



Napoleon's Ambition with India and his Rule

For Prelims: [Napoleon Bonaparte](#), Persia and Russia, Oriental World, [Alexander the Great](#), [Tipu Sultan](#), Russian Tsar Paul I, Napoleonic Code, Continental System, Peninsular War, Nationalism and Resistance, Egyptian Campaign, Louisiana Purchase, Ottoman Empire, Battle of Waterloo, Saint Helena,

For Mains: Key Facts about Napoleon Bonaparte, facts about the Continental system, Renaissance and Colonialisation.

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Napoleon Bonaparte's deep interest in India, fueled his ambition to **undermine British dominance in the subcontinent**. He also had great influence on European, American and African politics.

What was Napoleon's Ambition with India (Orient)?

- **Oriental World:**
 - The term "Oriental" refers to the **Eastern world from the European perspective**, encompassing regions and cultures situated to the east of Europe.
 - It broadly denotes the continent of Asia, including countries such as **China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and other East Asian nations**.
- **Napoleon's Ambition with the Orient:**
 - From an early age, Napoleon Bonaparte was deeply fascinated by the Orient, inspired by the conquests of **Alexander the Great in Asia**, which fueled his ambitions in the region.
 - His **specific interest in India developed around 1798** during his Egyptian expedition, aimed at threatening Britain, France's primary adversary, and disrupting the growing British trade with India.
 - Although **Napoleon suffered a significant defeat** by Britain in Egypt and [Tipu Sultan died in 1799](#), his ambitions to challenge British control in India persisted, with various strategies devised against the backdrop of territorial struggles among the major European colonial powers, including **Britain, Russia, and France**.
- **Partners of Napoleon for Invasion of India:**
 - **Russia:**
 - Following his defeat in Egypt, Napoleon was approached by **Russian Tsar Paul I at the height of the "Great Game,"** a geopolitical struggle between Britain and Russia over control of Asian territories.
 - In 1801, the Tsar secretly proposed a joint **Franco-Russian invasion** of India to expel the British and the East India Company, with the plan to divide the conquered lands between Russia and France.
 - Although **Napoleon declined the offer**, Tsar Paul I briefly attempted to proceed alone before **abandoning the mission following his assassination**.
 - **Persia (Iran):**
 - Persia, strategically **located between Europe and India**, was of great

importance to imperial powers. By 1800, Napoleon viewed Persia as a **key route to India and had French agents engaging with Persian Shah Fath Ali.**

- In response, **Britain sent Captain John Malcolm to negotiate, resulting** in a commercial and political treaty with Persia in 1801.
- The treaty prevented French influence in Persia and allowed Persia to wage war on Afghanistan if it threatened India.
 - **Britain excluded Russia from the treaty**, even though Russia posed the biggest threat to Persia at the time.
- In **1801, Russia annexed Georgia** (territory claimed by Persia) and by 1804 had advanced further by capturing Erivan (modern Armenia).
 - When the **Persian Shah sought British assistance** under the treaty due to fears of a Russian attack, his request was denied.
 - Following this, Napoleon formalised the **Treaty of Finkenstein** with Shah Fath Ali, which guaranteed Persia's territorial integrity and offered French military support against Russia.
 - In exchange, Persia agreed to sever ties with Britain and provide future war assistance to French.
- Despite the French alliance with Persia, **Napoleon signed secret pact the Treaty of Tilsit with Russia in 1807**, dividing global influence.
 - France dominated Europe, while Russia had control over Asia. **This alliance undermined Persia**, which had sought French help to counter Russian aggression.
- After the secret pact, the Persian Shah sought a new treaty with the British, under which Britain promised military aid and annual subsidies to Persia.

Tipu Sultan's Relation with French

- **Tipu Sultan** and his father **Hyder Ali** allied with the **French** to fight the British in India.
 - He **used French officers to train his soldiers**, but he did not allow them to become a pressure group.
- Tipu Sultan was **inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution**. He adopted the name "**Citizen Tipu**" and became a **member of the Jacobin, a French club** that advocated liberty and equal rights.
- He also planted the **Tree of Liberty in his capital, Srirangapatna.**

French in India

- The **first French factory in India** was established at **Surat in 1667** by Francois Caron which was **followed by the factory at Masulipattam** by Marcara **in 1669**.
- They occupied **Mahe in Malabar, Yanam in Coromandal (both in 1725) and Karikal in Tamil Nadu (1739).**
- The arrival of **Dupleix as French governor in India in 1742** saw the beginning of **Anglo French conflict (Carnatic wars)** which resulted in their final defeat in India.
 - The decisive battle of the **Third Carnatic War** was won by the English in **January 1760 at Wandiwash (or Vandavasi) in Tamil Nadu**. After this the French ambition to build empire in India came to an end.
- On **1st November 1954**, the **French territories in India** were officially **integrated into the Indian Union**, and **Puducherry became a Union Territory**. This marked the **end of 280 years of French rule**.
 - But only in 1963 Puducherry became officially an integral part of India after the French Parliament in Paris ratified the Treaty with India.



What are the Key Facts About Napoleon Bonaparte?

▪ Personal Life:

- Napoleon Bonaparte was **born in 1769** on the **Mediterranean island of Corsica**.
- In **1785**, at the age of 16, he **became a lieutenant in the artillery**.
- Following the outbreak of the **French Revolution**, Napoleon joined the army of the newly established government.
 - In **1804**, he **crowned himself emperor of France**.

▪ Role of Napoleon:

- **France:**
 - **Revolutionary Wars:** Napoleon initially rose to prominence as a military commander during the **French Revolutionary Wars**.
 - He led **campaigns against various European coalitions**, particularly in **Italy (1796)** and **Egypt (1798)**, establishing himself as one of France's greatest military strategists.
 - **Overthrow of Directory:** In 1799, Napoleon played a central role in **the coup d'état** that **overthrew the ineffective Directory government**, marking the end of the French Revolution and the beginning of the Consulate, where **he held power as First Consul**.
 - **Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815):** After becoming Emperor (1804), Napoleon expanded French territorial control across much of Europe through a series of military campaigns known as the **Napoleonic Wars**.
 - He centralised power, modernised the administration, and implemented reforms in education, taxation, and infrastructure.

- **Establishment of the Napoleonic Code:** As a ruler, Napoleon introduced the **Napoleonic Code in 1804**, a **legal framework that reformed the French legal system**.
 - The code emphasised **equality before the law, individual rights, and secular government**. It remains the foundation of legal systems in many countries.
- **Continental System:** To weaken Britain economically, Napoleon imposed the **Continental System**, a trade blockade aimed at cutting off British commerce with mainland Europe. However, the policy had mixed results and hurt France's own economy.
- **Modernisation of France:** Napoleon modernised many aspects of French society, including the **education system, banking, and infrastructure**.
 - His reforms left a lasting impact on France and the broader European continent.
- **Europe:**
 - **Establishment of the Continental System (1806):** In November 1806, Napoleon instituted the Continental System, a **strategic blockade aimed at isolating Great Britain** by cutting off its trade and communication with continental Europe.
 - The primary objective was to **make Europe self-sufficient** and to cripple Britain's commercial and industrial strength.
 - Although his allies and family members did not adhere to the Continental System.
 - **Peninsular War (1808):** He waged war **to compel Portugal to comply with the Continental System**.
 - **In Spain, Napoleon deposed the Spanish king** and installed his brother Joseph on the throne. The **Spanish populace reacted with outrage**, inflaming nationalist sentiments.
 - **Growth of Nationalism and Resistance:** Napoleon's actions, particularly in Spain, fueled **growing nationalist fervor across Europe**.
 - The **imposition of foreign rulers** and the **undermining** of local institutions, including the **Church**, spurred widespread resistance, contributing to the eventual collapse of his empire.
- **Out of Europe:**
 - **Egyptian Campaign (1798-1801):**
 - **Strategic Aims:** Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign sought to **weaken British influence in the Middle East and India** by gaining control of Egypt.
 - **Egypt was a vital link in Britain's trade route to its colonies**, especially India, making it strategically important for Napoleon's objectives.
 - **Defeat and Retreat:** Despite initial victories like the Battle of the Pyramids, the campaign ultimately failed.
 - Napoleon's fleet was destroyed by the British at the **Battle of the Nile (1798)**, and he was forced to abandon his army and return to France in 1799.
- **Role in the Americas:**
 - **Louisiana Purchase (1803):** In a major geopolitical decision, Napoleon **sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803 for USD 15 million**.
 - The sale, known as the **Louisiana Purchase**, doubled the geographical size of the US and helped fund Napoleon's military campaigns in Europe.
 - The primary goal of the sale was to **strengthen the US against England**, as **Britain was an adversary to both the US and France**.
 - **Haiti and the Caribbean:** Napoleon attempted to reassert French control over its Caribbean colonies, particularly **Saint-Domingue (Haiti)**, the wealthiest French colony due to its sugar plantations.
 - However, after a **slave rebellion led by Toussaint Louverture**, Haiti **declared independence in 1804**. Napoleon's efforts to regain control failed, and Haiti became the **first independent Black republic**.

How Napoleon's Policy led to his Downfall?

- **The Decline of the Empire:**
 - **Failed Russian Invasion (1812):** In 1812, Napoleon invasion of Russia, the Russian **strategy of scorched earth and harsh winter** conditions devastated Napoleon's Grand Army, leading to massive losses.
 - **The Sixth Coalition War (1813-1814):** After the failed Russian campaign, **European powers—Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia—**formed the Sixth Coalition and renewed attacks on Napoleon.
 - The decisive **Battle of Leipzig (1813)**, resulted in a **major defeat for Napoleon**, leading to the collapse of French control in Central Europe.
- **First Abdication and Exile to Elba (1814):**
 - Facing overwhelming defeat, he **abdicated the throne in April 1814 in favour of his son**.
 - Following his abdication, **Napoleon was exiled to the island of Elba**, off Italy's coast, where he was granted sovereignty and attempted to reform the administration.
- **Defeat at the Battle of Waterloo (1815):**
 - Napoleon's final bid to restore his empire culminated in **the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815**, where he **faced British and Prussian forces**. His newly formed army was decisively defeated, marking the end of his rule and the Napoleonic Wars.
- **Second Abdication and Exile to Saint Helena:**
 - **Napoleon was exiled to** the remote island of **Saint Helena**, far from Europe, to prevent any return to power. Napoleon lived under British supervision, **dictating his memoirs and reflecting on his legacy** while facing deteriorating health.
 - Historians suggest that **stomach cancer** may have caused his eventual death.
 - Despite his downfall, **Napoleon's legacy endures through his reforms**, especially the Napoleonic Code, which influenced global legal systems.
 - His military strategies remain a subject of study, and his impact on European politics and governance significantly shaped the **19th century**.

Drishhti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss Napoleon Bonaparte's policies and reforms shape modern nation-states in the 19th century?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. Which one of the following statements does not apply to the system of Subsidiary Alliance introduced by Lord Wellesley? (2018)

- (a) To maintain a large standing army at others expense
- (b) To keep India safe from Napoleonic danger
- (c) To secure a fixed income for the Company
- (d) To establish British paramountcy over the Indian States

Ans: (c)

Mains:

Q. What can France learn from the Indian Constitution's approach to secularism? (2019)

