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## CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, HIS TRINITY, AND THE 1812 RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN, PART TWO

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*This article analyzes the 1812 Russian campaign using Clausewitz's concept of the trinitarian nature of war. This approach uses a case study to delve deeply into understanding the subtle, philosophical nature of Clausewitz's trinity. The article is serialized into two parts; the first discusses each of the trinity's elements. The second part applies each trinitarian element to the Russian campaign.*

Part One of this study offered a brief overview of historiography of the 1812 Russian campaign and delved deeply into each element of Clausewitz's trinity. In summary, Clausewitz's first element of psychology, passion, and emotion provides a human dimension that permeates all aspects of human action in war. This element is not simply limited to an amorphous concept of the "people," but extends to other groups and individuals, such as soldiers, civil populations, government leaders, and military commanders. Human passions and emotions reflect the enemy's will, a commander's temperament, cultural values, or soldiers' morale. Every human activity and interaction in war can be affected by psychology, passion, and emotion.

Reason, the second element, provides a framework for the human mind to approach the planning and conduct of war. Ultimately, Clausewitz writes, war is fundamentally political. Therefore the political objective dominates—or ought to dominate—military planning. All actions in war should support the attainment of this objective. Some aspects of war are scientific—it is possible for a planner to calculate how much food an army would need each day as long as he knows the army's size and the ration of bread per soldier.

However, not all rationally devised plans succeed. Sometimes the inability of the human mind produces a flawed plan—humans formulate war plans, and as the first element indicates each individual human has his or her psychological and emotional tendencies and biases. External forces such as bad

weather or miscommunication can also prevent even the most logical plan from succeeding. Every possible development cannot be taken into account during war planning because of the possibility of the unexpected.

Hence the third element of chance, probability, and uncertainty play a role in the conduct of every military campaign. The play of chance generates uncertainty within a situation. In war, a leader rarely, if ever, achieves complete knowledge of the situation. Often some piece of vital information is missing and the commander must use his judgment. Chance, such as whether or not rain slows an army's advance, serves as an impersonal factor that influences both the actual conduct of operations and commanders' perceptions of the conduct of operations.

This uncertainty can cause a commander to lose confidence in his abilities or to make an error in judgment. Both of these occurrences can have a severe impact on the outcome of a war. War, despite being a human activity, is often influenced by inhuman, impersonal factors—such as a sudden thunderstorm or a messenger who, in the dark of the night, turned on the wrong road—guided by events that humans cannot control.

In summary, Clausewitz's trinity can be said to comprise

1. human emotions and irrationalities,
2. structured, ordered—rational—human thought, and
3. the uncertainty of an environment that humans cannot completely control.

These are the essential features of Clausewitz's tripartite definition of the nature of war. What follows is a historical case study of the 1812 campaign viewed through the analytical lens of Clausewitz's tripartite definition of war. The following examples from the 1812 Russian campaign serve to highlight these features through the use of a historical case study from Clausewitz's era. From this examination of his trinity through the events of 1812, one can perceive the sublime characteristics that define the nature of war. The three component parts of psychology and emotion, reason, and chance and uncertainty, each offer unique insights into war as a phenomenon. However, each component alone is incapable of providing the full picture of war's nature. Only by considering the relationships between all three elements of the trinity can one truly understand the nature of war as Clausewitz defined it.

### **THE FIRST ELEMENT IN THE RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN**

Both Napoleonic France and Tsarist Russia possessed the capability to tap in to society's latent violent attributes through measures such as the *levee en masse* and the social niche filled by the Cossacks. Given the violence of human nature and the government's ability to apply this violence in

war, Clausewitz's emotional element can achieve practical effects. By influencing the conduct of the campaign and helping to better define the nature of the war on which Napoleon embarked upon by crossing the Niemen in 1812, this first element contributes to a more complete understanding of Clausewitz's trinitarian tool for analyzing the nature of war. In the Russian campaign, the three primary manifestations of the emotive factor (the psychology of the commander, motives of the troops, and role of the people in arms) were expressed through actual events. To understand the emotional element as it is exhibited through actions and events, it is necessary to analyze the psychologies of the competing commanders, understand what motivated their soldiers, and examine the role played by the Russian people in partisan warfare.

The psychology of the competing commanders played a tremendously important role in the conduct and outcome of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. Ultimately, any army's fate lies in the hands of its primary decision-maker. In the case of the *Grand Armée*, that decision-maker was the brilliant Napoleon Bonaparte. The essential features of a commander's psychology as Clausewitz outlines them include both moral (courage, determination, etc.) and intellectual qualities (such as *coup d'oeil*). Throughout the campaign, these aspects of Napoleon's psychology influenced the conduct of the campaign and help to reveal the value of Clausewitz's first trinitarian element.

Though he once wrote that "the foremost quality of a commander is to keep a cool head," Napoleon in Russia acted somewhat uncharacteristically.<sup>1</sup> Caulaincourt observed Napoleon's behavior; "although there were moments when the man showed himself, it was the demigod whom one recognized most often."<sup>2</sup> Usually bold, decisive, and energetic, Napoleon in the Russian campaign is generally portrayed as moody, hesitant, and sickly. Historians have made much of this uncharacteristic behavior. However, it is not necessary to understand Napoleon in order to understand the emotional role of a commander's psychology in war. Instead, one must simply understand Napoleon's general mindset when at war and how specific actions or decisions during the 1812 campaign reflect his mentality.

Personally, "Napoleon could be by turns charming, hypnotic and caring, or foul-mouthed, unspeakably rude and even physically violent."<sup>3</sup> In his conduct of diplomacy, Bonaparte "could be equally acerbic and brusque."<sup>4</sup> Making peace with Napoleon consistently translated into subordination to Imperial French supremacy. Napoleon sought to dominate

<sup>1</sup>Jay Luvaas: *Napoleon on the Art of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1999) p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Armand de Caulaincourt: *With Napoleon in Russia*. (New York: William Morrow and Company) 1955. p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>David G. Chandler: *On the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Greenhill Books, 1994) p. 238.

<sup>4</sup>Chandler, *On the Napoleonic Wars*, p. 238.

his opponents politically. Through his military campaigns, Napoleon “consistently sought the decisive battle in order to break his opponent’s political will.”<sup>5</sup> The achievement of a decisive battle in each campaign marks the hallmark of Napoleon’s approach to war. All of his successful campaigns prior to 1812 were decided by decisive battles in which Napoleon engaged his enemy’s army and defeated it in detail. To achieve this result, he used “mobility as a means of applying remorseless psychological pressure upon his opponents” by “affording his enemy no time to draw breath.”<sup>6</sup> Through vigorous maneuver and the pursuit of a decisive engagement, Napoleon achieved his most stunning victories. He was to apply the same formula that had succeeded at Marengo, Austerlitz, and Jena again in 1812, but with far worse results.

Command is one of the most important aspects of warfare. In the case of Napoleon as a military commander, understanding his individual command style is necessary to comprehend the role of a commander’s psychology in Clausewitz’s emotional element. Bonaparte once wrote that “in war men are nothing; one man is everything. The presence of the general is indispensable. He is the head, the whole of an army. It was not the Roman army that subdued Gaul, but Caesar; not the Carthaginian army that caused the republic to tremble at the gates of Rome, but Hannibal.”<sup>7</sup> Understanding Napoleon’s system of command becomes easier after reflecting on what he wrote. Napoleon clearly believed that an army’s supreme commander had a tremendous impact on the conduct of a war. Perhaps in an attempt to maximize his own control over the army, Napoleon commanded through a very centralized system in which “unity of command is of the first necessity in war.”<sup>8</sup>

By maximizing the control that Napoleon retained over his forces, he would maintain greater ability to apply his military talents to the conduct of the campaign. Decisions, often even the most mundane decisions, would be taken by the Emperor himself rather than delegated to lower levels of command. This highly centralized decision-making apparatus allowed Napoleon’s genius to command his armies with a high degree of control, but also prevented the exercise of initiative at lower levels of command. Lack of initiative was exhibited especially among Napoleon’s marshals, who often seemed confused or indecisive without Napoleon to direct them. However, due to communication difficulties and the sheer size of his army, Napoleon often “could not control everything he pretended to control.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Chandler, *On the Napoleonic Wars*, p. 243.

<sup>6</sup>Chandler, *On the Napoleonic Wars*, p. 244.

<sup>7</sup>Luvaas, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup>Luvaas, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup>Russell F. Weigley: *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) p. 444.

In essence, Napoleon's general approach to war revolved around mobility and the drive for decisive battle in an army with a command structure in which decision-making was highly centralized. This approach resulted in numerous victories, but in Russia psychological aspects of command negatively influenced Napoleon's conduct of the campaign.

According to Clausewitz, war is the realm of uncertainty and a commander must base his actions on his instincts and understanding of a situation while possessing incomplete information. The effects of uncertainty most influence war's psychological aspects. Napoleon exhibited some of these effects during the campaign in Russia.

Before the battle of Borodino, French and Russian troops skirmished at a small Russian redoubt in the village of Shevardino. Napoleon saw the carnage inflicted by a small battery of twelve Russian cannon on the attacking French cavalry, which "may well have contributed to his hesitancy during the main battle [Borodino] two days later."<sup>10</sup> At Borodino, Napoleon first hesitated to deploy the Imperial Guard in an assault against weakened Russian positions on the far left flank of the Russian position. By the afternoon, French forces under Eugéne had captured a Russian redoubt. Again, Napoleon hesitated, and decided not to send reinforcements to exploit the brief tactical advantage. Napoleon remained tentative and timid in his reluctance to deploy the elite Imperial Guard. Had he not hesitated to deploy the Guard, Napoleon might have achieved a decisive defeat of the Russian army at Borodino. Instead, the Russians fought him to a draw, allowing an orderly retreat towards Moscow.<sup>11</sup>

Upon reaching Moscow, Napoleon acted with indecision and frustration. He expected that by occupying Moscow Alexander would soon offer to negotiate a peace settlement: "Napoleon waited, in a state of semi-paralysis, day after day, for the overture from the Tsar which never came; 'moody and taciturn,' so Constant described him, it seemed as if he were dreaming that somehow another Tilsit was just around the corner... . Days of deceptively balmy autumn weather intervened as Napoleon dallied."<sup>12</sup> When it became clear that Alexander would not sue for peace, Napoleon contemplated a march on St. Petersburg. This proved impracticable, so Napoleon next "decided to try peace overtures," but "Caulaincourt declined such a mission as hopeless and only serving to advertise French weakness."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Alan Palmer: *Russia in War and Peace* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972) p. 160.

<sup>11</sup>Weigley, pp. 445–449.

<sup>12</sup>Alistair Horne. *How Far from Austerlitz? Napoleon 1805–1815* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) p. 319.

<sup>13</sup>Allen McConnell. *Tsar Alexander I: Paternalistic Reformer* (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1987) p. 110.

In addition to his indecision over his next course of action, Napoleon became frustrated not only with Alexander's refusal of peace negotiations, but also the burning of Moscow. Napoleon's frustrations boiled over: “‘A demon inspires these people,’ Napoleon declared. ‘They are Scythians! This is a war of extermination.’”<sup>14</sup> Moscow’s destruction left him “strangely inactive, withdrawn from a disaster which he had never anticipated.”<sup>15</sup> On October 18, “everything was ready for Napoleon to leave the city that Sunday evening, but, though his escort was already waiting, it was announced that the Emperor had changed his mind” and would leave the next morning.<sup>16</sup>

A military commander must be psychologically prepared to deal with the effects of war’s uncertainty. For this reason, Clausewitz emphasizes a commander’s emotional balance. Without this balance, the effects of war’s uncertain environment (such as hesitancy, indecision, paralysis, or the reversal of decisions) can breed disaster and defeat. In Russia, Napoleon hesitated and failed to act decisively, which contributed to his defeat. Napoleon tried to apply his usual approach to war—seeking decisive battle as a first priority—but when this failed, he lapsed into the paralysis of indecision. By studying his actions and their consequences, one can better understand the play of Clausewitz’s emotional element in war.

For Napoleon’s opponents, Tsar Alexander I and his Commander-in-Chief Mikhail Kutuzov, the commanders’ psychological elements also played a key role in the outcome of the campaign. After ascending to the throne of Russia, Alexander felt almost disqualified to rule. He saw himself as lazy and unconfident, he hated courtly life, and he was often confused and indecisive.<sup>17</sup> Despite these feelings of inadequacy and his usual indecision, the Tsar acted forcefully in 1812. He remained determined to struggle against Imperial France and not to give in to Napoleon’s demands. To the Russian ambassador to London, the Tsar wrote “I will not make peace until I have driven the enemy back across our frontiers, even if I must, before succeeding in this, withdraw beyond Kazan’.”<sup>18</sup> Alexander’s moral determination would translate into a surge of Russian patriotic feeling later in the campaign.

In terms of personal military ability, Alexander could not compete with Napoleon as a military commander. Most, if not all, senior Russian generals could not compete with Napoleon—those who had, such as Kutuzov, were badly defeated (Kutuzov had commanded Russia’s armies at Austerlitz).

<sup>14</sup>As quoted in Palmer, *Russia in War and Peace*, p. 172.

<sup>15</sup>Alan Palmer: *Napoleon in Russia* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2003) p. 154.

<sup>16</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup>McConnell, pp. 6–10.

<sup>18</sup>As quoted in Janet M. Hartley: *Alexander I* (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1994) p. 118.

Perhaps it was for this reason that Alexander favored foreign military advisors: “Alexander so lacked confidence in Russian judgements that he tended to turn for advice to Austrian or Prussian ‘experts,’ many of whom were mere paper strategists and unable to understand the strange character of warfare across the great expanses of the Russian plain.”<sup>19</sup>

During the campaign’s initial stages, Alexander took supreme command and followed the advice of the Prussian General Phull, whose plan called for the Russian armies to fall back to a fortified camp at Drissa. Eventually, other officers convinced the Tsar that Phull’s plan was impractical, and soon Phull lost Alexander’s confidence. Russia’s senior commanders “wanted Alexander back in his capital, partly because they were apprehensive that he would discover yet another paper theorist to succeed [Phull], but also because they genuinely thought he could rally public opinion in Moscow and St. Petersburg, which was still lukewarm in support of the war.”<sup>20</sup> The Tsar’s emotional bias toward foreign officers’ expertise could have proved disastrous for the Russian forces had they encamped at Drissa. However, it was another officer with a foreign background, Barclay de Tolly, who finally convinced Alexander to withdraw from Drissa.

Although Alexander did not initially intend to leave the army, this was one of his best decisions. The Tsar was not as accomplished as his senior generals as a battlefield commander, but he did have the prestige and influence to engender support for the war from the Russian nobility and peasantry. His generals could lead a battle against Napoleon, but they could not rally the nation to support a war. After leaving the army and arriving in St. Petersburg, the Tsar named Kutuzov as the supreme commander, replacing the foreigner Barclay. Although Kutuzov did not hold Alexander’s complete confidence (Alexander still mistrusted his abilities after the defeat at Austerlitz), Kutuzov was highly popular and maintained a solid reputation both with noble society and the rank-and-file of the Russian army. Alexander turned over control of the army to Kutuzov, and then headed to St. Petersburg and Moscow, where he could best influence the campaign.

By essentially “getting out of the way” of his military commanders, Alexander allowed them to control the armies while he contributed to the war effort by increasing support and overseeing the management of the country. Through these actions, he contributed more to the success of the campaign than he could have contributed by leading Russian soldiers in the field. Tsar Alexander remained morally determined to fight Bonaparte’s invasion, but this psychological determination alone did not

<sup>19</sup>Palmer, *Russia in War and Peace*, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup>Palmer, *Russia in War and Peace*, p. 154.

create disaster for the French. Emotionally biased toward foreign military émigrés' advice, Alexander might have caused disaster for the Russians had he not listened to other officers' good counsel to withdraw from Drissa. Again, he listened to his closest advisors when they recommended that Alexander leave the army. By operating as head of state only, and not simultaneously as supreme military commander and head of state, Alexander could focus his attention on matters of state while leaving the day-to-day conduct of the campaign to Kutuzov. Throughout the campaign, Alexander remained morally determined to fight the French and listened to his subordinates' good advice. Emotionally, Alexander knew that he did not possess military talent similar to Napoleon—perhaps because of his feelings of inadequacy from earlier in his life—but proved able to make sound decisions when offered advice from his counselors. Psychologically, Alexander acted with more emotional balance and decisiveness than Napoleon. By delegating responsibilities and seeking opinions from his advisors, Alexander avoided becoming overwhelmed by the uncertainties of war as Napoleon was.

The importance of a commander's psychology as essential in the outcome of war can be illustrated by the examples of Napoleon and Alexander. The different psychological make-up of both individuals contributed greatly to the conduct of the campaign. The first factor in Clausewitz's emotional element, the psychology of the commander focuses on the individual commander and his personal attributes. A commander's courage, determination, emotions, and experience—all of which are parts of his psychology—can either help or hinder his ability to see through the psychological fog that permeates nearly every aspect of warfare. Through his vital position as the supreme decision-maker, the commander's personality can affect a situation more often than any other single individual.

Soldiers' motivations provide a second factor integral to the emotional element. Motivated by previous glory, the French army that marched on Moscow included a number of veterans from Napoleon's prior victorious campaigns. This successful tradition created a strong sense of conquest and pride within the French army. After years of victorious wars and intense military exertions, psychological and emotional feelings of *esprit de corps* had created a strong bond among France's soldiers. Napoleon maintained an almost legendary stature and his mere presence would suffice to inspire his soldiers: "the troops ... were superb, and received the Emperor with real enthusiasm."<sup>21</sup> Confidence in their commander's abilities as well as their own record of triumph counteracted the psychological effects of danger and fear within the army, at least initially. However, morale is a constantly changing condition.

<sup>21</sup>Caulaincourt, p. 41.

Success and confidence will motivate soldiers to fight, but defeat can ruin morale and shatter confidence. Sometimes simply the lack of success will degrade an army's high morale. As the Russian campaign progressed, French soldiers found increasing difficulties with foraging—the scarcity of food and water became more acute as the army approached Moscow. They were expecting to find sustenance in Moscow, but, fires which destroyed most of the city also destroyed much in the way of supplies and shelter. Although “considerable supplies were saved ... it required a determined effort by Napoleon to restore discipline to an army on its way to becoming a band of looters.”<sup>22</sup> As demonstrated in Russia, soldiers’ motivations can shift due to the uncertain and dangerous environment within which war occurs. Without success, motivating an army is much more difficult. However, the Russians managed to motivate their soldiers, and populace, through methods other than a tradition of martial success and prestige.

For Russia, patriotism provided an emotional connection to the war that motivated its armies despite years of defeat in previous wars against Napoleon and weeks of retreat in the 1812 campaign. The Tsar’s actions and the destruction of Moscow kindled Russian patriotism, which motivated Russia’s armies to continue the struggle against Napoleon.

After Alexander left the army and had traveled to Moscow, he selected Kutuzov as commander-in-chief. This cheered the dreary mood in the army because Kutuzov, despite being defeated at Austerlitz, still had a strong reputation among Russian elite society as well as the individual soldiers of the army. Unlike his predecessor Barclay, Kutuzov “was Russian to the core; and there was no alien affectation about the ‘old fox of the north.’”<sup>23</sup> On Kutuzov’s appointment, “all ... were agreed, that a true Russian, a disciple of Suvarov, was better than a foreigner, and much wanted at the moment.”<sup>24</sup>

Next, the Tsar went to Moscow, where he sought to rally the people. In this task he succeeded marvelously. Upon his arrival on July 23, “he was rapturously received, the people kneeling in the streets as he went by.... . The enthusiasm continued for all the eight days the Tsar spent in the city.”<sup>25</sup> In Moscow “he received 80,000 volunteers from the townspeople, 3 million rubles from the nobility, and 8 million from the merchants; their generosity moved the sovereign to tears.”<sup>26</sup> Alexander’s presence in

<sup>22</sup>Weigley, p. 450.

<sup>23</sup>Palmer, *Russia in War and Peace*, p. 157.

<sup>24</sup>Carl von Clausewitz: *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia* (London: John Murray, Albermarle Street Publishers, 1843) p. 136.

<sup>25</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup>McConnell, p. 107.

Russia's holiest city provided the inspiration that he and his generals had hoped for—faced by the French threat, Moscow responded vigorously.

After the fall of Moscow and the fire which destroyed most of the city, “the Russians, at the time, believed the French had deliberately ravaged Holy Moscow, and this conviction intensified the patriotic fervour of the nation throughout the coming winter.”<sup>27</sup> Although the French army was most likely not responsible for burning Moscow, the city’s destruction, followed by French reprisals against Russian arsonists, stirred popular sentiments against Napoleon’s invasion and steeled Russians’ will to resist. Napoleon had hoped that occupying Moscow would result in an opportunity for peace. Instead, with the Russian populace eager to continue a struggle that the Tsar had earlier characterized as “the last struggle of independence against enslavement, of liberal ideas against tyranny’s system,” Alexander refused French offers to negotiate and kept fighting.<sup>28</sup>

By accessing the Russian people’s patriotic sentiments, Alexander motivated his army and population to fight against Napoleon. Appointing a Russian commander and inspiring militia volunteers and aid from the people of Moscow created deeper and broader Russian support for the war effort as well as directly affecting the army’s morale and determination to continue the war.

Napoleon’s and Alexander’s soldiers, though many had very different motives for fighting, were equally susceptible to the effects of fear, danger, uncertainty, and indecision that plague the human spirit during combat. As the campaign progressed, changed circumstances influenced soldiers’ morale and motives. Through Clausewitz’s three principal moral factors that contribute to the spirit of war—the skill of the commander, experience and courage of the troops, and their patriotic spirit—one can comprehend how soldiers’ motivations play an important role in understanding the emotional element of the nature of war.

The emotional element’s third sub-factor concerns the people in arms. When a nation mobilizes its population for war, as Revolutionary and Imperial France did through the *levee en masse*, the people’s passions play an important role. Since the populace must contribute to the war effort, the government relies on the people’s support to be able to conduct the war with adequate resources. A conscripted populace does not respond to war through passion alone. If the burden of a war seems too high a price to pay, logically fewer citizens will support the war. The French soon discovered after 1812 that twenty years of warfare were too

<sup>27</sup>Palmer, *Russia in War and Peace*, pp. 172–176.

<sup>28</sup>McConnell, p. 107.

many. Constant casualties meant that by the end of Napoleon's reign conscription and death were viewed by many Frenchmen as synonymous.

In addition to the taxing manpower requirements of Napoleon's incessant wars, some French allies in 1812 proved very unreliable. For instance, the French army had been accompanied by a Prussian corps under the command of General Yorck. Yorck hated Napoleon, and since September had kept in contact with the Russians, who assured him that Alexander I had no quarrel with Prussia. By November, Napoleon's army was in headlong retreat, and the local Russian commander, Diebitsch, suggested that Yorck switch sides. After contemplation and a conversation with Clausewitz (who had been sent to Yorck as a Russian representative), Yorck brought his corps over to the Russian side.<sup>29</sup>

Prior to the invasion, Napoleon had largely coerced army contingents from his erstwhile allies. Some of these soldiers, especially the Poles, were highly motivated and fought tenaciously. Others, such as the Prussians, whose population remained cold and skeptical, if not outright hostile, toward Napoleonic France, sought merely to placate their powerful imperial neighbor. When the populace does not want to fight, as the Prussians did not want to support Napoleon's invasion, motivating a national army becomes much more difficult.

For the Russians, arming the people proved much easier. Thanks partially to the Tsar's efforts to rally the population in Moscow, the Russians raised large numbers of militia to augment the army. Some populations mobilized completely: the Cossacks "sent their entire male population to fight" Imperial France.<sup>30</sup> Also, the Moscow fire inspired popular resistance because the Russians largely believed that Napoleon had purposefully burned the holy city. Moscow's flames had the effect of further enflaming Russian patriotism. Napoleon, believing that the Russians had set fire to Moscow, ordered the execution of suspected arsonists as a reprisal.<sup>31</sup> This served only to amplify Russian hatred and further stir the Russian people's passions against the invaders.

Using this passion to advantage, Russian troops, especially Cossack cavalry, harried the French retreat from Moscow, destroying French foraging patrols, annihilating stragglers, and generally intensifying the French troops' misery. Armed mobs of Russian peasants also wreaked havoc on many hapless French stragglers who wandered into a hostile village. Much has been made of this national partisan campaign in Russian popular myth, but it must not be overstated. Although partisans

<sup>29</sup>Peter Paret: *Clausewitz and the State* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) pp. 229–230.

<sup>30</sup>Nicholas Feodoroff: *History of the Cossacks* (Commack, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 1999) p. 111.

<sup>31</sup>Palmer, *Russia in War and Peace*. p. 176.

contributed to Russia's victory, the guerrilla campaign was not a decisive element. However, partisan fighting illuminates the extent to which Napoleon's invasion roused the passions of the Russian people.

Passions, emotions, and psychology provided an essential and pervasive aspect of the Russian campaign of 1812. Through an exploration of the psychology of the commander, soldiers' motivations, and the role of popular sentiment, one can better understand how Clausewitz's first element of the tripartite nature of war was expressed during 1812. Although passion and emotion played an important role in defining the nature of war in Russia, the emotional element cannot be considered alone. Integrated with the first element, the second element of reason and rationality also influenced the nature of the campaign.

### **THE SECOND ELEMENT: REASON**

Before invading Russia, Napoleon's planners created detailed schemes of maneuver for the massive *Grande Armée* and made extensive logistical calculations. Napoleon concentrated thousands of spare horses, provisions for over 400,000 men, over 800 wagons, and enough artillery ammunition to provide between 670 and 1100 rounds per gun.<sup>32</sup> However, these exhaustive preparations would prove fruitless without a coherent policy objective and matching strategy to achieve that objective. Imperial France differed from many nations because the political and military leadership were united in Napoleon Bonaparte. Even tsarist Russia maintained some division between the military commander-in-chief, Kutuzov, and the political leadership of Tsar Alexander. By combining the roles of policymaker and strategist, Napoleon ensured that he would make the most important decisions largely by himself.

The Emperor's overall policy end was "that Russia should be brought back into line in the economic struggle against Great Britain."<sup>33</sup> He had felt since as early as August 1811 that war would be necessary due to Alexander's deliberate evasion of the Continental System and numerous minor intrigues over Poland and the Balkans. Napoleon would not tolerate a "backslider nor a rival ... and by 1811 Alexander represented both."<sup>34</sup>

To bring Russia back into the Continental System, Napoleon conceived of a military strategy that he had relied on numerous times before—an offensive in search of a decisive battle. Napoleon sought to invade, concentrate his army, fix the Russian army in place, maneuver to a position of

<sup>32</sup>Martin van Creveld: *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 63.

<sup>33</sup>David G. Chandler: *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (Commack, NY: Scribner, 1966) p. 747.

<sup>34</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, pp. 745–746.

advantage, defeat the Russians in battle, and force their surrender. He “had told Davout that his aim was to be able to ‘concentrate 400,000 men at a single point.’”<sup>35</sup> Destroying the enemy’s army remained Napoleon’s primary military objective in all his campaigns—Russia was not an exception. Napoleon, “whenever possible, after pinning the foe frontally by a feint attack” would march “his main army by the quickest possible ‘safe’ route, hidden by the cavalry screen and natural obstacles, to place himself on the rear or flank of his opponent.”<sup>36</sup>

In 1812 Napoleon applied his usual military solution—an offensive to seek decisive battle—to his latest political problem with the Russian tsar. Despite his numerous battlefield successes over a twenty-year career, Napoleon employed one doctrine: take the offensive and destroy the enemy army in decisive battle. Perhaps one of his greatest failings as a political and military leader was his inability to apply varied and flexible military strategies to achieve his political objectives.

Each time he went to war, the French Emperor prescriptively adopted his force-on-force engagement strategy. In 1812, the Russians refused to offer a decisive battle for months and Napoleon proved unable to outmaneuver them. By refusing to offer decisive battle, the Russians effectively neutralized the French strategy. In these circumstances, Napoleon could not find an alternative to seeking battle, which drew him further into Russia, continuing his attempt to force battle with the main Russian army. When the Russians finally offered battle at Borodino, Napoleon did not win decisively as he had hoped. Although he won the field, this victory did not act as a panacea. In earlier campaigns, such as in Egypt, Napoleon had achieved a military victory that did not translate into political success (and therefore was not “decisive”) because Nelson destroyed the French Fleet at Aboukir Bay.<sup>37</sup>

According to Clausewitz, a successful strategy must support the political objective. Since Napoleon’s political objective had been to compel Russian compliance with the Continental System, Napoleon could have adopted an alternative military strategy which should have emphasized a Russian center of gravity that directly influenced Russia’s ability to evade the Continental System. One alternative strategy could have been for Napoleon to direct his forces against the aspect of Russia’s economy that most threatened the Continental System—foreign exports and imports. Foreign trade relied primarily on access to the Baltic through the ports of St. Petersburg and Riga. During the century prior to Napoleon’s invasion, St. Petersburg and Riga had grown considerably

<sup>35</sup>Horne, *How Far from Austerlitz?*, p. 309.

<sup>36</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 163.

<sup>37</sup>John Keegan: *Intelligence in War* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

due to foreign trade.<sup>38</sup> In 1812, Russian trade relied heavily on shipping entering and leaving these two ports. Had Napoleon attacked these important ports, he could have inflicted significant damage on Russian trade rather than chasing an elusive Russian army.

Historians have often questioned Napoleon's rationale in his plan to invade Russia: “‘Don’t march on Moscow’ was consistently one of Field-Marshal Montgomery’s ‘basic rules of war’ . . . . Like many other students of military history, he ‘never understood Napoleon’s reasoning.’”<sup>39</sup> Accepting Clausewitz’s assertion that “policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument,” a military commander or planner must carefully analyze the best military means of achieving the political end.<sup>40</sup> In 1812, seeking a decisive battle with the main Russian army might not have been the best means of forcing Russia back into the Continental System. However, decisive battle was the only option that Napoleon considered. “War” could mean small, fast raids or large battles; it could involve limited or total national effort, but to Napoleon, war always meant decision in pitched battle. Napoleon simply applied the same strategy that he always used: “To beat the enemy—to shatter him—to gain the capital—to drive the government into the last corner of the empire—and then, while the confusion was fresh, to dictate a peace—had been hitherto the plan of operation in his wars.”<sup>41</sup> The Emperor wanted battle, but the Russians did not conform to his desire.

Russian policy was to never “sign a peace dictated on Russian territory.”<sup>42</sup> Alexander “stated that he would negotiate with France only if the French were to withdraw from Prussia.”<sup>43</sup> This policy apparently can be summarized as simply not surrendering to the French. Russia did not have a clearly articulated political objective other than Alexander’s insistence on not agreeing to a French-dictated peace. In support of this amorphous policy end, the Russians adopted an equally ambiguous military strategy.

At the outbreak of the campaign, the Russian strategy was centered on a plan created by a Prussian, General Phull. This plan relied on a withdrawal to a fortified camp at Drissa, from which the combined armies of Bagration and Barclay de Tolly could decide what to do next.<sup>44</sup> Several

<sup>38</sup>Arcadius Kahan: *The Plow, The Hammer, and The Knout: An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) pp. 163–167.

<sup>39</sup>Horne, *How Far from Austerlitz?*, p. 308.

<sup>40</sup>Clausewitz, p. 607.

<sup>41</sup>Carl von Clausewitz: *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia* (London: John Murray, Ablemarle Street, 1843) p. 253.

<sup>42</sup>As quoted in Paul Britten Austin: *The March on Moscow* (London: Greenhill Books, 1993) p. 30.

<sup>43</sup>George Nafziger. *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988) pp. 11–12.

<sup>44</sup>Paret, p. 224.

foreign officers serving with the Russian army, Clausewitz included, thought the Drissa plan impractical and advocated continuing the withdrawal past Drissa.<sup>45</sup> Tsar Alexander finally lost confidence in Phull and the Drissa plan, and continued the withdrawal.

The Russian commanders did not anticipate a continuous withdrawal for the entire duration of the campaign. At some point they envisioned the necessity of fighting Napoleon. The Russian leadership did not have a coherent idea of when or under what circumstances they would fight Napoleon in a major battle. However, once Napoleon had begun his march on Moscow from Smolensk, Alexander pressured Kutuzov into finally offering battle at Borodino.

In contrast to the Russians' confusion, many of the Prussian officers in Russian service, Clausewitz included, viewed the progress of the campaign with a sense of inevitability: "With Scharnhorst, Boyen, and other Prussian officers, Clausewitz shared the belief that only a strategic withdrawal, possibly beyond Moscow, would save the Russians, and his major concern during the opening weeks of the war was that no artificial schemes should interfere with what he took to be the natural course of fighting, which compelled the Russians, even against their wishes, to give way before Napoleon."<sup>46</sup>

From this perspective, the Russians unintentionally followed the best possible strategy. So long as they did not succumb to a decisive defeat in battle at Napoleon's hands, the Russian army would emerge with its political aim intact. Accidentally, the Tsar had managed to find a strategy that strongly supported his policy. The Russians had achieved a good strategy-policy match that allowed them to survive Napoleon's invasion with their forces largely intact and capable of offering continued resistance. Napoleon's armies, on the other hand, were weakened by their advance and were unable to sustain offensive operations deep in enemy territory, which forced the Emperor to retreat.

The Russian campaign provides an excellent example of the primacy of the human aspects of war planning. Leaders and planners must apply reason and critical analysis in the formulation of their strategies and policies, but ultimately all decisions are made by people who are not always capable of acting rationally or analytically.

In Napoleon's case, the strategy adopted did not support the political objective despite the rational thought applied to the planning of logistics and troop dispositions. Napoleon never adopted a different approach to achieving his policy aims. No matter what he wanted to accomplish politically, he always sought decisive battle first. In 1812, several other

<sup>45</sup>Paret, p. 224.

<sup>46</sup>Paret, p. 224.

alternative strategies were available—the enemy army should not necessarily act as the primary objective. To punish Russia for flaunting the Continental System, Napoleon could have attacked the Baltic ports or Saint Petersburg, thereby damaging Russia economically. The Continental System was, after all, mainly a tool for waging economic warfare on Britain. Because of Napoleon's personal limitations and position as Emperor and supreme commander, rational strategic analysis did not negate his personal preference for seeking decisive battle.

Tsar Alexander accidentally avoided confrontation with Napoleon in a decisive battle. When the Russian army finally did fight at Borodino, Kutuzov wisely preserved his army as a viable fighting force despite leaving Napoleon in possession of the battlefield. The Russians essentially benefited from what Clausewitz saw as the natural course of the campaign. In Clausewitz's view, so long as they did not interfere with this natural course—that is, by not losing decisively—the Russians would inevitably succeed. The Russian leadership did not arrive at a strategy of withdrawal through any rational process, but largely because the alternative Drissa plan proved impractical and possibly disastrous. By avoiding a decisive defeat, the Russians nullified Napoleon's only means of achieving his political goals and simultaneously managed to accomplish their own political goal of not negotiating a coerced peace settlement.

Again, the application of Clausewitz's second trinitarian element—reason—to the Russian campaign illuminates the centrality of war's human aspects. Although reason serves as a vital tool in the search to define a political objective and formulate a strategic plan to achieve that objective, the successful application of reason is not always completely attainable or completely necessary. Napoleon couldn't apply reason completely; the Tsar didn't have to.

### ***CLAUSEWITZ'S THIRD ELEMENT: CHANCE, PROBABILITY, AND UNCERTAINTY***

The element of chance, probability, and uncertainty unifies the other elements of the trinity. Chance and uncertainty permeate war at every level and in each detail. Operational plans, no matter how thorough, may easily be disrupted by the play of chance. A commander, no matter how courageous, could misjudge an uncertain situation and make the wrong decision given imperfect information. Difficulties with communication, logistics, mobility, weather, terrain, and intelligence contribute to the uncertainty of war. Every operation displays this trinitarian element. However, only a few examples from the Russian campaign are necessary to illuminate the effects of chance and uncertainty in war.

Upon crossing the Niemen, Napoleon's intelligence informed him that the main Russian armies were located 200 miles apart. Barclay de Tolly's main army consisted of six infantry corps and three cavalry corps deployed in southern Lithuania. Prince Bagration commanded 40,000 infantry and a cavalry force headquartered near Lutsk.<sup>47</sup> Napoleon thought that the most likely course of action for the Russians, when faced with a French advance, would be for Barclay's army to gradually fall back until Bagration could march north to link the two armies.<sup>48</sup>

When Napoleon heard that Barclay was withdrawing and that Bagration was moving north, he realized that "the fact that Barclay was retiring toward Drissa, that is to say northeast, meant that he was in fact putting more distance between his army and that of Bagration, and thus was delaying the concentration of the two Russian armies."<sup>49</sup> Now Napoleon hoped that the French army could maneuver "between the two Russian wings and close the trap on Bagration... always provided that they could move forward rapidly enough to secure Vilna as a center of operations for the enveloping attack while Jerome's army switched from the defensive to the offensive in order to exert strong frontal pressure on the Second Army of the West [Bagration], preventing it from slipping away to the east beyond the grip of the Emperor."<sup>50</sup>

This maneuver against Bagration relied on good communication between huge armies arrayed across hundreds of miles. Napoleon had to move against Vilna to split the two Russian armies, but could not do so until Eugene's army on Napoleon's left flank moved far enough forward to cover Napoleon's movement east to Vilna. Also, Jerome, whose army was deployed to the southwest of Bagration, would have to advance in coordination with Napoleon's movement.

Napoleon had already sent Murat's cavalry toward Vilna, but Eugene was lagging behind due to the poor mobility of his supply trains. Because of this, Napoleon had to "check the rate of advance of Murat... and at the same time retain Davout near the Niemen."<sup>51</sup> To make matters worse, "there were few indications from the right flank to suggest that Jerome was making an effective advance from the Warsaw area to intercept Bagration.... Thus from the very outset of the campaign, lack of mobility and associated problems were threatening to ruin Napoleon's brilliant strategic plan."<sup>52</sup> War's uncertain environment acted on Napoleon by forcing the unexpected—his transport columns slowed due to poor mobility

<sup>47</sup>Nafziger, p. 110.

<sup>48</sup>Nafziger, p. 110.

<sup>49</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 770.

<sup>50</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, pp. 770–771.

<sup>51</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 771.

<sup>52</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 771.

across bad roads. This unanticipated event delayed Napoleon's plan for trapping Bagration, but the opportunity for Napoleon to catch the Russian Second Army remained.

Chance intervened: "Next morning, the French staff enjoyed an apparent stroke of luck. Some Russian dispatches were intercepted revealing that the Tsar and the First Army were, in fact, still at Vilna, and that the town had been designated as the meeting point with Bagration's converging forces."<sup>53</sup> Napoleon still had time to trap the Russians. Eugene had finally arrived to cover Napoleon's flank, and Napoleon ordered Murat's cavalry to resume the march on Vilna on June 28. After a short artillery engagement, the Russians withdrew and the French triumphantly entered Vilna, but without achieving Napoleon's goal of separating the Russian armies.<sup>54</sup>

Barclay had managed to break contact with Murat's cavalry, but on June 29 French reconnaissance located Docturov's Russian infantry corps (part of Barclay's army). On hearing this information, Napoleon initially thought that Docturov's troops were from Bagration's Second Army.<sup>55</sup> Later intelligence reports placed Bagration's army at Ochmiana. Without reliable intelligence on Bagration's whereabouts, Napoleon "was in effect being forced to wait upon events."<sup>56</sup> Barclay, retreating northeast towards Sventsianski, could be contained, so Napoleon dispatched Murat, with two infantry divisions attached, to pursue Barclay's First Army.

On July 1 Napoleon finally received reliable information that Bagration was again moving north to link with Barclay. Napoleon ordered Davout to move in three columns, one each against Bagration's advance guard, main body, and rear guard. Jerome, who was now in Grodno, was also ordered to continue his advance to exert added pressure on Bagration's rear, preventing him from turning south. Given these plans, Napoleon had arranged for "one hundred and ten thousand French troops" to surround "a paltry 45,000 Russians; Bagration could hardly hope to escape."<sup>57</sup>

On July 5, however, Jerome reported that he "had found no trace of the Russians at Ochmiana ... and that Bagration seemed to be moving off toward Slonim and Minsk."<sup>58</sup> The French had moved too slowly in the south, allowing the Russians time and space to escape. Bagration headed south and rested at Nesvizh. Davout did not realize that the Russians had doubled back until July 8 when he entered Minsk—"all Davout's marching

<sup>53</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 774.

<sup>54</sup>Nafziger, p. 118.

<sup>55</sup>Nafziger, p. 119.

<sup>56</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 775.

<sup>57</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 776.

<sup>58</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 776.

has been in vain. Bagration has eluded him.”<sup>59</sup> Realizing the French armies’ positions and directions of march early on, Bagration used speed and stealth to his advantage in avoiding entrapment by Napoleon’s vastly superior forces.

By the middle of July, “Napoleon was forced to admit that his first full-scale maneuver against Bagration, intended to destroy the left wing of the Russian army at one blow, had ended in complete failure.”<sup>60</sup> Despite Napoleon’s solid planning, probability, chance, and uncertainty intervened. Initially, Napoleon could rationally deduce the Russians’ most likely course of action. He determined that Bagration would *probably* move north to link with Barclay. This is in fact what happened. However, imperfect information as to Bagration’s location and direction of movement plagued Napoleon’s decision-making. Without knowledge of where Bagration was before, is now, or will go in the future, Napoleon had to rely on his instincts and experience. Poor intelligence contributed to the uncertainty of the situation. Chance intervened by slowing Eugene’s supply columns, which in turn delayed the beginning of the French movement against Bagration, allowing him several precious days to maneuver without worrying about French harassment. However, chance also worked in Napoleon’s favor. The French were lucky to capture Russian dispatches that revealed Vilna as the link-up point between Barclay’s and Bagration’s forces. Unfortunately for Napoleon, he captured Vilna without engaging either Barclay or Bagration, and without driving a wedge between their two armies as he had hoped.

Napoleon’s maneuver against Vitebsk provides another example of Clausewitz’s third element. Having failed to isolate and engage Bagration, Napoleon next turned his attention to Barclay’s Russian First Army. Having abandoned Drissa, Barclay was now moving toward the Dvina. Now “Napoleon believed that Barclay would now make his way down the Orsha road to hasten the junction with his colleague [Bagration], and accordingly all units were ordered to concentrate at Kamen, ready to fight the long-sought battle.”<sup>61</sup> In fact Barclay was moving to link with Bagration, but this rendezvous was intended to occur at Vitebsk, not Polotsk. Napoleon found that the Russians were not in Polotsk and moved to the next crossing point on the Dvina, Biechenkovski. Again he found that the Russians were not there. To Napoleon “nothing appeared certain.”<sup>62</sup> Napoleon “continued to hope for news that Murat had made contact with Barclay’s army as it moved towards the Dvina.... Somewhere a hundred

<sup>59</sup>Paul Britten Austin: *1812: The March on Moscow* (London: Greenhill Books, 1993) p. 89.

<sup>60</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 777.

<sup>61</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 778.

<sup>62</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 778.

thousand men were following their Tsar eastwards: where exactly they were, Napoleon had no idea.”<sup>63</sup>

While Napoleon struggled to ascertain the situation, Barclay moved to Vitebsk, anticipating that they French would advance on Moscow using the main highway, and ordered Bagration to head northeast toward the highway.<sup>64</sup> During the middle of July, Barclay’s First Army concentrated around Vitebsk while the French frantically searched for them. Finally, “on July 25 … less than thirty miles from Vitebsk, [Napoleon] learned what he most wanted to hear.”<sup>65</sup> Murat had found that the entire Russian First Army was encamped at Vitebsk.

Since Barclay’s entire command was concentrated around the city, Napoleon decided to delay an attack until he could consolidate his own forces. Napoleon did not want to squander this opportunity for battle by attacking prematurely with a small, tired force. On July 27, Napoleon “saw the Russian army drawn up in battle order, some 80,000 strong, he estimated, and deployed his own. As was his custom, he rested his troops that day in expectation of a major battle on the morrow.”<sup>66</sup> The next day, as the French advanced ready for battle, they discovered “Vitebsk in its turn evacuated by the elusive foe.”<sup>67</sup> Barclay had abandoned the field during the night.

Napoleon’s delay had possibly cost him the decisive battle that he had sought from the beginning of the campaign. Although historians have highly criticized Napoleon for delaying his attack on Vitebsk, waiting for reinforcements was a prudent decision. Barclay’s army “had assumed a strong position in front of Vitebsk, the regional capital. The probability of a determined defense was high as a result. Napoleon assumed that they would feel their position was strong enough and their duty clear enough to warrant a serious defense.”<sup>68</sup>

Again, poor information contributed to an uncertain picture of the situation in the French headquarters. Finally when Napoleon could ascertain the situation, he—prudently—delayed offering battle for one day. However, chance cheated him of his decisive battle. Napoleon could not have expected the Russians to evacuate the city during the night, especially since they had remained deployed in battle order. This unexpected move on Barclay’s part preserved the Russian army and forced Napoleon to continue what had already become a much longer, more drawn-out campaign than had been anticipated.

<sup>63</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, pp. 55–56.

<sup>64</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, p. 57.

<sup>65</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, p. 61.

<sup>66</sup>Nigel Nicolson: *Napoleon 1812* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1985) p. 47.

<sup>67</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 779.

<sup>68</sup>Nafziger, p. 179.

A final example of uncertainty and chance in war is Napoleon's attempt to negotiate a peace settlement and Kutuzov's deception. In September, after capturing Moscow, Napoleon sent several letters entertaining the possibility of a negotiated settlement to the war. These were left unanswered by the Russians. Again in October Napoleon tried to make peace with the Russians. Napoleon was led to believe that the Russian soldiers wanted peace because he "was being deliberately lulled into a sense of false security, for Field-Marshal Kutuzov was determined to gain invaluable time before the next phase of the campaign should open."<sup>69</sup>

To support this deception, "the Russians often stressed their desire for peace," but also "spread alarm among the French by emphasizing how far the army had come from its homeland and how grim the Russian winter could be."<sup>70</sup> The Russian advanced guard, made up mainly of Cossack cavalry, treated the French with respect and "lulled them into a tacit truce."<sup>71</sup> The Russians "showed great courtesy, especially so long as Murat was advancing in the wrong direction, away from Kutuzov's line of retreat."<sup>72</sup>

At the beginning of October, Napoleon dispatched a formal delegation to Kutuzov, who "received Napoleon's representatives with every civility and deliberately encouraged the impression that the Russian soldiers wanted peace."<sup>73</sup> However, he did not allow the French delegation to continue on to St. Petersburg to receive an audience with the Tsar. Instead he sent the French delegation's letters along with one of his own, in which he "strongly advised the Tsar to avoid negotiation at all costs."<sup>74</sup> In his meeting with the French ambassador Lauriston, Kutuzov "could sense the discomfiture of the French in everything that Lauriston had to say."<sup>75</sup> Kutuzov realized that the French were suffering, and saw no reason why the Russians should allow them to escape with a settlement. The negotiations did not produce any worthwhile results for the French, though Napoleon tried again by sending a second delegation in the middle of October.

Despite the failure of this second delegation, Napoleon refused to believe that the Tsar would refuse to make peace when a foreign army had marched across Russia and occupied Moscow. Napoleon's "enthusiasm was such, and so eager was he to nurture the illusions and hopes raised in his own mind, that he cherished the hope of receiving a reply from the

<sup>69</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 813.

<sup>70</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, p. 167.

<sup>71</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, p. 166.

<sup>72</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, p. 167.

<sup>73</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 814.

<sup>74</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 814.

<sup>75</sup>Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, p. 176.

Tsar, or at least negotiations for an armistice with Kutusof [sic].”<sup>76</sup> While “the overtures to Petersburg remained unanswered,” Russian “Cossacks continued to harry the fringes of Moscow.”<sup>77</sup>

As Napoleon waited for a peace that was not to come, Kutuzov had reorganized his army and prepared for the next stage of the campaign: “Every day that passed was allowing the advantage of the strategical situation to move more decidedly in the Tsar’s favor. Kutuzov appreciated this and did all in his power to protract Napoleon’s stay in Moscow, deliberately playing on his opponent’s desire for peace.”<sup>78</sup> By the middle of October, Russian forces around Moscow outnumbered those of Napoleon’s army. Kutuzov had been playing for time by deceiving Napoleon. By acting as if he wanted negotiations, Kutuzov fomented uncertainty. Napoleon did not know whether the Russians would accept peace or not—since Kutuzov seemed open to the possibility, Napoleon expended his efforts on achieving a settlement rather than preparing to continue the campaign. The French remained unsure whether peace was possible. By not eliminating the possibility of peace, Kutuzov gained more time to prepare the newly-reinforced Russian army.

For an entire month Kutuzov had succeeded in delaying Napoleon’s stay in Moscow. Finally on October 20, Napoleon began his retreat. By chance, Kutuzov had selected October 20 to begin an attack which took Napoleon “completely by surprise.”<sup>79</sup>

Kutuzov’s peace deception took advantage of an uncertain situation. He knew that the Russians required time to reorganize and prepare for future operations. He also knew that what Napoleon most wanted at the time was a negotiated peace. By playing up the possibility of negotiations, Kutuzov achieved his objective of gaining time because he knew that Napoleon was psychologically predisposed to view any attempt at negotiation with optimism and enthusiasm. Kutuzov created uncertainty in the situation and leveraged that uncertainty to his advantage. In this example, uncertainty interacted with Clausewitz’s emotional and psychological element to produce the result that Kutuzov ultimately hoped to achieve and that Napoleon dreaded.

From these three selected examples—Bagration’s escape, the maneuver on Vitebsk, and Kutuzov’s peace deception—the effects of Clausewitz’s third trinitarian element of chance, probability, and uncertainty in war can be better understood. These few examples also highlight the interaction between the trinity’s three elements. Bagration’s escape and

<sup>76</sup>Caulaincourt, p. 145.

<sup>77</sup>Caulaincourt, p. 150.

<sup>78</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 815.

<sup>79</sup>Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, p. 819.

the maneuver on Vitebsk both portray the effects of chance and uncertainty on rationally-devised war plans. Kutuzov's peace deception illuminates the psychological and emotional effects of uncertain situations on military leaders. The nature of war's third element reveals the interconnectivity of the trinity because detailed planning, excellent communication systems, accurate intelligence, high morale and motivation, and a commander's military genius must all contend with the play of chance, the possibility that the probable may or may not happen, and the uncertainty of rapidly changing situations and unknown circumstances.

### **CLAUSEWITZ'S HOLISTIC ANALYSIS OF WAR**

An understanding of war's nature must incorporate a holistic examination of all three trinitarian elements as an integrated whole, not as three distinct, detached parts. As Peter Paret writes in *Clausewitz and the State*, "an adequate theoretical understanding of war—one that did not fly in the face of reality—must incorporate all three of these elements. Theories that dealt only with the military aspects of the second—how planning, leadership, and effort might succeed in the uncertain business of defeating the enemy army—were inadequate, as were theories that interpreted war primarily as a political or psychological phenomenon."<sup>80</sup>

Clausewitz sought to approach the study of war in a comprehensive, integrated manner: "The tripartite definition of war alone made it possible for Clausewitz to advance from partial studies to a comprehensive and integrated analysis of war."<sup>81</sup>

His integrated, holistic approach to the nature of war marked a major intellectual advance in the conceptualization of war as a phenomenon. Through these insights, Clausewitz's theory has enabled modern military professionals and scholars to examine war through this comprehensive, integrative method.

In this sense, Clausewitz's work more closely resembles philosophy than history. Very few professional military studies specifically seek an understanding the nature of war as a phenomenon. Clausewitz was not the first European to delve into the subject—for instance, Machiavelli highly influenced Clausewitz's intellectual development—but *On War*, and especially the tripartite definition of the nature of war, has provided enduring philosophical insights that have stimulated the study of war more than any other Western study of war.

<sup>80</sup>Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 368.

<sup>81</sup>Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 368.

## THE TRINITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Clausewitz integrated his philosophical analysis with historical examples in much the same way as this article has attempted to integrate philosophical and historical analysis. The utility of historical examples, in Clausewitz's opinion, arises from the fact that "the knowledge basic to the art of war is empirical" and "is derived from the nature of things, this very nature is usually revealed to us only by experience."<sup>82</sup> He then outlines four reasons for using historical examples, the first of which is that "a historical example may simply be used as an *explanation* of an idea. Abstract discussion, after all, is very easily misunderstood, if not understood at all."<sup>83</sup>

In this article the 1812 Russian campaign has been used as a historical example to more fully explain the subtleties and intricacies of Clausewitz's trinitarian nature of war. As such, one hopes that the application of a historical example has illuminated the depth of each individual element integral to the trinity as well as the close relationships among each of the three parts. Through the lens of the 1812 campaign, historians and military scientists can better comprehend the Clausewitzian trinity as a tool to better understand warfare.

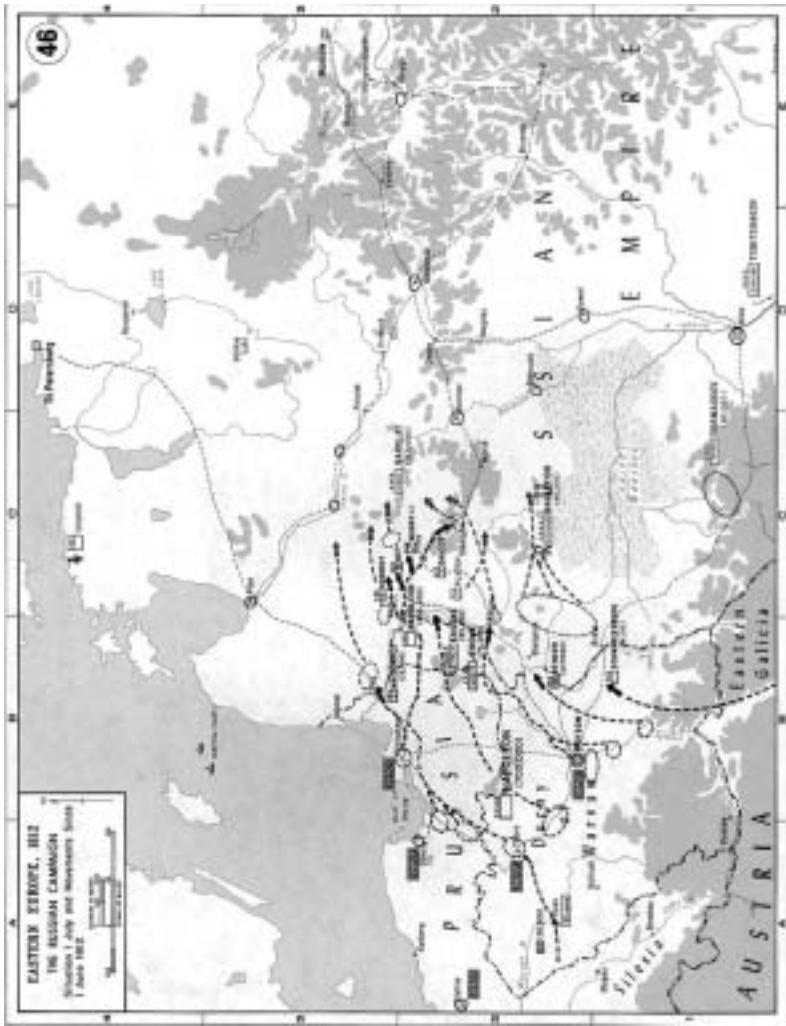
The increasing complexity of technological developments and their application to the art of war has channeled much of the study of military history and theory into a discussion of technological change and its influence on the art of war. Railroads, tanks, airplanes, submarines, nuclear weapons, cruise missiles, and computers have drastically altered the methods by which humans wage war on each other. The development of increasingly complex weapons systems and support structures has pulled the focus of military history away from the study of human social and cultural interactions.

However, 21<sup>st</sup> Century global terrorism reminds us that war is fundamentally a human phenomenon, and that technology changes only how a war is fought, not the nature of war itself. War is a contest of competing wills and competing ideas. Ultimately, Clausewitz's greatest contribution to the study of war has been his ability to articulate the essential human qualities that define the nature of war through his concept of the trinity.

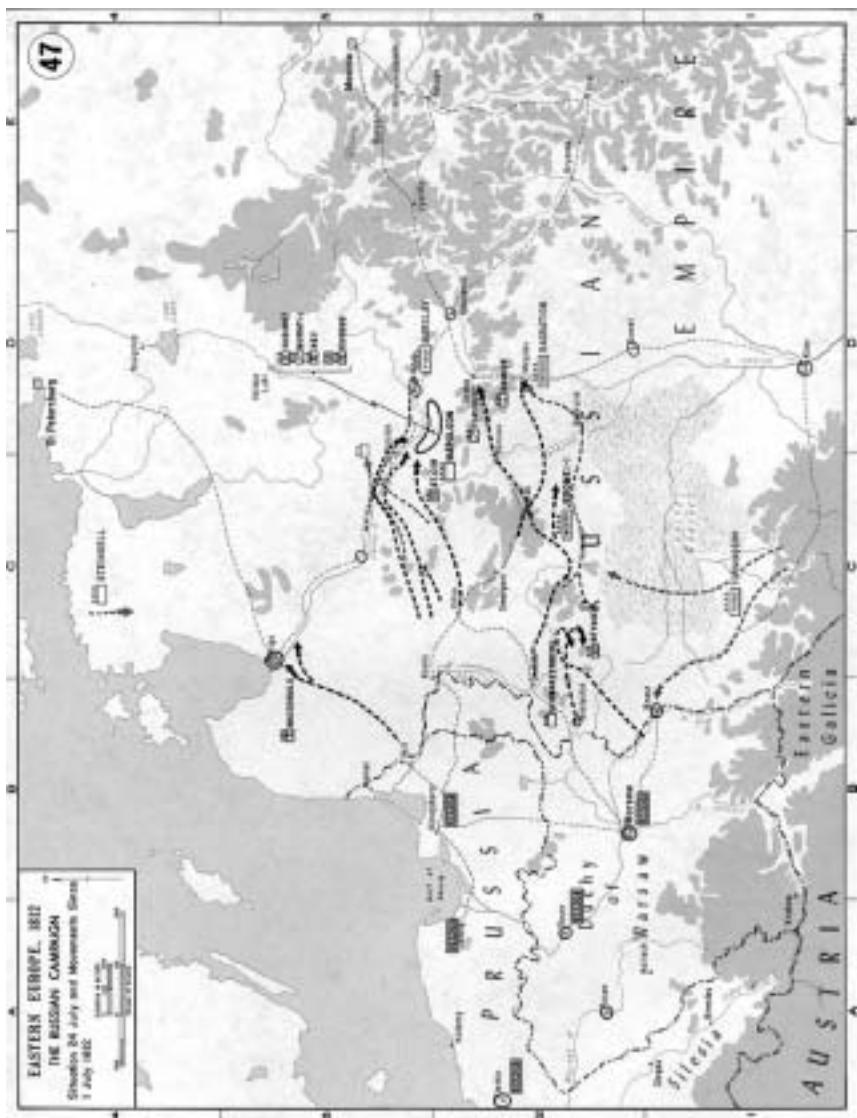
<sup>82</sup>Clausewitz, p. 170.

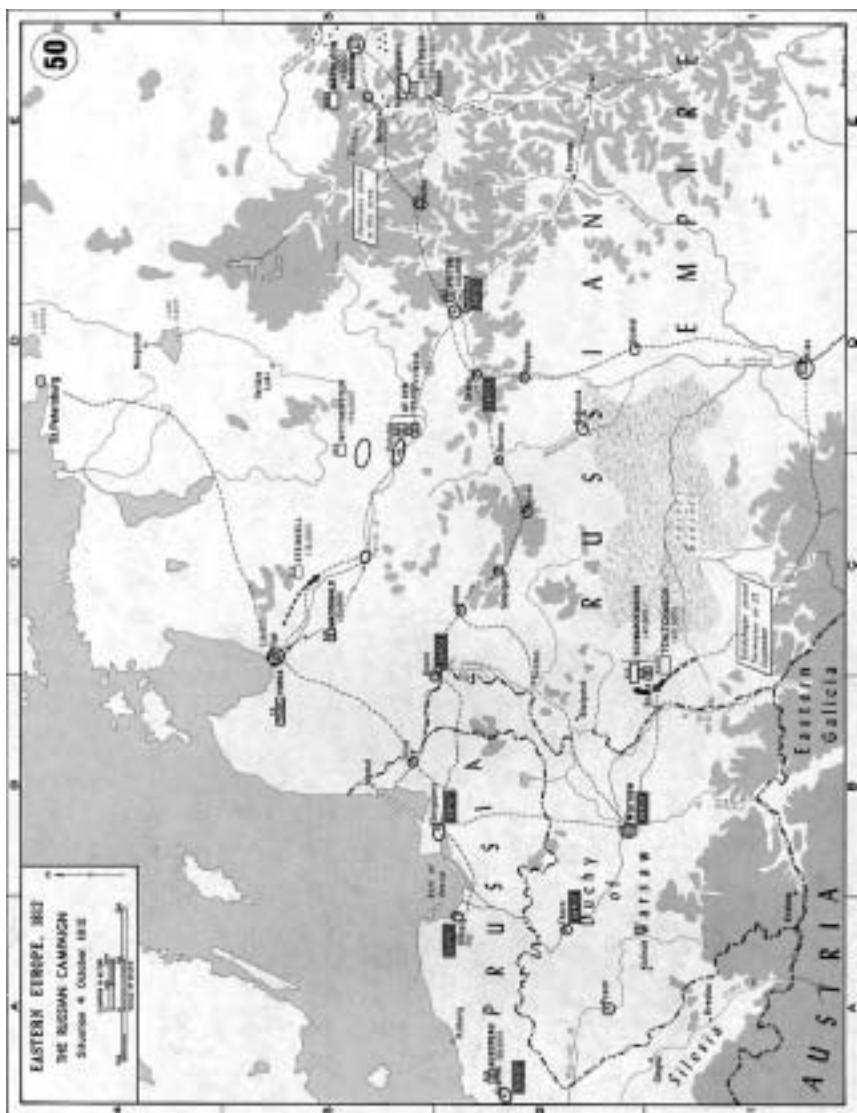
<sup>83</sup>Clausewitz, p. 171.

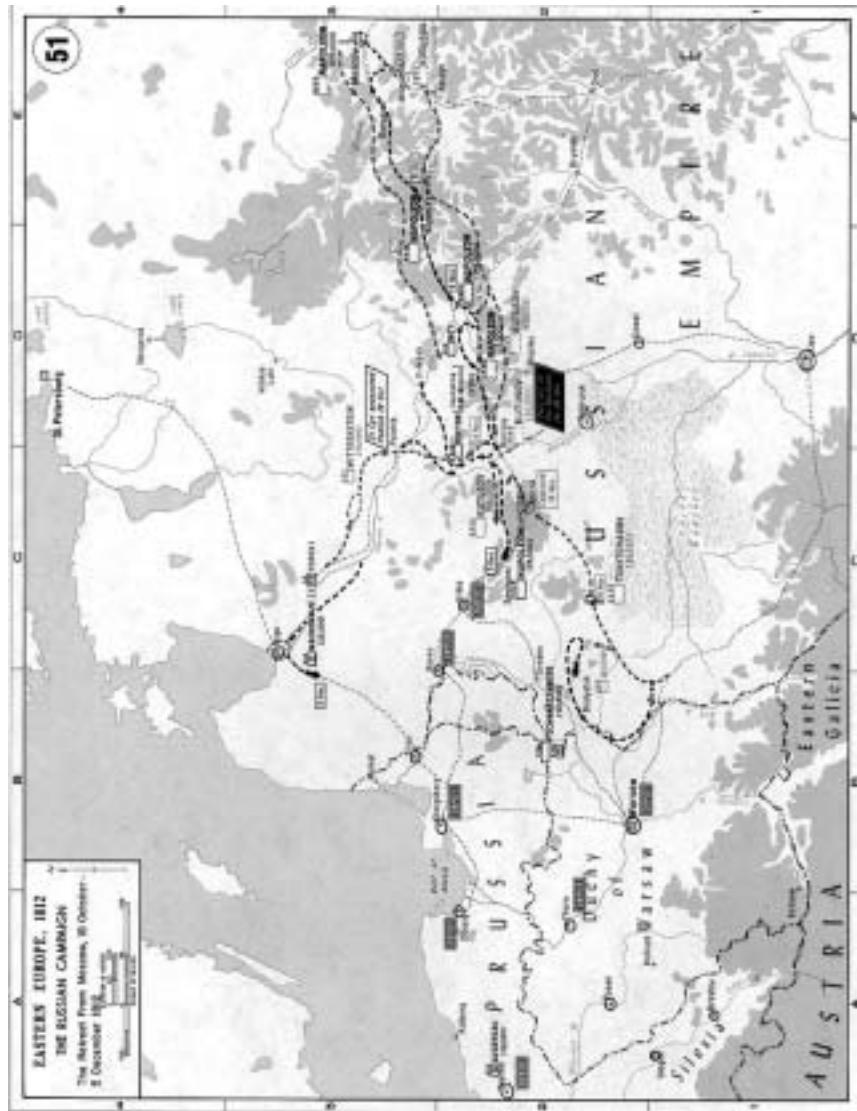
## APPENDIX: MAPS<sup>83</sup>



<sup>83</sup>All maps from the US Military Academy—West Point, Department of History website: <http://www.dean.usma.edu/departments/history/history/web03/atlas/napoleon/napoleon%20war%20war%20index.htm>. 28 March 2005.







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