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The Pragmatic Diplomacy of Paul I: Russia's Relations with Asia, 1796–1801

In recent years, a number of scholars have argued that the traditional negative image of Paul I is in need of substantial revision. Even Boris Nolde's seminal history of the Russian Empire presents the emperor in an uncomplimentary light, as a man who was greedy for territory but not an astute analyst of the information available to guide his decisions.¹ If no one has yet claimed that Paul was an exceptionally wise and able man, some historians, at least, have shown that he was neither as foolish nor as mad as the partisans of Catherine and Alexander would have him be. Hugh Ragsdale has argued that Paul was far more aware of Russia's international interests and more assertive in policy making than is usually thought.² Two other scholars, Norman Saul and A. M. Stanislavskaja, have reappraised Paul's diplomacy in the broader context of Russia's international relations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, showing that Paul's interest in the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean was the product of quite rational concerns over the security of Russia's southern provinces or the disruption of the balance of power caused by French and British conquests.³ Yet, Professor Saul implies that there was much that was unrealistic, albeit in a rather attractively idealistic way, about Paul's diplomacy.⁴ Although Professor Stanislavskaja presents Russia's foreign policy in a positive light, she rarely shows Paul as the initiator of well-chosen policies; but instead, depicts him as mentally ill and given to wild schemes.⁵ A more capable side of Paul's nature can be seen in his policy toward Asia, especially the Caucasus, Iran, and India. (His policy toward the Ottoman Empire was concerned above all with the European and African provinces—the Balkans, Ionian Islands, and Egypt—not the Asian ones.) In this sphere, Paul's foreign policy—far from being based on Prussian obsessions and fear over the dangers of French expansion—was generally level-headed and pragmatic, much more so than the policies of his mother, Catherine, or his son, Alexander.

Catherine, Paul, and Alexander all shared certain broad assumptions about the nature of Russia's interests in western Asia and India. Although Paul is usually seen as having begun his reign with the deliberate reversal of his mother's policies, his fundamental outlook, at least as regards this subject, was virtually identical to Catherine's. First of all, a foothold in the Caucasus and favorable

1. B. Nolde, *La Formation de l'Empire Russe*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1952), 2: 379–82.

2. Hugh Ragsdale, "Was Paul Bonaparte's Fool?," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 7, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 52–67. Other articles in the same issue seek to offer fresh insights into different aspects of Paul's reign.

3. Norman E. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean, 1797–1807* (Chicago, 1970); and A. M. Stanislavskaja, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia i problemy Sredizemnomor'ia 1798–1807* (Moscow, 1962).

4. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean*, pp. 36–37, 46, 50–51, 73–74, 142, 144.

5. Stanislavskaja, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia*, pp. 168 and 173.

relations with Iran were considered strategically valuable because they would enable Russia to apply pressure to the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Once this military value was perceived, economic considerations increased the appeal of the region. In addition to the overly optimistic assessments by a number of self-proclaimed experts on the natural resources of Georgia and neighboring Muslim principalities, there was the lure of trade in eastern luxuries—silks from Iran and a host of fabulous riches from India. In the late eighteenth century, many highly placed Russians were convinced that trade with Asia was a vital factor in the prosperity of Western Europe. Now it was Russia's turn—since it was so much nearer the commercial centers of the East—to enter into East-West trade and to dominate it.⁶

Despite the similar goals of the three rulers, Paul's methods differed strikingly from those of Catherine and Alexander. It is this difference which probably accounts for some of the derogatory remarks made about him. He challenged the pervasive assumptions about the nature of "Asiatics"; he saw the blunders which underlay the grandiose schemes of Catherine's favorites; and he tried to substitute inducement and accommodation for the widely preferred techniques of bluster and aggression. One of Paul's first acts, taken the day after his mother's death, was to order a halt to the expedition sent to conquer the eastern Caucasus and to overthrow the newly crowned Shah of Iran. Paul rightly perceived this highly touted undertaking to be a miserable failure, and it narrowly avoided turning into a disaster.⁷ He continued to act in this spirit over the next few years, seeking a reconciliation with Iran and the Caucasian principalities and striving to promote Russia's interests in the region by winning allies rather than forcing people into submission. In implementing this new approach, Paul had to grapple with two closely related problems: the defense of Russia's Caucasian interests and the resolution of the ongoing conflict with Iran.

Catherine had committed Russia to the defense of Georgia in 1783 by the Treaty of Georgievsk, which made the east Georgian kingdom of K'art'lo-Kakheti a Russian protectorate.⁸ Despite her endorsement of an assertive Russian stance in western Asia, Catherine's implementation of the treaty guarantees proved sorely inadequate. When war broke out between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1787, Catherine withdrew the troops stationed in Georgia to positions north of the Caucasus Mountains after one unsuccessful attack on Ottoman territory, and told the king of Georgia to look after his own defense as best as he could.⁹ Far more serious was Russia's failure to send troops to protect its vassal in 1795, when Āqā Mohammad Khān Qājār, who was in the process of reunifying Iran after decades of civil war and political fragmentation, attempted to conquer the eastern Caucasus. Without Russian protection, the Georgians could not stop the invasion, and, as a result, the country was plundered, many

6. M. A. Atkin, "The Khanates of the Eastern Caucasus and the Origins of the First Russo-Iranian War" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976), chapter 1.

7. Paul to I. V. Gudovich [commander of the Caucasian Line], January 5, 1797 (N. F. Dubrovin, *Istoriia voiny i vladychestva russkikh na Kavkaze*, 6 vols. [St. Petersburg, 1871–88], 3: 199 and 195).

8. Although there were a number of Georgian principalities in the eastern and western Caucasus, the kingdom of K'art'lo-Kakheti was the one which was called Georgia at that time.

9. D. M. Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1658–1832* (New York, 1957), pp. 210–11.

inhabitants were killed, and thousands more were carried off as slaves.¹⁰ Catherine attempted to avenge the calamity which she had done nothing to prevent by sending an expeditionary force the following year to take control of the eastern Caucasus and to overthrow Āqā Mohammad. But the campaign bogged down near the Caspian coast because of opposition from local Muslims and overall Russian bungling. Preparations to supply the expedition were sluggish and poorly coordinated. Most of the anticipated supplies never reached the war zone. Although a small proportion of supplies was delivered to the port city of Baku, a shortage of pack animals made it impossible to transport them to points along the campaign route. In any event, most of the supplies which reached the Caucasus were delivered to an island far south of Baku because the commander of the expedition, V. A. Zubov, had mistakenly assumed that he would advance quickly toward the Iranian plateau. Since the expedition moved slowly, the supplies sent to the island were inaccessible. A shortage of boats interfered with the transportation of men and supplies from Astrakhan to the Caspian's west coast. Because the expedition also lacked sufficient manpower even for the conquest of the eastern Caucasus, let alone the overthrow of the Shah, the Russian forces were stretched thin to garrison a few strategic locations. Neither Zubov nor anyone else involved in planning the mission had studied existing reports on the terrain of the region. The expedition was therefore unprepared for the swiftly flowing mountain streams, the coastal desert, the dense forests, or the narrow mountain roads which greatly impeded the movement of supplies and men, especially the Cossack cavalry, already in difficulty because of a shortage of horses.¹¹

When Paul ordered a halt to the undertaking, the problem confronting him was how to provide the effective protection his mother had failed to give and yet avoid relying primarily on force. Reluctance to use force was a reflection of Paul's basic approach to this part of the world, not an expedient necessitated by more pressing demands for Russian troops in other quarters. In early 1797, when Paul initiated his nonbellicose policy, Russia was at peace and Paul was trying to improve relations with France, England, and the Ottoman Empire.¹² He adhered to his Caucasian policy for the remainder of his reign whether or not he was at war elsewhere. He attempted to solve the problems of the Caucasus by negotiating a defensive coalition among the principalities. Russia would do its part in the defense of the region, although Paul hoped that his demonstration of concern over developments there would deter future attacks. Another important part of his policy of deterrence was to have Georgia play an active role in its own defense

10. M. F. Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie depuis l'antiquité jusqu'au XIX^e siècle*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1849), vol. 2, part 2, p. 262; Lang, *Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 213 ff., 226–29; K. F. Knorring [commander of the Caucasian Line] to Alexander, July 28, 1801 (*Akty sobrannye kavkazskoiu arkheograficheskoiu komissiei*, 12 vols. [Tiflis, 1866–1904], 1: 426 [hereafter cited as *Akty*]); Rezā Qoli Khān Hedāyat, *Rouzat os-Safā-ye Nāseri* [addition to the chronicle of Mir Khānd], 10 vols. (Tehran, 1960 [Shamsi: 1339]), 9: 271.

11. Dubrovin, *Istoriia voiny i vladychestva*, 3: 103–4, 118–20, 132–46, 149, 165, 171, 185–88; Anon., "O pokhode Rossiiskikh voisk v 1796 godu v Dagestan i Persiiu pod komandoiu Grafa Valeriana Aleksandrova Zubova," *Otechestvennyye zapiski* (June 1827), part 1, pp. 127–68, part 2, pp. 266–314.

12. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean*, pp. 52–54; Stanislavskaiia, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia*, pp. 80–82.

instead of relying wholly on Russia.¹³ Operating on the assumption that Christians, though differing on doctrinal matters, would band together to repel any Muslim attacker, Paul hoped to strengthen a depopulated Georgia by encouraging the migration of Armenians living nearby under Muslim rule. Paul also assumed that the commercial expertise of the Armenians would bring additional benefits. The Armenians were offered a variety of inducements to resettle in Georgia, including land grants, cash payments, and the promise of local autonomy. Some immigration did occur, although there are no reliable statistics as to the exact number involved.¹⁴

The emphasis on Christians' common interests was not linked to an anti-Islamic crusading spirit in Paul. On the contrary, he sought a way to unite Georgia to its Muslim neighbors for the purpose of mutual defense against Ottoman or Iranian designs on the region. In attempting to win Muslims over to this coalition, Paul proved to be more solicitous of their feelings than either his mother or his son. He rejected the aloofness with which Catherine had treated even her allies among the local Muslims. Catherine made a point of keeping Muslim allies at a distance; even her candidate for the Iranian throne, a brother of Āqā Mohammad, Morteżā Qolī, was denied permission to visit St. Petersburg and was kept in southeastern Russia, where he lived on a small Russian pension until the 1796 campaign. In contrast, Paul received a delegation from Qarābāgh, Georgia's most important local ally, and sent a message of good will to the khan of that principality. Rather than telling potential allies to submit to Russia and accept whatever terms it chose to bestow upon them (the usual Russian method),¹⁵ Paul's officials encouraged them to send their representatives to him and to expect readiness to cooperate.¹⁶ Although preceding and succeeding reigns generally attributed the worst motives to Caucasian Muslims, especially in disputes with Christians, Paul was more sensitive to the problems of bias. For example, one of the aims of the last two kings of Georgia was to use Russia to enforce extended territorial claims dating from periods of greater Georgian strength. Paul was willing to support his protectorate in the claims that his officials said were legitimate, but he was equally determined to restrain Georgia from acting unfairly or antagonistically toward its Muslim neighbors.¹⁷ Similarly, he was wary of the tendency of ambitious Russian officers to trump up excuses to seize territory. Late in his reign, when many of his actions were considered manifestations of his detachment from reality, he warned his representative in Georgia: "Do not seek to make acquisitions other than those who willingly seek

13. Paul to Knorring, July 10, 1800 (*Akty*, 1: 106); Paul to P. I. Kovalenskii [Paul's representative to the King of Georgia], April 17, 1799 (*ibid.*, 1: 95).

14. Paul to Kovalenskii, April 16, 1799 (*ibid.*, 1: 94–95); *ukaz* of April 22, 1799 (*ibid.*, 2: 1149).

15. Typical of this approach was the rebuff given the Khan of Qarābāgh in 1783 when he wanted to negotiate a treaty with Russia as his ally, King Erekle of Georgia, had done but was alienated by the Russian insistence that he comply with nonnegotiable demands (Dubrovin, *Istoriia voiny i vladychestva*, 2: 30–35).

16. Paul to Ebrāhim Khalil Khān of Qarābāgh, May 2, 1797 (*Akty*, 2: 1143); Knorring to I. P. Lazarev [commander of the Russian garrison in Georgia], December 15, 1800 (*ibid.*, 1: 630); Lazarev to Kalb 'Ali Khān of Nakhjavān, March 22, 1801 (*ibid.*, 1: 624); see also Dubrovin, *Istoriia voiny i vladychestva*, 3: 5.

17. College of Foreign Affairs to Kovalenskii, April 16, 1799 (*Akty*, 1: 94).

my protection. It is better to have allies who are interested in the alliance than untrustworthy subjects."¹⁸

In return for his benevolent approach toward Caucasian Muslims, Paul depended on them to provide the extra military support which would enable a coalition of local rulers to fend off Ottoman or Iranian attacks without requiring Russian involvement. There was a precedent for this: in the 1780s, Georgia and Qarābāgh had cooperated with some success against two neighboring khanates. In 1797 and 1800, when Iranian invasions seemed likely, Paul summoned several khans to join in the defense of Georgia.¹⁹ The wisdom of this policy was not put to the test since on both occasions the Shah recalled his armies after minor actions.

Russia's relations with the eastern Caucasus could not be considered separately from its relations with Iran, which had long ruled the principalities over which Russia now sought influence. By the end of her life, Catherine had surpassed even her own ambitious designs and launched Russia on a grandiose scheme to conquer the eastern Caucasus and Iran. Āqā Mohammad was denounced as a usurper and a tyrant, the irreconcilable enemy not only of Russia but of his own oppressed subjects. Catherine's proposed remedy was to destroy him and substitute her own enlightened influence.²⁰ Paul reversed his mother's policy in this matter as well, partly because circumstances beyond his control had changed—Āqā Mohammad had been removed from the scene—but also because he chose to make the most of the new circumstances and carry the initiative further in seeking a *modus vivendi* with Iran. The Shah returned to the Caucasus in the spring of 1797 but was assassinated shortly after capturing the capital of Qarābāgh. This was followed by a year-long struggle for power from which Āqā Mohammad's nephew and chosen heir, Fath 'Ali, emerged victorious. The new Shah opened the way for improved relations with Russia by sending several friendly messages to Paul sometime in 1798 or early 1799. Reports sent to Paul from various agents led him to conclude that Fath 'Ali was not the formidable threat his uncle had been and was not even an effective ruler. In the context of nearly eighty years of political turmoil and the fighting which began Fath 'Ali's reign (albeit exaggerated by the Russians), Paul seemed to be justified in ranking him with a host of other short-lived local rulers.²¹ This assessment was reflected in the way Paul addressed the new Shah in a letter—not intended to sound hostile—by his pre-coronation name, Bābā Khān, and the title *sardār* (general).²² Moreover, Fath 'Ali seemed to be a weak, luxury-loving man, unsuited to the demands of his office and backed by an equally unimpressive army.²³

18. Paul to Kovalenskii, January 23, 1801 (*ibid.*, 1: 414).

19. Paul to the khans of Erevan, Qarābāgh, and Ganjeh, August 3, 1800 (*ibid.*, 1: 108–9); Paul to Gudovich, January 5, 1797 (Dubrovin, *Istoriia voiny i vladychestva*, 3: 200).

20. Catherine to V. A. Zubov, February 10 and 19, 1796 (Dubrovin, *Istoriia voiny i vladychestva*, 3: 72–74, 125–27); manifesto to the Caucasian and Iranian peoples, March 27, 1796 (*ibid.*, p. 192).

21. Knorring to Paul, April 11, 1800 (*Akty*, 1: 113); Kovalenskii's observations on Georgia, August 1800 (*ibid.*, 1: 678).

22. This was also reflected in the letter by the reference to Paul's interest in "all other Persian rulers," Paul to Bābā Khān, March 23, 1799 (*ibid.*, 2: 1145); Paul to Kovalenskii, April 16, 1799 (*ibid.*, 1: 96); Paul to Skibinevskii [consul at Anzali, Iran] (*ibid.*, 1: 678).

23. Lazarev to Knorring, August 25, 1800 (*ibid.*, 1: 142); Kovalenskii's observations

It was undoubtedly easier for Paul to take a more conciliatory approach toward an Iranian ruler whose reputation was unintimidating and who had already made the first gesture of good will. The tsar certainly gave up nothing to Fath 'Ali in matters considered important to Russia's interests—the security of Georgia and environs and freedom for Russian merchants to do business throughout Iran.²⁴ Nonetheless, he did not exploit the Shah's supposed weaknesses by treating him as an inferior, as Catherine had tried, unsuccessfully, with Āqā Mohammad. Instead, Paul followed the policy he used in dealing with Caucasian Muslims: he acted on the assumption that Fath 'Ali had his own legitimate interests to promote and tried to find a basis for mutually beneficial relations. His lack of condescension of the Shah was evidenced by his countermanding various measures which displeased Iranians, such as the plan to build a fort to protect Russian commercial interests in the Iranian port city of Anzali.²⁵ The tone of his letter to the Shah, the freeing of several Iranian merchants imprisoned in Russia, the relaxation of commercial restrictions, and a variety of other actions all showed Paul's desire to win the Shah's good will.²⁶ He intended to promote what Peter I and Catherine II had tried unsuccessfully to achieve—freedom for Russian merchants to carry on their business in safety throughout Iran. The tsar wanted to ensure that the Russian consular staff in Iran did nothing to offend Iranian sensibilities but rather behaved so as to win their hosts' "trust and love."²⁷ Despite the Catherinian tradition of hostility toward the Qājār dynasty, he considered the possibility that the Shah's motives might be misinterpreted in matters of apparent conflict with Russia. He required the Shah to act like a good neighbor but realized that Georgian territorial claims might provoke a quarrel when Iran intended none.²⁸ In 1800, when an Iranian attack on Georgia seemed likely, Paul avoided the stock denunciations of "Asiatic treachery" and asked his officials to find out whether the real target might not be some truculent border vassal against whom Iran and Georgia might make common cause.²⁹

Whether a policy which combined Russian involvement in the eastern Caucasus with conciliatory moves toward Iran and the border khans could have been sustained is an intriguing but problematic question. Because there was no confrontation between Russia and Iran during Paul's reign, he did not speculate about what he would do should a conflict develop. Nonetheless, he followed the same policy throughout his reign, regardless of whether he was involved in large-

on Georgia, August 1800 (*ibid.*, 1: 113); Lieutenant Merabov [Paul's messenger to Fath 'Ali Shāh] to Kovalenskii, July 1800 (*ibid.*, 2: 1161 and 1168).

24. Paul to Bābā Khān, March 23, 1799 (*ibid.*, 2: 1145).

25. Reference to a letter from Paul to Gudovich, 1797, cited in Knorring to Alexander, March 6, 1802 (*ibid.*, 1: 688); session of the state council, November 11, 1798 (*Arkhiv Gosudarstvennago Soveta*, 5 vols. [St. Petersburg, 1869–1904], vol. 2, part 2, col. 726 [hereafter cited as *AGS*]).

26. Paul to Bābā Khān, March 23, 1799, and Russian government's reply to two notes from Mirzā Sayyed Hasan [Fath 'Ali Shāh's emissary to Paul], n.d. (*Akty*, 2: 1145–47); Paul to Kovalenskii, April 16, 1799 (*ibid.*, 1: 96); *ukaz* of College of Foreign Affairs, July 19, 1799 (*ibid.*, 2: 1149).

27. College of Foreign Affairs to Skibinevskii, July 27, 1800 (*ibid.*, 1: 681).

28. Paul to Kovalenskii, April 17, 1799 (*ibid.*, 1: 96).

29. Paul to Knorring, July 10, 1800 (*ibid.*, 1: 106–7).

scale wars in Europe. He was no more eager to send troops to fight Āqā Mohammad in 1797, when they could readily be spared, than to fight Fath 'Alī in 1800, when they probably could not have been. Still, the success of his approach was as much a result of Iran's inability to enforce its claim to the Caucasus as of a new spirit of reconciliation between the two empires. Only the hastily improvised assassination of Āqā Mohammad by two slaves prevented a direct confrontation in 1797. Even after Fath 'Alī won the struggle for the throne, he had to fight to hold on to areas which his uncle had subdued. Thus, while Paul ruled, the Shah divided his attention between the Caucasus and the large northeastern province of Khorāsān, where he was involved in a heated contest with the Afghan tribal chief, Zemān Shāh Dorrāni. A large-scale campaign in the Caucasus was not possible in 1800. The smaller undertaking that was launched that year failed for want of support from disgruntled members of the Georgian royal family and Georgian Muslims. Iran was not in a position to resume the offensive on its northwestern frontier until 1802, by which time Paul was dead and Alexander, after some initial uncertainty, had elected to follow an aggressive, expansionist policy similar to Catherine's—a policy that consciously rejected moderation and compromise.

Alexander confirmed the annexation of Georgia despite his qualms about the justice of displacing the thousand-year-old Bagration monarchy and well-documented attacks on the proannexation argument that he heard from his trusted advisers, A. R. Vorontsov, V. P. Kochubei, and the other members of the secret committee.³⁰ Apart from a brief display of concern over the rights of the Bagrations, Alexander did not ask the searching questions that Paul had asked about the nature of Russian involvement in Iran or the Caucasian borderlands. Moreover, he consistently supported an extremely aggressive policy in those areas. Having decided to annex Georgia, he also resolved that Russia would have to acquire all the khanates as far south as the Aras River and as far east as the Caspian Sea. He believed that the only way to deal with the rulers of those territories and Iran was through verbal or physical intimidation; genuine negotiations did not work in dealing with Asians. Although he instituted this policy while Russia was not distracted by other conflicts, he sustained it without question while he was involved in the Napoleonic Wars (for example, he approved an attack on Iran's Caspian coast in 1805). Throughout the war with Iran (1804–13), he insisted that Fath 'Alī Shāh be addressed only by his pre-coronation name and that he be denied recognition as Shah. Even while preparing for an attack by Napoleon in 1812, the tsar's only concession was to drop his claim to some of the disputed territory which his troops had not yet conquered.³¹

30. Session of the state council, April 15, 1801 (*AGS*, vol. 3, part 2, col. 1911); report to the state council, June 24, 1801 (*ibid.*, cols. 1220–26); meeting of the secret committee, August 13, 1801 (Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, *Graf Pavel Aleksandrovich Stroganov*, 3 vols. [St. Petersburg, 1903], 2: 90–93); see also Dubrovin, *Istoriia voiny i vladychestva*, 3: 416 and 419.

31. P. D. Tsitsianov [commander-in-chief in the Caucasus] to Alexander, April 27, 1803 (*Akty*, 2: 290); Tsitsianov to Prince Adam Czartoryski, foreign minister, May 22 and September 26, 1805 (*ibid.*, 2: 706, 1036–37); Chancellor N. P. Rumiantsev to N. F. Rtishchev [commander-in-chief in the Caucasus], April 7, 1812, two letters (*ibid.*, 5: 649–50).

Perhaps Fath 'Ali Shāh's irredentism would eventually have led to war, no matter what Russia's policy was. Paul was no more willing than Alexander to leave Georgia completely. The Georgian question did not spark the Russo-Iranian war, however. As late as 1802, Iranian efforts to recapture Georgia were limited to small-scale, ineffectual raids that were justified as the defense of Bagration claims. Fath 'Ali also tried to obtain his ends through peaceful methods by upholding his case in letters to Paul and Russian officials in the Caucasus. The real cause of the war was not only Alexander's desire to retain control of Georgia but also his endorsement of the conquest of neighboring khanates allied to Iran. The first major step was the conquest of Ganjeh, during which the khan and well over a thousand inhabitants were killed. Fath 'Ali believed this was a prelude to an attack and he tried once again to convince the Russians to withdraw, but to no avail. When Russian troops attacked Erevan in the summer of 1804, they were met by the Shah's army and the war began.³²

Despite Paul's preference for moderation and conciliation in his dealings with Asia, he appears to have followed an uncommonly aggressive course in the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire and in the attempt to conquer India, with or without Bonaparte's help. Yet in both cases the real issues were quite different from what is usually believed. The annexation of Georgia was primarily a response to changes over which Paul had no control; the plans to conquer India have been extravagantly misinterpreted.

The decisive factor in the termination of the Georgian monarchy was the internal weakness of the kingdom. The once powerful and respected King Erekle died in 1798 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Giorgi, an ineffective ruler whose health was rapidly declining. A struggle for the throne among Giorgi's brothers was expected to follow his imminent demise. When that happened, it was virtually certain that some of the contestants for power would call on Iran or the Ottoman Empire for support or that either empire might move in to fill the power vacuum. Such prospects were as alarming to Russia as to King Giorgi. The king's agents in St. Petersburg repeatedly urged Paul to annex Georgia and appoint a member of the ruling dynasty as governor.³³ But Paul had reason to fear that this would not be enough to stabilize that kingdom: as long as a member of the Georgian royal family held some position of influence in the country, there would be an alternate focus of loyalty for those dissatisfied with Russia's actions. Giorgi's relatives were a notoriously fractious lot, and Giorgi himself had dabbled in playing Russia off against Iran.³⁴ On December 18, 1800, Paul issued a manifesto decreeing the annexation of Georgia. Ten days later Giorgi died, and, on Paul's order, no new king was enthroned. Instead, he appointed a triumvirate composed of Giorgi's son, a member of the Georgian bureaucracy, and the com-

32. Hāji Ebrāhim [chief vizier] to Kovalenskii, n.d. [1800] (*ibid.*, 1: 97); Mirzā Shafi' [chief vizier] to Tsitsianov, May 23, 1804, and Tsitsianov's reply to Mirzā Shafi', May 27, 1804 (*ibid.*, 2: 808–9); see also 'Abd or-Razzāq Domboli, *Ma'āser Soltāniyeh* (Tehran, 1972–73 [Qomri: 1392]), p. 109; Hedāyat, *Rouzat os-Safā-ye Nāseri*, 9: 389–90.

33. Lang, *Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 228, 230–32, 235–36, 239–45.

34. Giorgi to Paul, 1799 (A. A. Tsagareli, *Gramoty i drugie istoricheskie dokumenty XVIII stoletīia otnosiashchiesia do Gruzii*, 3 vols. [St. Petersburg, 1891–1902], vol. 2, part 2, pp. 288–89; Hedāyat, *Rouzat os-Safā-ye Nāseri*, 9: 328; Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 267.

mander of the Russian garrison.³⁵ This unsettled and unpopular state of affairs existing at the time of Paul's death was left for Alexander to resolve, and he did this by ending all tokens of Georgian autonomy.

If the annexation of Georgia—which extended the Russian Empire south of the Caucasus Mountains into western Asia—appeared to be a bold step in imperial expansion, Paul's eagerness to conquer India seemed bold to the point of folly, conclusive proof of the man's madness. Professor Stanislavskaja cites the attempted conquest as a prime example of the "fantastic nature of some of Paul's projects."³⁶ The issue of his mental state, however, will have to be decided on the basis of other evidence. The assumption that his Indian ambitions were mad tells us far more about the double standard by which Paul and Russia have been viewed than it does about the man who conceived those ambitions.

Sending the Cossacks to expel the British from India in 1801 was certainly fraught with difficulties and extremely unpopular with the Russian elite, but it was not necessarily mad. Other Europeans have had similar ambitions and have not been judged mad or foolish. Napoleon's persistent dream of conquering India is generally treated as a manifestation of his magnificent daring. F. V. Rostopchin, one of Paul's key diplomatic advisers, still hoped Russia would achieve that dream even after the miserable failure of the Cossack expedition.³⁷ Paul's decision to attack India was based on a widely shared strategic assumption rather than some megalomaniacal desire for world conquest. Between the autumn of 1799 and the summer of 1800, the Anglo-Russian alliance broke down because a number of British actions, including a subsidy to Austria and the takeover of Malta, were considered by Paul to be inimical to Russian interests. At the same time, he became less wary of France as the source of revolutionary contagion, especially since Bonaparte seemed to be moving away from Jacobinism, and the reverses inflicted upon the French army and navy in the Mediterranean had virtually eliminated the danger of a French challenge to Russian interests in that quarter. Beginning in May 1800, when the British ambassador to St. Petersburg was expelled, Paul instituted a number of anti-British measures; the general terms of an alliance with France were agreed upon in November, and the focus of Russian diplomacy was turned to pressuring Britain. Paul considered an attack on India to be the best way to apply that pressure, an opinion shared by many British, who believed that their Achilles heel was the British East India Company's territory on the subcontinent. As an island kingdom with a formidable navy, Britain stood a good chance of repelling a direct attack but could be brought to its knees, many believed, by a threat to India. Paul followed this line of argument when he justified his attack on India by saying "it is necessary to attack [the British] where the blow will be felt by them and where they least expect it. Their establishments in India are the best for this."³⁸ Diverting India's wealth from England to its victorious rival would be a bonus but not a sufficient motive for undertaking the conquest. These were the considerations which led Paul to

35. Lang, *Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 242–44; N. N. Beliauskii and V. A. Potto, *Uverzhdenie russkogo vladychestva na Kavkaze*, 12 vols. (Tiflis, 1901–2), 1: 121.

36. Stanislavskaja, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia*, p. 168.

37. Rostopchin to Tsitsianov, April 21, 1804 ("Pis'ma F. V. Rostopchina k Kniaziu P. D. Tsitsianovu [1803–1806]," *Deviatnadsatyi vek*, 2 [1872]: 62).

38. Paul to V. P. Orlov [commander of the Cossack expedition], January 12, 1801 (in N. K. Shil'der, *Imperator Pavel I* [St. Petersburg, 1901], p. 417).

respond to an expected British attack on his Baltic allies in 1801 by ordering the invasion of India.³⁹

Although it seemed bizarre to send an army across Central Asia to India when Russia had no maps covering the route from the Amu Daria to the Indus,⁴⁰ this was not an unusual step for a major power to take in 1800. The British believed that with the small number of troops they had in India and the danger of local uprisings in conjunction with a French attack, the best way to defend the British East India Company's position in India would be to stop any invasion before it reached the subcontinent. Yet the company did not have any maps of the northwest frontier region, considered one of the most likely routes of French attack.⁴¹ The invasion of India via Iran or Central Asia and what is now Afghanistan was not inherently impossible; Alexander the Great, Mahmud of Ghazneh, Mongol raiding parties, Tamerlane, and, in the eighteenth century, Nāder Shāh had all followed some part of this route. Many of Britain's leading experts on India considered an attack by this route a serious threat, as revealed by attempts to guard against it by treaties made with Iran in 1801, 1809, and 1812.⁴²

The Russian attempt to conquer India was not in itself an irrational undertaking, but it was not a particularly judicious one either. Norman Saul has argued convincingly that in 1800 Russia had the economic and military resources to enable it to play the role of a great power.⁴³ Sending a small army to conquer India was one of the more risky ways of employing those resources, however. In 1797, the state council received a report which stated that the overland route to India via Central Asia was extremely dangerous because of the probability of attack by Turkoman tribes.⁴⁴ Yet Paul did not have the alternative of using the sea route from Astrakhan to the southeast corner of the Caspian Sea (a route which had been contemplated for trade with India during Catherine's reign), because the Caspian fleet was too small and too poorly maintained. The inadequacy of the fleet, demonstrated during the 1796 Zubov campaign, persisted for many years. At the end of February 1801, an invasion force of fewer than twenty-three thousand men set out for India via Central Asia and met with a series of difficulties: first, there were terrible winter storms, then an early thaw, which broke up the ice on the rivers and forced the troops to alter their route several times. They ended up in unfamiliar territory where food for men and horses was scarce. At this point, word reached the commander that Paul was dead and Alexander had recalled the expedition.⁴⁵ However injudicious the undertaking was, one criticism that cannot be leveled was that it diverted troops which were more urgently needed to defend St. Petersburg from British attack; the India campaign made no demand on Russia's Baltic fleet. Besides

39. Paul to V. P. Orlov, January 12, 1801 (Shil'der, *Imperator Pavel I*, p. 418); see also "Zapiska grafa F. V. Rostopchina," *Russkii arkhiv*, 1878, no. 1, pp. 105-7, 109-10.

40. Shil'der, *Imperator Pavel I*, p. 418.

41. Captain M. Williams to General John Malcolm [representative of the governor-general of India to the Shah], April 13, 1808 (Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office papers, 248/2, pages unnumbered).

42. 1801 treaty, articles 4 and 5; 1809 treaty, article 3; 1812 treaty, article 1 (C. U. Aitchison, ed., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighboring Countries*, 4th ed., 13 vols. [Calcutta, 1909], 12: 40-41, 46, 48-49).

43. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean*, p. 150.

44. Session of the state council, April 16, 1797 (*AGS*, vol. 2, cols. 646-47).

45. Shil'der, *Imperator Pavel I*, pp. 417-19.

being few in number, the land forces involved—primarily Don Cossacks and Kalmyk auxiliaries—were among those less likely to be summoned for the defense of the capital.

While the plan had a logic of its own, it cannot be defended, as some have done, on the grounds that the attack on India was actually part of the broader process of Russia's southward expansion in Asia.⁴⁶ This interpretation of Russia's imperial designs grew during the course of the nineteenth century and culminated in the "Great Game" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era characterized by intense Anglo-Russian rivalry in various parts of Asia and the widespread conviction among the English that Russia wanted to conquer India. It is not surprising, therefore, that a number of writers of that era believed they saw the seeds of the Russian menace in the actions of earlier tsars.⁴⁷ In fact, the Russian attack on India in 1801 was an extension of Anglo-Russian hostilities in Europe and was completely divorced from Russian policy elsewhere in Asia. Almost no southward expansion by Russia occurred in Asia at this time. Georgia had been annexed not because of Paul's broad plan for territorial gain but because he saw annexation as an ad hoc solution to the problems of Georgian internal instability. He also proved to be quite restrained on the issue of extending his suzerainty beyond Georgia, desiring only a few voluntary alliances, not annexation.

Paul's restraint seems inconsistent with the grandiose Franco-Russian plan to conquer India, to make scientific studies of the lands along the way, and to make alliances with the inhabitants of those lands. According to Professor Saul, the annexation of Georgia was intended to secure the Caucasus as the place where the French and Russian armies would join forces before proceeding east.⁴⁸ In the first place, the Franco-Russian plan of 1800 bypassed the Caucasus altogether. Napoleon proposed another plan to Alexander in 1807 and 1808 (to which the latter avoided any firm commitment), which suggested the Caucasus as one possible area for staging the campaign.⁴⁹ The Franco-Russian plan of 1800 is almost certainly a forgery, however, and therefore it does not really contradict the assessment that Paul's Asian policy was modest in scope. If the case against the plan's authenticity can be sustained, then Paul's limited territorial acquisitions in Asia can be seen in their proper perspective rather than as part of a grand scheme for Russian domination of the continent. Even the attempted conquest of India can be seen for what it really was—an ingenious, if not cautious, reaction to a perceived threat by England to Russia's interests in Europe. The plan was something Paul devised on his own and hoped to carry out by employing Russian resources exclusively.

46. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean*, p. 149. For a similar view, see H. Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East*, 2nd ed. (London, 1875).

47. For a discussion of the "Great Game" in terms of what happened and what each side thought was happening, see Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914* (New Haven, 1968).

48. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean*, p. 149.

49. Caulaincourt [French ambassador to Russia] to Napoleon, January 21, 1808 (Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, *Les relations diplomatiques de la Russie et de la France d'après les rapports des ambassadeurs d'Alexandre et de Napoléon, 1808–1812*, 7 vols. [St. Petersburg, 1905–14], 1: 73).

The first version of the plan appeared in 1840 as an appendix to a pamphlet dealing with French interests in Egypt during the reign of Louis XIV,⁵⁰ and it was later reproduced in other French and in Russian publications.⁵¹ A slightly different account was published in 1845, in the posthumous papers of the Swedish field marshal, K. B. Stedingk.⁵² According to the plan, as given in the first version, a Russian army of thirty-five thousand men was to go to Astarābād, on the southeastern coast of the Caspian Sea, where it would await an equal number of French troops, who were to sail down the Danube, across the Black Sea, up the Don, and down the Volga to Astrakhan. Once the French crossed the Caspian, the united armies would march to India via Herāt and Qandahār. (According to the Stedingk version, the two armies were to meet at Astrakhan; all seventy thousand men would cross the Caspian simultaneously.⁵³) Apart from the failure to locate an original text of the plan in either French or Russian archives, a factor which is not conclusive by itself, there are strong reasons to judge the plan a forgery on the basis of external and internal evidence.⁵⁴

First of all, if one accepts the versions of the plan which state that it was drawn up by Bonaparte, carried by his adjutant, Duroc, to Russia, and there annotated by Paul, the timing is wrong. General D. A. Miliutin double-checked Duroc's schedule and found that he had been delayed by business in Berlin and did not reach St. Petersburg until after Paul's murder on March 11/23, 1801.⁵⁵ Moreover, if Paul had really intended to join with Bonaparte in the conquest of India, some reflection of his intention ought to exist in other documents from his reign. Yet it is precisely these unimpeachably authentic documents which imply that no such operation was planned. In a conversation between Bonaparte and Paul's emissary to France, G. M. Sprengporten, on March 16/28, 1801, at the time the India campaign was already under way, the French leader explained why France urgently needed to hold on to Egypt and emphasized the importance of Egypt in undoing England's connection with India. All the ways he described for accomplishing that goal focused on the eastern Mediterranean, which he proposed to turn into a Franco-Russian lake. The desirability of severing Anglo-Indian ties by seizing India or interfering with shipping in the Indian Ocean was not discussed at all.⁵⁶ In addition, in October 1800, F. V. Rostopchin had drawn

50. *Mémoire de Leibnitz à Louis XIV, sur la conquête de l'Égypte, publié, avec une project d'expédition dans l'Inde, par terre concert entre le premier consul et l'empereur Paul I^{er} au commencement de ce siècle*, ed. Monsieur Hoffman (Paris, 1840).

51. A. P. Dubois de Jancigny and X. Raymond, *Inde* (Paris, 1845); P. P. Karatygin, "Proekt Russko-frantsuzskoi ekspeditsii v Indiiu 1800 g.," *Russkaia starina*, 8 (1873): 401-8.

52. *Mémoires posthumes du feld-maréchal Comte de Stedingk*, ed. General Count Björnstjerna, 3 vols. (Paris, 1845), 2: 6-8.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 7; Karatygin, "Proekt Russko-frantsuzskoi ekspeditsii," pp. 401-4.

54. A strong argument against its authenticity, based on the timing of certain key events, was made by General D. A. Miliutin in *Istoriia voiny 1799 goda*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1857), 2: 537-38, and 3: 667-69. The attack has been expanded by J. L. Shneidman, "The Proposed Invasion of India by Russia and France in 1801," *Journal of Indian History*, 35 (1957): 167-75. However, Shneidman's article suffers from factual errors and the failure to consider certain relevant sources, especially the complete text of Rostopchin's memoir on Paul's foreign policy options.

55. Miliutin, *Istoriia voiny*, 2: 538, note.

56. Sprengporten's report to St. Petersburg, March 16/28, 1801 (A. Trachevskii, ed., *Diplomatshekskaia snosheniia Rossii s Frantsiei v epokhu Napoleona I*, 4 vols. [vols. 70, 77,

up a memorandum surveying Russia's military and diplomatic interests, and Paul apparently shared his adviser's opinions, because he wrote a number of positive comments on the memorandum and authorized Rostopchin to act in accordance with the ideas it contained. The English menace, the vulnerability of England's communications with India, and the ways in which France and Russia might weaken their common enemy were all reviewed, but the memorandum contained no hint of an attack on India in cooperation with France. Rostopchin specifically stated that French expansion in Asia could hurt England but that his concern in that regard was totally focused on the eastern Mediterranean. The plan called for Russia, France, Austria, and Prussia to partition the Ottoman Empire and seal it off against the British.⁵⁷

The fact that Paul really did send troops to India has been interpreted by historians to be an indication of the tsar's fulfillment of his part of the Franco-Russian plan.⁵⁸ The connection between the real invasion and the supposed joint venture is spurious, however. The false plan called for the Russians and French to sail across the Caspian Sea, yet the real Russian expedition went overland north of the sea toward Central Asia. Paul's ample correspondence with his officials in Astrakhan and the Caucasus contained no instructions to prepare for the arrival of the French, or even to prepare the enormous flotilla needed to transport the French across the Caspian. Finally, the instructions given to the commander of the actual invasion force never mentioned any French involvement.⁵⁹

Even though Paul had acted on his own initiative and the text of the invasion agreement with France was not yet known to the public, some of his contemporaries assumed that there must have been French involvement in the 1801 expedition. Russia and France were at war with England, and Bonaparte—an audacious and brilliant military leader (a claim that could never be made about Paul, no matter what his other virtues were)—had demonstrated ambitions in regard to India. There was good reason for the British to be apprehensive about threats to their position in India. The second half of the eighteenth century saw the East India Company beset by political and financial troubles as well as military challenges from various Indian rulers and the French. In 1799, the British finally defeated their long-time enemy, Tipu Sultan of Mysore, who had received token assistance from the French. Britain's fears, combined with suspicion of French and/or Russian designs, created a climate in which a Franco-Russian invasion plan could readily be presumed to be authentic. It was not surprising that people suspected the first consul to be the instigator of any bold move against India. During the Napoleonic Wars, long before the secret agreement between Paul and Bonaparte was published, D. Hopkins, a British East India Company

82, 88 in *Sbornik Imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva*, 148 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1890–1903)], 70: 94).

57. "Zapiska grafa F. V. Rostopchina," pp. 105–7, 190. An incomplete version has also been published by Duc de Broglie, "La Politique de la Russie en 1800 d'après un document inédit," *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 3 (1880): 2–11.

58. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean*, pp. 149–50; Stanislavskaja, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia*, pp. 166–67.

59. Shil'der, *Imperator Pavel I*, pp. 417–18; Karatygin, "Proekt Russko-frantsuzskoi ekspeditsii," pp. 409–10.

resident in Bhagulpore, charged that France had been behind the Russian campaign, and that only Paul's death and Alexander's subsequent recall of the troops had prevented the Russians from reaching their rendezvous with the French.⁶⁰ Thus, an accumulation of circumstantial evidence convinced some people that a Franco-Russian attack on India was plausible and had in fact been attempted. Moreover, the existing climate of opinion facilitated acceptance of the supposed direct documentary evidence as confirmation of what was already believed.

The wording of the published versions of the forged plan also raises several questions. The plan called for transporting at least thirty-five thousand men at a time (seventy thousand according to the Stedingk version), enough horses for twenty thousand regular Russian cavalry and Cossacks, and the artillery of both armies by boat from Astrakhan to Astarābād. Such a task was far beyond Russia's capabilities. Its military vessels were so few that it had been necessary to supplement them with an assortment of merchant ships in order to handle—no matter how inadequately—the needs of the thirty thousand men of the 1796 expedition. Although Paul was aware of this when he sent his invasion force to India by an overland route, there is no indication in the text of the plan or in the marginal notations that the transportation problem had even been considered. In contrast, the unquestionably genuine plan Napoleon submitted to Alexander in 1807–8 took into account the possibility that Russia would not be able to transport its contingent across the Caspian Sea. Napoleon therefore suggested that the Russian troops go overland across the Caucasus instead and then join the French contingent, which was to travel across the Ottoman Empire.⁶¹

The very fact that Napoleon made such a proposal to Alexander may have stimulated the imagination of the forger of the first plan and added to the circumstantial evidence in favor of its authenticity. The strong resemblance in the ideas expressed in parts of the two plans raises the suspicion that the later plan provided a model for the "earlier" one. The most striking similarity is found in comparing a series of questions and answers about the feasibility of the campaign appearing in the "earlier" plan and in a report to Napoleon from Caulaincourt, his ambassador to Russia in 1808. In the first document, Alexander and the questioner expressed concern about the great distance of the proposed invasion route, the fact that the route crossed a number of deserts, and the likelihood that the expedition would encounter serious opposition from Central Asian tribesmen. The answers were very similar as well. Caulaincourt and his counterpart in the forged report stated that the length of the route would not be an insurmountable obstacle. The respondents in both accounts were confident that a Franco-Russian force would be superior to any Asian army; as for the hazards posed by deserts, they both used virtually the same terms: the land in question was not desolate, on the contrary, it was well watered by rivers, with food and forage found in abundance.⁶²

If the "earlier" plan is indeed a forgery, the identity of its author becomes an important question. One important contributor to the legend was Count

60. D. Hopkins, *The Danger to British India from French Invasion and Missionary Establishments* (London, 1808), pp. 52–54.

61. Ambassador Caulaincourt to Napoleon, January 21, 1808 (Nikolai Mikhailovich, *Les relations diplomatiques*, 1: 73).

62. Karatygin, "Proekt Russko-frantsuzskoi ekspeditsii," pp. 407–8; Nikolai Mikhailovich, *Les relations diplomatiques*, 1: 72–73.

Stedingk, the Swedish ambassador to St. Petersburg during the reign of Alexander, an ardent supporter of Alexander's Holy Alliance, and an equally ardent Francophobe. A document supposedly carried by Duroc to Paul was discovered among his papers. At the very least, Stedingk's hatred of Napoleon would have predisposed him to mistake a forgery for evidence of the villainy he suspected. One historian has even suggested that Stedingk himself was the forger.⁶³ Whoever wrote the document, its publication certainly came at an opportune time for Russophobes in France and for Francophobes elsewhere. When copies of the plan began to be published in the early 1840s, France's relations with Russia and England were verging on outright hostility, primarily over conflicting interests in the Ottoman Empire.

Paul had an unhappy talent for making even his wisest moves appear ill-considered. Yet he attempted to deal with a number of problems which few of his contemporaries had the courage to face. At the end of an era of remarkable Russian expansion, he questioned the benefits of uncritical territorial acquisition. Even though Alexander's exceptional charm contrasted sharply with Paul's pseudo-Prussian brusqueness, it was Paul who restrained the self-serving adventurism of his soldiers on the borders of Asia, while Alexander, captivated by the toughness of ambitious generals, sanctioned their conquests in the name of the glory of Russia. It was a dubious glory: it took more than two generations to complete the conquest of the Caucasus at an immense cost, both in lives and money. The fighting that occurred during Alexander's reign overlapped the Napoleonic Wars, when Russia could ill afford the diversion of its resources to such nonessential fronts. The economic return was far less than the cost of the war and administration of newly conquered territories. In a broader sense, Alexander's support for a war of expansion in the Caucasus encouraged the habit of expansion for its own sake, later employed in Central Asia and, with disastrous results for Russia, in the Far East. For a brief while, such folly was rejected and a calmer, more pragmatic approach was promoted by Paul, who is best remembered for having been mad.

63. A. Delrieu, "Une Ambassade française à la cour de la Perse sous l'Empire 1808," *Revue Britannique*, 20 (March–April 1854): 181.