Great Britain and the Russian Fleet, 1769–70

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THE successful transfer of a considerable Russian naval force from the Baltic to the Eastern Mediterranean by a voyage round the whole of Western Europe in the years 1769–70, followed by the annihilation of the Turkish fleet at Chesme on the coast of Asia Minor on 5–7 July 1770, is one of the most spectacular historical events of the 18th century. It revealed to an astonished Europe for the first time, at least since the days of Peter I, the full potentialities of Russia as a factor in the state-system of the Continent and, as the greatest modern historian of Anglo-Russian relations in the 18th century has pointed out, is symbolic of the development of new forces in European history and politics.[1] This remarkable achievement would have been impossible without the help, active as well as passive, of the British government and of many individual British subjects.

The fleet to which Catherine II fell heir after the revolution of 1762 was poor in discipline, training, and morale, unskilful in manœuvre, and badly administered and equipped.[2] From the first months of her reign the empress had attempted to raise its standards and increase its efficiency with British help.[3] Russian officers were sent to England for training and British officers, unemployed after the Peace of Paris, were recruited for the Russian navy. The most notable of these was a Scot, Samuel Greig, who entered the Russian service in 1764 and played a considerable part in the events to be described.

There were several reasons why Britain should look with favour on the maritime enterprise of the Russians and be willing to encourage it. In the first place, Russia was the traditional enemy of France and, by implication, of the Bourbon powers in general. After the diplomatic revolution of 1756 she was the only great continental power which seemed reliably anti-French and as such had a strong claim to any reasonable measure of technical or other assistance which Britain could give her, particularly in view of the fact that from the beginning of Catherine's reign negotiations had been proceeding,

[1] 'Eines der grossen symbolischen Ereignisse der Staatengeschichte . . . ein erstes Zeichen, dass eine neue Verflechtung sich anbahnte.' Dietrich Gerhard, *England und der Aufsteig Russlands*, Munich–Berlin, 1933, p. 23.

[2] Catherine II to Panin, 19 June 1765, *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva*, X, pp. 23, 25. Macartney to Grafton, 25 March 1766, *ibid.*, XII, pp. 253–4.

[3] Vorontsov to Halifax, 20 March 1763, S.P. 100/54. On the part played by British officers in the development of the Russian navy during the reign of Catherine II see F. T. Jane, *The Imperial Russian Navy, its Past, Present and Future*, London, 1904, Appendix C, pp. 715–24.

slowly but on the whole amicably, for an Anglo-Russian treaty of alliance. Indeed, Lord Cathcart, British ambassador in St Petersburg, declared on the outbreak of war in 1768 that 'My instructions, lead me to consider Russia, even before a Treaty, as a State with whom our Union is indissoluble'.[4] Catherine II had, moreover, recently provided proof of her anti-French proclivities by the encouragement and offers of help which she had given to Pasquale Paoli, the leader of the Corsican insurgents, during his struggle against France in 1768–9.[5] No argument a Russian diplomat could use carried more weight with the British government than the assertion that any help or support given to Russia was a blow at French influence in Europe. 'It is certain that Russia is the only power that can at present balance the protestant (*sic*) scale against the preponderating weight of the two great houses of Bourbon and Austria; to which now may be added Sweden, and possibly Portugal,' said the *Annual Register* in 1769, and it voiced an opinion widespread in Great Britain.

Secondly, Britain and Russia were joined by the strongest possible economic bonds. The reliance of Britain on naval stores from Russia for the maintenance of her maritime strength in the 18th century is too well known and has been too thoroughly discussed by Gerhard, Albion, Reading and others to need treatment here. Since however British support of Russia was bound in this instance to have, or appear to have, a certain flavour of hostility to Turkey, it may be worth while to emphasise that British trade with Russia was far greater in volume and value than that carried on with the Levant. The British Levant trade had been in decline since about 1730, and the foreign commerce of the Ottoman Empire was now completely dominated by France, who occupied in the Eastern Mediterranean a position comparable to that of Britain in the Baltic. An official French estimate of 1783 was that the total foreign trade of the Ottoman Empire, both imports and exports, amounted to 110 million livres, of which trade with France accounted for 60 million.[6] On the other hand, in the last third of the century, no more than twenty-

[4] Cathcart to Weymouth, 12 November 1768, No. 28, S.P. 91/79.

[5] For her attitude to the Corsicans, see Count Panin to Maruzzi (Russian minister in Venice), 31 May 1769 and 14 June 1769, *Sbornik* LXXXVII, pp. 436–8, 445–6. Sabatier de Cabres (French minister in St Petersburg) to Choiseul, 13 October 1769, *Sbornik* CXLIII, p. 43. Cathcart to Weymouth, 18 October 1768 (not numbered) and 23 October 1768, No. 22, S.P. 91/79. Catherine borrowed from Cathcart a copy of Boswell's *Account of Corsica* and had his *Memoirs of Pasquale Paoli* translated into French for her to read. (Cathcart to Rochford, 17 March 1769, No. 22, S.P. 91/80.)

[6] Ye. V. Tarlé, *Chesmenskiy boy i pervaya russkaya ekspeditsiya v Arkhipelag, 1769–1774*, Moscow, 1945, p. 7. For other statistics on the increase of the French Levant trade in the second half of the century see A. M. Arnould, *De la balance du commerce de la France* (three vols.), Paris, 1791, vol. I, pp. 254–6, and vol. III, tableau No. 10; Paul Masson, *Histoire du commerce français dans le Levant au XVIII^me siècle*, Paris, 1911, pp. 412–16; J. Peuchet, *Dictionnaire universel de la géographie commerçante* (five vols.), Paris, 1799–1800, vol. V, pp. 693–6.

seven British ships went to the Levant in any one year, against an average of 600–700 to Russia.[7]

Finally, British policy was influenced by the interesting though misguided idea that the maritime expansion of Russia would tend to make her more rather than less dependent on British support and accessible to British influence,[8] since, by striving to become an important naval power, she would be embarking on a course which she could not abandon without humiliation and could not follow successfully without British help. It was also believed that any commercial privileges or concessions she extorted from Turkey at the end of a successful war would inevitably be exploited by British rather than by Russian merchants, on the analogy of the position in the Baltic, because of the Russian lack of mercantile skill and backwardness in manufactures.[9] Both these beliefs rested, in the last resort, on a complete underestimate of the capacities of the Russians and of their ruler, but until events proved their falsity they were of considerable importance. In particular, a successful Russian war against Turkey promised to be the means of establishing British commercial supremacy in the Black Sea[10] and preventing that area from falling, like the Levant proper, under the commercial sway of France—a development which the energy of the French government and merchants and the supineness of the Levant Company seemed to threaten.[11] It even seemed possible, and not only to Englishmen, that French trade in the Eastern Mediterranean as a whole might be seriously menaced by a Russian victory.[12]

[7] Gerhard, *op. cit.*, p. 99. In the early 1770's the number of British ships clearing for the Levant was even lower, varying between six in 1771 and eighteen in 1774. *Hints about the Turkey Trade*, B.M. Add. MSS. 38348, f. 100. The figures given in the Board of Trade papers (B.T. 6/73) for ships arriving in Britain from the Levant during this period are of the same order of magnitude.

[8] Cathcart to Rochford, 23 September 1769, No. 79, S.P. 91/82.

[9] On this point, see the opinion of the French diplomat Favier in Louis Philippe de Ségur, *La politique de tous les cabinets de l'Europe pendant les règnes de Louis XV et Louis XVI* (three vols.), Paris, 1801, vol. I, pp. 376–9.

[10] Cathcart to Rochford, 10 May 1769, No. 44, Enclosure II, S.P. 91/81: 'It seems as if Great Britain, especially as the ally of Russia and guarantee (*sic*) of the treaty, would profit by all the advantages Russia might obtain, and acquire a weight at Constantinople greatly superior to what she ever had.' It is interesting to note that in 1783, at a time of growing Franco-Russian *rapprochement*, a French diplomat argued that Russian expansion in the Black Sea was to be encouraged, because 'elle ne peut rien gagner qu'elle ne partage avec la France'. L. Pingaud, *Choiseul-Gouffier: la France en Orient sous Louis XVI*, Paris 1887, pp. 64–5.

[11] France had already begun to show interest in the commercial possibilities of the Black Sea area, and small trading establishments had been set up in the Crimea before the outbreak of war in 1768. Masson, *op. cit.*, pp. 644–6; Pingaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16; Henri Déhérain, *Pierre Ruffin, orientaliste et diplomate* (two vols.), Paris, 1929–30, vol. I, pp. 12–26; N. E. Kleeman, *Voyage . . . dans le pays des tartares*, Neuchâtel, 1780, pp. 237–8.

[12] Comte de Broglie to Louis XVI, 7 June 1772. Edgard Boutaric, *Correspondence secrète inédite de Louis XV sur la politique étrangère* (two vols.), Paris, 1866, vol. I, p. 440. The Russian government was aware of this belief. A. V. Ulyanitsky, 'Dardanelly, Bosfor, i Chornoye more v XVIII veke' (*Sbornik Moskovskogo Glavnogo Arkhiva*, vol. III, Moscow, 1883, p. 291, note 1).

At the lowest estimate, it must be admitted that the comparative smallness of Britain's commercial interests in the Levant did something to free the hands of the government and make possible a more flexible and more opportunist policy than could have been carried out had it been committed, like that of France, to the defence of trading establishments of great national importance.[13]

British help for the Russian squadrons on their way to the Mediterranean, if desirable from the British point of view, was essential from that of Russia. The hostility of the Bourbon powers meant that their ports were quite useless to Russia except as places of refuge in the last extremity,[14] and thus the use of British ports and British bases in the Mediterranean, particularly Minorca, became indispensable if anything were to be accomplished, particularly as the empress's attempts to secure the help of the Order of St John at Malta and of the Venetian republic proved fruitless.[15]

Command of the Russian enterprise was entrusted to Count Aleksey Orlov (brother of Catherine II's lover, Grigory Orlov, and one of the prime movers in the conspiracy which placed her on the throne in 1762), who had gone to Italy in 1768 before the outbreak of war with Turkey.[16] The fleet was sent to the Levant not as a whole, but in separate squadrons, of which five in all were despatched from the Baltic between 1769 and 1773. The force which won the battle of Chesme consisted of only the first two of these squadrons, commanded respectively by an experienced Russian officer, Admiral Grigory Andreyevich Spiridov, and by a British officer, Captain John Elphinston, who entered Russian service on 10 June 1769 and was promoted to rear-admiral a month later.[17]

The first hint in the British diplomatic documents of the Russian intentions did not come till 24 May, in the postscript to a despatch from St Petersburg, in which Cathcart mentioned that orders had been given for sheathing several ships of the Baltic squadron and that

[13] On this point, see *Annual Register*, 1770, p. 3.

[14] The French government agreed to admit Russian ships to French ports only if they were driven in by the weather and entered the ports singly and if not more than one ship was in any port at any time. Choiseul to Sabatier de Cabres, 17 October 1769, *Sbornik* CXLIII, p. 45. Cf. Ségur, *op. cit.*, I, p. 344; II, pp. 173–4, also F. F. Martens, *Receuil des traités conclus par la Russie*, St Petersburg, 1892, vol. XIII, p. 132. Naples took similar precautions. Sir Horace Mann (British minister in Florence) to Lord Weymouth, 6 January 1770, S.P. 98/75.

[15] For her negotiations with Malta, see her letters to the Grand Master, 29 July and 6 October 1769, in *Sbornik* LXXXVII, pp. 454–5, 494–5, and C. C. de Rulhière, *Histoire de l'anarchie de Pologne, et du démembrement de cette république* (four vols.), Paris, 1807, vol. III, pp. 393–4, 413–14. For those with Venice, Panin to Maruzzi, 1 August and 28 October 1769, in *Sbornik* LXXXVII, pp. 456–8, 506–7. She seems to have had hopes of making use of Genoa and possibly also of Portuguese or Sardinian ports. (Rescript to Admiral Arff, 16 June 1770, *Sbornik* I, pp. 124–7.) However, Cagliari, the main Sardinian port, though open to the Russians, had not the resources to be of much use to them. Choiseul to Sabatier, 13 March 1770, *Sbornik* CXLIII, p. 113.

[16] Catherine II to Aleksey Orlov, 9 February 1769, *Sbornik* I, pp. 1–13.

[17] Tarlé, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

it was intended to sheathe the rest, 'a precaution not necessary for these seas'.[18] He did not refer to the subject directly till 14 July, when he remarked that if a squadron were sent to the Mediterranean it would be a severe blow to the Turks because of the dependence of Constantinople on the Greek islands for food supplies.[19] He also pointed out that Elphinston would not find it easy to work within the existing system of naval administration, for 'nothing has been under worse management than the Russian Navy', and a fortnight later hoped that Spiridov might 'escape everything tragical and ridiculous' if his squadron left the Baltic.[20] Quite obviously the ambassador did not have much faith in the capacities of the Russian fleet and its commanders.[21]

Meanwhile the Russian government was making arrangements in advance to secure the maximum of help and cooperation from Great Britain. On 30 July, Count Panin told Cathcart that Count Chernyshov, Russian ambassador in London, would be instructed to ask for such assistance to the fleet, upon payment, as could be given without infringing British neutrality, and asked the British ambassador to write to Rochford about the matter, presumably to prepare the way for the Russian action.[22] Chernyshov presented such a request to Rochford on 31 August, and on the same day the Secretary of State replied, agreeing to give the help asked for. He followed this up next day by ordering the Lords of the Admiralty to give the Russian ships 'the most friendly treatment and every kind of assistance and succour which may be necessary for them to continue their voyage',[23] orders which the Admiralty began to carry out by arranging for the Russian ships to be supplied with masts and rigging for necessary repairs, and for pilotage charges incurred by them to be paid by the Navy Board and recovered later, a means of avoiding delays and difficulties in this respect.[24] Instructions were also given for supplying them with masts and rigging at Gibraltar and Port Mahon, if necessary.[25]

The question of possible Turkish reactions, if help were given to a

[18] Cathcart to Rochford, 24 May 1769, No. 48, S.P. 91/81.

[19] At this time a report that several privateers were being fitted out in Italy to cruise under Russian colours in the Levant caused great alarm at Constantinople on account of the city's food supplies. Murray to Weymouth, 3 July and 17 July, Nos. 16 and 17, S.P. 97/45.

[20] Cathcart to Rochford, 14 July, No. 61, and 28 July, No. 65, S.P. 91/81.

[21] This lack of faith was fully shared by the Duc de Choiseul and the French representatives in Russia. Choiseul to Rossignol (consul in St Petersburg), 20 July 1769, *Sbornik* CXLI, p. 580. Choiseul to Sabatier de Cabres, 19 September 1769, *Sbornik* CXLIII, p. 29. Sabatier to Choiseul, 22 September and 1 December 1769, *Sbornik* CXLIII, pp. 31, 66–7.

[22] Cathcart to Rochford, 31 July 1769, No. 66, S.P. 91/82.

[23] Rochford to the Lords of the Admiralty, 1 September 1769, S.P. 91/82.

[24] Lords of the Admiralty to Navy Board, 9 September and 6 October 1769, in Adm. 2/239, ff. 34, 60. Special arrangements were made to provide Russian ships calling at Deal or Harwich with pilots. George Jackson (second secretary to the Admiralty) to Navy Board, 11 September 1769, Adm. 2/543, ff. 92–3.

[25] Lords of the Admiralty to Navy Board, 16 October 1769, Adm. 2/239, f. 68.

Russian fleet *en route* to attack the Ottoman Empire, had also however to be faced. John Murray, the British ambassador in Constantinople, was not definitely informed of the Russian plans by the government till 8 September 1769. If questions were asked by the Turkish ministers, he was told, he must give assurances of British neutrality and friendly intentions towards Turkey and must emphasise that, since news of the Russian intention to send a fleet to the Mediterranean had been received, no Englishman had joined their Navy.[26] If necessary, he was to explain away the presence of Scottish Jacobites in the Russian ships and prevent 'the bad Uses which may be made of it'.[27] The reason for this desire to conciliate the Turks as far as possible lay partly in the government's wish to end the war by mediation between the belligerents, which would obviously be very difficult to achieve if the Porte became convinced of British partiality for Russia, but also, and perhaps more, in the anxiety of the Levant Company merchants about their interests in the Near East, which would suffer from an outbreak of anti-British feeling there and from the effects which a naval campaign in the Mediterranean would have on trade. On 15 September 1769 they asked Rochford to secure from Catherine II positive orders to her commanders to respect British subjects and their property in any place which became the scene of operations, and immediate orders were sent to Cathcart to ask for this to be done.[28]

The Company also wrote to Murray and the more important of the Levant consuls telling them to take all precautions for the safety of British factors and their property.[29] It professed itself satisfied with the orders sent to Cathcart,[30] but was nervous, not without reason, about the effect which the presence of British volunteers on the Russian ships might have in increasing the danger to British merchants and their goods in Turkey.

Rochford himself showed no great enthusiasm for the Russian project, seeing in it a likely source of jealousies on the part of the existing Mediterranean powers, fearing that Venice might feel herself obliged, by the Treaty of Passarowitz of 1718, to side with the Porte, and suggesting that Russia should turn her energies in some other direction.[31] However, no real effort was made to deflect

[26] This was not strictly true, as a number of half-pay naval officers seem to have been given leave to enter the Russian service after Catherine II's plans were either suspected or known by the government. *Scots Magazine* XXXI, 1769, pp. 210, 493.

[27] Rochford to Murray, 8 September 1769, No. 15, S.P. 97/45.

[28] Levant Company to Rochford, 15 September 1769, S.P. 105/119, ff. 313–14, and Weymouth to Cathcart, 15 September 1769, No. 22, S.P. 91/82.

[29] Levant Company to Murray, 15 September 1769, S.P. 105/119, f. 315. Letters to consuls at Smyrna, Aleppo, Cyprus, Tripoli (in Syria), Latakia, Acri and Salonica on ff. 315–16.

[30] Levant Company to Rochford, 25 October 1769, S.P. 105/119, ff. 319–20.

[31] Rochford to Cathcart, 29 September 1769, No. 23, S.P. 91/82.

Catherine II from her chosen path, and the willingness of the British government to help her ships seems to have made a good impression on the empress,[32] although Cathcart persisted in taking a pessimistic view of the capacities of the Russian fleet and still more of those of the Russian naval administration. He emphasised the difficulties under which Elphinston had to work and insisted that 'Everything he has done has been against the grain, and therefore things will relapse here the moment he sails'.

When orders were given for the fitting out of Elphinston's squadron there were, he alleged, no hemp, tar or nails whatever in the 'Imperial Naval Stores', and yet no one had been punished for this neglect.[33] This tone of half-contemptuous patronage is audible in a good deal of the contemporary British comment on this remarkable Russian naval exploit and helps to explain the failure of the expedition, at least before the battle of Chesme, to arouse in Britain any real understanding of its importance and potentialities.

Considering their lack of experience and the obstacles, actual and artificial, which they had to face, the Russians carried through the movement of their ships to the Mediterranean with admirable tenacity and courage. The first squadron, under Spiridov, left Russia on 6 August 1769, reaching Copenhagen on 10 September and the Humber in the early days of October.[34] It was suffering considerably from disease,[35] but Spiridov himself, with four ships, left Hull for Gibraltar on 21 October, and the rest of the squadron, under Greig, put to sea on 6 November. The Russian ships had been supplied with large quantities of food and stores at Hull, and two of the ships, the *Severnyy Oryol* and the *Yevropa*, both of sixty-four guns, received extensive repairs in British dockyards at the cost of considerable interruption to routine repair-work on British ships.[36] The extent and duration of the repairs alone are a fairly convincing indication of the British desire to give all reasonable help to the Russians.

After leaving England, Greig arrived at Gibraltar on 23 November 1769, and received assistance there in the form of food and supplies

[32] Cathcart to Rochford, 17 November 1769, No. 97, S.P. 91/82. It was noted that on St Catherine's day at court the empress spoke only to Cathcart, ignoring Lobkowitz, the Austrian ambassador, who was immediately behind him. Sabatier de Cabres to Choiseul, 8 December 1769, *Sbornik* CXLIII, p. 70.

[33] Cathcart to Rochford, 6 October 1769, No. 84, S.P. 91/82. It is interesting to note that Murray made an exactly similar criticism of the Turkish navy. (Murray to Weymouth, 18 November 1769, No. 26, S.P. 97/45.) On the shortcomings of the Russian Admiralty, see also Sabatier de Cabres to Choiseul, 8 September 1769, in *Sbornik* CXLIII, p. 26.

[34] For the movements of Spiridov's ships, see Tarlé, *op. cit.*, p. 28, and 'Sobstvennoruchnyy zhurnal kapitan-komandora S. K. Greiga v chesmenskiy pokhod' (*Morskoy Sbornik* II, St Petersburg, 1849, pp. 647–50).

[35] Rossignol to Choiseul, 20 June 1769, *Sbornik* CXLI, p. 472. Tarlé, *op. cit.*, p. 24. S. M. Solov'yov, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremyon* (3rd edition), Moscow, 1856–79, vol. XXVIII, p. 36.

[36] Much correspondence on this in the Admiralty papers, Adm. 2/239, 543, 544 *passim*.

from Major-General Boyd, the lieutenant-governor, and Commodore Proby, commander of the British Mediterranean squadron.[37] Spiridov, who had reached Port Mahon on the 29th, waited there for the rest of his ships to join him and by the end of January 1770 had three of the line, three frigates and several store-ships with him and had detached a force of one of the line, one frigate, and one store-ship to Leghorn to make contact with Count Orlov.[38] The ships under his command did not leave Minorca till the beginning of February, after being joined by some Dalmatians and Greeks from the Morea, who were to act as pilots, and reached the coast of Greece at Porto Vitulo on 1 March 1770.[39] The squadron seems to have been relatively well handled, or lucky, on its journey from England to the Mediterranean and under good discipline. Johnston reported that their losses had been much smaller than the reports he received from England had led him to expect and that 'during their stay, there has not been the smallest complaint or quarrel between them, the soldiery, and the inhabitants'.[40]

Perhaps because of the greater proximity of the Turks, the British government was somewhat less generous in its attitude to the Russians in the Mediterranean than in the North Sea and English Channel. It refused, for example, to allow them to obtain ammunition and ordnance supplies at Port Mahon, though it recommended Lieutenant-Governor Johnston to pay them any 'friendly attentions' consistent with neutrality, an injunction which he carried out by forwarding the letters of Count Orlov to England enclosed in his own official correspondence, thus helping to shield them from the danger of being opened and read in France.[41]

The second Russian squadron, under Elphinston, left Kronstadt on 20 October 1769 and, with British pilots, sailed from Copenhagen on 12 December, reaching Spithead in the first days of 1770.[42] It also received a good deal of indispensable help in British ports. One ship, the *Afrika*, which had lost her rudder in crossing the North Sea, was rescued, brought into Margate, fitted with a new rudder and supplied with food and water for the voyage to the Mediterranean. The

[37] *Morskoy Sbornik* II, p. 651.

[38] Johnston (lieutenant-governor of Minorca) to Weymouth, 7 December 1769, No. 16, C.O. 174/5, and 28 January 1770, No. 18, C.O. 174/6. He had already sent an officer to Leghorn to advise Orlov of his arrival and to buy provisions. Dick (consul in Leghorn) to Weymouth, 18 December 1769, No. 42, S.P. 98/74.

[39] Johnston to Weymouth, 3 February 1770, No. 19, C.O. 174/6. Tarlé, *op. cit.*, p. 34. For the activities of the Russians in recruiting 'Sclavonians' in Italy to assist their fleet, see Mann to Weymouth, 2 September 1769, S.P. 98/74.

[40] An observer at Gibraltar warmly praised the infantry which the ships were carrying, though he thought little of their seamen or naval equipment. Report of 23 November 1769 in *Scots Magazine* XXXI, p. 658.

[41] Johnston to Weymouth, 8 December 1769, No. 17, C.O. 175/5.

[42] Cf. *An Authentic Narrative of the Russian Expedition . . . by an Officer on board the Russian Fleet*, London, 1772, pp. 12–13, also *Morskoy Sbornik* II, pp. 788–9.

Svyatoslav, of eighty-four guns, largest of the Russian ships, was top-heavy and had her masts shortened and some of her upper tier of guns removed to make her more stable, while the other ships were caulked and otherwise made seaworthy. Moreover, Elphinston had a large quantity of sails made and altered, ten sailmakers at Portsmouth working double time to get them ready with the minimum delay.[43] This squadron sailed from Spithead on 13 April 1770 and reached Cape Matapan in the Morea on 20th May.[44]

In spite of the comparatively generous help given to the Russian squadrons, the British government was quite sincere in its desire to remain within the bounds of neutrality, at least in its own interpretation of this somewhat elastic term. Quite apart from any considerations of international law or morality, its desire to mediate between the belligerents, and thus help to end the war, and its overriding determination not to contribute to any extension of French influence at the Porte, urged it to do nothing which would irreparably alienate the Turks. Thus it was with some dismay that it was realised that three British ships under British captains, one of whom was a naval lieutenant on half-pay, and possessing British Mediterranean passes, were being fitted out at Spithead, apparently with the intention of cruising as Russian privateers in the Mediterranean.[45]

The Law Officers of the Crown were asked for an opinion as to the government's right to stop these ships on mere suspicion of the use to which they were to be put, but before their replies had been received,[46] orders were given to Admiral Geary at Portsmouth to inquire into the matter and, if necessary, to confiscate their Mediterranean passes and forbid their captains to hoist British colours.[47] When these orders reached him however the ships, with the rest of Elphinston's squadron, had already sailed, and a fast cutter, the *Grace*, and the frigate *Seaford* were sent after them in an attempt to seize their passes. These returned unsuccessful a few days later after meeting bad weather. Another cutter was sent to Torbay in an effort to make contact with Elphinston, but again without success.[48] There can be no question of the concern of the government over this development, for it was

[43] Adm. 2/239, 2/543 *passim*.

[44] *Authentic Narrative*, p. 19. Greig, in *Morskoy Sbornik* II, p. 789, says the 21st.

[45] The ships were the *Count Chernichev*, twenty-eight guns, Captain Dishington (a half-pay naval lieutenant), the *Count Orlov*, twenty-six guns, Captain Arnold, and the *Count Pagnell* (*sic*), twenty-four guns, Captain Boddy. They were completely equipped for war, except for men, and had been cleared ostensibly to carry stores to Cagliari. See the letter of Captain Collier of H.M.S. *Tweed* to Philip Stephens, Secretary to the Admiralty, 9 April 1770, in S.P. 91/84.

[46] For these see the letters of the Attorney-General and the Advocate-General to Rochford, 13 and 17 April, in S.P. 91/84.

[47] Rochford to the Lords of the Admiralty, 12 April 1770, S.P. 91/84, Adm. 2/543, ff. 495–6.

[48] Rochford to Lords of Admiralty, 16 April 1770, S.P. 91/84. Geary to Stephens, 22 April 1770, Adm. 1/944; Adm. 2/543, ff. 557–8.

feared that if these ships retained their passes, the generally-accepted sign of the British nationality of a ship in the Mediterranean, it would provide a convenient precedent for French ships to act against the Russian fleet as auxiliaries of the Turks with unpredictable, but potentially very unpleasant, results. Moreover, if the ships were captured with British passes while fighting under Russian colours, their crews might even be treated as pirates.[49]

Orders similar to those given to Geary were sent to Gibraltar and Port Mahon,[50] but the ships in question, passing through the Straits on 3 May,[51] did not call at either of those places, and it was not till after the battle of Chesme that anything effective could be done in this matter. Captain Goodall, of H.M.S. *Winchelsea*, who joined the Russian fleet on 11 July between Chios and the coast of Asia Minor found that one of the ships had already been sent back to Port Mahon.[52] The other two, the period for which they had been hired in England having almost expired, were discharged by Count Orlov from the Russian service, Goodall taking them under his protection and leaving them in possession of their Mediterranean passes.[53] The whole episode shows the determination of the British government, in spite of its friendship for Russia, to observe the restrictions imposed on it by its neutrality (as defined by itself) and to take, if necessary, highly energetic steps to prevent any transgression of these limits. A report that a British ship loading provisions at Port Mahon might, in fact, be meant for use as a Russian privateer, produced a similar reaction. Efforts were made to seize her Mediterranean pass and prevent her sailing under British colours, while another British ship, the *St. Paul*, also carrying provisions for the Russians, had her pass confiscated at Leghorn, apparently merely on the strength of her 'warlike appearance'.[54]

To transfer a large fleet to the Mediterranean and to maintain it there required the assistance of a considerable network of agents and representatives in the Mediterranean ports, of which the Russians in 1769 possessed scarcely the rudiments. Some effort had been made to

[49] Rochford to Cathcart, 17 April, No. 11, S.P. 91/84. Elphinston had been planning for some time to use British transports as auxiliary cruisers (Panin to Elphinston, 19 February 1770, *Sbornik* XCVII, p. 27) and the commanders of these three ships were, in fact, given Russian commissions at Lemnos in June 1770. *Morskoy Sbornik*, IX, 1853, p. 286.

[50] Letters of Weymouth to Boyd and Johnston, 1 May 1770, in C.O. 91/17 and C.O. 174/6.

[51] Proby to Stephens, 4 May, Adm. 1/386.

[52] This was the *Count Chernichev*, which soon after left Russian service. Johnston to Weymouth, 13 August, No. 27, C.O. 174/6.

[53] Goodall to Lords of the Admiralty, 3 September, S.P. 91/85. *Morskoy Sbornik* II, p. 817, and *Authentic Narrative*, p. 89. Two of these ships were soon afterwards sold to the Bey of Tunis, who sent them to help the Sultan against the Russian fleet. Fraser (British consul in Algiers) to Rochford, 27 April 1771, No. 4, F.O. 3/4.

[54] Weymouth to Dick, 29 June, No. 3, and Dick to Weymouth, 30 July, No. 12, S.P. 98/75.

establish Russian agents at strategic points in the Western Mediterranean. For example, a Russian officer called Daragan arrived at Gibraltar on 23 October 1769, sent there by Aleksey Orlov, with letters of recommendation from Dick and Johnston,[55] while an unsuccessful attempt was made early in 1770 to establish a Russian consul in Trieste in the person of a Greek, Antonio Papa.[56] A complete solution of the problem would be possible however if the British government could be persuaded to allow some of its consuls to act on behalf of Catherine II and to accept Russian consular appointments. This expedient was not so far-fetched as it may seem to modern eyes. It was by no means unknown, especially in the Levant, for an individual to represent as consul two or even more different States.

In particular, the Russian government was anxious to make use of the services of Sir John Dick, British consul in Leghorn, since the latter, the only great port of the Western Mediterranean which was not under the control, or at least the influence, of any of the Bourbon powers, was destined to be an important source of supplies and information and a highly useful winter refuge for Russian vessels operating against the Turks. Moreover, Dick was personally on good terms with Aleksey Orlov. The first approach was made by Orlov to Dick in the autumn of 1769, and the latter agreed to act on behalf of Russia if the British government permitted, arguing that, as a former French consul in Leghorn had handled Swedish business there and the present one was also consul for the Order of St John at Malta, this could not give the Porte any cause for umbrage.[57] In spite of this, the proposal met with a peremptory refusal, Dick being told that the matter would be explained to Chernyshov in London and that no more need be said about it in Leghorn.[58]

No more, in fact, was said in Dick's official correspondence about the matter, and a British merchant, Robert Rutherford, was appointed by Orlov as agent for the Russian fleet in Leghorn, apparently without the British government being consulted in any way.[59] However, Dick continued to be in close touch with events in the Mediterranean

[55] Boyd to Weymouth, 25 October 1769, C.O. 91/17, and *Morskoy Sbornik* II, p. 653.

[56] The Austrian government refused to permit it because of the risk of antagonising the Turks. Galitsin to Panin (?), 21 March, and Panin to Galitsin, 20 April 1770, in *Sbornik* XCVII, pp. 38–40, 61–4.

[57] Dick to Weymouth, 6 October 1769, No. 11, S.P. 98/74.

[58] Weymouth to Dick, 24 October 1769, No. 5, S.P. 98/74. The main motive for the refusal seems to have been the desire to do nothing which might hinder Britain from ending the war by mediation. Rochford to Cathcart, 26 January 1770, No. 3, S.P. 91/83.

[59] Dick to Weymouth, 18 December 1769, No. 42, S.P. 98/74. Rutherford had been established as a merchant at Leghorn since at least 1754. At the beginning of 1771 he had as much as 200,000 sequins in his hands for the transaction of Russian business. (Cf. Auriant, 'Catherine II et l'Orient, 1770–74', *Acropole* V, Paris, 1930, p. 205.) He was also in charge of the sale in Leghorn of prizes taken by the Russians. Report of 2 January 1771, from Pisa, in *Scots Magazine* XXXIII, p. 97.

and acted on occasion as a channel through which Orlov could communicate with London.[60] He seems also to have played a considerable, though unofficial, part in the handling of Russian affairs in Leghorn, in spite of the prohibition of his appointment as Russian consul,[61] and at the end of the war was presented by the empress with the insignia of the Order of St Anne.[62]

In addition to Orlov's offer to Dick, Angelo Rutter, British vice-consul in Malta, was approached by the Marquis Cavalcabo, Catherine II's emissary to the Order of St John, to act as agent for Russia. This proposal he refused to accept without explicit permission from the British government.[63] It does not appear that he ever, in fact, asked for permission, and indeed, in view of the generally hostile attitude of the Order to the Russians and their plans, it is hard to see how an agent in Malta could have been of much use to them. In Minorca however the position was very different, and here a representative of Russia was established successfully in the person of Theodore Alexiano, a leading member of the well-established Greek colony in the island. Alexiano was first approached by Orlov in the autumn of 1769 with an offer to appoint him Russian consul in the island, but Lieutenant-Governor Johnston refused to agree to this until he had received instructions from home.[64] The British government refused to agree to any formal appointment of a British subject as Russian consul on the ground that this would seem to justify French allegations of its partiality in the war, but Alexiano continued to transact Russian business in Minorca as a private individual.[65] A few months later, for reasons which are not entirely clear, the government decided to recognise him as consul, and by the end of 1770 his new status had been publicly accepted by Johnston.[66]

Whether the help given by Britain to the Russian fleet was in fact a breach of neutrality, is a sterile, perhaps even a meaningless question. It seems at least possible to argue that, by the most generally accepted

[60] In May 1771, for example, Orlov proposed through Dick to put the British in possession of 'the island of Milo' in the Archipelago. Dick to Rochford, 13 May, No. 6, S.P. 98/76. He lived in Dick's house for some time after his return to Italy after the Chesme campaign. Dick to Weymouth, 7 January 1771, No. 1, S.P. 98/76.

[61] 'Your Lordship no doubt knows that I had, in conjunction with Mr. Rutherford, the Management of the Empress of Russia's Money, and other affairs relative to the War in the Archipellago (*sic*).' Dick to Rochford, 7 July 1775, No. 6, S.P. 98/80. There are of course no references in Dick's correspondence during the war to his handling of Russian funds.

[62] Dick to Rochford, 4 July 1774, No. 4, S.P. 98/79, and 3 March 1775, no number, S.P. 98/80.

[63] Rutter to Dick, 15 February 1770, S.P. 98/75.

[64] Johnston to Weymouth, 9 October 1769, No. 15, C.O. 174/5.

[65] Weymouth to Johnston, 7 March, No. 3, and Johnston to Weymouth, 21 April, No. 2, C.O. 174/6.

[66] Weymouth to Johnston, 15 November, No. 12; Johnston to Weymouth, 26 December, No. 33, C.O. 174/6. See also Orlov's letters of 5 and 27 February 1770 in N. V. Aleksandrenko, *Russkiye diplomaticheskiye agenty v Londone v XVIII veke* (two vols.), Warsaw, 1897, vol. II, pp. 130–2.

ideas of the period on international law, it did not constitute such a breach, since Britain had not refused to the Turks any facilities she had given to the Russians.[67] However, the knowledge that the Russian ships had been allowed to use British ports, were navigated largely by British officers and seamen, and had been equipped in part with British stores and supplies could not but have some effect on Britain's position at Constantinople and in the Near East generally. Obviously, it gave an ideal opportunity to any power hostile to Britain to prejudice the Porte against her, and Choiseul, ably seconded by the Comte de Saint-Priest, French ambassador to Turkey, seized the chance with alacrity.

The French government had been informed of the Russian intentions earlier than the British. A letter from Venice at the end of May, enclosing a 'Mémoire sur les Grecs', and signed by someone calling himself Duarig,[68] had warned Choiseul that the Russians were fitting out a squadron at Kronstadt for use in the Adriatic and the Archipelago.[69] At first, he refused to take the idea very seriously, believing that the Russians would be unable to withstand the hot climate of the Mediterranean or to navigate seas unknown to them, in which they would be forced to winter.[70] He also doubted whether the Russian ships would be openly received in British ports or in Gibraltar or Minorca. At the same time, he urged that the Turks should take defensive measures, particularly for the protection of Constantinople and the coasts of Greece,[71] and began to use the help already given by Britain to the Russians as a lever with which to exclude her from any share in a possible mediation between Russia and Turkey.[72] Saint-Priest kept up a steady running fire of 'offices' to the Porte, in which he alleged that Britain and Russia had concluded a convention by which the former was to receive and victual Russian ships in her ports and in Gibraltar and Minorca, that Britain had secured from the kings of Portugal and Sardinia permission for Russian ships to use ports in their dominions, and (quite correctly) that the transfer of Elphinston to the Russian Navy had been authorised by the British

[67] See the discussion of help given in wartime by a neutral to a belligerent in Emerich de Vattel, *Le droit des gens*, London, 1758, vol. II, pp. 83–5, also *ibid.*, pp. 98–9.

[68] Probably a French adventurer called Gérard.

[69] Choiseul to Saint-Priest, 27 June 1769, No. 13, *Archives du Ministère des affaires étrangères, Paris; Correspondance Politique, Turquie* (hereafter cited as C.P.T.), vol. 147. Another copy of the memoir is in C.P.T. 151. Saint-Priest did not pass on the information in its entirety to the Turks for fear of causing trouble to the Venetians, the Neapolitans, and the dignitaries of the Greek Church, whom the Turks would consider partly responsible for the Russian project. Saint-Priest to Choiseul, 17 August 1769, No. 24, C.P.T. 151.

[70] 'They have talked here with great contempt of the Russian fleet, the ships are weak (*sic*), they are built of Fir, and cannot resist the Mediterranean Seas.' Walpole (British *chargé d'affaires* in Paris) to Weymouth, 15 November 1769, No. 33, S.P. 78/279.

[71] Choiseul to Saint-Priest, 13 September, No. 20, C.P.T. 147.

[72] Choiseul to Saint-Priest, 26 September and 20 November, Nos. 22 and 29, C.P.T. 147. It was assumed by most contemporaries that the war would be ended by mediation by some third power or group of powers.

government. Moreover, he supplied the Turks with fairly full and surprisingly prompt and accurate information on the position and movements of the Russian ships.[73]

All this could not fail to influence the minds of the Turkish ministers, and, apart from the fact that they had some not unreasonable grounds for complaint against Britain, their ignorance of European politics, law, and even geography, made it very difficult for Murray to counter the French suggestions and influence effectively. The first explicit Turkish complaint came in October, two months after the Russian scheme had been revealed by Saint-Priest to the Porte, when the Reis Effendi asked Murray's dragoman why, if Britain were still a friend of Turkey, she had allowed the Russian fleet to pass through the 'Manche'. The ambassador pointed out that 'by the Discourse of the Reis Effendi, he looks upon the Manche to be a channel like the Dardanelles where every ship is stopped to be examined' and took the use of the word, probably correctly, as indicating that the Turks were relying on information given to them by the French.[74] However, the fact that the Russian squadron had not yet appeared in the Mediterranean and perhaps also a reluctance to do anything which might antagonise a power potentially so useful as Britain prevented the Porte from pressing the point at this time.

With the approach of the Russian ships however the very real and, as events proved, abundantly justified fears of the Turks found vent in increased complaints of the British attitude and unjustifiable demands on Britain for protection. On 11 and 13 March 1770 the Reis Effendi suggested that steps should be taken to prevent the Russian fleet from molesting Turkey, in spite of Murray's assertion that this could not now be done without Britain going to war with Russia. Murray went so far as to believe that the French were trying to obtain a Turkish declaration of war against Britain, a war in which France would take part. All the Turkish complaints and grievances could be answered only by renewed assurances of the genuineness of British neutrality, and towards the end of April 1770 Murray gave the Porte a written declaration that Britain had not supplied the Russians with ships, money, ammunition, troops, or pilots. He prudently refrained however from putting either his signature or his seal to this document, 'so that no bad use can be made of it'.[75] Finally, at the beginning of July, before the news of Chesme had reached the capital, the Reis Effendi told Murray's dragoman frankly that the

[73] See his 'offices' to the Porte, of 13 and 17 October, 14 November, and 2 December in C.P.T. 148 and that of 15 December in C.P.T. 152.

[74] Murray to Weymouth, 18 October 1769, No. 24, S.P. 97/45. The phrase 'le canal de la Manche' does in fact appear in an 'office' sent by Saint-Priest to the Porte on the 13th, C.P.T. 148.

[75] Murray to Weymouth, 2 May 1770, No. 9, S.P. 97/46.

support Britain had given to the Russian fleet made British mediation unacceptable. The ambassador then offered, if he were properly authorised by the Porte to do so, to write to the Russian commanders on sea and land and to London and St Petersburg to bring about a cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of the fleet, but this proposal broke down on the impossibility of any Turkish minister who valued his own life suggesting such a surrender to the sultan.[76]

By the middle of August the British government had decided to make concessions to the Porte to the extent of agreeing that a peace, if made at once under British mediation, should be guaranteed by Great Britain, Murray being empowered to make any declaration, verbal or written, which the Turks might require on this point and to state explicitly to the Porte that any British subjects taking part in the war would forfeit the protection of the Crown.[77] But the damage was now done and the British position at Constantinople too thoroughly compromised for anything to be achieved there. Popular, as well as official, opinion had become definitely hostile to Britain, as Murray had already noted. The defeat at Chesme was followed by an outbreak of anti-foreign, above all anti-British, public feeling in Smyrna, and the British factory there had to take twenty extra janissaries into its pay for protection.[78] When, in November, three British frigates arrived off the port to protect the British merchants there, they were assumed to be part of the Russian fleet, and the local authorities refused to obey the sultan's *firman* permitting them to enter the harbour. It was only with great difficulty that Murray secured their permission for one of the three to be received there. The Porte was now looking for mediation more and more to Austria and Prussia, and by the end of the year the decline in British influence at the Porte was an accomplished fact.[79]

It can hardly be contended that by the aid she gave to the Russian fleet Great Britain lost the chance of ending the war by a successful mediation. Catherine II had never shown much inclination to make use of Britain's desire to serve her in this respect,[80] and as early as February 1770 Sabatier de Cabres had decided that the victories already won by her armies and her own pride would lead her to reject

[76] Murray to Weymouth, 3 July 1770, No. 13, S.P. 97/46.
[77] Weymouth to Murray, 18 August 1770, No. 11, S.P. 97/46.
[78] Murray to Weymouth, 2 May, No. 9, 3 August, No. 15, S.P. 97/46.
[79] Murray to Weymouth, 17 December 1770, No. 24, S.P. 97/46. A formal invitation to the Austrian and Prussian governments to mediate had been made by the Turks on 9 August and was accepted by both. Cf. *Politische Correspondenz Friedrichs des Grossen* XXX, pp. 103–14, 132–5. This proved a mortal blow to British hopes of being entrusted with the mediation.
[80] For illustrations of this point, see Martens, *op. cit.*, IX, pp. 279–80; Cathcart to Rochford, 17 March 1769, No. 23, and 21 March, No. 24, S.P. 91/80; Ulyanitsky, *op. cit.*, p. 291, note 1; Rossignol to Choiseul, 8 January 1769, and *Sbornik* CXLI, pp. 520–1.

all offers of diplomatic help from whatever quarter they might come.[81] After the intoxicating news of Chesme had reached St Petersburg there was less chance than ever of any foreign mediation being accepted, and it was decided at a meeting of the *gosudarstvennyy sovet* on 23 August to make peace with Turkey directly and not by the mediation of any foreign power.[82] A month later, Rumyantsev, commander-in-chief of the Russian armies in the Principalities, was instructed to negotiate directly with the Turkish government for this purpose.[83] Even if Russia had not won the battle of Chesme or had been unable to send a fleet to the Mediterranean at all, her sweeping victories on land would probably have been sufficient to sustain Catherine's desire to keep any peace negotiations in her own hands, to make peace at the point of the sword and, as far as possible, to impose her own terms, unhampered by the interference of third parties, however well-meaning. Britain however had thrown away the chance, such as it was, of building up at the Porte a political influence which might seriously challenge, if not supplant, that of France, and to some Frenchmen, including the Duc de Choiseul himself, the chance of such a development did not seem completely remote.[84] The help given to Russian naval development and to Catherine II's romantic, but far-sighted maritime ambitions involved sacrifices on the part of Britain which, though unintentional and unforeseen, were nevertheless, within their limits, real.

[81] Sabatier de Cabres to Choiseul, 9 February 1770, *Sbornik* CXLIII, p. 100. Also, if the mediation of Britain, generally regarded as a strongly pro-Russian power, were accepted, the Turks might not unreasonably demand the inclusion of France as a joint mediator, thus confusing and complicating affairs and heightening existing tensions in Europe. Martens, *op. cit.*, IX, pp. 284–5. The same objection is repeatedly stressed by Frederick II in his correspondence. Cf. *Politische Correspondenz Friedrichs des Grossen* XXX, *passim*.

[82] Ljubov Jakobson, *Russland und Frankreich in den ersten Regierungsjahren der Kaiserin Katherina II, 1762–72*, Berlin–Königsberg, 1929, p. 69.

[83] Rescript of Catherine II to Rumyantsev, 25 September 1770, *Sbornik* XCVII, pp. 139–41.

[84] Comte de Saint-Priest, *Mémoires* (two vols.), Paris, 1929, vol. I, p. 123. See also Saint-Priest to Choiseul, 18 November 1769, No. 33, C.P.T. 152, and 19 January 1770, No. 2, C.P.T. 153, and Choiseul to Saint-Priest, 11 December 1769, No. 31, C.P.T. 147.