



Peter III's Obsession with Schleswig-Holstein and Russia's "Chimeric Campaign" against Denmark in 1762

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Abstract

This article, based on the analysis of Russian academic scholarship, examines Russian motivations for going to war against Denmark in 1762 and evaluates competing hypotheses as to why the planned military campaign was aborted before it started. The author uses the example of Russia's failed "chimeric campaign" to annex the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein in 1762 as a cautionary tale for the Trump administration fixated on annexing another part of the Danish kingdom, Greenland, in 2026.

Keywords: 1762, Denmark, Ekaterina, Frederick II, Holstein, Peter III, Prussian Kingdom, Rumyantsev, Russian Empire, Schleswig, Senate, Seven-Year War, Vorontsov

Sovereigns are humans, too. They have wants and needs, ideals and interests, insecurities and fears, quirks and whims, habits and personal obsessions. When they make even the highest stakes decisions like going to war, they are motivated by many reasons and calculations—some of which are obvious and visible whereas others tend to be obscure and indiscernible. Looking back hundreds of years ago, it is not easy to determine what motivated a particular ruler to go to war. Even when a historian deals with the well-researched cases and well-established "truths," the reality is that while one can more or less

accurately ascertain the dates (when), locations (where), activities (what), and actors (who) involved in the events under study, one can always come up with competing alternative explanations as to why the ruler in question made certain critical decisions as opposed to others.

Intentions matter. With due diligence, one can find enough primary and secondary source evidence to portray a complex thought process, which usually goes into strategic decision-making related to the questions of war and peace. And yet, choosing the dominant motivation driving the decision-maker to war is analytically hard and lends itself to oversimplification fraught with cementing misunderstandings and propagating historical myths.

This article explores Russia's forgotten decision to declare war against Denmark in the final phase of the Seven-Year War in 1762. What were Emperor Peter III's real intentions and war aims? Why was the war aborted? What was the historical significance of the tsar's war decisions in the context of general evolution of Russian foreign policy?

In my research, I relied on the contemporary accounts of direct participants and eyewitnesses of the events under consideration, using the memoirs of Empress Catherine II,¹ Countess Dashkova,² Field Marshal General Munnich,³ Chancellor Vorontsov,⁴ Commander of Russian Expeditionary Corps in Pomerania General Rumyantsev,⁵ Andrey Bolotov,⁶ correspondence between Emperor Peter III and King Frederick II of Prussia,⁷ the Imperial Manifesto and Rescripts signed by Peter III,⁸ as well as the protocols, reports, memoranda, and orders issued by the Russian government (Governing Senate,⁹ Collegium of Foreign Affairs (CFA),¹⁰ War Collegium,¹¹ and Admiralty¹²). I also examined the scholarly works of imperial historians (Shilder,¹³ Bilbasov,¹⁴ von Stählin,¹⁵ Soloviyov¹⁶), Soviet historians (Korobkov,¹⁷ Mylnikov,¹⁸ Frumenkov,¹⁹ Anisimov²⁰), and post-Soviet historians (Vozgrin,²¹ Kurukin,²² Dolya,²³ Medinsky²⁴). They offer different

explanations of the war decision, but all agree that this was the aborted war of choice, not of necessity.

“Petty Tyrant” and Legacy Diplomats

Peter III Fyodorovich, born on February 10 (21), 1728,²⁵ in Kiel, the capital of the Duchy of Holstein, to Grand Duchess Anna Petrovna, the eldest daughter of Emperor Peter I of Russia, and Charles Frederick, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp, was anything but a traditional Russian ruler; judging by his foreign education, heretic values, unorthodox beliefs, unconventional attitudes, and unpatriotic goals. Yet, his aunt Russian Empress Elizabeth made him her successor because he was the only surviving grandson of Peter the Great, despite the fact that “she personally didn’t like her nephew, considered him incapable of governing, and knew he didn’t love Russians.”²⁶ In her private diaries, his wife Catherine II, whom he disdained, cheated on, and wanted to banish to a convent,²⁷ referred to him as a “child husband,” “idiot,” “drunkard from Holstein.”²⁸ British minister in St. Petersburg Sir Charles Keith described him as a “mad man.” French minister in St. Petersburg Louis Breteuil called him a “despot” and “Northern tyrant.” Imperial historian Bilbasov characterized him as “the dumb, stubborn, and intemperate” man who was “blinded with absolute power and became a petty tyrant.”²⁹ Yet, Czech historian Shtellner described Peter III as “a mediocre, withdrawn and emotionally suffering man on whose shoulders fate had placed more than he could bear.”³⁰

Peter III ascended to the Russian throne on December 25, 1761 (5 January 1762) and decided to keep in place the legacy leadership of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs (Chancellor and CFA President Mikhail Vorontsov and Vice-Chancellor Alexander Golitsyn) and Elizabeth I’s ambassadors at major foreign courts.³¹ This initial continuity in diplomatic personnel coupled with the tsar’s maiden manifesto fueled the hopes in the allied capitals that Russia’s foreign policy would not be altered.

However, the 33-year-old emperor defied these expectations and soon ordered a “sudden, drastic, and decisive overhaul of Russian foreign policy.”³² It was evidenced in the abrupt termination of Russian involvement in the Seven-Year War, abandonment of Russian allies, conclusion of separate peace with the former enemy Prussia, and giving up of all the territorial conquests paid for with Russian blood. He began preparations for war against Denmark-Norway, which had been maintaining friendly and amicable relations with Russia for over a century. Russian Chancellor and all diplomatic envoys, who harbored the illusions that the Elizabethan foreign policy system would be continued, found themselves in a difficult position, had to eat their words in conversations with foreign counterparts and do the opposite of their original promises to foreign capitals. Only one foreign policy issue remained intact: despite capricious and unpredictable behavior, the new emperor stubbornly wanted to get back the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein, rejecting all proposed compromises, including monetary compensation and territorial exchanges.

“Holstein Obsession”

The original explanation of the Russian about-face advanced in the imperial historiography centered on the eccentric personality of the Russian ruler. As Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, Peter III was obsessed with the recovery of his patrimony and restoration of parts of Schleswig and Holstein to his Duchy. As someone who could barely speak Russian,³³ mocked and attacked the Russian Orthodox Church,³⁴ and “despised and insulted Russia,”³⁵ he was the first tsar who pursued the “openly anti-Russian” foreign policy reflecting his parochial desires and personal whims, as well as the selfish interests of his foreign idols, including Holstein relatives and the Prussian sovereign. The narrow-minded desire to restore his personal mastery over the harbor of Kiel and regain his ancestral castle in Gottorp was his fixed idea.³⁶ He hated Denmark, just like his father, Charles Frederick, did, and wanted to take revenge for the insults inflicted upon him and his ancestors by the Danish kings. Privy councilor Dmitry Volkov, who drafted most of Peter

III's manifestos, Imperial Rescripts and Orders of the Imperial Council, wrote in his post-coup testimony: "I always knew that war against Denmark was a pre-determined matter, and any word of opposition to it could cost life."³⁷ The tsar didn't want to wait. Princess Ekaterina Dashkova, younger sister of his favorite mistress Elizaveta Vorontsova, wrote in her memoirs: "Eager to reclaim from the King of Denmark a small piece of land he believed belonged to him, he did not want to delay this war until after his coronation."³⁸ Field Marshal-General Burkhard von Munnich testified: "It was obvious that Peter III was in a rush to set out with the Russian army to reclaim the duchy of Schleswig and wage war on the King of Denmark, whom he said must be subdued and sent to Malabar (on India's southwestern coast)."³⁹

The emperor's firm and clear intention not to seek diplomatic compromise and go to war against Denmark was evidenced by his actions before he assumed power and throughout his short 186-day reign. In July 1761, the Grand Duke demanded that Denmark pay an astronomical amount of 24 million rigsdaler silver species, which was an equivalent of four times the national budget of Denmark, as a compensation for the taxes that his Duchy could have collected from Schleswig for 41 years since the day when Copenhagen had seized it in 1720. He threatened tough sanctions if this demand was not met. When Russian allies—France and Austria—attempted to persuade St. Petersburg to agree to the peaceful exchange of territories with Denmark to settle the Holstein issue, the Grand Duke refused even to discuss it with them. The sick and fading Empress Elizabeth showed no interest in it while the most influential courtiers dodged the issue out of fear to cross the future emperor's path.⁴⁰

In February 1762, Peter III summoned the Commander of Russian Expeditionary Corps in Pomerania, Lt.-General Petr Rumyantsev, to discuss how to recover "our Holstein lands, which were illegally and violently seized by the Danish court." Rumyantsev received a five-point "general secret instruction" from the emperor, which outlined the steps

he needed to take following the conclusion of a ceasefire with Prussia. Specifically, Article Five stated that should the Danish government reject Russia's "peace offer" or attempt to drag out diplomatic negotiations, he must launch a military offensive against Denmark, seize the lands occupied by the Danes, and administer the oath of allegiance to residents.

On May 18 (29), 1762, the emperor chaired the meeting of the Imperial Council⁴¹ to deliberate Russian strategy in the conflict with the Danish court and signed the Imperial Order "On the Benefits of Current Moment for War over Schleswig Against Denmark," addressed to CFA. Its main idea was that since the Danish court didn't want to resolve the outstanding issues amicably and sought to buy time, waiting for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Prussia, Russia had no choice but to turn its army in Pomerania against Denmark and attack the enemy forces in Holstein. The emperor told the Council members he didn't want to hear any objections to his plan.⁴² On May 21 (June 1), 1762, Lt.-General Rumyantsev received the secret Imperial Rescript prescribing that he regard the war against Denmark not only as inevitable but as having been declared in reality and ordering that he take positions in Mecklenburg before the Danish army attempted to move in there.

On May 24 (June 4), the tsar dispatched the Imperial Rescript to the Russian envoy in Copenhagen, Johann von Korff, appointing him as the head of the Russian diplomatic delegation and Holstein councilor and Frederick II's loyalist Caspar Saldern as his deputy at the proposed Russo-Danish Conference in Berlin. The rescript prescribed that they use all means, including the threat of military force, to compel Denmark to yield the Schleswig-Holstein lands to Russia in the shortest time.⁴³ Soon thereafter, the tsar personally drafted Russia's ultimatum delivered to Danish negotiators Asseburg and Adlefeldt, on June 20 (July 1), 1762: either return Schleswig, the islands of Fehmarn and Helgoland, and the Danish part of Holstein, as well as pay reparations in the amount of 1,117,740 silver Reichsthalers for the damages caused

by the Danish occupation, or prepare for war, in which Russia would aim to conquer all Danish lands and liquidate Denmark as a sovereign state. The tsar didn't hide from his Holstein confidants in Oranienbaum his intention to conquer Denmark, seize the Danish throne, annex the defeated country, and banish the Danish king and his family to Tranuqebur, a Dutch colony in India, or gift him an estate and pension in the Russian Governorate of Liflandia.⁴⁴

Although the "Holstein obsession" may seem bizarre for the Russian emperor, one can explain it by several reasons, in addition to Peter III's unstable eccentric personality. First, the tsar surrounded himself with the "Holstein relatives," who didn't speak Russian and ignored Russian rites and traditions, yet held significant sway over the foreign and military policies of St. Petersburg court, especially with respect to Schleswig-Holstein and relations with Denmark, because they occupied key positions in Russia's military and political institutions.⁴⁵ This was not unprecedented in Russian history: Empress Catherine I invited her relatives from Livonia to the court, and Empress Anna Ioanovna brought her people from Courland, including her lover and "grey cardinal," Count von Biron. In modern terms, such obvious regional favoritism would be called "assembling the leader's own team which he or she can trust and rely on" (like Georgian cadres under Stalin, the Dnepropetrovsk cadres under Brezhnev, and the St. Petersburg cadres under Putin).

Second, the emperor found it difficult to reconcile the perceptions and impulses stemming from his dual national identity—the German-Holstein identity, instilled by early childhood socialization and education in Holstein where he lived for fourteen years since birth, and the imperial Russian identity, inculcated in adulthood at the St. Petersburg court where he spent twenty years from 1742 to 1762. Clearly, he showed great favoritism to all things and interests Holstein and felt "direct aversion to Russian customs and culture."⁴⁶

Third, during his aunt's reign, Peter III was not allowed to participate in Russian state affairs and was restricted mostly to the consideration of Holstein issues, which didn't help him broaden the worldview or escape the limitations of his Holstein upbringing.

Fourth, political culture and dynastic traditions in the Early Modern Period favored personal dynastic unions in Europe: for instance, the Saxon-Polish dynasty and the British-Hanoverian dynasty.⁴⁷ It is a curious historic fact that George II was more interested in the affairs of Hanover and Lower Saxony than governance in the British kingdom. In the same vein, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania Augustus III (1733-1763), a.k.a. Frederick Augustus II, Elector of Saxony, was more interested in the affairs and administration of the Electorate of Saxony in Dresden than those of Poland and Lithuania in Warsaw. This historical context helps us better understand Peter III's greater interest in the affairs of Schleswig-Holstein than Russia. No wonder historian Anisimov concludes that the tsar prioritized the Holstein-Gottorp dynastic politics over Russian state interests, which lay in the foundation of his decision to go to war against Denmark.⁴⁸

“Frederick II's Loyal Soldier”

Historical evidence suggests Peter III adored and sought to ingratiate himself with Prussian king Frederick the Great⁴⁹: the emperor's own words and private correspondence, testimonies of his relatives and confidants who knew him intimately, observations of high-ranking contemporaries, and historical accounts grounded in archival documents. According to Schilder, Peter III often said: “Frederick's will is God's will.” Once he wrote to Frederick II that he'd rather be a general in the Prussian army than Tsar of Russia. He told his confidants he wanted to change his Russian Orthodox faith to that of Frederick's.

His wife Empress Catherine II wrote in her diaries that most Russians, especially patriots, regarded him as “the sovereign with unbridled temper and limited intelligence, who hated and disdained Russians,

absolutely didn't know his country, couldn't concentrate, stingy and spendthrift, devoted solely to his whims and debauchery."⁵⁰ There is no question that the Empress was prejudiced against her late husband, who despised and frequently humiliated her in public. But she strongly believed that "he harbored hatred towards everything Russian, even without trying to hide it."⁵¹ She cited his own words when she wrote that "he often called the Prussian king as his sovereign, claimed he had sworn an oath of allegiance to him, wanted to enter into an alliance with the Prussian king and provide him with Russian troops."⁵²

Lady-in-waiting Princess Ekaterina Dashkova reminisced that "Being the morning general-corporal at the guard parade, enjoying a good dinner with fine Burgundy wine, spending the evening with his jesters and a few women of easy virtue, and doing whatever the King of Prussia ordered him to do—that was what constituted Peter III's happiness and glory."⁵³ Field Marshal Munnich recollected that "he imitated the Prussian king with so much enthusiasm that it was hard to understand."⁵⁴

Prince Mikhail Scherbatov, senator and president of the Collegium of State Revenues, who was also a well-respected 18th century historian and author of the seminal 7-volume *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, wrote that for Russian courtiers, "praising the Prussian king, who had just ceased to be our enemy, and denigrating the bravery of Russian troops, was the easiest way to earn Peter III's love."⁵⁵

During the Seven-Year War, Peter III's affection for Prussia and worship of Fredreck II grew stronger and more explicit, according to Jacob von Stählin, Peter III's mentor and private librarian.⁵⁶ He openly criticized Russia's political system. He claimed that Empress Elizabeth I was deceived by her advisers, who were bought by the Austrians and the French. He ignored the reports about military and diplomatic developments in Europe received from Russian commanders and diplomats and trusted only the reports published in Prussian

newspapers and “his own sources,” hinting at his Prussian connections.⁵⁷ Being a member of the Conference of Ministers at the Highest Court,⁵⁸ he denounced Russian involvement in the Seven-Year War in general and the war against Frederick II in particular. He instructed his right-hand man Volkov to tell the Conference members on his behalf that “over time, Russia will repent entering into alliance with Austria and France.”⁵⁹ It is no wonder that when he became emperor, he radically transformed Russian foreign policy by abandoning Russian allies and reaching out to Prussia and Britain in order to resolve the Holstein problem and advance Russian interests in the Baltic Sea.

Princess Dashkova recalled that when he was grand duke, Peter III Fyodorovich had often mocked Empress Elizabeth I’s secret orders to Russian troops in Prussia, maintained confidential correspondence with the Prussian king, and forwarded secret imperial rescripts via Volkov to him. She was appalled at how proud he was of the fact that he served so well to the open enemy of his country.⁶⁰

Soon after taking power, Peter III reformed the Russian army (which had already defeated Frederick II’s forces in numerous military battles, occupied East Prussia in 1758, and conquered Berlin in 1760) in accordance with the field manuals of the defeated Prussian army and dressed Russian officers and soldiers in the Prussian-style military uniform.⁶¹ These military reforms outraged the Russian patriotic public and fueled serious resentment against the Prussophile emperor among the military ranks.⁶²

The Russian emperor reached out to the Prussian king in a personal letter dated December 25, 1761 (January 5, 1762), to inform him about the death of Empress Elizabeth and his intention to restore the amicable and friendly relations between the two royal houses. In Breslau, desperate Frederick II warmly received the tsar’s envoy and confidant Andrey Gudovich and thanked heaven for the good news: “our rear is

no longer threatened,” he wrote to his brother Prince Henry.⁶³ In his reply dated February 6 (17), the king called Peter as his “old loyal friend” and expressed appreciation for the tsar’s reassurances of honoring their “precious friendship,” restoring “good harmony,” and expanding the “useful agreement” between them.⁶⁴

Shortly thereafter, both sides freed and exchanged all prisoners of war. Peter III made the most senior Prussian POW, Lt.-General Paul von Werner, as his informal military adviser, with whom he liked to discuss military strategy. In a February 15 (26) letter, the tsar asked the king to allow von Werner and other freed senior Prussian officers to serve him by joining the Russian military,⁶⁵ addressing the king as “my brother sovereign,” and lauding him as “one of the greatest heroes of our time.”⁶⁶ In a March 20 (31) letter, Frederick II was happy to oblige, despite the shortage of general officers in his weakened army.⁶⁷

On January 28 (February 8), Lt.-General Prince Mikhail Volkonsky, Commander of a 12,000-men strong Russian Expeditionary Corps in Pomerania, Poland (a.k.a. the Poznan Corps), notified Peter III that Governor of Szczecin (Stettin) Duke Bevern, one of Frederick II’s most experienced and trusted commanders, proposed to commence a general ceasefire. The emperor ordered that Volkonsky do as Duke Bevern proposed, and the Russian-Prussian ceasefire was reached on March 5 (16). According to Volkov, Prince Volkonsky hesitated to accept the Prussian ceasefire offer without the signed imperial rescript, which later exposed him to the accusations of malign intent by Prussophile Lt.-General Adjutant Gudovich, who showed no bounds in his zeal towards the Prussian king because he knew the emperor loved and rewarded it. Volkov claimed the emperor rebuffed his attempts to defend the honor of the Russian state and army by proposing to impose conditions on Prussia during the armistice, to the profound chagrin of other Russian officials like Prince Nikita Trubetskoy, President of the War Collegium.⁶⁸

To conclude a separate peace and form a defensive alliance with Russia, Frederick II dispatched his adjutant, 26-year-old Colonel Baron Wilhelm Bernhard von der Goltz, as his ambassador to St. Petersburg and gave him the following instructions: “The essential goal of your mission is to end the war and detach Russia from its allies. The Russian emperor’s kind disposition gives us hope that peace conditions won’t be heavy for us.” Acknowledging the paramount importance of the Holstein question for Peter III, the king instructed Goltz to sign the peace agreement at once “if they agree to withdraw from all my domains, under the condition that I guarantee Holstein for them, especially if you can secure their guarantee of Silesia.”⁶⁹

In his memoirs, Frederick II described how worried he was about Goltz’s mission because he felt he was playing a weak hand: Russia defeated Prussia and occupied most of its lands; the Versailles and Vienna courts had already guaranteed Prussia for the St. Petersburg court during the reign of the late Elizabeth I; the residents of East Prussia had pledged allegiance to the Russian crown in January 1758; the occupied region experienced economic growth due to increasing arms production for the Russian army and expanding trade with Poland and Lithuania; and the Russian administration functioned smoothly without popular resistance in Königsberg. So, why would the new emperor, who had inherited a victorious military campaign, switch sides, withdraw from the winning coalition, and give up the conquests guaranteed by his allies, which could cast a shadow on the glory and honor of the Russian state and undermine his nascent rule and domestic political standing?!

Being aware of how hard it was to discern the true causes of human action and various springs that moved human will, Frederick II attributed Peter III’s decision to his “noble sentiments” and “determination to satisfy all desires of the Prussian king, which went well beyond what one could expect from a head of state.” Arguably, the Russian emperor, who proudly wore a finger ring engraved with Frederick’s portrait and the

Prussian Order of Black Eagle and hung the full-length portrait of the king in his chamber, acted as a foreign agent on the Russian throne. He was not just a sycophantic admirer but a decision-making proxy for the Prussian king at the St. Petersburg court.⁷⁰

Frederick II admitted that “the outcome of the case [dealing with the Russians] turned out to be much more fortunate than one could expect.” Later on, the Russian emperor’s decision to abruptly end his country’s participation in the Seven-Year War, throw its weight behind the losing party, and accept the peace terms as dictated by the defeated power was dubbed as the “Second Miracle of the House of Brandenburg,” which truly saved the Prussian state from disappearance from the European geopolitical scene and historical oblivion.

On March 2 (March 13), Peter III told Goltz he would be glad to see the king’s draft of a peace treaty, stressing he would sign everything proposed by his dear friend because the king’s gains would be like his own gains. He ordered his close aides Volkov, Shuvalov, Naryshkin, Melgunov, and Vorontsov not to mention anything that might contradict the king’s wishes during the peace-treaty drafting process. Frederick II dispatched Count Schwerin to deliver his draft and personal letter, increase Prussian influence in St. Petersburg, advise the tsar on political matters, and expedite peace negotiations. On March 29 (April 9), the emperor told Goltz to discuss all matters concerning peace directly with his right-hand man Volkov. In his memoirs, Volkov claimed that Goltz ran around him when he attempted to improve the original Prussian draft by adding the provisions concerning continued Russian control over East Prussia and Pomerania and delaying possible war against Denmark. Goltz rejected Volkov’s amendments, and the talks briefly stalled. When both complained to Peter III about the other side’s “obstruction,” the emperor ordered that Volkov and privy councilor Wolf draft an alternative version of the peace treaty. When Volkov presented the Russian counter-draft more favorable to Russian national interests to the emperor for his consideration, Holstein Prince Georg,

Prussian envoy Goltz, and Wolf denied that it had been coordinated with them. Brazen Goltz took a copy of the Russian counter-draft with him, re-wrote it into a completely new draft, read it to the emperor without witnesses when the two of them were dining alone, got the verbal approval, and forwarded it to Chancellor Vorontsov for signing with the note stating the emperor had approved the text of the treaty in its entirety and in all details.⁷¹ On April 24 (May 5), 1762, in St. Petersburg, Goltz and Vorontsov officially signed the peace treaty between the Russian Empire and Prussia,⁷² which ended the state of war and proclaimed “eternal peace” between the two countries, pledged to make peace with Sweden, committed Russia to return all Prussian lands occupied by Russian forces to the Prussian king, and vowed to form a defensive alliance.⁷³ On May 2 (13), the Senate heard the CFA report concerning the treaty and associated Russian obligations and ordered Commander of Russian Forces in Europe Field-Marshal General Saltykov, the War Collegium, Riga and Revel Governorates-General, Main Provisions Chancellery, and Russian Governor of Königsberg Lt.-General Panin to implement its provisions without delay.⁷⁴

On May 21 (June 1), Chancellor Vorontsov, Holstein Prince George, and Prussian envoy Goltz began negotiations on the formation of a Russian-Prussian defense alliance, using the German language draft agreement prepared by the Collegium of Foreign Affairs. On June 8 (19), Vorontsov and Goltz finally signed the treaty on friendship and mutual assistance,⁷⁵ in which they pledged that Russia and Prussia would defend each other if either party came under attack by providing 15,000 infantry troops and 5,000 cavalry troops, as well as an annual subsidy equivalent to 600,000 rubles, and vowed not to enter into any ceasefire or peace talks with enemies without the knowledge and consent of the other party. The treaty had five addenda: three secret protocols (on Holstein, on succession in Kurland, and on the form of government in Poland) and two separate protocols (on wartime relations with other great powers and on the protection of the rights of co-religionists [Lutherans and Greek Orthodox] in Poland and Lithuania). The first

secret protocol specified their mutual obligations with respect to the Holstein problem, which was so dear to Peter III's heart. In particular, the Prussian king reaffirmed his commitment to help the Russian emperor by all means to return the Duchy of Schleswig and to use his diplomatic and political influence to persuade the Danish court to satisfy all "fair and lawful claims" of the Russian court. But, should the Danish court hold on to its position and the Russian emperor have no choice but to reclaim his ancestral hereditary domains by way of arms, then the Prussian king not only would not hinder it but also provide the emperor with a corps of Prussian troops in addition to 20,000 troops or, in the event of the Ottoman or [Crimean] Tatar attack on Russia during hostilities against Denmark, the annual subsidy promised in the main text of the treaty.⁷⁶ When the newly appointed Russian envoy to Prussia, Major-General Prince Nikolay Repnin, presented his credentials to Frederick II at a military camp near Breslau on June 29 (July 10), he told the latter that the emperor was really happy with the new mutual defense treaty in general and the king's promise to assist Russia in resolving the Holstein problem in particular.⁷⁷ Neither Repnin nor Frederick II knew that the day before Peter III had been deposed, and a new era in Russian-Prussian relations was about to begin.

If we are to apply the Duck Test to Peter III,⁷⁸ then, using modern terminology, he clearly was a foreign agent acting on behalf of a foreign power, at least with respect to Russia's relations with major powers like Prussia, France, Austria, Britain, and Sweden. But his determination to go to war against Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein is more difficult to explain by simply treating him like Frederick II's pawn because the Prussian king eyed Holstein for himself, came to oppose that war, and actively sought to dissuade his Russian asset from pursuing it on his own.

Strategic Realignment and Russian Diplomacy at Work

While historical records are unambiguous about Peter III's personal motives to go to war against Denmark, some contemporary scholars

assume that he was a realist and planned to secure a grip on the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein in order to expand Holstein-Russian power northward and westward.⁷⁹ They assert that the tsar believed East Prussia was not as useful and valuable for him as Denmark and Northern Germany.

At first sight, this assertion doesn't appear to make sense, considering how much blood Russia shed in conquering it during the Seven-Year War. However, they emphasize the fact that the tsar was a Holstein to his bone and indeed was primarily worried about the sovereignty and security of Holstein, which was facing a clear and present danger from Denmark, not East Prussia. From this narrow ethno-nationalist perspective, owning the harbor of his birthplace Kiel and gaining territory and influence in neighboring Denmark and Mecklenburg-Pomerania was more useful in enhancing the security of his true homeland than holding on to a more distant East Prussia.

Alternatively, from the Russian imperial perspective, it might have been more valuable for Russian national security to establish a foothold on the strategically important Jutland peninsula in Northern Europe in order to project power over the isthmus between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, which would have enabled the Russian merchant fleet to conduct not only Baltic maritime commerce but also unimpeded ocean shipping and global commerce. Moreover, if Russia, as the new power broker on the Jutland peninsula, were to dig a 62-mile-long canal, its merchant and naval ships could forego paying the Sound transit fee to the Danes altogether.

Equally important, perhaps, was Peter III's calculation that bandwagoning with rising Britain, mending fences and making alliances with traditional Russian enemies, Prussia and Sweden, could do more to advance his geopolitical agenda in Northern Europe and ensure they wouldn't intervene on Denmark's behalf than strengthening the legacy alliances with either untrustworthy Austria or

weakened France. Further, the distance between Kiel claimed by Peter III and Hanover ruled by the British monarch was around 150 miles, which made England by way of Hanover the nearest neighbor of Schleswig-Holstein, and, in the geopolitical sense, the closest power to Russia. So, for Peter III, who was primarily concerned about the security and prosperity of Schleswig-Holstein, it was quite rational to seek peace and friendship with its closest neighbor—rising Britain.

Court officials in St. Petersburg thought that the dramatic change in foreign policy, namely realignment with Prussia and distancing from Austria and France, should naturally lead to rapprochement between Russia and Britain. From day one, the new Russian emperor treated with full confidence British envoy Sir Charles Keith, regarding him as the man who would be the most sympathetic to his new pro-Prussian policy. However, Peter III didn't consider the change of government in London⁸⁰ and consequent adjustment of the British strategy in the Seven-Year War and British policy towards Prussia.⁸¹

In January 1762, Lord Bute confided in the outgoing Russian envoy to the Court of St. James, Prince Alexander Golitsyn, that King George III had no desire to wage an endless war for the benefit of the Prussian court and was strongly opposed to the continued deployment of British troops in western Germany; he also advised the Prussian king via the British Minister Plenipotentiary in Berlin, Andrew Mitchell, to make territorial concessions to the Russians to reach peace. Golitsyn, who hadn't been informed yet about the radical pro-Prussian re-orientation contemplated by Peter III, assured Lord Bute that the new emperor would want to follow the suit of his predecessors and maintain Russia's traditional alliance with the Vienna court and friendship with the court of St. James, while insisting that the defeated Frederick II give up his claim to East Prussia, which had no connection to the German Empire, and exchange other Russian territorial gains for commensurate rewards. In his final report on January 26 (February 6), 1762, Golitsyn informed the tsar that the British government didn't believe Fredreck

II's "chimeric fantasy" that Russia would abandon its allies and join hands with Prussia, that London desired peace, and it was "extremely tired of its alliance with the Prussian king and would abandon its Prussian ally at the first convenient opportunity." He concluded by stating that "the British court would gladly agree to the Russian annexation and eternal ownership of Prussia (province)."⁸² In a personal letter dated February 15 (26), 1762, Golitsyn informed Chancellor Vorontsov that Britain had refused to prolong the subsidy agreement with Prussia, which meant that the Anglo-Prussian alliance fell apart. He also opined that it was solely within Peter III's power to deprive the Prussian king of the greatest part of his territorial domain if he wished to do so because Britain wouldn't object to it.⁸³ Little did he know about the abrupt and dramatic shift in Russian foreign policy priorities ordered by the new emperor.

Although the conversation between Lord Bute and departing Ambassador Golitsyn was meant to be held in total confidence and safeguarded as top secret, on March 2 (March 13), Peter III not only showed Golitsyn's diplomatic report to Prussian envoy Goltz but made a copy thereof for Frederick II. Peter III's unceremonious action caused a diplomatic scandal and dimmed any hope for the improvement in Russo-British relations during his reign.

This notwithstanding, to advance his pro-Prussian diplomatic agenda, in March 1762, the tsar appointed a new minister to the court of St. James, 21-year-old Count Alexander Vorontsov, Chancellor Vorontsov's nephew and brother of the tsar's mistress Elizabeth Vorontsova. Peter III instructed his new envoy in London to exert all efforts 1) to convince King George III to treat the Prussian king with as good intentions as he used to have in the past; 2) to smear and undermine the political influence of Prime Minister Bute, who deceived the king by spreading lies about Frederick II, especially if he intended to abandon the Prussian king and conclude peace with Austria; 3) to destroy royal friendship with the Copenhagen court and break up the British-Danish alliance; 4)

to lure England by all means to join the Russo-Prussian alliance by emphasizing the great benefits Britain could derive from increasing trade with Russia on one hand; and 5) to stress the great harm Britain could suffer if Russia were to ban its critical exports to England such as tree stumps, mast timber, copper, iron, and hemp oil, on which British shipbuilding heavily depended, should the British government choose to fight against the newly formed Russo-Prussian alliance, on the other hand.⁸⁴ But, young Vorontsov's mission in London failed: he didn't have the knowledge, diplomatic experience, or personal gravitas to impress or change the mind of the British; his ambassadorial tenure was short-lived and he was recalled home soon after the overthrow of Peter III.

That said, Britain refused to support either Russia or Denmark in the Holstein question. On the one hand, on April 12 (23), Chancellor Vorontsov asked British envoy Sir Charles Keith for several frigates and other warships for Russian naval operations against Denmark but was rebuffed because "Britain was extremely overburdened with conducting two simultaneous wars and couldn't spare any warships for others."⁸⁵ On the other hand, when Copenhagen formally asked London for help in mediating the Russo-Danish dispute, King George III replied to the Danish king Frederick V that his country didn't interfere in the territorial disputes of other countries, and his court was not interested in the Holstein problem between Denmark and Peter III. When Britain's new State Secretary for the Northern Department, George Grenville, who replaced Lord Bute in May 1762, met with Russia's new envoy Alexander Vorontsov, he condemned the Danes' aggressive actions in Hamburg and promised that Britain would remain neutral in the event of war between Russia and Denmark.⁸⁶

Austrian Ambassador in St. Petersburg, Count Mercy-Argenteau, who had played the *primus inter pares* role in St. Petersburg's diplomatic circles during the final months of Elizabeth I's reign, sought reassurances that Peter III would continue his aunt's pro-Austrian foreign policy. However, Chancellor Vorontsov told him that the new

emperor sought peace, advising the Vienna court to follow his suit. His explanation was that Peter III “didn’t want to know anything about war, never recognized the current war as useful and never thought it would bring any benefits to the Russian state; he could never understand what exactly compelled Russia to sacrifice its money and troops to detach one province from the Berlin court and yield it to the Austrian house.”⁸⁷ On January 4 (15), 1762, Mercy-Argenteau reported to Empress Maria Theresa that Russia was going to change its traditional foreign policy system. Accordingly, the Austrians decided to hold on tight and adjust their war plans for the 1762 campaign by switching to strategic defense. Subsequently, Ambassador Mercy-Argenteau reported that the tsar was enraged when he heard the news that his Austrian ally was defiant and didn’t intend to lay down arms. As a result, Mercy-Argenteau was ostracized and denied access to the emperor and lost much influence at the St. Petersburg court. On January 21 (February 1), frustrated Mercy-Argenteau informed Empress Maria-Theresa that Peter III openly expressed affection for Frederick II, and no one dared to contradict him.⁸⁸

On January 20 (31), Peter III ordered that Commander-in-Chief Field Marshal General Petr Saltykov withdraw Lt.-General Zakhar Chernyshev’s expeditionary corps from Graz in Austria to Poznan in Poland in preparation for war against Denmark. On January 23 (February 3), the Senate instructed that the War Collegium, Field Marshal General Saltykov, General-Kriegskommissar Glebov, and the Collegium of Foreign Affairs use available local resources, reparations due, and 200,000 rubles from the general operational fund of one million rubles appropriated for the 1762 military campaign to ensure that Lt.-General Chernyshev’s corps would face no shortages with provisions, fodder, and pay in Poland while regrouping and waiting for further combat orders.⁸⁹ On January 28 (February 8), Russian envoy in Vienna Prince Dmitry Golitsyn received the Circular Rescript signed by the emperor,⁹⁰ ordering that he inform Austrian State Chancellor Kaunitz that Russia would pull out from the war immediately due to

lack of money and men and would no longer be able to provide war assistance to Austria. On February 1 (12), Chancellor Vorontsov handed the Imperial declaration about Russia's withdrawal from the war against Prussia to Ambassador Mercy-Argenteau. As soon as Vienna got the bad news, unhappy Kaunitz asked for clarifications as to how exactly Peter III intended to end the war, whether Russian and Prussian troops had concluded a ceasefire, whether the tsar planned to organize a peace congress, what specifically he wanted from peace, and whether he planned to leave the Russian army in Prussian lands or recall it back to Russia.

On March 25 (April 5), in his report to Chancellor Vorontsov Count Pyotr Chernyshev, who was passing through Vienna, he confirmed Austria's determination to continue war primarily because of the allied obligations before France, no matter how burdensome it was for the country and its people and exhausting for the Austrian army. He added that the departure of the Russian Expeditionary Corps commanded by his brother, Gen. Zakhar Chernyshev, caused despondency and loss of hope among the generals and officers of the Austrian army. On March 29 (April 9), Amb. Golitsyn received the Imperial Rescript reaffirming that Russia was seeking peace and drawing the attention of the Vienna court to the fact that Russia's continued participation in the war on Austria's side played into the hands of the Danish court, which hoped Russia would exhaust its forces and resources in the extraneous war while Denmark was rearming and taking advantage of Russia's distraction to consolidate its illegal gains in Holstein. Ambassador Golitsyn told State Chancellor Kaunitz that traditional friendship between Russian and Austrian houses could be preserved only if Vienna were to follow St. Petersburg's example and make peace with the Prussian king without any conditions. On April 21 (May 2), as 16,000 Russian troops were being redeployed to assist the Prussian army fighting against the Austrian forces, Golitsyn received the Imperial Rescript ordering him to inform the Austrians that the stubbornness of the Vienna court was the main reason for the continuation of war, and

Russia no longer intended to provide military assistance to Austria and instead would dispatch its troops to aid Frederick II.

In order to prevent the inevitable rupture in the Russo-Austrian alliance, in his conversation with Chancellor Vorontsov, on May 11 (22), Ambassador Mercy-Argenteau expressed profound regret at St. Peterburg's decision to redeploy its army corps to help the Prussian king and, as a last resort, offered money and Austrian troops for the tsar's war against Denmark.⁹¹ But Peter III told his foreign minister to inform Empress Maria Theresa that he didn't need money; he would defeat the Danes by himself, and, should any help be needed, he would seek it elsewhere, "actually anywhere except Vienna." The Russian one-eighty extinguished any hope in Vienna to reach its war aims and fulfil Maria Theresa's dreams: without Russia, Austria wouldn't be able to curtail the power of Prussia, neutralize its great power ambitions, and regain Silesia annexed by Frederick II.⁹²

To put more pressure on the Vienna court, Peter III orchestrated a daring gambit in Constantinople. On April 20 (May 1), the Russian envoy in Constantinople received the CFA's instruction to tell Sultan Mustafa III that "should the Ottomans declare war against Austria, Russia would not intervene either directly or indirectly." He was also instructed to use the embassy's discretionary funds to induce Grand Vizier Koca Ragıp Pasha and foreign and war ministers to convince the sultan to attack Austria. The Vienna court was displeased and disappointed.

The French government officially learned about the dawn of a new era in St. Petersburg on January 18 (29), 1762, when Russian Ambassador in Paris Pyotr Chernyshev presented Peter III's letter to French king Louis XV and French foreign minister Choiseul.⁹³ According to Chernyshev, Choiseul eagerly read the paragraph revealing the new emperor's desire to preserve the traditional alliance with France. This was good news for Paris because, in Choiseul's thinking, France couldn't

achieve a total victory in Continental Europe without defeating Germany, which would be impossible without defeating Britain. So, he hoped that his allies—Russians and Austrians—would tie down and press the German-British forces in the east and south, and the French forces would mount an ambitious invasion of Britain and compel London to seek for peace while repelling the British attacks on French colonies around the world. Hence, Choiseul assured the Russian envoy that France would stand by its allies, too. To prove its commitment to the allied policy, France refused to side with the Danish government or mediate in the Holstein matter in late January 1762 when Andreas Bernstorff, a cousin of Denmark's First Minister, visited Paris and delivered his uncle's letter with the request for French support in Copenhagen's conflict over Holstein with Russia.⁹⁴

But soon, the French government learned about the new pro-Prussian foreign policy line in Russia. Peter III's decision to distance himself from his wartime allies and conclude a separate peace treaty with Prussia wreaked havoc in Choiseul's war strategy. When, on April 26 (May 7), Chernyshov informed Choiseul about the conclusion of peace between Russia and Prussia, the latter couldn't hide his irritation, reproached the St. Petersburg court for the separate peace and abandonment of its allies, and admonished the Russians to honor their allied commitments. In the formal reply, the French king accused the Russian emperor of betrayal of the allied cause. Afterwards, Louis XV stopped talking to Ambassador Chernyshev at state receptions. The breakup of relations between Russia and its allies made the situation of the Russian Ambassador in Paris very uncomfortable: everyone tried to avoid contact with him. The French ambassador in St. Petersburg, Baron de Breteuil, too, lost influence at the St. Petersburg court. Russian-French diplomatic tensions caused by Russian-Prussian rapprochement were further aggravated by the French envoy's refusal to meet officially with and pay respects to Peter III's Holstein uncle Field Marshal Prince George, which offended the tsar, as indicated by Breteuil's conversation with Chancellor Vorontsov, on May 11 (22).⁹⁵ As a result, Breteuil found

himself isolated at the St. Petersburg court. When Choiseul in his conversation with Chernyshev threatened to recall Breteuil and lower the level of diplomatic relations to chargé d'affaires, the Russian emperor ordered his envoy on May 16 (27), 1762, to leave Paris.

The simmering mini-Cold War between the Russian Empire and British ally Sweden for influence in Finland and the Baltic region didn't stop Peter III from trying to get the Swedish King Gustav III on board in his planned war against Denmark, counting on their common ties to the House of Holstein-Gottorp.⁹⁶ On June 4 (15), Russian envoy to the Swedish court Count Ivan Osterman was instructed to inform the king that "war between Russia and Denmark was inevitable," to persuade him to join the Russo-Prussian alliance, and to solicit his permission for Russian warships in distress to enter Swedish harbors for repair and restocking and military assistance for Russian troops in Pomerania. On June 18 (29), Swedish foreign minister Count Claes Ekeblad replied that his country was exhausted by hostilities and could perform only officia humanitatis (duties of humanity) and only for a "fair fee" for the Russian ships in distress. Disappointed, Ambassador Osterman asked King Gustav III not to extend similar officia humanitatis to Denmark but was rebuffed.⁹⁷

In the course of diplomatic preparations for war against Denmark, Russian diplomats were able to garner political and military support from Prussia, nudged Austria to promise money and troops, reached a modus vivendi with the Ottoman sultan, and convinced Britain, France, and Spain, all of which were preoccupied with their own problems in the colonies, and the exhausted Sweden not to intervene and remain neutral. Thus, within a few months Peter III's diplomacy isolated Denmark on the international scene and left it with no choice but to prepare for war against the more powerful Russia. This was a surprisingly effective outcome for someone who was characterized by his contemporaries as the inexperienced eccentric "mad man" who lacked understanding of or appreciation for Russian national interests.

Domestic Power Play: Special Operation “Marriage”

An interesting alternative explanation of Peter III’s decision to go to war against Denmark concerns his domestic political priorities. Russian historian Sergey Dolya argues that consolidating his grip on power at home was more important for the tsar than the overseas pursuits, especially after two relatively successful foreign policy moves, i.e., the painless withdrawal of Russia from the costly great powers’ war and quick formation of a military-political alliance with Prussia.⁹⁸ The tsar felt so insecure on the throne that in the first manifesto he neither mentioned his wife and son nor named his son Paul as the heir,⁹⁹ which prompted speculations regarding whom he might declare as the successor. The candidates rumored ranged from the sons of Holstein Prince George to his own future male offsprings. Peter III wanted to replace the Empress by getting rid of his wife Ekaterina Alexeyevna, whom he disdained and maltreated, and putting on the throne his mistress Countess Elizaveta Vorontsova, Chancellor Vorontsov’s niece.¹⁰⁰ He even delayed his official coronation at the Kremlin in Moscow so that he would place the Empress’ crown on his mistress Elizaveta, not his wife.¹⁰¹ He couldn’t divorce legally, even though they lived separately: Peter III with his mistress and Ekaterina with her favorite guardsman Grigoriy Orlov.¹⁰² Although the emperor’s position was shaky in the eyes of Russian society, his wife’s position was fragile at the court, too, especially after she gave birth out of wedlock to Orlov’s son Alexey Bobrinsky, on April 11 (22), 1762.¹⁰³ When Peter III asked Frederick II for advice, the latter tried to dissuade him from divorce and, on the opposite, urged an early coronation to solidify his control. The Prussian king admonished him not to leave St. Petersburg for the Danish campaign, fearing the possibility of a palace coup in his absence,¹⁰⁴ and, if that was impossible, to keep a close eye on the suspect coup plotters and foreign envoys by ordering them to travel with him to Europe.

But the capricious emperor didn’t heed his Prussian idol’s advice because he was “sincerely convinced that the entire world existed only

to satisfy his wants, wishes, and whims.”¹⁰⁵ Instead, on the one hand, he intended to organize a mass wedding ceremony between 40-50 Russian noble ladies and the Holstein officers,¹⁰⁶ probably in order to create numerous precedents of the Holstein men marrying Russian women in preparation for his own marriage to Elizaveta Vorontsova, thereby weakening the public stigma against such cross-cultural marriages while also strengthening the family bonds between his duchy and the empire. Another rumor circulating at the court had it that the emperor wanted to dissolve the marriages of all Russian court ladies and then give them away in marriage again in accordance with his own wishes. They said he would set the example by divorcing Ekaterina and marrying his mistress Elizaveta Vorontsova, Prussian envoy Goltz would marry Countess Stroganova, ladies-in-waiting Maria Naryshkina and Countess Bruce would be given away to his Holstein drinking buddies.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, the emperor reportedly told his closest aides: “In the coming days, I will put my wife in a situation where she will no longer be a hindrance to me.”¹⁰⁸ This ominous warning probably reflected his calculation that before the official coronation he could banish his wife to a convent¹⁰⁹ or imprison her at Schlüsselburg Fortress near St. Petersburg without public outrage and become a “free man,” who could marry and crown Vorontsova.¹¹⁰ This is like what his grandfather Tsar Peter the Great did when he banished his first wife Eudoxia Lopukhina to the Intercession Convent of Suzdal and later married his friend Alexander Menshikov’s housemaid Marfa Skavronskaya, who was eventually crowned as Empress Catherine I, and she transferred Peter I’s abandoned wife to Schlüsselburg Fortress.¹¹¹ Interestingly, it was no secret in St. Petersburg that the emperor, unhappy with his wife, long wanted to get rid of her one way or another—by either exiling or arresting her, but in any case, divorcing and abandoning her because he frequently spoke about it in public during drinking parties with his Holstein pals.¹¹²

Judging by the personal observations of his contemporaries, Peter III was not dumb or passive. Schtelin described him as “rather witty and

well-read." Field marshal Minnich portrayed him as "passionate by nature, energetic, quick, tireless, angry, quick-tempered, and indomitable."¹¹³ Prussian envoy Count Finckenstein characterized him as "deceitful and secretive," as well as "cruel and ruthless." Therefore, he must have understood that his wife was not like an oppressed, submissive, and powerless woman. Although he called her names in public, he feared her penchant for intrigue, close connections with guardsmen and several foreign envoys, and judged it would not be easy to expel her from the palace because she would fight back. At a formal gala reception held on June 9 (20) on the occasion of the ratification of peace with Prussia, he loudly called his wife "stupid" and drove her to tears in front of the entire court and foreign dignitaries after she refused to stand up and drink to the health of his uncle Prince Georg of Holstein as a member of the imperial family.¹¹⁴ In a fit of rage after dinner, he ordered his wife be arrested but was persuaded to rescind the order shortly thereafter. According to Princess Dashkova, the following day, in the summer palace, the emperor held an informal feast with binge drinking and courtesans for his pals, Holstein generals, and the Prussian envoy, at which he awarded Elizaveta Vorontsova with the Order of St. Catherine (this order was to be given only to the duchesses of royal blood) and swore his adjutants to serve as lackeys of the Prussian king.¹¹⁵ These two incidents shocked everyone at the court, signaling that the demolition of the Empress was probably imminent. They put in focus Ekaterina's future for her, compelling her to give serious consideration to various intrigues aimed at removing her husband from power, which came to fruition in the palace coup on June 28 (July 9), 1762.

The marital problems in the imperial family also hurt Denmark's standing in the eyes of the emperor because Danish envoy Count Adolf Osten took the Empress' side and became one of her close confidants. Ekaterina Alexeyevna was always in need of money to maintain her small court at the Peterhof Palace in St. Petersburg, and Count Osten was always generous and forthcoming with funds. She liked the sharp-witted and reliable Osten, and he gained so much trust that she used

him as her postillon d'amour to deliver love letters to her then lover Polish Prince Stanislaw Ponyatovsky. The Danish diplomat found the Empress to be sympathetic to his government's idea of territory exchange to solve the problem of Schleswig-Holstein.¹¹⁶ The emperor was probably told of Osten's secret role in the Empress' inner circle, which led to his isolation at Peter III's pro-Holstein court in Oranienbaum at the critical time when the emperor was deliberating his options with respect to Denmark.

In addition to tricky legal issues, opposition from the disgruntled church hierarchs, and disapproval of the indignant general public, the emperor faced two very powerful obstacles to his plan to enthrone his mistress: the Russian military, which couldn't understand his orders to retreat and surrender all gains in Europe and hated his Prussian-style military reforms modeled after the defeated enemy, and, especially, the Imperial Guards, who were exasperated with his anti-Russian policies and looked at him with contempt.

Russian historian Dolya contends that Peter III's proposed war against Denmark was meant foremost to address these two challenges to his rule. He calls it Special Operation "Marriage." Its domestic political goal was to keep the Russian army engaged in a less costly and more easily winnable military campaign against a weaker opponent in a remote corner of Europe and to move the Imperial Guards far away from St. Petersburg so that they couldn't meddle into politics at home, threaten Peter III's rule, and ruin his marriage and coronation plans. Its diplomatic goal was to put moral pressure on the Copenhagen court, signaling that unless it relinquished control over Schleswig-Holstein, the Russian army and navy would crush the much smaller and inferior Danish forces, the Danish king would lose his throne, and Denmark would disappear as a sovereign state.¹¹⁷

The Russian emperor looked down on and didn't trust the Russian army and was irritated and worried by the dissolute behavior of the Lifeguard

Company of Imperial Guards.¹¹⁸ He regarded Russia's regular army as inferior to the Prussian troops, often quipping that "Russians could never beat Prussians"¹¹⁹ and called the guardsmen, who lived in barracks together with wives and children, as "Janissaries," musing that: "They only block the imperial palace, can't perform any work or military duties, and always pose a serious threat to the government."¹²⁰ To set the example for Russian military units and build his own praetorian guard, Peter III organized the 1,500-men strong Holsten force,¹²¹ recruited from free men (except ethnic Russians and Malorussians) in Holstein, Lifland, Estland, and Poland.¹²² On January 9 (20), 1762, he made his 64-year-old relative, Field Marshal-General Peter August, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Beck, who didn't speak Russian and was physically frail and mentally deficient, as Governor-General of St. Petersburg and Revel and commander of all field and garrison units in the capital, Finland, Estonia, and Narva, to the dismay of Russian nobles.¹²³ To eliminate the potential armed force that could challenge his rule, on March 21 (April 1), the emperor issued the Imperial Rescript disbanding the most elite Guard unit, Lifeguard Company, which had played the critical role in helping Elizabeth I seize power in 1741.¹²⁴ In May, under the pretext of the concentration of forces to prepare for war against Denmark, the emperor ordered that Lt.-General Rumyantsev's Expeditionary Corps in East Pomerania redeploy to the Danish border by way of Mecklenburg, instead of returning home. On June 26 (July 7), upon the imperial rescript, the Senate ordered that all units of the Imperial Guard, too, depart from St. Petersburg and move out towards the Danish frontier by way of Riga.¹²⁵ This proved to be the "last drop" and "major catalyst" mobilizing the guardsmen in support of the empress against her conniving husband.¹²⁶ In Russian provinces, rumors circulated that Peter III had sold Russian troops to Frederick II so that they wouldn't return to Russia and that he would disband the Guard.¹²⁷ The newly appointed Commander of the Russian Army, Generalissimo Prince Georg of Holstein, who couldn't speak Russian, ordered that Holstein troops redeploy from Oranienbaum

west of St. Petersburg to the capital to assume all key security and law enforcement functions there. The rumor swirling in the capital had it that the arrest of the empress was imminent, and “her life was in danger.”¹²⁸

According to Soloviyov, “Just like in 1741 when the overthrow of the Braunschweig [Brunswick] family was expedited by [Peter I’s niece Grand Duchess] Anna Leopoldovna’s order for the Imperial Guard to go to war against Sweden in Finland, so were the palace coup and proclamation of Ekaterina Alexeyevna as Empress Catherine II in 1762, precipitated by the anxiety and unwillingness of the guards to participate in the military campaign against the Danes.”¹²⁹ I would add that one can find another striking historical similarity between events in 1741 and 1762. In 1741, Ambassador of France Marquis de La Chétardie and Ambassador of Sweden Eric Nolcken (who both didn’t like regent Anna Leopoldovna’s pro-Austrian, anti-French and anti-Swedish policies and the prospect of Russian war against Sweden) established secret contacts with Grand Duchess Elizabeth and encouraged her to stage a coup d’état, supported by France and Sweden, against the young Ivan VI and Anna. In 1762, French Ambassador Baron de Breteuil and Denmark envoy Count Osten (who were both close to Ekaterina and opposed to Peter III’s pro-Prussian, anti-French and anti-Danish policies, especially the newly formed Russian-Prussian alliance and prospect of Russian war against Denmark), too, were sympathetic to the coup plotters and even instrumental in organizing “the revolution,” as Ekaterina later called it.

Why Didn’t the War Occur?

Although Peter III was determined to restore his suzerainty over Schleswig-Holstein with the use of arms, the Imperial Council, Senate, Collegia, and all government offices were preoccupied with preparations for war against Denmark, the regular army and Imperial Guards were ordered to move out to the future battlefield, Russian diplomats canvassed Europe for diplomatic support, the emperor issued the ultimatum to the Danish king but Copenhagen refused to give

in, and the Danish troops were pre-positioned in Mecklenburg to resist Russian invasion, yet the war didn't happen. This begs the question of why not.

Russian historiography offers four possible answers as to why the planned war against Denmark was aborted: 1) Russia was not ready for war, and domestic opposition prevailed over warmongers; 2) the saber-rattling Russian leader yielded to the anti-war foreign influence; 3) "revolution" in St. Petersburg; and 4) Russian leadership didn't really intend to go to war and used the war rhetoric and ostensible war preparations as a diversion for domestic political purposes.

The first explanation, advanced by Igor Kurukin, is that Russia was not ready for this highly unpopular war; everyone, except the emperor, opposed and sabotaged it.¹³⁰ Most of the Imperial Council members were against the war on Denmark. Chancellor Vorontsov led the anti-war party. On April 12 (23), he wrote to the emperor that it was unreasonable to wage this "chimeric campaign" without a strong Navy, "sufficient arsenals," and "great sums of money."¹³¹ On May 30 (June 10), the Imperial Council submitted the Memorandum (*zapiska*) to the emperor, critical of the war option, underscoring "the Russian army was unprepared for war": LT-General Rumyantsev had only 17 regiments under his command, with the rest of the troops still on the march; they couldn't find any fodder and provisions in either Pomerania or Mecklenburg; the troops would reach the borders of Holstein only in August when it was too late to open hostilities. The Memorandum recommended that the emperor initiate the Danish military campaign in spring 1763 after Russia would've exhausted all diplomatic means and set up "dependable strongholds" and "sufficient arsenals" close to Denmark, and, in the meantime, Russian Cossacks could carry out punitive missions to ravage Danish lands.¹³²

On June 10 (21), Chancellor Vorontsov repeated his warning that going to war was a bad idea because provisions, logistics, and funding were

key to victory, and these depended more on “the nature of things and timing rather than the loyalty, zeal, or leadership abilities of military commanders.” According to his information, the Russian army had provisions in Mecklenburg only until July 1, strong headwinds delayed additional naval transports in the Baltic Sea, and the war would cost more than ten million rubles, which would be hard to raise before autumn. He pleaded with the emperor not to risk his “heroic glory” because the timing was disadvantageous, and “the insurmountable nature of things” was against the war.

To stress his argument that the timing was bad, on June 12 (23), Chancellor Vorontsov informed the tsar about the intelligence reports from Kiev Governor-General Glebov warning about the Crimean khan’s intention to attack the Russian frontier near St. Elizabeth Fortress, the capital of New Serbia, in the south. The Senate was alarmed enough to order on June 18 (29) that the War Collegium deploy several regiments to the south with due precautions to scare off the Crimean khan but without raising suspicions in the Ottoman Porta.¹³³ On June 23 (July 4), the Senate went further and appointed Lt.-General Count Mescherskiy as the commander of Russian troops in New Serbia in preparation for defense against possible Crimean Tatar attack.¹³⁴

The members of the Governing Senate were opposed to war on the grounds that the country lacked the resources required to prosecute it successfully. The Senate’s Secret Expedition found it difficult to cover the projected war expenditures, organize a new draft of recruits, raise food provisions for an additional 100,000 troops, including 20,000 cavalry men, and to find additional means to purchase horses for the army.¹³⁵ Senate President Alexander Glebov, who was also Procurator-General and General-Kriegskommissar,¹³⁶ was against the war because he feared it could have negative effects on domestic stability and the economic well-being of the country. He informed the tsar that as of mid-June, a dozen provinces and numerous counties reported peasant

rebellions supported by the clergy, which even regular troops struggled to suppress.

War funding was a serious problem. Given the shortage and misappropriation of funds and foreign exchange problems,¹³⁷ the Senate was very slow with disbursing money to the expeditionary forces. In 1761, the Cabinet allocated one million rubles in gold and silver to conduct an expeditionary campaign in Europe. But, on March 8 (19)¹³⁸ and April 24 (May 5), 1762, the Senate heard the emperor's complaints reported by his aide Lt.-General Melgunov that the expeditionary army had not been paid salaries for eight months, which caused desertions. Senators rebuffed the tsar's criticism and insisted that all sums to cover regular and emergency expenses had been disbursed to the troops in full by the end of 1761, and, in addition, 99,001.59 rubles were transferred to the expeditionary command in 1762.¹³⁹

In May, the emperor ordered that the Cabinet mint all gold and silver in the treasury into coins and designate 300,000 rubles in collected customs duties for war purposes. He also ordered that all government offices freeze their administrative expenses to save money for war financing. But new coins, customs duties, and administrative savings were not enough to cover the expected war expenses. On May 3 (14), Peter III's aides Melgunov and Volkov told the senators that the emperor wanted them, in addition to regular military expenditures, to find an additional four million rubles a year in 1762 and 1763 for the "extraordinary [war] expenditures" by the expeditionary army in the military campaign of 1762-1763.¹⁴⁰ (Four million rubles a year was a huge amount approximating a quarter of the government's annual budget of 15 million rubles in 1762.) In response, on May 6 (17), the Senate reported to the tsar that the government planned to mobilize the internal monetary reserves by increasing the production of gold and silver in Nerchinsk mines in Altay and minting the lower probe silver

and lighter copper coins with the caveat that the new revenues could arrive in September at the earliest.¹⁴¹

On June 5 (16), the Senate reported to the emperor that government expenditures far exceeded its revenues, mostly because of the spending on the expeditionary army in Europe, and, therefore, it proposed to issue the war debt obligations in the Dutch financial market. However, on June 14 (25), it became clear that the Amsterdam bankers Clifford and Gopp couldn't find the requested amount of 3-4 million rubles for the war loan in question,¹⁴² and, therefore, the Senate proposed to print new bank notes worth five million rubles to be backed by the State Bank of Russia to be established shortly.^{143,144} According to the Cabinet's financial reports, Russian expeditionary troops began to receive delayed pay only in early June, but most of the emergency funds raised (over two million rubles) never made it to Rumyantsev's army in Europe and, ironically, were used by Catherine II to pay bonuses to the coup plotters who helped her overthrow her husband.¹⁴⁵

The Most Holy Synod was seriously disturbed by the imperial rescripts ordering the immediate collection of annual tax from all archbishop and monastery peasants (June 1 (12))¹⁴⁶ and confiscation of all horses suitable for military service from the church-owned horse farms for war purposes (April 13 (24)).¹⁴⁷

Top military brass was against the war, too. Field Marshal-General Munnich and President of War Collegium Nikita Trubetskoy were against the war because, in their judgment, the Russian army was fatigued and not motivated to fight against a former ally.¹⁴⁸ General-Feldtseykhmeyster of the Russian Army (Chief of Artillery) Alexander Vilboa was opposed to the war because of the lack of artillery guns in Russian units in Europe. On April 4 (15), Commander of Russian Expeditionary Corps in Pomerania, Lt.-General Rumyantsev expressed concern to the emperor's right-hand man Volkov that the Danes were rapidly rearming themselves whereas his troops didn't have enough

horses or money to pay soldiers' salaries to prosecute the new war. On April 14 (25), Rumyantsev reported directly to the emperor that his corps didn't have the assigned artillery, cannon balls, and grenades required for a successful offensive. On March 1 (12) and in May, the Admiralty reported that the aging Russian Navy was badly outnumbered by the Danish Navy: only half a dozen Russian warships from Arkhangelsk would be able to reach the Danish shores in the fall, no new warships were being built in Kronstadt, while Denmark assembled a fleet of 30 battleships and 18 frigates to counter Russian naval operations in the Baltic Sea.¹⁴⁹ In his reports to the War Collegium dated June 8 (19), 12 (23), 18 (29), June 21 (July 2), and June 25 (July 6), Lt.-General Rumyantsev repeatedly expressed his "utter desperation" at the lack of pay, fodder, provisions, and ammunition for his army and growing concerns about the lack of cooperation from Prussian "allies" and German merchants in terms of logistics and supplies. But what worried him the most, judging by his June 27 (July 8) report, was the rapid buildup and successful operations of the Danish forces near his positions in Mecklenburg.

The second explanation is focused on Peter III's psychological dependency on his idol Frederick II and hypothesizes that the Prussian king's opposition to war ultimately prevailed in the Russian emperor's calculations. In plain terms, since the controller (Frederick II) of foreign agent (Peter III) didn't give the green light to proceed, the war plan was aborted.

It is interesting that Frederick II's view on the desirability of a Russian-Danish war evolved over time. Initially, he thought a Russian attack on Denmark would be beneficial to Prussia because it would divert Russian attention and resources away from military operations in Prussia and Austria. But, after Peter III quickly made peace with him, agreed to withdraw all Russian troops from Prussia and Austria, and entered into a defensive alliance with him, which far exceeded his expectations, he decided that a Russian war against Denmark would no longer suit

Prussia's interests and had to be either averted or delayed. The Prussian king had good reasons to change his mind: 1) Berlin long harbored its own expansionist ambitions with respect to the South Jutland duchies; 2) a Russian war against Denmark would hinder his plans to finish off Austria; 3) he didn't want to send scarce troops or pay any subsidy to support Russian war efforts; and 4) he feared that Peter III's departure from Russia to personally lead his troops against the Danes might make the tsar vulnerable to a domestic plot to overthrow him during his absence. In his letter dated April 23 (May 4), Frederick II reminded the tsar about the bloody streltsy uprising organized by Peter I's elder sister Sophia Alexeyevna during his first trip abroad in 1698. The king even raised the possibility that some conspirators might use foreign money to plot a palace coup against the tsar by freeing the deposed infant emperor of Russia, Ivan VI Antonovich (1740-1741) of the Braunschweig dynasty, installing him on the throne and rallying the disgruntled troops behind him.¹⁵⁰

As a consequence, he instructed Amb. Goltz to dissuade the Russian emperor from war against Denmark by offering to intermediate a peaceful settlement at the Russo-Danish talks in Berlin and by instilling in the tsar's mind the idea that his sacrifice of some negligible lands on the Jutland peninsula could bring him the glory of being lauded as "the peacemaker of the North." In March and April, Goltz repeatedly told the emperor at their private dinners that the Danes would never attack first, that all their seemingly belligerent moves like troop mobilization, rearmament, and other war preparations on land and at sea stemmed from their fear of becoming an object of attack, that they would be all too happy to settle their differences with the Russians at the negotiation table, and that all news about their hostile intentions were fake and concocted by the malign Courts in Vienna and Versailles to disinform the Russians and derail the peace and alliance talks between St. Petersburg and Berlin. In May 1762, despite Peter III's saber rattling and continued belligerent rhetoric towards Denmark, Goltz wrote to Frederick II: "I am almost certain that the war will not start this year."¹⁵¹

The foreign agent was running along the side of his handler on a tight leash after all.

The third explanation, which is advanced by Vladimir Vozgrin, holds that the palace coup and regime change in St. Petersburg prevented the war against Denmark, and those who concocted, sponsored, organized, and executed the coup, especially Ekaterina Alexeyevna and her close confidants, the Imperial Guard, and the government of Denmark, should be given credit for the repudiation of the war option.¹⁵² According to imperial historian Korsakov, “during six months of Peter III’ reign, Ekaterina entered into an open conflict with her husband and pondered over the different ways to depose him within the intimate circle of her close confidants.”¹⁵³ Once Peter III was removed from power, the new regime quickly purged his Holstein relatives, courtiers, soldiers, and diplomats from the court, administration, army, and foreign service and reverted to the traditional Russian foreign policy approach to Europe. Among the first foreign policy directives signed by Catherine II were the notification of her ascension to the throne to all foreign powers, the Imperial Rescript recalling all Russian troops from Europe, the Imperial Rescript to the Russian envoy in Constantinople Obreskov, cancelling the old regime’s instruction to provoke the Ottoman attack on Austria, the Imperial Rescript rescinding all anti-Danish orders of the deposed Emperor Peter III, the Imperial Rescript to Russian envoy in Denmark Korff to immediately return from Berlin to Copenhagen, to reassure the Danish government of Russian adherence to all previous treaties and agreements, and to restore and deepen traditional friendship between the two courts. The Empress also informed the Danish king that she was willing to resolve the legacy of the Schleswig-Holstein problem in a peaceful and mutually advantageous manner through a territorial exchange, as proposed by her confidant, Danish envoy Count Osten.

Lastly, the fourth explanation, advanced by Sergey Dolya, maintains that Peter III actually didn’t want to go to war at all: he simply wanted to force the Danes to make territorial concessions by exerting moral and

diplomatic pressure on their government through diplomatic demarches, public ultimatums, and the Berlin Congress, and by demonstrations of military force on land and at sea.¹⁵⁴ Dolya argues that the emperor was venting out his frustrations and imitating belligerent actions, but he was in no rush to engage Denmark in real war. He points out that preparations for the celebration of his name day appeared to be more important to the tsar than preparations for war. He draws attention to the fact that the Holstein troops usually spent winter months in Holstein and sailed on chartered ships to Oranienbaum in summer. This is exactly what happened in early summer 1762, too. This raises the legitimate question of why anyone would want to remove the well-trained, combat-ready troops from the battlefield to the rear on the eve of the planned war. This would've been absurd had Peter III really intended to go to war. But he didn't.

What It All Means and So What

The year of 1762 was the time when declining France was defeated in the French and Indian War and lost all claims in North America to the rising Britain, while 13 American colonies were still fourteen years away from declaring independence from the British empire. In the Old World, eccentric Russian emperor Peter III, who inherited the birthright to the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, controlled by allied Denmark, challenged the Danish crown to return his inheritance to its lawful owner. Having the national might of the powerful expansionist Russian state behind him, he used heavy diplomatic pressure and blatant military threats to coerce the Danish court to give up a significant part of its territory—Schleswig-Holstein.

The tsar's true motivations are still subject to academic debate. I believe that this war resulted from Peter III's obsession with his patrimonial Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein, his idolization of Frederick the Great, his creative re-interpretation of what Russia's "true national interest" required, and poor knowledge of his own country, its people, and the real reasons why Russia intervened in the Seven-Year War.¹⁵⁵ His anti-

Danish campaign bore no fruit, and the war plan was aborted as soon as he was removed from power.

Once Peter III was ousted in a palace coup, the St. Petersburg court apologized for the old regime's transgressions and quickly mended fences on terms favorable to Copenhagen. The "chimeric campaign" against Denmark not only saved Prussia as a geopolitical actor but also reconfigured alliances and altered the balance of power in Europe, proved to be beyond Russia's financial means, and turned out to be fatal for the emperor.

The dramatic change in the Russian position, following the "revolution" in St. Petersburg, was like a miracle that saved the Danish kingdom from inevitable defeat, loss of sovereignty, and territories. Denmark stood firm, refused to yield to foreign bullying, and successfully survived the military-diplomatic crisis with one of its important allies. Although its treasury had almost been emptied by the end of the ordeal, Denmark's territory was left intact, its sovereignty was unscathed, and the honor of its government and army were preserved.

These days, very few people remember Peter III, and even fewer know about his aborted campaign in 1762 to chip away "an inch" of Danish land, which he believed belonged to him, but Denmark still stands strong and united.

Today, 264 years later, the kingdom of Denmark is faced again with an acute existential threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity: this time, not from Russia but from its own NATO ally and seemingly invincible global hegemon on a roll, the United States. After quick, painless, and head-turning victories in Iran and Venezuela, the Trump administration repeatedly states its strategic intent to annex Greenland one way or another—through political action (like a popular referendum) or financial bargaining or diplomatic negotiations or military intervention. The publicly aired pretexts are many: the Donroe

doctrine and defense of the Western Hemisphere, containment of Russian and Chinese military threats, US missile defense needs, the U.S. demand for critical minerals and energy resources, control over critical transportation and communication infrastructure in the Arctic, the U.S. domestic (Congressional) politics, President Trump's ego and supposedly divine mission, let alone the wishes of the indigenous population. The risks for Trump are high: loss of global moral leadership, flagrant violation of international law, loss of important allies and markets, possible disintegration of NATO alliance, alienation of major powers and world public opinion, high financial costs, potential domestic political and legal challenges, let alone possible loss of human lives.

As the clouds of international crisis are gathering over the heads of Greenlanders, the Danes, supported by some of their European allies and ridiculed by foes, dig in their heels and prepare to fight back again. It remains to be seen whether this time Denmark will be able to persevere and survive intact the frontal attack of the world's sole superpower on its centuries-old history, identity, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Notes

- ¹ Catherine the Second, *Notes of Ekaterina II, Empress of Russia* (Leipzig: E.L. Kasprovich Press, 1876).
- ² Ekaterina Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, Second Edition (Leipzig: E.L. Kasparovich Press, 1876).
- ³ Burkhard von Munnich, *Essay on the Government of the Russian Empire* (St. Petersburg: V. Bezobrazov & Co. Press, 1874).
- ⁴ *Archive of Prince Vorontsov* (Moscow: Printing House of A.I. Mamontov and Co., 1870), Books 1-40, <https://runivers.ru/library/471474.html>; Book 7, Part *Reign of Peter III*, Chapter XXVII, "Reports of Count M.L. Vorontsov to Peter III," 525-576, <https://runivers.ru/library/471505.html>
- ⁵ Petr A. Rumyantsev, *Documents*, Vol. 1 (1757-1763) (Moscow: Military Printing House of the USSR War Ministry, 1953).
- ⁶ Andrey Bolotov, "Notes," *Russian Old Times 2* (1871): 161-166.
- ⁷ "Letters of Emperor Peter III to Prussian King Frederick II," *Russian Archive (a publication of Petr and Yuri Bartenevs)*, Book 1 (Moscow: University Press, 1898): 5-17, https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000199_000009_013542793/
- ⁸ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire, from 1649 until 1825* (St. Petersburg: Printing Office of the Second Department of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery, 1830-1851), vol. 15 (from 1758 to June 28, 1762; No. 10788 – 11581), 1830, 1052 pages; <https://www.prlib.ru/item/358608>
- ⁹ *Protocols of the Governing Senate, 1762* (St. Petersburg: The Senate Printing Office, 1907), 114-178, <https://www.prlib.ru/item/444141>
- ¹⁰ Archival documents of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs (CFA) can be found in the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI) at <https://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/docs/5-poisk> and include: 1) Imperial Rescripts to Russian envoys overseas; 2) Chancellor Vorontsov's reports to

Emperor Peter III; 3) Vorontsov's conferences with foreign envoys in St. Petersburg; 4) CFA circular memos and specific instructions to RU envoys in foreign capitals (Berlin, Vienna, London, Paris, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Constantinople, Warsaw, Mitava, Madrid); 5) Reports of Russian envoys from their posts to CFA; 6) Vorontsov's correspondence with Russian military commanders in Europe; 7) CFA budget reports for 1762.

¹¹ Archival documents of the War Collegium (WC) can be found in the Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA) at <http://xn--90ag.xn--80adcv1b.xn--p1ai/> and include: 1) Imperial Rescripts to Russian military Commanders in Europe (Saltykov, Rumyantsev, Volkonsky, Panin); 2) reports of Russian military commanders in Europe addressed to Peter III; 3) WC reports to the emperor; 4) WC orders and instructions to Russian military units and commanders; 5) WC budget reports; 6) reports of Russian military agents in Europe.

¹² The Admiralty's documents include: 1) the Admiralty's reports to the emperor; 2) Imperial Rescripts and orders to the Admiralty.

¹³ Nikolay K. Shilder, *Emperor Paul I (Historical and Biographical Essay with Portraits, Landscapes, Plans and Autographs)* (St. Petersburg: A.S. Suvorin Press, 1901).

¹⁴ Vasiliy A. Bilbasov, *The Story of Catherine the Second*, Volume 1, in Russian (Berlin: the edition of Friedrich Gottheiner, 1900).

¹⁵ Jacob von Stählin, "Notes on Peter III, Emperor of Russia," in *Readings of the Society of Lovers of History and Russian Antiquities*, Book 4, Section 5 (1866).

¹⁶ Sergey M. Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, Book 5, Volume XXV, Chapter 1, "Reign of Emperor Peter III Feodorovich (25 December 1761 – 28 June 1762)," 1241-1344.

¹⁷ Nikolay Korobkov, *The Seven-Year War (Actions of Russian in 1756-62)*

(Moscow: State Military Printing House of the People's Commissariat of Defense, 1940).

¹⁸ Alexander S. Mylnikov, *Pyotr III* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardia Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Georgy G. Frumenkov, "Russia in the Seven-Year War," *Issues of History*, no. 9 (1971): 107-119.

²⁰ Mikhail Anisimov, *Russian Diplomacy in the Seven-Year War* (Moscow: Academic Project, 2020).

²¹ Valery E. Vozgrin, "The Fate of Schleswig-Holstein Inheritance of Russian Emperors," *Proceedings of the Department of History of Modern and Contemporary Times*, St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, no. 2 (2008).

²² Igor V. Kurukin, "The Corps of P.A. Rumyantsev and the 1762 Abortive War Against Denmark," *The Journal of Military History (Military Chronicles of the Fatherland Series)*, no. 10 (2019).

²³ Sergey Dolya, *Lace and Steel. Notes on the Seven-Year War 1756-1763* (Knizhnyi Perekrestok, 2013).

²⁴ Vladimir Medinsky, "Peter III: How Not to Be Tsar," *Course of Vladimir Medinsky (XVIII century)*, podcast, episode 52 (February 6, 2024), <https://historyofrussia.mave.digital/ep-34>

²⁵ The first date shows the Old Style (Julian) dating system, and the date in brackets shows the New Style (Gregorian) dating system.

²⁶ Shilder, *Emperor Paul I: Historical and Biographical Essay with Portraits, Landscapes, Plans and Autographs* (St. Petersburg: A. S. Suvorin, 1901), 14.

²⁷ Catherine the Second, *Notes of Ekaterina II, Empress of Russia*, 247-248.

²⁸ Catherine the Second, *Notes with Portraits and Autographs* (St. Petersburg: A.S. Suvorin Press, 1907), 504.

²⁹ Bilbasov, *The Story of Catherine the Second*, 431-432.

³⁰ Frantisek Shtellner, "Relatives of Peter III at the St. Petersburg Court," *Modern and Contemporary History*, no. 3 (2024): 42-51, <https://journals.rcsi.science/0130-3864/article/view/259812>

³¹ These key diplomats were the Russian envoy in Vienna Prince Dmitry Mikhailovich Golitsyn, Russian envoy in Paris Pyotr Grigorievich Chernyshev, Russian minister in London Count Alexander Romanovich Vorontsov, Russian envoy in Constantinople Alexey Mikhailovich Obreskov, Russian minister in Copenhagen Johann Albrecht Korff, Russian envoy in Stockholm Ivan Andreyevich Osterman, Russian envoy in Warsaw General Feodor Matveyevich Voyeykov, and Russian envoy in Mitava (Kurland) Johann Matthias Edler von Simolin.

³² Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1295.

³³ Grand Duke Paul's mentor Nikita Ivanovich Panin, who wasn't favorably disposed to the tsar, testified that "Peter III preferred expressing himself in German and spoke Russian hardly ever and always poorly." (L. Maykov, "Story of Count N.I. Panin on the Ascension of Empress Catherine II to the Throne," *Russian Archive*, 1879, book 1, issue 3).

³⁴ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 41.

³⁵ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 48.

³⁶ Korobkov, *The Seven-Year War (Actions of Russian in 1756-62)*, 37.

³⁷ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1271.

³⁸ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 70.

³⁹ Munnich, *Essay on the Government of the Russian Empire*, 93.

⁴⁰ Vozgrin, "The Fate of Schleswig-Holstein Inheritance of Russian Emperors," 64.

⁴¹ The Imperial Council was established on May 18 (29), 1762. The council's focus was on war against Denmark as conceived by the

emperor; specifically, it deliberated on the issues of war strategy and military financing. Source: *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, May 18 (29), 1762, No. 11.538, 1006.

⁴² Munnich, *Essay on the Government of the Russian Empire*, 93.

⁴³ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times, 1275-1276*.

⁴⁴ Vozgrin, "The Fate of Schleswig-Holstein Inheritance of Russian Emperors," 68.

⁴⁵ Shtellner, "Relatives of Peter III at the St. Petersburg Court," 43.

⁴⁶ Shtellner, "Relatives of Peter III at the St. Petersburg Court," 43.

⁴⁷ Specifically, two successive Electors of Saxony (Dresden) of the Holy Roman Empire were also elected Kings of Poland in personal union from 1697 to 1763, while the monarchs of Great Britain were concurrently the Electors of Hanover of the Holy Roman Empire from 1714 to 1837, including Peter III's contemporaries, English kings George II and George III.

⁴⁸ Anisimov, *Russian Diplomacy in the Seven-Year War*.

⁴⁹ Catherine the Second, "Notes of Ekaterina II, Empress of Russia," 249.

⁵⁰ Catherine the Second, "Notes with Portraits and Autographs," 504.

⁵¹ Schilder, *Emperor Paul I*, 529.

⁵² Schilder, *Emperor Paul I*, 519.

⁵³ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 70.

⁵⁴ Munnich, *Essay on the Government of the Russian Empire*, 92.

⁵⁵ Mikhail Scherbatov, *On the Damage of Mores in Russia*, Volume 2 (St. Petersburg, 1898), 223.

⁵⁶ Jacob von Stählin, "Notes. Karl Peter Ulrich, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein," *Morning 3* (1868): 309-362.

⁵⁷ Jacob von Stählin, "Notes on Peter III, Emperor of Russia," in *Readings of the Society of Lovers of History and Russian Antiquities*, Book 4, Section 5 (1866): 93.

⁵⁸ The Conference of Ministers at the Highest Court was the supreme consultative body set up in 1756 to deliberate and advise Empress Elizabeth I on domestic, foreign, and military policies.

⁵⁹ von Stählin, "Notes on Peter III," 93.

⁶⁰ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 50.

⁶¹ Bolotov, "Notes," 164.

⁶² Schilder, *Emperor Paul I*, 532.

⁶³ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1265.

⁶⁴ "Reign of Peter III: Genuine Correspondence Between Emperor Peter III and Prussian King Frederick II. 1762," *Russian Antiquity*, Vol. 3 (January-June 1871) (St. Petersburg: V. Golovin Press, 1871): 283-309, <https://runivers.ru/library/57320.html>

⁶⁵ "Letters of Emperor Peter III to Prussian King Frederick II," Peter III's letter dated February 15, 1762, 5-6.

⁶⁶ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 42.

⁶⁷ During the war, the Prussians had lost 120 generals and over 1,500 officers out of 5,500. "Reign of Peter III: Genuine Correspondence Between Emperor Peter III and Prussian King Frederick II. 1762," Frederick II's letter on March 20, 1762, 290-291.

⁶⁸ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1266-1267.

⁶⁹ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1268.

⁷⁰ Korobkov, *The Seven-Year War (Actions of Russian in 1756-62)*, 38.

⁷¹ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1271-1272.

⁷² *Archive of Prince Vorontsov* (Moscow: Printing House of A.I. Mamontov and Co., 1870), Book 7, Part *Reign of Peter III*, Chapter XXVIII, "Conferences of Count M.L. Vorontsov with Foreign Envoys during the Reign of Peter III," 556-557, <https://runivers.ru/library/471505.html>

⁷³ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, April 24 (May 5), 1762, No. 11.516, 987.

⁷⁴ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, May 2, 1762, 141-142.

⁷⁵ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, June 8 (19), 1762, No. 11.566, 1034-1039.

⁷⁶ *Archive of Prince Vorontsov* (Moscow: Printing House of A.I. Mamontov and Co., 1870), Book 7, Part *Reign of Peter III*, Chapter XXVIII, "Conferences of Count M.L. Vorontsov with Foreign Envoys during the Reign of Peter III," 562-567, <https://runivers.ru/library/471505.html>

⁷⁷ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1273.

⁷⁸ The Duck Test posits that "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck."

⁷⁹ Vozgrin, "The Fate of Schleswig-Holstein Inheritance of Russian Emperors," 60.

⁸⁰ Following the royal succession from King George II to his grandson George III, the Whig coalition of Prime Minister Thomas Pelham, 1st Duke of Newcastle, and Secretary of State for the Southern Department William Pitts was replaced with the Tory Prime Minister John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, who was King George III's former tutor and favorite.

⁸¹ The Whig government of Newcastle and Pitts pursued the grand strategy of conquering the entire French Empire by using the Royal Navy as the main force which could control the seas and bring as many troops as needed anywhere on earth. Their military strategy to win the war was to tie down large numbers of French troops and resources in Germany, while Britain would use its naval domination to launch expeditions to

capture French colonies around the globe. In contrast, the Tory government of Lord Bute wanted to withdraw the British expeditionary forces from Germany, reduce the British subsidies to Prussia, and concentrate on defending the homeland and defeating the French forces on high seas and in colonies.

⁸² Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1287.

⁸³ Anisimov, *Russian Diplomacy in the Seven-Year War*, 771.

⁸⁴ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1288.

⁸⁵ *Archive of Prince Vorontsov* (Moscow: Printing House of A.I. Mamontov and Co., 1870), Book 7, Part *Reign of Peter III*, Chapter XXVIII, "Conferences of Count M.L. Vorontsov with Foreign Envoys during the Reign of Peter III," 553-554, <https://runivers.ru/library/471505.html>

⁸⁶ Anisimov, *Russian Diplomacy in the Seven-Year War*, 777.

⁸⁷ Anisimov, *Russian Diplomacy in the Seven-Year War*, 771.

⁸⁸ Anisimov, *Russian Diplomacy in the Seven-Year War*, 772.

⁸⁹ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, January 23, 1762, 122-123.

⁹⁰ In contrast to Elizabeth I, who delegated the signing of her rescripts to the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, Peter III signed the imperial rescripts addressed to his diplomatic envoys by himself.

⁹¹ *Archive of Prince Vorontsov* (Moscow: Printing House of A.I. Mamontov and Co., 1870), Book 7, Part *Reign of Peter III*, Chapter XXVIII, "Conferences of Count M.L. Vorontsov with Foreign Envoys during the Reign of Peter III," 560-561, <https://runivers.ru/library/471505.html>

⁹² Anisimov, *Russian Diplomacy in the Seven-Year War*, 774-775.

⁹³ Foreign minister Étienne-François de Choiseul directed the French foreign and military policy during the Seven-Year War.

⁹⁴ Anisimov, *Russian Diplomacy in the Seven-Year War*, 776

⁹⁵ *Archive of Prince Vorontsov* (Moscow: Printing House of A.I. Mamontov and Co., 1870), Book 7, Part *Reign of Peter III*, Chapter XXVIII, "Conferences of Count M.L. Vorontsov with Foreign Envoys during the Reign of Peter III," 561-562, <https://runivers.ru/library/471505.html>

⁹⁶ The king of Sweden, Gustav III, and Peter III were distant cousins, both belonging to the House of Holstein-Gottorp, and his wife Empress Ekaterina Alexeyevna and Gustav III were first cousins, sharing common ancestry through their grandparents, Christian August of Holstein-Gottorp and Albertina Frederica of Baden-Durlach.

⁹⁷ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1289-1290.

⁹⁸ Dolya, *Lace and Steel. Notes on the Seven-Year War 1756-1763*, 11.

⁹⁹ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, December 25, 1761 (January 5, 1762), No. 11.390, 875.

¹⁰⁰ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 46.

¹⁰¹ Schilder, *Emperor Paul I*, 529.

¹⁰² Grigoriy Orlov was Ekaterina Alexeyevna's third lover. Her first lover was Count Saltykov, and her second lover was Polish Prince Stanislaw Ponyatovsky.

¹⁰³ Catherine the Second, *Notes of Ekaterina II, Empress of Russia* (Leipzig: E.L. Kasprovich Press, 1876), 265.

¹⁰⁴ To give credit to Frederick II for his foresight, one must mention that Princess Dashkova wrote in her memoirs that "the departure of the emperor for Denmark was supposed to serve as a signal for the stunning blow" (Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 61).

¹⁰⁵ Bilbasov, *The Story of Catherine the Second*, 431-432.

¹⁰⁶ Mylnikov, *Pyotr III*, 221.

¹⁰⁷ Bilbasov, *The Story of Catherine the Second*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Mylnikov, *Pyotr III*, 222.

¹⁰⁹ Catherine the Second, *Notes of Ekaterina II, Empress of Russia*, 255.

¹¹⁰ Schilder, *Emperor Paul I*, 529.

¹¹¹ Eudoxia Lopukhina was held as a state prisoner in a dungeon of the Schlüsselburg Fortress until her grandson Peter II assumed the Russian throne and freed her in 1727.

¹¹² Bilbasov, *The Story of Catherine the Second*, 14.

¹¹³ Munnich, *Essay on the Government of the Russian Empire*, 92.

¹¹⁴ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 55-56.

¹¹⁵ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 61.

¹¹⁶ Vozgrin, "The Fate of Schleswig-Holstein Inheritance of Russian Emperors," 63.

¹¹⁷ Dolya, *Lace and Steel. Notes on the Seven-Year War 1756-1763*, 16.

¹¹⁸ Von Shtelin, "Notes on Peter III, Emperor of Russia," 106.

¹¹⁹ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1263.

¹²⁰ Von Stählin, "Notes on Peter III, Emperor of Russia," 106.

¹²¹ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1261-1262.

¹²² *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, January 24 (February 4), 1762, No. 11.416, 893.

¹²³ Dmitry Bantysh-Kamenskiy, *Biographies of Russian Generalissimos and Field Marshal Generals* (St. Petersburg: Printing Office of the Third Department of the Ministry of State Properties, 1840), vol. 1, 309-311.

¹²⁴ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, March 21 (April 1), 1762, No. 11.480, 945-948.

¹²⁵ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, June 26, 1762, 177.

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- ¹²⁶ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 58, 71.
- ¹²⁷ Bilbasov, *The Story of Catherine the Second*, 14.
- ¹²⁸ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 71.
- ¹²⁹ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1330.
- ¹³⁰ Kurukin, "The Corps of P.A. Rumyantsev and the 1762 Abortive War Against Denmark," 59-64.
- ¹³¹ Kurukin, "The Corps of P.A. Rumyantsev and the 1762 Abortive War Against Denmark," 60.
- ¹³² Kurukin, "The Corps of P.A. Rumyantsev and the 1762 Abortive War Against Denmark," 63.
- ¹³³ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, June 18, 1762, 175-176.
- ¹³⁴ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, June 18, 1762, June 23, 1762, 176-177.
- ¹³⁵ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, June 18, 1762, March 19, 1762, 137-138.
- ¹³⁶ General-Kriegskommissar was the person who supervised war logistics and supplies, military administration and justice.
- ¹³⁷ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, March 1, 1762, 131-132.
- ¹³⁸ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, March 8, 1762, 133.
- ¹³⁹ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, April 24, 1762, 140-141.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, May 3, 1762, 142.
- ¹⁴¹ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, May 6, 1762, 143-146.
- ¹⁴² *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, June 14, 1762, 174-175.
- ¹⁴³ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, May 25 (June 5), 1762, No. 11.550, 1021.
- ¹⁴⁴ *Protocols of the Governing Senate*, May 24, 1762, 168-169.

¹⁴⁵ Kurukin, "The Corps of P.A. Rumyantsev and the 1762 Abortive War Against Denmark," 64.

¹⁴⁶ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, June 1 (12), 1762, No. 11.560, 1031.

¹⁴⁷ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, April 13 (24), 1762, No. 11.502, 976.

¹⁴⁸ Dashkova, *Memoirs of Princess E.P. Dashkova*, 64.

¹⁴⁹ *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*, vol. 15, March 1 (12), 1762, No. 11.458, 932.

¹⁵⁰ "Reign of Peter III: Genuine Correspondence Between Emperor Peter III and Prussian King Frederick II. 1762," Frederick II's letter on May 4, 1762, 300-305.

¹⁵¹ Soloviyov, *History of Russia from Ancient Times*, 1277.

¹⁵² Vozgrin, "The Fate of Schleswig-Holstein Inheritance of Russian Emperors," 60-76.

¹⁵³ Dmitry Korsakov, "From the Lives of Russian Statesmen of the XVIII's Century," *Review of D.F. Kobeko's Tsesarevich Pavel Petrovich (1754-1796)* (Kazan: Printing House of Imperial University, 1891), 439.

¹⁵⁴ Dolya, *Lace and Steel. Notes on the Seven-Year War 1756-1763*, 23.

¹⁵⁵ On January 23 (February 3), 1762, Chancellor Vosontsov submitted the report describing the European power dynamics and alliance politics on the eve of and during the Seven-Year War, explaining in detail the reasons why the Russian Empire joined the war in Europe, and requesting that the emperor declare his intentions with respect to war and peace to the European powers. But Peter III's subsequent actions indicate that he neither shared the chancellor's views nor accepted his reasoning. For Vorontsov's report, see *Archive of Prince Vorontsov* (Moscow: Printing House of A.I. Mamontov and Co., 1870), Book 7, Part *Reign of Peter III*, Chapter XXVII, "Reports of Count M.L. Vorontsov to Peter III," 542-557, <https://runivers.ru/library/471505.html>