen despised each other deeply, and Kutuzov relied more on the advice of his devoted subordinates Konovnitsyn and Karl von Toll. By mid-October, Barclay had enough and resigned his command. [62]

On November 3, the Battle of Vyazma happened between the Russian vanguard led by Mikhail Miloradovich and the French rearguard commanded by Marshal Davout, supported by Prince Eugène and Marshal Ney. The Russians failed to destroy the French rearguard completely, because Kutuzov refused to help with his main army. Still, the French losses were much heavier than the Russians, and Davout's famed First Corps were badly shaken. Caulaincourt commented how the army's morale collapsed and disorder began after this battle. [63] By that time, the French cavalry almost ceased to exist, and artillery too became weak, as many cannons and wagons had to be abandoned due to lack of horses. Still, Kutuzov remained ultra-defensive, and preferred the self-destruction of the *Grande Armée* rather than risking an all-out assault. [64]

Snowfall began on November 6. That October was unusually warm, which gave Napoleon a false sense of security. He neglected to arrange proper winter uniforms for his troops, and even winter horseshoes for the horses. The latter had disastrous consequences, as Caulaincourt wrote in his memoir. [65] Without horses, foraging became very difficult, and the men were vulnerable to Cossack harassments. But, unlike popular legends, the famous 'General Winter' played a minor role in the French defeat, as they were already defeated and were in flight. But it was important in Kutuzov's strategy, as he preferred to let cold destroy the French instead of his troops. [66]

Napoleon arrived in Smolensk on November 9 and left five days later. It was a major supply base of the French. Taking advantage of the French delay in Smolensk, Kutuzov could have blocked their crossing the river Dnieper, but he again refused, against the wishes of all his generals. In a series of skirmishes called Battle



of Krasny (November 15-18), the Russians delivered heavy defeat to the famous corpses of Davout, Eugene, and Ney, the latter had escaped only with 800 men out of 15,000, the rest either killed or captured. They also lost almost all of their remaining artillery. Kutuzov refrained from full-scale attack when Napoleon launched an aggressive maneuver with his Imperial Guards on November 17. With vastly superior force, Kutuzov could have destroyed most of the French army, but that would have been possible with heavy Russian losses as well, precisely what he wanted to avoid. [67]

Back in September, Tsar Alexander devised a plan to entrap and destroy the *Grande Armée* during their retreat. His plan was to encircle the French with Kutuzov pursuing from behind, while blocking their escape routes by Wittgenstein's forces from the north and Admiral Chichagov's from south. The latter was coming from the Ottoman war, and joined Tormasov's Third Army on September 19. Alexander sent Aleksandr Chernyshev (the former spymaster in Paris) to the headquarters of the three generals with his plan. It was a modified version of the original Russian strategy, in which the 'other Russian armies' would attack the flanks and rear of the enemy. The plan was highly ambitious and not very practical, but the condition of the French made it possible in November. [68] Chernyshev led a partisan attack into the Duchy of Warsaw in October, destroying French supply magazines. That was the only 'real offensive' (invading Napoleon's territory) launched by the Russians in 1812. [69]

While the ultra-defensive Kutuzov had no appetite for this plan, Chichagov had. After meeting Tormasov, he had about 60,000 men. He left about 27,000 of them under General Fabian von der Osten-Sacken to hold off the enemy forces present in the south. Chichagov's main army marched through Belorussia, and his advance guard commander Count Charles de Lambert led his men to capture the major French supply base in Minsk and destroy the vital bridge in Borisov over the river Berezina (November 21). It blocked the way out of Russia for the French. On the other hand, Wittgenstein defeated the French in the Battle of Polotsk (October 16-18), but advanced very slowly. Throughout November, he remained defensive in front of Marshal Victor's forces. When Victor retreated on November 22, Wittgenstein finally moved towards Berezina. [70]

Usually the river Berezina remains frozen in late November, but somewhat warm weather melted the ice in that particular November. When Napoleon got the news of the destruction of the bridge in Borisov, he decided to cross the river in a place called Studienka, eight miles north of Borisov. By that time, his forces united with the troops of Victor and Marshal Oudinot, increasing the French numbers to around 49,000, excluding about 30,000 stragglers. Clever maneuvers by these forces made Chichagov believe that Napoleon would try to cross further south, so he moved his troops there, while the French engineers were busy building pontoon bridges over the river. When the Russians finally realized their mistake, they returned speedily, but by then Napoleon and his Guards were safely across the river. In the Battle of Berezina (November 26-29), Russian artillery did terrible damage to the French, with about 30,000 killed (mostly stragglers). But most of the commanders and staff officers of Davout, Eugène and Ney's men escaped, which could have been prevented with more efficiency and alertness of Chichagov and his officers, and a less slow and defensive approach on the part of Kutuzov. [71]

After Berezina, the only Russian general who played a significant role in fighting was the 'General Winter'. The unusually terrible cold of that December resulted in the deaths of about half of the soldiers who escaped at Berezina. This was what Kutuzov predicted and wanted, but his strategy played an indirect role there. Primarily responsible was Napoleon's mistakes (lack of winter clothing) and the severity of the winter itself. [72] On December 14, the French troops finally crossed the Niemen, and finally left (or, rather fled from) Russia.

The Tsar did not forget the initial masterminds. Barclay was restored to offices and honor in 1813, and was made a prince by the end of his career. On December 12, 1813, Alexander wrote to Karl von Pfühl, "It is you who conceived the plan which, with the help of the Providence, had as a result the salvation of Russia and that of Europe." [73]

## **ANALYZING THE DEFENSIVE STRATEGY**

To analyze the Russian strategy in 1812, three questions come into mind. First, why did they pursue a defensive strategy? Second, how consistently did they follow it? And third, how far did it contribute in defeating Napoleon and the destruction of his *Grande Armée*?

The first one has been discussed early in this paper. Russian strategy was based on Napoleon's own plans, aims, and strategy. Napoleon had no intention of conquering Russia or annexing their territory. He realized the Russians were not fully crushed in 1807, and were preparing for another war. He wanted to neutralize the Russian threat by a quick invasion with a massive army, defeating them in a new Austerlitz or Friedland, then force Tsar Alexander to accept his submissive alliance. The Russians planned to wage a war exactly contrary to this plan. And that would inevitably have been a strategy based on retreat, scorched-earth policy, wearing the enemy down with starvation and exhaustion, and when the enemy was sufficiently weakened, attack. This was the core of the defensive policy advocated by Russian strategists since the March 1810 memorandum by Barclay de Tolly. Of course, there were variations of this general strategy, from the

‘Drissa Plan’ of Karl von Pfühl to a years-long defensive warfare modelled after Wellington in Spain by Pyotr Chikevich. Ironically, most Russian generals were in favor of an offensive strategy, but they were overruled by the ultimate commander, the Tsar himself.

Did the Russians consistently follow this strategy in 1812? The answer would be, mostly yes. From the beginning, there was strong opposition to this strategy. A strategy based on simply giving up hundreds of miles of territory to the enemy was bound to raise uproar. The strategy appealed to cool rationality, not the emotions and fighting spirit of the soldiers. After Smolensk, Alexander had to replace Barclay with Kutuzov, in front of mounting political pressure. But Barclay’s strategy proved correct in the pitched battle of Borodino, the terrible result of which forced the Russian commanders to abandon the offensive strategy altogether and to evacuate Moscow. That was perhaps the most pivotal moment of the war, as Napoleon’s capture of Moscow became a hollow victory. He captured territory, but failed to destroy the Russian army.

What Kutuzov did after Napoleon’s departure from Moscow should be called ultra-defensive, as it was different from the original defensive plan. The original defensive plan did not mean total abstention from big battles, but attacking the French when they were sufficiently weak. Alexander’s modified version was to encircle and destroy the enemy in retreat. Kutuzov was in a position to do so in November, as even small battles like Vyazma and Krasny proved the enemy’s growing weakness. But he refrained to do so, mainly citing military-logistical reasons, and probably also with political motives. Kutuzov was right about saving his army, but at the same time it led to a victory less than complete.

The final intriguing question is, how far was the defensive strategy responsible for the Russian victory? Napoleon himself blamed geography, climate (‘General Winter’), and circumstances for his catastrophic defeat. Historians traditionally have stressed on French miscalculations and blunders, along with adverse circumstances. Richard Riehn showed the importance of logistical failures on the part of Napoleon, while Dominic Lieven emphasized on the Russian strategy. [74]

My own opinion is, Napoleon could have won the war despite the Russian defensive strategy if he stopped at Smolensk. He could have devoted his energy to resurrect the Polish kingdom, and then prepare for another massive campaign in 1813 with his Polish allies. The problem with this theory is, restoring Poland was never Napoleon’s aim, he just used them in his war against Russia. Moreover, he did not want to annex Russian territory, he wanted to crush their army to bring Russia firmly under his control, as he did to Prussia and Austria.

Certainly Napoleon’s blunders were responsible for his defeat. In Borodino, he could have deployed the Imperial Guard and crush the routed Russians. He should have departed Moscow much sooner, attack Russian supply bases in Kaluga and arms factories in Tula, cripple the Russian war effort, then retreat towards Smolensk without fear of a vigorous pursuit by the Russians. It would certainly have saved the bulk of his army. Not arranging proper winter clothing and winter horseshoes were terrible mistakes as well.

All that being said, one cannot deny the importance of the Russian strategy in the defeat of the greatest military genius of the time. Barclay’s initial strategy of retreat made him unpopular, but it certainly saved his army from being annihilated. The decision to abandon Moscow after Borodino too was an unpopular but brilliant decision. More debatable is Kutuzov’s ultra-defensive strategy during the last two months of the campaign. Whatever reasons he had behind pursuing it, it led to less than a total victory.

This strategy was definitely not a novel invention. It closely followed historical and contemporary examples, most crucially Wellington’s strategy in Spain. This kind of strategy has little appeal to popular imagination or emotions. Probably that was the reason why later Russian authors like Leo Tolstoy stressed much more on the ‘valiant struggle of the Russian people’ and Soviet rulers like Stalin on ‘partisan warfare’ and disorganized peasants’ fighting. But in cold reality, the defensive strategy devised by a few of their leaders were much more important than the supposed ‘peoples’ war’. We should not forget, this defensive strategy, followed in Spain and Russia, along with the British naval supremacy, paved the way for Napoleon’s eventual downfall.

#### NOTES:

- [1]. Best English-language works dealing with the Russian strategy against Napoleon include Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon* (London: Allen Lane, 2009) and Alexander Mikaberidze, *The Battle of Borodino* (London: Pen & Sword, 2007). Also important are Mikaberidze, *The Battle of the Berezina* (London: Pen & Sword, 2010) and *The Russian Officer Corps in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1792-1815* (New York, Savas Beatie, 2007).
- [2]. Some excellent recent works dealing with the causes of the war include Adam Zamoyski, *1812: Napoleon’s Fatal March on Moscow* (London: HarperCollins, 2004) and Richard K. Riehn, *1812: Napoleon’s Russian Campaign* (New York: John Wiley, 1991).
- [3]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 125.
- [4]. Friedrich Wilhelm to Alexander, April 30/May 12, 1812, in *Briefwechsel König Friedrich Wilhelm III und der Königin Lusie mit Kaiser Alexander I*, ed. P. Bailleu (Leipzig, 1900), 214-18.
- [5]. About Alexander’s plans to restore Poland, see Adam Czartoryski, *Mémoires, vol. II* (Paris, 1887), 221, 227, 231.
- [6]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 126.
- [7]. Barclay’s aide Friedrich von Schubert expressed this opinion in his *Unter dem Doppladler* (Stuttgart, 1962), 212-13.
- [8]. For Bagration’s advocacy of an offensive strategy, see Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 127, 136.

- [9]. Ibid, 126-30.
- [10]. Alexander to Friedrich Wilhelm, May 14, 1811, in *Briefweschel* ed. Bailleu, 219-22. For Saint-Julien's opinion, see his letter to Metternich, August 13, 1811, in W. Oncken, *Österreich und Preußen in Befreiungskriege, vol. II* (Berlin, 1878), appendices, no. 30.
- [11]. For Wellington's influence on the Russian strategy, see Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 85, 131.
- [12]. About the condition of Russian military, see Alexander and Yuri Zhmodikov, *Tactics of the Russian Army in the Napoleonic Wars, vol. II* (West Chester, 2003), chs. 10-15 and Gunther Erich Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Indiana University Press, 1980), 201-02.
- [13]. Peter Waldron, "State Finances" in *Cambridge History of Russia, vol. II*, ed. Lieven (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 468-88 deals with the economic condition of Russia.
- [14]. Russian army numbers are discussed in Riehn, *1812*, 159, Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 138.
- [15]. Robert Wilson praised the quality of the Russian cavalry in his *Campaigns in Poland* (London, 1810), 14.
- [16]. For Russian espionage activities, including Champagny's memo, see Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 80-85.
- [17]. Ibid.
- [18]. Pyotr Chuikevich, *Patriotic Thoughts or Political and Military Considerations on the Upcoming War between Russia and France*, trans. Alexander Mikaberidze, placed on the Napoleon Series on July, 2007, [https://www.napoleon-series.org/military-info/organization/Russia/MilitaryThought/c\\_Chuikevich.html](https://www.napoleon-series.org/military-info/organization/Russia/MilitaryThought/c_Chuikevich.html)
- [19]. Ibid.
- [20]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 132.
- [21]. Francis Ley, *Alexandre Ier et sa Sainte Alliance* (Paris, 1975), 45-48. Alexander I is widely regarded as the most enigmatic personality of the tsars.
- [22]. Devastating losses of the *Grande Armée* in the first months is well-documented. See Riehn, *1812*, 159-62, 168-69, among many others.
- [23]. Zamoyski, *1812*, 171, Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 150.
- [24]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 149-50.
- [25]. Armand de Caulaincourt, *At Napoleon's Side in Russia* (New York, 2003), 43.
- [26]. A good account of the Battle of Mogilev is in Mikaberidze, "Mogilev, Action at (July 23, 1812)" in *Russia at War*, ed. Timothy C. Dowling (Oxford, ABC-CLIO, 2014), 527-28.
- [27]. Mir, more of a skirmish than battle, was the first Russian victory in the war.
- [28]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 156-57.
- [29]. Philippe de Ségur, *History of the Expedition to Russia, vol. I* (Stroud, 2005), 145, Duc de Fezensac, *Souvenirs militaires* (Paris, 1863), 221-22.
- [30]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 158.
- [31]. Ibid, 159.
- [32]. Ibid, 159.
- [33]. Bogdanovich, *Istoriia otechestvennoi voiny 1812 goda, vol. I* (St. Petersburg, 1859-60), 234-235.
- [34]. Baltic German officers' memoirs about this factionalism: Ludwig von Wolzogen, *Mémoires d'un Général d'infanterie au service de la Prusse et de la Russie (1796-1836)* (Paris, 2002), 106, 115. V. von Löwenstern, *Mémoires du Général-Major Russe Baron de Löwenstern, vol. I* (Paris, 1903), 217, 247-48.
- [35]. For a French firsthand account of the skirmish at Krasny, see Baron Fain, *Manuscrit de Mil Huit Cent Duze* (Paris, 1827), 359.
- [36]. Mikaberidze, "Limits of the Operational Art: Russia 1812" in *Napoleon and the Operational Art of War*, ed. M. Leggerie (Brill, 2016), 296-98 has an excellent account of the Battle of Smolensk. For Barclay's unpopular retreat, see Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 165, Zamoyski, *1812*, 219-20.
- [37]. See Bogdanovich, *Istoriia...goda, vol. I*, 285-289, Duke Eugen von Württemberg, *Memoiren des Herzogs Eugen von Württemberg, vol. II* (Frankfurt, 1862), 18-41, Robert Wilson, *Narrative of Events during the Invasion of Russia* (London, 1860), 178-79.
- [38]. Fain, *Manuscrit, vol. I*, 394, Caulaincourt, *Mémoires, vol. I* (Paris, 1933), 393 give firsthand account of Napoleon's thinking about whether to halt in or advance from Smolensk.
- [39]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 174-180.
- [40]. Ibid, 180-184.
- [41]. Carl von Clausewitz, *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia* (London, 1992), 148.
- [42]. Mikaberidze, *Borodino*, 49-53.
- [43]. Ibid, 209, 217.
- [44]. Bogdanovich, *Istoriia...goda, vol. II*, 219, 226. For a contrary viewpoint, see Eugen, *Memoiren, vol. II*, 110-11.
- [45]. The best English-language account on the Battle of Borodino is Mikaberidze, *Borodino*.
- [46]. Antoine de Jomini, *The Art of War* (London, 1992) 230, 233-38. Clausewitz offers a contrary viewpoint in his *Campaign of 1812 in Russia*, 175-76.
- [47]. For Kutuzov's actions just after the battle, see Clausewitz, *Campaign of 1812 in Russia*, 167-68, Löwenstern, *Mémoires, vol. I*, 278, Levin von Bennigsen, *Mémoires du Général Bennigsen, vol. III* (Paris, 1908), 87.
- [48]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 212-13.
- [49]. See Paul Austen, *1812: Napoleon in Moscow* (Frontline Books, 2012) chp. 1, based on French eyewitness accounts of the fire.
- [50]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 235.
- [51]. Wilson, *Narrative...Invasion of Russia*, 115-17.
- [52]. About winter horseshoes, see Fain, *Manuscrit, vol. II*, 157, Caulaincourt, *At Napoleon's Side...*, 136-38.

- [53]. Zamoyski, *1812*, 309-12.
- [54]. Viscount de Puybusque, *Lettres sur la Guerre de Russie en 1812* (Paris, 1816), 142-44.
- [55]. Zamoyski, *1812*, 371. Clausewitz called Kutuzov mountebank in his *Campaign of 1812 in Russia*, 142.
- [56]. Soviet historians used to portray partisan warfare as the predecessor of the partisan warfare during the WWII, which is completely unhistorical.
- [57]. Wilson, *Narrative...Invasion of Russia*, 209.
- [58]. Ségur, *History of the Expedition to Russia*, vol. II, 82-83.
- [59]. Wilson in his *Narrative...Invasion of Russia*, 232-37 gave an eyewitness account of the battle and Kutuzov's strategy.
- [60]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 258-59.
- [61]. Wilson, *Narrative...Invasion of Russia*, 234.
- [62]. Theodor von Bernhardt, *Denkwürdigkeiten des russischen Generals von der Toll*, vol. II (Leipzig, 1856), 204. Also see, Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 253.
- [63]. Caulaincourt, *At Napoleon's Side...*, 197.
- [64]. Almost all Russian generals, including those who were personally close to him, like Konovnitsyn and von Toll were opposed to Kutuzov's defensive strategy.
- [65]. Caulaincourt, *At Napoleon's Side...*, 136-38.
- [66]. Napoleon himself, and many other French historians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century blamed winter for their defeat. See, Fain, *Manuscrit...*, 151-52.
- [67]. For a general account of the Battle of Krasny, see Bogdanovich, *Istoriia...goda*, vol. III, 101-146. For Kutuzov's strategy, see Eugen, *Memoiren*, vol. II, 241-50.
- [68]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 242-44.
- [69]. *Ibid*, 244-45.
- [70]. For the Battle of Polotsk, see Riehn, *1812*, 312-17. For Lambert's troops' action, see Bogdanovich, *Istoriia...goda*, vol. III, 206-35.
- [71]. Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 282.
- [72]. Charles Minard's famous graph gives a clear picture of the terrible cold of Russia in December, 1812. For example, on December 7, the temperature was -36°C (-38°F).
- [73]. *Allegemine Deutsche Biographie*, Bd. 26, (Leipzig, 1888), 93.
- [74]. Riehn, *1812*, 151, 407, Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon*, 4-6, 9-12.

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- [3]. Bogdanovich, M. I. *Istoriia otechestvennoi voyny 1812 goda*, 3 vols. St. Petersburg, 1859-60.
- [4]. *Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 2, edited by Dominic Lieven. Cambridge, 2006.
- [5]. Caulaincourt, Armand de. *At Napoleon's Side in Russia*. New York, 2003.
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- [7]. Czartoryski, Adam. *Mémoires du Prince Adam Czartoryski et Correspondence avec l'Empereur Alexandre Ier*, Paris, 1887.
- [8]. Fain, Baron. *Manuscrit de Mil Huit Cent Duze*. Paris, 1827.
- [9]. Jomini, Antoine de. *The Art of War*. London, 1992.
- [10]. Ley, Francis. *Alexandre Ier et sa Sainte Alliance*. Paris, 1975.
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- [13]. Mikaberidze, Alexander. *The Russian Officer Corps in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*. New York, 2005.
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