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# The Royal Navy's Intervention at the Beginning of Chile's Independence Process, 1810-1814

## Abstract

When Chile started its emancipation process from the Spanish empire (1810-1814), the Royal Navy was the only formal representation of the United Kingdom in South America's west coast. During those years only two British warships arrived at Valparaíso. The analysis of the correspondence exchanged by Captain Charles Fleming and Commodore James Hillyar with the British, Spanish, and Chilean authorities reveals they were carrying out missions of a military and strategic nature, linked to the international conflicts in which England was engaged. However, both officers became directly involved in internal political affairs between Spain and its colonies, causing divergent effects among the opposing players. The examination of such correspondence allows identifying, in official sources from decision-making authorities, the initial British interests in that distant colony. This study argues that, even though the British governments favoured a balance of power and non-intervention policy towards the European powers, during the analysed period the Royal Navy's actions in Chile reveals an erratic policy concerning Spain and its South American possessions. Even more, those events are evidence that the prevailing British geostrategic and security interests were beyond the economic and commercial benefits which British subjects were looking for in the emerging republic; and concludes that both naval officers interventions gave rise to the first perception of Great Britain's future influence in Chile's emancipation struggle, inspiring the mutual representation which would dominate the bilateral relation between British and Chilean authorities during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

**Keywords**: Chile, United Kingdom, Spain, nineteenth century, Spanish-American revolutions, Royal Navy's presence, Chilean independence process, Anglo-Chilean relations, British expansion

## Resumen

Cuando Chile inició su proceso de emancipación del Imperio español (1810-1814), la Armada Real británica era la única representación formal del Reino Unido en la costa occidental de Sudamérica. Durante esos años solo dos buques de guerra británicos arribaron al puerto de Valparaíso. El análisis de la correspondencia intercambiada por el co-

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mandante Charles Fleming y el comodoro James Hillyar con las autoridades británicas, españolas y chilenas, revela que cumplían misiones de carácter militar y estratégico, vinculadas a los conflictos internacionales en los que el Reino Unido estaba comprometido. Sin embargo, ambos oficiales se involucraron directamente en asuntos políticos internos entre España y su colonia, provocando efectos divergentes entre los actores enfrentados. El examen de dicha correspondencia permite identificar, en fuentes oficiales procedentes de instancias decisorias, los iniciales intereses británicos en la lejana colonia. Este estudio sostiene que, a pesar de que los gobiernos británicos favorecían una política de equilibrio de poder y no intervención frente a las potencias europeas, durante el período analizado las acciones de la Armada Real en Chile revelan una política errática en relación con España y sus posesiones sudamericanas. Estos hechos muestran que los intereses geoestratégicos y de seguridad británicos estaban por encima de los beneficios económicos y comerciales que los súbditos de la corona inglesa buscaban en la naciente república; y concluye que las intervenciones dieron origen a la primera percepción de la futura influencia de Gran Bretaña en la lucha emancipadora chilena, inspirando la representación mutua que dominaría la relación bilateral entre las autoridades británicas y chilenas durante las primeras décadas del siglo XIX.

**Palabras clave:** Chile, Reino Unido, España, siglo XIX, revoluciones hispanoamericanas, presencia de la Armada Real, proceso independentista chileno, relaciones anglo-chilenas, expansión británica

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## Introduction

The foreign influences in Latin America during the years of the independence revolutions is a subject that has deserved great historiographical attention. Due to the importance this period had and continues to have for the nations and states which took part in the process, both in America as well as in Europe, the topic has not been exhausted with the passage of time and continues to be a source of new approaches and interpretations. Thus, researchers have studied Latin America's so-called "mother-time"[1] broadening their views, providing information that complements previous understandings and validating or defying traditional perspectives. This has not only benefited the understanding of a time of change, which affected various societies, but has also been the source of enhancing controversies, encouraging an approach to a structural knowledge of the period and a more complete vision of its total history.

In the case of British influence in Chile, historiography is congruent regarding the relevance of the consequences –positive and negative– this bilateral relationship produced for both countries, and particularly for the growth of the new republic. Studies of

[1] Employing the term originally formulated by Gabriel Salazar in *Construcción de Estado en Chile (1800-1837)*, Santiago, Editorial Sudamericana, 2005, pp. 21-37.

the United Kingdom's formal involvement in the Chilean independence process have been approached from complementary European and American perspectives. However, recognizing the importance of this influence, the historiographical research on the bilateral relationship have been focused mainly on the non-official events carried out by private enterprises since 1817, when the United Kingdom had already managed to overcome the upheavals of both the Napoleonic wars and its conflict with the United States of America, beginning its greatest period of global expansion. Since that year the Spanish Crown began to definitively give up control of its colonies in America, and Chile managed to consolidate a first political and organizational structure, attracting the first English private travellers, merchants, adventurers, and investors, thus strengthening its foreign trade, providing evidence of its international presence as a self-governing entity, and drawing the attention of the British government.

In contrast to what has been the most traditional approach, this paper studies a timeframe prior to Chile's long process of structural transformation which began in 1817. By analysing the first formal presence of the British State in Chile, at the beginning of a time of instability and complex political definitions, it presents a perspective before the existence of any official bilateral relationship, examining the influence exerted by a specific and only British State actor in Chile during the 1810-1814 period: the Royal Navy.

The purpose of this work is to present some evidence for examining the most common historiographical perceptions of the British government's initial attitude and policy towards one precise Latin American revolutionary movement: that of having maintained a strictly neutral position, of favouring its commercial interests or even considering an eventual veiled support for the independence crusades[2]. This study carries out a comparative descriptive work, through a critical discourse analysis, using as primary sources a set of official correspondence of the only two Royal Navy commanders arrived in Chile during the period, exchanged with the Spanish authorities in Lima, the Chilean government in Santiago and with their own superiors in Rio de Janeiro, and London. The analytical categories used to identify the value and scope of the political interference, were defined as the level of representation assumed by the two commanding officers, the expressed recognition of an external threat to the United Kingdom and their understanding of British foreign policy regarding the conflict between Spain and its colonies.

Based on those findings this article argues that, at the beginning of the Hispanic American liberation movements, the United Kingdom was unable to define a precise policy towards the Spanish colonies, failing to convey it to its own state agents and to the confronting players. The cause of this vacillation was the inability to resolve the dilemma of prioritizing between two major state interests: to provide strategic security, by

[2] The idea of a primarily commercial British interest in Chile during the independence period has been well developed by Hernán Ramírez in *Historia del Imperialismo en Chile*, Santiago, Editora Austral, 1960, pp. 21-31; and Gabriel Salazar, "Dialéctica de la modernización mercantil: intercambio desigual, coacción, claudicación (Chile como West Coast, 1817-1843)", in *Cuadernos de Historia*, n.° 14, Santiago, 1994, pp. 21-80, among others.

maintaining a balance of power in Europe and neutralizing the ideological and territorial expansion of the Napoleonic Empire[3], or to favour the prosperity it could be obtained from the growth and expansion of its own trade with the Spanish colonies, by opening new markets for its industrial production. The scarce information available at that time also contributed to this complex definition, as well as the biased broad and collective vision by which the British political authorities analysed and decided on scattered and dissimilar events taking place in Latin America, making difficult for them to fully understand the problem. Thus, faced with the classic dilemma of choosing the right equilibrium between security and development, the British options ranged from favouring the preservation of the Spanish monarchy and empire integrity, maintaining neutrality at all costs, supporting the emancipation of the colonies from Spain, or even establishing a strategy of expansion and territorial dominion[4].

For the general and immediate interest of the United Kingdom, the worst-case scenario in its relationship with the Spanish-American community was to avoid adopting a specific position; but faced with this complex dilemma, that was precisely what happened in Chile. This hesitant attitude produced divergent perceptions among the opposing players, and translated into disappointment and distrust between Spaniards, American monarchists, and revolutionaries, and produced the first perception of Great Britain's future position in Chile's emancipation struggle, inspiring a mutual representation which would dominate the bilateral relation between both country's authorities during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Lastly, the analysis infers that, for the British government, the value of this province on South American west coast was geostrategic and linked to the state's security interest; it was not economic.

However, regardless of which interest and policy the British government prioritized, the key tool for exercising its influence was the same: sea power provided by the Royal Navy. Therefore, case studying the Royal Navy's actions in Chile, through testimonies available in the letters exchanged between 1810 and 1814, and analysing the outcome effects these actions had, sheds light on an unresolved political dilemma. The cases of the Royal Navy's first two interactions in Chile during the examined period, with HMS *Standard* in 1811 and HMS *Phoebe* in 1814, and the political consequences they had, are evidence of this lack of political definition and the undesired effects sea power may produce in such environments.

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[3] For the purposes of this study we have used the definition and theory of Balance of Power established by Paul R. Votti and Mark V. Kauppi in *International Relations Theory*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1999, 3rd edition, pp. 71-76; and the nineteeth century historical conceptualization used by Edward Vode Gulick in *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1967.

[4] The different policies open to the United Kingdom have been addressed by John Lynch, "British Policy and Spanish America, 1783-1808", in *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. I, n.º 1, 1969, pp. 1-30; and in *América Latina, entre Colonia y Nación,* Barcelona, Editorial Crítica, 2001; and by William W. Kaufmann, *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America, 1804-1828,* New York, Yale University Press, 1967.

## Historiographical Approaches to the British Influence in Latin America's Independence

The historiography of British influence during the independence of the Spanish-American colonies, has focused its research mainly from the perspective of the imperialism paradigm. Based on theories of formal or informal imperialism, of dependency, domination, world system or as a simple extension of influences, historiographical studies have addressed the British presence in the Latin American independence struggles from the perspective of a broad and collective political context towards the region; as if Hispanic America at the beginning of the nineteenth century represented a solid, uniform, political and social block, with identical interests and homogeneous behaviour. Hence the proliferation of general historiographical works on Latin America, written from the perspective of states with imperialist pretensions[5].

With only a few very specific exceptions, which privilege the analysis of the British presence in the Spanish colonies on the Atlantic coast (Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, and even Mexico), the influence of the United Kingdom during the collapse of the Spanish empire in America is analysed from a rather global and holistic position towards the territory[6], and with a significant thematic trend in economic history. Although this historiographic approach enables to draw valid conclusions from a Eurocentric perspective, in some way instrumental to the imperialist representation, it overlooks details that reveal the specific attitudes and actions in each Latin American actor. With such a theoretical approach, disregarding the notable territorial, cultural and historic differences, the historiographical approach has not reached a full understanding of the phenomenon of British influence in the foundation of each of the new states resulting from the emancipatory process. Coincidentally, this global and collective historiographic analysis towards the region is analogous to the British authority's approach when trying to define their policy concerning the Spanish colonies at the beginning of the nineteenth century[7].

In the case of the influence in Chile, it has also been the economic issue under the same paradigm of imperialism that has received the most attention; especially after the

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[5] A detailed description of the state of the art in British and American historiographical research on Latin America can be found in Rodrigo Escribano Roca, "The world upside down. Territorialidad, nacionalización e imperio en las visiones británicas de la América Española (1824-1850)", in *Historia 396*, vol. 11, n.° 1, Valparaíso, 2021, pp.163-202.

[6] This generalization in Anglo-Saxon historiography is evident in works such as: James Fred Rippy, *Latin America in World Politics: An Outline Survey*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1928; Kaufmann, *British Policy…*, *op. cit.*; Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Historia de América Latina*. *Volumen V. La Independencia*, Barcelona, Editorial Crítica, 1991; John A. Crow, *The Epic of Latin America*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 4th edition, 1992; Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith, *Modern Latin America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 4th edition, 1997; John C. Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire. A Concise History of Latin America,* New York, W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 2001; Rory Miller, *Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, London, Routledge, 2013, among others.

[7] Kaufmann, *British Policy…*, *op. cit*.

most intense arrival of British merchants which began in the 1820s[8]. There are also researches addressing this historical change from the specific focus of bilateral diplomatic relations[9]. Other important and revealing studies have used as their primary source the accounts of European travellers from the early nineteenth century, focusing on social, cultural, and the scientific contexts, and on the arrival, exchange, and impact of ideas at the dawn of new American states[10]. Recent research has made a valuable contribution to the understanding of British influence of the period by linking the Anglo-Chilean relationship to different private players and matters, developing new approaches and connecting arguments from a much richer multidimensional analysis[11].

Despite the existence of different and new approaches and priorities in historiographical studies on this unique Anglo-Chilean relationship of the early nineteenth century, less relevance has been given to those sources coming from formal state actors who were direct witnesses at the events; those official players who produced the basic information and to some extent the intelligence that most supported British authorities' political decision-making. At a time when very few English travellers, merchants and private adventurers had visited Chile, and a decade before the first consular agent arrived in the country[12], those reports and orders exchanged by Royal Navy officers and the Admiralty, were the only ones describing and mapping first-hand Chile's state of affairs, shedding light on what would be Britain State's interests for this rebellious

[8] Chilean representatives of this economic historiography are to be found in: Hernán Ramírez, *Antecedentes Económicos de la Independencia de Chile*, Santiago, Universidad de Chile, 2nd edition, 1967; and Ramírez, *Historia del Imperialismo…*, *op. cit.*; Sergio Villalobos, "El Comercio extranjero a fines de la dominación española", in *Journal of Interamerican Studies*, vol. IV, n.° 4, Cambridge, 1962, pp. 517-544; and *Comercio y Contrabando en el Río de la Plata y Chile*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1965; Eduardo Cavieres, *Comercio chileno y comerciantes ingleses,* Valparaíso, Editorial Universitaria*,* 1999; Gabriel Salazar, "Dialéctica de la modernización…", *op. cit.*; and *Construcción de Estado…*, *op. cit.*; and *Mercaderes, Empresarios y Capitalistas,* Santiago, Editorial Debate, 2013.

[9] Ricardo Montaner, *Historia Diplomática de la Independencia de Chile,* Santiago, Editorial Andrés Bello, 1961; Mario Barros Van Buren, *Historia Diplomática de Chile, 1541-1938*, Barcelona, Ediciones Ariel, 1970.

[10] For the Chilean perspectives see Juan Ricardo Couyoumdjian, "Masonería de habla inglesa en Chile: Algunas noticias", in *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de la Historia*, n.° 105, Santiago, 1995, pp. 185-208 and "El alto comercio de Valparaíso y las grandes casas extranjeras, 1880-1930: Una aproximación", in *Historia*, vol. 33, Santiago, 2000, pp. 63-99; Baldomero Estrada, "Los Relatos de Viajeros como Fuente Histórica: Visión de Chile y Argentina en Cinco Viajeros Ingleses (1817-1835)", in *Revista de Indias*, vol. XLVII, n.° 180, Madrid, 1987, pp. 631-666; Claudio Llanos, "Imperialismo inglés y ciencia. La Sociedad Geográfica Real de Londres, 1830-1870", in *Boletín Americanista*, año LX 1, n.° 60, Barcelona, 2010, pp. 209-225; and Escribano, "The world upside…", *op. cit*.

[11] Marcelo Somarriva, *An Open Field and Fair Play; The Relationship between Britain and the Southern Cone of America between 1808 and 1830*, PhD Thesis, London, University College London, 2013; Andrés Baeza Ruz, *El otro imperio. Chilenos y británicos en la revolución de independencia, 1806-1831*, Santiago, RIL editores 2021.

[12] The first British formal and non-naval representation in Chile was the arrival to Valparaíso of consul Christopher Nugent in May 1824. For the difficulties and the late official British recognition of Chile as an independent state see Charles W. Centner, "The Chilean Failure to Obtain British Recognition, 1823-1828", in *Revista de Historia de América*, n.° 15, 1942, pp. 285-297. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/20136471 [accessed: January 22, 2023].

Spanish province. Consequently, a historiographical approach based on these sources and supported in the conceptual security framework and sea power theory, instead of the imperialist economic-centric model, provides a different contribution to this background of new interpretations.

## The Presence of Royal Navy in the Chilean Coast

Due to the unique environment in which navies operate, they have always been organized and employed as useful power instruments for the promotion and defence of a state's interests overseas. As specific manifestations of the culture and will of states, they have operated in the protection and promotion of these values, taking advantage of the world's oceans as a means of communication and exchange with other international players. From the theoretical standpoint of sea power, navies have always played two main roles: defence and power projection at the strategic level; and contribution to growth and development via the protection of global trade in the economic sphere. In fact, both roles are expressions of the political will of the State, seeking to take advantage of the capacity to protect its interests and expand its objectives. This was evident since the sixteenth century European states overseas expansions, and the United Kingdom was particularly successful founding her security, development, and global reach on the broad concept as a sea-power state[13]. However, despite her success in understanding and using sea power as an instrument to promote her interests, until the beginning of the nineteenth century the South Sea and its coasts were of difficult access and a restricted space to British naval presence.

The presence of English ships on the South Pacific west coast, although extremely infrequent, was the first and only formal expression of the English Crown in the Captaincy General of Chile since the arrival of Europeans into the New World. Beginning with the first expeditions of privateers like Francis Drake (1578), until the cartographic cruises of Commodore George Vancouver (1795)[14], the Royal Navy seldomly appeared on the west coast of South America, and normally in a brief and hostile manner. As state instruments, all British seafarers who arrived in the South Pacific did so on a mission mandated by British authorities, for strategic and military purposes or with a scientific

[13] The concept of the sea-power state as used here, is an expression of a nation's consciousness, culture and identity linked to the oceans, that has been extensively developed with sound historical foundations by Andrew Lambert in *Seapower States*, London, Yale University Press, 2018.

[14] Commodore George Vancouver's journey is particularly interesting because it is the last trip by a Royal Navy force to reach the Captaincy General of Chile, prior to the beginning of the independence process. Vancouver landed in Valparaíso, with the HMS *Discovery* and HMS *Chatham*, on March 25, 1795, due to an emergency caused by a severe damage to its ship and the presence of scurvy among its crew. However, he had specific instructions from the British Admiralty not to visit Spanish settlements or ports on the South Pacific coast. George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and Round the World*, London, John Stockdale, 1801, vol. VI, p. 227.

perspective of exploration with a clear sense of information gathering or intelligence production[15].

At the beginning of the nineteenth century British interest in the Spanish colonies in the Pacific was widely known in public dominion, both for its strategic value in international conflicts and for the economic benefit it sparked among private individuals as a profitable whaling and trade destination[16]. Thus, in October 1806, after the unofficial and unauthorized failed conquest of Buenos Aires by a British military force, Sir William Windham, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, conceived a plan for seizing Valparaíso and Santiago, which was entrusted to General Robert Craufurd and was to be supported by a naval force under the command of Vice Admiral Sir George Murray[17]. Even though the military expedition to the west coast of South America never took place, and because of the extended wars with Spain, the potential presence of English naval forces on the Pacific shores was always considered by the Spanish vice-royal authorities as hostile and openly unfriendly[18]. As a result, the defences were largely designed to reject the presence and action of British privateers or the Royal Navy on the coast of Chile, as established by the plans and fortifications of the Captaincy General and Valparaíso in 1808[19]. However, a momentary turn in this adverse representation of the British naval presence on the west coast occurred after Napoleon Bonaparte's surprise invasion of Portugal.

With the Lusitanian royal family's scape to Brazil in January 1808, escorted by Royal Navy ships, the formal and permanent presence of a British State actor in South

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[15] The presence of English privateers on the Chilean coasts during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries was always acting on behalf of the British Crown or with a Letter of Marque from the Admiralty. See works by Armando de Ramon, Juan Ricardo Couyoumdjian and Samuel Vial, *La gestación del mundo Hispanoamericano*, Santiago, Editorial Andrés Bello, 1992; Isidoro Vazquez de Acuña, *Historia Naval del Reino de Chile 1520-1826,* Santiago, Compañía Sudamericana de Vapores S.A., 2004; Patricia Arancibia, Isabel Jara and Andrea Novoa, *La Marina en la historia de Chile*. *Tomo I. Siglo XIX*, Santiago, Sudamericana, 2005; and Carlos Tromben, *La Armada de Chile, una historia de dos siglos. Tomo I: Desde el periodo colonial a la Guerra del Pacífico*, Santiago, RIL editores, 2017.

[16] A clear example is William Burke, *South American Independence or the Emancipation of South America, the Glory and Interest of England*, London, J. Ridgway, 1807. In this publication the author, known and linked to Francisco Miranda, makes a detailed justification of the convenience of a British military invasion in the Spanish colonies, as a measure to generate independence movements that would open those markets to the commerce of the United Kingdom.

[17] "Instructions to Craufurd", October 30, 1806, The National Archives at Kew (hereafter TNA), War Office (hereafter WO) 1/161, pp. 136-54.

[18] The frequent presence of British whalers on the Chilean coast started during the 1790s and lasted until the year 1806, after the war against Spain was declared. Following that year, the British contraband traders appeared in the South American west coast. But neither the whalers nor the smuggling merchants were a reason for the Royal Navy's presence in the South Sea. See Christopher Maxworthy, "British whalers, merchants and smugglers, contraband trade on the Pacific Coast of South America 1783-1810", in *Derroteros de la Mar del Sur*, n.° 15, Lima/Madrid/Mulazzo/París, 2007, pp.77-86.

[19] Several plans and military preparation to defend Chile form a British invasion took place between 1806 and 1808. The complete military defensive plan of the Governor of Valparaíso, Joaquín de Alós, of June 4, 1808, appears in Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Obras completas. Volumen IV. Historia de Valparaíso. Tomo II*, Santiago, Universidad de Chile, 1936*,* pp. 471-475.

America began. On May 17, 1808, the South American Naval Station was created in Rio de Janeiro. Led by Rear-Admiral Sir William Sidney Smith, it was under direct political and military orders of the Admiralty in London[20]. The subsequent arrival in Brazil of Lord Percy Sydney Smythe, Viscount Strangford, as the British government's extraordinary envoy and minister plenipotentiary, gave the Anglo-Portuguese relationship a formal diplomatic character. Despite the confidence and prestige Lord Strangford achieved with the Portuguese Crown, the analysis of his correspondence with London and with the political authorities in Brazil and Río de la Plata, it is evident that his main instrument of manoeuvre, information, and influence, was always the presence of the Royal Navy in the region[21]. This was specifically clear for the inhabitants of Spanish America; still unable to discard its former image as a threat, after decades of rivalry, it was the British navy that assumed the formal representation of the British Crown's interests in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. On the other hand, the disagreement between Lord Strangford and Rear-Admiral Smith, which ended with the latter's dismissal in May 1809, is evidence of the United Kingdom's inconsistent policy towards the Spanish colonies and a testimony of the relative autonomy the naval commanders had assumed with respect to their new Spanish ally in America in the face of the more significant French threat[22].

In the case of Chile, the scarce official correspondence between the authorities of the South American Naval Station and the governor of the province were carried out by sea, using British private vessels, in an incipient commercial traffic between Lima and the Atlantic ports. Rear-Admiral Smith's first formal communication with Governor Francisco García Carrasco was sent in July 1808, via Lieutenant (RN) William Fitzmaurice, who sailed to the Pacific aboard the British merchant ship *Vulture*. Fitzmaurice arrived in Valparaíso on September 17, 1808. He then travelled to Santiago and delivered the letter in which Ferdinand VII's Secretary of State reported of the peace signed between Spain and the United Kingdom, ordering the release of the British prisoners who had been held captive since the English invasions of Buenos Aires in 1806-1807[23].

Two years later, and just two weeks after the first Chilean government *Junta* was established, on October 2, 1810, its secretary Gaspar Marín sent letters to both Lord Strangford and Rear-Admiral Smith. There he notified of the new government that

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[20] Gerald S. Graham and Robin A. Humphreys (eds.), *The Navy and South America 1807-1823. Correspondence of the Commander-in Chief on the South American Station*, New York, The Navy Records Society, 1962, vol. CIV, pp. 4-6.

[21] Archivo General de la Nación, *Correspondencia de Lord Stragford y la Estación Británica del Río de la Plata con el Gobierno de Buenos Aires, 1810-1822*, Buenos Aires, Guillermo Kraft Ltda., 1941; Charles K. Webster (ed.), *Gran Bretaña y la Independecnia de América Latina 1812 -1830. Documentos escogidos de los Archivos del Foreign Office*, vol. I, Buenos Aires, 1944; and in Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8 and 10-11.

[22] Admiral Smith's letter to the Admiralty after being relieved of office, states he had followed secret instructions issued by Lord Castelreagh. Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

[23] *Op. cit.*, pp. 7 and 25. In Chile there were no British prisoners in custody.

had taken over the Captaincy General, requesting for "the generous protection that the British nation extents ours, that in no event Your Excellency will allow the tyrant [Napoleon] the free transit to these seas"[24]. These letters illustrate the initial perception Chilean authorities had regarding the attitude the United Kingdom would assume towards the new government; that of support and eventual defence provided by British sea-power; particularly acknowledging the threat came from a common enemy. After the opening of Chilean ports to international traffic, decreed by the *Junta* in February 1811, the lawful presence of trading ships and especially British whalers calling at its coasts increased. However, despite the initial requests for support and protection, the appearance of British warships was a very rare exception.

There were two specific events that changed the first perception of the attitude and influence that the United Kingdom would assume towards autonomy movements in the Captaincy General. Both episodes, directed by the political authority of the Admiralty in London and not related to the South American Naval Station missions, caused serious political repercussions that, for years, generated a feeling of distrust towards the British ships that pulled into Chileans ports and to the overall attitude the United Kingdom would adopt concerning the patriots' liberation process.

## The Case of HMS *Standard* and Captain Charles Fleming

On April 17, 1811, the British frigate HMS *Standard* set sail from Cadiz. She was part of the Royal Navy's squadron protecting to the maritime flank of the besieged Spanish city-port[25]. Her commanding officer, Captain Charles Elphinstone Fleming (18 June 1774 - 30 October 1840), in a clear demonstration of the mutual understanding between the governments of Spain and the United Kingdom, was commissioned with precise instructions from both the British Admiralty and the Regency authorities in Cadiz. His mission was to carry official and private correspondence to Chile and the Viceroyalty of Perú; to offer protection and transport for the deputies that each Spanish province had to send to the General Congress of the *Cortes*; and most importantly, to collect the economic resources with which the Spanish colonies supported the financing of the war against Napoleon on the Iberian Peninsula. This latter responsibility was of the greatest interest to the British government. Since 1806 the United Kingdom was unable to access European markets with its growing industrial production due to the continental blockade decreed by Napoleon, and it was making enormous economic efforts to sustain General Arthur Wellesley's army in the peninsular campaign. Consequently, the econo-

[24] *Colección de Historiadores y Documentos Relativos a la Independencia de Chile*, 1913, vol. XXV, pp. 319-321.
[25] Jorge Carmona Yáñez, *Carrera y la Patria Vieja*, Santiago, Instituto Geográfico Militar, 1952, p. 49; Diego Barros Arana, *Historia General de Chile*, Santiago, Editorial Universitaria, 2002, vol. VIII, p. 263; Carlos Marichal, *Bankruptcy of Empire: Mexican Silver and the Wars between Spain, Britain and France, 1760-1810*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 231.

mic support that the Spanish-American colonies could give to the mother country was of direct benefit to the general war effort and returned part of the funds that the British had already contributed to the Cadiz government in its struggle against the French[26].

Captain Charles Fleming unmistakably understood the relevance of the task entrusted to him, since he had already carried out a first commission to New Spain with the same assignment conveying the values that the colonies sent to Cadiz. On that occasion, in command of frigate HMS *Bulwark*, he had arrived at Veracruz in July 1810. After traveling to Puebla and Mexico City, with the instructions of the finance minister of the Courts of Cadiz, he had gathered a considerable sum of resources that the Viceroyalty sent to Spain[27]. Upon his return to the Peninsula in December 1810, the Spanish government granted Fleming the honorary rank of Brigadier of the Royal Spanish Armada in recognition for his services to the Crown[28]. But, in 1811, Fleming and the *Standard's* mission to the west coast of South America took place in a much more complex scenario. Since September 18, 1810, a *Junta* had assumed the government of the Captaincy General of Chile; although swearing allegiance to Ferdinand VII and emulating the *Juntas* that had arisen in the different kingdoms of the Peninsula, it showed clear signs of seeking greater autonomy from to the metropolis. By coincidence, onboard HMS *Standard* the Spanish Council of Regency sent, among other gazettes and official documents, the letter in which it formalized the recognition of the authority assumed by Chile's *Junta*, although stating certain terms and conditions[29].

Several passengers were also traveling on the British frigate who, with certainty, presented Fleming with divergent positions regarding what could be expected at their arrival in Valparaíso. Among them was Antonio Caspe, who had been appointed to the important post of judge of the Royal Audience of Santiago and who was unaware that, since the end of April 1811, this institution of Spanish authority

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[26] William S. Robertson, "The Juntas of 1808 and the Spanish Colonies", in *The English Historical Review,* Oxford University Press, vol. XXXI, n.º 124, Oxford, 1916, pp. 573-585. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/551442 [accessed: September 19, 2022].

[27] Marichal, *Bankruptcy of Empire…*, *op. cit*., p. 231. Points out that after his stay in Mexico, Fleming on the HMS *Bulwark* landed in Havana, where he brought in another amount of money amounting 1,566,222 pesos transported to Cadiz.

[28] Barros Arana, *Historia General…*, *op. cit.*, p. 263. In 1828 Charles Fleming still held the rank of Brigadier in the Spanish Royal Navy, awarded in 1809. See *Estado Militar de España en 1828*, Madrid, Imprenta Real, 16th edition, 1828, p. 141. Available at http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/issue.vm?id=0000740507&search=&lang=es [accessed: February 26, 2022].

[29] José Miguel Carrera, *Diario de José Miguel Carrera*, Santiago, Quimantú, 1973, p. 15. The *Cortes* official letter, detaed April 14, 1811, is published by Chile's National Congress in*, Sesiones de los Cuerpos Legislativos de Chile. Vol. I, 1810-1814*, Santiago, 1887, p. 168. Fleming also carried recommendation letters in his favor issued by Joaquín Fernández de Leyba and Miguel Riesco y Puente, at that time interim Deputies of Chile at the *Cortes* of Cádiz and addressed to the Bishop of Santiago, the Dean and Governors of the University of San Felipe. In them, Fleming's mission was explained and urged them to contribute with donations to support the Spanish government in its war against France. See Elías García-Huidobro, "Las Cortes de Cádiz y las elecciones de los Diputados de Chile", in *Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía,* vol. IV, n.º 8, Santiago, 1912, pp. 330-361.

in Chile had been dissolved by the new *Junta*. Also, onboard HMS *Standard* was Spanish citizen José Joaquín de Aguirre who was traveling on business matters, carrying goods he hoped to sell in Valparaíso and Santiago. Another passenger was Sergeant Major José Miguel Carrera, who after been wounded in combat during the Peninsular War and conscious of the events happening in Chile, was returning to his homeland after four years of military service in Spain. This group of passengers also included Pedro Díaz Valdés, an Asturian advisor to the Captaincy General and brother-in-law of José Miguel Carrera, who was returning from Spain where he had represented the Chilean government in the allegations that had been presented against the previous Governor Francisco García Carrasco. Finally, mandated by the British government, was the representative of the General Commissioner of the British Army in Spain, Mr. D. Drummond, whose responsibility was to register and ensure the safe transfer of the funds that the provinces sent to Spain[30].

The diversity of origin and ideological positions of the passengers with respect to the events taking place in Spanish America, generated various frictions among them, which must have given Captain Fleming a greater understanding of the complex political scenario in that province[31]. At the end of May 1811, HMS *Standard* called at Rio de Janeiro on her way to the west coast of South America. In this Atlantic port, homebase of the Royal Navy's South American Naval Station, Charles Fleming was updated on the latest events in the Spanish colonies. From Rio de Janeiro José Miguel Carrera mailed via Buenos Aires, a letter to his father, in which he expressed the appreciation and respect he had acquired for Fleming, which led him to invite the latter to spend a few days at the Carrera family's home in Santiago[32].

Consequently, based on the gazette and correspondence he carried, and the conflicting information and opinions that most certainly confronted the passengers during the three long months of sailing, and from the instructions he had received on his departure from Cadiz and which had been updated in Rio, and finally from the friendship he had established with Carrera, it is evident that Charles Fleming had a complete and up-to-date appreciation of what was happening in the Captaincy General since September of the previous year, and he had the opportunity to form his own opinion of the complex political scenario he would face in Chile.

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[30] Among the passengers travelling to Chile on the *Standard* were also Ramón Errázuriz Aldunate, a Chilean merchant who had lived in Cadiz since 1801 and who would become an alternate Senator in 1812 and a Member of Parliament on several occasions between 1823 and 1845. Full list of passengers travelling on the *Standard* are given in Barros Arana, *Historia general…*, *op. cit*., pp. 263-264.

[31] José Miguel Carrera, who would become one of the leaders of the Chilean emancipation process, expressly mentions his severe discussion with José Joaquín Aguirre as "a noisy collision that he had with me on board", Carrera, *Diario de José Miguel…*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[32] Diego Barros Arana, "Don José Miguel Carrera. Un capítulo para su biografía", en *Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía*, vol. XL, n.° 44, Santiago, 1921, pp. 220-223; Carmona Yáñez, *Carrera y la Patria…*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

The *Standard's* arrival in Valparaíso, on July 25, 1811, must have come as a great surprise to the authorities and inhabitants of that small port, considering that more than sixteen years had passed since Commodore Vancouver had arrived in 1795. This uneasiness and mistrust towards the British were evident in the first meeting that José Miguel Carrera held with the Governor of Valparaíso, Colonel John Mackenna[33]. In his diary, Carrera mentions that Mackenna "called me to his sleeping quarters and asked about the state of Spain and the reason for the arrival of an English warship". Carrera was able to calm him down and "I persuaded him of the trust we should have in the honourable Fleming, who had only come to Lima for money". Subsequently, Fleming had the opportunity to meet on several occasions with the Governor of Valparaíso. According to Carrera's journal, the days Fleming stayed in Valparaíso gave him the opportunity to establish "a quite intimate friendship with Mackenna"[34], which must have allowed him to get informed in a more precise way of the events taking place in the province and to hear the proposals of who would eventfully become a faithful and active defender of Chilean independence.

Two days after his arrival, on July 27, 1811, Captain Fleming addressed a first and brief formal note to the Chilean authorities, explaining his mission and submitting his requirements[35]. It is interesting to observe that, even though he knew precisely what was happening at that moment in the province and who the authorities were, his letter was addressed to the "Governor of the Kingdom of Chile", a position that represented the previous political authority of the Spanish empire in Chile and which Fleming knew with certainty no longer existed. In his letter, he explicitly stated that he had been mandated by both the Spanish and English governments, and that he would continue to Lima as soon as possible. He asked straightforwardly if the election of the deputies of the "kingdom" whose members "will represent in the General Congress of Courts" had occurred. Then, without offering it as a proposal or leaving it as an alternative, he added that "I will take them onboard the ship under my command", thus contributing to "their meeting with the other members of the Spanish Monarchy of both hemispheres". Finally, he explained his second task, "the transportation of the treasuries that **must** be sent to the peninsula from these dominions". In this second aspect, together with the

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[33] John Mackenna (26 October 1771 - 21 November 1814) was an Irish-born officer who had served in the Spanish army and arrived in Chile in 1896. At the beginning of Chile's emancipation process he joined the revolutionaries and became one of the military heroes of the independence.

[34] Carrera, *Diario de José Miguel…*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[35] The letters exchanged between Charles Fleming and the Chilean government authorities were published in January 1812, *Gazeta de Buenos Aires 1810-1821*, vol. III, 1811-1813, in Junta de Historia y Numismática Americana (eds.), Buenos Aires, 1911, pp. 85-86; and in the newspaper *El Español*, n.° XXVI, London, June 30, 1812, pp. 129-136, available at https://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/hd/es/viewer?id=69a7d868-a7c8-4539-8230-c9bc6260f46c [accessed: February 26, 2022]. In addition, they are reproduce in Melchor Martínez, *Memoria histórica sobre la revolución de Chile, desde el cautiverio de Fernando VII hasta 1814*, Valparaíso, Imprenta Europea, 1848, pp. 360-365; and in *Sesiones de los Cuerpos Legislativos de la República de Chile 1810-1814* (hereafter SCL), Santiago, Imprenta Cervantes, 1887, vol. I, pp. 45-48.

bluntness of his expression, he clearly reveals the importance of this task in the fight of his own country and of Spain "to shake the enemy" and for the resistance of the Spanish "from the tyrant"[36].

In this first document Fleming does not leave up to interpretation three aspects: first, he assumes the formal representation of British government position in the relationship of Spain with its colonies. Secondly, he does not come to ask for eventual funds that the Captaincy General would like or was willing to submit to Spain; he assumes it as an obligation that the subjects of the Americas must fulfill with the motherland. In fact, Charles Fleming reinforces his intention by pointing out in his letter that he himself has already passed into "New Spain and transported the recent funds that that kingdom sent for the defence of the motherland". Thirdly, the rhetoric in his message shows evidence it comes from a professional soldier, who is fully aware to be fulfilling a mission of strategic importance, in a scenario of international armed conflict, and a direct contributing to his country's capability to defeat Napoleon Bonaparte's French empire.

Three days later, on July 30, the government of Chile, represented by the provisional executive authority, Martín Calvo Encalada, sent a brief and elusive reply. In it he praised Fleming's "personal generosity and that of the Great Nation" of the United Kingdom, thanked him for "the noble offer" of transporting the deputies and the treasuries, offered to "replenish the provisions that your crew may lack" and invited him to go to Santiago "to the house that is prepared for you". But the letter, besides being a remarkable effort at showing courtesy, avoided giving a direct answer to both of Fleming's specific requests[37].

Faced with this unexpected and unclear reply, on August 2 –with the only delay that the mail took between Santiago and Valparaíso–, Fleming addressed a second letter to the "Governor of the Kingdom of Chile"; this time in a much less friendly tone and with a noticeable compulsive sense. In it he emphasized how delicate it was for him and "I believe it will be for the British nation" to learn that the deputies for the *Cortes* had not been elected. It is evident that he must have known this from a second source, since Calvo Encalada's letter did not mention it nor sheds any light of this fact. Then, closing the subject of the deputies for the *Cortes*, he took without reservations the representation of his government, reaffirming the regrettable absence of delegates of "this Kingdom in the General Council of Cortes", pointing out that this assembly was considered by the British government "as the greatest obstacle to the ambitious aims of the tyrant [Bonaparte]". Regarding the funds he hoped to transport, Fleming was categorical in stating that he assumed them to be the legitimate property of the Spanish government, requesting that "you would be pleased to inform me if there are any funds belonging to the Royal Treasury that I am about to transport". It is in this aspect where Fleming, in

[36] Fleming's first letter is published in *El Español*, *op. cit*., p. 130; Martínez, *Memoria histórica…*, *op. cit*., pp. 360-361; SCL, *op. cit*., vol. I, p. 45.
[37] *El Español*, *op. cit*., p. 131; Martínez, *Memoria histórica…*, *op. cit*., p. 362; SCL, *op. cit*., vol. I, p. 46.

his capacity as a naval officer and representative of the British government, suggests on what he considers of the greatest relevance for his mission: the economic resources that constitute "the general resource with which Spain and its allies must sustain the just war they have undertaken" against France[38].

It is well known that Fleming's second letter caused a considerable stir in the recently established first Chilean National Congress. Although the deputies for the *Cortes* had not been elected, the government did have some economic resources that, although scarce, could have been sent to the peninsula. Remarkable was the statement made by the deputy for Los Ángeles, Bernardo O'Higgins, who in a passionately speech managed to tip the balance so that the initial motion for the scarce funds available to be sent to the peninsula onboard HMS *Standard*, would be rejected. Thus, the Chilean government's second response to Fleming was brief, straightforward, and blunt; although not entirely sincere. With an emphatic "at the time we don't have any funds to be send", on August 6, 1811, the recently assumed president of the Congress, Manuel Pérez de Cotapos and congressmen Juan Cerdán and Agustín de Vial, signed a letter that gave a resounding signal of authority, willingness of autonomy, and a clear first message of what the relationship of the province with its metropolis would become. But, together with the strong refusal to Fleming's request, this letter made clear the understanding that the Chilean authorities had of the international scenario and of the strategic priority that moved the United Kingdom with respect to the threat that France meant for the whole Spanish empire and for its own survival. In justifying the lack of funds, along with mentioning an alleged waste of resources made by the previous Spanish authorities, the Chileans stressed the imperative need to "pay for an army not only indispensable to defend the Kingdom from the armed force of the tyrant, but especially from his scheming and intrigues, aimed at revolutionizing these dominions"[39]. Although there were certain indications of a French military threat to the Captaincy General and a willingness to subvert its population, its chance of occurrence was far-off. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the new Chilean leaders had the foresight to understand the fundamental interest which moved the representative of the British government in his capacity as military, presenting him with an argument that was undisputable: the risk which represented by Napoleonic France prevented the sending of resources to the metropolis.

With this last response HMS *Standard* sailed to Callao, where she arrived on August 28th and remained there for more than two months40. In the Viceroyalty's capital Charles Fleming had the opportunity to meet with the Viceroy José Fernando de Abascal, to whom he made a detailed presentation of what he had observed, expressed his assessments of the political situation in Chile, as well as being updated on the events

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[38] *El Español*, *op. cit*., p. 132; Martínez, *Memoria histórica…*, *op. cit*., p. 362; SCL, *op. cit*., vol. I, p. 46.
[39] *El Español*, *op. cit*., p. 133; Martínez, *Memoria histórica…*, *op. cit*., pp. 362-363; SCL, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 46.
[40] Jorge Ortiz Sotelo, *La Real Armada en el Pacífico Sur. El Apostadero Naval del Callao, 1746-1824*, México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Editorial Bonilla Artigas, 2015, p. 307.

occurring in the peninsula and in the rest of Spanish America[41]. In those circumstances, on October 3, 1811, Fleming wrote a third and final letter addressed to the "President Governor of the Kingdom of Chile". This document, of considerable length, has all the characteristics of a political statement, and in it, as he had not done before, Fleming expressed himself as the formal representative of His Majesty's Government. He began by recognizing that, from the opinions received in Chile and from the responses to his letters, it was evident that the Captaincy General was not satisfied with the political leadership carried out from the metropolis; but he was clear in stating that the solution reached in Chile did not assure the "reestablishment of peace and quiet" and would not restore the confidence of the government of the Spanish nation "of which it is part", nor of the United Kingdom "which is in its alliance". He then stressed his posture by pointing out the deep foundations of the British-Spanish alliance, emphasizing that it "cannot be considered purely ceremonial". He dismissed flatly any erroneous assumption that Great Britain would act as "protector of an independence which has hallucinated men of little reflection and incapable of examining the powerful obstacles that resist a principle so opposed to the reason for justice, convenience and politics". Moreover, in a very personal interpretation Fleming stated that England did not consider the "Spanish Americas" were in a position to secede from the metropolis, since this would not be "the general wish or opinion of its people"[42].

Among his arguments, Charles Fleming linked "this delusional idea of independence" to the influence of the North Americans and some British who "driven by personal interests" contradicted Great Britain's interests and feelings. As evidence of the United Kingdom's rejection to any liberation movement in Spanish America, Fleming referred to a letter, dated October 29, 1810, which Lord Liverpool, then Secretary of War and Colonies of the British government, addressed Brigadier General John Thomas Layard, governor of the colony of Curaçao. In that instruction, Liverpool had ordered:

> "to oppose all kinds of proceedings that could create the slightest segregation of the Spanish Provinces of America from their European Metropolis, since the integrity of the Spanish Monarchy founded on principles of justice and true policy is the goal to which His [British] Majesty aspires"[43].

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[41] Among the correspondence Charles Fleming delivered to José Fernando de Abascal was a copy of the official letter of the Council of Regency of Spain, dated April 14, 1811, addressed to the President of the Chilean government *Junta*, in which his installation was recognized under certain conditions, in SCL, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 169. That letter in turn prompted Viceroy Abascal to send his own letter to the "Government of the Kingdom of Chile", dated September 4, 1811, requesting that he be informed regarding what was agreed to comply with the provisions of the Regency Council. SCL, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 168.

[42] Fleming's third and final letter to the Government of Chile was first published in "Suplemento a la Gazeta de Buenos Aires", Buenos Aires, January 3, 1812, in Junta de Historia y Numismática Americana (eds.), *Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86. Also in *El Español*, *op. cit*., pp. 133-136; Martínez, *Memoria histórica…*, *op. cit*., pp. 363-365; SCL, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 46-48.

[43] This letter was copied to the Spanish government and was published in full in the *"Gaceta de la Regencia de España e Indias"*, Cádiz, n.° 57, August 17, 1810, pp. 544-546, for which reason Fleming and Abascal

To leave no doubt as to what he interpreted as his country's official position, Fleming ended his letter by highlighting the legitimacy and recognition that the British government had granted to the General *Cortes* in Spain.

Four days later, on October 7, 1811, Fleming handed over to José Fernando de Abascal copies of the three letters sent to the Chilean authorities and the two responses received. In his brief note addressed to the viceroy, Fleming again made clear his position on the events taking place in Chile, stating that "my whole desire is that the evils suffered and the greater ones that threaten it may cease in that Kingdom"[44]. In November of that year HMS *Standard* sailed from Callao bound for Rio de Janeiro and then to Cadiz. She carried on board 410,797 pesos from the Viceroyalty's Royal Treasury and 2,516,652 pesos from private Spanish merchants living in Lima[45]. In her transit to the Atlantic she would never again pull into a Chilean port.

The letters exchanged and Fleming's involvement in the political affairs taking place in Chile triggered various reactions and complains on various political players. When the third letter was received in Santiago, where José Miguel Carrera was governing at the time, the confusion and anger was great. Due to the friendship and trust that Fleming had established with Carrera, it is probable that the surprise was even greater, although the latter had information that the British sailor was not in favour of supporting any initiative that involved damaging the Spanish monarchic authority in Chile[46]. A copy of Fleming's last letter was sent from Santiago to the Buenos Aires *Junta*, where it was published in the *Suplemento a la Gazeta de Buenos-Ayres* of January 3, 1812[47], and generated an anti-British feeling, particularly against the Royal Navy ships anchored in the Río de la Plata. Months later, when the information reached the Commander of the South American Naval Station and the British Admiralty, strict orders were issued to mitigate the dispute that had arisen. Thus, on July 11, 1812, the Admiralty gave specific instructions to Captain Peter Heywood of the frigate HMS *Nereus*, who at that time was deployed to the Río de la Plata, regarding the perceived animosity towards the British in the Spanish colonies, which "is said to be owing in a great degree to the unauthorized language adopted by Captain Fleming of HMS *Standard* in his communication last autumn with the governor of Chili"[48]. The Admiralty ordered Heywood, if necessary, to

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were aware of its content and of the political orientations conveyed therein. Available at https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmc9g7b5 , [accessed: February 26, 2022].

[44] Fleming's letter to José Fernando de Abascal, as well as copies of all correspondence exchanged with the Chilean government, were published in the "*Gaceta del Gobierno de Lima*", Lima, Tuesday 15 October 1811, reproduced in Martínez, *Memoria histórica…*, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

[45] Ortiz Sotelo, *La Real Armada…*, *op. cit.*, p. 491.

[46] Fleming had suggested to José Miguel Carrera not to get involved in the events he observed in Chile. In his military journal Carrera notes that Fleming "advised me to go with him to Lima, and not to commit myself or take the least part in the revolution", in Carrera, *Diario de José Miguel…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

[47] Junta de Historia y Numismática Americana (ed.), *Gazeta de Buenos Aires…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

[48] Instructions to Captain Heywood, Spithead, 11 July 1812, in Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and*

establish direct communications with the government in Buenos Aires and to deny any authority for Captain Charles Fleming to intervene on behalf of the British government. From Rio de Janeiro, Lord Strangford sent the government of Río de la Plata a letter apologizing and disavowing Fleming's actions, pointing out "that the officer had no rights to make such statements, nor to involve himself into such matters"[49]. To put a formal closure to the unfortunate event, Heywood addressed a note to the Government of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata, where he stated that he had received instructions from his government:

> "to deny that any authorization has been given to Captain Fleming to intervene in any form in political matters on the part of the British government; and at the same time that I declare my disapproval of such an act, and deny any intention or desire to intervene in the internal divisions which unfortunately exist among the Spaniards"[50].

The facts show that, in the face of the political crisis in the Spanish colonies, Fleming was not inclined to accept a different perspective from his own, nor did he intend to adopt a neutral position in Chile's conflict. His personal interpretation of the best way to defend the United Kingdom's interests, as well as being overruled by his top commanders, prove that, from the British perspective, there was no adequate doctrine or political orientation for those who were perceived as representatives of His Majesty's Government. Even after the formal censuring sent to Buenos Aires, for the Spanish, *criollos* and royalist subjects in Chile, the opinion expressed by Fleming still embodied the official position of the British government. In that respect, Captain Fleming's attitude towards the Chilean authorities were perceived as evidenced of the political position of the United Kingdom; and this was not the initial expected support to the revolutionary movement, and as Ricardo Montaner states "he even amplified it, declaring that his government, in accordance with its alliance with Spain, was against that movement"[51]. The expressions used in his letters addressing the Chilean government, as well as the epistolary exchange with Viceroy José Fernando de Abascal proved that the interests defended by Fleming were unquestionable. On the other hand, this statement differs from the opinion expressed by Mario Barros Van Buren, who presumes that until 1812 in the United Kingdom it was thought that the autonomist trend was "a liberal movement, similar to the one faced by Spain in favour of a Constitution that would limit the power of the crown", and therefore that movement was not contrary to the very ideals that the British supported in the peninsula[52]. Had it been as Barros points out, both Fleming's

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*South…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

[49] Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), *Correspondencia de Lord Strangford y de la Estación Británica en el Río de la Plata con el Gobierno de Buenos Aires: 1810-1822*, Buenos Aires, 1941, p. 97; and published in *El Español*, n.° XXXIII, London, January 1813, Part I, p. 65. Avaliable at https://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/hd/es/viewer?id=634d23d1-29a2-49a9-ac36-b60fd7db918f&page=3, [accessed: February 26, 2022].

[50] AGN, *Correspondencia…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 383-384.

[51] Montaner, *Historia Diplomática…*, *op. cit*., p. 16.

[52] Barros Van Buren, *Historia Diplomática…*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

outspoken hostility, as well as the efforts made by the Admiralty, Lord Strangford, and Captain Peter Heywood to restore the impression made, would have been unnecessary. The details of the crisis caused by Fleming and the damage to the relationship of the British with the Spanish-American *criollos* is evident in Captain Heywood's journal and his extensive correspondence mailed from Buenos Aires between 1812 and 1813[53]. The outcome of Fleming's presence in the country and the attitude assumed by the Chilean patriot authorities toward his demands, was also an indisputable sign of self-determination and political will in front of a representative of the British and Spanish Crowns, and together with the well-known decree that opened the Chilean ports to international trade, can be considered as "the first acts of insubordination of Chile" against the monarchy[54].

After HMS *Standard's* affair, almost three years elapsed before a Royal Navy warship returned to the Chilean coastlines. The British government, via the Admiralty, issued instructions regarding the neutral and strictly non-interventionist position to be assumed in the events in Spanish America. However, on the following occasion that a British warship called at a Chilean port, under a different strategic scenario and military mission, the seemingly clear instructions from the Admiralty to the Royal Navy commanders again proved to be ambiguous and were openly breached.

## The Case of HMS *Phoebe* and Commodore James Hillyar

Despite Fleming's complicated affair with the Chilean government and its repercussions with the Buenos Aires *Junta*, for the British authorities the internal affairs in the Kingdom of Chile continued to be of slight interest or concern. Between 1810 and 1813 the official correspondence between the South American Naval Station in Rio de Janeiro and the Admiralty in London, as well as among Lord Strangford and the British government (Lord Castlereagh), concerning the Spanish colonies on the west coast of America, was very limited[55]. There were few reports and little analyses on the political and strategic situation in the South Pacific. The correspondence exchanged focused almost exclusively on the crisis that was evolving in the region of The Plate, between Buenos Aires and Montevideo, and the United Kingdom's eventual mediation between those colonies and Spain. Since the establishment of the South American Naval Station in 1808, the sporadic information on what was happening in the province of Chile reached the British naval commanders at Buenos Aires by means of correspondence sent by British travellers and merchants.

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[53] Edward Tagart, *Memoir of the late Captain Peter Heywood, R.N. with extracts form his Diaries and Correspondence*, London, Effingham Wilson, 1832, pp. 236-261.
[54] Montaner, *Historia Diplomática…*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[55] This is evident from the compilations by Webster, *Gran Bretaña…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-122; and in Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., pp. 35-129.

After the Chilean *Junta* opened its ports to maritime traffic in February 1811, a limited number of merchant ships began to call at the west coast ports, in addition to the British whalers that ventured rounding Cape Horn and operated in the South Pacific. These private vessels were another source of information that, although inexact, was received by the representative of the Royal Navy stationed at Río de la Plata[56]. It was in Buenos Aires where the British naval officers gathered data arriving from Chile and, together with information from the local press, locals, politicians, and the foreign community living there, made its own interpretation of what was happening in the Pacific. Thus, the source of information and intelligence received by the commander of the Naval Station in Rio de Janeiro and the British government authorities in London were the reports issued by a Royal Navy officer stationed in Buenos Aires[57]. Consequently, the knowledge on the events in Chile was scarce, irregular, behind time, and often poor in its interpretation and assessments; however, the political decisions taken by the British government with respect to that province were based fundamentally on that inaccurate understanding.

Nevertheless, circumstances began to change due to a new high priority political and strategic scenario for the United Kingdom: the war with the United States of America. The volume and extent of the correspondence sent and received, both in Rio de Janeiro and by navy officers stationed in the Río de la Plata, shows the gradual increase of interest that Chile began to take since 1814. But this augmentation of information, rather than aimed at updating the awareness of the rebel colony's internal situation and the war between *criollos* and metropolitans, was intended to satisfy a British strategic urgency. Britain's war with the United States of America, declared on June 18, 1812, and the presence in the Pacific of the first U.S. naval vessel to enter this ocean, became a security threat of the highest priority, indirectly affecting British political decisions regarding the Spanish colonies on the Pacific coast[58].

On April 3, 1813, Captain Peter Heywood, commanding officer of HMS *Nereus* stationed in the Río de la Plata, wrote to Rear-Admiral Manley Dixon, the new commander of the South American Naval Station[59], stating that by private correspondence from Chile, he had received news that an American frigate, the USS *Essex*, had arrived

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[56] It should be borne in mind that, once the governing *Junta* opened Chilean ports to free trade, Viceroy José Fernando de Abascal authorized private Peruvian and Spanish ships to exercise privateering activities over the incipient maritime traffic that ventured to approach those ports.

[57] In general, correspondence from the naval commanders deployed in Río de la Plata was addressed directly to the Commander in Chief of the South American Naval Station in Rio de Janeiro. However, there were many cases in which this regular channel was altered, allowing direct communication with the Admiralty in London, taking advantage of the maritime means that moved between Buenos Aires and the United Kingdom.

[58] British priority interest on the American naval threat is evident in the letters exchanged between the Admiralty and Royal Navy commanders in South America. Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-139.

[59] Rear-Admiral Sir Manley Dixon replaced Rear-Admiral Michael de Courcy, serving as commander of the South American Naval Station from mid-1812 to May 1816.

in Valparaíso on March 15 and was operating in those waters[60]. That same month, Manley Dixon received instructions from the Admiralty in London to provide protection for merchant ships sailing from Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro to the United Kingdom transporting treasure and goods belonging to British subjects. Manley Dixon was directed not to allow commercial traffic to sail without adequate protection and that he should organize convoys escorted by his warships. These instructions are evidence that, due to the threat posed by the North American navy, Dixon's priority and exclusive mission was focused on the Atlantic Ocean. But the orders also mentioned that the Admiralty had welcomed Dixon's suggestion to deploy two ships from the South American Station to the "Spanish ports of the South Pacific"[61] to protect the English whalers from enemy operating in those waters. In addition to the eventual risk French naval presence meant to British interests in Spanish America, now the Royal Navy had to add the direct threat posed by American warships and the political influence that this enemy nation could exert over the rebellious Spanish colonies. But the instructions received from London, as well as demonstrating the increased interest that Pacific was beginning to have for the British government, are also evidence that the commander of that Naval Station enjoyed a limited autonomy regarding the naval military operations it could carry out in his geographic area of responsibility.

The political effect this could have on the Anglo-Spanish alliance and the relationship with the Portuguese made it necessary to be cautious; strategic and operational decisions were taken in London. On the other hand, such direct superior control contrasts sharply with the relative freedom of action with which subordinate British commanders operated, particularly in certain political matters between the colonies and the Spanish authorities. Above all, the strategic interest that the United Kingdom was acquiring in the events happening in the Pacific waters was not due exclusively to the protection of its whaling fleet or the sparce British commercial shipping on the western coasts of South America.

War against the United States and the American presence and influence represented a major political threat; and this demanded exercising sea control and performing military operations against that country in all the regions of the world where they were present. Dixon's initiative to send some ships to the South Pacific was the first formal expression of a British State policy to protect her interests in those waters, which would eventually give rise to its first permanent military presence off the coast of Chile.

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[60] The USS *Essex*, a thirty-two-gun frigate under the command of Captain David Porter, crossed Cape Horn between 13 and 16 February 1813, calling at Valparaíso on 15 March of that year, according to Porter himself in his memoir of the cruise. See David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise made to the Pacific Ocean by Captain David Porter, in the U.S. Frigate Essex, in the years 1812,1813, and 1814*, New York, Wiley & Halsted, 2nd edition, 1822, vol. I, pp. 61-94. Its mission was to protect the reduced American commercial traffic against privateers from Lima, to interdict British traffic on its routes to Asia and India, and to harass British whaling fleets operating in the Pacific.

[61] Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

In this political-strategic context, and prior to becoming aware of the American naval presence in the Pacific, on March 25, 1813, the British Admiralty dispatched from Portsmouth the thirty-six-gun frigate HMS *Phoebe*[62]. Under the command of Captain James Hillyar (October 29, 1769 - July 10, 1843), the ship was to escort the private armed transport ship *Issac Todd* to the North Pacific coast of America. The *Issac Todd* belonged to the North-West Company, who since 1779 was trading furs from the territories of the British colony of Canada to China. HMS *Phoebe* and the *Isaac Todd* were tasked to reach the mouth of the Columbia River[63], where they would resupply and support a British Army land force that would then occupy Fort Astoria, from where North Americans civilians were threatening the fur trade with Asia. Due to the importance of this task, and the necessary security and surprise the military operation demanded, on March 1, Captain Hillyar received secret orders from the Admiralty, indicating that he should "to destroy and if possible totally annihilate any settlements which the Americans may have formed either in the Columbia river or on the neighbouring coasts"[64].

As in the case of HMS *Standard* in 1811, HMS *Phoebe's* mission was evidently of military strategic importance, her orders originated directly from the Admiralty and his relationship with the Commander in Chief of the British Naval Station in Rio de Janeiro was only hierarchical. James Hillyar would not operate under admiral Dixon's orders, through whose jurisdiction HMS *Phoebe* would only transit to reach her destination on the west coast of North America. Consequently, Hillyar sailed from Portsmouth tasked with the mission of supporting a military operation against the United States and establishing a British base on the North Pacific coast. He had no mission in relation to the Spanish colonies on the Pacific coast, he was not updated of the latest political and military developments in Spanish America, he was not briefed of British interests in the crisis between Spain and its rebel provinces, and he was even unaware of the presence of American warships in the South Pacific[65]. On the other hand, the purpose of the South American Naval Station's warships that Dixon planned to send to the South Pacific was without a doubt the protection of the whaling fleet operating in those southern seas, since the British commercial maritime traffic, by then banned, was almost non-existent, while smuggling, which was somewhat more active, was harassed by the privateers from Lima (even with British and American crewmen) dispatched by Viceroy Abascal.

Upon his arrival in Rio de Janeiro, on June 11, 1813[66], after being updated of the latest events in the Spanish colonies, Captain Hillyar received additional instructions from

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[62] HMS *Phoebe's* Log Book, National Maritime Museum (hereafter NMM), AGC/23/2, Greenwich.

[63] In the current State of Oregon, U.S.

[64] Admiralty to Hillyar, London, March 1, 1813, The National Archive (hereafter TNA), Admiralty (hereafter ADM) 3/260, and in Hillyar's Letter Book at NMM, AGC/23/2, Greenwich.

[65] Presence of the USS *Essex* in the Pacific was notified to Rear-Admiral Dixon in May 1813 (through Captain Heywood's letter of April 3) and he reported the Admiralty in a letter dated June 9. So, as Captain Hillyar set sail from Portsmouth, he was unaware the *Essex's* was on his route to the North Pacific.

[66] In the primary sources used there is discrepancy as to the exact date HMS *Phoebe* called in Rio de Janeiro. In his report to the Admiralty, Admiral Dixon states the ship arrived on June 10 (Graham and Humphreys, *The*

Rear-Admiral Manley Dixon for his transit to the North Pacific. Although HMS *Phoebe's* mission was beyond the South America Naval Station Commander´s responsibility and jurisdiction he instructed Hillyar to assist in protecting the British whalers being assaulted by the American frigate *Essex* and privateers from Lima operating in the South Pacific. In his instructions to Captain Hillyar, Rear-Admiral Dixon made it very clear that these were not to affect in any way the mission entrusted by the Admiralty, which had absolute priority for British interests[67]. Nevertheless, arguing the need to provide adequate protection for *Issac Todd's* transit through the Pacific, Admiral Dixon assigned Hillyar two brigs, HMS *Cherub*, and HMS *Racoon*, which would provide him with superior fire power against the threats posed by USS *Essex*, the privateers from Lima and other probable American warships that he might run into during his transit to the Columbia River. As a result, the small squadron under the command of the now Commodore Hillyar was the first British naval force to enter the Pacific on a military war mission since Lord Anson in 1741, only in this case the enemy was no longer Spain, but the United States of America. It is worth to note that, after the undesirable experience caused by Fleming in 1811, Admiral Dixon gave Commodore Hillyar specific and explicit guidelines for his transit through the South Pacific. These orders established what his behaviour should be regarding the conflict between "Spain and her colonies"[68]. Thus, faced with the very probable need to call at Spanish-American ports in the South Pacific, the instructions to Hillyar indicated that he should "use every endeavour to cultivate the most friendly understanding between the two nations" adding the precaution of "taking every possible care, yourself, and recommending the same to the captains and officers of the respective ships, *to take up no cause of politics between Spain and her colonies* but to act with the most perfect neutrality towards them both"[69]. Given the latest political events in the region, when mentioning to the conflict between Spain and its rebellious colonies in the South Pacific, it is obvious that Dixon could only be referring to Hillyar's eventual interaction with the pro-independence authorities Chile.

In mid-August 1813 the small squadron under Hillyar's command rounded Cape Horn and entered the South Pacific[70]. To keep his mission as secret as possible, the

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*Navy and South…*, *op. cit.*, p. 93); while in HMS *Phoebe's* Log Book, TNA, ADM 51/257, as in Midshipman Allen Gardiner's diary, it is stated she arrived on June 11, Allen F. Gardiner, *Hunting the Essex*. *A Journal of the Voyage of HMS Phoebe 1813-1814*, edited by John S. Rieske, Barnsley, Yorkshire, Seaforth Publishing, 2013, p. 41.

[67] The priority given to *Phoebe's* mission on supporting the expedition against the American base on the Columbia River over the protection of British whalers in the South Pacific was evident in Dixon's correspondence to the Admiralty on 21 June and 12 July 1813, as well as his own confidential instructions to Hillyar on 1 July 1813. See Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., pp. 93-101; and James Hillyar Correspondence, Secret orders from Admiral Manley Dixon (hereafter MSS), AGC/23/2, NMM, Greenwich.

[68] Instructions from Admiral Manley Dixon, NMM, HYL/1/1, *op. cit*.

[69] Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., pp. 100-101. Author's emphasis.

[70] Commodore Hillyar sailed from Rio de Janeiro with HMS *Phoebe*, *Racoon, Cherub, and the Isaac Todd*, on the 18 of July 1813. H. Lloyd Keith, "Voyage of the Isaac Todd", in *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 109, n.º 4, 2008, p. 576. Avialable in https://www.jstor.org/stable/20615904 [accessed: January 24, 2022].

Commodore decided not to call at Valparaíso to replenish water and provisions; instead, he arrived at Juan Fernández Island with his three warships, where he remained between the 11th and 18th of September 1813[71]. There, through information received from the governor of the island, Hillyar learned about the actions of the USS *Essex* off the coast of Chile and the British whalers she had captured[72]. Under these circumstances, he decided to modify the Admiralty's secret orders, giving priority to put out of action the American frigate rather than "to destroy and if possible totally annihilate" the American settlements in the Columbia River. To this end, he deployed HMS *Racoon* with instructions to contact the *Isaac Todd*, to escort her to the North Pacific and support the British expedition against Fort Astoria[73]. For his part, with HMS *Phoeb*e and *Cherub*, he began cruising for almost three months in search of *Essex*, which led him to call at the port of Tumbes, the Galapagos Islands, and finally arriving at Callao, on December 3, 1813.

During their long stay in the Peruvian port, as Allen Gardiner recorded in his diary, the crews of HMS *Phoebe* and *Cherub* were warmly welcomed by the viceroyalty authorities[74]. On several occasions Commodore James Hillyar had the opportunity to meet Viceroy Abascal and was updated of the current situation in the Captaincy General, at the time when the Patriots and Royalist armies were colliding in Chillán. There, on January 1, 1814, Hillyar witnessed the departure from Callao of the Spanish force under General Gabino Gaínza, who left for Chile to take command of the royalist military forces and lead the operations for reconquering the province. From the Viceroyalty authorities he also obtained updated information on the latest actions of USS *Essex*, which allowed him to correctly estimate that the American ship would be in Valparaíso or operating in its vicinity. On the other hand, although it was not part of the mission that he now considered a priority, Hillyar intervened before Viceroy José Fernando de Abascal requesting the liberation and restitution of a couple of merchant ships and their cargoes, which had been detained by Lima privateers and were about to be condemned. In the instructions that Manley Dixon had issued Hillyar upon his departure from Rio de Janeiro, was a request from Lord Strangford stating that, if HMS *Phoebe* should call at Callao, to use his best efforts to obtain from the viceroy the restitution of the American-flagged

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[71] In his journal, Allen Gardiner points out that Hillyar's decision to avoid Valparaíso would have been due both to the convenience of keeping the presence of British warships in the Pacific secret, and to the more favorable wind conditions for a landing in Juan Fernández on its route to the north. Gardiner, *Hunting the Essex…*, *op. cit*., p. 55.

[72] According to different sources, the Essex had captured at least twelve British whalers (totaling 4,000 tons), more than five million dollars and taken at least four hundred prisoners. See Ortiz Sotelo, *Perú and the British…*, *op. cit*., p. 20; Arancibia, Jara and Novoa, *La Marina en la historia…*, *op. cit*., p. 82; Lambert, Andrew, *The Challenge Britian Against America in the Naval War of 1812,* Faber and Laber, London, 2012; and Gardiner, *Hunting the Essex…*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[73] Due to her slower speed and poor seaworthiness, the *Isaac Todd* had become separated from the three warships prior to the Cape Horn crossing. Thus, the transport ship proceeded on its way direct to the Columbia River, without calling at the Spanish-American ports of the South Pacific, finally meeting up with HMS *Racoon* in San Francisco in mid-January 1814. Keith, "Voyage of the Isaac…", *op. cit*.

[74] Gardiner, *Hunting the Essex…*, *op. cit*., pp. 70-100.

*Borishka* and the Portuguese merchant *San José de la Fama*. Both ships had been detained in the Pacific, accused of smuggling, while carrying wheat and cargo belonging to the British government, to support the war in the peninsula. Although it did not seem to imply an interference in Spanish "internal affairs", Hillyar's intervention in favour of third-party ships, charted by British authorities to transport goods needed in Europe, had a new political repercussion, which again shed light on the position that the United Kingdom would eventually adopt towards the liberation movement in Chile[75].

Despite the seemingly clear instructions received from Admiral Dixon, regarding "not to get involved in political causes between Spain and her colonies", HMS *Phoebe's* commanding officer having already modified the Admiralty's orders, also dared offering his services to help mediate the dispute in Chile. Undoubtedly Hillyar's good disposition and intentions presented to José Fernando de Abascal was backed by the status of allies that Spain and the United Kingdom had at that time in their mutual fight against France. Convinced of the opportunity to help pacify the rebellious southern province, Viceroy Abascal accepted the Commodore's offer. Sailing from Callao to Valparaíso in search of USS *Essex*, on January 11, 1814, Hillyar carried some "notes" with guidelines issued by the viceroy[76]. These contained specific orientations establishing how to approach an eventual mediation with the Chilean government and the conditions under which an agreement could be established to end the conflict. Furthermore, Abascal sent also a letter addressed to General Gabino Gaínza in which he stated that the British Commodore "has offered me to engage the Chilean *Junta* with the most effective arrangements to reach a just and reasonable understanding"[77]. Accepting the British sailor's offer, the viceroy instructed the Spanish general to "act in agreement with Mr. Hillyar", always adhering to the specific orders Gaínza had received to achieve peace in Chile. Hillyar's non-compliance with Dixon's specific orders on "take up no cause of politics between Spain and her colonies" was evident[78].

As proof of the viceroy's goodwill towards the rebellious Chilean government as to facilitate Hillyar's welcome upon his arrival in Valparaíso, eleven Chilean prisoners who had been detained in Callao since the middle of 1813 were released and transferred onboard HMS *Phoebe*[79]. Thus, upon arriving in Valparaíso on February

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[75] The cases of the *Borishka* seized in Callao, and *Fama* detained in Valparaíso by Lima privateers, although not directly related to Hillyar's military mission, are two examples of a British naval authority intervention in a politico-legal (even commercial) matter concerning a military rather than a private issue. See Ortiz Sotelo, *Perú and the British…*, *op. cit*., pp. 22-23.

[76] The viceroy's notes "Apuntaciones dadas al Capitán de la Fragata de S.M.B. 'Phoebe' que zarpó de este puerto del Callao para el de Valparaíso con la Corbeta 'Cherub', el 11 de enero de 1814" and his letter to General Gaínza can be seen in *Colección de Historiadores y Documentos…*, *op. cit.*, 1900, vol. IV, pp. 136-142.

[77] *Colección de Historiadores y Documentos…*, *op. cit.*, 1900, vol. IV, p. 141.

[78] Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., p. 101.

[79] The North American merchant frigates *Perla* (former *Pearl*) and *Potrillo* (former *Colt*) had been leased and armed by the patriot merchants of Valparaíso to break the blockade imposed by the Lima privateers. However, in their first action in front of the port, against the *Warren*, on May 2, 1813, both were captured due to a mutiny by their crews who had been bribed by Spanish and foreign merchants, and the officers were taken prisoner

8, 1814, in addition to finding the elusive USS *Essex* with a companion ship[80], James Hillyar presented himself to the Governor of Valparaíso with an image that, to some extent, sought to mitigate the distrust that the patriot authorities had towards the British presence, due to their status as allies of Spain, and because of the memory of Fleming's previous hostile performance. In his first meetings with the governor of the port, at that time Colonel Francisco de la Lastra[81], James Hillyar made him aware of his willingness to mediate the conflict, pointing out the confidence and instructions conferred upon him by the Viceroy of Perú. However, his self-imposed military mission to neutralize the American ships in the harbour took precedence over the Commodore's commitment and intentions to mediate in an internal Spanish political matter. But, facing the obligation to comply with the neutrality of a port belonging to a Spanish colony, the *Phoebe* and *Cherub* had to restrain the desire to fight and capture the American ships, being forced to keep the *Essex* blockaded, preventing her from escaping taking advantage of her greater speed. This situation lasted for six long weeks, during which time Hillyar had several opportunities to interact with the Chilean authorities, as well as with the captain and officers of the *Essex*.

The fact that they refrained from fighting was an unquestionable sign of the respect that both contenders showed for the rules of law of armed conflict at the time, although for different reasons. For the American ships, the port of Valparaíso, under control of the *criollos*, offered an adequate safeguard, since for the Chilean pro-independence authorities the *Essex's* operations had been welcomed as they contributed to neutralize the Lima privateers disrupting their maritime traffic[82]. The British ships also felt obliged to comply with the port´s neutrality which they assumed belonging to their Spanish ally, who had adopted an impartial position towards the Anglo-American war. But such idleness and respect for neutrality could not last forever.

For this work purposes, the details of the so-called "battle of Valparaíso" are not relevant. Just to point out that on March 28, 1814, when *Essex* tried to break the blockade, the British ships attacked and both forces engaged. After fighting for

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to Callao. *Archivo de don Bernardo O'Higgins* (hereafter ABO), Santiago, Editorial Nascimento, 1947, vol. II, p. 62; Barros Arana, *Historia General…*, *op. cit*., vol. IX, p. 308; and Tromben, *La Armada de Chile…*, *op. cit*., pp. 133-139.

[80] Along with the USS *Essex* was one of its prizes, the British whaling schooner *Atlantic*, which, had been crewed, armed, and renamed *Essex Junior*.

[81] Francisco de la Lastra was a Chilean military officer who had served in the Royal Spanish Navy. On his return to Chile in 1811 became an active member of the independence movement, and eventually became the first Supreme Director of that country, governing from March to July 1814.

[82] The Chilean authorities at that time saw the American presence as supportive to the independence cause. In fact, the United States Consul in Chile, Joel Poinsett, had been a great supporter of José Miguel Carrera, even participating in his military campaigns. For her part, the *Essex* had provided intelligence on the naval movements of the viceroy's forces. When naval means sent from Lima were blockading the bay of Concepción, it was even thought of asking Poinsett and the *Essex* to escort supplies sent to the Chilean army operating in the south. See letter from Agustín de Eyzaguirre to Bernardo O'Higgins, Talca, February 4, 1814, in ABO, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 52-59.

more than three hours and several casualties, mostly on the *Essex*, the American ship surrendered, but not after causing considerable damage to the *Phoebe*. The battle which took place a few miles from the coast and within gun range of Valparaíso's forts, has had numerous interpretations regarding if Hillyar violated neutrality by initiating combat actions against *Essex*. British and American naval historiography has maintained various and opposing postures on this issue[83]. However, even if there are viable justifications for his actions, it is evident that by initiating the action Hillyar violated the neutrality of what he considered Spanish sovereign waters, in this case of a colony. But, regardless of Hillyar eventually breaking the rule of law, the Chilean authorities did not raise any complaints against the British Commodore. So, after the capture of the *Essex*, instead of resuming his initial priority mission of supporting the North Pacific operation, Hillyar remained in Valparaíso, repairing his ship and his captured prize, and sending the American prisoners back to their country.

On the other hand, not knowing HMS *Phoebe* was in pursuit of the *Essex* and unaware of the subsequential results in the naval action in Valparaíso, Rear-Admiral Manley Dixon dispatched two warships to that Chilean port. The frigates HMS *Tagus* and HMS *Briton* left the Brazil Naval Station with the specific task of capturing the American frigate and protecting the British whaling fleet operating in the South Pacific[84].

While refitting his ships and waiting for the arrival of the two British frigates in Valparaíso, on April 13, 1814, James Hillyar received a letter from the now Chilean Supreme Director, Francisco de la Lastra[85], who was aware the Commodore had the intention, and the viceroy's endorsement, to mediate between the opposing factions in Chile. In that letter De la Lastra invited him to "get in touch with this Government to consent the treaties that could most probable acceptance can be discussed and ratified by the generals of both armies"[86]. Accepting the offer and once again omitting his instructions "to take up no cause of politics between Spain and her colonies", Hillyar travelled to Santiago, arriving on April 16[87]. After a warm reception by the Chilean authorities, he

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[83] The controversy surrounding this battle, the breaking of the port neutrality by the combatants, and the behavior of sailors on board, are still a matter of debate by historians. See Philip MacDougall, "The Valparaíso incident reassessed", in *Naval History Magazine*, vol. 21, n.° 2, Annapolis MD, 2007, pp. 50-57. Available at https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2007/april/valparaiso-incident-reassessed [accessed July 20, 2023].

[84] HMS *Tagus* (Captain Philip Pippon) left Rio de Janeiro in February 1814 and arrived at Valparaíso in mid-April, while HMS *Briton* (Captain Thomas Staines) left in March 28 arriving on May 21, 1814. Gardiner, *Hunting the Essex…*, *op. cit*., p. 114; Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., pp. 128-137.

[85] De la Lastra, who had interacted with James Hillyar in his capacity as Governor of Valparaíso, took over as Supreme Director of Chile on March 14, 1814, replacing the Government *Junta* that had served as executive branch of the Captaincy General until that date.

[86] De la Lastra's letter to Hillyar is translated into English in TNA, FO 72/169, fs. 183-84, and quoted at length in Miguel Luis and Gregorio Víctor Amunátegui, *La reconquista española de Chile en 1814*, Madrid, América, 1851, pp. 35-36.

[87] Before traveling to Santiago, Hillyar ordered Captain Thomas Tuker of HMS *Cherub* to proceed to the Sandwich (Hawaii) islands "to distress the [American] enemy by capture or destruction of his vessels". Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., pp. 147-148.

presented the terms under which the viceroy had established a framework for negotiation. As a renowned mediator, he participated directly in the formulation of the guidelines for a peace treaty, which were approved on April 19 with the agreement of the Chilean Senate[88].

It should be noted that it was not until April 21 that James Hillyar wrote to Rear-Admiral Manley Dixon reporting of his presence in Santiago. Although under direct orders from the Admiralty in London, he was cautious of addressing the Commander of the South American Naval Station, since it was Admiral Dixon´s instructions that he was violating by getting involved in an internal matter of Spain with one of its colonies. In this letter, Hillyar noted:

> "As you may hear of my being employed in *State* affairs, and some anxiety may be excited as to my prudence in a most trying situation, I send you a copy of my reply to a letter received from the Supreme Director of the State of Chile in answer to a request to quit my country´s duty for a few days for the purpose of aiding in the restoration of peace between Chili and Perú"[89].

In that same letter Hillyar was cautious to enclose a copy of his letter to the Supreme Director in which he accepted the position of mediator. Strangely, the letter addressed to Francisco de la Lastra was written on the same date as the one addressed to Admiral Dixon, April 21, when Hillyar had already been in Santiago for almost a week negotiating the basis for the agreement. In the preamble to his letter to De la Lastra, the Commodore warned of his restrictions:

> "In answer to your letter of the 13th instant [April], I have the honour to acquaint you that the British government, under the impression, I conceive, that naval officers are not competent to decide upon questions of such great importance as may arise between Spain and her colonies, has most strictly prohibited their interference"[90].

After making this warning, Hillyar added that, because there was coincidence between Viceroy of Perú and the Supreme Director of Chile to restore peace, he had resolved to quit his professional duties and mediate between the two contenders. At the same time, he made it clear to Francisco de la Lastra that his intervention was only feasible if the result was satisfactory to Spanish interests, conditioning his participation only if "you assure me that the terms on which it may be obtained accord with the views of the existing government of the respected ally of my nation respecting its colonies". This significant and revealing official document ends again with references to the interests of Spain by stating "I request it may be perfectly understood that I dare not, by the

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[88] *ABO*, 1947, vol. II, pp. 138-141.
[89] Hillyar to Dixon, 21 April 1814, ADM 1/22, in Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., p. 143.
[90] James Hillyar to Francisco de la Lastra, Santiago, 21 April 1814, in Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit.*, pp.143-144.

line of conduct I may adopt, disobey the orders of my superiors, hazard the disapprobation of my country's faithful ally, or compromise the confidence with which you [...] have honoured me"[91].

Both for the date in which it was written, as well as for the content and language used by James Hillyar, it is feasible to assume that this letter, although addressed to De la Lastra, was also intended to justify to Manley Dixon his intervention "in cause of politics between Spain and her colonies" and to the Admiralty for having modified the secret instructions. But also, it reassures that Hillyar understood perfectly well that his actions could at no point harm the interests of his country or of the Spanish Crown in a rebellious colony.

On April 22, 1814, Hillyar left Santiago for the city of Talca[92]. After meeting and exchanging notes with the patriot generals Bernardo O'Higgins and John Mackenna in Quechereguas on April 25, and two days later with the Spanish General Gabino Gaínza in Talca, the Commodore attended the meeting between the generals of both armies on the banks of the Lircay River, witnessing the difficult process of negotiation between the parties, which ended with the signing of the treaty on May 3[93]. That same night he returned to Santiago with a copy of the Treaty of Lircay, which he presented to the Supreme Director on May 5. In gratitude for his efforts, the Commodore was entertained by various authorities. The Cabildo of Santiago, in its minutes of May 16, 1814, resolved that "the city council, not finding nor being able in any other way to express its recognition and gratitude, has agreed to name him as perpetual alderman of this borough"[94].

Unaware of the differences that soon arose between the parties, both with respect to the formality and the spirit of the Treaty of Lircay, on May 11, James Hillyar wrote to the Admiralty in London, via Admiral Dixon, giving an account on his proceedings, enclosing copies of the treaty and of the correspondence exchanged during the mediation[95]. In his report to London, which Dixon endorsed with a note of support and recognition, Hillyar referred to his previous letter in which he informed on the mediation task undertaken, stating:

> "I have now the satisfaction to add that it has pleased Divine Providence to bless my humble effort with success, and if the approbation of my superiors follows, I shall consider this as one

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[91] *Op. cit.*, p. 144.

[92] On 19 April, with the agreement of the Senate, the bases for the peace treaty were approved, and Brigadiers Bernardo O'Higgins and John Mackenna were appointed as Chilean government's plenipotentiaries for the negotiations.

[93] The complex negotiation process and the exchange of letters and notes between Generals Gaínza, O'Higgins, Mackenna, and Commodore Hillyar can be seen in the process against Brigadier Gaínza in *Colección de Historiadores y Documentos…*, *op. cit.*, vol. XV, 1909 and vol. XVII, 1910.

[94] The minutes of the Cabildo of Santiago of 16 May 1814 are reproduced in full in Barros Arana, *Historia General…*, *op. cit*., tomo IX, p. 321.

[95] The Treaty of Lircay, in its fifteenth article, recognizes the efforts made by Commodore Hillyar, stating "we pay him the most expressive thanks as the mediator and principal instrument of such an interesting work".

of the most happy as well as most eventful periods of my life. I have endeavoured to attend most scrupulously to their Lordships' directions"[96].

After staying for another two weeks in Santiago and being entertained by the capital´s high society, Hillyar returned to Valparaíso, where he re-joined the two frigates that Dixon had sent to the Pacific for the protection of the whalers. To ensure that, prior to his return to the United Kingdom, no American warships remained in the South Pacific waters, Commodore Hillyar sailed from Valparaíso on 31 May 1814 with HMS *Phoebe*, *Tagus*, *Briton*, and the captured USS *Essex* to Juan Fernández Island. From there they set course for Rio de Janeiro together with his prize ship, leaving the two frigates belonging to the South American Naval Station, providing protection to the British whaling ships[97].

Shortly after James Hillyar left Chile, deep disagreements arose regarding the validity and effectiveness of the treaty he had mediated. The opposing parties considered it as an instrument that favoured their rival´s interests. Both the Spanish authorities in Lima and the pro-independence *criollos* in Chile, each with their own arguments, perspectives, and defending their interests, questioned the endeavour elaborated by the British mediator. The viceroy openly ignored the treaty, ordered General Gaínza to be prosecuted for his military and political conduct and for having signed the treaty. He made evident that Commodore Hillyar had exceeded his powers, not having adjusted his mediation to the instructions that José Fernando de Abascal had given him in his "notes".

On the other hand, discord and rejection of the impositions set out in the agreement also arose among the Chilean government authorities. A certain distrust of Hillyar's management had already been expressed prior to his intervention as mediator[98]. After the result of this treaty, the suspicions against the Commodore became evident in several correspondences between Chilean authorities, who openly expressed the perception that Hillyar proceeded in favour of Spain's interests[99]. Hillyar's intervention in a

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[96] James Hillyar to John Croker, Santiago, May 11, 1814, in Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., p.145.

[97] Complying with one of the agreements established in the Lircay treaty, the Chilean government embarked on the frigates HMS *Tagus* and *Briton* several Spanish prisoners who were in the hands of Chilean patriots, and who were transferred to Callao on the British ships. See John Shillibeer, *A Narrative of the Briton's voyage to Pitcairn's Islands*, London, J.W. Marriott, 1817, p. 22.

[98] In a letter addressed to Bernardo O'Higgins on 19 April 1814, announcing James Hillyar's arrival in Santiago, John Mackenna noted his concern about the future scenario. Given the ongoing withdrawal of the French forces from Spain and the evidence of the arrival of military reinforcements from Lima, Mackenna recommended that O'Higgins should "act according to the circumstances, and especially in view of the lack of any protection that England offers us; everything must be reserved and only tell the army that the Englishman whom the Viceroy has used begs us on his behalf with peace". See Carrera, *Diario de José Miguel…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-181.

[99] In his correspondence with the Buenos Aires Deputy, Juan José Pasos, and with the Chilean envoy to London, Francisco Antonio Pinto, both dated May 27, 1814, the Supreme Director Francisco de la Lastra indicated his distrust of the British sailors of the *Phoebe*. In those letters, he warned his recipients of the precaution taken in correspondence sent to them by means of the British frigate since "as that correspondence was through a foreign channel [HMS *Phoebe*], which expressed so much interest in Spain, it was necessary that

political matter between the Viceroyalty and Chile, far from being perceived as neutral, was seen by the Chilean independence fighters as the actions of an envoy and defender of Viceroy Abascal. Proof of this perception is that some Chilean citizens, sentenced to imprisonment in 1815 for having participated in the Chilean revolution, presented to the viceroy in their own defence that they had supported Spanish interests in the mediation carried out by the Commodore[100]. In this regard, the analysis of the correspondence exchanged by the British officer permits us to agree with Diego Barros Arana's statement that Hillyar offered his mediation and promoted the peace agreement "believing that he was rendering a significant service to Spain's cause and aiming to the survival of colonial domination"[101].

With HMS *Tagus* and *Briton* patrolling between Valparaíso, Callao, the Galápagos, and as far as the Marquesas Islands, the Royal Navy would establish an emerging and temporary presence in the South Pacific. The Friendship and Alliance treaty between Spain and the United Kingdom signed in Madrid on July 5, 1814[102]; the Spanish military reconquest of Chile in October 1814; the British peace with the United States established at Ghent on December 24, 1814; and the military defeat of Napoleon and the results of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, removed the American and French military threats to British security from the coasts of Chile. Consequently, the Royal Navy would again be absent from the Pacific for some years, ceasing the formal representation and influence of the British Crown in the Spanish colonies on the South American west coast.

## The Similarities of the Two Cases and their Consequences

Although Charles Fleming and James Hillyar's cases present certain differences due to the context of the Anglo-American war, their similarities provide clues on the causes and effects of the British government's policy and behaviour in the face of the first episodes of the Chilean independence movement. Through their correspondence with British and Viceroyalty authorities, as well as their reports on the events in Chile, these two British officers were a relevant source of information and intelligence, contributing to important political decisions for the future of the Chilean liberation movement.

Significantly, at the time of each of the events, the United Kingdom was engaged in a survival war against the French Empire, while at the same time was an ally of

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Chile, anticipating continence, express its concept wisely and without freedom". See *Colección de Historiadores y Documentos…*, *op. cit.*, 1900, vol. IV, pp. 194-197.

[100] In a memorial addressed to the Viceroy of Perú, the Chilean prisoners in their own defence pointed out that Hillyar "He himself willingly approved and found the articles of the peace of 3 May in accordance with Your Majesty's wishes". In *ABO*, 1947, vol. XIX, pp. 262 and 273.

[101] Barros Arana, *Historia General…*, *op. cit*., vol. IX, pp. 311-312.

[102] This treaty granted special privileges to the United Kingdom to trade with Spanish America. See Foreign Office (eds.), *British Foreign State Papers 1812-1814,* James Ridgway and Sons, London, 1841, vol. I, Part. 2, pp. 273-275.

Spain. In this context, both commanders sailed from Europe and arrived in the South Pacific in fulfilment of an official mission of a purely military nature, and they had full understanding of the external threats Great Britain was facing. In the case of Charles Fleming, the protection in the safe passage of diplomats, correspondence, and goods to support the war effort against France. In James Hillyar's case, supporting an operation to destroy and capture American installations in the North Pacific. Both missions were ordered by the highest military-political authority of the United Kingdom, the Admiralty in London. Therefore, the tasks mandated should have been in accordance with the British government's policies towards Spain and its colonies. From this it can be deduced that Fleming's and Hillyar's missions were not within the scope of responsibility of the commander of the South American Naval Station, who's obligations were safeguarding the commercial interests of British subjects in the region, especially on the Atlantic coast. Consequently, neither of these two missions was linked to trade and economic benefits that could eventually result in the very fragile trading with the Spanish colonies in the Pacific.

But the most illustrative fact regarding these cases is that both commanders, based on their own understanding of what was happening in the province, the recognition of the threats to British security, and knowing their government's policy towards Spain and its colony, decided according to their interpretation of the British interests at stake, assuming a role beyond the one assigned by the political authorities in London. Both Fleming and Hillyar modified their mission and, without having the formality of diplomatic agents to the viceroyalty and the Creole authorities, they behaved as such. Furthermore, as is clear from the letters exchanged, they were received, recognized, and treated by Chilean pro-independence authorities as official representatives of the Spanish Crown, becoming openly involved in a conflict of political nature. By their interventions, both officers generated to the confronted parties the perception that Great Britain, with its the Royal Navy, openly supported the interests of the Hispanic monarchy.

In the case of HMS *Standard*, Fleming's presence and arrogant expressions provoked a defiant attitude by the Chilean government. The demands presented by an agent of a monarchical power, which initially could have been perceived as a political support to the cause, had the effect of an unquestionable show of autonomy and political will on the part of the Creoles. Fleming created the right scenario for the Chilean political authorities to exercise and display the first demonstration of sovereignty and rebellion against expressions of interventionism at the beginning of the independence era. As for the effect on the viceroyalty authorities and the monarchists in Chile, Fleming's attitude provoked a sense of optimism and peace regarding the British Crown's position in the face of the liberation movement. Agreeing with Ricardo Montaner's opinion, even though Fleming "failed to meet the objectives that had brought him to Chile, he provided a service to the Royalist cause, because he disclaimed the general opinion that

England was helping the subversive movement in the Spanish colonies"[103], and his actions raised the first suspicions about the future role the United Kingdom could take.

On the other case, HMS *Phoebe's* attack on USS *Essex* had a similar effect in the Chilean independence-fighters' perception regarding the support they could expect from Britain. The violation of neutrality of waters which the British considered to be under Spanish jurisdiction, but at the same time knew to be under control of the Chilean rebel government, is still a matter of historical legal debate. Regarding the battle of Valparaíso, it is possible to agree with Fred Rippy's approach, who pointed out that "England's maritime rules were those of a great belligerent naval power, which disregarded the rights of neutrals and jealously defended itself against competitors in maritime trade"[104]. But whether Hillyar acted under the rules of law of armed conflict at that time, the effect it had on the perception of what the *criollos* could expect from the Royal Navy was crystal-clear; from the patriots' perspective, the victory of the *Phoebe* over the *Essex* was deeply regretted. In fact, the American frigate's raids in the Pacific, while damaging the British whaling industry, had at the same time contributed to the protection of the Chilean coastal trade by neutralizing the blockades and the actions of Lima's privateers. For the Chilean political authorities and merchants, the presence of the British ships, allied with Spain, could only represent a new threat to their pretended independence.

The concern provoked by the United States' military presence in the colony during this period also enables to deduce the British interests at stake. The problem of the growing North American influence in Spanish America was a significant variable for the British authorities when seeking a political definition regarding the autonomist movement that was beginning in Chile. The United States quickly noticed and understood what was happening in the Spanish provinces of America and the opportunity that this meant to expand its trade, extend its borders, improve its strategic position and, above all, spread its political ideology. The swift dispatch of special agents to each of the Spanish colonies is evidence of the priority that the U.S. government gave to the events occurring in Spanish America and the clear understanding of the difference between each of the provinces. The case of the American consul Joel Roberts Poinsett, who arrived in Santiago in February 1812, after having negotiated a trade agreement with the Buenos Aires *Junta*, is a clear example of the American effort to get closer to the colonies that were starting their liberation[105]. This was a matter of obvious concern to the British government.

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[103] Montaner, *Historia Diplomática…*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[104] James Fred Rippy, *La rivalidad entre Estados Unidos y Gran Bretaña por Améria Latina (1808-1830)*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1967, p. 2.

[105] The case of Joel Poinsett not only illustrates the concern that his presence caused among the British naval authorities. It is also clear evidence of the early interest that the United States showed in the independence process that was emerging in Spanish America. See Charles Lyon Chandler and R. Smith, "The Life of Joel Roberts Poinsett", in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 59, n.° 1, Philadelphia, 1935, pp. 1-31. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20086886 [accessed: July 16, 2021].

The dispatches of the Royal Navy commanders stationed in South America, which gave account of Poinsett's actions in Chile, are eloquent in showing the anxiety that the North American actions produced[106]. Since July 1813, both Commodore William Bowles, stationed in Buenos Aires, and Admiral Dixon from Rio de Janeiro, sent frequent reports to the Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty in London, warning of the activities that Poinsett was carrying out in Chile and his influence over General José Miguel Carrera[107]. However, despite the concern that the North American activities implied for the British interests, identified as political-ideological and commercial, these letters clearly reveal that the main apprehension was still the war against the Napoleonic empire. France, not the United States, was the geostrategic objective to neutralize and the driving force behind all the Royal Navy's actions regarding the Hispanic American independence movements. Proof of this is Commodore Bowles's letter to the Admiralty on November 9, 1813, with his assessment of the recent events in Chile and the internal dispute between the Carrera family and the governing *Junta*. In it he makes a special reference to British interests, pointing out that "The Carreras are entirely guided by the American agent Poinsett, who may be considered as much in the interests of France as America…"[108].

Analysing the British government's dilemma in defining its state interests and policy towards the autonomist movement in the rebellious colony, the presence and actions of the Royal Navy suggest that the priority was on the security provided by maintaining the integrity of the Spanish empire. As Fred Rippy points out, form 1812 onwards "the official representatives of the United States were consuls, commercial agents, naval officers and commissioners, while England depended fundamentally on naval officers"[109]. Just as the United States' interest in the independence of the Spanish colonies in the South Pacific was primarily commercial and then geopolitical and ideological, in the case of the United Kingdom, at that time, its main interest was geopolitical and strategic and lastly commercial.

It is also enlightening to note Hillyar's unauthorized interference in the mediation that led to the fragile and transient "Treaty of Lircay". Along with the well-deserved doubts stemming from his correspondence with Admiral Manley Dixon and the explanations he gave for his involvement in the conflict, as well as the genuine distrust he later aroused among the Creoles, Hillyar's intervention allows us to assume that he understood that his responsibility and priority was to contribute to achieving peace in a political conflict. Having already neutralized the military threat posed by the American

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[106] The first news of Poinsett's activities affecting British interests in South America was transmitted by Captain Peter Heywood, from Buenos Aires, in December 1812. Tagart, *Memoir of the late Captain…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-248.

[107] Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., pp. 102-130.

[108] William Bowles to John Croker, Buenos Aires, 9 November 1813, Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit*., p. 113.

[109] Rippy, *La rivalidad…*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

ship in the Pacific, his efforts were aimed towards supporting a stabilization process in the rebel colony, restoring the authority of the Spanish monarchy in Chile, and preventing it from falling under the influence of the French and U.S. political ideas[110].

## Conclusions Regarding British Influence in Chile during the so Called "Patria Vieja"[111]

Charles Fleming and James Hillyar's cases are evidence of the political and strategic interests the United Kingdom had on the South Pacific west coast: security came first, commercial benefits could wait. The Anglo-Spanish alliance of 1809, as well as Britain's mediation efforts between 1811 and 1813 to avoid the conflict brewing between Spain and her American possessions[112], were in essence only a means to achieve their main state interest of security and survival, by defeating Napoleon's empire, preventing it from expanding to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World and restoring a balance of power in Europe. As early as 1809, the British government had begun to be uneasy about independence initiatives in Spanish America. As James Fred Rippy points out in his study, the British authorities "were engaged in a terrible struggle with Napoleon and resented any disturbance that tended to weaken their Spanish ally"[113].

Prior to the beginning of the independentist movement in Chile, when he handed over the command of the South American Naval Station, in a letter dated May 24, 1809, Admiral Sydney Smith pointed out to his successor:

> "The actual conquest of the European territory of Spain by France may occasion such a separation [from its American colonies], but as long as the Spanish monarchy exist in Europe I have been instructed by His Majesty's secretary of state to maintain the integrity of the whole, and in this I have hitherto succeeded, as appears by the answers I have received from the Viceroys of Lima and Buenos Aires and from the presidency of Chili, which have all acknowledged Ferdinand the VII and proclaimed themselves as making common cause with England in the war with France"[114].

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[110] It is worth mentioning that an analysis of Hillyar's correspondence suggests his deep spirituality and strong Christian sentiment, which is reflected in the language he used; this must have been a relevant factor in his decision to deviate from his instructions and mediate in the armed conflict.

[111] The term "Patria Vieja" (old motherland) is traditionally used by Chilean historiography to identify the period between its First Government *Junta* in September 1810 and the Spanish military reconquest of the province in October 1814.

[112] On the British mediation effort between Spain and its colonies from 1811 to 1813, see John Rydjord, "British mediation between Spain ans her colonies: 1811-1813", in *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 21, n.° 1, Duke University Press, 1941, pp. 29-50. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2507518 [accessed: October 1, 2021].

[113] Rippy, *La rivalidad…*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[114] Smith to de Courcy, Rio de Janeiro, 24 May 1809, Graham and Humphreys, *The Navy and South…*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

In this regard we agree with Mario Barros's assessment of the secondary role that commercial interests played in relation to British geopolitical security interests:

> "Two events prompted Prime Minister Lord Castlereagh to draw England's attention to Spanish America: the first was the possibility that the throne installed by Napoleon in Spain would strengthen and the empire would become French; and the second was that, under this instance, the United States would capture the vast Hispanic American market"[115].

Neither Charles Fleming nor James Hillyar arrived with their ships to the Pacific for the protection of the whalers or the almost non-existent British trade; and both commanders did not have the freedom of action to interfere in political affairs between Spain and the province of Chile. Moreover, HMS *Phoebe* did not cross the South Sea to neutralize the *Essex,* as the most traditional historiography points out[116]; she was on a clear military strategic mission to the Columbia River in North America and her commander had explicit instructions to observe a neutral position towards the oppossing the parties in conflict. But this neutrality was to be incompatible with the much broader British policy of alliances.

From 1689 to 1815 the United Kingdom and France had faced themselves in at least seven wars. The experiences of those 126 years of conflict permeated the British rulers, their nation, and especially the Royal Navy, with the conviction that France represented its main threat and strategic rival. Their security and survival were at stake in their fight against that empire, thus its development and prosperity depended on that security. To reach that industrial growth and economic power, it necessarily demanded security and geostrategic strength. The balance of power in Europe was the means to achieve this. As has been presented, the view of France as the main obstacle to achieving that balance, and the resulting strategic security, did not change overnight when British seafarers were faced with a scenario of independence upheaval in the different Spanish American colonies[117].

Consequently, under a complex Euro-American security scenario and in an extremely extensive geographical region, a unilateral British policy of neutrality in the face of Spain's conflict with its colonies could not be sustained simultaneously with a balance of power policy in Europe that, based on alliances and shared interests with the Spanish empire, sought to neutralize the threats from France and the United States. Thus, the

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[115] Barros Van Buren, *Historia Diplomática…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

[116] As mentioned by historians such as Amunátegui, *La reconquista…*, *op. cit.*, p. 28; William Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy. A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*, London, Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1901, vol. VI, p. 101; Carmona Yáñez, *Carrera y la Patria…*, *op. cit*., p. 255; Rodrigo Fuenzalida, *La Armada de Chile desde la alborada hasta el sesquicentenario*, Valparaíso, Armada de Chile, 1975, vol. I, p. 19; Barros Arana, *Historia General…*, *op. cit*., vol. IX, p. 306; Arancibia, Jara and Novoa, *La Marina en la historia…*, *op. cit*., p, 82; and Tromben, *La Armada de Chile…*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

[117] John B. Hattendorf, "The Struggle with France, 1690-1815", in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy*, John Richard Hill (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 80-119.

United Kingdom faced with the dilemma of its own conflicting interests, did not adopt a formal policy towards the independence movements in Spanish America during the crucial period of 1810 to 1814. While formally declaring its neutrality in Spain's crisis with its American colonies, it occasionally displayed its support for the preservation of the Spanish empire and its monarchy.

The United Kingdom's concern to protect its trade with South America, using its sea power as a tool, was evident for the Spanish and Portuguese Atlantic colonies and ports. The letters exchanged by the British naval commanders reveal that what was happening in Brazil, Montevideo and Buenos Aires were of concern for the effects it could have on their trade and commercial interests; while the situation in the Pacific was only of concern as long as it affected the war against France and the United States. The scenario, public and private actors, their interests, and resources were too different to keep a common position towards each regional struggle. As Hernán Ramírez pointed out, "There was, temporarily, a very marked disconnection between the economic interests of certain mercantile elements and the reasons of political and military order which the Government must had necessarily taken into account"[118]. The state interests and strategic objectives that British political authorities –the Foreign Office and the Admiralty– made evident in the west coast, regardless of what was formally declared, were to protect the integrity of the Spanish empire, which provided resources to the war effort in Europe; to prevent the occupation of Spanish American territories by France; to neutralize the presence and ideological influence of the United States; to provide protection to the whaling industry; and to develop intelligence, by means of hydrographic reconnaissance, as an asset of a strategic nature. In that order. Consequently, as Jorge Ortiz Sotelo points out, "captains sailing to the west coast needed a far more precise set of instructions to avoid future complaints against British neutrality in what was officially considered an Spanish internal affair"[119].

In the case of Chile, the activities of the Royal Navy, as the only formal representative of the British government in that province, created perception of great doubts, distrust and eventually rejection of its influence in the autonomist political process. During the first years of the Chilean independence manifestations, the British authorities did not assume an official stance, nor did they transmit a clear political position and, occasionally, they took decisions that were perceived as in direct support to their Spanish ally. Analysed from the Chilean authorities' point of view, the actions of the Royal Navy gave rise to the Chileans sending signals of autonomy in the face of what they perceived as indications of the interests of a global power. The straightforward rejection of Fleming's demands and not recognize what had been agreed by Hillyar's intervention, were not only expressions of sovereignty of a nation that was taking its first steps in the con-

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[118] Ramírez, *Historia del Imperialismo…*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
[119] Ortiz Sotelo, *Perú and the British…*, *op. cit*., p. 19.

text of international relations; they were also a demonstration that the British capacity for political coercion was still far from being what it would become half a century later.

The Royal Navy would not exert any further influence on the events unfolding in the province of Chile until mid-1817. However, even though the *Standard* and the *Phoebe* cases did not change British interest in what was happening on the west coast of Hispanic America, the disagreements and misunderstandings caused by Fleming and Hillyar, at a time when Chile was defining its future and exploring political alternatives, did have lasting implications on the future influence the United Kingdom would have during the formation of the new nation-state as in the perception of its authorities. Both cases would remain for years in the memory of the actors involved.

## Epilogue

As long as the Spanish reoccupation of the province of Chile lasted, between the end of 1814 and the beginning of 1817, the United Kingdom's supposed neutrality policy in the *internal* conflict was no longer justified, and the Royal Navy's presence and influence in the Pacific disappeared. But this was not to last for long. When, in February 1817, the patriots' Army of the Andes achieved its first victory over the Spanish military forces at Chacabuco, the British authorities' concern about the events in Chile resurfaced with intensity. The United Kingdom's policy towards Hispanic America would not facilitate the establishment of a cordial bilateral relationship. The significant increase in correspondence between British sailors in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro with London is proof of this, and the return of the Royal Navy ships to the South American west coast confirms it.

On August 6, 1819, more than two years after the establishment of the sovereign government of Chile, its Plenipotentiary Minister in London, Antonio José de Irisarri, wrote to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Colonies of the United Kingdom, Lord Castlereagh, noting that commanders of British warships, lacking diplomatic status, had committed themselves in recent statements and actions of a political nature. Along with expressing his objections to these attitudes, Irisarri reminded Castlereagh of the events of previous years, stating:

> "Your Excellency must understand that before now, and very since the beginning of the revolution, Chile has suffered much as a result of the arbitrariness of the commanders of H.B.M's Royal Navy. Brigadier Fleming, of the *Standard* ship, was the first who abused the name of his government, making statements contrary to the neutrality that this nation should observe. Afterwards, Captain Hillyar, of the frigate *Phoebe*, induced the Chileans to capitulate with the Spanish General Gaínza, bringing for the purpose instructions from the Viceroy of Lima, whose unfortunate result will always be remembered with pain in that country"[120].

[120] Letter from Antonio José de Irisarri to Vizconde Castlereagh, ABO, 1947, vol. III, p. 48.

In sending a copy of this letter to the Chilean Foreign Affairs Minister, Irisarri warned about the "humiliations" he had suffered from the British government by not being received by Lord Castlereagh or even being recognized as an official envoy of the Chilean government. But more significantly, Irisarri stressed the need to anticipate the future problems that Royal Navy ships, by then setting sail for the "South Sea", could cause the Chilean government:

> "The Commodore, under whose command the English ships will be in the South Sea, is Sir Thomas Hardy, a man as famous for his exploits, as he is to be feared for his thoughtless genius; and without doubt he will be more troublesome in Chile than Fleming, Hillyar, Porter[121], Shirreff and Biddle have been"[122].

The emergence of misunderstandings between the Crown's naval representatives and the new independent authorities would be inevitable; and using naval power as a main instrument to protect and promote the colliding strategic interests in time of peace, would lead to bilateral confrontation. The future intervention of the Royal Navy in the Anglo-Chilean relationship would give rise to what, in a combination of international relations and sea power theories, would come to be called "gunboat diplomacy"[123].

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[121] Strangely, Irisarri includes Captain David Porter, of the United States Navy, commander of the USS *Essex* in his assessment.
[122] ABO, 1947, vol. III, p. 43.
[123] Concept developed by James Cable in *Gunboat Diplomacy. Political Applications of Limited Naval Force*, London, Macmillan, 1981.