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Access to the Sea and the Imperial Ambitions of Peter the Great

Abstract

Access to the Baltic Sea was the main initial goal of Russia's participation in the Great Northern War (1700–1721). This military involvement was primarily due to the personal motives of Peter the Great, however, numerous different factors also played an important role. The foundation of St Petersburg, making it the capital city, and fortifying it with a defensive system was aimed at securing the Russian control over the mouth of the Neva. The military operations and diplomatic efforts undertaken by Russia in 1702–1709 were aimed exclusively to maintain access to the sea. At this time, Russia was ready to agree to the peace terms which were to grant it only the old Russian provinces of Ingria and Karelia. However, after the victorious Battle of Poltava of 1709, Peter the Great developed imperial ambitions. Under the pretext of ensuring the security of St Petersburg and ensuring Russia's access to the sea, the Russians captured Swedish lands in the Eastern Baltic and Finland, and then annexed most of these territories. At the same time, Russian diplomacy constantly ensured of its readiness to conclude peace, but these attempts were rejected by the Swedes. Ten years of warfare and destructive raids on the coastal regions of the Kingdom of Sweden forced the Swedes to negotiate. The Treaty of Nystad of 1721 not only ended the war between Russia and Sweden, but it also became the starting point of the extraordinary development of Peter the Great's imperial ambitions. Russia entered the world of great European and global politics as an empire, as an aggressive state of despotic character.

Keywords: Peter the Great; Charles XII of Sweden; Great Northern War; Russian Empire; St Petersburg; Baltic Sea; Congress of Åland; Treaty of Nystad; peace negotiations; imperialism

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The scholarly literature is divided in its opinion on why Peter I the Great started the Great Northern War with the siege of the Swedish fortress of Narva in the autumn of 1700. According to many historians, most notably Reinhard Wittram[1], the Narva military campaign was directly aimed at capturing Livonia, contrary to the plans of Polish King Augustus II the Strong and his adviser, Johann Reinhold Patkul. The renowned Slavist, Vladimir D. Korolyuk, claimed quite the opposite: Patkul was pushing the Russians to move towards Narva in the first place[2]. There is no doubt that both the Saxons and Patkul, who was a representative of the German nobility of Livonia, initially wanted Peter I and his army to join them in the siege of Riga, which was led by Augustus II from February 1700. This, however, proved impossible, not only because the advance of the Russian army was too late as the Saxons had ended the siege earlier, but also because Peter I wanted to act in his own theatre of war, thus aiding his ally by distracting the enemy forces that were already there[3]. This military theatre was already specified in the alliance treaty with Saxony in November 1699 as 'the provinces of Ingria and Karelia'[4].

At first, Patkul, a shrewd politician, thought that Russian involvement would be secondary and auxiliary, and that the Russian troops should not be allowed to approach Narva which was the key to Estonia and other Swedish dominions. Yet the war did not follow the scenario that Patkul and Augustus II envisioned. The Saxon attempt to capture Riga with one decisive strike in February 1700 failed, and the army was not prepared for a long siege. Augustus II as king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was unable to persuade Polish and Lithuanian nobles to join him in the war against the Swedes. By that time, Denmark, defeated and bound by the Treaty of Travendal concluded in 1700, was already unable to help its allies. Under such circumstances, the successful Russian seizure of Narva did not strike Patkul as threatening. Moreover, after the Saxons drew back from Riga, he wrote: '[…] We are weak, we need the help of the tsar and Sweden will be much weakened, having lost Narva. Conse-

[1] Reinhard Wittram, *Die Unterwerfung Livlands und Estlands 1710*, [in:] *Geschichte und Gegenwartsbewußtsein. Historische Betrachtungen und Untersuchungen*, hrsg. v. Waldemar Besson, Friedrich H. von Gaertringen, Göttingen 1963, p. 278–310.

[2] Владимир Д. Королюк, *Речь Посполитая и начало Северной войны*, Ученые записки Института славяноведения, т. 5: 1952 [Vladimir D. Korolyuk, *Rech' Pospolitaya i nachalo Severnoy voyny*, Uchenyye zapiski Instituta slavyanovedeniya, t. 5: 1952], pp. 268–269.

[3] Генрих фон Гюйссен, *Журнал государя Петра I с 1695 по 1709*, [in:] Федор О. Туманский, *Собрание разных записок и сочинений*, ч. 3, пол. 1, Санкт-Петербург 1787 [Genrikh von Gyuyssen, *Zhurnal gosudarya Petra I s 1695 po 1709*, [in:] Fedor O. Tumanskiy, *Sobraniye raznykh zapisok i sochineniy*, ch. 3, pol. 1, Sankt-Peterburg 1787], pp. 194–202.

[4] *Письма и бумаги императора Петра Великого* (further cit. ПБПВ), т. 1, Санкт-Петербург 1887 [*Pis'ma i bumagi imperatora Petra Velikogo*, t. 1, Sankt-Peterburg 1887], pp. 304–310.

quently, we should not haggle with the tsar, so as not to upset him'[5]. It was only necessary to ensure his consent to hand over the territories he had conquered to Augustus II, something Peter I at first willingly and repeatedly promised.

Swedish military historians, authors of a multi-author work on the military campaigns of Charles XII, claimed that nevertheless, Peter I's main aim in 1700 was to conquer Ingria, and that by looking at the map, he understood that the land enclosed between Lake Ladoga, the Neva River, the Gulf of Finland, the Narva River, and Lake Peipus was protected on two sides: by Nyenskans and Nöteburg on one side, and by Narva on the other. Thus, the operation against Narva was, in their opinion, a well thought out first step towards conquering Ingria, as capturing Narva cut off the land connection between Finland and Eastern Baltic lands[6]. In other words, the Narva campaign was in line with Peter I's main strategic plan aimed to reach the Baltic Sea.

The purpose of this article is to examine the evolution of Peter I's designs for war against Sweden and to trace the emergence and development of his imperial vision, which became the mainstream of Russian foreign policy for three centuries.

As is well known, the Russian documents on the outbreak of the Great Northern War list two main reasons for declaring war on Sweden. The first was the so-called 'Riga incident', when during an incognito visit to Riga in the spring of 1697 Peter I was offended by the Swedish administration for not allowing him to see the fortification system of Riga. The second reason was Peter I's desire to regain his ancestral lands in Ingria and Karelia, the so-called 'lands of the fathers and grandfathers', which had been sold for money and military aid at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Swedish ownership was confirmed by numerous treaties, but in Russia it was assumed that the Swedes had annexed these lands, taking advantage of the Time of Troubles (*Smuta*) in Russia at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The first reason represented a personal grudge, the infliction of which required not an apology, which the Swedes did bring, having no desire for war, but revenge, while the second reason can be understood in terms of national and mental factors.

The point is that, in my opinion, in assessing their own country, the Russian mind is characterised by the notion that the greatest wealth of Russia, the

[5] '[…] мы слабы, помощь царя нам необходима и Швеция немало ослабнет, потеряв Нарву. Следовательно, мы не должны торговаться с царем, чтобы не раздражать его'; Николай Г. Устрялов, *История царствования Петра Великого*, т. 4, ч. 1, Санкт-Петербург 1863 [Nikolay G. Ustryalov, *Istoriya tsarstvovaniya Petra Velikogo*, t. 4, ch. 1, Sankt-Peterburg 1863], p. 6.

[6] *Походы Карла XII. Зеландия и Нарва*, т. 1, пер. Олег М. Шолин, ред. Владимир С. Великанов, Олег М. Шолин, Москва 2014 [*Pokhody Karla XII. Zelandiya i Narva*, t. 1, per. Oleg M. Sholin, red. Vladimir S. Velikanov, Oleg M. Sholin, Moskva 2014], p. 58.

object of pride of its people, is what in Russian is called 'vastness' (*простор*), i.e. the boundless space, the enormous size of the territory. This notion is also linked to the idea of freedom, liberty, and the absence of restrictions and constraints. Continuous expansion of territory is seen, like the American movement to the West, as Manifest Destiny. On the other hand, the loss of even a small part of this space is seen by the Russian mind as a bitter defeat, or, as it was called at that time, a 'loss' (*потеря*), or to be more precise, a 'little loss' (*потерька*), which, although small in comparison with the large country, has to be made up for. So it was with the territories of Novgorod which were annexed to Sweden in 1617.

Peter the Great, when starting the war and stating the abovementioned reasons, was not guided by them at all. In 1695–1696 as is well known, Peter I, fighting the Turks, was keen to get to the Black Sea and gave no thought to the 'lands of fathers and grandfathers' in the Baltic region. Indeed, already during the Great Northern War he was prepared to give the Swedes much more important 'lands of the fathers and grandfathers', i.e. Pskov, only for the sake of Russia's retaining Ingria and St Petersburg which for him symbolised access to the sea.

It was the access to the sea that was the main driver of Peter I's strategy, the often hidden, but true cause of all the tsar's military and peaceful efforts during the Great Northern War. It was the main motive for building St Petersburg on an uninhabitable swamp, and the cause of the official relocation of the capital there in 1712, which was unprecedented in world history, as the capital was relocated to a foreign territory nine years before the peace treaty of 1721 allowed for the annexation of this territory to Russia. It should be noted that this impertinence, insulting to the Swedes, was one of the reasons why the war dragged on so painfully for the opponents – it was hard for the Swedes to come to terms with this fact.

Peter I's ambitions connected with the Russia's access to the sea reflected his inherent ideas and feelings, forming the essence of his ideology and shaping his psyche and statesmanship. It is important to consider Peter I's inherent romantic approach to the sea, what the Portuguese call the *vento do mar* ('wind of the sea'). In one of his letters of 1706, Peter I lamented that there were few young people in the country who, 'having forsaken amusements in societies, would of their own free will listen to the sound of the sea'[7]. For Peter I, access to the sea also represented a break with the old Russia that he hated, and with the fears of his childhood and adolescence spent in Moscow. Access to the sea meant the beginning of a new, happy life for the tsar. It is not by chance that he

[7] 'оставя в компаниях забавы, своею волею шуму морского слушать хотел'; ПБПВ, т. 6, Санкт-Петербург 1912 [t. 6, Sankt-Peterburg 1912], pp. 85–86.

called the modest village by the sea, which St Petersburg was in the beginning, a 'paradise', and in a letter to Aleksandr Menshikov sent from St Petersburg on 29 November 1709, not afraid of sacrilege, he wrote: '[…] I have nothing to write from this holy land, only that everything, thank God, is fine'[8].

For his mind, which had mastered the foundations of Cartesianism and the cult of experiential knowledge, which was also imbued with Baroque imagery, sailing the open sea in a ship he himself had built (and it should be remembered that the tsar was a good shipbuilder and sailor) was a symbol not only of overcoming blind nature with the help of the mind that built the ship, but also of conquering archaic, landlocked Russia. Furthermore, he, who had been in love with the Netherlands since his youth, saw in that country a model of how, with the help of trading ports, ships crossing all the oceans of the world, and commerce, people could achieve unprecedented prosperity and glory. The wish to acquire a 'pier' embodied the dream of Peter the Mercantilist, who wanted to enrich his country, so well situated between East and West, by means of commerce and maritime trade. Fascinated with medicine, Peter wrote: '[…] through this artery a healthy and profitable heart of the state may be established'[9]. Without access to the sea, a quay cannot be built, just as it is impossible to build the foundations of a country's power without a navy, such as the one that the island which is 'the best, the most beautiful and the happiest in the whole world'[10] is proud of. This was how Peter I referred to England, the second country which he loved at least as much as he loved the Netherlands. All this explains the advance of the Russian army to Narva and then to the shores of the Gulf of Finland.

The desire to gain access to the sea and secure it for Russia also explains Peter I's persistent striving for peace over the course of the entire Great Northern War. At first the terms on which Russia accepted the peace with the Swedes were stated by Feodor Golovin in his letter of 5 February 1701 to Peter Golitsyn, who was sent to Vienna to seek Austria's mediation: '[…] at the very least keep [the fortress of] Kantsy by the Neva River in our possession'[11], although at the time, in 1701, it was nearly two years before Kantsy (Nyenskans) – the Swedish fortress at the Neva estuary – was seized. I admit, though, that Peter I's imperial fantasy was modest at the time. He had no thoughts of seizing any other Baltic lands and in 1700–1704 he was sincerely claiming that 'he would

[8] '[…] не имею, что из сей святой земли писать, только что всё, слава Богу, здорово'; ПБПВ, т. 9, ч. 1, Москва–Ленинград 1950, [t. 9, ch. 1, Moskva–Leningrad 1950], p. 469.

[9] '[…] чрез сию артерию может здоровое и прибыльное сердце государственное быть'; ПБПВ, т. 3, Санкт-Петербург 1893 [t. 3, Sankt-Peterburg 1893], pp. 30–31.

[10] 'лучшей, красивейшей и счастливейшей из всего света'; Г. фон Гюйссен, op.cit., p. 67.

[11] '[…] по последней мере удержать Канцы на реке Неве в нашей стороне'; Н. Г. Устрялов, op.cit., pp. 78–80.

not seek an inch of land in Estonia and Livonia', that 'he would not like to keep a single original [i.e. belonging to the Swedes – E.V.A.] village', only that 'the native […] lands [of Ingria and Karelia – E.V.A.) remain with him forever'[12].

That this was a sincere commitment can be seen by the way the Russian army ruthlessly and cruelly ravaged Estonia and Livonia from 1701 onwards. Towns and manor houses were mercilessly burnt, cattle and property pillaged, and people who had survived were taken into slavery (the Tatar term for this was *yasyr*). Particularly frightening was the campaign of Field Marshal Boris Sheremetev to South Estonia and Livonia, in the summer of 1702. The aim of the plundering, similar to the invasion of Russia by Batu Khan in the thirteenth century, was to obstruct a possible Swedish counter attack, 'so that the enemy could not find shelter and aid in their towns [which in this context means 'fortresses' – E.V.A.]'[13]. By contrast, Peter I condemned the robberies of Voivode Peter Apraksin's corps, which operated in Ingria in 1701–1702: 'And what […] has been pillaged and destroyed, it is not very pleasant for us, as you have been told in words, and in orders it has been laid down, that it should not be touched'[14]. It was not a matter of humanitarianism – Peter I needed these territories to be inhabited in order to realise his plans to develop the mouth of the Neva.

Access to the sea in the Neva region was assured in the autumn of 1702 when Nöteburg was taken by storming. In May 1703 Nyenskans was surrendered and the fortress of Sankt-Peter's-burg was established almost immediately, as well as the town surrounding it, later given the same name. It is difficult to realise today how much importance Peter I attached to Russia's access to the sea. When celebrating the capture of Nöteburg in December 1702 Peter I told the Prussian envoy Georg Johann Keyserlingk that 'er müste den kommenden frühling Neue Schantze [Swedish Nyenskans, Russian Kantsy – E.V.A.] haben, oder er wolte nicht leben'[15]. The significance of the event was emphasized by the symbolic renaming of the seized Swedish fortresses: Nöteburg became Schlüsselburg ('Key City') and Nyenskans was renamed to Slotburg ('Castle City'). This was planned beforehand, even before the fall of Nyenskans. During

[12] 'ни пяди земли не искать в Эстляндии и Лифляндии […] ни единой деревни шведской подлинной себе удержать не изволит […] чтоб отечественные […] земли недвижно при нем остались'; ПБПВ, т. 3, pp. 30–31, 577.

[13] 'дабы неприятелю пристанища и сикурсу своим городам подать было невозможно'; ПБПВ, т. 2, Санкт-Петербург 1889 [t. 2, Sankt-Peterburg 1889], p. 79.

[14] 'А что […] разорено и вызжено, и то не зело приятно нам, о чем словесно вам говорено, и в статьях положено, чтоб не трогать'; ibid., pp. 60–61, 355.

[15] Paul Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power, 1671–1725*, Cambridge 2001, p. 234.

the New Year celebrations of 1703, a firework display was set off in Moscow, depicting on a banner an ancient god holding a key in one hand and a castle in the other, and a picture of a ship with the words: 'His wish shall come true'[16].

Three months later, in early May 1703, with the sacking of Nyenskans, it did happen. 'The desired seaport has been obtained', Peter I wrote to his allies who responded in the same enthusiastic tone. 'The city of Kantsy: a seaport, the gate of the open sea'[17], wrote Tihon Streshnev, but neither he, nor other subjects of Peter I knew yet that on the place of this 'gate to the sea' the tsar planned to establish a new capital. Having built a fortress, in his correspondence Peter already in 1704 started to call the first nearby settlement on the banks of the Neva River the 'capital'.

Such a course of events, naturally, except for the project of moving the capital, was recognised and even foreseen in Stockholm, but the weak Swedish forces in Finland and Estonia were unable to prevent the tsar from entering the sea and capturing Ingria. However, King Charles XII, who was then involved in chasing the army of Augustus II in Poland, was not disturbed by the developments at the mouth of the Neva. He believed that the inevitable defeat of the Russian army would lead to the punishment of his treacherous neighbour and the return of Ingria to Swedish rule.

Meanwhile, the founding of St Petersburg, which was synonymous with access to the sea, for Russia was a watershed event in the war with the Swedes. I would like to emphasize: not the victory at Poltava in 1709, but the founding of St Petersburg in 1703! The task which Peter the Great faced from the moment he reached the sea was threefold. First, to permanently secure the conquered foothold, to build an echeloned defence system, to erect a fortified city, and to move his residence there; in short, make the geopolitical changes irreversible. Second, to force the Swedes to make peace on the condition of ceding the territories conquered by Russia, by means of convincing military victories and all kinds of blockades and diversions. Finally, to achieve the legitimisation of the conquests by the international community. There is no need to discuss the first problem in this article, except to point out that at the cost of huge financial expenses and immeasurable casualties the 'new Akhetaton'

[16] 'Желание его исполнится'; Владимир Н. Васильев, *Старинные фейерверки в России (XVII – первая четверть XVIII века)*, Ленинград 1960 [Vladimir N. Vasil'yev, *Starinnyye feyyerverki v Rossii (XVII – pervaya chetvert' XVIII veka)*, Leningrad 1960], pp. 30–31.

[17] 'Желаемая морская пристань получена'; 'город Канцы: пристань морская, врата отворенныя, путь морской'; *Гистория Свейской войны (Поденная записка Петра Великого)* (further cit. *Гистория Свейской войны*), вып. 1, сост. Татиана С. Майкова, ред. Александр А. Преображенский, Москва 2004 [*Gistoriya Sveyskoy voyny (Podennaya zapiska Petra Velikogo)*, vyp. 1, sost. Tatiana S. Maykova, red. Aleksandr A. Preobrazhenskiy, Moskva 2004], p. 231.

was built in a very short period of time, while the other two tasks were very difficult to complete.

Already in 1702–1703 Peter I realised that he would not be able to keep his access to the sea without a military victory over Charles XII. On 10 April 1703 he wrote to Augustus II, referring to the Swedish king, that 'his pride' could only be 'defeated by force' and that 'only in this way, and in no other way, can peace be obtained advantageously and effectively'[18]. Later, in 1708, the tsar wrote that he 'constantly strove to perfect the regiments for the battles, which was more reliable than all diplomatic affairs'[19]. Defeating Charles XII on the battlefield initially seemed an impossible task for the tsar, given the king's military talent and the excellent training of the Swedish army. On the contrary, Peter I was well aware of the fundamental shortcomings of his large, but poorly trained army, which lacked skilled officers, weapons and, most importantly, the regular character on which the best armies of the time were founded.

The Russian army had to learn while fighting the war, which is why all the efforts of Peter I during the war in 1705–1709 were directed, first, to securing his position at the mouth of the Neva River, by taking advantage of the absence of the Swedish king's army in the Baltic region; second, to continuously avoiding the decisive battle desired by the Swedes while simultaneously building up the strength of his army and allowing it to gain experience in campaigns and engage in combat. At the same time, widespread use was made of the 'Scythian method' of warfare, where the enemy marched through the ruined and burnt country, struggling for provisions and animal feed, fending off attacks from various sides by small units, and losing men in trifling skirmishes and foraging. The calculations were based on the fact that, as Peter I wrote in 1706, 'the enemy will tire from a long march and will lead his troops to considerable ruin'[20].

In the end, this defence tactic worked: the movement of Charles XII's army eastwards towards Moscow was halted and, before reaching Smolensk, the Swedes turned south towards Ukraine. This retreat, as is well known, culminated in June 1709 in the Battle of Poltava. The Battle of Poltava was won by Peter the Great to a great extent owing to the fact that by the time of the battle his forces were twice as large and also thanks to the application of tactical

[18] 'его гордость […] силами преломить […] сим способом токмо, а никакими иными пути, способной и благополучной мир возможно получити'; ПБПВ, т. 2, pp. 150–151.

[19] 'непрестанную суету […] исправлении полков по баталии, которая вещь есть надежнея всех посланнических дел'; ПБПВ, т. 8, ч. 1, Москва–Ленинград 1948 [t. 8, ch. 1, Moskva–Leningrad 1948], pp. 188–189; ПБПВ, т. 8, ч. 2, Москва–Ленинград 1951 [t. 8, ch. 2, Moskva–Leningrad 1951], pp. 797–799, 808–809.

[20] 'неприятель от дального похода утомитца и в немалое разорение, свои войска'; ПБПВ, т. 2, pp. 19–20.

innovations on the battlefield. Throughout all these years of intense military struggle, Peter I never tired of looking for ways to reach a compromise peace, which he believed would be the best outcome in a confrontation, dangerously verging on disaster, with such a powerful and unpredictable opponent, as Charles XII seemed to the tsar.

Immediately after founding St Petersburg, Peter I made an offer of peace to Charles XII on one condition – that Ingria should be handed over to Russia[21]. The king was silent. This continued year after year, although there was no peace negotiator in Europe who was not approached by Peter I in search of a way to reach an agreement. These intermediaries were invariably the English and the Dutch, the Austrians and the French, the Danes and the Prussians. In the first months of 1707, when it was known that Charles XII was determined to start a campaign against Moscow, Peter I intensified the pursuit for peace. The situation of Russia, which was in complete international isolation at the outset of the Swedish invasion, was critical. But even in these desperate circumstances he remained true to himself: when asked about surrendering Ingria he answered that 'in no way will it be done […] as there is nothing worse than that'[22], but was prepared for new, unprecedented concessions on 'reasonable terms'. The English envoy Charles Whitworth, reported to London what Peter I's 'reasonable terms' were: 'What he means by "reasonable terms" is to keep Ingria for an equivalent either of money alone or of the town of Pleskow with some money'[23]. As we can see, Peter I showed his readiness to give the Swedes the most ancient 'land of the fathers and grandfathers', Pskov, which Russia could not be imagined without. Undoubtedly this is the ultimate testament to the utmost importance which Peter I attached to gaining an access to the sea. At the same time Peter I tried to start negotiations with the Swedes through the French ambassador to Sweden Jean Victor de Besenval, offering to start bargaining with the Swedes for Dorpat and Narva, but on the following condition: 'And about Peterburg by all means seek to keep it for whatever else, and do not even think about giving it back'[24].

However, Charles XII believed that negotiations with Peter I – in his opinion a 'barbarian and oath-breaker' – could only be held if Russia capitulated in

[21] Г. фон Гюйссен, op.cit., pp. 369–376.

[22] 'ни по которому образу того не будет, […] понеже хуже сего нечему быть'; ПБПВ, т. 5, Санкт-Петербург 1907 [t. 5, Sankt-Peterburg 1907], p. 51.

[23] *Сборник императорского Русского исторического общества* (further cit. СИРИО), т. 39, Санкт-Петербург 1884 [*Sbornik imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva*, t. 39, Sankt-Peterburg 1884], pp. 372–373.

[24] 'А о Питербурхе всеми мерами искать удержать за что-нибуть, а отдачи оного ниже в мысли [не] иметь'; ПБПВ, т. 5, pp. 620–621; ПБПВ, т. 6, p. 349.

full, returned all territories it had treacherously seized, and paid compensation for their devastation as well as for all the losses and moral costs the Swedes had suffered[25]. Feodor Golovin wrote in 1704, that the king 'is very stubborn, and will not hear of any peace […]' and intended to wage war until victory[26]. Neither Chancellor Gavriil Golovin, nor his master, who both were used to the realistic and pragmatic world of international affairs, where the search for compromise was at the core of politics, could understand Charles XII, who saw politics with an altogether different perspective than was the norm. As the Great Northern War historian Valeryi Vozgrin wrote: 'What is important for a historian of diplomacy is the very approach of Charles XII to the problem of peacemaking: based on the fact that (in his view) the tsar had violated a number of guarantees he himself had given, the king concluded that any compromise solutions based on treaties with Russia before defeating it were impossible. The conclusion to be drawn from this was that the future security of Sweden was inconceivable without the defeat of the Russian army, the replacement of the tsar (presumably with Jan Sobieski), the possible division of the country into smaller states, dependent on Sweden, and the return of the boyar aristocracy to its former position'[27].

Charles XII was determined to accept Peter I's surrender in Moscow and therefore did not respond to any appeals made to him by Russia and its many peace mediators. In doing so, Peter I was just as stubborn as Charles XII. James Jefferies recorded in 1719 the words of Peter Shafirov that His Majesty 'were resolved to continue the war 20 years to come rather than restore any part of their conquests but Finland, which, continued he, they do not design to restore entire neither, Wiburgh, Slusselburgh and Kexholm being of the greatest importance to His Czarish Majesty'[28].

In the end, reaching a compromise and establishing peace was utterly impossible. The two contending rulers, like two deer, with their horns locked, stood their ground agonisingly for years, until a bullet from a musket pierced

[25] ПБПВ, т. 4, Санкт-Петербург 1900 [t. 4, Sankt-Peterburg 1900], p. 739.

[26] 'зело упорен и ни о каком миру […] слышить не хочет'; ПБПВ, т. 3, p. 557.

[27] 'важен для историка дипломатии сам подход Карла XII к проблеме заключения мира: основываясь на фактах нарушения (с его точки зрения) царем ряда им же данных гарантий, король делал вывод о невозможности любых компромиссных решений, основанных на договорах с Россией, до победы над ней. Отсюда, очевидно, следовал вывод – безопасность Швеции в будущем немыслима без разгрома русской армии, замены царя (предположительно, Я. Собеским), возможно, раздела страны на мелкие государства, зависимые от Швеции, и возврата боярской аристократии былого влияния'; Валерий Е. Возгрин, *Россия и европейские страны в годы Северной войны*, Ленинград 1986 [Valeriy Ye. Vozgrin, *Rossiya i yevropeyskiye strany v gody Severnoy voyny*, Leningrad 1986], pp. 204–205.

[28] СИРИО, т. 61, Санкт-Петербург 1888 [t. 61, Sankt-Peterburg 1888], p. 524.

one of their heads, and even then the conflict between the two countries was not over.

In the winter of 1709, however, a new light seemed to dawn on the political horizon. Charles XII, who happened to be in Ukraine, suffering severe frosts, found himself in a particularly difficult position as the auxiliary corps of General Adam Ludwig Löwenhaupt had been defeated by Peter I in autumn of 1708 near the village of Lesnaia in what is now Belarus. The tsar, whose army was also exhausted, took advantage of the defeat. In February 1709 Chancellor, Gavriil Golovkin, through a captive Swedish officer, offered Karl Piper, the Swedish king's First Minister, a truce on the condition that part of Ingria (with St Petersburg) and part of Karelia would be bought. Russia was also ready to buy Narva. In this way, Peter I flattered himself with the hope that if not the king, then at least his entourage would respond to the offered money, much needed for the warring country's budget, and show a 'ministerial bent' towards peace[29]. However, Karl Pieper replied to Gavriil Golovkin that the king was ready to make peace, but only if Russia capitulated[30]. Once again the attempt at negotiation failed, and on 27 June (8 July) 1709 the irreconcilable opponents marched to the field of Poltava.

Peter I's victory at Poltava marked Russia's advantage in the Baltic region and in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. But it was not the victory itself that was important to the tsar. The first thing Peter I thought about after the victory was St Petersburg. He wrote to Feodor Apraksin: 'The final foundation stone of St Petersburg has now been laid […]'[31]. Immediately he offered the defeated enemy peace. The tsar was convinced that Charles XII would agree to negotiate when faced with reality. But it was not to happen! In Peter I's appeal to the Swedish people in August 1709 it is mentioned with sorrow that Charles XII had rejected the peace offer made to him immediately after the battle, although it was a 'moderate and thoroughly Christian peace offer on condition that only Vyborg and Karelia would be granted to us'. Ingria is not even mentioned here, because for Peter I this issue had already been resolved: it unequivocally belonged to Russia. But alas, said Peter I: '[…] how little reaction from the king and the Swedish Senate these laudable plans have received'[32].

[29] ПБПВ, т. 9, ч. 1, p. 176.

[30] ПБПВ, т. 9, ч. 2, Москва 1952 [t. 9, ch. 2, Moskva 1952], pp. 856–858.

[31] 'Ныне уже совершенной камень во основание Санкт-Петербурху положен […]'; ПБПВ, т. 9, ч. 2, p. 988; ПБПВ, т. 9, ч. 1, pp. 228–231.

[32] 'умеренное и вполне христианское предложение мира на условиях предоставления нам только Выборга и Карелии'; '[…] как мало отзвука со стороны короля и шведского сената получили эти наши достохвальные замыслы'; Антоний В. Флоровский, *Забытое воззвание Петра I к шведам после Полтавы*, [in:] *Полтава. К 250-летию Полтавского сражения. Сборник статей*, Москва 1959 [Antoniy V. Florovskiy, *Zabytoye vozzvaniye*

Nor did the cause advance even a single step forward, when Peter I rushed to reap the fruits of his victory at the field of Poltava. He restored the Northern Alliance against Sweden and in the course of 1710 seized: Riga, Reval, Pernau and Ahrensburg in Livonia and Estonia, Elbing (Polish Elbląg) in Polish Royal Prussia, and Vyborg and Kexholm in Karelia. While Kexholm-Korela still counted as the 'lands of the fathers and grandfathers', none of the other towns and lands did. From this point on, the notions of 'returned' and 'conquered' territories became part of the vocabulary of Russian diplomacy, with the status of the former (i.e. Ingria and Karelia) not even being open for discussion.

The status of the 'conquered' territories from this point on becomes, in Peter I's view, a bargaining chip, with two exceptions allowing for the annexation of these territories (or part of them) by Russia. The first exception was based on the 'compensation motive', the second on the 'barrier motive'. The compensation motive was first demonstrated in relation to Estonia. It is well known that, according to the Treaty of Narva of 1704, Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became allies on the condition that Poland-Lithuania would reclaim the right bank of the Dnieper River and Livonia after its conquest by Russia. Peter I repeatedly assured his Polish-Lithuanian allies that he would fulfil the terms of their alliance. After Stanislaw I Leszczynski claimed to the Polish-Lithuanian throne and King Augustus II was overthrown by the Swedes, the Sandomierz Confederation, which remained loyal to Augustus II and maintained the alliance with Russia, remained Peter I's only ally in the fight against Sweden for several years on the terms of the Treaty of Narva. However, after the Battle of Poltava, Augustus II, who regained the Polish-Lithuanian throne, concluded with Peter I and added to the treaty a secret article, according to which Livonia, after it had been conquered by the Russian army, would become Augustus II's hereditary possession, and once Russia conquered Estonia, Peter I would annex it, on the basis of '[…] the great suffering he had endured from him [i.e. the enemy – E.V.A.] in his lands, he has the right to exact retribution from the enemy'[33]. And immediately after the seizure of Reval in 1710, Peter I stipulated that this 'retribution' for the 'use of resources […] throughout the whole century' by the Swedes in Ingria and Karelia would be: 'the city of Reval and the province of Estonia, re-conquered from the Swedish Crown, also to safeguard it against further attacks by the Swedes, the city of Vyborg, conquered by His Majesty, which belongs to the province of Karelia by

Petra I k shvedam posle Poltavy, [in:] *Poltava. K 250-letiyu Poltavskogo srazheniya. Sbornik statey*, Moskva 1959], pp. 361–362.

[33] '[…] das in ihren Landen zugefügten grossen Schadens dadurch dedomagieren können'; ПБПВ, т. 10, Москва 1956 [t. 10, Moskva 1956], pp. 458, 775.

the position of the land, may from now on be in his eternal possession'[34]. But that is not all: for the costs already incurred in the course of the war Sweden was to surrender Helsingfors with its surroundings to Russia, and even pay a total of five million thalers.

The 'barrier motive', i.e. the creation of a buffer zone around St Petersburg is already evident in the text ('to safeguard against further attacks by the Swedes'). This referred to Vyborg and what was then called 'Old Finland'. In June 1710 congratulating his concubine, the future Empress Catherine, on the seizure of Vyborg Peter I wrote: '[…] a solid cushion has already been laid for St Petersburg by the help of God'[35].

The second 'cushion' was Estonia and, following the conquest of Finland in 1714, Helsingfors, on the grounds that if 'Revel and Helsingfors remained in Swedish possession, they would also have the entire fairway [in the Gulf of Finland – E.V.A.] to St Petersburg in their hands'[36]. The motive of 'cushioning', 'creating a barrier', and establishing a 'buffer zone' around St Petersburg became a key point in the peace talks and subsequently a traditional reason for justifying Russia's aggressive policy towards Finland throughout the eighteenth-twentieth centuries. Importantly, peace negotiations were carried out along with the actual incorporation of the conquered territories. By taking Vyborg, for example, Peter I immediately showed that he was annexing it for good. He kept the garrison of Vyborg until the fulfilment of essentially impossible, unrealistic conditions: the garrison would not be released until the Swedes had returned the wives and children of the Vyborg townsmen who had fled to Sweden, and the property that they had taken with them. The rationale was that 'the citizens of Vyborg, after their surrender, are under the power of His Royal Majesty'[37]. This is how Peter I, even before signing the peace treaty with Sweden, acknowledged the inhabitants of the conquered Swedish town as his subjects.

[34] 'вновь завоеванныя от короны Свейской город Ревель с провинцею Естляндской, тож к тому для безопасения впредь от нападения шведцкого да пребудет в Его величества вечном владении город завоеванной Выборг, которой к Корельской провинции по положению земли принадлежит'; ПБПВ, т. 11, ч. 1, Москва 1962 [t. 11, ch. 1, Moskva 1962], pp. 38–39, 79.

[35] '[…] уже крепкая падушка Санкт-Питербурху устроена чрез помощь Божью'; ПБПВ, т. 10, p. 193.

[36] 'Ревель и Гельсингфорс в шведском владении останутся, то и весь фарватер в Санкт-Петербург у них же в руках будет'; as cited in: София А. Фейгина, *Аландский конгресс. Внешняя политика России в конце Северной войны*, Москва 1959 [Sofiya A. Feygina, *Alandskiy kongress. Vneshnyaya politika Rossii v kontse Severnoy voyny*, Moskva 1959], p. 222.

[37] 'гражданя выборгские по капитуляции под владетельством Его царского величества обретатися имеют'; ПБПВ, т. 10, p. 632.

The same principle, but on an even larger scale, was demonstrated with Livonia and Estonia. Contrary to the promises made to Augustus II (and separately to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), immediately after the conquest of Riga and Reval in 1710, Peter I had declared the inhabitants of those lands subjects of Russia. He granted the nobles and the burghers of those provinces all their former privileges, and released the Swedish soldiers that were taken captive, but had been born in Livonia, and invited them to join the Russian army[38]. The reason was, that 'the men of Livonia and other cities, that once belonged to the Swedish Crown, and had been captured by Russian forces, may be called Russian subjects'[39]. Those Livonians who refused to serve the Russian tsar were, like Russian deserters, to be tried by the military court 'as mutineers'[40].

Naturally, with such a turn of events, the previous search for a peaceful dialogue with Sweden from the standpoint of equality of the parties came to an end. From that moment on, Russia finally adopted a harsh policy of enforcing peace on Sweden, using all possible means of pressure. On the one hand, having forced the Swedes off the southern coast of the Baltic Sea, Peter I rushed with the same purpose, but in alliance with the Danes and Saxons, into Swedish Pomerania. On the other hand, from 1713 the tsar set about conquering Finland. By naming Finland in a letter to the Admiral-General Feodor Apraksin (October 1712), 'the breast of Sweden, as you yourself know, not only the meat and other things, but also the wood [comes] from there'[41], he hoped to put economic pressure on the enemy, who had lost half of the royal budget because of the loss of the overseas territories. The economic blockade would, in Peter I's view, have brought Sweden to ruin, when, as the imaginative tsar wrote, 'the Swedish neck will bend better'[42]. In 1714 Finland was fully occupied, but Sweden would not be 'bent' in this way.

With each success on the battlefield and in the diplomatic game, Peter the Great became increasingly confident that the Swedes were crushed and a truce on his terms was near, but soon disappointment set in, as Swedish society again showed its 'stubbornness', and in fact, demonstrated resilience, patience, and loyalty to its king. On every occasion Sweden seemed to find internal resources to resist, and once again peace would prove elusive for Peter I.

[38] ПБПВ, т. 10, pp. 645–646; *Гистория Свейской войны*, вып. 1, p. 350.

[39] 'лифляндцы и других городов [жители], бывших короны Швецкой, взятых чрез оружие российское […] – те могут назватися росийскими подданными'; *Гистория Свейской войны*, вып. 1, pp. 350–351.

[40] ПБПВ, т. 11, ч. 1, p. 242.

[41] 'титькой Швеции, как сам ведаешь, не только что мяса и протчее, но и дрова оттоль'; ПБПВ, т. 12, ч. 2, Москва 1977 [t. 12, ch. 2, Moskva 1977], pp. 197–198.

[42] 'шведская шея мяхче гнутца станет'; ibid.

It was only in 1718, largely thanks to the efforts of Georg Heinrich von Görtz who became the closest ally of Charles XII, that talks began in the Åland Islands, although they were fruitless, as Sweden was not prepared to sustain territorial losses for the sake of peace. Still, by the end of the Great Northern War, even before peace was concluded, Peter I had already fulfilled the dream of his youth. Russia had gained access to the sea and the tsar was finally able, as the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin wrote a hundred years later, to 'on coast now firmly take position'. The foundation of St Petersburg became a fact which even the Swedes no longer doubted and there was no longer any question of returning the mouth of the Neva to Sweden. It is curious that when the conditions of peace were being discussed in 1721 Peter I amended the Swedish draft treaty. The Swedes declared in the draft that they were ceding 'Ingria with St Petersburg', but Peter I demanded that they should not 'mention St Petersburg as it had never been in their possession'[43]. This is to say that the Swedes considered the city to be theirs, as illegally built on their territory.

All the negotiations concerned mainly the fate of the 'barrier' territories, that is, Estonia, Finland, Vyborg, and partly Kexholm. The fate of Livonia, the most important overseas province of the Kingdom of Sweden, remained an important question for a long time. Peter I and his diplomats had been assuring Augustus II for ten years, since the beginning of the war, that Russia would turn Livonia over to the personal possession of the Polish king. In the negotiations with the representatives of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, its right to hold the territory was not called into question either. But after Riga had been taken by the Russian army, everything changed. In May 1711, in conversation with the French envoy Jan Kazimierz Baluze, Vice-Chancellor Peter Shafirov said that the Swedish king '[…] demandait la restitution des provinces que le czar, possède présentement par le droit de la guerre, ce qu'il serait impossible de lui accorder par rapport á la justice, et á l'état supérieur où se trouve son maître; que d'ailleurs il avait des pretentions sur la Livonie aussi bien que le roi et la république de Pologne'[44].

What Peter Shafirov said about the claims of Russia, which was in a better position than Sweden, regarding Livonia, revealed Peter I's long-time intention to annex Livonia, which first manifested itself with the declaration of its inhabitants as subjects of the tsar. This intention to incorporate Livonia and even the oath given by its inhabitants did not solve the issue of Livonia's belonging

[43] 'о Петербурге упоминать не надлежит, ибо оного при их владении не было'; Иван И. Голиков, *Деяния Петра Великого, мудрого преобразователя России*, т. 8, Москва 1838 [Ivan I. Golikov, *Deyaniya Petra Velikogo, mudrogo preobrazovatelya Rossii*, t. 8, Moskva 1838], pp. 215–216, 218.

[44] СИРИО, т. 34, 1881 [t. 34, Sankt-Peterburg 1881], pp. 68–69.

to the tsar after the peace was concluded. Livonia had for a long time been a bargaining chip in Peter I's geo-political calculations, and the tsar could not ignore the opinion of the great powers who feared the rapid growth of Russia and its conquest of other countries. Eventually, Peter the Great did not have the time to settle the matter with the 'stubborn' Sweden before the end of the War of the Spanish Succession (1713–1714), and after the conclusion of the Peace of Utrecht the attention of the great powers shifted to the situation in the Baltic region. This held Peter I back, especially when Great Britain joined the camp of Russia's enemies, as king George I was irritated by Peter I's imperial in nature attempt to infiltrate Germany by stationing troops in Mecklenburg, which threatened Hanover, George I's hereditary possession.

The supremacy of Great Britain and its powerful navy, which kept entering the Baltic Sea and blockading the Russian fleet in Reval harbour, compelled Peter I to be careful at sea as well. He was prepared to sacrifice Livonia in order to achieve (if only as a preliminary condition), indisputable recognition of Russia's 'inherited lands', i.e. Ingria and Karelia, by the great powers. Thus Peter I was prepared to accept the so-called Husum draft of the peace treaty drawn up by the Northern Alliance in 1712–1713. It stipulated the recognition of Russian 'lands of the fathers and grandfathers', presuming that Livonia would fall under Augustus II and/or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, while Riga was to be a free city[45]. The tsar even agreed to return Livonia to the Swedes on condition that all its fortresses be destroyed and Finland be ceded to Russia instead of Livonia. Thus Finland had become a bargaining chip in the negotiations since its conquest in 1714. Peter I took possession of Finland with the sole purpose of crushing Sweden's economy and 'having something to surrender when making peace during negotiations'[46], which is what happened later.

Meanwhile the discussions in the Åland Islands, initiated by Georg Heinrich von Görtz, came to an abrupt end with the death of Charles XII at the end of 1718. Georg Heinrich von Görtz was called back from the negotiations, tried, and executed, thus the Swedish government's position became even tougher as Stockholm received a million thalers and naval support from London and would not agree to any concessions. Peter I was now in a position to mount serious military pressure on Sweden through widespread and destructive raids on coastal areas of the Swedish mainland. For this operation, Peter I used a shallow-seated galley fleet, against which the large-tonnage fleet of Sweden was helpless. The idea of breaking the Swedish will to resist by destroying their towns, villages, and the entire infrastructure of Sweden had been in his mind for a long time. Already in 1716, in alliance with the Danes, he had

[45] ПБПВ, т. 13, ч. 2, Москва 2003 [t. 13, ch. 2, Moskva 2003], p. 71.
[46] 'было б что при мире уступить'; ПБПВ, т. 12, ч. 2, pp. 197–198.

planned such an operation in Scania, but then it did not take place because of Peter I's uncertainty about the success of the operation and friction with the Danish allies.

Now nothing stood in the way of an operation of intimidation and, as the British resident James Jefferies reported to London in 1719, one of Peter I's associates told him that '[…] il falloit porter le flambeau de la guerre jusques dans la capitale de la Suède'.[47]

The Russian assault galleys only needed to make their way from Finland to the shores of Sweden before the British squadron entered the Baltic Sea to prevent the planned ravaging of the Swedish coastline. Although Peter I was scared of the British fleet, and wrote to his sailors that if necessary, they should retreat, as 'there is no shame in retreating from a forceful fleet'[48], the operations were successful. The British were too late to reach the Swedish coast. Twice, in 1719 and 1720, the Russian landing military force consisting of 26 000 soldiers arrived on the Swedish coast unhindered. The soldiers burned c. 2000 villages, castles, manors, and towns (c. 17 000 households), dozens of enterprises and mills, and vast forests were set on fire[49]. The memory of this invasion is still alive in Sweden. At the same time, Peter I put pressure on the Swedes with harsh ultimatums.

One Russian unit penetrated to within 10 kilometres of Stockholm. Alarmed by the sight of burning villages that were visible from the capital, the newly enthroned King Fredrik I proposed peace negotiations in December 1720 in Nystad.

The paradox of the end of the Great Northern War was that by this time Russia had already lost all its allies and friends and found itself in practical isolation, as it had been in 1707, after the collapse of the Northern Alliance, when Peter I was terribly discouraged by the course of events[50]. Now, in 1721, however, the tsar was no longer afraid of being isolated. Thanks to the radical reforms he had carried out, and the mobilisation of enormous human and material resources, Russia had grown considerably stronger. Peter I would no longer have to take anyone into consideration in the Baltic region. According to Jefferys, he had been told in St Petersburg that Sweden was trying Peter I's patience in vain, for 'ils sont assez capables par leur propre force d'en tirer une

[47] СИРИО, т. 61, p. 468.

[48] 'от сильного ретироваться стыда нет'; Архив Санкт-Петербургского института истории РАН [Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburgskogo instituta istorii RAN], fond 270, opis' 1 (further cit. АСПИИ РАН), delo 97, l. 360.

[49] АСПИИ РАН, delo 90, l. 491–492; Magnus Ullman, *Rysshärjningarna på Ostkusten sommaren 1719*, Stockholm 2006.

[50] Shafirov then told the foreign envoys, that the tsar 'had the misfortune to be abandoned by all the world', and no one made the least step in his favour, see СИРИО, т. 39, p. 383.

paix selon leur souhaite'.[51] In a letter written in the spring of 1721, the tsar, in his usual pragmatic way, referred to the threat from Great Britain in the sense that 'there is nothing to be feared from the English […] as they have nothing to gain by it'[52]. Among his men, he mocked at how the formidable British--Swedish fleet, commanded by Admiral John Norris, failed to reach the coast of Estonia in 1720, and only managed to burn down a barn and bathhouse on Nargen Island (today's Naissaar in Estonia)[53]. Peter I believed that Sweden was relying on the British aid in vain, and that it would eventually be left alone against Russia. This was understood by the new King Fredrick I, who was not morally bound by obligations made during the reign of his predecessor. For him, a German aristocrat from Kassel, the whole long war was unfamiliar and had to be ended. In the spring of 1721 Peter I laid down final conditions: Ingria and Estonia as well as Vyborg 'with a respectable barrier, as well as the town of Kexholm in Karelia and some parts of it'. Peter I promised to give 'a certain sum of money' for Livonia by instalments over four years. The diplomats were to 'bargain for money' and the tsar was prepared to return Finland and the swampy parts of Karelia, except Vyborg and Kexholm, to Sweden[54]. In sum, after the short negotiations in Nystad, in the autumn of 1721 Peter I secured everything he wanted, and more than he had even dreamed of in 1703. The Treaty of Nystad marked Russia's complete and unconditional victory over Sweden, formerly the dominant power in the Baltic region. This treaty brought Russia new territories, legitimized access to the sea, and established a new capital. However, the main and direct consequence of the Treaty of Nystad was the proclamation of the Russian Empire and the realisation by the rest of Europe that this change in nomenclature reflected the reality of power in the region.

It is important to note that the proclamation of Empire was an emanation of the harsh regime of autocracy established under Peter the Great, directly reflected in foreign policy. Since then, Russia has been characterised by features of an imperial state of that time, such as territorial expansion – the permanent and supreme political aim of every empire's existence – as well as the cult of imperial power and the desire for unconditional hegemony over its neighbours. At the same time, the Empire has not always successfully justified or sustained its aggressions and annexations and has resorted to cunning explanations about the 'need to protect borders' and 'preventive attacks'. Often it did not even hypocritically talk about the higher messianic, civilisational purposes

[51] СИРИО, т. 61, p. 68.

[52] 'агличан опасатца нечево […] понеже никакой прибыли [им] в том им нет'; АСПИИ РАН, delo 97, l. 383.

[53] АСПИИ РАН, delo 93, l. 472.

[54] 'с пристойною бариерою, також и в Карелии город Кексгольм с некоторым дистриктом'; И. И. Голиков, op.cit., pp. 198–200.

of annexation, but acted directly and brutally. In this sense, the abovementioned quote by Peter Shafirov in 1711 about Russia's right to Livonia as war booty is suggestive. A similar explanation was given almost a hundred years later in 1808 by the Emperor Alexander I for seizing and incorporating the Swedish province of Finland into the Empire: 'Finland has been incorporated into Russia by right of conquest and by the lot of war and cannot be separated from it except by force of arms'[55].

The cult of imperial power was to instil fear in the Empire's neighbours. This had already been achieved by the end of the Great Northern War. Vice-Chancellor Peter Shafirov wrote in his journalistic essay *Discourse on the Causes of the Swedish War* (1717): 'And I can say that no one is so feared as we are'[56]. The logic set by the workings of imperial power demanded the consolidation of the hegemony sustained by conquest at all costs. Peace according to the imperial ambitions could not be mutually acceptable, it had to be framed in such terms that the defeated enemy would not be able to breathe freely for long, and would instead be confined to a close alliance with the victorious Russia, as in the case of the alliance with the defeated Sweden signed in 1724. Moreover, Russia, for all the rigidity of its own domestic policy, was anxious to maintain political tolerance in the Kingdom of Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and guaranteed the permanence of their political systems, all in the name of maintaining the comfortable weakness of these countries' political regimes.

At the same time, the Empire had to anticipate the inevitable desire of the defeated for revenge. In his *Discourse* Vice-Chancellor Peter Shafirov, arguing with imaginary interlocutors who allegedly persuaded Russia to return the territories seized during the war to the Swedes, replies harshly: if, '[…] having carried out everything that they feared, and having so deeply vexed them, we shall disarm ourselves again, then think whether they will leave us alone, whether they will not seek to ruin us so that from now on we will not be able to do any noble thing. And not only will they not be afraid of us, but they will always be so above us'[57].

[55] 'Финляндия присоединена к России по праву завоевания и по жребию битв и не может быть отделена от нее иначе, как силою оружия'; Александр Н. Михайловский-Данилевский, *Описание Финляндской войны на сухом пути и на море в 1808 и 1809 годах*, Санкт-Петербург 1841 [Aleksandr N. Mikhaylovskiy-Danilevskiy, *Opisaniye Finlyandskoy voyny na sukhom puti i na more v 1808 i 1809 godakh*, Sankt-Peterburg 1841], p. 367.

[56] 'И могу сказать, что никого так не боятся, как нас'; Пётр П. Шафиров, *Рассуждение о причинах Свейской войны*, [in:] *«Россию поднял на дыбы». Сборник материалов*, т. 1, Москва 1987 [Pëtr P. Shafirov, *Rassuzhdeniye o prichinakh Sveyskoy voyny*, [in:] *«Rossiyu podnyal na dyby». Sbornik materialov*, t. 1, Moskva 1987], pp. 548–549.

[57] '[…] исполня все то, чего оные опасались и так глубоко им досадя, паки себя обнажим, то, подумай, оставят ли они нас в покое, не будут искать того, чтоб так нас разорить,

It is the 'fear' (*страх*), the 'great fear' (*великий страх*), embodied in the overwhelming military might that brings Russia continuous victories, that is the essence of Peter I's imperial ambitions. This 'fear' must surely and constantly be brought upon Russia's neighbours by the Empire's new conquests. On more than one occasion Peter I argued that the neglect of the army and relying on peacemaking was the cause of the fall of the Byzantine Empire ('the Greek fall due to disdain for war')[58]. In short, in the name of its security the Russian Empire could not afford to be peaceful or even neutral. Archbishop Theophanes Prokopovich, who provided Peter I's autocracy with a theoretical background, spoke in one of his sermons about the magical effect of changes brought about in neighbours under the influence of fear: those of them, '[…] who hated us as coarse, now they diligently seek our brotherhood; who called us infamous, they praise us; who threatened, they fear and tremble; who despised us, they are not ashamed to serve us; many crowned heads in Europe join Peter in alliance […] and they do so willingly; […] they revoke their opinions, they have erased their old stories about us, and they have started to speak and write differently; Russia has raised its head – bright, beautiful, strong, loved by friends, feared by enemies'[59].

Theophanes and other publicists of the time paint a new reality: a new imperial Russia established with access to the sea, which had parted with its outdated past when it had been land-based, archaic, and weak. In the new system of international relations in which Russia found itself, once it had access to the sea and became, thanks to the Treaty of Nystad, an empire, it was destined to claim and fight for world domination – the path that many empires had followed. But, as is well known, this goal was never achieved by anyone. Russia,

чтоб век впредь не в состоянии были какие знатные дела чинить. И не только чтоб им нас бояться, но всегда б так над нами быть'; ibid.

[58] 'о греческом падении от презрения войны'; *Законодательные акты Петра I. Редакции и проекты законов, заметки, доклады, доношения, челобитья и иностранные источники. Сборник документов*, т. 2–3, сост. Николай А. Воскресенский, ред. Евгений В. Анисимов, Москва 2020 [*Zakonodatel'nyye akty Petra I. Redaktsii i proyekty zakonov, zametki, doklady, donosheniya, chelobit'ya i inostrannyye istochniki. Sbornik dokumentov*, t. 2–3, sost. Nikolay A. Voskresenskiy, red. Evgenii V. Anisimov, Moskva 2020], p. 336.

[59] '[…] которые нас гнушалися яко грубых, ищут усердно братства нашего; которыи бесчестили – славят; которые грозили, боятся и трепещут; которые презирали – служити нам не стыдятся; многии в Европе коронованныи главы в союз с Петром […] идут доброхотно; […] отменили мнение, отменили прежния свои о нас повести, затерли историйки своя древния, инако и глаголати и писати начали; поднесла главу Россия – светлая, красная, сильная, другом любимая, врагом страшная'; Феофан Прокопович, *Слова и речи*, ч. 1, Санкт-Петербург 1760 [Feofan Prokopovich, *Slova i rechi*, ch. 1, Sankt-Peterburg 1760], p. 115.

at first greeted without delight at the table of the great powers, actively participated in the formation of alliances, political and military blocs, and coalitions, and engaged in behind-the-scenes struggles.

But for Peter I's Russia, all this was yet to come. Immediately after the Treaty of Nystad and the proclamation of the Empire, key principles of imperial practice came into force: a programme of building huge, equipped with 100 cannons ships designed for ocean navigation was adopted in St Petersburg. The expansion to the East has become an important issue of Russian politics. Despite the failure of the Prut military campaign of 1711 against the Turks, Peter I later sent detachments to explore and conquer Central Asia What followed were the Persian campaign of 1722–1723, the occupation and subsequent annexation of the western coast of the Caspian Sea and two northern Iranian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran, plans to build the city of Ekaterinenpol there and to replace the local Muslim population with Orthodox Russian and Armenian settlers, and the formation of a large occupation corps.

Peter I intended to build a new Petersburg at the mouth of the Kura River, making it the centre of world trade, and for this purpose he wanted to set up a trading company headed by the adventurer John Law, following the collapse of his scheme to establish a national bank in France. At the same time the tsar was drawing up plans for an overland military campaign to India. At the end of his life, in addition to planning a land expedition from Gilan to Hindustan, he was preparing a squadron to conquer Madagascar as a base for the campaign in India[60]. In the end, with a titanic effort, Peter the Great put Russia on the imperial track on which it would roll. And it all started with a youthful dream of gaining access to the sea.

Translated by Aleksandra Lewandowska

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