

# French Revolution & Napoleon: Coalition Wars

## War of the First Coalition: 1792-1797

As events unfolded in France, its neighbors watched with concern and began preparing for war. Aware of this, the French moved first declaring war on Austria on April 20, 1792. Early battles went poorly with French troops fleeing. Austrian and Prussian troops moved into France but were held at Valmy in September. French forces drove into the Austrian Netherlands and won at Jemappes in November. In January, the **revolutionary government executed Louis XVI which led to Spain, Britain, and the Netherlands entering the war**. Enacting mass conscription, the French began a series of campaigns which saw them make territorial gains on all fronts and knocked Spain and Prussia out of the war in 1795. Austria asked for peace two years later.

## War of the Second Coalition: 1798-1802

Despite losses by its allies, Britain remained at war with France and in 1798 built a new coalition with Russia and Austria. As hostilities resumed, French forces began campaigns in Egypt, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. The coalition scored an early victory when the French fleet was beaten at the **Battle of the Nile** in August. In 1799, the Russians enjoyed success in Italy, but left the coalition later that year after a dispute with the British and a defeat at Zurich. The fighting turned in 1800 with French victories at Marengo and Hohenlinden. The latter opened the road to Vienna, forcing the Austrians to sue for peace. In **1802, the British and French signed the Treaty of Amiens ending the war**.

## War of the Third Coalition: 1803-1805

The peace proved short-lived and Britain and France resumed fighting in 1803. **Led by Napoleon Bonaparte, who crowned himself emperor in 1804, the French began planning for an invasion of Britain while London worked to build a new coalition with Russia, Austria, and Sweden**. The anticipated invasion was thwarted when **Vice Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson** defeated a combined Franco-Spanish fleet at **Trafalgar** in October 1805. This success was offset by an Austrian defeat at Ulm. Capturing Vienna, Napoleon crushed a Russo-Austrian army at **Austerlitz** on December 2. Defeated again, Austria left the coalition after signing the Treaty of Pressburg. While French forces dominated on land, the Royal Navy retained control of the seas.

## War of the Fourth Coalition: 1806-1807

Shortly after Austria's departure, a Fourth Coalition was formed with Prussia and Saxony joining the fray. Entering the conflict in August 1806, Prussia moved before Russian forces could mobilize. In September, **Napoleon launched a massive attack against Prussia and destroyed its army at Jena** and Auerstadt the following month. Driving east, Napoleon pushed back Russian forces in Poland and fought a bloody draw at Eylau in February 1807. Resuming campaigning in the spring, he routed the Russians at Friedland. **This defeat led Tsar Alexander I to conclude the Treaties of Tilsit** in July. By these agreements, Prussia and Russia became French allies.

## War of the Fifth Coalition: 1807-1809

In October 1807, **French forces crossed the Pyrenees into Spain to enforce Napoleon's Continental System which blocked trade with the British. This action began what would become the Peninsular War** and was followed by a larger force and Napoleon the next year. While the British worked to aid the Spanish and Portuguese, Austria moved towards war and entered a new Fifth Coalition. Marching against the French in 1809, Austrian forces were ultimately driven back towards Vienna. After a victory over the French at Aspern-Essling in May, they were badly beaten at Wagram in July. Again forced to make peace, Austria signed the punitive Treaty of Schönbrunn. To the west, British and Portuguese troops were pinned in Lisbon.

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## War of the Sixth Coalition: 1812-1813

While the British became increasingly involved in the Peninsular War, **Napoleon began planning a massive invasion of Russia**. Having fallen out in the years since Tilsit, he attacked into Russia in June 1812. **Combating scorched earth tactics, he won a costly victory at Borodino and captured Moscow but was forced to withdraw when winter arrived**. As the French lost most of their men in the retreat, a Sixth Coalition of Britain, Spain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia formed. Rebuilding his forces, Napoleon won at Lutzen, Bautzen, and Dresden, **before being overwhelmed by the allies at Leipzig** in October 1813. **Driven back to France, Napoleon was forced to abdicate on April 6, 1814, and was later exiled to Elba** by the Treaty of Fontainebleau.

## War of the Seventh Coalition: 1815

In the wake of Napoleon's defeat, members of the coalition convened the **Congress of Vienna** to outline the postwar world. **Unhappy in exile, Napoleon escaped and landed in France on March 1, 1815. Marching to Paris, he built an army** as he traveled with soldiers flocking to his banner. Seeking to strike at the coalition armies before they could unite, he engaged the Prussians at Ligny and Quatre Bras on June 16. Two days later, **Napoleon attacked the Duke of Wellington's army at the Battle of Waterloo. Defeated by Wellington and the arrival of the Prussians, Napoleon escaped to Paris where he again was forced to abdicate on June 22. Surrendering to the British, Napoleon was exiled to St. Helena where he died in 1821.**