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Russia marches South: army reform and battlefield performance in Russia's Southern campaigns, 1695-1739

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CHAPTER 4

THE PERSIAN CAMPAIGN (1722-1724)

Peter's campaign in Persia is probably the least studied element of the tsar's military endeavors. The following subchapter would try to present a concise description of Russia's Caucasian adventure as well as a detailed evaluation of the factors, which influenced the performance of the Petrine army. Regarding the dissertation itself, the description of Peter's march south would serve as the primary contribution of the research.

The march to present-day Azerbaijan and Iran was the final stage of Peter's military activities and was the first one carried out after the military reforms of the tsar had been fully completed. The campaign along the shores of the Caspian Sea was the first European expedition to this region since the time of Alexander the Great. Before describing in details the Russian preparations and activities, some notes are necessary, regarding the decline of the Persian political and military power, which enabled not only Russia but also the Ottoman Empire and the Afghans to try to carve out substantial chunks of the ailing Safavid state. The political situation in the Caucasus is a direct consequence of the developments that took place in the Safavid state, which were discussed in a previous chapter.

4.1. Historical Context - The Power Vacuum in the Caucasus

Power and control are very fluid terms when it comes to the Caucasus. Ever since the Middle Ages, greater powers have tried to establish their suzerainty over the region. Byzantines, Arabs, Turks, Persians and later Russians all launched offensives in the mountainous region, hoping to gain control. However, none of them succeeded in establishing a centralized local administration that could rein in the tribal chieftains and local princes. In most of the cases, empires had to rely on bribes, patronage or puppet-rulers in order to exercise their policy in the Caucasus region. The broken terrain, combined with the high ethnic diversity of the population, made it impossible for one country to extend its control over the entire area. Religious and ethnic animosity was often the reason for the shift of imperial boundaries, and greater states were unable to maintain their position in these remote, mountainous lands. This led to a perpetual power-vacuum that escalated in times of instability of some of the empires, which claimed suzerainty over the region.

Following the disintegration of Safavid power during the second decade of the eighteenth century, the people of the Caucasus decided to take matters in their own hands. Local tribe leaders and governors overthrew the authority of the shah and proclaimed their independence. In addition, peasants and townsfolk

had grown weary of the ever-increasing taxes and the religious persecutions of the Shi'i clergy and rose in support of their local rulers, who promised religious tolerance and lower taxation.

As a consequence, several “rebellious” states emerged in the Caucasus region. The most powerful of them was the union of the Lezgins – Caucasian tribes, unified by their common ancestry and the Sunni faith. They ravaged the provinces of Shirvan and Gilan and defeated local supporters of the shah. The Lezgins hoped to receive Ottoman support and thus - to protect their autonomy. The correspondence between their leaders and the grand vizier Ibrahim Paşa is one of the main primary sources, regarding the period of the Persian Campaign.¹

Several governors in Shirvan proclaimed themselves independent and sought the support of the Ottoman or the Russian Empire in order to secure their position. The most prominent of them was Shamkhal Adil Girei, who controlled most of the present-day Dagestan.² Adil Girei carefully chose his allies among the warring parties and gave his support to whoever had the strongest force in the region. He opted to ally himself with Peter I and to help him with the conquest of Derbent and the establishment of the Svyatoy Krest fort on the Kuma River. Another powerful local ruler was Sultan Mahmud of Utamysh.³ He had a 12,000 strong army of Kabardians and Tatars and was allied with the Lezgins.⁴ Unlike the Shamkhal, Mahmud was a supported the Ottomans and hoped that the Sublime Porte will acknowledge his authority in the Caucasus.

Apart from the Muslim local leaders, several Orthodox factions existed. The most influential was that of the king of Kartli – Vakhtang VI (r. 1716-1724). He rose to power after his father Giorgi XI became the supreme commander (*beglerbeg*) of the Persian army in 1700. When the Lezgins ravaged Shirvan and Gilan in 1717, Vakhtang gathered a 60,000 strong Georgian army to subject them.⁵ However, the advisors of Shah Husain, jealous and frightened of Vakhtang's power, convinced the Shah to order the disbandment of the Georgian army. The Georgian prince had to obey and to return his army to

¹, C. Lemerrier-Quelquejay, “An Unpublished Document on the Campaign of Peter the Great in the Caucasus”, *Journal of the Royal Asian Society*, vol. LIV (London, 1967), 174 – 8.

² Aadil Girei was the shamkhal of Tarki and served as the governor of Dagestan for the Safavid Empire. His family name “Girei” suggests a relation to the ruling dynasty of the Crimean Khanate. Such a relation could prove to be very important for the shamkhal, since he could use it to secure his protection by the Crimean Khanate and thus - by the Ottoman Empire. Whether such a family relation is possible is a question that would be hard to answer. It is known, however, that the Crimean royal house – the Gireis married to Caucasian royal families in order to extend their influence in the area and block Russia's advance south during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, a possibility remains, that the shamkhal of Tarki was indeed a relative of the Crimean Khan. A further proof of a relationship is the fact, that although the shamkhal allied himself with Russia, there was no punitive expedition against his territories neither by the Lezgins, nor by the Ottomans.

³ Peter Henry Bruce refers to him as “sultan Udenich”; see P.H. Bruce, *Memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, Esq. - a military officer in the services of Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain, containing an account of his travels in Germany, Russia, Tartary, Turkey, and the West Indies, &c, as also several very interesting private anecdotes of the Czar, Peter I of Russia* (Dublin, 1783), 327-8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Foran, “The Long Fall of the Safavid Dynasty: Moving beyond the Standard Views”, *IJMES* 24, 2 (1992), 294.

Kartli, but proclaimed that he would offer no further support to the Persians.⁶ During the Afghan invasion of Persia (1721), Vakhtang sent several embassies to Peter I in which he promised his allegiance in order to obtain the Tsar's help. The second powerful Orthodox faction was that of the Armenians, headed by their Catholicos Asdvadzadur.⁷ Armenians held a very influential position in Safavid Persia, since most of the leading merchant families were Armenian.⁸ During the Afghan invasion, the Armenians took control of Yerevan – a key point in controlling the route from Georgia to Persia and from Anatolia to the Caspian Sea. Supported by Russia's diplomacy, Vakhtang and Asdvadzadur reached an agreement and gathered a 40,000 strong army to help Russia's invasion. The Georgian-Armenian alliance threatened the interests of the Ottoman Empire and the Sublime Porte decided to support the Lezgins and the Sultan of Ultamysh against the Caucasian Christians.

By the time Russia decided to launch its offensive, the Caucasus region was significantly destabilized and fractured into several small states and independent tribal territories. During the winter of 1721/2, both Ottomans and Russians sought to gain the support of the local power-holders in order to strengthen their strategic position. On the other hand, local factions intended to use the strength of the neighboring empires to achieve their goals. The inability of Russia, Persia, and the Ottoman Empire to assert direct control over the Caucasus predetermined the outcome for the local power-holders. Once again, though on the war of the mighty, they would manage to keep their autonomy.

4.2. Historiography

Regarding the historiography of the Persian Campaign, there are only three works that analyze in detail Peter's southern project. The earliest is written by the Soviet historian V. Lystsov, who studied the campaign as a political and economic continuity of the Petrine policy, following the Northern War.⁹ The second book is Lockhart's narrative on the fall of the Safavid dynasty.¹⁰ Lockhart places Peter's campaign in the context of the expansionist policy, carried out by the Afghans under Shah Mahmud Hotaki and the Ottomans under the grand vizier Damat Ibrahim Paşa, as well as during the resistance of the

⁶ He was afraid that if he continued on his behalf, the shah might depose him of his titles. This would have given the other Georgian nobles the right to depose Vakhtang, just as they deposed his father. Determined to keep his throne, Vakhtang accepted the terms of Shah Husain. For an exhaustive description of the Georgians and their relation to the fall of Safavid Persia; see D.M. Lang, "Georgia and the Fall of the Şafavi Dynasty", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 14, 3 (1952), 523-39.

⁷ Catholicos is a title, equivalent to "patriarch". The catholicos was the leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

⁸ For the Armenian trade families and their enterprises in Asia; see V. Baladouni and M. Makepeace (eds.), *Armenian Merchants of the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: English East India Company Sources* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1999).

⁹ V. Lystsov, *Persidskiy Pokhod Petra I: 1722 – 1723* (Moscow, 1951).

¹⁰ L. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Şafavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

Persians under Nadir Shah. According to Lockhart's evaluation, Russia wanted to counter the Ottoman incursion in the southern Caspian coast, and to expand its trade towards Central Asia and India. The newest work on the Persian Campaign is written by the Russian historian Igor Kurukin.¹¹ Kurukin's primary purpose is not so much to describe the military endeavour itself, but rather to study the Russian occupation of the South Caspian provinces. Nevertheless, he dedicates a substantial part of his work to clarify the main problems and developments in the context of Peter's southern policy.

Apart from these main works, several other articles devote some attention to Russia's Caspian expansion. In his article on the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and the Caspian Sea, Benningsen takes a pro-Ottoman position, strongly criticizing Russia's inability to maintain its expansion in the Caspian area.¹² He also tries to prove that the Ottoman Empire was not as weak as preserved by Western historians and that during the first quarter of the eighteenth century it was the leading power in the Near East. Some additional information could be found in Lemercier-Quelquejay's preface to the letter from the grand vizier Damat Ibrahim Paşa to Daud Beg of the Lezgins.¹³ Quelquejay gives a brief overview of the events, which took place in the context of the above-mentioned letter. However, he outlines that without giving any evaluation of the relations between Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia.

4.3. Preparations for the Campaign

The Persian Campaign of Peter the Great was anything but spontaneous. After 1715 when the outcome of the Northern War seemed predetermined, Peter began to follow more closely the events that took place in the Caspian Sea area.¹⁴ At first, his attention was drawn to the possibility of establishing Russian control in Central Asia by subjecting the khanates of Khiva and Bukhara. Further information on gold deposits in the lands along the Amu Darya River strengthened the determination of the Tsar. However, as the course of events between 1714 and 1716 proved, Central Asia was still far from Russia's reach. Expeditions sent to establish forts on the eastern coast of the Caspian failed. They were met by a firm resistance from the local tribes, as well as by the inability of the state to supply these bases with provisions and ammunitions. Furthermore, the Tsar underestimated the local forces. Russia's expeditions numbered no more than 3,000. Against them local rulers and tribal chiefs could

¹¹ I.V. Kurukin, *Persidkiy pokhod Petra Velikogo. Nizovoy korpus na beregakh Kaspiya, 1722-1735* (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2010).

¹² A. Benningsen, "Peter the Great, the Ottoman Empire and the Caucasus", *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 8, 2 (1974), 311-8.

¹³ Lemercier-Quelquejay, "An Unpublished Document", 174-8.

¹⁴ P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 107.

assemble hosts of between 10,000 and 50,000.¹⁵ With such numerical superiority, guns and firepower had little impact and Russian forts were swept away by the Asian hords. After the disastrous mission of Knyaz Aleksandr Bekovich-Cherkasskiy in 1716, Peter decided to transfer his attention to the disintegrating Safavid state.¹⁶ The first embassies to the Safavids were sent as early as 1714, hoping to obtain better possibilities for the Russian traders. However, their efforts were countered not only by the Persian authorities but also by the Armenian merchant community. A new embassy under Artemiy Volynskiy was sent in 1717. His official mission was to negotiate the right of Russian merchants to trade in all Persian markets. However, he was also instructed to gather information about the main trading routes, the income of the provinces, and the military potential of Persia. Volynskiy spent two years (1717-1719) in Persia and upon his return to Russia he reported to Peter that the Safavid Empire was ready to be conquered and that it would take only a small unit of regular soldiers to subject a major part of it with ease. As time would prove, he was correct, as the main enemy of Russia would not be men but nature itself.¹⁷

However, until the end of the Northern War, any plan for a campaign in Persia remained only on paper. When in 1721 the Treaty of Nystad was finally signed, Peter found his hands free to redirect his effort southward. Nevertheless, Peter's desire for war must not be overestimated. As late as June 1722 (one month before the expedition began), the emperor was still hesitating because the hasty preparations had to be carried out in a matter of months, instead of spanning over a year.¹⁸ The main reasons for his concerns were the Afghan invasion of Persia (1721), and the fear that the Ottomans could intervene and take control of the Caspian coast.¹⁹

The army was hastily assembled and included veteran infantry regiments from the war with Sweden, seven dragoon regiments as well as a body of irregular horsemen, comprised of Cossacks and Kalmyks. While the exact number of troops is still debatable, the realities of logistics as well as the short period for preparation did not allow for a great number of men to be mustered. Probably the Russian army did not exceed 50,000 men, including officers, artillerymen, and servants.²⁰ However, concerning Persia's diminished power, as

¹⁵ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 27; S.M. Solovyev, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremen 17-18*, IX (Moscow, 1963), 349; Bruce, *Memoirs*, 149.

¹⁶ The whole expedition was decimated by the local nomadic tribes, united under the khan of Bukhara. Only few Russians managed to survive the slaughter. The only account of the massacre, which reached Peter, was told by a Russian officer, who was enslaved and bought by some Kalmyks, who later exchanged him for ransom in Astrakhan, see Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 27-8 ; Solovyev, *Istoriya Rossii*, 352.

¹⁷ As Kurukin notes, the major Russian successes in this campaign were achieved by small, mobile forces; see Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 97.

¹⁸ Peter was proclaimed "emperor" on 22nd October 1721, following the end of the Northern War.

¹⁹ The Ghilzai leader Mahmud Hotaki had launched his forces against Persia in 1721. After defeating the Persian forces twice in 1721 and 1722, his army besieged the capital Isfahan.

²⁰ The exact army strength of the Russian force is still a matter of debate. Older works (Beskrovnyy, Lockhart, Solovyev) estimate figures of around 100,000 soldiers. Solovyev estimates, that Peter brought 86,000 men, of

well as the limited objectives of the campaign, Peter's forces were quite sufficient.²¹ Furthermore, local leaders were suspicious of each other, and it was unlikely for an anti-Russian coalition of Dagestan tribes could be formed.²²

4.4. The Persian Campaign

Boarded on the only significant fleet in the entire Caspian Sea, the Russian army left Astrakhan on 18th July 1722 and set sail to the fortress of Terki – Russia's southernmost possession. However, problems did arise as soon as the fleet entered the Caspian Sea.²³ The fleet lacked compasses, and only a few experienced navigators were available.²⁴ Thus, confusion occurred, and the entire fleet reached Tarki as late as 27th August 1722. After the provisions were replenished and further instructions were sent by Peter, the fleet continued its way south.²⁵

On 27th July 1722 the army reached Agrakhan bay and on the next day, the emperor ordered a landing to be carried out. Again, the misleading information which had stated that Agrakhan was the most suitable landing spot led to confusion. Due to the shallow waters of the bay, the ships were unable to reach the coast and the soldiers had to carry their supplies, armament and other baggage on their backs, walking in waist-deep water.²⁶ The landing operation took the entire day, and the Russians were fortunate that there was no enemy force to face them. As soon as the army was on dry land, Peter ordered a fortified camp to be erected for the protection of the landing area and of the fleet, which was anchored in the Agrakhan bay. The fortifications were built

which 22,000 were infantry, 9,000 were dragoons, 20,000 - Cossacks, 30,000 – Kalmyks and 5,000 – sailors. Lockhart repeats the same figures, but instead of 30,000 Kalmyks, he estimates that there were 20,000 Kalmyks and 35,000 Tatars, bringing the total of Russian force at 111,000. Peter Bruce in his Memoirs notes that there were 33,000 infantry, 7,000 dragoons, 20,000 Cossacks and 40,000 Kalmyks, estimating a total of 100,000 men. However, Lystsov, who is supported by Kurukin calculates that the Russian army did not exceed 50,000. Lystsov states the following numbers: 21,495 infantry, 8,757 dragoons, 16,300 Cossacks and 4,000 Kalmyks or a total of 50,552. According to Kurukin, there were 18,602 infantrymen, 8,786 dragoons, 16,300 Cossacks and 4,000 Kalmyks or 48,057 in overall. The later figures seem far more plausible as Kurukin and Lystsov had better evaluated the sources. Furthermore the logistics support of a hundred thousand men seems impossible, taking into consideration the local specifics of Dagestan. For a comparison of the given army figures, see Table in the Appendix for the current chapter.

²¹ To this day there is no evidence that Peter made any plans to go beyond Baku, when he sailed from Astrakhan on 29th July 1722; see Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 58.

²² As early as 1720, the most prominent Dagestan ruler – Adil Girei the shamkhal of Tarki swore his allegiance to Peter. The rulers of Aksay, Ultamysh and the Qaitaq still hesitated, but did not express hostilities toward the Russians.

²³ The dates of the campaign are given in Old Style in order to avoid errors in transferring them to the New Style dates. The text uses the dates, listed in the *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722 and 1723* (St. Petersburg, 1855).

²⁴ P. Bruce, *Memoirs*, 310; Except for the crew of the Soymonov-Verden expedition (1721), there were no other sailors, familiar with the Caspian Sea. Thus, the fleet scattered and it took two days before all ships managed to reach Tarki on 5th August.

²⁵ The most important note was sent to the shamkhal, with an order to prepare carts for the army as well as to dig wells along the expected army route through his territory, see *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 51.

²⁶ Bruce, *Memoirs*, 316.

considerably fast and by 4th August, the army was ready for departure.²⁷ A garrison was left to protect the camp, and the main bulk of the army marched toward the Sulak River.²⁸ There, on 6th, August Peter met with shamkhal Adil Girei and the Sultan of Aksay. Both confirmed their allegiance to Peter and supplied the army with additional carts, oxen, and food.²⁹ After the meeting, the shamkhal returned to Tarki, and the sultan of Aksay rode back to his lands. On 7th August the Russian army began crossing the Sulak River, but a great storm, which lasted four days, raised the water level. The army had to rebuild their camp far from the river. Furthermore, the two bridges which were built for the crossing had to be supplemented by other two. To construct the additional bridges, a band of Cossacks was sent upstream the Sulak in search for boats. It was not until 11th August that the army crossed the river and continued its march to Tarki.

After crossing the Sulak River, the Russians entered in the lands, governed by the shamkhal. Here they did not meet any armed resistance and the only troubles on their way were the hot weather and the insufficient water supplies. The march to Tarki took only two days and in the early afternoon of 12th August, the army entered the city and formed a camp near one of its suburbs.³⁰ Peter stayed in Tarki for three days, giving his army some rest, during which he enjoyed the hospitality of Adil Girei. On 16th August the army broke camp and continued its way toward Derbent, which already acknowledged Peter as its overlord and was ready to open its gates to the advancing Russian force.³¹

Two days after leaving Tarki, the Russians entered the lands of Mahmud of Utamysh. Peter sent three Cossacks and an envoy to negotiate his army's passing and to ask for supplies and help with the transportation. However, Mahmud was not as hospitable as Adil Girei. The envoy was sent back with his nose and ears cut and the three Cossacks were killed and dismembered. Hours after Peter received this news, Mahmud appeared ahead of a 10,000 strong army and confronted the Russian vanguard.³² Peter's troops were already prepared and began a skirmish with the enemy. Thus, began the only major engagement during the campaign. While the Russian infantry drew the enemy's attention, the Cossacks and the dragoons launched a flanking attack and appeared behind the enemy position. Surprised by the cavalry attack, the army of Utamysh retreated,

²⁷ For a map of the campaign routes for 1722-23; see Map 2 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

²⁸ The garrison consisted of 200-300 regular troops and 1,500-1,600 Cossacks; see Table 6 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

²⁹ See Table 8 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

³⁰ *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal* 1722, 59.

³¹ Already in Tarki, Peter received a letter from his emissary to Derbent – Naumov, that the local deputy-governor had accepted Peter's offer and was ready to hand the city to the Russians; see Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavī*, 183.

³² The exact number of the Utamysh forces varies between 6,000 and 12,000 men. In the journal, Peter states that the enemy forces engaged in the battle were firstly preserved to be 5-6,000, but when the Cossacks and the dragoons returned after chasing the enemy off the field, the total strength of the Utamysh forces was estimated at 10,000. Peter Henry Bruce claims that the sultan of Utamysh had a 12,000 strong army; see *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal* 1722, 11; see Bruce, *Memoirs*, 326.

closely pursued by the Russian cavalry and by part of the infantry. Finally, late in the same day, the Cossacks and the dragoons reached the capital of Utamysh, took it and destroyed 600 houses, taking between 30 and 40 prisoners.³³ The army of Mahmud lost between 600 and 700 men while there are no mentioned casualties among the Russians.³⁴ Peter's evaluation of the local soldiers was that if they had the discipline of a regular force, no army would have been able to subdue them.³⁵

Having scattered the forces of Utamysh and destroyed Mahmud's capital, Peter marched his troops south, toward Derbent. A day before he reached the city, a messenger came from Baku, stating that this town also accepted Peter's manifest and was ready to surrender itself to Russia.³⁶ The emperor entered Derbent in the afternoon of 23rd August 1722. He received the silver keys from the deputy-governor and stationed his army in the city's fortress, as well as in a camp, south of the main settlement. While in Derbent, Peter ordered the strengthening of the fortifications and made arrangements for a garrison to be established. Two days later, an event that greatly influenced the future of the campaign occurred. A great storm arose on the evening of 24th August and continued in the early hours of 25th. As a result, twelve of the supply-ships, coming from Astrakhan, were sunk. Though there were no casualties, part of the supplies was lost, and the flour for the soldiers' bread was damaged and had to be baked into sukhari.³⁷ The news of Peter's army marching back had a substantial impact on local leader's policy. Sensing the Russian weakness, Mahmud of Utamysh allied himself with the Usmi of the Qaitaq and with Daud Beg, the chief of the Lezgins. Together they mustered a 20,000 strong force that began to follow Peter's retreating army. Russia's allies also changed sides. The sultan of Aksay refused to sell supplies to the Russians while the shamkhal slew Russian envoys in his capital. Later he submitted to Peter's will only after the Russians reached Tarki. Peter's retreat also left his main Christian ally in the area – Vakhtang of Georgia, without any support. Faced with internal struggle and the advance of a powerful Ottoman army, Vakhtang had to leave Tiflis (Tbilisi) and to seek shelter in Russia. Russia lost its only ally in the Caucasus and had to rely only on its forces and the variable loyalty of its Muslim allies.³⁸

³³ *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 119.

³⁴ P.H. Bruce states that a dragoon platoon was killed by a Utamysh ambush, but this information is not confirmed by official Russian documents; see Bruce, *Memoirs*, 330.

³⁵ Bruce, *Memoirs*, 333; Peter further remarked that local fighters were very weak when fighting as a coherent force and were fast to scatter. When, however, they fought in a single combat, they struggled desperately and if captured committed suicide by cutting themselves with daggers and swords; see *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 11.

³⁶ The manifest was written in three languages – Tatar, Turkish and Persian by the former prince of Moldavia Dimitrie Cantemir, while the Russian army was in Tarki. Cantemir accompanied Peter in his march south.

³⁷ The sukhari are a type of dried bread, separated in rations. They were baked by the soldiers themselves in field ovens, dug in the ground. Russian troops used sukhari long before Peter came to power. During the Northern War they were an essential part of the soldier's diet.

³⁸ The story of Vakhtang's downfall is told by Abraham of Yerevan in his "*History of the Wars 1721-1738*". Vakhtang was proclaimed traitor by Tahmasp II of Persia for allying with Russia and was attacked by his cousin Constantine II of Kakheti (r. 1722-1732). Betrayed by his nobles, Vakhtang left Tiflis and went to Peter in the

As soon as Peter returned to Astrakhan on 5th October 1722, he immediately began issuing orders for the following year. A considerable amount of boats had to be constructed along the Volga ports from Tver to Nizhny Novgorod.³⁹ In addition, the army had to be resupplied with horses, due to the great number of animals, which perished during the summer offensive.⁴⁰ Fresh recruitment had to be carried out, and Peter planned to concentrate additional 20,000 men in St. Cross fort in order to launch an early campaign in 1723.⁴¹ However, the diplomatic development, which will be analyzed later in the dissertation, made some changes to Peter's initial plans. The concentration of Ottoman forces in Erzurum and the Ottoman ultimatum that the entire Shirvan had to be incorporated into the Sultan's Empire called for quick action. More importantly, in October 1722 Isfahan was conquered by the Afghans and rumors whispered that Mahmud Hotaki was on his way to Tabriz and the Caspian shore. On 4th November 1722 a new expedition, the preparations for which were swiftly carried out in October, was sent to Resht under Colonel Mikhail Shipov.⁴² His task was to capture Gilan's principal port and counter any Afghan incursion in the area for as long as possible. This time, Peter decided to rely on a small task-force. Shipov was placed in command of two battalions, boarded on 14 vessels.⁴³ His forces had to establish a landing base near Resht, in a place, where supplies could be easily sent from Astrakhan or St. Cross fort. The next step was to take control of the city of Resht and its fortress.⁴⁴ The fleet reached the Gulf of Anzali on 5th December 1722. Shipov's forces established a fortified position – Fort Peribazar at the mouth of the gulf and began to negotiate with the governor of Resht – Mehmed Ali Beg. While Shipov did not achieve much, the effort was saved by Russia's ambassador in Persia – Semen Avramov.⁴⁵ He managed to talk Mehmed Ali Beg into allowing the Russian force to enter Resht in order to protect it from the Afghans and keep it in the name of Tahmasp II.

late autumn of 1722. Constantine conquered Tiflis on behalf of Tahmasp II, but several months later he was deposed by the advancing Ottoman forces, which conquered Tiflis in 1723. Vakhtang was to follow the fate of Dimitrie Cantemir of Moldavia; see Abraham of Yerevan, *History of the Wars, 1721 – 1738*, trans. by G.A. Bournoutian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 14-7.

³⁹ *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 90: 30 transport-ships (*Heckboot*), 6 large boats, 30 smaller boats, 30 smaller vessels (boats). The first thirty vessels were named *botov* which can be translated as "boats"; the other 30 were named *shlyupki* which means a smaller type of boat.

⁴⁰ *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 193.

⁴¹ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 92.

⁴² On the 24th October 1722 Peter received message from Resht that the local governor and the people had agreed to accept Russian protection. However, as soon as news of Peter's retreat reached the city of Resht, the situation changed, as Shipov was to find out; see *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 19.

⁴³ Between 24th October and 4th November 1722 Peter stayed in the home of Admiral Apraksin and held constant military councils. During these meetings the plans for the following months were laid down, as it is evident from Peter's actions on the 4th November when he sent several dispatches, regulating the preparations for the winter and spring activities; see *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 91-3, 180-94.

⁴⁴ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 85-6.

⁴⁵ Negotiations were not going well and Mehmed Ali Beg even began mustering a force in order to expel the Russians from Anzali; see *Ibid.*, 86.

The conquest of Resht was celebrated with great joy by Peter, who organized a feast in St. Petersburg.⁴⁶

The situation in Dagestan and Gilan remained calm throughout the winter.⁴⁷ In March Tahmasp II's envoy to Petersburg – Ismail Beg, came to Resht. He was sent to negotiate a treaty with Peter, according to which the Shah would recognize Russia's conquests in exchange for Russian support against the Afghans. However, by the time Ismail Beg reached Resht, Tahmasp had made up his mind and sent a special messenger with new instructions. Fortunately for the Russians, Avramov was vigilant and able to slow down the messenger until Ismail Beg was already on his way to Peter. Nevertheless, the local population in Resht did not want Russian presence in the city and by April 1723 Governor Mehmed Ali Beg armed the citizens and decided to attack the Russians. Colonel Shipov monitored carefully Mehmed Ali's actions and managed to fortify his garrison in the old Russian caravansary. On 4th April 1723, the citizens of Resht laid siege on the caravansary. During the night, Shipov, personally leading three of his units, made a sally and dispersed the crowd. However, the news of the accident was alarming, and Peter dispatched reinforcement under brigadier Vasilii Levashov, who was to take command of the Resht garrison.⁴⁸ Levashov reached Resht on 9th June 1723 and quickly asserted full control over the city.

The next step of the plan, designed in October 1722 by Peter and Admiral Apraxin, was the capture of Baku. Satisfied with the success of Shipov's strike-force, Peter decided to send another considerably small unit to accomplish the task. Brigadier Matyushkin was placed in charge of four regiments.⁴⁹ Matyushkin's expedition was, however, significantly delayed, because he had to wait in St. Cross fort for additional vessels from Astrakhan to arrive. The operation, which was scheduled for the spring, finally took place in July. Matyushkin tried to negotiate the surrender of Baku, but its governor refused. Urged by the emperor's orders, as well as by the need to land the troops, Matyushkin began bombarding the city. After four days of cannonade and a successful landing manoeuvre of the Russian forces, Baku capitulated and Matyushkin positioned a strong garrison in the city. Although frustrated by the offense's delay, Peter was very pleased with the news of Baku's fall. He elevated Matyushkin from brigadier to lieutenant-general and placed him in charge of the entire Caspian theater.

While the army was marching, the Russian diplomacy was fighting its own war. The young ambassador in Istanbul – Nepliyuev did his best to calm the Ottoman government. He claimed that Peter's actions were not set against the

⁴⁶ It was referred as *Schastlivoy prikhod* (The Fortunate Arrival). Peter celebrated by issuing fireworks and special prayers in several monasteries in the capital. *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1723*, 11.

⁴⁷ Strengthening positions and transferring troops according to the emperor's will were the only active developments. The Muslim forces in Dagestan ended their raids and the population of Resht still feared of the Afghans.

⁴⁸ 2,000 troops and 24 cannons – Lystsov, *Persidskiy Pokhod Petra I*, 129; Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 90.

⁴⁹ Solovyev, *Istoriya Rossii*, 384.

Ottomans, but were designed as a punishment for the brigands in Dagestan, who robbed the Russian merchants in Shamakhi.⁵⁰ The grand vizier Damat Ibrahim Paşa was no fool and was well aware that Russia desired to establish a firm hold on the Caspian coast. This contrasted the Ottoman interests in the area. The vizier was able to play his cards well and accepted Daud Beg of the Lesgins as a vassal of the Ottoman Empire.⁵¹ Daud Beg was proclaimed governor of Shirvan and the Porte gave an ultimatum - Russia must retreat to the Terek River and remove any fortifications and garrisons, established by Peter. The complicated diplomatic struggle, which also involved the ambassadors of England and France, continued until 1724. However, these negotiations are not a subject of the current dissertation.⁵² Instead, only several crucial moments will be pointed out, which have been part of a debate, regarding the entire development of the 1722-1724 conflict.

Firstly, according to Benningsen's article, Peter was intimidated by the Ottoman demands, and it the ultimatum given by the Porte that made him retreat from Derbent and return to Astrakhan.⁵³ However, as all other works on the issue point out, it was logistics, rather than diplomatic pressure, which compelled Peter to sail back to Russia in October 1722. As the Russian position in the negotiations clearly proves, Peter was more willing to fight a war against the Ottomans, instead of withdrawing from Dagestan. As Lockhart and Lystsov point out, Russia was adamant in its position that no Ottoman presence will be established on the Caspian coast. If the Ottomans gain access to the Caspian, this would enable them to contact the Muslim tribes in Central Asia and use them against Russia. Peter was indeed worried by such a perspective, and he demanded from the governor of Astrakhan that no Ottoman or Crimean envoys should reach the Kalmyks or any other nomads. Furthermore, Russia's preparedness for war must not be underestimated. In the spring of 1723 over 22,000 Cossacks and regular troops were already concentrated in St. Cross fort.⁵⁴ Further forces were sent to strengthen the garrisons at Derbent and Resht.⁵⁵ In addition, Peter sent a call to arms to the Cossacks of Ukraine and Don and was ready to redirect the entire army to the border with the Crimean

⁵⁰ In 1721 the combined forces of Daud Beg and Ahmad Khan (leaders of the Lesgins and the Qaitaq) pillaged Shamakhi and took goods, worth 500,000 rubles from the local Russian merchants. This accident was used as a pretext by Peter to launch his campaign; see Lockhart, *The Fall of the Şafavī*, 177-8).

⁵¹ In the spring of 1723 Daud Beg, Mahmud of Utamysh, Mehmed of Aksay and the Usmi of the Qaitaq made a secret agreement with Aadil Girei of Tarki to send an embassy to Istanbul in order to place their lands under Ottoman suzerainty; see Lystsov, *Persidskiy Pokhod Petra I*, 131. The letter from Damat Ibrahim Paşa, accepting Daud Beg as a vassal and urging him to act against the Russians, is given in Lemerrier-Quelquejaye, "An Unpublished Document", 174 – 8.

⁵² For an exhaustive description of the Ottoman-Russian negotiations; see Lockhart, *The Fall of the Şafavī*, 212-37.

⁵³ Benningsen, "Peter The Great", 311-8.

⁵⁴ Lystsov, *Persidskiy Pokhod Petra I*, 140.

⁵⁵ Derbent was reinforced with 1,200 Cossacks, two infantry battalions and 20 guns and Resht was supported by Levashov's 2,000 troops and 24 cannons. In total, by July, 1723, Russia had some 38-40,000 troops concentrated in Dagestan and Gilan; see *Ibid.*, 141; Table 6 in the Appendix of the current chapter.

Khanate. It is safe to say that by August 1723 the total Russian potential could have been mustered and ready to defend the borders. Furthermore, there was a considerable amount of frontier troops, permanently concentrated on the southern frontier.⁵⁶ Thus, Russia was ready to risk a war. What could have been the outcome of such a conflict or how Peter could finance a conflict with such proportions is a whole different story.

The second issue which is a subject of debate is the Ottoman preparedness for a large-scale conflict. According to Lockhart, Damat Ibrahim Paşa was a peace-loving man, who wanted to reform his state and avoid further conflict. Also, his master Ahmed III – a very avaricious man, did not wish to spend funds on effortless conflicts. As Lockhart concludes, this duo was reluctant to risk war with Russia and doubted whether to intervene in Persia at all.⁵⁷ However, this cheerful story of an art-loving vizier and a cautious sultan though pleasant is to some extent naïve. As Ibrahim Paşa's actions during the negotiations with Russia and with the Dagestani tribal leaders demonstrate, he was not willing to allow any Russian incursion in the Caspian and was ready to pursue his goals. As already outlined in a previous chapter, the Ottoman Empire still had the potential to defend its interests. Ottoman forces, mustered for the advance in Persia, numbered no less than 50,000 and were well supported by artillery.⁵⁸ More troops could be sent by ships to the Azov Sea in order to threaten Russia's southern borders. Apart from that, the Ottomans could count on the support of the Crimean Khan, who could still muster some 70-100,000 horsemen and also on the Muslim faction in the Caucasus, with its 20,000 force. Ottoman diplomacy was also firm in its position and was ready to fight Russia for the control of Dagestan. In the end, it was the mediation of the French ambassador in Istanbul – Jean-Louis d'Usson, Marquis de Bonnac that helped to avoid the conflict.⁵⁹ Or at least that is Lockhart's point of view.

Parallels of the situation could be found in modern history. There is a remarkable resemblance between the Russo-Ottoman tension and the several crises that marked the Cold War between the USSR and the USA. Both states were "superpowers" in the Caucasus region, and both states had the potential of gathering some of the largest wartime armies in Europe. They had overlapping strategic and economic interests, and supported local factions, using them as

⁵⁶ There were some 70,000 garrison troops, most of which were concentrated on the southern frontier; see the Appendix of Chapter I.

⁵⁷ Lockhart, *The Fall of the Şafavīd*, 213.

⁵⁸ The Ottoman forces were concentrated in Erzurum in the spring of 1723 and marched east, conquering by the spring of 1724 the two most important fortresses in the Caucasus – Yerevan and Tiflis. Soon after, Tabriz, the gate to Inner Persia, was also taken. Another army entered Hamadan from Iraq under the Paşa of Bagdad. By the end of 1724, Western Persia was already occupied by the Ottomans. Though, as it was outlined in part I, chapter 2, Abraham of Yerevan overestimates the Ottoman numbers, it is doubtless that the Porte was able to send at least 80,000 men in Persia. Compared to the approximately 40-50,000 Russians, the Ottoman presence in the region was considerably larger; see Lockhart, *The Fall of the Şafavī*, 255-73; Abraham of Yerevan, *History of the Wars*, 17-37.

⁵⁹ Lockhart, *The Fall of the Şafavī*, 231.

tools in their grand strategies. In 1722 there was no European power that could serve as a mediator between these two states, not to mention a single ambassador, who was deprived of his government's support.⁶⁰ Thus, the influence of the British resident in Istanbul – Abraham Stanyan over the policy of Damat Ibrahim Paşa must not be overestimated. In general, Lockhart tries to prove that European powers exercised almost the same influence in the Near East as they did during the early nineteenth century. This, however, was far from the truth. Neither Russia nor the Ottoman Empire were as dependent on Western Europe as Lockhart supposes. It can be argued that the war between the Ottomans and the Russians was not fought solely because these states decided not to fight. It was not so much the actions of de Bonnac and Stanyan but the complicated economic and military state of the two empires, which predetermined the outcome of the conflict. Both Peter and Damat Ibrahim knew that a direct conflict between Russia and the Ottomans would lead to an economic crisis.

It is true that the two eastern colossi could raise vital forces, but the question was - for how long. The money and the resources, needed for a full-scale war were hardly present in Istanbul and St. Petersburg. The Ottoman Empire had just ended a 35 year-long period of wars and for Russia, it was jumping from one major conflict into another.⁶¹ Thus, it was not so much the real war, but the possibility of one, that was the playground of the Russian and the Ottoman diplomacy. In reality, both states were unwilling to fight, just as were the USSR and the USA, but their leading policy-makers were very good at playing their cards. The game of bidding with military preparations finally ended in the summer of 1724, after both states had conquered their primary objectives and an effective repartition of Persia took place.⁶² The final treaty resembled very much the outcome of the first partition of Poland-Lithuania by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1773.⁶³ And if the Russo-Ottoman “Cold War” was slow to develop in the winter of 1723/24, the Russo-Safavid relations took a more rapid progression. As noted above, Avramov, Russia's ambassador to Persia, was able to trick Ismail Beg, the Persian envoy to St. Petersburg, and deprive him of his master's final instructions not to conclude peace with Peter. Ismail Beg continued his way to Russia and reached Astrakhan in March 1723. Peter ordered Artemiy Volynskiy to delay Ismail Beg and to bring him to

⁶⁰ As. L.Lockhart notes in his narrative, de Bonnac acted on his behalf, since Paris was not willing to intervene in the Russo-Ottoman conflict. It was in October 1723 that Louis XV finally decided to support his ambassador by giving him a *carte blanche*; see Lockhart, *The Fall of the Şafavī*, 220, Note 1.

⁶¹I am referring to the War of the Holy League (1683-1701), the Russo-Ottoman War (1711-3), the Ottoman-Venetian War (1714-8) and the Austro-Ottoman War (1716-8); The Great Northern War. It was preceded by the Russo-Ottoman War (1686-1700) in the context of the War of the Holy League and the two campaigns against Crimea (1687; 1689).

⁶² For the Russians – Derbent, Baku and Resht; For the Ottomans – Tiflis, Yerevan and Tabriz.

⁶³ One might argue that Russian diplomacy had a good background of partitioning other states, based on the Persian and Crimean experience.

Petersburg later in the summer.⁶⁴ Following the fall of Baku, Peter finally met with Ismail Beg. After a series of lavish feasts and celebrations, a treaty was concluded between Russia and Persia.⁶⁵ According to the treaty, Persia had to give up all Caspian provinces to Russia, including Astrabad, where no Russian soldier had ever set foot. In exchange, Russia was to provide military aid to Tahmasp II and help him in case of war against a third party.⁶⁶ In reality, Tahmasp II never ratified this document, and the occupation of the Caspian provinces was carried out without the approval of Persia. However, until Nadir Shah expelled the Afghans in 1729, none of the factions, struggling for the Persian succession, had the strength to remove Russia from its newly acquired territories.

The Struggle for Persia was brought to an end in 1724 or at least, so it seemed. The Ottomans and the Russians were able to partition their neighbor's lands and to conclude an agreement. The "Cold War" between the two empires ended and both states were satisfied with the outcome. It is hard to measure who won the most. Both Peter and Damat Ibrahim managed to fulfill their primary goals. Russia had to abandon the Orthodox population of the Caucasus to the Ottomans and exchange their allegiance for the volatile loyalty of the population of Gilan and Dagestan. It was also uncertain whether the newly-conquered lands would pay off for the vast resources, invested in their acquisition. However for the time being, Russia received what she came for, and Peter managed to transform the Caspian into a *mare nostrum*. Any full-scale evaluation of the Russian effort in Persia would require a further, in-depth research of the Russian occupation and the developments, which led to the treaties of Resht (1729) and Ganja (1735), which ended Russia's presence in the Southern Caspian region and returned the borders between Persia and Russia to the status quo from 1722. However, such a study is not the subject of the current dissertation. Here it is sufficient to note that Russia managed to establish successfully its presence in the Near East.

⁶⁴ A. Volynskiy reported to the emperor, that Ismail Beg was ready to sign a treaty according to which Persia would secede all Caspian provinces to Russia; see Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 97. Peter, however, decided to postpone the signing of the treaty, since Russia's position in the Caspian was still unstable (Almost 1/3 of the troops in Resht were sick and Matyushkin was nowhere near sailing to Baku). Thus, when in the end of July 1723 Baku finally fell in Russian hands, Peter was ready to negotiate with Ismail Beg.

⁶⁵ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 97-8.

⁶⁶ The signing of the Treaty of St. Petersburg was a critical point in the Russo-Ottoman negotiations. Peter did not notify his ambassador in Istanbul Nepliyev about the clauses of the treaty. Nepliyev became familiar with the text through its translation in one Venetian newspaper. The subsequent scandal was overcome only by the mediation of de Bonnac, who was able to convince Damat Ibrahim Paşa that the pact was not aimed against the Ottoman Empire. It was perhaps the only situation, in which the personality of de Bonnac proved essential for avoiding a conflict. Yet, it is still doubtful whether the grand vizier was ready to start a war against Russia. Instead, the scandal gave him the chance to deny any Russian claim made so far and to demand better terms from Nepliyev. As it turned out, Peter had to mend his mistake by agreeing to some of the Ottoman terms, most importantly by avoiding any open support to the Georgians and the Armenians.

4.5. The Performance of the Russian Army

The Persian Campaign is the only one of the conflicts, reviewed in the current dissertation, which takes place outside the well-known battlegrounds of early modern Europe. Thus, it will be presented with a more detailed description of the actual performance of the Russian army, and with an analysis of the non-military factors, influencing the development of the campaign. This will be a deviation from the pattern of evaluation followed so far, but it is necessary in the context of the overall contribution, pursued by this dissertation.

The terrain factor – The Caucasus and the Caspian as a battleground

The Caucasus chain is the highest mountain system in Western Asia, with its tallest peak - Elbrus reaching 5642 meters. If the Caucasus Mountains have to be compared to any similar part of Europe, it would be the Alps. Both mountains could be traversed only through a small number of passes and both separate two regions, distinctive by social structure and environment. However, the size of the mountains and the character of the local population mark the main differences between the two cases. The Caucasus Mountains stretch in northwest – southeast direction, dividing the river system into three general zones.⁶⁷ The first area includes the rivers, which flow north and enter the Caspian Sea. These rivers serve as the natural southern border of the Eurasian Steppe and can be used as a divide between the nomadic Mongolian tribes of the grasslands and the mountain tribes of Circassia (Cherkassiya). The second river zone includes the streams that flow south-eastward into the Caspian Sea and mark the southern border between the mountainous population and the peoples inhabiting the Persian mainland. Finally, the third zone includes all the rivers, which flow into the Black Sea. These territories are dominated by the settled Georgian societies and since ancient times have been the most well-known part of the Caucasus.⁶⁸ The region, which is the primary concern of our study, is the second, the south-eastern zone and more specifically - its northern periphery. These territories are dominated by the densely wooded eastern slopes of the Caucasus and the small valleys, which are locked between the mountains and the Caspian Sea. It is precisely these interrelated coastal valleys, which are one of the three most

⁶⁷ See Map 3 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

⁶⁸ Unlike the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea was connected with Europe and Asia through the Straights of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, as well as the Danube, Dnieper and Don rivers. Ever since the Greeks established their colonies along the Black Sea coasts (ninth-seventh centuries BC), Georgia (then known as Kolkhis or Iberia), was integrated in the trading system of Europe and Western Asia. During the Medieval period, due to its links with Byzantium, Georgia participated in the trade routes, which linked the Baltic with the Black and Caspian seas and even further - to what is present day Iraq.

important routes for passing through the Caucasus.⁶⁹ The valleys alongside the Caspian coastal road are crossed by small rivers and dry gullies, which break the terrain and make it hard for any army to maintain high marching speed. Woods and little dales in the mountains are perfect spots for ambushes and standoffs. During the eighteenth century the best way to move in this area, was on horseback and the best way to transport a baggage-train - was by using pack animals.

The terrain had a high impact on the movement and on the manoeuvres of the Russian army. To begin with, Peter had to carefully choose his way south. Concerning his goals – the capture of Baku and the establishment of a foothold on the western Caspian coast, the Black Sea coastal route was quite unsuitable. Firstly, it could transfer the line of operations far from the primary objective. Secondly, it could lead the Russians through a territory, which was under Ottoman suzerainty.⁷⁰ Thirdly, the route was far from any Russian supply center, and no naval assistance could be expected in the Black Sea. Finally, using this road could expose the lines of communication to the attacks of the Crimean and Kuban Tatars. The only benefit for Peter could be the support of the Orthodox Georgian princes of Imereti, Abkhazia and Mingrelia. However, Peter never put too much trust in the Caucasian Christians and thus, there was no reason for the emperor to march his army through this route.⁷¹

Peter's second option was the Georgian Military road. Unlike the Black Sea route, the passage through the central Caucasus had its positive sides. It was the shortest way to cross the mountains and to enter the valley of the Kura River. Once in the valley, the Russians could conquer Tiflis and thus block any possible Ottoman advance from the west. Once Tiflis was secured, the army could march or even sail along the Kura, to reach the Caspian Sea near Baku. Peter wanted to control the mouth of Kura.⁷² Furthermore, the rich trade center of Shamakhi was also situated in this area. Russian goods in this town had been pillaged and this incident served as a pretext for the Tsar's military effort. If Peter had wanted to avenge the mistreating of the Russian merchants by the Lesgins, he would have taken this route. Although this option seemed tempting, the Georgian Military road held several risks. Firstly, there was no Russian base on the northern slopes of the Caucasus.⁷³ The nearest Russian position was Terki, on the Terek River, approximately 400 kilometers to the north-east. The

⁶⁹ The other two were the Black Sea coastal road (*Beregovoe Shosse*) and the so-called Georgian Military Road (*Voenno-Gruzinskaya doroga*), which ran from Vladikavkaz (Ordzhonikidze) to Tiflis (Tbilisi); see Map 4 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

⁷⁰ Provoking the Ottomans to strike was never part of Peter's plan.

⁷¹ Solovyev, *Istoriya Rossii*, 374.

⁷² As proven by the expedition toward Resht. During the expedition the fleet, under Soymonov first had to map the mouth of the Kura River and only then to leave Shipov's corps near Resht.

⁷³ Vladikavkaz was established in 1784 for the purpose of controlling the so-called "Caucasus Gates". This is a system of gorges, which traverses the mountain from north to south, following Terek River upstream and then the Aragvi River, until its influx with the Kura River, twenty miles north of Tiflis; see W.E.D. Allen and P.Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields – A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828-1921* (Nashville, 1999 – reprinted from the Cambridge, 1953 edition), 4.

territories between Terki and the “Caucasian Gates” were under the control of the Circassian princes, who, at least nominally, were subjected to Russia. However, these princes often fought each other, separated in parties, either supporting the Russians or the Ottomans and their Tatar allies. One such conflict took place between 1718 and 1720 and although it was won by the pro-Russian faction, the region remained unstable. Even if this obstacle could have been overcome, there was a second problem. The so-called “Caucasian Gates” were in fact a series of narrow gorges, cut by the upstream of the Terek and Aragvi rivers. The passes were often blockaded by snow and landslides and any army, traveling through them could be easily cut off from its supply lines not only by nature, but also by the mountain tribes, which inhabited the region, and were allies of the Lesgins.⁷⁴ Apart from all that, the road also hindered the setting of communication and supply lines. Until the Kura was reached, there were no navigable rivers or established roads, which could ease the traversing of the Caucasus. Thus, it could probably take weeks, if not months to transport supplies and messages along the route.

Finally, there was the Caspian coastal road. It followed the Caspian Sea in northwest – southeast direction: beginning from the Terek river system, traversing the narrow valleys around Terki and Derbent and finally ending at the northern periphery of the Kura river system, near Baku. There were several main advantages of this route. Firstly, Russia was practically the master of the Caspian Sea, being the only state to possess a real fleet in the region. By using its fleet, based in Astrakhan, the Russians could deliver supplies along the entire route, if there were suitable locations to harbor the ships. Secondly, the fortress of Terki – Russia’s southernmost base, controlled the northern end of the route and could be used as a logistics center, as well as an operational base for any campaign in the region. The Caspian route also had the advantage of not crossing the Caucasus at all. It was the only direct way to Baku, without traversing highlands. Regarding the population, Russia could count on the support of the Terki and Greben Cossacks, who inhabited the region since the sixteenth century and were always loyal to the tsar. These Cossacks were quite familiar with the terrain and with the nature of the area, as well as the peoples, who inhabited Dagestan. The main disadvantage of the Caspian route was that it left the western flank of the army opened to attacks from the mountain tribes and separated the Russians from their potential allies in Georgia and Armenia.

After taking these possibilities into consideration, Peter decided to choose the Caspian coast. After the operation against Finland in 1713, Peter had a preference for amphibious warfare. He believed that only through combining land advance with adequate naval support the victory was going to be certain. Furthermore, Peter pursued the total control of the Caspian Sea in order to affirm Russia as an indispensable part of the trade route between India and

⁷⁴ For the composition of the tribes and states, see Map 5 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

Europe. By establishing strongholds on the western Caspian coast, Peter could eliminate any possibility of Ottoman incursion in the area. The relations with the local leaders also influenced his decision. The shamkhal of Tarki, the most prominent local leader, swore allegiance to Russia in 1718 and promised his support if Peter was to march in Dagestan. Furthermore, the city of Derbent gave an affirmative reply to Peter's manifesto even before the campaign had started. Regarding his allies in Georgia and Armenia, Peter urged Vakhtang VI to take control of Tiflis and unite his forces with the Armenians. According to the plan this army had to march south-eastward, capture Shamakhi and merge with the Russians near Baku. The Caucasian allies had to avoid any possible provocation of the Ottomans. Their main objective had to be to rout the Lesgins. After the path had been chosen, it was time to think about the possible ways of transporting the army and the supplies, given the existing infrastructure in Dagestan.

Infrastructure

When Peter decided to expand his realm southward, he planned to use the established system of canals and rivers to transport and concentrate his troops in Astrakhan. However, once the army went on its way, the possibilities to use local infrastructure for the benefit of the army's advance faded. When the fleet sailed from Terki on 26th July 1722, Peter left behind the last safe harbor and supply center, available to his forces. Any further operations had to be exercised relying on the army's capacity and the doubtful assistance of the local rulers.

One thing is certain – there was no road system in Dagestan, or, at least, no roads in terms of a network of paved ways, supervised by local authorities. The only two significant settlements, which stood on Peter's way to Baku, were Tarki and Derbent. Between these, however, no real road existed, except probably, some dirt road, well-trodden by carts and horses. In order to understand why local authorities did not construct roads, two reasons must be outlined – the frequent conflicts between the rulers, and on larger scale - struggle between the empires and the local leaders, who were trying to preserve their autonomy.

With regard to regional conflicts, ever since the Middle Ages warfare in Dagestan concentrated on the usage of mounted troops. Bands of horsemen served as the main striking forces of the Dagestani warlords in their struggle against each other. To better understand the way war was fought in the Caucasus, a parallel with similar development in Asia Minor could be made. There the predominant forces, prior to the Ottoman conquests, were the gazi bands. In a similar fashion, a gazi ethos developed among the Dagestani tribes and since there was no major power to conquer or centralize the region, the state of play remained unchanged up until the Russian conquests during the nineteenth century. Except for the weak central authority, fortifications also

played part in the preservation of the gazi ethos. Unlike Asia Minor, where a lot of forts and fortresses existed, especially in the western parts, in the Caucasus, there were no significant settlements, nor any significant fortifications. The population lived in a semi-nomadic fashion and could abandon its settlement until the enemy had been defeated or had left the occupied territory.⁷⁵ Therefore, “forts” were simple ramparts, consisting of wooden palisades and shallow moats. Such fortifications were able to hold a cavalry for some time but were still vulnerable to the dismounted charge of the gazi.

Apart from the local conflicts and the specific art of war, a second reason for the lack of adequate road network was the constant struggle of the empires to impose their rule over the Caucasian peoples. A well-known fact is that good roads are the veins of any imperial power. By using a road system, Persia, Russia or the Ottoman Empire would be able to launch punitive expeditions and to maintain strong garrisons. Furthermore, roads would make the supply of these imperial forces much easier and would thus threaten the autonomy of the local warlords. The imperial administration could also use the road network in order to collect tolls and taxes and to establish a better functioning bureaucratic system. With such a system empire’s official documents would travel faster throughout the realm. As for the trade, the population of Dagestan’s main trading product was animals – oxen, sheep, and horses, which were sold at the big trade centers, situated in the valleys around the Caucasus. Animals, unlike goods, did not need a road system to be transported, and thus, there was no economic necessity for the local population to maintain a road network for trade’s sake.

How did Peter deal with the situation? When his army landed on Agrakhan Bay, Peter’s first task was to establish a fortified camp, which would serve as starting point for the new line of communications. His next task was to secure the loyalty of Tarki and Derbent, the only sizable settlements in the area and to control their vicinities. After these main fortified positions were secured, the army had to establish a chain of harbors along the western Caspian coast, so that the fleet from Astrakhan could support the troops with supplies and munitions. Still there was the question why did Peter preferred the marine transportation. There were two main reasons. Firstly, because only Russia possessed a fleet in the Caspian, and no enemy force could attack and capture the supply ships.⁷⁶ Secondly, the construction of a road network would require

⁷⁵ This is exactly what happened during the Russian march south. The population of both Endirey and Utamysh managed to leave their homes and retreated deeper into the mountains. When the Russians were gone, the people returned and rebuilt their settlements. During the return of the Utamysh population, a surprise attack by a 5,000 force of Cossacks and Kalmyks caught the local completely off guard and resulted in hundreds of captives and the loss of 7,000 heads of cattle.

⁷⁶ In the course of the campaign and following the Russian march north, the attacks of the Dagestani horsemen proved that the land-based line of communications was quite vulnerable and in order to maintain it, a very strong chain of garrisons had to be established. Instead, Peter opted for a small number of garrisons on key locations and a maritime system for supplying the army and the troops, stationed in the Dagestan fortifications.

time and funds, which Russia could not currently afford.⁷⁷ Peter came to the logical solution by preferring the naval transport as safer and cheaper. However, it turned out, that there was an enemy in the sea against which no eighteenth-century army or navy was protected – the weather.

Climate

The next factor, which played a crucial role in the development of the Persian Campaign, was the weather. When it comes to the climate of Western Asia, people often picture vast deserts and rocky wastelands, heated by the merciless sun and swept by sandstorms. However, the reality of the Persian Campaign was quite different. Thanks to the accurate day to day account of the campaign journal of the Persian expedition, the dissertation summarizes the weather conditions for most of the Persian Campaign of 1722.⁷⁸ It turns out that rain and storms were as troublesome for the army as was the heat.

Unfortunately, it cannot be estimated if the climate of the Caspian and the Caucasus was the same as it is today, thus, no general assumptions about the nature of the weather could be made. However, it is possible to trace what the weather conditions were in Dagestan and the Astrakhan province during the months of July, August and September. When Peter started his expedition on 18th July 1722, it was midsummer in the Caspian region. The weather was warm and sunny, and for the first three days the army sailed under clear skies. Upon entering the Caspian Sea, two storms from the north-east hampered the army advance. In the following days the fleet sailed in good weather conditions, reaching Terki on 24th July.⁷⁹

During the next two weeks, the weather remained hot and sunny, with almost no rain. At the beginning of August, when the army left its camp in Astrakhan Bay, the weather was extremely hot, and the soldiers suffered during their march to the Sulak River. If the heat only harassed the troops on their way south, it was storms that stopped the army's advance. Between 7th and 11th August, there was a great storm that raised the level of the Sulak River. The water damaged the two bridges, built by the Russians and Peter had to seek materials for the construction of two new pontoons. It took four days for the entire army to cross the river. After the storm ended, the weather became very hot again and took the lives of many soldiers and horses. After the army finally reached Derbent, a new powerful northern storm destroyed the supply fleet off the coast, near the city, and made any further advance to Baku impossible. The

⁷⁷ Peter was determined to advance as fast as possible, in order to place the Ottomans in *a fait accompli* and deny them the ability to interfere in Dagestan. As for the cost, in 1722 Russia had to spend more than 1,600,000 rubles on military costs. The cost for transporting materials, workers and also for protecting their work from local tribes' incursions was immense. The only land-based constructions, apart from forts, were the bridges, build for the crossing of several small rivers, which flowed into the Caspian Sea. Except for an ancient stone bridge near Buynaksk River, all other crossings required from the army to erect its own pontoon bridges.

⁷⁸ See Table 2 and Table 3 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

⁷⁹ Peter entered Tarki on the 24th July. Some of the ships were delayed and the entire fleet gathered on 25th July.

army remained in Derbent until early September. When on the 8th September the Russians began their return march, the weather suddenly changed. The breezy summer evenings were replaced by cold autumn nights, and on 10th September, the hills were covered in frost. The weather during daytime also changed, becoming cold and cloudy. If the army marched in blistering heat on its way south, the troops moved north in cold, harsh weather, swept by wind and storms. Finally, the Russians reached the Sulak River at the end of September, but unfortunately, there is no account of the climate after 18th September.

There is no information, regarding the weather during the expeditions against Resht and Baku. The Resht expedition was carried out in the winter, and it could be guessed that the weather in the Caspian Sea was cold and windy.⁸⁰ As for Matyushkin's capture of Baku, it took place during the second half of July 1723 and considering the weather in Dagestan the previous year, it could be supposed that it was hot during the four days of the siege. There were probably no major storms during the two later expeditions since no reports for sunken ships appear in the sources.

While the cold, harsh weather in September was nothing new for the Russian troops, it was the summer heats and storms, which had a greater impact on the army. Before the march south began, measures were taken to avoid the heat.⁸¹ The army stopped several times a day so that the soldiers and the horses could rest. Also, the army always camped near rivers or wells, so that the troops could slake their thirst. However, the sun was taking its toll. On several occasions Peter Bruce notes that the soldiers were exhausted from the heat and dropped out. Furthermore, the soldier's diet also had something to do with the heat resistance of the army. Food comprised of bread and meat, water and probably wine. However, fruits, which contained the required vitamins were absent for the most part of the campaign. During the stay at the Sulak River, the army received an abundant supply of fresh fruit, which were devoured with such haste that many of the soldiers got sick.⁸² The uncontrollable hunger could be explained not so much with the lack of food supplies but with the exhaustion and dehydration of the troops due to the heat. Water was also problematic since the rivers flowed through soils with high limestone content. The limestone entered the water and made it salty, which increased the soldiers' thirst and made them vulnerable to the heat.

The sudden change of the weather in the early September also had its impact on the soldiers. The veterans from the Northern War were used to the cold, but after two months of heat, even they found it hard to adjust. Furthermore, according to Bruce's memoirs, the Russians lacked winter

⁸⁰ It took almost a month for the fleet to reach Resht. However, the delay was partially due to the exploration of the mouth of Kura River, carried out by Soymonov, according to Peter's orders.

⁸¹ The soldiers were prohibited from staying outside without hats between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.; the troops were forbidden to sleep on the bare ground or use grass and reed as their bedding. In addition, drinking alcohol and the frequent usage of salty meat were also restricted; see Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 58.

⁸² Bruce, *Memoirs*, 317.

uniforms during their return march.⁸³ Taking into account the cold nights, the exhausting marches and the several evenings in which the army was in full alert, it could be supposed that the cool weather also influenced the general extortion of the army during its march north.

In general, the weather was one of the “new” factors, with which the Russian army had to adjust to. Considering the specific circumstances, it can be concluded that Peter’s army did very well. Similar problems were often among the main issues, faced by western armies as late as the Napoleonic Wars. There was no eighteenth-century army anywhere in the world that could manage to overcome nature’s power. Even during the 20th and 21st centuries, modern armies, fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan, have problems with the weather conditions, including heat and storms.

Food and water

As already mentioned, food and water had a lot to do with the impact of the heat on the troops. There are no exact numbers of how much food the army carried with itself. When in late August the supply fleet sunk near Derbent, the Staff reported to the Emperor that the army had food supplies for only one month. Taking into consideration that so far half of the campaign was spent in camps and in settlements, a conclusion can be drawn that the army did not have sufficient provisions which could last until Baku without the support of the navy. Before putting the “failure” label to the expedition’s supply system, several important things must be considered. First and foremost, in the summer heat goods tend to spoil quite fast, especially the meat. Therefore, it seems, Peter preferred to carry a small baggage of supplies with the army and count on the regular resupply from the fleet, bringing fresh provisions from Astrakhan or Terki. In addition, Peter also hoped to acquire a certain amount of goods from his allies in the region and to conquer easily the settlements along his way, which would have cost him a lot if he had been fighting in the fortress-abundant European lands. Secondly, as already noted in the section about infrastructure, Peter considered naval transport to be safer and faster. If the army had to carry too heavy baggage train, it would become quite vulnerable to the mobile forces of the local warlords. Apart from the vulnerability, low speed meant that the Ottomans would have more time to react and to send an army in Shirvan.

In the course of the campaign, the Russians were able to acquire food from the locals on several occasions.⁸⁴ The first time was during the crossing of the Sulak River, when the shamkhal delivered a large number of fruits and oxen for the army, apart from the pack animals, which were assigned to the baggage train. Following the arrival at Tarki, the Russians resupplied their provisions by

⁸³ Ibid., 345.

⁸⁴ For a summary regarding the supply acquisitions and problems during the 1722 campaign, see Table 8 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

using the local markets. The population of Derbent was initially unwilling to share their supplies with the Russians, but eventually, with the establishment of a garrison in the city, the army was able to purchase some food and fruits from the locals. Nevertheless, Peter never put too much trust in local supplies and counted on the naval support from his fleet under van Verden.⁸⁵ However, the weather played its part and the destruction of 12 supply ships, along with part of the flour and some other goods predetermined the early end of the campaign.

Regarding the water supplies, Peter counted on the several small rivers in the area as a source of fresh water. Furthermore, while still in Tarki, Peter instructed shamkhal Adil Girei to arrange the digging of wells along the future route of the Russian army. As it turned out, the shamkhal did not put too much effort into the task. The first days following the crossing of the Sulak turned out to be critical for the Russians, who exhausted by the heat, had access only to the badly-dug, muddy wells, left by Girei's men.⁸⁶ The slipshod work of the men from Tarki taught the Russians a lesson and until the end of the campaign, they used only well-built old wells or upstream rivers in order to supply with fresh water. The quality of the water itself was also problematic, due to the large quantity of limestone in the soil. It made the water salty and thus instead of quenching the thirst of the troops, it made the situation somewhat worse. The only possible solution was to boil the water, but the Russians did not know they should or did not have the time to do it.⁸⁷ It can be only speculated whether the water had any impact on the number of sick soldiers during the expedition. However, it certainly increased the burden of the march.

While Europe was blessed with an abundance of drinkable water from many rivers, springs and streams, the situation in Western Asia was different. The rocky soil, filled with different minerals, easily penetrating the streams, made the water salty and often unsuitable for drinking. Only local people knew from which wells and springs to drink, and which streams had a clear water debit. Therefore, a foreign army, unaccustomed to the local lore would suffer greatly from the lack of fresh water. Given the doubtful allegiance of the local population, the Russians were lucky enough to survive the campaign without any critical lack of water supplies.

The same refers to food. The army ate a lot of fruits, which were uncommon in Russia and this had its effect on the troop's health. But the greater impact was on the horses. As Peter Bruce notes in his *Memoirs*, hundreds and even thousands of animals died from poisonous grass. Since the animals of the cavalry were brought mainly by the Kalmyks and the Cossacs in Ukraine, they were unaccustomed to the types of grass and herbs, which grew in Dagestan.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Van Verden was a Dutch sailor, who served in the Russian army. Together with Soymonov, he was sent to chart the Caspian Sea and later to command the supply fleet, which escorted Peter's southern march.

⁸⁶ *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 8.

⁸⁷ Neither the *Zhurnal* nor Bruce's *Memoirs* give any note on processing the water in some manner.

⁸⁸ See below the subchapter about the Animal factor.

Unlike the camels and the oxen, which were bought or received from the local tribes, the horses came with the army and were unaware of the local pasture.⁸⁹

In general, given the circumstances and the general lack of information on the quality of local food and water supplies, the Russian army performed well. It is a well-known fact that Western European contingents in Asia, the West Indies and Africa often suffered from the same problems, until eventually they became accustomed to the local environment. Peter's reliance on the naval support was justified by the logic of the campaign specifics and failed only because of the weather factor, which was beyond any human control during the eighteenth century.

Animal factor

One of the central issues of modern military history is to trace the origins of the horses for the cavalry and the animals, pulling the baggage train. While cavalries, as structure, armament and performance have been adequately studied, the mounts and the pack animals somewhat remain a mystery. Regarding the Persian Campaign, there are only a few secondary notes, which give information about the acquisition of horses. On the last pages of the *Pokhodnyy zhurnal* for 1722, a brief note mentions that due to the high mortality rate of the animals during the summer campaign, Peter ordered colonel Tarakanov to purchase additional horses from the Kalmyks, the Cossacks, and the "Lower Cities".⁹⁰ Tarakanov was to receive full support from local authorities, and his mission was considered of crucial importance for the campaign, which was planned for the next year.⁹¹ Using this scarce material, as well as several other sources, the dissertation maps the main horse breeding areas in the region, as well as the primary horse markets, available to the Russians.⁹²

The main regions, which bred horses, were located in Southwestern Asia in the territories of the Safavid and the Ottoman empires. Regarding Russia, its main "horse supply" areas were concentrated in Ukraine and around the Lower Volga. Other horse-breeding areas were the pastures of Central Asia. From these areas, the Russians had direct access to only three – Ukraine, the Lower Volga, and the lands of the Kalmyks. The Ottomans and their Tatar allies would certainly not provide the Russians with mounts and neither would the Persians or the khanates of Central Asia, with whom Peter already entered into a conflict. Therefore, the only possible solutions were the areas, already mentioned and this is where Peter concentrated the activities of his agents. Additional animals could have been acquired from Poland—Lithuania, but their transfer to the Caspian

⁸⁹ As Bruce notes the camels and the oxen never ate from the herbs, since they were "familiar" with them; see Bruce, *Memoirs*, 320.

⁹⁰ The cities on the Lower Volga – Saratov, Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan.

⁹¹ *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 193.

⁹² See Map 6 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

theater of war would require too much time and funds.⁹³ The Western Eurasian Steppe remained Russia's horse-breeding territory at the time. The other possible source could have been the peoples of the Caucasus, given that they agreed to assist the Russian advance. After the sacking of Enderi by the cavalry under Veterani, the Dagestani leaders united against Peter and denied him any chance to acquire a lot of horses or pack animals from their herds.⁹⁴

Regarding the pack animals, Peter had to arrange their acquisition from the local warlords, since their transportation from Russia would require too much time and would also deprive the peasants of their primary labor force, which, given the nature of the Russian economy, would be fatal for the Treasury's income.⁹⁵ Thus, Peter arranged with the shamkhal the acquisition of 7,000 oxen and 600 carts for the baggage train.⁹⁶ In addition, the army purchased a number of camels, which were also used to carry the equipment and the provisions of the troops and were quite useful in the hot summer days of late July and August. Even if these numbers seem to some extent high, as it turned out, the army was still in shortage of pack animals and on its way back tried to acquire more oxen from the population of Buynaksk.⁹⁷ Finally, after the expedition was over, Peter issued a decree on the further acquisition of pack animals and carts for the next campaign season.⁹⁸

These problems, however, did not slow the Russian advance and the army continued with superb speed. Again, given the conditions, the Russians performed well. They had to depend on local support for their baggage train. Horse supply for the cavalry was also problematic. Nevertheless, at the cost of additional human labor, the day-to-day problems of the campaign were overcome, and the army managed to reach Derbent in good order. The return march to Agrakhan also went without serious problems, except, of course, for the death of several hundred horses, caused by the above-mentioned poisonous herbs. In general, the Russians were able to provide enough animal power to support their effort and to achieve part of the campaign objectives. The inability

⁹³ Augustus II the Strong (1697-1706; 1709-1733) was an ally of Peter and probably would have agreed to sell horses to the Russians.

⁹⁴ Kurukin and Lockhart argue that the destruction of the Endirey capital united local rulers against Russia. This issue will be analyzed later on.

⁹⁵ Like the horses, which had to be marched on land in order to reach Agrakhan, the pack animals also needed land route. However, moving a large herd of oxen through northern Circassia would only tempt the local tribes to attack the convoy and steal as much animals as possible. Such an outcome would have jeopardized the entire campaign and Peter was probably well aware of this fact. The animals could not have been transported via ships, since the Russians did not possess vessels, big enough for the purpose, or at least not in the Caspian Sea.

⁹⁶ See Table 8 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

⁹⁷ During the march toward Derbent, Peter tried to negotiate additional cattle for his army, but locals responded that they only had cattle enough to meet their own needs. As soon as the locals realized that the Russians were marching back, they refused to sell them oxen and even allied with Mahmud of Utamysh.

⁹⁸ *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 192; The order was for the governor of Astrakhan – Volynskiy and contained the following arrangements: [To be purchased] 2,000 cattle, 500 bulls and 500 charts from Greben and Terki. The money was to be extracted from the annual income of the Astrakhan guberniya; In addition, the Senate was to raise 65,000 rubles for the acquisition of bulls and charts.

to continue the march after Derbent had nothing to do with the lack of pack animals or horses.

Guns and munitions

The transformation of Russia into a self-sufficient military power was one of Peter's main goals. This task was accomplished only to a certain level, and there were still things to be done. Regarding the production of gunpowder, guns, and munitions, it was already outlined that Russia was able to satisfy most of its needs, but still a sizable amount of weapons had to be imported. Furthermore, no standardization of the weaponry was achieved, and the army continued to use dozens of different calibers.

It would be rather hard to estimate the exact number of guns, employed by the Russians in the course of the Persian Campaign. Only I. Kurukin has given an accurate figure of the artillery train. He estimates a total of 196 guns, operated by 369 artillerymen under the command of Major Ivan Gerber.⁹⁹ According to the campaign journal some 96 guns were left in the garrisons, including Resht and Baku. Peter Bruce claims that the Derbent garrison was left with 150 guns. Though this number seems exaggerated, it suggests that the Russians captured a number of local guns when they occupied the city, and then deployed them as part of the new defenses, constructed at Peter's command.¹⁰⁰ Regardless of the exact figures, it is quite certain that the Russians had a great advantage over their local enemies, who hardly had anything resembling an artillery train. Neither Bruce nor the campaign journal gives any note on the usage of guns by the Dagestani forces.

Regarding the munitions and gunpowder supply for the campaign, of the available information is very little. The only concise summary up to this day is provided again by I. Kurukin. He estimates that only for the artillery there were 102,246 pieces of different munitions along with some 206 tons of gunpowder.¹⁰¹ The campaign journal and P. Bruce do not mention weapon supplies and there is no complaint from the army for lack of munitions or powder. Therefore, it could be concluded that as far as the provisioning of ammunition and gunpowder was concerned, the Russians did their job very well and managed to supply enough ammunition for the entire march south. In addition, it was a common practice for Peter to issue gun salutes on any holiday, which the Russians celebrated during the campaign, as well as when the army entered Tarki and Derbent. Taking also into consideration that there were no

⁹⁹ Kurukin, *Persidskiy Pokhod*, 55-6; The artillery was as follows: 2 1 pud howitzers, 1 5 pud howitzer, 4 2 pud mortars, 12 six pounder mortars and 177 other guns from different calibers. (1 pud = 16.38 kilograms).

¹⁰⁰ Usually Russian garrisons were supported by 20-30 cannons; see Table 6 in the Appendix for the current chapter. It was also supported by Abraham of Yerevan's narrative, that gunpowder weapons were not as scarce in Persia, as previously supposed.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 56; The munitions were as follows: 59,472 cannon balls, 2,874 bombs, 29,820 grenades, 10,080 grape shots, and 12,579 pud (206,044 kilograms) of gunpowder.

sieges and only one major engagement, the Russians did not need a lot of war materials during their march. Nevertheless, the effort to transport the guns and munitions through the Caspian Sea and then on land through Dagestan must not be underestimated.

Ships and naval transportation

So far on several occasions it became evident that Peter had a preference for shipping both supplies and troops in the course of the Persian Campaign. As already concluded, maritime transport was cheaper, faster and safer than its land equivalent. Ships could also deliver the required goods in a precise location, following the maps, which several expeditions in the Caspian provided.

The vessels, used by the Russians were constructed in the dockyards along the Volga River. Since there was too little time for preparation, most of the vessels were built by soldiers, rather than by professional carpenters and later on, after a series of problems, this became evident. The vessels were relatively small, and most of them were just large boats, rather than real ships or galleys. As it is evident from Table 1 for the current chapter, there is no unanimous estimate on the exact size of the Russian Caspian fleet.¹⁰² While Bruce refers to all vessels as galleys, scholars try to distinguish between sailing and oar-powered ships. The only certain thing is that only a small portion of the vessels was with sails while most of the fleet was powered by oar-power.¹⁰³

Following the arrival at Agrakhan bay, the fleet was left on anchor and, later on, was used to transport supplies as well as news and dispatches to and from Astrakhan. However, at the beginning of August, the first problems with the ships appeared. Verden reported as early as 4th August that the ships were leaking and sustained substantial damage. The next stroke came with the storm near Derbent, which sunk 12 vessels and destroyed part of the army's provisions. During the return sail from Agrakhan to Astrakhan, P. Bruce notes that they had a very serious breach in the hull of the galley on which he was sailing.¹⁰⁴ Finally, a storm on 3rd of October sunk several ships, before the fleet managed to enter the mouth of the Volga River. Due to the sustained losses in both vessels and provisions, Peter issued an order on 4th November 1722, according to which additional ships had to be built and concentrated in Astrakhan for the next campaign season.¹⁰⁵ It was the delay of their building that

¹⁰² See Table 1 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

¹⁰³ Kurukin estimates a total of 47 sailing and 400 oar-powered vessels; see Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 56. Lystsov gives the following: 3 snaw ships (Nederl. *Snauw*), 2 hegbots (Nederl. *Hekboot*), 1 *guker* (a type of sailing ship), 9 schuits, 17 *tyalok* (transport ships), 1 yaht, 7 *evers*, 12 galiots, 1 strugi, 34 transportation ships and many boats; see Lystsov, *Persidskiy Pokhod Petra I*, 116) L. Lockhart estimates a total of 274 vessels, without specifying their types, or the place, from which he took the figure; see Lockhart, *The Fall of the Šafavī*, 179.

¹⁰⁴ Bruce, *Memoirs*, 352-3.

¹⁰⁵ In Kazan, Astrakhan and Nizhny Novgorod 30 hekbots, 6 big boats (*botov*) and 30 smaller had to be built. In addition, each of these 66 vessels had to have a life-boat on it; see (*Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 174.

prolonged the time, needed by Matyushkin to organize his expedition against Baku in 1723.

Apart from the troubles with the ships, Peter also had to take care of the establishment of safe harbors if he was to use the maritime transportation as his main tool for supply. Following the return of Artemiy Volynskiy from Persia in 1719, Peter sent an expedition under Captains Soymonov and Verden to explore the western and southern shores of the Caspian and to look for appropriate places for the building of harbors.¹⁰⁶ In addition, two additional expeditions were carried out. The first, again under Soymonov, had to map the mouth of the Kura River in late November 1722.¹⁰⁷ The second, under Peter Henry Bruce, had to circumvent the Caspian shores in eastern and then – in southern direction.¹⁰⁸ The results of these expeditions, combined with the land observations, made by Peter during his march south, led to the establishment of several desired positions, in which ports were to be built in order to a massive naval line of communications to be created - spanning from Astrakhan, all the way to Resht.¹⁰⁹ According to Peter's project for future ports, it could clearly be seen that he was not only planning to establish a good logistics system to support his garrisons, but he also wanted to lay the foundations of a maritime trading network, crossing the Caspian Sea on its way south. The 1723 campaign's last expedition – the conquest of the Kura River mouth and the submission of the governor of Salyan secured Russia's dominance in the coastal regions. The next step was undertaken by the piece-time administration in order to establish the required ports for strengthening Russia's commercial and military position in the region.

The hasty preparations, as well as the considerable distance for satisfying the transportation needs, made the Russian naval effort a labor-consuming task. Nevertheless, Russia was blessed to be the only naval power in the Caspian Sea. Even though ships were slow to be built and provisions were hard to allocate, there was no maritime competition, and the only obstacle before the Russian naval projects was the climate.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately for Peter, the summer storms of 1722 sank a substantial part of his supply ships and prevent him from reaching the final destination of the campaign – the conquest of Baku. Nevertheless, during the following year, Russia was able to launch a successful expedition against Baku with which the Empire sealed its dominance in the Caspian Sea. By the time the treaty with the Ottomans was signed in 1724, the position of Russia in the region was cemented and secured. We must not be too judgmental toward the Russians as in 1724 the Russian Navy had existed for just 26 years. In comparison, Western European states had centuries of trans-oceanic

¹⁰⁶ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 40.

¹⁰⁷ The other purpose of the expedition was the landing of Colonel Shipov's troops near Resht.

¹⁰⁸ The entire expedition is well-documented in chapter IX of Bruce's *Memoirs*.

¹⁰⁹ See Map 7 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

¹¹⁰ As late as July 1723, the authorities in St. Cross fort had not yet completed the fortifications, due to lack of timber supplies from Astrakhan; see Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 94.

navigation experience. Therefore, although setbacks were evident, the young Russian Navy was finally able to achieve its purpose, even though it never met any actual resistance from its enemies.

The human factor

While logistics and armament are essential for the success of an army, it is the troops in it which are the heart of the entire system. Similar to all other nations in Europe, the Russians developed a generation of veteran soldiers, forged in the fires of the Great Northern War. It was exactly these experienced, battle-hardened veterans that marched southward with their Emperor into the ill-known lands of Dagestan. General accounts about the quality of the Russian soldiers differ. Some are quite critical of their lack of discipline and narrow-mindedness while others claim that the Russians were the best soldier stock in Europe. Probably the truth lies somewhere in the middle, and the comparative analysis between the qualities of the Russian soldier in comparison to his Western European counterparts is not a subject of the current dissertation. It is very important to note, is that the army, which followed Peter in Asia, was an experienced force, accustomed to marches, pitched battles, and swift manoeuvres. It had been formed under the fire of the Swedish artillery and in the face to face fight with one of the most formidable forces in seventeenth century Europe. The Russians won. When it comes to the quality of the personnel, Russia had a great advantage over the local gazi forces of the Dagestan warlords. It is precisely this professionalism that made it possible for Colonel Shipov to disperse a 15,000 strong mob in Resht with only a thousand troops.¹¹¹ It was this quality that allowed the garrison of 300 men in Milyukent to repel the attacks of a 12,000 strong force of local warriors and later - to retreat intact to Derbent.¹¹² One thing is certain - there is nothing miraculous about these successes. In fact, the Russian combat experience was no different than similar developments, which took place prior or after the Persian Campaign in other parts of Asia.¹¹³ Dutch, English, Portuguese, Spanish and French soldiers had already proven that it was not so much gunpowder, but determination, discipline and combat experience, which brought Europe's final success over its Asian rivals. Here is is useless to describe the physical shape of the Russian troops as Dagestani and Persian men were probably as well-built as any European.¹¹⁴ It

¹¹¹ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 87.

¹¹² *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 16-7.

¹¹³ Well-known examples are: the building of the *Estado da Índia*, the Dutch experience in the Far East, as well as Britain's latter success in India.

¹¹⁴ Throughout his description of Dagestan, P. Bruce constantly repeats the fine appearance of both men and women in the region. Peter also held a high esteem of the individual qualities of local fighters as it was previously noted. Thus, it would be erroneous to suspect any traces of "racial superiority" idea amongst the Russians. It is true that they referred to the Persians as barbarians, butso did they toward Europeans, especially before the Westernization trend unraveled in the course of the eighteenth century. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to place too much emphasize on concepts of "barbarity", commonly present in the primary sources.

was certainly not a matter of “racial superiority”, which spelled the preponderance of the Russian forces over their opponents.

The main body of the Russian army could be divided into two general categories – regular and irregular soldiers. Unlike most European armies, Russia continued to maintain a large contingent of irregular troops in order to combat its Asian enemies and pacify the vast eastern reaches of the Empire. The irregular cavalry comprised of either Cossacks, who inhabited the territories between the Dnieper and Volga rivers, or of Kalmyks, who had settled in the Lower Volga and around what would later become the province of Orenburg. Both societies belonged to the larger Frontier ethos, which was the dominant element in the struggle between the empires and states in Western Asia and Eastern Europe since Antiquity. Both Cossacks and Kalmyks were well-experienced soldiers, who participated in different expeditions and assignments on behalf of the Russian Empire. Fighting against Tatars and other eastern enemies made the irregular cavalry an indispensable part of any Russian project, focused on Asia. Peter was well-aware that his irregulars were the best tool for fighting against the gazi soldiers of Dagestan, and that is the main reason why these troops comprised one-half of his entire force. Except for their combat experience, Peter valued them for their ability to swiftly adapt to the frontier environment and for being able to use its elements for the benefit of their mission. This is why, for example, Peter used Cossacks and Kalmyks as vanguard and reconnoiter force, since they could find the best places for camping, and could also swiftly erect field fortifications to protect the camp and the baggage train from enemy depredations.¹¹⁵ In addition, the irregulars served as a perfect punitive force, when local warlords had to be subordinated by force. Peter was quite careful not to pillage enemy settlements by regular soldiers. The dirty work would always be carried out by the irregulars, thus removing any possible “dishonor” from the main army. In addition, pillaging was the only way the emperor could compensate the Cossacks and the Kalmyks since otherwise the upkeep of their numbers would be quite costly for the Treasury.¹¹⁶

The regular body of the army was comprised of three major components – the infantry, the dragoon cavalry and the artillery. Since no protracted sieges were expected, Peter did not include an engineer corps in his forces. The infantry consisted of standard infantry regiments and several grenadier regiments. In general, it was conscripted among the peasantry for a 25 years term. In the current campaign, however, most of the troops were drafted from different regiments, situated throughout the entire empire, rather than taken as

¹¹⁵ In addition, the Cossacks along with the dragoons were used as engineer forces, when the land in front of the army had to be leveled or when bridges had to be built; see *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 63.

¹¹⁶ The 7,000 heads of cattle and the war prisoners, captured by the Cossacks and the Kalmyks in September 1722 were given as booty to them and their leaders; see *Pokhodnoy Zhurnal 1722*, 89; P. H. Bruce, *Memoirs*, 350.

fresh recruits.¹¹⁷ The dragoons were also experienced soldiers and due to their close cooperation with the Cossacks and the Kalmyks, were somewhat different than their western counterparts and fit better in a comparison to the Polish or Hungarian hussars. During the Caspian expedition, the dragoons were expected to be the main striking force of the army. They were as fast as the local gazi horsemen and were well armed with both muskets and sabers.¹¹⁸ After the Battle near Buynaksk, the dragoons along with the Cossacks and the Kalmyks followed the enemy retreat and played part in the conquest of the Utamysh settlement. Nevertheless, Peter did not hesitate to use his regular soldiers when it came to building forts. Dragoons were employed in the construction of all garrison posts, which the army erected during the campaign. A substantial number of them were left in St. Cross fort to assist the Cossacks in the construction works.

In the course of the Persian Campaign, the Russian army proved to be an effective force, capable of routing local resistance with ease. The main problems of the army were not related to the enemy, but rather derived from logistics and weather conditions. The heat, followed by rapid cold and the frequency of the storms certainly had their impact on the army. In addition diseases, uncommon in Russia struck a severe blow at the state of the army. In general, the men performed well, and there were no reports of mutinies according to the available sources. Kurukin notes a certain number of deserters, but it would be hard to estimate any exact figures.¹¹⁹ The realities of the campaign were also part of the reasons for the considerably lower level of desertion. First and foremost, any Russian deserters in Dagestan would have found it impossible to return to Russia on their own, since the only two options were the Navy at Agrakhan or the land route to Tarki, both of which were under strict state control. In addition, the locals had no sympathy for the Russians, and any captured deserter would probably end in slavery or worse.¹²⁰ Therefore, only extreme desperation would urge a man to abandon the relatively safety of the column in exchange for the dangers of the local lands.

Since the campaign itself lasted for a relatively short time, it would be hard to reconstruct the daily routine of the soldiers. Based on the scarce materials it could be presumed that the army often began its march early in the morning, somewhere between 5 and 6 a.m. During the day several rests were allowed, the longest at noon, lasting for one or two hours. In the afternoon, the

¹¹⁷ The Campaign Journal notes that on 10th July, 1722 certain number of regiments was brought to Astrakhan by Brigadier Matyushkin. The total number of soldiers, listed in the source is as follows: "...[From all regimental ranks], 20 soldiers form the *Preobrazhenskiy*, *Semyonovskiy* - 10, *Astrakhanskiy* - 328, *Moskovskiy* - 440, *Koporskiy* - 568, *Galitskiy* - 489, *Nizhegorodskiy* - 62, *Vyborskiy* - 86, *Troitskiy* - 15, *Sibirskiy* - 512, *Pskovskiy* - 64, *Voronezhskiy* - 517, *Velikolutskiy* - 572, *Arkhangelogorodskiy* - 561, all 4,304 [The actual sum is 4,244] including 140 sick..."; see *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 48; Recruitments were, however, carried out, and I. Kurukin estimates that a total of 22,500 men were drafted on the basis of two recruits in 1722; see Kurukin, *Persidskiy Pokhod*, 84.

¹¹⁸ Muskets and sabers were only used when the troops were dismounted.

¹¹⁹ See Table 10 in the Appendix for the current chapter. Kurukin, however, estimates a much higher rate of desertions than Lystsov.

¹²⁰ As obvious in the fate of Peter's emissaries to Mahmud of Utamysh..

march continued until 5 or 6 p.m., but if the column did not reach a suitable location, the movement could last until such was found. Soldiers were sleeping in tents, although, Kurukin mentions that the number of tents was insufficient for the entire army.¹²¹ As already mentioned, bread, sukhari and meat were the main parts of the soldier's diet. Water was the main drink allowed, since alcohol was prohibited, due to the heat. It is for certain that the best days for the soldiers were when the army was encamped in the vicinity of Derbent and Tarki. Drinks and additional food could be purchased in local markets. Regarding the non-combat camp followers, it is hard to determine their numbers and their designation. It is certain that Peter did not take any civilians on his ships, but local camp-followers probably formed as early as the end of July, when P. Bruce notes that local merchants came to sell oxen, camels, and horses to the army. He again mentions that after the departure from Tarki (16th August) he was able to purchase two camels to carry his baggage.¹²² Neither the Journal nor Bruce gives any additional detail on the camp-followers. But it could be assumed that there were also women and probably boys, offering their services as servants.¹²³ A further investigation of the daily life of the Russian garrisons in the newly occupied lands is well developed in I. Kurukin's work, but is not a concern of the current research.

Marching

Marching was an essential part of soldiers' lives during the Persian Campaign. Nevertheless, the time, which the army spent moving, must not be overestimated. From a total of 43 days spent in Dagestan, only 23 were spent in moving. Taking this into consideration, the distance, covered by the army in each march between two camping points, as well as the total length of the army's route is estimated in the current dissertation.¹²⁴ In total, the Russians covered a distance of 490 kilometers with an average of 21 kilometers per day. The medium marching speed of a late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century army was approximately 22 kilometers. This shows that the Russians did a fine job in advancing through a land with a broken terrain, where no roads existed, and the landscape had to be leveled now and then so that the army could enhance its speed if the situation required it. For example, Peter sent his dragoons and irregulars to chase the retreating Dagestani. The pursuit lasted for several hours, in which time the cavalry covered a distance of 21 kilometers and managed to besiege and take the capital of Utamysh and to return to the camp on

¹²¹ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 51.

¹²² Bruce, *Memoirs*, 316 and 327.

¹²³ It could be argued that the locals, being Muslims did not allow their women to accompany the Russians. However, early modern Christians were as conservative as Muslims in that matter and still, Europe was full of female camp-followers. Therefore, probably similar groups existed in Western Asia as well.

¹²⁴ For a full summary of the marches, see Table 4 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

the following day.¹²⁵ Taking into consideration that the Russians did not have a good preliminary knowledge of the terrain and that the weather conditions, along with the problems of supply with food and water, were all acting against them, Peter's men did very well. The army's march was rapid on its own, although a lot of time was spent in camps near Derbent, Tarki, and Buynaksk. It is debatable whether the army could have marched the remaining distance between Derbent and Baku by the end of the campaign season. The distance between these two settlements is 231 kilometers.¹²⁶ If the Russians had kept their medium marching speed for the southern march (21.2 kilometers), it would have taken them approximately 11 days of marching to reach Baku. If we add additional 11 days in which the army would not march, Peter could have reached Baku sometime in the end of September 1722. We know, from the Staff meeting, which took place on 29th August, that the Russians had provisions for one more month. This means that, in theory, Peter could have marched his troops to Baku and captured it by the end of September. However, if he had done that, he would have risked the starvation of his army, since the supply ships were badly damaged and the ships in Agrakhan Bay already displayed problems. Thus, carelessness of the Russian leader toward human life must not be overestimated.

To conclude, the Russians were able to maintain a steady speed of 21 kilometers per day during the entire campaign and covered a total of 490 kilometers within only 23 days of actual marching. In comparison, Marlborough's famous rapid march to the Danube took him five weeks, in which the army covered 400 kilometers.¹²⁷ To put it in other words, Marlborough's "exceptional" movement took 35 days to march to distance, 100 kilometers shorter than the Russian movement, and only a week faster.¹²⁸ Thus, the marching speed of the Russians is quite impressive and shows Peter's ability to mobilize the potential of his troops in the pursuit of the campaign objectives.

Keeping the conquest

Marching an army and defeating enemies was not sufficient to seal a true victory. The only way for Peter to prove the success of his plan was to manage to maintain his conquest after his main army left Dagestan in September 1722.

¹²⁵ Sometime between 4 p.m. and 9 p.m. The army returned in 5 p.m. on the following day; see *Pokhodnyy Zhurnal 1722*, 117-9.

¹²⁶ For the distance between Derbent and Baku in kilometers; see <http://www.distancefromto.net/distance-from-baku-az-to-derbent-ru>.

¹²⁷ See D.G. Chandler, "The art of war on land" in J.S. Bromley (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History: The rise of Great Britain and Russia, 1688-1715/25*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 741-762.

¹²⁸ If we compare a medium marching speed, taking all days of both movements, we get an average of 11.42 kilometers per day for Marlborough's army and 11.39 kilometers per day for Peter's forces. Unlike Marlborough, Peter was not marching in well-developed rural area with roads and available points of communication. This makes the Russian achievement even more impressive.

He was well aware of this fact and made all possible arrangements to erect a chain of fortified positions to protect his lines of communications and to secure the conquests, achieved so far. As soon as the army reached Agrakhan on 28th July, Peter ordered a fortified camp to be erected to protect the landing and the fleet. After the army embarked, the garrison of the fort comprised of a total of 1600 soldiers, including the ones who were sick. Peter's next step was to reach Tarki. It is interesting that he did not place a Russian garrison there, but only left a regiment of troops to protect the shamkhal.¹²⁹ The next garrison to be established was on the Milyukent River to protect the future harbor there. After it became apparent that the army had to march back, Peter also strengthened the garrison of Derbent. North of Derbent Peter established a small fortified post on the Inchi River to protect the road between Tarki and Derbent from the Sultan of Utamysh. Finally, the largest newly-built fort was placed on the influx of the Agrakhan and Sulak rivers, namely the St. Cross fort. It was designed by Peter Bruce. The plan consisted of five bastions, and two demi-bastions next to the river on the south side, with ravelins and a covered way with a palisade; on the north-side were six bastions, also with ravelins and a covered way; the two sides were to communicate by a bridge in the middle, over the river. It is evident that the emperor decided to use a western-style fortification, even though it was mainly constructed of wood, brought from Astrakhan or the woods, upstream the Sulak River.¹³⁰

As soon as the army left Dagestan, the instability of the Russian position was revealed. Peter was still marching between Buynaksk and the Sulak, when Mahmud of Utamysh managed to destroy the Inchi garrison and to force the Milyukent garrison into abandoning their position. Peter responded to the new threat by strengthening the St. Cross fort and dispatching a flying corps of 5,000 Cossacks and Kalmyks, who once again destroyed the capital of Utamysh and plundered a big portion of its riches. In early 1723 Peter sent additional 12,000 Cossacks to strengthen Russia's hold of Dagestan and to counter the alliance of the mountain warlords against Russia.

With regard to the two southern positions - Baku and Resht, Peter acted in a similar manner. Resht was initially held with a small force, which was later strengthened while Baku was conquered with a substantial number of soldiers and garrisoned by the chief of the Caspian Theater – lieutenant-general Matyushkin. Artillery pieces were also provided and by the autumn of 1723,

¹²⁹ The shamkhal Adil Girei was a vassal of Peter. Placing a garrison probably means that the Emperor did not trust his vassal, which undermines the position of the shamkhal. Peter could not afford to have a disturbed situation in his back, while marching toward Derbent. It could be presumed that he preferred to leave Tarki to the shamkhal.

¹³⁰ The fashion of the fort resembles the trace italienne. However, the need to place such a fortress is somewhat uncertain in a region, where no substantial artillery existed. Nevertheless, Peter always demonstrated a strong desire to apply western ways in his own dealings and the approval of Bruce's sophisticated entrenchments may serve as an example. On the other hand, the importance of the enterprise for Peter's plans must not be underestimated. In addition, if there was an Ottoman intervention, the Russians would indeed need better forts to withstand the Ottoman incursions and the raids of their Tatar vassals.

Russia possessed a system of well-fortified positions, which were to guarantee its strong presence in the region and to convince the Ottomans to abandon any hope of repelling the Russians north of the Terek River.

Paying the Price

Like any other military effort, the Persian Campaign had its price. While it was not as costly and life-consuming as the Northern War, the Persian Campaign was indeed a laborious effort for Russia, mainly because of the speed with which Peter urged the preparations. Like any military “cost”, the toll of the Caspian expeditions could be measured in two different aspects – the price in money and materials and the human casualties.

It would be impossible to calculate exactly how much resources were used to build the Caspian fleet, to erect the Dagestan garrisons or to feed and supply the army. The cost of human labor is also impossible to calculate since most of the work was done by both regular and irregular soldiers, rather than professional engineers and specialists. Also, there is no certainty on the exact proportions of the food, timber, and other materials, extracted from Russia to support the southern effort. What we know are some basic numbers, collected by I. Kurukin, during his work in the Russian archives. These numbers are summarized in Table 11 in the Appendix for the current chapter. What is evident from these numbers is that more than half of the 1722 state expenditure for military purposes was spent on the provisioning of ships and munitions for the army. The 320,000 rubles listed as supplies, might also include part of the ammunition for the army, but it could be assumed that the larger portion was spent on food supplies, uniforms and other goods, concerning the life of the soldiers. What is also surprising is that the money, spent to bribe foreign officers and warlords were almost four times as much as the money spent on medicines.¹³¹ In total, the 1722 expeditions cost the state around 1,000,000 rubles, which was a substantial part of the state’s revenue at that time.¹³²

The human cost is also hard to estimate. Lystsov calculates a total loss of 11,545 men due to desertion, death and dismissal from service.¹³³ In his recent work, I. Kurukin estimates a higher loss due to diseases and desertion.¹³⁴ He does not manage to provide a summary in the manner of Lystsov, but rather notes certain cases, available in the documents of the Russian archives. Until 16th October 1722, Kurukin estimates some 2,700 dead, 3,936 sick and more than 200 deserters or a total of 6,836 casualties, almost all of them non-

¹³¹ It seems that the state put additional effort in the following two years, since in 1724 a total of 7,000 beds for sick and injured were established in the five main points of Russian power in the Caspian; see Table 9 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

¹³² Russia’s state revenue in 1723 was 6,042,000 rubles. An educated guess for 1722 would be to estimate the state revenue to 6,000,000, which means that the total expense of the campaign would amount to 1/6 of the state revenue or 16.6 per cent; see Table 5 in the Appendix for Chapter II.

¹³³ See Table 10 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

¹³⁴ It must be noted that Lystsov does not put the sick in his estimates.

combat.¹³⁵ Out of an infantry of 18,602, these losses count for more than 33 per cent of the total force. Regarding the combat casualties, according to the campaign journal, between 212 and 241 soldiers were killed, 20 or 121 were wounded and two were captured by the enemy. The combat casualties were only around 275 out of more than 6,800 in total, which is a quite insignificant number.¹³⁶ In comparison, the enemy lost either 1,926 or 2,126 killed and between 357 and 367 captured.¹³⁷ The situation was even more problematic in the cavalry. On 16th October, a total of 6,925 dragoons returned to Astrakhan, accompanied by only 956 horses. Another 588 dragoons were left in Dagestan as garrisons.¹³⁸ According to Kurukin, the dragoons in the beginning of the campaign numbered 8,786, which mean that 1,273 dragoons died during the expedition, along with at least 7,800 horses.¹³⁹ The total casualties for the entire campaign, according to Kurukin's estimates, would be 8,109 or approximately 33 per cent of the total regular forces in the army.¹⁴⁰ The problem with the high level of sickness continued in the following year, when Colonel Shipov reported from Resht that of 1110 soldiers, 315 were sick.¹⁴¹ The actual numbers are hard to determine. What is certain from the numbers, given above, is that the Russian regular forces suffered 33 per cent casualties, of which almost all were non-combat. It is clear that the climate and the new variety of diseases took a heavier toll than any enemy force was able to inflict. However, these were soldiers, quite unaccustomed to the climate and to the general conditions of the Caspian region. In a similar situation, other European expeditions in the New World and in Asia suffered a very high degree of mortality, due to sickness, food poisoning and the differences in the climate.

The locals

The final element regarding the performance of the Russian troops is not directly related to the army itself. Nevertheless it was essential for the development of the Persian Campaign. The local population has always been an important part of any military operation, especially in modern times. As the combat experience of the USSR and the USA has shown in the past forty years, no matter how powerful a country is, if it does not win the allegiance of the natives, its campaigns would remain victorious only in the field.

¹³⁵ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 78.

¹³⁶ Taking the highest possible figures; see Table 5 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

¹³⁷ See *ibid*.

¹³⁸ Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 79.

¹³⁹ If it is presumed that for each dragoon there was at least one horse this would mean that out of 8,786 horses, only 956 survived while 7,830 perished.

¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately there is no information about how many Kalmyks and Cossacks were killed or got sick in the course of the campaign.

¹⁴¹ This would mean some 35 per cent of the total force. The report came only a month after the capture of Resht; see Kurukin, *Persidskiy pokhod*, 87.

The pursuit of Peter's ambition placed the Russian Empire in the same situation. While Peter was confident in his power on the southern march, none of the local leaders confronted him openly and even, the sultan of Utamysh did not actually risk a pitched battle, but retreated as soon as the Russians advanced on his position. On the other hand, when it became apparent that Peter was returning north, an army of 20,000 Dagestani horsemen was swiftly assembled by Mahmud of Utamysh, the Usmi of the Qaitaq, Mohammad of Aksay and Daud Beg of the Lesgins. Although this force was too weak to overcome the power of Peter's veteran army, it was sufficient to harass the Russian movement and to destroy two of the main outposts, established by the Emperor. Later on, Adil Girai of Tarki secretly joined the anti-Russian coalition and tried to avoid the entering of the Russian army on its return march.¹⁴² However, Tarki was far too vulnerable to oppose Russia and Girei had to reconsider his position and maintain his allegiance to Peter. The Dagestani were not ready to accept the Ottoman suzerainty either. As soon as Daud Beg was proclaimed governor of Shirvan, the Utamysh, Aksay and the Qaitaq withdrew from his alliance and opposed his pretense to be their overlord. In general, the Caucasian warlords were not very happy with the possibility to be incorporated by either Russia or the Ottomans. The long established tradition of local autonomy was the status quo for which these chieftains strived. In this sense, the disintegration of the Safavid Empire was on the one hand favorable, since they achieved their independence, but on the other - the interference of the Russians and the Ottomans made the situation complicated and uncertain. Therefore, the warlords tried to balance between the powers in order to secure their own position. As it turned out, neither Russia nor the Ottoman Empire were able to impose their direct control on the mountainous tribes. The control of the garrisons and the major settlements reduced the tribes' possibilities for plunder, but could not deny them the advantage of mobility. The guerilla-style war, waged by the Dagestani was impossible for the Russians to cope with and only partial control could be achieved. It would take more than a century before Russia was finally able to subdue most of the Caucasus and rein in the various tribes, which inhabited the region.

4.6. Conclusion

To give a concise evaluation of the Russian military efforts during the Persian Campaign would be rather hard. It is certain that Peter possessed an army, which surpassed all local bands of gazi soldiers, or anything that the Persians or the Afghans could place on the field. Peter's main opponents were the Ottomans, but they were as reluctant as he was to risk any major conflict given the

¹⁴² Three Russian envoys were killed a day before the army reached Tarki. Adil Girei was able to accuse his cousins and handed them to Peter as hostages. Thus, Girei managed not only to escape the revenge of the Russians, but also to remove some of the opposition in his own realm.

uncertain gains in a region, which had been so troublesome to control. Thus, there was no real military threat to the advance of the Russian forces. The army was well-trained and achieved an amazing speed of marching in a territory, deprived of infrastructure and favorable conditions. Combat was scarce and could be categorized as skirmishes, rather than actual battles. In this sense, Russia had a total military superiority over her enemies in the Caspian region.

Yet, the question about what were the problems remains. The first and foremost obstacle before the Russian advance was the climate of the region. Powerful summer storms, combined with the sharp temperature variations had a lot to do with the high level of sickness, which took its toll of the Russian army and garrisons. The second problem was the supplying of the army with fresh food and water. While food had to be imported or collected from the reluctant natives, water had to be taken from the wells and rivers of Dagestan. Water was rather salty and instead of slaking the thirst of the soldiers, it became a supplement to the heat in harassing the marching troops. Finally, Peter urged his state and army too much. Preparations for the campaign were carried out hastily, and many things remained unfinished or unsupplied. Uniforms, tents, water-carriers, carts, oxen and other goods were not sufficient, and their lack had to be compensate by acquisitions or additional purchases. There was no real reconnaissance of the terrain, and no measures were taken to protect the horses from the poisonous plants, which took as many animal lives as the heat and the lack of provisions.

Although as a military achievement the campaign was fully successful in terms of securing the Caspian Sea for Russia, the logistics failed to demonstrate the ability of the northern Empire to march adequately its armies outside Europe. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the same issues were experienced by other European armies on the Continent. Over 20,000 Austrians and Prussians perished from hunger and disease during the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778-1779), and many more died during the Seven Years War. What the Russian experience confirmed, however, was that small, well-equipped contingents achieved far greater success in Caucasian conditions than large armies. The major acquisitions of the Persian Campaign – Baku and Resht were conquered by a combined force of some 5-6,000 troops and 40-50 cannons. Similar patterns were present during the British expansion in India and the earlier operations of the Portuguese and the Dutch. Even today, the armies, used by the USA to conquer territories in Asia are relatively small, given the scale of the enemy resistance and the size of the states. Nevertheless, a pattern that was evident in Russia in 1722 is still visible in the actions of US army some 290 years later – the battles themselves take fewer lives in comparison to the non-combat or post-combat casualties.