



**CALTRAIN' 25**

**HISTORICAL CRISIS CABINET**

**STUDY GUIDE**

**RUSSIAN EMPIRE**

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## **1. Letter from Secretary General**

Esteemed Participants,

As the Co-Secretary-Generals of Cağaloğlu Model United Nations, it is our distinct honor to welcome you all to the 2nd edition of CALTRAIN, which will take place on December 6th and 7th, 2025. It is with great pleasure that we present the study guide for HCC: Russian Empire, which aims to equip you with the essential knowledge and context for the upcoming two days. After months of preparation and dedicated effort, we are proud to say that we are now just one step away from CALTRAIN 2025. We hope that, by reading this guide, you will feel as ready and enthusiastic as we are. Without a doubt, this conference would not be possible without the contributions of our remarkable academic team. We are extending our gratitude to our Head of Academy, Azra Kayar; our Heads of Crisis, Ahmet Taha Özkul and his deputy Elif Köse; our devoted and hardworking team members; and our motivated trainees. Their commitment and passion have brought this vision to life and elevated CALMUN's academic quality to its peak. Furthermore, I would also like to extend my best wishes to all delegates participating in CALTRAIN 2025. Whether this is your first conference or not, we thank each of you for taking a step forward and joining us. We truly hope that CALTRAIN will be a special experience that you will remember warmly in the future. From our perspective, MUN is about motivation, enjoyment, meaningful discussion, and connection. We wish each delegate an inspiring, engaging, and memorable experience.

Warm regards,

Meryem Sultan Çok, Akay Engin

Co-Secretary-Generals of CALTRAIN'25

## 2. Glossary

**betrayal:** cruel or dishonest behaviour towards someone who trusts you

**blockade:** the situation in which a country or place is surrounded by soldiers or ships to stop people or goods from going in or out

**buffer zone:** an area created to separate two countries that are fighting

**campaign:** a planned group of especially political, business, or military activities that are intended to achieve a particular aim

**casualty:** a soldier who is killed, wounded, captured, or goes missing during a conflict

**client state:** a country that gets support and protection from another larger and more powerful country

**continental:** relating to Europe, but not Britain

**duchy:** the land owned by a duke or duchess

**embargo:** an order to temporarily stop something, especially trading or giving information

**hegemony:** (especially of countries) the position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others

**impose:** to officially force a rule, tax, punishment, etc. to be obeyed or received

**logistics:** the planning and organization of supplying an army with food, weapons, transport, and other essential materials

**maritime:** connected with human activity at sea

**merchant:** a person whose job is to buy and sell products in large amounts, especially by trading with other countries

**milestone:** an important event in the history or development of something or someone

**peasantry:** especially in the past, all the people who were peasants

**rivalry:** a competitive or hostile relationship between two states, groups, or individuals who seek to gain advantage or dominance over each other

**supply:** the resources such as food, ammunition, and equipment that needs to support an army or population

**tariff:** a tax placed on goods that are imported or exported, usually to protect domestic industries or regulate trade

**treaty:** two or more states sign a formal, legally binding agreement that defines their rights, responsibilities, or relations

### **3. Introduction to the Agenda Item**

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Russian Empire stood as one of the largest and most influential powers in Europe and protected its imperial authority while the rest of the continent experienced political changes. The French Revolution and the rapid rise of Napoleon Bonaparte deeply concerned St. Petersburg because France's unstable transformation threatened to reshape the balance of political power across Europe.

Although the rise of Napoleon was firstly a domestic French issue, his military expansion soon created direct strategic challenges for Russia and whole Europe. Napoleon defeated Austria and Prussia and expanded French influence toward the east and moved closer to territories that St. Petersburg considered essential for Russian security.

The tension between Russia and France reached its peak in the War of the Fourth Coalition(1806). Despite Russia's strong resistance, heavy losses forced Tsar Alexander I to reach an agreement about truce. This resulted in the signing of the Treaties of Tilsit in 1807, France made peace with Russia, which agreed to join the Continental System. This agreement temporarily ended hostilities but placed Russia in a diplomatically and economically over controlled position.

One of the most heavy obligations of Tilsit was forcing Russia to participate in the Continental Blockade. After realizing that he would not directly defeat the British navy, Napoleon found a solution by imposing a massive embargo on Britain and forcing other European countries to do the same. However the Russian economy was heavily dependent on maritime trade, particularly the export of grain, timber, hemp, and tar, which were essential for European navies. British manufactured goods were also essential to Russian merchants and the nobility. The implementation of the blockade weakened the Russian economy, led to a severe economic downturn, inflation and budget deficit, also negatively impacted the nobility, merchants, the state treasury and port cities.

Meanwhile, Russia was facing a growing threat along its western borders. The creation of the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807 placed a French-dominated Polish state directly on Russia's border. For St. Petersburg, the possibility of a reestablished Poland was extremely dangerous. It was seen as a rebirth of Poland's lost independence, therefore it was providing a source of hope for Polish nationalists. It threatened the territories Russia had gained from the partitioning of Poland. Napoleon's decision to strengthen this duchy militarily increased



Russian fears that he intended to use Poland as a base for future operations against Russia. Also, Napoleon's marriage to Marie Louise, who was the daughter of the Austrian Emperor, brought Austria closer to France and isolated Russia more in continental politics.

By 1810, the alliance that was created by Tilsit had become unsustainable. Alexander I softened the blockade and reopened trade with Britain which was an act that was a violation of their agreement. Eventually, the conflict became unavoidable. Napoleon gathered together one of the largest armies in European history and reinforced the Duchy of Warsaw as a forward base. At the same time, Russia strengthened defensive preparations, expanded its armies, and repositioned troops along its western borders. On June 24th, 1812, Napoleon crossed the Niemen River with his Grand Army and officially started one of the largest military campaigns in history.

#### **4. Coalition Wars**

After the French Revolution began, the European states realized that the revolution became a more aggressive and serious issue day by day. Even though the revolution was an internal struggle for liberation, European states were worried that the idea of a revolution might spread to their own countries. Their concerns led them to unite among themselves and form a coalition to conclude the French Revolution and restore the monarchy. Thus the first coalition, which included the Archduchy of Austria, Kingdom of Prussia, Great Britain, Spanish Empire, Dutch Republic and Kingdom of Sardinia, launched an attack against the Republic of France. The Republic of France succeeded on the Italian front through Napoleon's clever tactics and strategy.

After Napoleon became the first consul of France in 1799, he took action against the second coalition which was formed by the union of Great Britain, the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Archduchy of Austria, Portugal, and Napoli. Even though both sides were powerful, the Second Coalition War concluded with the victory of France and by the Luneville Agreement which was signed in 1801, European states were forced to acknowledge France's hegemony in Europe.

In 1804, after Napoleon declared himself emperor, European states were concerned that Napoleon would take control of all of Europe. Therefore Great Britain, the Austrian Empire, the Russian Empire, Sweden, and the Kingdom of Sicily formed the third coalition against the French Empire. Even though Napoleon's main goal was to defeat Great Britain decisively, he could not reach his goal, and the French navy was defeated by Great Britain. After this defeat, Napoleon focused on land battles against the Third Coalition and advanced his troops towards the Austrian Empire. In 1805, Napoleon's greatest victory came at the Battle of Austerlitz which is also known as the Battle of Three Emperors. The French army decisively defeated the combined forces of Austria and Russia despite being outnumbered. As a result, the Austrian Empire had to withdraw and in 1805 the Treaty of Pressburg, which confirmed France's hegemony over Europe once again, was signed between the French Empire and the Austrian Empire.

In 1806 the fourth coalition was formed by the Kingdom of Prussia, the Russian Empire, Saxony, Sweden and Great Britain against the French Empire. The French army defeated the Prussian and Russian forces in several wars and as a result of these battles, on 7 July, 1807, the First Treaty of Tilsit was signed between the Russian and French Empire. One of the most important results of this treaty is the Russian Empire's acceptance of the Continental Blockade. Since the British economy is heavily dependent on maritime trade, Napoleon aimed to economically damage Britain by cutting off its trade with continental Europe. After the First Treaty of Tilsit, the Russian Empire allied with the French Empire and acknowledged the continental blockade against Great Britain along with the other European states.

On July 9, 1807, the Second Treaty of Tilsit was signed between the Kingdom of Prussia and the French Empire. However, the consequences of the second treaty were more severe than the First Treaty of Tilsit. The Kingdom of Prussia lost half of its territory with the Second Treaty of Tilsit and the French Empire established client states on these territories such as the Duchy of Warsaw. As it is understood, the French Empire became an unstoppable power after it allied with the Russian Empire and established client states near the Russian border. However, in time these client states would pose a major threat to the Russian Empire and betrayals would show up between the two states.

After Russia's defeats at Austerlitz (1805) and Friedland (1807), the empire realized that the army required urgent modernization, financial status tightened under wartime pressure, and Tsar Alexander I found himself politically and psychologically cornered by one after the other failures. Therefore, the Treaty of Tilsit became unavoidable for Russia. With reasons such as Prussia collapsing, Austria defeated, and France dominating continental Europe, Russia started to worry of total diplomatic isolation. In the end, Alexander had no choice but to sign the Treaty of Tilsit, therefore Russia entered a period of forced alignment with France. Russia suffered economically under the Continental System and watched as the Duchy of Warsaw emerged as a potential base for Polish revival on its western frontier. The empire's prestige has weakened also with the weakening of Austria and Prussia disadvantaged Russia of traditional partners and increased its diplomatic isolation.

## **5. Causes of Tension Between Russia and France**

### **a. The Continental System**

Russia's forced involvement in Napoleon's Continental System, an economic blockade intended to harm and isolate Great Britain, was one of the elements that increased tensions between the two empires. Alexander I was forced to join this blockade at Tilsit, but this policy was structurally incompatible with the Russian economy. Russia was largely dependent on exporting raw materials to British markets, including iron, grain, hemp, and naval supplies. Both the merchant elite and the agricultural nobility benefited from these exports, which generated significant foreign exchange. Russia's export earnings decreased after the blockade became in effect. Local industries suffered, ports stagnated, and prices increased. The Tsar was under pressure to leave the French alliance from the nobility, whose wealth was dependent on agricultural exports.

Despite the continental blockade, Alexander I rebuilt trade with England by 1810 through a variety of smuggling and customs reforms. Napoleon saw these actions as open threats to his economic war and purposeful violations of Tilsit.

### **b. The Polish Question and the Duchy of Warsaw**

Napoleon's choice to establish the Duchy of Warsaw following the Treaty of Tilsit became one of Russia's biggest geopolitical concerns. Even though it was officially a French client state, its symbolic significance was much higher because it signified the resuscitation of a Polish political entity that had been eliminated only a decade before. The Polish people had long been seen by Russian rulers as rebellious, unstable, and influenced by the West. Napoleon could eventually try to reestablish Poland's pre-partition borders, which stretched far into areas that Russia now controlled, given the resurgence of a Polish state under French protection. Meanwhile, the Poles lived in the hope that the duchy would become a kingdom.

The French military presence was essentially brought to the very edge of Russian territory by the Duchy of Warsaw, which was located at Russia's western border. In the scenario that conflicts broke out between Paris and St. Petersburg, Polish soldiers trained by French officers produced a well-armed force that could act as a forward base. Therefore, the Polish Question was a direct military threat that convinced many Russian officials that Napoleon could not be trusted, in addition to being an issue of national identity and historical memory.

### **c. Imperial Ambitions in Europe**

The last source of conflict was the struggle for supremacy in Europe. The balance of power was drastically changed by Napoleon's victories and the restructuring of Central Europe. Russia became more and more isolated as a result of this quick transformation. Napoleon's growing network of satellite states overshadowed Alexander I. Each French victory limited Alexander's capacity to independently influence European affairs and decreased Russia's diplomatic influence. By 1811, both empires were getting ready for a conflict that was becoming more and more inevitable as the diplomatic front of cooperation had completely fallen apart.

## **6. The Course of the War**

In 1812, Napoleon moved the Grande Armée from France and continued eastward through Germany and Poland. At first, the army seemed highly motivated, well-organized, and powerful. But the army's multinational structure, the intense summer heat, illnesses, and food and water shortages became apparent as the troops got closer to the Russian border. Napoleon intended to force a swift, intense battle when the Russian army crossed the Niemen River and

entered Russian territory at the end of June, but the Russian army slowly withdrew, destroying infrastructure and stores to slow the advance. This "scorched earth" strategy left the attacking army starving, worn out, and short on supplies as the retreating side destroyed fields, livestock, depots, bridges, and provisions. As a result, Napoleon's army made progress but received heavy casualties during the initial weeks.

This scorched earth policy made the French advance in July and August even worse; the army was vulnerable due to long supply lines, damaged roads, and growing food scarcity. Napoleon was hoping to finally force the Russian forces into a significant battle close to Smolensk. Despite intense fighting for Smolensk, the Russian army chose to completely retreat. Napoleon had to choose to turn east toward Moscow with every step of the Russian retreat.

- **Battle of Smolensk (1812)**

When Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, he had a massive army consisting of approximately half a million soldiers from various nations. Even though the French army outnumbered the Russian army, the Russians gained time and weakened the French army by retreating deeper into Russia instead of engaging in a pitched battle. The French army pursued the Russian army as far as Smolensk, but the Russians burned the areas they passed through during their retreat. Therefore, it became impossible for the French army to obtain supplies from the territories they had captured. The Russians' retreat strategy also forced the French army to move away from its supply lines.

Napoleon advanced his army toward Smolensk in the hope that the Russians would halt their retreat and defend the city, since it played a significant strategic role on the way to reaching Moscow and taking control of the whole country. Two French columns, consisting of Michel Ney's infantry and Joachim Murat's cavalry units, crossed the Dniester River at night without facing any major threat except for Cossack forays. Through this forced march, they came within 30 miles of Smolensk, encountering only minor resistance along the way. When Napoleon reached Smolensk, the French army had approximately 120,000 soldiers while the Russian army was defending the city with 80,000 soldiers. Although Napoleon expected to capture Smolensk rapidly and then advance toward Moscow, the strong Russian resistance

delayed the capture of the city. French artillery caused significant damage to the city walls, and Russian resistance started to weaken. Even though the French army captured Smolensk with heavy attacks, the city was in a terrible state when the Russians began to retreat again. The entire city had been destroyed by fire therefore, it became impossible for the French army to obtain supplies from the region.

Although the French army finally conquered Smolensk, its arrival in Moscow was delayed and since the Russian troops decided to retreat, the Russians did not suffer heavy losses, contrary to Napoleon's expectations. The French army also became increasingly distant from its supply lines while they were trying to catch up with the enemy.

## **7. Cabinet Members**

### **Tsar Alexander I**



Tsar Alexander I was born in Winter Palace, in Russia on 23 December, 1777. Alexander took the throne after his father was murdered in 1801. He played a significant role in the Napoleonic Wars. A grandson of Peter the Great, Alexander attempted to institute liberal reforms, but his efforts, such as the abolition of serfdom, were aborted. He repelled Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 and participated in peace negotiations at the Congress of Vienna as leader of the coalition powers in Europe. His reign contributed to the modernization of Russia and European diplomacy.

### **Mikhail Andreas Barclay de Tolly**



Prince Michael Andreas Barclay de Tolly was a Russian Field Marshal of a Baltic German family, born in Livonia (modern Latvia). He was a significant military leader during the Napoleonic Wars. He started his career in the Russian army at age 14, he fought in conflicts like the Russo-Turkish War and the Polish Uprising therefore earned a reputation for his tactical brilliance and bravery. As commander-in-chief during Napoleon's

invasion of Russia, he started the "scorched earth" strategy that weakened the French force and contributed to their retreat from Moscow. He later led Russian troops in major battles such as Bautzen and Leipzig. Moreover, he reformed the army as Minister of War.

### **Mikhail Kutuzov**



Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov is known as one of Russia's most well known military commanders. He is particularly known for his resistance to the French invasion of 1812 during the Napoleonic Wars. He gained experience in wars against the Ottoman Empire in his youth then led the Russian army at the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805 and was later appointed commander-in-chief of Napoleon's Russian campaign. Despite being wounded at Borodino, he contributed to Napoleon's defeat with "scorched earth" tactics. This victory made him a national hero.

### **Pyotr Bagration**



Pyotr Bagration was a Russian general and a prince of Georgian origin. He was born into a noble family in the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, then he joined the Russian Imperial Army at a young age and proved himself in campaigns against the Ottoman Empire and Persia. As a significant commander in the Patriotic War of 1812 against Napoleon's invasion, he led the Russian left wing at the Battle of Borodino, where his forces repelled French attacks but suffered heavy casualties. Bagration was mortally wounded during the battle and died shortly after.

### **Alexander Balashov**



Alexander Dmitrievich Balashov was a Russian statesman, diplomat, and general who played a significant role in the Napoleonic Wars and Russian imperial administration. He was born into a noble family and he served as an adjutant to Emperor Paul I. Later he appointed governor general of several provinces under Alexander I. During Napoleon's invasion of Russia, Balashov was sent as a special envoy to negotiate with the French emperor in order to deliver a defiant message from Tsar Alexander I that rejected peace terms. He later commanded troops in the campaign and continued in military and diplomatic roles such as ambassador to France after the war.

### **Aleksey Andreyevich Arakcheyev**



Aleksey Andreyevich Arakcheyev was a Russian count and general who made important reforms in Russia's military reforms after the Napoleonic Wars. He was also in charge of the modernization of the army as Alexander I's Minister of War. He was known for his harsh discipline and the system of military colonies, which forced peasants to work in military labor camps and that led to social unrest and him being viewed as an oppressive ruler by the population. During the Patriotic War of 1812, he oversaw recruitment and management of army supplies. Through his service, Arakcheyev was known for his meticulous following of the tsar's will.



## **Pavel Vasilyevich Chichagov**



Pavel Vasilyevich Chichagov was one of the leading admirals of the Russian Empire who played a key role in many wars, including the Napoleonic Wars. In 1807, he was appointed Minister of the Navy and contributed to the modernization of the Russian navy. In 1812, during Napoleon's invasion of Russia, he was appointed commander of the Baltic Fleet in order to conduct operations across the Baltic Sea to block the retreat of the French army. However, in November 1812, he was accused of allowing Napoleon to escape across the Berezina River and dismissed from the army. He remained a member of the State Council until 1834 and died in 1849.

## **Fyodor Vasilyevich Rostopchin**



Fyodor Vasilyevich Rostopchin was a Russian count, statesman, and infantry general. He served as governor of Moscow in 1812 during the Napoleonic Wars. He conducted propaganda in the city before the French invasion and motivated the population and encouraged resistance against Napoleon's army. He is a controversial figure due to allegations that he set fire to large parts of Moscow during the evacuation; some historians claim he ordered this, while others maintain the fire was accidental. He later served as a diplomat and died in 1826.

## Peter Wittgenstein



Peter Wittgenstein was a prince and a very successful field marshal in the Imperial Russian Army during the Napoleonic Wars. In the War of 1812, he commanded the right wing of the Russian Army in the First and Second Battles of Polotsk, as well as at Chashniki and Smolyany. His resistance, particularly in the battles around Klyastitsy and Polotsk, prevented Napoleon from advancing on Petersburg, which earned him the nickname "Saviour of Saint-Petersburg" in Russia.

## 8. Resources and Links for Further Research

<https://www.britannica.com/event/French-invasion-of-Russia>

[https://www.worldhistory.org/Napoleon's\\_Invasion\\_of\\_Russia/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Napoleon's_Invasion_of_Russia/)

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/invasion-of-russia/>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPN1gx4z\\_Hw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPN1gx4z_Hw)

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Duchy-of-Warsaw>

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/the-continental-system/>

[https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/napoleon-bonapartes-russian-campaign-the-patriotic-war-of-1812/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/napoleon-bonapartes-russian-campaign-the-patriotic-war-of-1812/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

