

Q: What was continental system? Why it was introduced after 1806? How did it fail?

# Continental System of Napoleonic Era

Give numbering to headings

Continental system was introduced by Napoleon on November 21, 1806 to ensure European boycott with British commerce. This <sup>economic</sup> system was aimed at damaging British economy and destroying its capacity to wage war against Napoleonic regime. According to Adam Zamoycki<sup>ee</sup> "Continental system was the weapon of a man driven to extremes by his obsession with Britain." (Napoleon: A Life, 2018)

You did not discuss "What was the continental system" part of the question. You discussed the why part, but not the "what" part.

## Explicating the Background behind Introduction of Continental System after 1806

→ Rise of France as a Major Victorious state in Europe:

Napoleon introduced Continental system after 1806 mainly due to rise of France as a major victorious state in Europe <sup>before 1806</sup>. Its one of the best example is of Italian Campaign 1796 in which.



France fought a series of battles against Sardans and Austrians in 1796 and remained victorious. France also acquired territorial gains after these victories and by signing Treaty of Campo Formio in October 1797.

## → Series of Victories of France against Austria

Continental System was introduced after 1806 due to series of victories gained by France against Austria before 1806. Battle of Marengo and Hohenlinden fought in 1800 are best examples of French victories, after which Treaty of Luneville was signed in 1801. Moreover, France also remained victorious against combined armies of Russia and Austria in Battle of Austerlitz in 1805.

## → Rise of France as a Major Countering Force against Great Britain

France introduced Continental System after 1806 mainly due to rise of France as a major countering force against Great Britain before 1806. Battle of Pyramids of 1798 is a major event in this regard. French army fought against Malmuk forces and became victorious in acquiring control over Egypt. This was intolerable for British as it

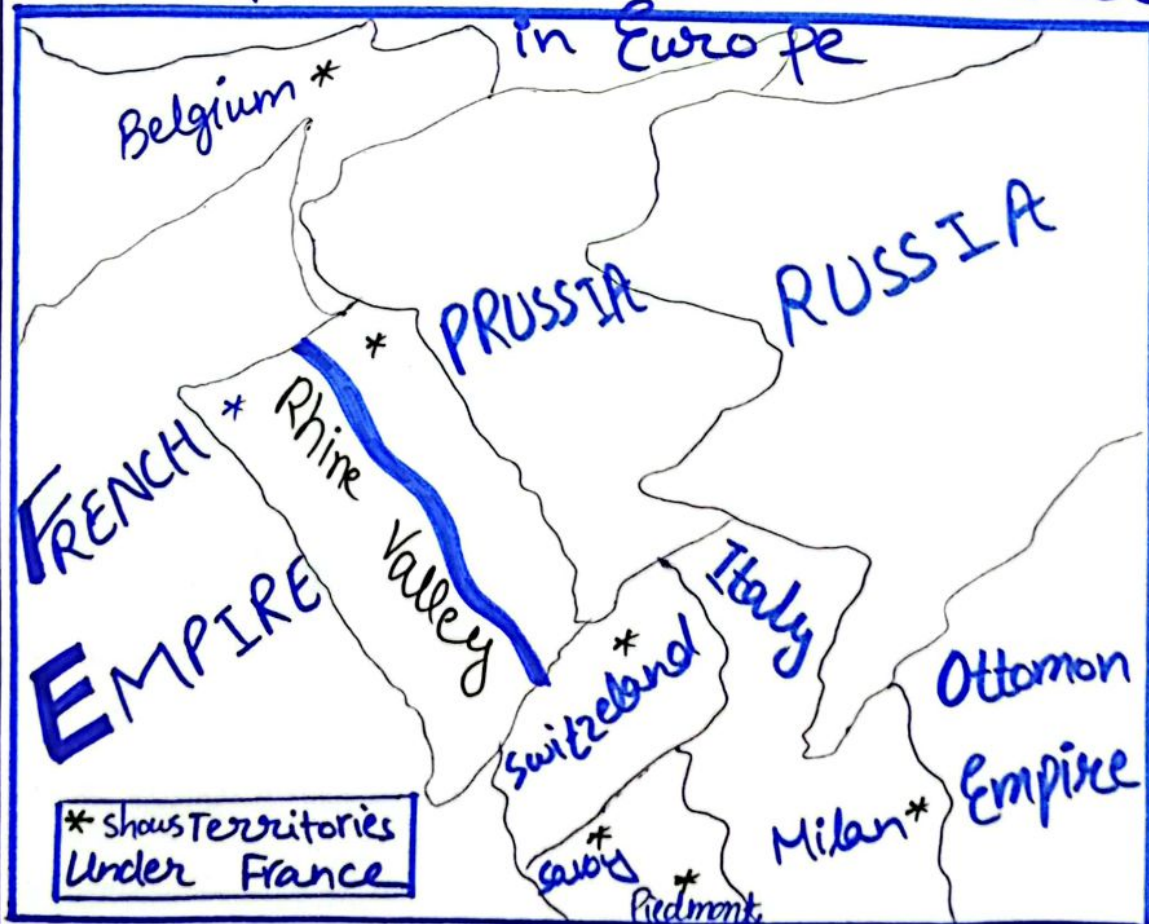


was a threat to British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean.

## → Growing Rivalry between France and Great Britain

One of the main reasons that contributed to introduction of continental system after 1806 was growing rivalry between France and Great Britain before 1806. **Battle of Nile in 1798** and **Battle of Trafalgar in 1800** were major events in this regard, in which naval engagement was won by British Royal navy to disrupt Napoleon's plans in the Mediterranean. Due to this tussle between two great powers before 1806, continental system was introduced on November 21, 1806.

## Rise of France as a Great Power in Europe





# Failure of Continental System

Napoleon's continental system of 1806 failed due to numerous reasons, some of which are enlisted below.

## → Poor Administration of Napoleon:

Poor administration of Napoleon in continental system led to failure of this economic system because smuggling allowed British goods to enter in continental markets, thus circumventing Napoleon's intended economic isolation of Britain. This smuggling disrupted the balance of trade and goods in continental markets.

## → Shortages of Goods in Europe:

Due to disruption of trade in Europe after continental system there were shortages of goods in Europe that led to failure of continental system. In response to European boycott of British commerce, Britain imposed an efficient blockade on European coast to block Latin America's and West Indies market for Europe. So, there were shortages of coffee, tea, sugar and cotton in Europe.

## → Irrational Policy of Napoleon:

Napoleon's policy in continental system was irrational as his approach was "France first approach." His economic administration was France centric. This led to failure of continental system. If the whole Europe was seen



as a single entity and France was not given the whole importance in development of industry and economic progress, Continental system could have worked.

Rise of nationalism  
Installing outsiders on  
conquered lands  
Naval supremacy of  
England

### → Obsession of Napoleon with Britain:

The key reason for introduction of Continental system was obsession of Napoleon with Britain and it was the same reason that led to its failure. Because while introducing this system Napoleon ignored the fact that Britain was ahead of France in industrial revolution and it was impossible for France to replace the British industry. Moreover, during this period British national income rose from 14 million pounds to 335 million pounds, while rest of Europe was suffering with shortages of goods.

### → Economic Recessions in Europe:

Continental system failed due to economic recessions in European countries after this economic system. There were cessation of economic activities, disruption of trade, poverty, chronic unemployment and shortages of goods in Europe due to irrational policies of Napoleon in this economic system. These economic recessions of Europe ultimately led to failure of Continental system.



## → Strain on French resources:

For implementation of continental system, France needed resources like naval patrol, custom officials and administrative infrastructure.

This strained French resources and distorted Napoleon's attention from other important issues like military campaigns and domestic governance.

This ultimately led to failure of continental system.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Napoleon introduced continental system mainly to counter British economy and reducing its strength to wage war against France. But it had reverse repercussions as this system had strengthened British economy. According to Andrew Roberts, Napoleon's Continental system was a clumsy instrument of economic warfare. It hit Britain more effectively than France's supposed allies, whose economic interests were damaged rather than enhanced by it.