The secret intelligence from Tilsit

NEW LIGHT ON THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE BRITISH BOMBARDMENT OF COPENHAGEN IN 1807

BY

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Introduction

'The secret intelligence from Tilsit' is a murky aspect of a much larger story – the upheavals that turned international relations in Europe upside down in the last seven months of 1807.[1] In early June 1807, Napoleon was the master of continental western Europe. Spain was his ally, he controlled mainland Italy and the Low Countries and, since crushing the Prussian army at Jena in October 1806, virtually the whole of Germany and Poland. He was opposed in northern Europe by a coalition made up of Russia, Prussia, Sweden and Britain. There was some fighting in north-western Germany, where the Swedes held out in the province of Swedish Pomerania, but the main theatre of operations was in eastern Poland, where Napoleon faced the main Russian field army. The emperor of Russia, Alexander I, was bitter that he carried the main burden of the war alone – Austria, the only neutral great power, refused to enter the war against France, and Britain had failed to mount any kind of diversion that might relieve the pressure on Russia by landing forces somewhere in northern Germany. When Napoleon inflicted a severe defeat on the Russians and what was left of the Prussian army at Friedland on 14 June 1807, Alexander was quick to think in terms of

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adopting an entirely new system of foreign policy. The result was the famous meeting between Alexander and Napoleon on a raft in the river Niemen at Tilsit on 25 June and the signature on 7 July not only of a peace treaty but also of a secret treaty of alliance between Russia and France.

Under the terms of the peace treaty, Alexander was to offer the British government his mediation for the conclusion of peace between Britain and France, but the treaty of alliance clearly anticipated that Russia would join France by the end of the year in making war against Britain. In that event, Denmark, Portugal and Sweden would be compelled by Franco-Russian pressure to declare war on Britain. These stipulations represented a great victory for Napoleon. On 21 November 1806, Napoleon had issued the Berlin Decree, which declared the British Isles under blockade and prohibited all commerce with them. The treaty of alliance signed at Tilsit opened up the prospect that not only Russia but also Denmark, Portugal and Sweden would adhere to Napoleon's great campaign to override the effects of British naval supremacy by subjecting Britain to economic strangulation.

Future events did not entirely follow the pattern anticipated. By the end of the year, Russia was indeed at war with Britain and had closed her ports to British shipping, but matters were more complicated in the case of the three smaller countries. The neutral state of Denmark was attacked by Britain before any Franco-Russian pressure could be applied to her. In mid-August 1807, a seaborne British army landed on Zealand and secured the surrender of the Danish fleet after Copenhagen had endured three nights of terror bombardment. In response, Denmark declared war on Britain and became the ally of France and Russia. As for Portugal, the country was occupied by a French army, but the Portuguese court and the Portuguese fleet escaped to Brazil. In contrast to Denmark and Portugal, Sweden was not neutral and she proved recalcitrant about abandoning her war against France or her alliance with Britain. In consequence, she was invaded by Russia in February 1808 and it was not until the following year that she was successfully coerced.[2]

The collapse of Britain's alliance with Russia and the emergence of a new alliance between France and Russia directed against Britain are the background against which the secret intelligence from Tilsit needs to be

[2] For a concise and incisive account of events in Europe between late 1806 and early 1808, see Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 305-331 & 338-339.

considered. The point of departure for any investigation of the secret intelligence from Tilsit must be a definition of what is meant by that term. In this article, it will be used to describe the information contained in the postscript to the private letter the British foreign secretary, George Canning, wrote to his friend, the British ambassador to Russia, Lord Granville Leveson Gower, on 21 July 1807. The postscript is dated 22 July.

> Since I finished my letter to you at two o'clock this morning I have received intelligence which appears to rest on good authority, coming directly from Tilsit, that, at a conference between the Emperor of Russia and Bonaparte, the latter proposed a maritime league against Great Britain to which Denmark and Sweden and Portugal should be invited or forced to accede. The Emperor of Russia is represented not indeed to have agreed to the proposition but not to have said anything against it. He preserved a profound silence which is attributed in the report made to me to the presence at the conference of persons before whom he probably would not like to open himself. I think it right to give notice to you [of] this information; but it is strictly in confidence for Your Excellency alone, as the knowledge of it would infallibly compromise my informer. If this be true our fleet in the Baltic may have more business than we expected. Ascertain the facts, if possible, and write by the quickest mode; and by more than one.[3]

The secret intelligence reappears in a slightly different form in Canning's instructions to Brook Taylor, the newly appointed British minister to Denmark, on the same day.

> Intelligence reached me yesterday directly from Tilsit that at an interview which took place between the Emperor of Russia and Bonaparte on the 24th. or 25th. of last month the latter brought forward a proposal for a maritime league against Great Britain, to which the accession of Denmark was represented by Bona-

[3] Canning to Gower, 21 July 1807. The original of this letter, in Canning's hand, is in Gower's private papers, which are in the Public Record Office, London [cited as PRO] – PRO 38/29/8/4. There is another copy in fine secretarial hand in Canning's private papers, Leeds District Archive, George Canning Papers [cited as LDA], HAR/GC/42; and the postscript is printed in A.N. Ryan, 'Documents relating to the Copenhagen operation, 1807', *Publications of the Navy Record Society*, vol. 125, *The Naval Miscellany*, vol. 5 (1984), pp. 307-308.

> parte to be as certain as it was essential. The Emperor of Russia is described as having neither accepted nor refused this proposal. His silence is attributed to the presence of persons before whom he was not likely to speak with perfect openness.[4]

In the course of June and July 1807, the British government naturally received other pieces of intelligence from Tilsit and elsewhere about Napoleon's plans and the new relationship that was emerging between France and Russia, but the information which Canning transmitted to Gower and Taylor on 22 July has generally been regarded as *the* secret intelligence from Tilsit. It is not my purpose to attempt to assess the impact of the secret intelligence from Tilsit, among the welter of other reports and rumours reaching London, on the formulation of British policy. This article has more restricted goals. First, it will describe how the secret intelligence was first announced to the world in late 1807 and early 1808 and what historians have subsequently said about its source. It has been clear for some decades now that Canning derived his information from the comte d'Antraigues, a French émigré resident in London since September 1806, and the article will therefore also say something about d'Antraigues and his position in Anglo-Russian relations. Thirdly, I shall demonstrate that d'Antraigues told Canning that his intelligence came from a letter sent to him by Prince Troubetzkoi, one of the aides de camp to Emperor Alexander l of Russia, from Tilsit on 27 June. Finally, the article will investigate whether the alleged letter from Troubetzkoi is genuine or whether it was partially or entirely concocted by d'Antraigues. The primary goal of the article, in other words, is to explore whether the secret intelligence from Tilsit should be regarded as reliable information.

The debate on the secret intelligence from Tilsit

It was the outbreak of war first with Denmark, and then with Russia, in the latter part of 1807 that prompted the British government to claim that it possessed secret intelligence from Tilsit that France and Russia had agreed to force the two neutral states of Denmark and Portugal to join a maritime league against Britain. The proclamation issued in the name of George III on 25 September 1807 in response to the Danish

[4] PRO, desp. 3, Canning to Taylor, 22 July 1807, FO 22/53; printed in J. Holland Rose, 'A British Agent at Tilsit', *English Historical Review*, vol. XVI (1901) [cited as Rose 1901], p. 717.

declaration of war on Britain did no more than hint at the secret intelligence from Tilsit when it referred to 'the design ... of subjecting the powers of Europe to one universal usurpation, and of combining them by terror or by force in a confederacy against the maritime rights and political existence of this kingdom.'[5] The king's proclamation of 18 December 1807 replying to the Russian declaration of war was somewhat more explicit.

> His Majesty feels himself under no obligation to offer any atonement or apology to the Emperor of Russia for the expedition against Copenhagen. It is not for those who were parties to the secret arrangements of Tilsit, to demand satisfaction for a measure to which those measures gave rise, and by which one of the objects of them has been happily defeated.[6]

The secret intelligence from Tilsit was mentioned again on 21 January 1808 in the lords commissioners' speech to the new session of the British parliament that opened that day. Great events had occurred on the international stage since the previous parliamentary session had ended on 14 August 1807, and the speech read out by the lord chancellor was largely devoted to them. On the subject of the secret intelligence, the speech claimed that 'no sooner had the result of the negotiations at Tilsit confirmed the influence and control of France over the powers of the continent than His Majesty was apprized of the intention of the enemy to combine those powers in one general confederacy'. States that had hitherto been neutral were to be forced into hostility to Britain so as 'to bring to bear against the different points of His Majesty's dominions the whole of the naval force of Europe, and specifically the fleets of Portugal and Denmark.'[7]

In the ensuing debates on the speech in the two houses of parliament, many supporters of the Portland administration declared that they were prepared to trust the word of the government and that the source of the secret information should not be divulged 'to the curiosity of [parliament], or to the vengeance of Bonaparte.'[8] There was, however, heavy criticism from the opposition over a wide front about the attack on Denmark, and some of this criticism rested on scepticism con-

[5] *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time*, vol. 10 (London, 1812) [cited as Parl. Deb. 10], pp. 117-118.

[6] *Parl. Deb. 10*, pp. 122-123.

[7] *Parl. Deb. 10*, pp. 1-2.

[8] *Parl. Deb. 10*, pp. 46, 55 (quotation), 84, 88-89, 92.

cerning the government's claim that it possessed secret information from Tilsit.[9] In the lords, the home secretary, Lord Hawkesbury, insisted that the government had received information that there were 'secret engagements' in the treaty of Tilsit to use the Portuguese and Danish navies against Britain. The evidence could not, however, possibly be produced, because it would destroy the confidence on which the receipt of privileged information rested and would endanger the lives of individuals.[10]

In the commons, Canning, who as foreign secretary took the lead for the government on this point, declared that the government would never reveal the secret intelligence from Tilsit. And he asked the classic rhetorical question: 'Was this country to say to the agents, who served it from fidelity, or from less worthy motives, you shall never serve us but once, and your life shall be the forfeit?' Canning conceded that the government did not have possession of the actual secret articles concluded at Tilsit, but he insisted 'that the substance of such secret articles had been confidentially communicated to His Majesty's government.'[11]

The attack on Denmark was debated repeatedly in both houses of parliament from late January until 8 April 1808, but the government never became more forthcoming about the secret intelligence from Tilsit. Indeed, ministers proved disinclined to discuss the subject further. In the first debate in the Commons devoted solely to the expedition against Copenhagen on 3 February, Canning spoke for three hours, but it was clear that he now wished to concentrate on criticising the Danish government for its alleged long-standing hostility to Britain and subservience towards France. As for the secret intelligence from Tilsit, he merely reiterated in passing that ministers would never divulge their source.[12]

The government had a secure majority in both houses, and all assaults were easily repelled, but the opposition was able to allege with some plausibility that ministers had shifted the ground of their argument.[13] Some went further and claimed that the secret intelligence from Tilsit did not exist at all. On 11 February, Lord Grey, the leader of the Foxites and foreign secretary in the previous Grenville administration, was quite explicit on this point when he referred to the claim that there was 'a secret article in the treaty of Tilsit, in which Russia pledged

[9] *Parl. Deb. 10*, pp. 13, 18, 30, 59, 68, 69, 72-73, 74-75, 86-87, 92, 94.
[10] *Parl. Deb. 10*, pp. 28-29.
[11] *Parl. Deb. 10*, p. 63, 93.
[12] *Parl. Deb. 10*, pp. 267-287.
[13] *Parl. Deb. 10*, pp. 292, 303, 357, 378-379, 652.

herself that the Danish fleet should be at the disposal of France ... he did not believe in the existence of any such article.'[14] Lord Grenville, the former prime minister was just as harsh: ministers had at first tried to justify Copenhagen by reference to some alleged secret articles in the treaty of Tilsit 'tantamount to a stipulation for the surrender of the Danish fleet to France, [but] ... it was now manifest, there were no secret articles or arrangements at Tilsit ... to justify the Danish expedition.'[15]

The parliamentary debates between January and April 1808 put an end to the secret intelligence from Tilsit as a matter of topical political discussion, and the question was left to the historians. On 3 August 1812, a few weeks after d'Antraigues's death, the *Morning Chronicle* claimed that he was the man who passed the secret intelligence from Tilsit to Canning, adding that he had received a substantial annual pension from the British government in return for this service. In the nineteenth century, British and French historians generally took this same view.[16] A notable exception was d'Antraigues's first biographer, Léonce Pingaud, who grumbled that this supposition was accepted as 'an established fact' [*un fait acquis*], but argued that it could not be true, since d'Antraigues was in London at the time and in no position to obtain information about what was happening at Tilsit.[17] There was also the legend that a British spy had been concealed on the raft during the first interview between Napoleon and Alexander I and had overheard their conversation. A third possibility that was mentioned was Talleyrand, the French plenipotentiary who signed the actual treaty of Tilsit and who was accused of having betrayed its secrets to the British in the spurious memoirs of Fouché.[18]

All such stories were fairly speculative, but the debate moved into a new phase between 1896 and 1908, when a number of articles were published after scholars were given access to the British foreign office papers for 1807. The lead was taken by John Holland Rose, who was the first to locate and publish in 1901 Canning's instructions to Brook Taylor on 22 June 1807. Learned discussion produced no agreement on the source of Canning's intelligence.

Some urged the claims of a certain Colin Alexander Mackenzie. These assertions largely rested on a tradition handed down within his

[14] *Parl. Deb. 10*, p. 453.

[15] *Parl. Deb. 10*, pp. 658-659.

[16] John Hall, *Four Famous Mysteries* (London, 1922) [cited as Hall], p. 24.

[17] Léonce Pingaud, *Un agent secret sous la Révolution et l'Empire. Le comte d'Antraigues* (second edition, Paris, 1894) [cited as *Pingaud*], p. 327.

[18] *Hall*, pp. 10-11.

family that he had overheard the first conversation between the two emperors, disguised as a Cossack, whose uniform he had acquired 'by means of gold and liquor,'[19] but he also made an attractive suspect in that he was in some sort an agent of the British government. He was attached to Gower's mission with the intention that he should serve as a volunteer with the Russian army in Poland and provide the British government with independent information on the progress of military operations.[20] He only reached Memel on 10 June 1807, too late for Friedland, but he did spend a few days at Russian army headquarters after the battle. He was introduced to the Russian commander defeated at Friedland, General Bennigsen, by Prince Troubetzkoi and Dr. James Wylie, a Scotsman in Russian service, and received a general invitation to dine at Bennigsen's table.[21] On 25 June, Mackenzie witnessed the first meeting between the two emperors from the riverbank before leaving Tilsit the following day.[22]

Mackenzie did not, however, obtain any confidential political information. His only report to Gower from Russian headquarters on 23 June merely contained some details on the condition of the Russian army,[23] and he clearly had no significant political intelligence to transmit to Gower orally about what was happening at Tilsit after he returned to Memel, since Gower wrote to Canning on 3 July that he (Gower) had been unable to learn anything 'as to the basis upon which [France and Russia] are negotiating'. In the same letter, Gower told Canning that he was sending Mackenzie home because 'there is no possibility of his returning to the Russian Army.'[24] Mackenzie arrived in London on 23 July, more than 24 hours after the secret intelligence from Tilsit reached Canning.[25]

Mackenzie was a red herring, and he was ultimately dismissed as a possible source of the secret intelligence by both H.W.C. Temperley and

[19] Oscar Browning, 'A British Agent at Tilsit', *English Historical Review*, vol. XVII (1902), p. 110; E.C. Mackenzie, *Notes and Queries*, 10th Series, vol. VIII (1907), pp. 511-512 (quotation).

[20] PRO, FO 65/69, Draft instructions to Mr Mackenzie, 17 May 1807, and second unnumbered desp., Canning to Gower, 17 May 1807.

[21] *Rose 1901*, pp. 713-715; and J. Holland Rose, 'Canning and the Secret Intelligence from Tilsit', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, New Series, vol. XX (1906) [cited as *Rose 1906*], p. 65.

[22] *Life of General Sir Robert Wilson*, edited by Herbert Randolph, 2 vols. (London, 1862) [cited as *Wilson*], vol. 2, pp. 283-284.

[23] PRO, FO 65/69, Mackenzie to Gower, 23 June 1807, enclosed in unnumbered desp., Gower to Canning, 26 June 1807.

[24] LDA, HAR/GC/57, Gower to Canning, 3 July 1807.

[25] Anonymous article in *The Athenæum*, 27 Sept. 1902, pp. 414-415.

Rose, the two leading historians who took an interest in the subject between 1896 and 1908. Temperley clung to the view that Talleyrand was the source,[26] while Rose favoured the hypothesis that the information came from Bennigsen, who was out of favour after Friedland, or from some other senior Russian military figure. Almost as an afterthought, Rose mentioned Prince Troubetzkoi as the most likely Russian on the grounds that he had demonstrated his anglophile tendencies by introducing Mackenzie to Bennigsen.[27]

D'Antraigues hardly featured in this discussion. Only one contributor to the debate mentioned him at all and that was merely to dismiss him as a possible source for the secret intelligence on the same grounds as Pingaud had done.[28] However, in 1922 d'Antraigues returned to the scene with a vengeance when Sir John Hall emphatically identified him as Canning's informant. He based his argument on a letter from Canning in Gower's published correspondence. The letter was dated 18 August 1812 and one passage touched on the murder of d'Antraigues and his wife by a domestic servant the previous month. Canning wrote that he and Nicholas Vansittart, the recently appointed chancellor of the exchequer, had been asked by the government to go through 'poor d'Antraigue's [sic] papers'.

> We have found nothing suspicious, and nothing very important with which I was not ... previously acquainted. I have had the opportunity, however, of destroying some papers of *my* time, which if they had fallen into ill hands might have compromised individuals very seriously[29] [Canning's emphasis].

The words '*my* time' clearly refer to the years 1807-1809, when Canning was foreign secretary. Having cited this passage, Hall went on to dismiss Pingaud's argument that, since d'Antraigues was in London in the summer of 1807, he could not have been Canning's informant. Hall assert-

[26] H.W.V. Temperley, *Life of Canning* (London, 1905), pp. 92-93.

[27] *Rose 1906*, pp. 76-77.

[28] W.H. Cook in *Notes and Queries*, 10th Series, vol. IX (1908), p. 135. Other contributions, apart from those already cited, to the discussion about the secret intelligence from Tilsit between 1896 and 1908 can be found in *The Athenæum*, 27 Sept. 1902, pp. 414-415; 15 June 1907, pp. 730-731; and 29 June 1907, p. 795; *Notes and Queries*, 10th Series, vol. VIII (1907) 469-470, 510-512; 10th Series, vol. IX (1908). pp. 31-32 & 96; and *The Quarterly Review*, no. 415 (April, 1908), pp. 425-432.

[29] Granville Leveson Gower, Lord (First Earl Granville), *Private Correspondence*, ed. by Castalia, Countess Granville, 2 vols. (London, 1916), vol. 2, pp. 444-445.

ed, quite correctly, that d'Antraigues might well have received the secret intelligence from one of his 'habitual correspondents' in Russia and that his source was 'some Russian grandee'.[30]

In the early 1950s, A.N. Ryan was the first historian to come across the postscript to Canning's private letter to Gower of 21 July 1807.[31] The postscript, which is printed at the beginning of this article, gives a more complete and accurate description of the secret intelligence from Tilsit than Canning's instructions to Taylor, but contains the same essential information. In the early 1960s, Canning's private papers were deposited in what is now the Leeds District Archive and became generally accessible to scholars. One of the first to find material relevant to the secret intelligence from Tilsit was Sven Trulsson, who came across two letters from Canning to his wife, dated 22 and 29 August 1807. It is clear from these communications that on 22 August d'Antraigues had given Canning a copy of a letter dated 20 July from Prince Adam Czartoryski, a letter that Canning regarded as of cardinal importance. Trulsson drew the conclusion that Czartoryski was the most likely source of the secret intelligence from Tilsit.[32] Trulsson was mistaken in this assumption. As Canning's communications to Gower and Taylor show, Canning received the secret intelligence from Tilsit in the early hours of 22 *July*, not on 22 *August*. It was contained in a letter from d'Antraigues to Canning of 21 July 1807, which states explicitly that the information did not come from Czartoryski. This letter is buried in one of the three large, unsorted bundles that hold d'Antraigues's communications to Canning between 1807 and 1809. The first historian to locate this letter was Peter Dixon,[33] and a short, but central extract from it was published in 1986 by Colin Duckworth in his biography of d'Antraigues.[34]

The cumulative effect of historical research has established that Canning really believed that he had received secret intelligence from Tilsit and that it was communicated to him by d'Antraigues in a letter dated 21 July 1807. This article will add two things to the existing picture – the definitive identification of Troubetzkoi as d'Antraigues's alleged Russian informant; and an analysis of the reliability of d'Antraigues's letter

[30] *Hall*, pp. 25-33.

[31] A.N. Ryan, 'The Causes of the British Attack upon Copenhagen in 1807', *English Historical Review*, vol. LXVIII (1953), p. 51.

[32] Sven G. Trulsson, 'Canning, den hemliga kanalen till förhandlingarna i Tilsit och invasionsföretaget mot Köpenhamn 1807' *Scandia*, vol. 29 (1963), pp. 356-357.

[33] Peter Dixon, *Canning. Politician and Statesman* (London, 1976), pp. 111, 172.

[34] Colin Duckworth, *The D'Antraigues Phenomenon* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1986) [cited as *Duckworth*], p. 292.

of 21 July 1807. However, before passing on to these two subjects, d'Antraigues himself invites some words of introduction.

The comte d'Antraigues

Louis-Emmanuel-Henri-Alexandre de Launay, the comte d'Antraigues (1753-1812) is a controversial figure among historians, largely because he is mainly seen as a counter-revolutionary spy and much uncertainty surrounds the reliability of the intelligence material he produced.[35] It can be taken for granted that he wanted to impress his paymasters with the wide range of the information at his disposal, and that this served as a spur to his imagination. There are also many clear-cut examples in his intelligence reports of distortion and fabrication designed to promote policy options that he was inclined to favour.[36] Jacques Godechot, one of the historians most hostile to d'Antraigues, summarises his technique in the following terms: 'd'Antraigues reshaped the letters of his correspondents ... so that all his reports ... assume the same appearance and contain a portion of truth and another portion, of greater or lesser importance, made up of invented news or forged documents' (*d'Antraigues remaniait les lettres de ses correspondants ... de sorte que tous ses bulletins ... ont la même allure, contiennent une part de vérité, et une part plus ou moins importante de fausses nouvelles ou de faux documents.*)[37]

This puts the case for the prosecution rather well, but it does not prove, of course, that every intelligence report transmitted by d'Antraigues was distorted or fabricated. Indeed, it is perfectly possible that the greater part of these reports is essentially authentic. Godechot is obliged to concede – or rather lets slip – that some of d'Antraigues's reports contain summaries or extracts, rapidly and often badly copied to be sure, of documents which can still be found in public archives.[38] But clearly d'Antraigues's unsupported word can never be good enough. In the absence of corroborating evidence, all his statements must be rigorously subjected to the test of plausibility; and, even then,

[35] Jacques Godechot, *Le comte d'Antraigues. Un espion dans l'Europe des émigrés* (Paris, 1986) [cited as *Godechot*], though less interesting in most respects than the biographies written by Pingaud and Duckworth, is informative, because of the semi-bibliographical approach it adopts, about the controversies d'Antraigues has provoked among scholars.

[36] *Godechot*, pp. 72-76, 115-118 & (especially) 199-203; H. Mitchell, 'Francis Drake and the comte d'Antraigues: A study of the Dropmore bulletins, 1793-1796', B*ulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 29 (1956), *passim.*

[37] *Godechot*, p. 251. See also pp. 187, 238.

[38] *Godechot*, pp. 214-215. See also *Pingaud*, p. 231.

we can only hope to reach tentative, hesitant conclusions. It follows that the secret intelligence from Tilsit is a very hot potato.

Why was d'Antraigues in London in July 1807 and what was his relationship with Canning? Since emigrating from France in 1790, d'Antraigues had worked for many European governments, simultaneously or in succession, turning out propaganda directed at the new regime in France, intelligence reports based on material supplied to him by agents in France and analyses of the political situation in Europe. In 1797, he fell into the hands of the advancing French army in Italy, was interrogated at Milan by its commander, General Bonaparte, and imprisoned, but eventually escaped to Austria. It is very possible that d'Antraigues was allowed to escape in return for writing or altering a document, allegedly found in his briefcase or *portefeuille* when he was arrested, which was used by the Directory to damage the royalist cause. The pretender to the French throne, the future Louis XVIII, was among those who placed an unfavourable interpretation on d'Antraigues's conduct at Milan, and d'Antraigues was never again on good terms with the royalist court in exile after 1797.

D'Antraigues lived in Austria between 1797 and 1802, employed for most of the time in a somewhat hazy capacity by both the Austrian and Russian governments. He acquired a more stable position in 1802, when he was attached to the Russian mission at Dresden. His four years in Saxony were a time of frenetic activity – he furnished the Russian government with an endless flow of intelligence reports from French sources, and he was also an energetic propagandist. In 1805, he published *Traduction d'un fragment du XVIIIe livre de Polybe*, an allegorical anti-Napoleonic tract which created a great stir in Germany. While at Dresden, d'Antraigues had an influential patron in the person of Prince Adam Czartoryski, the acting foreign minister of Russia and a personal friend of Emperor Alexander I.[39]

Despite the busy life he led and the protection of Czartoryski, d'Antraigues became anxious after a couple of years to leave Dresden. Napoleon had unsuccessfully pressed both the Saxon and the Russian governments for his removal from Dresden in 1803 and 1804; and, although d'Antraigues stayed put, he was cold shouldered by the Saxon court.[40] Even more alarming were the warnings d'Antraigues received from his agents in Paris that, if he fell into the hands of the French army

[39] For d'Antraigues's life between 1790 and 1806, see *Pingaud* pp. 82-224; *Godechot* pp. 53-260; and *Duckworth*, pp. 189-284.

[40] *Pingaud*, pp. 278-282.

again, this time he would most assuredly be shot.[41] His first request to St. Petersburg for a different posting, preferably in London, was made early in 1805, but initially fell on deaf ears.[42] France's stronger position in Germany after Austerlitz made d'Antraigues's departure from Dresden more desirable from his own point of view. The flow of intelligence he was receiving from Paris appears to have dried up towards the end of 1805, for reasons that are not clear, making his presence at Dresden less important to the Russian government.[43] However, the decisive factor was Czartoryski's decision in early 1806 that he would have to resign from the foreign ministry owing to his policy differences with Alexander. Before he left office, Czartoryski ensured that d'Antraigues would be transferred to London. In Britain, d'Antraigues would be paid an augmented Russian pension, but he would not be attached to the Russian mission. His duties in London would be relatively undemanding: he would write anti-Napoleonic propaganda and furnish the Russian government with regular analyses of the political situation – one memoir every month on Britain and another about the continent.[44]

Czartoryski had secured for d'Antraigues an honourable semi-retirement, but that does not mean that either of them regarded the tasks which d'Antraigues was to perform in London as unimportant. We should take care against regarding d'Antraigues exclusively, or even primarily, as a spy. When Czartoryski proposed to Alexander that d'Antraigues be sent to London, he wrote that d'Antraigues was one of those well-informed and perceptive writers on political affairs who could not only exert a salutary influence on public opinion but also sometimes present ideas that might be helpful to the Russian government in formulating its own policies.[45] D'Antraigues would doubtless have agreed. He did not wish merely to provide secret intelligence. He wanted money, certainly, and in substantial quantities, but more than that he wanted a role: to sit at the right hand of princes and ministers and to exert influence on policy. In his eyes, London was not a place where he could pass his latter years in tranquillity; it was a new world to conquer.

[41] *Godechot*, p. 224; *Pingaud*, p. 318.

[42] *Pingaud*, p. 303; *Godechot*, p. 256.

[43] *Pingaud*, p. 303; *Godechot*, pp. 235, 256.

[44] *Pingaud*, pp. 317-320; *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1892), [cited as *Sbornik*], vol. 82, Czartoryski-Alexander, 8/20 March 1806, pp. 332-333; Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Fonds Bourbons, Paris [cited as AAE, FB], vol. 631, Czartoryski to d'Antraigues, 12 April 1806, ff. 160-164.

[45] *Sbornik*, vol. 82, Czartoryski to Alexander, 8/20 March 1806, pp. 330-334.

D'Antraigues had prepared the ground by cultivating the British minister at Dresden, Henry Watkin Williams Wynn, a young man with important connections in that he was the nephew of Lord Grenville, one of Britain's leading politicians and prime minister, since February 1806, at the head of the ill-fated coalition christened the 'Ministry of All the Talents'. By the eve of his departure for London, d'Antraigues had entirely gained Wynn's confidence. On 2 July 1806, Wynn wrote to his uncle, enclosing two of d'Antraigues's publications (one was the *Traduction d'un fragment du XVIIIe livre de Polybe*) and describing him as 'by far the best informed man I have met since I have been in Germany.'[46] A month later, he gave d'Antraigues a letter of introduction to Grenville to take with him to London. In the letter, Wynn described d'Antraigues as 'one of my most intimate friends' and as 'the man whom I should point out above all others as having the clearest insight into the affairs of the continent.'[47]

After he got to London on 3 September 1806, d'Antraigues carried out the tasks entrusted to him by the Russian government. He sent regular memoirs to Baron Budberg, Czartoryski's successor at the foreign ministry.[48] Within weeks of his arrival, he was producing anti-Napoleonic articles for the *Courier d'Angleterre*, and he soon became the intermediary between its editor and the British government.[49] However, he put at least as much energy into developing his relationship with the British government, and his efforts met with great success. After a few initial meetings, he appears to have seen little of Grenville, and instead had to deal with Nicholas Vansittart, a subordinate minister at the Treasury. His surviving letters to both men during the last months of 1806 abound with information and advice, mostly but not exclusively about the collapse of Prussia after Jena.[50] When the Talents fell in March 1807, d'Antraigues was on friendly terms both with Vansittart and the foreign secretary, Lord Howick (the future second Earl Grey), and he had been granted an annual pension of £600 from the foreign office's secret service fund, backdated to 1 October 1806[51] on the grounds that his 'connections and correspondence abroad [might] afford important service

[46] British Library, London [cited as BL] Add. Mss. 58900, Wynn to Grenville, 2 July 1806, ff. 98-99.

[47] BL Add. Mss. 58900, Wynn to Grenville, 1 Aug. 1806, ff. 100-101.

[48] There are several virtually illegible copies of these memoirs in PRO, FO 95/636.

[49] Simon Burrows, *French Exile Journalism and European Politics* (Woodbridge, 2000), [cited as *Burrows*], pp. 29, 31, 53, 130-135.

[50] D'Antraigues letters to Vansittart and Grenville, Sept.-Dec. 1806, are in BL Add. Mss. 31230, ff. 154-185 and 59035, ff. 1-39.

[51] LDA, HAR/GC/59, d'Antraigues to Canning, 29 April 1807.

to the Government.'[52] It was presumably because of his friendship with d'Antraigues that Vansittart was the minister who took on the task of going through d'Antraigues's papers after his murder in 1812.

The linchpin of d'Antraigues's strategy for attracting the attention of British ministers was his relationship with Czartoryski. Even before leaving Dresden, he had let it be known to the British government that Czartoryski, though out of office, still had the ear of the emperor and that he (d'Antraigues) had been entrusted with 'an extraordinary mission' in London by Alexander and Czartoryski. He was to observe and report on 'the disposition & means & actual designs' of the British government in relation to the continent. It was essential that the reason for d'Antraigues's presence in London should remain secret, even from the Russian ambassador.[53] These claims were a gross exaggeration of his role. D'Antraigues often wrote to Czartoryski during his first 10 months in London, even though Czartoryski had told him that all correspondence between them had to cease once he left the foreign ministry. Indeed, he informed d'Antraigues in a letter of 6 September 1806 that it would be the last which he would write him.[54] Czartoryski did not quite mean it in that he did allow d'Antraigues to write, provided he did so discreetly,[55] but it is clear from d'Antraigues's letters to him that Czartoryski had told him to send all his official memoranda to Budberg and that Czartoryski for his own part failed to address a single letter to d'Antraigues between 6 September 1806 and 2 June 1807.[56] As for Budberg, he wrote to d'Antraigues on 26 August 1806 confirming Czartoryski's previous instructions, and urging d'Antraigues to place the same confidence in him as he had done in his predecessor, but it was not until 7 April 1807 that d'Antraigues was able to tell Czartoryski that he had at last received a second letter from Budberg.[57]

In other words, there was a large element of fiction in what d'Antraigues told British ministers about the duties that had been assigned to him by St. Petersburg, but it was plausible fiction, especially when it was reinforced by a most obliging willingness to pass on to the Russians whatever British ministers wanted them to hear. On 29 Decem-

[52] PRO, FO 27/76, note by Howick, 12 June 1807.

[53] Durham University Library, second Earl Grey papers [cited as DUL], GRE/B7/15/2, Boothby to Fox, 30 June 1806 (quotations) and 20 July 1806.

[54] Czartoryski Library, Cracow, Czart. Mss., vol. 5481 [cited as Cracow 5481], d'Antraigues to Czartoryski, 13 March 1807.

[55] Cracow 5481, d'Antraigues to Czartoryski, 17 Nov. 1806 & 6 Jan 1807.

[56] Cracow 5481, d'Antraigues's letters to Czartoryski between 17 Nov. 1806 and 2 Aug. 1807.

[57] Cracow 5481, d'Antraigues to Czartoryski, 17 Nov. 1806 & 7 April 1807.

ber 1806, d'Antraigues wrote to Vansittart to remind him that he had promised to supply a note, which d'Antraigues could transmit to Alexander 'as if from myself' (*comme de moi*). The note would set out what it was 'possible and useful' (*possible et utile*) for Alexander to know about the British government's financial position and would demonstrate that Britain had the resources to fight on alongside her Russian ally for another 20 years, if necessary, without concluding 'a perfidious and infamous peace' (*une paix perfide et infame*).[58]

D'Antraigues was distressed by the fall of the Talents in that it removed from office men with whom he had already established a rapport, but he appears to have assumed that he would have no difficulty in striking up a good relationship with the new foreign secretary, George Canning, who took office on 25 March 1807. He bombarded Canning with notes offering advice on diverse points and seeking interviews, and he took the opportunity to request an increase in his annual pension to £1,000, citing the high cost of living in London.[59] None of this cut much ice with Canning, who was irritated by d'Antraigues's behaviour and puzzled by his precise role. The large batch of official despatches and private letters which Canning prepared for the new British ambassador to Russia, Leveson Gower, prior to the latter's departure for Russia included one private letter of 16 May devoted entirely to the subject of d'Antraigues. Gower was on no account to say anything to Budberg on the matter and should speak only to Czartoryski regardless of 'whether (as we agree in hoping most anxiously) you find him restored to his former situation [i.e. as foreign minister], or whether he be still only a private individual attached to the person of the Emperor'. What, Canning asked, was the nature of d'Antraigues's mission in London and of his relationship with the Russian ambassador, Maksim Alopeus? Was he supposed to supervise or report on the activities of Alopeus?

Whatever the answers to these questions, Canning found the present situation highly unsatisfactory. He was able to deal with all the business of the Anglo-Russian relations in half the time with Alopeus and then had to go over the same points again with d'Antraigues 'for the purpose of enabling him to write a private memoir ... to Pr. Czartoryski or the Emperor'. Replying to d'Antraigues's communications 'would of itself require the full attention of an establishment larger than the Foreign

[58] BL Add. Mss. 31230, d'Antraigues to Vansittart, 29 Dec. 1806, ff. 172-173.

[59] LDA, HAR/GC/59, d'Antraigues to Canning, 29 April 1807 and HAR/GC/59B, d'Antraigues to Canning, 27 & 30 April 1807.

Office'. D'Antraigues was 'importunate' in his requests for interviews and the flow of his letters was 'incessant'. Canning preferred seeing him to writing to him, 'though the option is a hard one', since he remembered something about the seizure of d'Antraigues's papers in Italy in 1797 – 'a transaction thought to be rather equivocal at the time; but which I recollect only as a warning not to trust any correspondence of mine to his portfolio'. In Canning's view, d'Antraigues was an able man, who might also be a 'very honest' one, but he was also 'very indiscreet' and consequently 'somewhat dangerous'. The upshot was that Canning wished 'he were working in the [Foreign] Office at St. Petersburgh, instead of collecting materials for his memoirs here' and wanted to be 'well rid of him'. Gower ought therefore in his confidential discussion with Czartoryski to 'contrive to relieve me & M d'Alopeus from the Count d'Antraigues.'[60]

What is striking about Canning's remarks is that, despite his low opinion of d'Antraigues, he had swallowed the story of d'Antraigues's special mission hook, line and sinker – like the ministers of the Grenville administration before him. He wanted d'Antraigues recalled to Russia, but until that happy day he dared not ignore him because of his supposed special link to Czartoryski and Alexander, and saw him every Saturday morning. He did not even turn down his request for an increased pension. Canning merely temporised, writing that he was still considering the question, adding the quaint observation that d'Antraigues was doubtless sufficiently familiar with British practices to appreciate that an immediate answer was impossible in matters of this kind.[61] Canning doubtless assumed that he could stall over the matter of the increased pension until Gower secured d'Antraigues's recall.

There was a further element in Canning's irritation with d'Antraigues. Indeed, this may have been the most heinous offence of all. Canning told Gower that d'Antraigues had written a letter to Sir John Macpherson ('a mad politician', according to Canning), for communication to George III, 'remonstrating against the removal of the late ministers, & predicting the alienation of Russia in consequence of it ... And now M. d'Alopeus has orders to present M. d'Antraigues to His Majesty – to renew those representations, I suppose, by word of mouth!!'[62] D'Antraigues rubbed salt in this particular wound by sending Canning a memoir in which he laid great stress on the confidence and esteem

[60] PRO 30/29/8/4, Canning to Gower, 16 May 1807.

[61] LDA, HAR/GC/59, Canning to d'Antraigues, 30 April 1807. There is another copy of this letter in AAE, FB, vol. 35, ff. 29-30.

[62] PRO 30/29/8/4, Canning to Gower, 16 May 1807.

Alexander had felt for Grenville and referred to the need to animate the emperor with an equal confidence in the new ministers of King George.[63]

In short, d'Antraigues had not got off to a good start with Canning, and matters did not improve over the next few months. On 9 June, Canning wrote to Gower that he was 'well satisfied' with Alopeus. 'I cannot say as much for his colleague, or supervisor, the Count d'Ant. ... I am happy, however, to hear that an unimpaired cordiality still subsists between him (d'A.) & Sir John Macpherson.'[64] Eleven days later, Canning again referred to d'Antraigues, though without naming him, and this time he did so in an official despatch. Moreover, he now wanted Gower to tell 'the Russian Ministry', not just Czartoryski confidentially, of the difficulties arising from 'the consciousness (which I know [Alopeus] to feel) that he is under the constant and watchful supervision of a person who carries on a secret correspondence with the Russian Government'. It was possible that Alopeus did 'not feel assured of the entire confidence of his own Court', and it was 'but too evident' that when transacting business with the British government, Alopeus was anxious to guard against 'any partial misrepresentation of his conduct at home.'[65]

Canning's despatch of 20 June was more menacing than anything he had previously written about d'Antraigues, but it was overtaken by events. By the time it was written, Gower had already acted on Canning's earlier, informal instructions of 16 May. He reached Memel on 10 June and set off immediately for Tilsit, where he had meetings with both Alexander and Budberg a few days before the fateful battle of Friedland on 14 June. While at Tilsit, Gower also spoke privately to Czartoryski to request that d'Antraigues should be recalled, and on 15 June, back in Memel, he reported the outcome to Canning. 'Czartoryski lamented extremely that his protegé should have acted so foolishly, but expressed a strong wish that you [Canning] would not insist upon his recall saying that there was really no other asylum for him than England.' When Gower suggested that d'Antraigues might be employed in the foreign ministry at St. Petersburg, Czartoryski dismissed the idea on the grounds that d'Antraigues was too 'restless' (*remuant*) to work there. He assured Gower that

[63] LDA, HAR/GC/59B, undated 'Note confidentielle pour Mr Cannings (sic)' by d'Antraigues.

[64] PRO 30/29/8/4, Canning to Gower, 9 June 1807.

[65] PRO, FO 65/69, desp. 17, Canning to Gower, 20 June 1807.

> [D'Antraigues] 'possessed in no degree the confidence either of the Emperor or of any person of influence in the Russian Govt., that he was instructed to attend more to literary than political subjects, and that if you would only repress his forwardness by refusing to see him so frequently as you had done he might, he hoped be permitted to continue in England.'

Gower concluded by saying that he would await Canning's further instructions as to whether he should take 'any more effectual steps' to obtain d'Antraigues's recall.[66]

Czartoryski's remarks amounted to a refusal to remove d'Antraigues from London (at least in the absence of a renewed and more pressing request from Canning), but they were a devastating commentary on d'Antraigues's pretensions. In normal circumstances, they would presumably have put an end to d'Antraigues's regular interviews with Canning and possibly have led to his removal from Britain as well. Circumstances, however, were not normal: 'the afflicting intelligence of the disastrous result' of the battle of Friedland reached London on 30 June.[67] Gower's letter concerning his conversation with Czartoryski about d'Antraigues was received by Canning on 10 July, the same day as his first report on the initial meeting between Alexander and Napoleon at Tilsit arrived in London.[68] The situation in northern Europe was in turmoil and the Anglo-Russian alliance appeared on the verge of collapse. The question of d'Antraigues's recall was hardly of any great significance in the new situation. It was against this background that Canning received from d'Antraigues in the early hours of 22 July the secret intelligence from Tilsit.

Prince Troubetzkoi and the secret intelligence from Tilsit

In his letter to Canning, d'Antraigues did not name his Russian informant, but promised to do so orally when they met. The name which he gave Canning can only have been that of Prince Vassili Troubetzkoi.

Troubetzkoi had trained for a military career, but had been obliged to leave his regiment in 1796 when Paul I appointed him a gentleman of the bedchamber. He had subsequently held a number of positions at

[66] LDA, HAR/GC/57, Gower to Canning, 15 June 1807.
[67] PRO, FO 65/69, desp. 21, Canning to Gower, 30 June 1807.
[68] PRO, FO 65/69, desp. 7, Gower to Canning, 25 June 1807.

the Russian court under Paul I and Alexander I.[69] By the end of 1804 at the latest, he was in Dresden, where he met d'Antraigues and became amorously involved with Katharina Frederika Wilhelmina Benigne, Princess of Sagan. Troubetzkoi and Wilhelmina (her preferred Christian name) set up home together in apartments located in the large house where d'Antraigues lived with his wife and son, while Wilhelmina awaited a divorce from her first husband, a French émigré, the prince de Rohan-Guéménée.[70] As the eldest daughter of Peter Biron, the last duke of Courland, who had renounced his rights in Courland in favour of Catherine II of Russia in 1795 in return for ample financial compensation, Wilhelmina was extremely wealthy after his death in 1800 and had inherited the tiny principality of Sagan in northern Silesia. Wilhelmina and d'Antraigues had a mutual friend in Baron Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, the Swedish minister to Austria. Wilhelmina had secretly had an illegitimate child by Armfelt early in 1801, but the affair was long over by 1805 and Armfelt had assumed the role of affectionate but strictly avuncular friend.[71]

Wilhelmina was divorced from Rohan on 7 March 1805 and married Troubetzkoi two months later, on 5 May, in the church of the Russian legation at Dresden. In the latter months of 1805, Troubetzkoi was able to rejoin the Russian army in order to serve during the Austerlitz campaign. His marriage to Wilhelmina was dissolved after only one year,[72] and by July 1806 he was back in St. Petersburg, where he was appointed as one of Emperor Alexander's aides de camp. He was also commander of a guards cavalry squadron and served with distinction during the hard-fought Polish campaign of 1806-1807, including the battle of Friedland – he was twice decorated, given the title of general aide de camp and promoted to the rank of major-general. As one of Alexander's aides de camp, he accompanied him to Tilsit in June 1807 to meet Napoleon.[73]

During the short-lived golden days of Troubetzkoi's romance with Wilhelmina in Dresden in 1805, a close friendship developed between d'Antraigues and his family on the one side and Troubetzkoi and Wilhelmina on the other, despite the difference in their ages – d'Antraigues and his wife were in their early fifties, while Troubetzkoi was 29 in

[69] [Grand Duke] Nicholas Mikhailovitch, *Portraits Russes*, 5 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1905-1909) [cited as *Portraits Russes*], vol. 5, no. 131.

[70] *Pingaud*, pp. 293-294.

[71] Carl von Bonsdorff, *Gustav Mauritz Armfelt. Levnadsskildring*, 4 vols. (Helsingfors, 1930-1934) [cited as *Bonsdorff*], vol. 1, pp. 549-589 and vol. 2, pp. 71-84.

[72] *Portraits Russes*, vol. 5, no. 132.

[73] *Portraits Russes*, vol. 5, no. 131.

1805 and Wilhelmina 24. The main source for this friendship is about 35 letters from Troubetzkoi or Wilhelmina to d'Antraigues, running from December 1804 to April 1807. Many are undated, some are no more than brief, hurried notes and none of d'Antraigues's replies has survived. The letters often provide too little context and background for the reader to know what they are about, but they speak eloquently about the nature of d'Antraigues's relationship with the young couple. They looked to him for advice and assistance both before and after their estrangement, and he was happy to oblige – for example, by drafting letters on delicate matters. After their separation, d'Antraigues remained on good terms with both and lent both a sympathetic ear.[74]

D'Antraigues did not find friendship a bar to adopting a sarcastic tone about Wilhelmina and Troubetzkoi when reporting to Armfelt on their affairs. Armfelt approved of Troubetzkoi as little as he had previously done of Rohan, and he appears to have warned Wilhelmina against her proposed second marriage, claiming to have heard that Troubetzkoi was a gambler.[75] Armfelt was doubtless gratified by the letter, dated 13 June 1806, he received from d'Antraigues which covered, among other things, 'the end of the tragicomedy of our unhappy princess' (*la fin de la tragicomedie de nostres malheureuse princesse*). Like Rohan before him, Troubetzkoi had been paid off with 150,000 *écus* at the time of the divorce. D'Antraigues added that if Wilhelmina continued at this tempo, she would soon be financially ruined. As for Troubetzkoi, he had expressed outrage at the despicable conduct of Rohan in taking money from a woman and then done precisely the same one year later.[76]

However fragmentary and cryptic Troubetzkoi's letters to d'Antraigues frequently are, they provide a good deal of information about him and his attitudes, and some of that information contributes to identifying him as the man whom d'Antraigues claimed to be his Russian informant at Tilsit. First of all, he shared d'Antraigues's violent hostility to Napoleon, 'this Corsican devil' (*ce diable de Corse*),[77] and was eager for

[74] Troubetzkoi and Wilhelmina's letters to d'Antraigues between 1805 and 1807 are in AAE, FB vol. 643, ff. 102-147.

[75] *Bonsdorff*, vol. 2, p. 84.

[76] *Kansallisarkisto* (National Archives of Finland), Helsinki, Armfelt archive, d'Antraigues to Armfelt, 13 June 1806, microfilm PR 10. D'Antraigues's remarks about Troubetzkoi on this occasion deserve quotation in the original: 'que dire de son mari [i.e. Troubetzkoi] qui avait jetté les hauts cris sur la conduite de rohan sur la bassesse de se faire paier par une femme et qui un an après se fait paie au meme prix, meme terme, meme condition.'

[77] AAE, FB, vol. 643, f 141, Troubetzkoi to d'Antraigues, undated.

the renewal of war against France during the period in 1806, after Austerlitz, when hostilities were suspended between Russia and France.[78] It is consequently likely that Troubetzkoi was outraged by Alexander's change of policy towards Napoleonic France at Tilsit.

Secondly, Troubetzkoi treated d'Antraigues as a dear friend to whom he owed an great debt of gratitude and in whom he could confide his most intimate feelings. On 16 February 1805, he assured d'Antraigues that 'I shall never cease to be grateful, my friend, until my last breath for the services you have done me' (*Jusqu'à ma dernière heure je ne cesserai de reconnaitre les services que Vous m'avez rendu mon ami*).[79] In May 1806, he declared, presumably because of the collapse of his marriage to Wilhelmina, that his life was 'finished' (*flambée*), and 'that happiness has completely abandoned me forever' (*que le bonheur m'a fuit à tout jamais*).[80] In July 1806, after his return to St Petersburg, Troubetzkoi assured d'Antraigues that, despite the geographical distance between them, he would always remain devoted to him.[81]

His friendship was undiminished when he wrote to d'Antraigues in April 1807 from Bartenstein in eastern Prussia, where Alexander I was in conference with his ally, the king of Prussia. Once again, Troubetzkoi declared his undying attachment. He also confided that his wounded heart had healed. He had become calm and his passionate agitation had been cured – 'I have failed to be unhappy for the rest of my life' (*J'ai faillit être malheureux la reste de ma vie*). The explanation he gave for his improved spirits is also significant: 'I owe my salvation to the Emperor and my life is devoted to him ... I am convinced that he fully merits the adoration which he inspires (*Je dois mon salut à l'Empereur, ma vie Lui est consacré ... Je me suis convaincu quil merite entierement l'adoration qu'on lui porte*). Troubetzkoi does not say why he felt such a sense of gratitude towards Alexander, but his readmission to the Russian army and swift promotion within it offer a likely reason.

Troubetzkoi's letter from Bartenstein contains a piece of information which is absolutely central to his identification as d'Antraigues's alleged informant. He mentions that he had received several letters from his sister in London and that she had spoken much of the kindness shown to her there by d'Antraigues and his wife. Troubetzkoi added that he was delighted his sister had left Madrid and hoped she would soon return

[78] AAE, FB, vol. 643, Troubetzkoi to d'Antraigues, 2 April 1806, ff. 111-112 and 15 May 1806, ff. 113-114.

[79] AAE, FB, vol. 643, Troubetzkoi to d'Antraigues, 16 Feb. 1805, f 103.

[80] AAE, FB, vol. 643, Troubetzkoi to d'Antraigues, 15 May 1806, ff. 113-114.

[81] AAE, FB, vol. 643, Troubetzkoi to d'Antraigues, 4/16 July 1806. ff. 116-117.

to Russia.[82] The sister he refers to can only be Baroness Anna Stroganova, the wife of Baron Grigori Stroganov, who had been Russian minister to Spain since 1805. On 29 December 1806, d'Antraigues wrote to Vansittart that she had arrived in London from Spain two days previously. He added that she was the sister of Alexander's adjutant general, Troubetzkoi, 'my good friend and an honest fellow' (*mon bon ami et un brave homme*). As for her husband, he remained alone at Madrid, having sent his wife and children to London.[83] Baroness Stroganova spent the winter and spring in London and then returned to Russia via Sweden in the summer of 1807. The list of passports issued in 1807 by the Swedish legation in London includes an entry for 10 July 1807 which shows that a passport was issued on that date for 'Baroness Stroganova with her six children and seven persons of her household, including servants, to travel from England to Sweden and from there to Russia' (*Mme la Baronne de Stroganoff avec ses Six enfans & Sept personnes de sa suite, y inclus les domestiques, se rendant d'Angl: en Suede, & de là en Russie*)[84] As we shall see, the movements of Baroness Stroganova are highly significant for our purposes.

We can now turn to the text of the letter which d'Antraigues addressed to Canning from his house in Barnes (or 'Richmond', as d'Antraigues calls it).[85] I have divided the letter into two parts for the purposes of analysing it later in this article. The original is not so divided and forms one seamless document. The words in italics are underlined in the original, and the section in bold represents what Canning treated as the secret intelligence from Tilsit. What follows is a diplomatic transcription in which no changes whatsoever have been made to d'Antraigues's spelling.

D'Antraigues to Canning, 21 July 1807

pour vous seul

richemond ce 21 juillet 1807

[Part 1]

ma femme etant allée hier a Londres menvoie cette nuit par expres des letres quelle y a trouve pour moi.

il y en a une dun homme (*que je vous nommerai*) ce nest pas le prince CZ...

[82] AAE, FB, vol. 643, Troubetzkoi to d'Antraigues, 11/23 April 1807, ff. 128-129.

[83] BL, Add. Mss. 31230, d'Antraigues to Vansittart, 29 Dec. 1806, ff. 172-173.

[84] *Riksarkivet*, Stockholm (Swedish National Archives), Foreign Ministry Archive, 'Passlista vid Kongl: Svenska Beskickningen i London 1807', Anglica/491.

[85] LDA, HAR/GC/59B, d'Antraigues to Canning, 21 July 1807. I am grateful to the Earl of Harewood for permission to reproduce this document in its entirety.

mais cest un de mes intimes amis, dans les principes de CZ. general et placé aupres de lempereur, il la accompagné a tilsit il mecrit de La le 15/27 juin et menvoie sa Letre a altona par un courier quil envoiait avec des Letres, *au devant dune parente* partie dici depuis peu, et quil croiait devoir descendre a husum il avait muni ce courier dun passeport francais du general savari.[86]
sa letre a ete remise le 10 a altona chez m hue[87] qui me la renvoiée le 11 de ce mois.
il est au desespoir de tout ce quil voit et entend et ne pouvant plus y tenir ni simposer la reserve necessaire il quittait tilsit le 17/29 juin pour retourner a petersbourg.
cet homme est devouée a lempereur personellement et il le devait au moins par reconnaissance, mais il me dit que maintenant cela ne lui est plus possible et quil faut quil aille reunir et consulter ses amis et sa famille.
il me dit (tout cela en chiffre)

> 'que beningsen est un scelerat que il a totalement perdu La tete le 14 et na scu donner aucun ordre, que le centre ou Lui meme (celui qui mecrit etait) et Laile droite commandée par beningsen manquait *de tout*, et en *tout genre* tandis que Laile gauche aux ordres dessen[88] etait dans labondance de *tout*, et quelle seule a sauve larmée de sa ruine totale.
> que apres cette action beningsen a ete ouvertement pour la paix et que en ce moment il est entierement de Lavis, de ceux qui veulent se soumettre en tout a La france'

ensuite il sabandonne a des coleres contre Lui que je ne transcris pas car vraiment je ne le puis croire un traitre.
il me dit que lon est obligé pour faire signer cette paix par un homme

[86] General Anne Jean Marie René Savary (1774-1833), later the duc de Rovigo and Napoleon's minister of police.

[87] François Hüe (1757-1819), a senior domestic servant of Louis XVl and later of Louis XVIII, ultimately ennobled as Baron Hüe, who spent about 9 months in the Hamburg area in 1807 distributing funds to indigent émigrés in accordance with the instructions of the Bourbon court in exile. See Philip Mansel, *Louis XVIII* (revised edition, Stroud, 1999), pp. 83, 89, 148; *Souvenirs de Baron Hüe* (Paris, 1903), pp. 261-262. While at Altona, Hüe was very active in passing on whatever useful information came his way to the British government – see PRO, FO 33/38, unnumbered desp., Thornton to Canning, 29 July 1807.

[88] There were two generals in Russian service during the Polish campaign of 1806-1807 called von Essen. See F. Loraine Petre, *Napoleon's Campaign in Poland, 1806-1807* (reprinted edition, London, 1989), pp. 47, 350.

qualifie denvoier chercher mon ami le prince kourakin[89] qui est attendu a tout instant.
il Lappelle mon ami parce que lors quil etait vice chancelier en 1801 il affectait de se dire mon admirateur et de me donner sa confiance.
je ne le connais pas si ce nest par letres cest un bon homme mais sans aucun talent et tout devouée a Limperatrice mere.
il me dit

> **'scaches que des le 12/24 juin il a ete hautement question dans lentretien de ce jour et de La veille entre lempereur et napoleon, de se reunir contre langleterre dont nostre empereur est mecontent et non pas sans raison. napoleon la scu comme il scait tout par ses amis ici et par beningsen avec detail.**
> **il a propose la Ligue navalle de ce pais contre langleterre et La reunion des escadres russes a celles de suede et du dannemark etant sur dit il des forces de Lespagne et du portugal, a leffet dattaquer Langleterre corps a corps.**
> **cela a ete ecouté avec surprise et sans colere et quoique bonaparte y soit revenu a deux fois, lempereur na pas repondu, et *cela est sur car* jy etais ainsi que beningsen et ostermann.[90] mais ce silence ne prouve rien parce que lempereur ne pouvait se fier pour repondre que a beningsen car il connait mes sentimens et ceux tres prononces dostermann. ainsi ce silence ne prouve rien de tout. je nai plus ete ensuite aux conferences qui se sont continuées ni ostermann non plus, et je vous previens que mon opinion et celle de ostermann est que bonaparte lentrainera.**
> la tete est perdue et lempereur humilié de labandon de ses anciens amis fera quelque enorme faute.
>
> [Part 2]
> qualles vous devenir? jai scu par savari que napoleon veut demander a lempereur de vous rappeler dangleterre a petersbourg et il Leut fait si berthier[91] ne Lui eut dit quil etait plus convenable que ce fut talleyrand qui arrangeat cela avec kourakin.

[89] Prince Alexander Kourakin (1752-1818) had been well regarded by Paul I (much of the time, at least) and was on good terms with Paul's widow, the empress mother, Maria Fedorovna. Alexander I employed him on a number of diplomatic missions. See *Portraits Russes*, vol. 1, nos. 27 and 48.

[90] Count Alexander Ostermann-Tolstoy (1770-1857) was a lieutenant general during the Polish campaign of 1806-1807. He later played a distinguished part in the war of 1812-1814 against France. See *Portraits Russes*, vol. 1, no. 182.

[91] Marshal Louis Alexandre Berthier (1753-1815), chief of staff of Napoleon's *Grande Armée*.

> je ne perds pas une minute pour vous prevenir et vous conjure au nom de tous les amis de ne pas quitter londres quoiquil arrive, on nosera pas vous pousser a bout on vous connait et Lempereur craindrait que vous ne retrouvies un autre Livre de polybe. mais vous pousses tot a bout restes cher ami vous le deves a nos amis, a la russie a La cause. ceci ne peut rester comme cela est cest tout ceque je vous peux ecrire, il faut quelqun en angleterre qui possede toute la confiance du parti.
> dites a alopeus dy prolonger son sejour sous des pretextes plausibles tant quil pourra le faire.
> restes a la russie jusques a ce que cela soit impossible avec honneur, et alors encore et plus encore restes a londres. si langleterre en ce cas ne faisait rien pour vous – nous ne le pourrions concevoir, mais alors – il faut compter ici sur vos amis dont vous connaisses la fortune ajoutes y marcoff[92] et panin[93] qui ennemis de CZ, redeviennent des nostres par les effroiables evenemens de ce jour.
> ainsi alors fixes a chaqun ceque vous voules accepter jusques a des tems plus heureux qui arriveront soies en sur.'

voila cette letre qui ma terriblement occupé toute La nuit.
mais croies que ce nest pas pour mon compte mon parti est pris et irrevocablement arreté.
mais le dernier moien quils moffrent ne me convient pas et ne me conviendra jamais. je ne suis pas fait pour recevoir Laumone pas meme de mes amis.
je nen veux pas. je nai pas lestomac asses robuste pour digerer ce pain La.
si la russie me maltraite, je recevrai du pain de langleterre, avec honneur: parceque je la servirai de toutes mes forces et que je lui devouerai le peu de talent que jai.
si elle ne men donnait pas jirai menterrer dans quelque province de langleterre ou je puisse exister avec le peu que jai.

[92] Count Arkadi Morkov (1747-1827) had previously served as Russian ambassador in Paris, where he had markedly failed to establish a good rapport with Napoleon. During a visit to Dresden, he had become well acquainted with d'Antraigues. See *Portraits Russes*, vol. 1, no 33; and *Pingaud*, p. 310.

[93] Count Nikita Panin (1770-1837) had briefly served as Alexander I's first foreign minister in 1801, but was out of favour in 1807. He was noted for his hostility to France, and – like Morkov – had got to know d'Antraigues while visiting Dresden. See *Portraits Russes*, vol. 1, no 31 and vol. 5, no 159; and *Pingaud*, p. 214.

mais bref je préférerais detre Laquais en angleterre a etre le 1er ministre a petersbourg.
brules cette Letre non a cause de moi mais a cause de mes amis.

***

English translation of d'Antraigues to Canning, 21 July 1807

For you only

Richmond this 21st. July 1807

[Part 1]
My wife went up to London yesterday and this evening sent me specially the letters which she found waiting there for me.
There was one from a man (*whom I shall name to you*)... He is not Prince Cz..., but one of my intimate friend who shares the principles of Cz. He is a general and holds a position close to the emperor. He accompanied the emperor to Tilsit and he wrote to me from there on 15/27 June. He sent the letter to Altona by a courier whom he despatched with other letters *to await the arrival of a female relative*, who left here [i.e. England] recently and whom he believed would have no choice but to disembark at Husum. He furnished this courier with a French passport from General Savary.
His letter was delivered to M. Hüe in Altona on the 10th, and M. Hüe sent it to me on the 11th. of this month.
He is in despair over everything that he sees and hears and, feeling unable to stay any longer or to observe the necessary circumspection, he was intending to leave Tilsit on 17/29 June in order to return to St. Petersburg.
This man is personally devoted to the emperor, or at least he ought to be for reasons of gratitude, but he tells me that this is now no longer possible and that he must gather together and consult his friends and his family.
He tells me (all this in cipher)

> that Bennigsen is a scoundrel, who completely lost his head on the 14th. [i.e. at Friedland] and was unable to give any orders, that the centre where he (the one who writes to me served) and the right wing commanded by Bennigsen was deficient in *all things* of *every kind*, while the left wing which was under the orders of Essen had *everything* in abundance and alone saved the army from total ruin.
>
> He goes on to say that Bennigsen had openly been in favour of peace after this battle and that at this moment he entirely shares the opinion of those who wish to submit completely to France.

He then gives himself over to a furious outburst against Bennigsen, which I omit because truly I cannot believe Bennigsen to be a traitor.
He tells me that it has been necessary in order to have the peace signed by a qualified man to send for my friend Prince Kourakin, whose arrival is awaited at any moment.
He calls him my friend because when he was vice chancellor in 1801, he professed to admire me and to give me his confidence.
I only know him by letter. He is a good man, but lacking in any talent and completely devoted to the empress mother.
He tells me

> **You should know that there has been much discussion since 12/24 June during the conversations held today [i.e. 15/27 June] and yesterday [i.e. 14/26 June] between the emperor and Napoleon about combining against England, a country with which our emperor is displeased and not without reason. Napoleon knows this like he knows everything in detail through his friends and through Bennigsen. He has proposed a maritime league of this country [i.e. Russia] against England and the unification of the Russian squadrons with those of Sweden and Denmark, being certain, he says, of the forces of Spain and Portugal in order to attack England at close quarters.**
> **This proposal was heard with surprise and without objection, and although Bonaparte reverted to it twice, the emperor did not reply. *This is quite certain*, because I was there as were Bennigsen and Ostermann. But this silence proves nothing, because the emperor could only respond with confidence in front of Bennigsen as he knew my sentiments and the very pronounced views of Ostermann. This silence therefore proves nothing at all. I was no longer in attendance at subsequent conferences and nor was Ostermann, and I must warn you that my opinion, and that also of Ostermann, is that Bonaparte will win him over.**
> The emperor has lost his head and, humiliated by the desertion of his old friends, will commit a grievous fault.
>
> [Part 2]
> What is going to become of you? I know from Savary that Napoleon wishes to ask the emperor to recall you from England to St. Petersburg and that he would have done so if Berthier had not said to him that it was more seemly that Talleyrand should arrange it with Kourakin.
> I do not lose a moment to warn you and to implore you in the

> name of all your friends not to leave London whatever may happen. They will not dare to provoke you beyond endurance. They know you and the emperor fears that you will discover another lost book of Polybius. But you quickly lose patience. Stay, dear friend. You owe it to our friends, to Russia, to the cause. Matters cannot remain as they are. This is all that I can write to you: there must be someone in England who enjoys the complete confidence of the party.
> Say to Alopeus that he should prolong his stay in England for as long as he can, using plausible pretexts.
> Stay with Russia until it becomes impossible to do so with honour, and once again above all stay in London. If in that event England does nothing for you (we cannot conceive that this will be so, but still it is possible), it will be necessary to rely on your friends here and you know the extent of their wealth. Add to them Markov and Panin who have been enemies of Cz, but who will return to our side again because of the frightful events of this day.
> Fix the sum then that you wish to accept from each of your friends until happier times come, as they will, I assure you.

This is the letter on which I have laboured terribly throughout the night.
But believe me that I have not done so on my own account. I have taken my stand and it is irrevocably settled.
But the last-mentioned method which my friends in Russia offer me does not suit me and never will. I am not made for receiving charity, even from my friends.
I do not want it. I do not have a sufficiently robust stomach to swallow bread of that nature.
If Russia uses me ill, I shall accept bread from England with honour, because I shall serve her with all my energies and devote to her such little talent as I possess.
If England were not to give me bread, I shall bury myself in some province of England where I can exist with the little that I have.
In short, I should prefer to be a lackey in England than to be first minister in St. Petersburg.
Burn this letter, not for my sake but for the sake of my friends.

***

The section which Canning regarded as the central core of d'Antraigues's letter is marked in bold in both the transcription and the

English translation, and Canning immediately added it as a postscript to the private letter he had just written to Gower, and summarised it, in so far as it related to Denmark, in his instructions to Taylor. In other words, there can be no doubt that the secret intelligence from Tilsit was contained in d'Antraigues's letter. It is equally clear that, when d'Antraigues met Canning, he claimed that his correspondent in Tilsit was Troubetzkoi. This is plain from what the d'Antraigues's letter tells us about his informant.

D'Antraigues claims him as one of his intimate friends. Troubetzkoi's letters supply ample evidence of the close relationship between them. Secondly, he was deeply wounded by the change in Alexander's policy towards France at Tilsit. Troubetzkoi's previous opinions about the 'Corsican devil' make it highly likely that he disapproved of the new turn in Russian policy. Thirdly, he held the rank of general and a position close to the emperor. Troubetzkoi had been promoted to the rank of major-general during the Polish campaign and was one of Alexander's aides de camp. Fourth, d'Antriagues's correspondent had himself fought at the battle of Friedland, as Troubetzkoi had done. Fifth, d'Antraigues described his informant as personally devoted to Alexander and added that he ought to be for reasons of gratitude. Toubetzkoi's letter to d'Antraigues from Bartenstein in April 1807 bears testimony to his sense of gratitude and loyalty towards Alexander at that time.

D'Antraigues's correspondent also formed part of Alexander's entourage during some of his early interviews with Napoleon. The two emperors met for the first time on a raft in the Niemen on 25 June. They met again on the raft the following day, but on the evening of 26 June, Alexander moved to the town of Tilsit on the left bank of the Niemen and remained there until the treaties of peace and alliance were signed on 7 July. Troubetzkoi is not mentioned in the sources as being among those who accompanied Alexander at the first meeting on the raft on 25 June,[94] but he was a member of Alexander's retinue when he moved to the town of Tilsit on the evening of 26 June.[95] There is no

[94] *Correspondence de Napoléon 1er* (Paris, 1864) [cited as *Nap. Corres.*], vol. 15, p. 372; N.K. Shilder, *Imperator Aleksandr Prevyi. Ego zhizn i tsarstvovanie*, vol. II (St. Petersburg, 1904) [cited as Shilder], pp. 185, 294 footnote 328. If Troubetzkoi is the 'Prince Tubiskoy' who spoke to Mackenzie shortly after Alexander returned to the right bank of the Niemen after his first interview with Napoleon on 25 June, then it seems that he merely observed that first meeting from the shore – *Wilson*, vol. 2, p. 284.

[95] Serge Tatistcheff, *Alexandre Ier et Napoléon d'àpres leur correspondance inédite 1801-1812* (Paris, 1891) [cited as *Tatistcheff*], p. 156.

evidence about Troubetzkoi's movements after that. D'Antraigues's correspondent expressed an intention on 27 June to leave Tilsit two days later and return to St. Petersburg, but this does not, of course, prove that he acted on this intention and he would in any case have needed the emperor's permission to do so. We do not know whether or not Troubetzkoi left Tilsit on 29 June, so this point tells us nothing.

The crucial piece of evidence which clinches the identification of Troubetzkoi is that d'Antraigues's correspondent had a female relative who had recently left Britain to return to Russia and he believed she would disembark at Husum in Schleswig. Troubetzkoi's sister, Baroness Stroganova, travelled from Britain to Russia in the summer of 1807, but she did not use the southerly route through Holstein to Kiel or Copenhagen and then across the Baltic. Instead, as we have seen, a Swedish passport was issued to her on 10 July so that she could take the northern route to Russia, which involved landing at Gothenburg and passing through Sweden. By 23 August 1807, d'Antraigues assumed that Baroness Stroganova was back in St. Petersburg.[96] It is perfectly plausible that she may have initially intended to disembark at Husum and wrote to Troubetzkoi in this sense, but then changed her mind and chose to travel through Sweden instead.

When these items of evidence are put together, there can be no doubt that d'Antraigues named Troubtezkoi as his informant when he spoke to Canning. The two questions that remain to be considered are whether Troubetzkoi wrote to d'Antraigues at all and, if so, whether d'Antraigues tampered with the contents of the letter.

The secret intelligence from Tilsit: an analysis

D'Antraigues's letter to Canning on 21 July 1807 should be regarded as falling into two parts. The first concerns how Troubetzkoi's communication reached d'Antraigues and events at Friedland and Tilsit, and the statements it contains can to some extent be checked against other sources. The second is really only about d'Antraigues himself and few of its contents can be verified. Nonetheless, let us begin with the second part of the letter, because it tells us much about why d'Antraigues wrote the letter as a whole.

In the section of this second part of the letter which purports to quote Troubetzkoi, d'Antraigues is warned that Napoleon will seek his recall from Britain to St. Petersburg and is urged to remain in London

[96] LDA, HAR/GC/59B, d'Antraigues to Canning, 23 Aug. 1807.

at all costs, because it was essential that there should be someone in London who enjoyed the confidence of those Russians opposed to Alexander's new policy of alliance with France. If the British government failed to provide him with an adequate pension, his Russian friends would club together to ensure that he was not destitute. After putting these words in the mouth of Troubetzkoi, d'Antraigues goes on to assure Canning that he would never accept charity, even from his friends, but that he would be proud to accept money from Britain, if his Russian pension were stopped, since he would serve her with unsleeping energy. If the British government was not inclined to employ him, he would not go to Russia; he would merely leave London and withdraw to the English countryside, where he could survive on the limited funds he possessed in his own right.

What all this amounts to is a plea for permanent refuge in Britain and an enhanced British pension. As early as December 1806, he had tentatively raised the question of his denization with Vansittart, and in early September 1807 he reverted to the subject with Canning.[97] His request for an increase in his British pension from £600 to £1,000 also remained unresolved. It is reasonable to suppose that fear as well as greed lurked behind such aspirations – fear that the reversal of Russian policy might lead to his dismissal from Russian service and the loss of his Russian pension or that he might indeed be summoned to St Petersburg, perhaps even handed over to the French. It is unlikely that he knew how precarious his position with Canning was. Canning had received Gower's account of his interview with Czartoryski on the subject of d'Antraigues on 10 July, but there is no evidence that d'Antraigues knew anything about it. What he offers Canning in return for refuge and an increased pension is that the friends of Britain in Russia wish him to remain in London to serve as an intermediary between them and the British government. This is a variation on what he had claimed was his previous role – an unofficial channel which the British government could use to communicate its views to Czartoryski and Emperor Alexander.

The whole second section of the letter is obviously self-serving. It is safe to assume that the section of this second part in which d'Antraigues professes to quote Troubetzkoi is largely hogwash, and there is one sentence in this part which is demonstrably fabricated. D'Antraigues makes Troubetzkoi claim to have learnt from 'savari' that Napoleon intended

[97] BL Add. Mss. 31230, Vansittart to d'Antraigues, 1 Jan. 1807, f 123 (the letter says 1806, but this is a slip of the pen for 1807); LDA, HAR/GC/59B, d'Antraigues to Canning, 6 Sept. 1807.

to demand d'Antraigues's recall from London. The problem with this statement is that General Savary, though he fought at Friedland, was appointed governor of Königsberg and Old Prussia two days after the battle. Savary appears to have remained in Königsberg throughout the negotiations at Tilsit, and Napoleon addressed instructions to him there from Tilsit on 25 and 26 June and again on 6 July.[98] D'Antraigues must simply have assumed that Savary would be at Tilsit during the negotiations.

If we turn to the first section of the letter, matters are less straightforward. Given what we can deduce about d'Antraigues's objectives, it can certainly be argued that he had good reasons for concocting the whole of Troubetzkoi's letter. D'Antraigues was offering to serve as a channel through which Britain's friends in Russia could remain in touch with the British government, and he had a motive for fabricating the alleged information about what was happening at Tilsit in order to demonstrate to Canning that he could deliver interesting intelligence. If that is the case, he forged Troubetzkoi's letter with considerable cunning. There is only one piece of information in the letter that is of crucial importance for a British foreign secretary – the passage about the formation of an anti-British maritime league. This is the only passage that Canning reproduced when he wrote to Gower and Taylor after receiving d'Antraigues's letter. In other words, d'Antraigues contrived to touch Canning on an extremely raw nerve. Britain's survival, Britain's ability to continue the war against France without a major ally, rested primarily on her naval supremacy. Any hint of a revival of the armed neutrality leagues of 1780 and 1800, which had both been led by Russia and which had both included Denmark and Sweden, any hint of a threat to Britain's naval supremacy, was bound to arouse the alert interest of a British foreign secretary.

All this is persuasive, but we cannot simply say there was no letter from Troubetzkoi at all and that the whole business is pure fabrication. There are certain points in favour of d'Antraigues's veracity in the first part of his letter. The story of a Russian courier passing across northern Germany through French-occupied territory was true. After his first two meetings with Alexander on 25 and 26 June 1807, Napoleon made a conciliatory gesture by ordering that the duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin should be restored to his principality.[99] The duke had close

[98] *Memoires du duc de Rovigo pour servir a l'histoire de l'Empereur Napoléon* (Paris, 1828), pp. 94-95; *Nap. Corres.*, vol. 15, pp. 371, 374, 393.

[99] *Tatistcheff*, p. 157; *Sbornik*, vol. 89, Budberg to Saltykov, 16/28 June 1807, pp. 38-39.

ties with the Russian imperial house (indeed his son had been married to one of Alexander's sisters, who had died in 1803) and had been at Altona with his family since his duchy had been occupied by the French in November and December 1806. Alexander wrote to the duke's son, the hereditary prince, on 29 June from Tilsit, communicating the happy news. Alexander's letter was carried by a Russian courier, who reached Altona at noon on 5 July. The hereditary prince allowed Edward Thornton, the British envoy to the Hanse Towns, who had been resident at or near Altona since the French occupation of Hamburg in November 1806, not only to read but also to transcribe the letter, and Thornton hurried to send a copy to Canning. The courier also brought a letter from Berthier to the French commander in Mecklenburg, informing him that the duke was to be immediately restored to his duchy.[100]

It is entirely plausible that Troubetzkoi, as one of the emperor's aides de camp, was in a position to give the Russian courier letters for his sister, but there is a problem about dates. The courier reached Altona on 5 July, but d'Antraigues told Canning that Hüe only received Troubetzkoi's letter for him on 10 July. This is not a conclusive objection. It may be Troubetzkoi's letters were contained in a single packet and that the courier sent them on to Husum and that it was only there that his packet was opened and the letter for d'Antraigues sent back to Hüe in Altona. It is also possible that Hüe merely told d'Antraigues that he had received the letter on 10 July in order to cover up his delay in forwarding it. A more serious difficulty is presented by the reference to Savary, who was at Königsberg, not Tilsit, throughout the negotiations between the two emperors. It may be that Savary provided the Russian courier at Königsberg with the passport which took him across northern Germany, but it would have been more natural for the passport to be issued by Berthier at Tilsit, since the courier also carried Berthier's instructions to the French commander in Mecklenburg.

Despite these objections, the fact that d'Antraigues knew about the Russian courier at all must count in his favour. So too does his knowledge not only that Prince Kourakin had been appointed to conduct the negotiation of the text of the peace treaty but also that he had been summoned to Tilsit for this purpose. Budberg was part of Alexander's entourage when he met Napoleon for the first time on 25 June, and he

[100] PRO, FO 33/38, desp. 65, Thornton to Canning, 5 July 1807. See also Elizabeth Sparrow, *Secret Service. British Agents in France 1792-1815* (Woodbridge, 1999) [cited as *Sparrow*], pp. 342-343, where Alexander's letter to the hereditary prince is printed in full.

would have been the natural choice, as foreign minister, to negotiate with his French counterpart, Talleyrand. However, Budberg did not become involved in the negotiations, presumably because of his hostility to Napoleonic France. Kourakin was not at Tilsit on 25 June, but he was nearby at the village of Schawel on his way to Vienna on a special mission to the Austrian government. He was sent for in haste, and he – along with the second Russian plenipotentiary, Prince Lobanov Rostovsky – held his first round of discussions with Talleyrand on 28 June.[101] Kourakin's role was not publicly announced at this stage. It was not until 2 July that Gower was able to report to Canning that Kourakin was 'said' to have been appointed as one of the Russian plenipotentiaries in the peace negotiations with France, and this despatch did not reach London until 23 July.[102]

On the other hand, some of the statements in the first section of the letter are clearly inaccurate. It was the Russian left, not the right wing, that was broken at Friedland and it was commanded by Prince Bagration, not by General von Essen, though one of the two Russian commanders called von Essen was wounded at Friedland.[103] Troubetzkoi's alleged letter also suggests that the first meeting between the two emperors at Tilsit was held on 24 June and not, as was the case, on 25 June. These are not conclusive points. It was already known in Britain by 21 July that the first interview on the raft at Tilsit had taken place on 25 June, so the misdating is likely to be a slip of the pen. It is also possible that after the terror and confusion of battle, Troubetzkoi did not recollect all the details of Friedland accurately. He was certainly not alone in criticising Bennigsen's conduct of the battle.[104] His picture of the general atmosphere at Tilsit of a sudden and unexpected rapprochement between the two emperors is certainly accurate.

There is, however, one statement in the first part of d'Antraigues's letter which is false and which can only be the result of deliberate fabrication, unless we make the extremely charitable assumption that he decyphered the name 'ostermann' incorrectly. There is no reference in any source to the presence of an 'Ostermann' at Tilsit, and by 1807 there were only two Russian aristocrats who bore that name. One was Count Ivan Ostermann, the last of his family in the male line, who was in his eighties by 1807. The other was his great nephew, Count Alexan-

[101] *Tatistcheff*, pp. 114 and 160.
[102] PRO, FO 65/69, desp. 8, Gower to Canning, 2 July 1807.
[103] *Sbornik*, vol. 89, Zismer to Budberg, 3/15 June 1807, p. 10; *Wilson*, p. 271.
[104] *Wilson*, pp. 273-274.

der Ostermann-Tolstoy, the grandson of Ivan's sister, who played an active part in the war of 1806-1807. This must be the 'ostermann' whom d'Antraigues had in mind. What d'Antraigues did not know was that Ostermann-Tolstoy had been seriously wounded in the leg on 5 June 1807 – before Friedland and 20 days before the first meeting of the emperors at Tilsit. As a result, he returned home after a spell in hospital at Memel.[105]

Another difficulty with d'Antraigues's account is that Bennigsen was on the raft at the first meeting between the two emperors on 25 July, but did not accompany Alexander to the town of Tilsit on the evening of 26 July. In the case of Troubetzkoi, it was vice versa.[106] It is therefore unlikely that they were present simultaneously at a conversation between Alexander and Napoleon. This point would not be of great significance by itself, but the reference to 'ostermann' is damning. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that d'Antraigues threw in the names of Bennigsen and Ostermann-Tolstoy to embellish his tale, to lend colour and circumstantial detail.

These embellisments and fabrications do not leave much of d'Antraigues's credibility intact, but the balance of probability remains that the first part of his letter to Canning rests in some degree on truthful foundations. D'Antraigues's knowledge of the Russian courier who passed across northern Germany to Altona and of Kourakin's role in the negotiations with France make it more probable than not that he received a letter from Troubetzkoi which contained some information about what was happening at Tilsit. But the final, and central, question remains – is 'the secret intelligence from Tilsit' true? Is it the case that Napoleon and Alexander discussed the formation of a maritime league against Britain at Tilsit?

Three treaties were signed between France and Russia at Tilsit on 7 July 1807 – a public peace treaty that was later published; a series of attached secret articles; and a secret offensive and defensive treaty of alliance.[107] The secret intelligence is certainly correct in the loose sense that the atmosphere between Alexander and Napoleon and the spirit of the Tilsit alliance were deeply inimical to Britain. The treaties regulate

[105] *Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar*, vol. XII (St. Petersburg, 1905; reprinted New York, 1962), p. 421; Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Tolstoys. Twenty-four generations of Russian history 1353-1983* (London, 1983), p. 97; *Sbornik*, vol. 89, Budberg to Saltykov, 25 May/6 June 1807, p. 3.

[106] *Shilder*, pp. 185-186, 294 footnote 328.

[107] The text of the treaties is printed in many publications – for example, *Sbornik*, vol. 89, pp. 50-62; and Albert Vandal, *Napoléon et Alexandre 1er. L'alliance russe sous le premier empire*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1896), vol. 1, *De Tilsit à Erfurt* [cited as *Vandal*], pp. 499-507.

the affairs of Poland, Germany, Italy and Dalmatia, largely in accordance with Napoleon's wishes, and speak of settling the affairs of the Ottoman Empire in concert between France and Russia. The purpose of the Tilsit alliance was to deny Britain (along with Austria and Prussia) a voice in all such matters. The only reference to Britain in the public treaty was Napoleon's acceptance of Alexander's mediation for the conclusion of a peace treaty between Britain and France. This did not give much away, but the secret treaty of alliance envisaged that the peace between Britain and France would rest on two bases. The first was that Britain should recognise the principle that 'the flags of all the powers must enjoy an equal and complete independence at sea' [*le pavillons de toutes les puissances doivent jouir d'une égale et parfaite indépendence sur les mers*]. The second was that Britain should restore all the French, Spanish and Dutch colonies she had conquered and that Hanover would be handed back to George III in return. The exchange of captured colonies for Hanover was an obvious proposal, but the demand that Britain embrace the principle of the freedom of the seas and the assumption underpinning the treaties that Britain was to be excluded from all influence over the affairs of continental Europe and the Near East amounted to a recognition by Britain that she had been thoroughly defeated.

There was clearly no expectation that Britain would accept peace on terms like these, and the secret treaty of alliance also set out what would happen if she failed to do so by 1 December 1807. First, Russia's alliance obligations would be activated and she would make common cause with France against Britain. Secondly, France and Russia would in concert demand that Denmark, Portugal and Sweden should close their ports to British shipping and declare war on Britain. If one or more of these three powers refused, they would be treated as enemies by France and Russia.

The three treaties signed at Tilsit on 7 July 1807 do not, in short, contain any reference to a maritime league against Britain. Nor do the letters exchanged between Napoleon and Alexander during the negotiations at Tilsit.[108] The treaties merely talk of compelling Denmark, Portugal and Sweden to close their ports to British shipping and to declare war on Britain. Once they had done so, their fleets would obviously be at war with the British navy, and it could be argued that the formation of a maritime league was therefore implicit in the Tilsit treaties. However, a maritime league would suggest some kind of concerted naval action against Britain, and there is not the slightest hint of any such pro-

[108] *Nap. Corres.*, vol. 15, pp. 381-385, 389-391, 392, 400-403; *Tatistcheff*, pp. 162-169.

ject in the treaties or any associated document. Instead, the emphasis of the treaties is on closing all the ports of the European continent to British shipping.

This point is underlined by the stipulation in the public peace treaty that the dukes of Oldenburg and Mecklenburg-Schwerin were to be restored to their duchies, but that the ports of those duchies were to be held by French garrisons until the conclusion of peace between Britain and France, and by the clause in the secret treaty of alliance that strong pressure would be applied to Austria to induce her to close her ports to British navigation and to declare war on Britain. The peace treaty between France and Prussia signed at Tilsit on 9 July 1807 also obliged Prussia to close her ports to the British flag and to go to war with Britain.[109] The whole thrust of Napoleon's endeavours at Tilsit was the elimination of all gaps in his campaign of economic warfare against Britain, not the creation of a maritime league.

There are, however, certain considerations that have to be taken into account before we conclude that there was no reference at Tilsit to the formation of an anti-British maritime league. There were many private conversations at Tilsit between Alexander and Napoleon in which future possibilities were discussed, often in vague terms and without finding their way into the text of the actual treaties.[110] Moreover, even though the treaties contain no reference to a maritime league, there is most certainly a reference to the closely related question of neutral maritime rights. Britain had long exploited her position as the dominant naval power to enforce a restrictive interpretation of the maritime trading rights of neutral states, and Russia had twice put herself in the vanguard of attempts to resist such an interpretation through her leadership of the armed neutrality leagues of 1780 and 1800. Russia had been obliged largely to accept the British definition of neutral maritime rights in the Anglo-Russian convention of 17 June 1801,[111] but the secret alliance treaty of Tilsit spoke of British recognition of the principle that the flags of all states were to enjoy 'an equal and complete independence at sea'. Alexander's public declaration breaking off diplomatic relations with Britain of 7 November 1807 included the statement that he annulled every existing convention between Britain and Russia, particularly that of 17 June 1801. 'He proclaims anew the principles of the armed neutrality ... and engages never to recede from them.'[112] None of

[109] *Vandal*, pp. 99-100.

[110] *Tatistcheff*, pp. 181-183.

[111] Ole Feldbæk, 'The Anglo-Russian rapprochement of 1801', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 3:3 (1978), pp. 205-227.

this proves, of course, that Alexander and Napoleon discussed the formation of a maritime league at Tilsit, but it does show that imposing the principles of the armed neutralities of 1780 and 1800 on Britain was one of the goals of the Tilsit alliance. In the last resort, the question has to be left open – Alexander and Napoleon never had an opportunity of trying to form an anti-British maritime league, since the Danish and Portuguese navies never fell into their hands and Sweden refused to abandon her alliance with Britain. It is not inherently implausible that there was some discussion at Tilsit, vague and nebulous no doubt, about the long-term prospects of creating a maritime league against Britain, but there is no documentary proof to support this notion beyond what Troubetzkoi allegedly wrote to d'Antraigues. In the absence of new evidence, it does not seem possible to go further than that.

Aftermath and conclusion

The secret intelligence from Tilsit did d'Antraigues a lot of good and Troubetzkoi no harm. Gower was never able to confirm the secret intelligence, but Canning never gave any sign that he doubted its veracity, and this transformed his relationship with d'Antraigues, in the longer term at least.

On 22 August, d'Antraigues called on Canning again with a deciphered, transcribed copy of a letter dated 20 July, which he claimed he had just received from Czartoryski. An analysis of the trustworthiness of this letter falls outside the framework of this article, but Canning was impressed by it and very interested by the picture it presented of Alexander's hesitation and vacillation after returning to St. Petersburg from Tilsit.[113] Later the same day, Canning wrote to his wife that 'd'Antraigues has paid me his usual Saturday morning visit, & brought me the inclosed letter (to him) from Pr. Czartoryski. It is very curious in it's account of the state of St. Petersbg. & gives a picture of the Emperor's weakness that is almost incredible.' A week later, Canning commented on the letter again, and observed, 'Lucky that I did not get my will in having d'Antr. recalled. Such a letter as this is worth all the bore, & all the pensions, that he can give & take.'[114]

[112] *Parl. Deb.*, 10, p. 221. Alexander's declaration is wrongly dated 31 October in this English translation of it.

[113] LDA, HAR/GC/59B – Czartoryski to d'Antraigues, 8/20 July 1807; and d'Antraigues to Canning, 20 Aug. 1807.

[114] LDA, HAR/GC/22, George to Joan Canning, 22 & 29 Aug. 1807. Both letters are partially printed in A. Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III, 1783-1810*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1962-1970), vol. 4, p. 624, footnote 2.

Over the next two years, d'Antraigues organised the discreet distribution of British propaganda inside Russia,[115] and provided Canning with a regular supply of secret intelligence from Russia. He was not attached to the Russian mission in London and the Russian government made no attempt to summon him to St. Petersburg, but it did eventually stop his Russian pension in the middle of 1808. He was now on a good footing with Canning, who responded to the cessation of his Russian pension by finally agreeing to his request that the British one be increased to £1,000 a year.[116] Canning also wrote to the home secretary, Lord Hawkesbury, on 6 October 1808 to accelerate d'Antraigues's application for denization. It was, Canning pointed out, 'well earned you will agree when you know (as you probably already more than suspect) that we owe Copenhagen in a great degree to his intelligence.'[117] When d'Antraigues and his wife were murdered in 1812 by a domestic servant at their home in Barnes, the very house where d'Antraigues wrote to Canning on 21 July 1807, he left an estate of about £15,000.[118]

As for Troubetzkoi, if he did indeed write to d'Antraigues from Tilsit on 27 June 1807, he never suffered for it and went on to enjoy a distinguished career. He fought in the war of 1812-1814 against France and reached the rank of lieutenant general. He constantly accompanied Alexander on his journeys to international congresses abroad between 1814 and 1822. Toubetzkoi was made a member of the senate in 1826 and of the imperial council in 1835. His second marriage to a celebrated beauty in 1812 produced 11 children. Troubetzkoi died in 1841.[119]

The identification of Troubetzkoi as d'Antraigues's alleged correspondent can be regarded as safe, but conclusions about the secret intelligence from Tilsit must be hesitant and tentative. On balance, despite the errors and fabrications in d'Antraigues's letter to Canning, his knowledge of the Russian courier who rode to Altona and of Kourakin's role in the negotiations with France suggest that he did receive some sort of letter from Troubetzkoi from Tilsit. We cannot know whether the formation of a maritime league against Britain was discussed between Alexander and Napoleon, but at the very least Troubetzkoi's letter must have dwelt on the unexpected and startling intimacy which characterised the first meetings between the two emperors.

[115] *Burrows*, pp. 136-138.

[116] PRO, FO 27/88, d'Antraigues to Smith, 5 Oct. 1811.

[117] LDA, HAR/GC/32, Canning to Hawkesbury, 6 Oct. 1808. I am grateful to Martin Robson for drawing my attention to this letter.

[118] DUL, GRE/B8/14/1, Butler to Grey, 25 July 1812.

[119] *Portraits Russes*, vol. 5, no 131.

Once the attack on Denmark was underway scepticism about the secret intelligence from Tilsit was not in Canning's interests, but his belief in its truthfulness seems genuine. When he wrote to Gower in the early hours of 22 July, he stated that it 'appears to rest on good authority' and he became more emphatic with time. On 27 September, he claimed in a despatch to Gower that it was 'well known' that at Tilsit Napoleon had 'openly avowed' his intention of bringing Denmark into a confederacy against Britain and that Napoleon's remarks 'had not been resisted' by Alexander.[120] Canning's acceptance of the secret intelligence must have coloured his thinking, but there is not space in this article to explore the much broader question of the effect of the secret intelligence on British policy. The historians who have considered this problem have done so almost exclusively in terms of whether the secret intelligence influenced the decision to seize the Danish fleet, but its effect on British policy towards Russia – and Portugal too, for that matter – also needs to be examined. These are matters that I shall investigate in future publications.

SUMMARY

The secret intelligence from Tilsit. New light on the events surrounding the British bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807

'The secret intelligence from Tilsit' has been the subject of intermittent historical discussion for almost 200 years. The term refers to the information that reached George Canning, the British foreign secretary, in the early hours of 22 July 1807 from a confidential source. This information was highly alarming from a British perspective: it suggested that Alexander I of Russia and Napoleon had discussed the possible formation of a maritime league against Britain during their early meetings at Tilsit and that Denmark, Portugal and Sweden were to be forced to join this league.

This article begins by examining the historiography of the secret intelligence from Tilsit – the various speculations about its source and the ultimate revelation in the 1970s that it was contained in a letter to Canning, dated 21 July 1807, from the comte d'Antraigues, a French royalist émigré resident in London at that time. D'Antraigues's letter claimed that his information came from a Russian general who held a position close to Emperor Alexander.

This is the cumulative outcome of previous historical research. What this article seeks to add is the identification of d'Antraigues's alleged informant as Prince Vassili Troubetzkoi, one of Alexander I's aides-de-camp at the time of Tilsit, and an analysis of reliability of the secret intelligence.

[120] PRO, FO 65/70, desp. 34, Canning to Gower, 27 Sept. 1807.

The historiographical section is therefore followed by some details about d'Antraigues and Troubetzkoi and the relationship between them. D'Antraigues's letter to Canning is then printed both in the original French and in English translation, and Troubetzkoi is identified as d'Antraigues's alleged informant on the basis of evidence drawn from a wide range of different sources.

Finally, the article moves on to discuss the reliability of the secret intelligence from Tilsit. Did d'Antraigues receive a letter from Troubetzkoi at all or did he invent it? And, in particular, how much credence should be given to the assertion that Alexander and Napoleon discussed the formation of a maritime league directed against Britain at Tilsit?

A close analysis of the text of d'Antraigues's letter to Canning reveals that it is riddled with inaccuracies and suggests that it was written largely in order to secure for d'Antraigues a permanent refuge in Britain and an increased pension from the British government. However, d'Antraigues's letter contains several pieces of information that were not common knowledge when it was written. This makes it more likely than not that there was some kind of communication from Troubetzkoi, however much d'Antraigues embellished and embroidered its contents when writing to Canning.

As for the claim that the creation of a maritime league against Britain was discussed at Tilsit, there is no confirmation in French and Russian sources of this assertion. The various treaties concluded between France and Russia at Tilsit are, however, hostile in letter and spirit towards British naval and commercial supremacy. It cannot therefore be excluded that some words concerning an anti-British maritime league passed between the two emperors at Tilsit without being committed to writing.

The overall conclusion of the article is that Troubetzkoi was d'Antraigues's alleged informant and probably did send some sort of communication to d'Antraigues from Tilsit but that d'Antraigues's letter to Canning of 21 July 1807 contains too many inaccuracies to possess much value as a source for what happened at Tilsit.

When the British government was heavily criticised by the opposition in parliament during the early part of 1808 for its attack on Denmark the previous year, Canning referred to the secret intelligence from Tilsit in order to justify the seizure of the Danish fleet. This does not, of course, prove that the secret intelligence was in reality a factor in the government's decision to act against Denmark. The question of what influence, if any, d'Antraigues's letter to Canning exerted on that decision is one that the author of the present article proposes to discuss in future publications.