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**FOREIGN POLICY, STATE SECRETS AND PROPAGANDA
IN THE THE SPANISH ARMADA AND POSTARMADA YEARS (1580-1604)**

*Porfirio Sanz Camañes**

Abstract

The rivalry between England and Spain during the Philip II and Elisabeth I governments with the Dutch Revolt from 1568 and the Portugal annexation in 1580 led to a inevitable war. The political and religious troubles, on the one side, and the anglo-spanish economic conflicts, on the other side, were increasing as from 1570 while the Channel of la Mancha waters, the North Sea and the Atlantic mercantile routes were in serious risk for Spain. In 1585 Elisabeth I approved the Nonsuch Declaration directed to prevent any sort of Spanish intervention at the English Court, interested in all kind of conspirations to knock down the English Crown and to help the rebels in Ireland. From that moment, rumours about war spread around the embassies in Spain and England and the intelligence system was clearly organized in London and Madrid to take any political decision in foreign policy. During these years of rivalry, propaganda played an essential role between the positions of both monarchs and especially during the Spanish Armada and Postarmada years. With the Treaty of London in 1604, a new era in Anglo-Spanish political and economic relations was open

Key words: *Foreign Policy, state secrets, propaganda, Spanish Armada, 1580-1604*

This paper is focused in two central objectives. First, to explore the rivalry between England and Spain during the Philip II and Elizabeth I governments, and especially from 1580's to 1604, when the treaty of London was signed. During this period the political and religious troubles, on the one side, and the Anglo-Spanish economic conflicts, on the other side, were increasing as from 1570 while the Channel of la Mancha waters, the North Sea and the Atlantic mercantile routes were in serious risk for Spain (Sanz, 2005a: 557-592). Second, the battle of the propaganda and the creation of an image of the enemy during the years of the anglo-spanish rivalry was clearly won by the English Monarchy (Maltby, 1971). After the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the perceptions of the Spanish Decline and the end of the XVI Century were very close connected with the prestige and reputation of Spain as a military power.

The foreign policy directed by Philip II, King of Spain (1556-1598), based on the defense of Catholicism and the preservation of an extraordinary territorial heritage, had left important military fronts open on the turbulent European scene¹. The costing of an aggressive intervention in different conflicts and wars, was supported by the American resources (Hamilton, 1975). This policy worked while the military power was sustained thanks to the financial resources (Thompson, 1981). Fiscal pressures on Castile and over the rest of his kingdoms –such as Flanders, Aragon and Italy– provoked some revolts (Stradling, 1989: 253-275). Royal authority was questioned in Flanders as from 1566,

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¹ An important point of view, can be seen in: G. Parker (1984), H. Kamen (1997), J. Lynch (1997), M. Fernández Álvarez (1998); and J.H. Elliott (2001).

where the Calvinist doctrines spread too fast (Geyl, 1935; Parker, 1982: 115-145; Fernández Álvarez, 1984: 56-62; 1986: 7-15; Van Gelderen, 1992; Israel, 1997; Echevarria, 1998). Lastly in Aragon, where the regional laws and privileges, called *fueros*, use to defend their traditions and were against the absolute power found through Antonio Pérez affair, a way for its reformation (Marañón, 1969; Mignet, 1983; Alvar Ezquerro, 1986).

Anglo-Spanish rivalry was increased after Mary Tudor's death, in 1558, and the English began to interfere in the Spanish colonies in America (Fernández Álvarez, 1998: 515-540). The suspicious plots to dethrone Elizabeth I and Spain's support of the Irish Catholics were arguments used by London in facing up to England's secret collaboration in the Netherlands, which led to discouragement in the court of Madrid (García Hernán, 2000: 49-50). In fact, the network of spies organized by Bernardino de Mendoza between England, France and Flanders, based as much on resident agents as on traveling emissaries, enabled him to obtain information favorable to the interests of Philip II. What Philippine diplomacy could not stop was that both Guerau de Spés and Mendoza, Spanish diplomats, were thrown out of England for their conspiratorial activities (Dean, 1996: 63-70).

With these antecedents it is not strange that following years of mounting tension, the progression of the conflict in Flanders, with the advance of Farnese in the summer of 1585, conquering Antwerp and Brussels, ended up hastening the situation (Sanz, 2005a: 564-566). The fall of Antwerp, the "Jerusalem" of some chroniclers of the era, together with the vanishing from the political scene of two dangerous rivals like William of Orange, assassinated by Baltasar Gérard, and the duke of Anjou, made it very clear to Elizabeth I that England's security was in danger, as was translated in a rough session in the House of Commons agreeing upon English military intervention in favor of the Dutch rebels (CSPF, 1585-1586: 332).

Anglo-Spanish relations, deeply shaken during the governments of Philip II of Spain and Queen Elizabeth I of England, found new ways to understanding from their irreconcilable positions in the generational takeover in the courts of both countries. Spain's largest-scale military intervention in Flanders and the defense of its rights to the throne in Portugal, whose kingdom was annexed to the Spanish monarchy in 1580, ended up arousing London's fears before the appearance of a new Empire whose dimensions in geography, politics and economics in fact supposed, according to some protestant chronicles of the era, a threat to peace and stability in the world (Sanz, 2005a: 562). A *Black Legend*² began to be fostered which already had a legion of followers in the Isles (Sanz, 2012: 81-90).

² The *Black Legend* or *Leyenda Negra* refers to a style of historical writing or propaganda that demonizes the Conquerors and in particular the Spanish Empire in an attempt to incite political animosity against Spain. Anti-Spanish propaganda and anti-Spanish sentiment appeared in different parts of Europe as the Spanish Empire grew, especially during the 16th century when Spain was at its height of political power, by propagandists from rival European powers, such as the Protestant countries of England and the Netherlands, as a means to morally disqualify the country and its people. The Black Legend particularly exaggerates the extent of the activities of the Spanish Inquisition or the bad treatment of American indigenous subjects in the territories of the Spanish Empire, thanks to the writings of the Dominican Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, particularly his "Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias" (1552). The term was initially

Elizabethan England, through her *Declaration*, went from secret military and financial collaboration to direct intervention, sanctioning the military alliance between the Dutch rebels and the English with the Treaty of Nonsuch, signed in August 1585 (Sanz, 2012: 52-58). With the treaty not only was England's position in Europe made clear, but it also reproduced the conflict in America at other levels.

The ideological or religious differences started to become irreconcilable and be above the traditional interests which both countries had in common. On both sides the opponent was religiously disparaged. The Philippine policy deployed and upheld in the political-strategic, ideological and economic fields, translated into the *inalienable* nature of the patrimonial lands, dynastic-religious reasons and the monopoly of sailing to the West Indies, was going to be more and more questioned in the northwest Atlantic by Elizabeth I's England (Fernández Álvarez, 1995: 244).

The growing antagonism between both countries seemed to be leading said relations to an imminent clash, as the preparation of an Armada by Spain ended up confirming. The disaster of the *Spanish Invincible Fleet* or *Armada Invencible*, as was disclosed in the circles in London, came about due to several causes, although there were those, especially in England, who did not take long to explain the defeat in religious terms. Where was the God who supported Spain's arms to fight against heresy? How was the catholic Philip II repaid for his pious, exemplary conduct? (Cabot, 1998: 171).

Another important chapter on Anglo-Spanish political relations was the propaganda that arise before and after the disaster of the Spanish Armada. Before the disaster, between 1585 and 1588, Philip II of Spain was preparing a fleet, the Spanish Armada, to invade England. His plan was for the fleet of 130 ships, carrying 30,000 sailors and soldiers, to sail up the English Channel and reach the Low Countries where the Spanish army was waiting to board and attack England. The main objectives were not to conquest England but to remove the protestant Queen Elizabeth from the throne and restore the Catholic religion in England. Nobody could believe what the English propaganda says that the King of Spain pretended an annexation of the island country as a colony into the powerful realm of Hapsburg Spain (Maltby, 1971: 59-62). The king of Spain was interested, in first place, in keeping the English away from Spanish affairs and the English cessation of military activities in support of the Dutch rebels. In second place, the Spanish wanted that the English privateers³ non to interfere with the Spain's gold and silver treasure transportation in the waters of the Caribbean and the Atlantic. On the other side, the preparation of the Armada in Spain was no surprise⁴ and the English known about it for several years therefore they could make their own preparations to face the invasion (Herrera Oria, 1946). The English government had been building new ships, forts and warning beacons. Besides, they made efforts to

coined by Julián Juderías in 1914 in his book *La leyenda negra y la verdad histórica* ("The Black Legend and Historical Truth"). A more pro-Spanish historiographical school emerged as a reaction, especially within Spain, but also in the Americas. A different style which describes events of Spanish colonization in an idealized manner has been referred to the opposite as the "White legend" or *Leyenda Blanca*.

³ London, Southampton, Dorset, Devon y Cornwall, Bristol y Bridgewater were the more important harbours of the English privateering.

⁴ The letters in relation to the gestation of the Spanish Armada can be followed through the correspondence collected by Enrique Herrera Oria.

disrupt the Spanish preparations in 1587 with the attack to the Spanish fleet in Cadiz harbour by Francis Drake.

It's true that the defeat, I prefer to insist in "disaster" of the Spanish Armada was one of the most famous events in European history. The Spanish Monarchy, Catholic, was the most powerful country in the world, due to the vast territories of land with the Spanish-Portuguese Empire around the world. On the opposite, England, a small country, protestant, with little wealth and apparently isolated from the continent with many difficulties to resist the attack of the King Philip II armies. In other words, as in the biblical history David vs. Goliath. An unequal fight of these features attracted the attention of all European countries, most of them interested in the events of the English Channel and specially the Pope of Rome, Sixtus V, according to some, one of the promoters of the Spanish Army (Gómez-Centurión, 1988b: 48-50). Certainly, if the English realm could return to the Catholic faith Sixtus could demanded that the church's properties and rights, alienated since the time of Henry VIII, should be restored.

An image fostered by some Italian and Spanish libelists, at the same time defenders of Spanish values and Philippine politics. Tomás Campanella devotes many of the pages of his *De Monarchia Hispanica* to deal with the causes intervening in the constitution and ascent of a monarchy, the factors contributing to its strength or weakness and the orientation of Spain's foreign policy. His work, however, went largely unnoticed in Spain although paradoxically it was widely read elsewhere in Europe, yet another of those contradictions which could not hinder the intentional spreading of certain clichés and images about Don Quixote's Spain (Sanz, 2005b: 291-313). At any rate, the words devoted to the English and their nation in *Monarchia* are clearly influenced by this wave of opinion, which had fostered differences between both countries: "*The Englishman is the least inclined to universal monarchy; however, he greatly harms the Spaniard who so pretends. Elizabeth of England provided an example of it, favoring corruption in both's possessions, in Belgium against the catholic king, in France against the very Christian king and helping the heretics with advice and material support, since the island has plenty of ships and soldiers who seize everything Spain has in the north, and scamper to the New World...*" (Campanella, 1601: 189-190). Later on, the Calabrian thinker pointed out the substantial differences between both countries, paying attention to two fundamental criteria: religion and dynasty (Campanella, 1601: 191).

The events and the disaster of the Spanish Armada are well known (Gómez-Centurión, 1988a). Even we should recognize that the Spanish Armada was only one battle (1588) in a long war (1585-1604), English propaganda contributed to create false myths⁵, among them that Spain was eclipsed as a great power and English victory was decisive for the future of the islands. According to this opinion the defeat of the Spanish Armada was the beginning of England's control of the seas and the foreign policy of Philip II was weaker. Many of British historian has said that after the Spanish Armada's failure to invade England, the Spaniards were never able to successfully land troops on English soil. This is another false fact. During the 1590's there were new attempts (in 1596 and in 1597) from the Spanish court to land in the British Isles and intervene in its politics (O'Donnell, 1993: 7).

⁵ About these false myths, see: "Top 10 myths and muddles about the Spanish Armada, history's most confused and misunderstood battle," by Wes Ulm, Harvard University personal website, URL: http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~ulm/history/sp_armada.htm, © 2004.

The international situation favored the possibility of Irish military operation in a definitive way since 1600. The misrule introduced by the English on the island and the religious changes of the Queen, delegitimized England, which had lost its right, based on a papal concession, to its dominion of Ireland, putting the island on the brink of destruction (Silke, 1970: 67). The Irish resistance relied on various plans of support from Spain to try to strike England through Ireland, such as the failure of Kinsale in 1601 (Recio, 2002).

The debacle of the Spanish Armada was not at all decisive and Spain recovered quickly with the shipbuilding of a series of galleons, called the *Apostles*. Spain's post-Armada navy was retooled and expanded, and Spain ruled the Seas for most of the 1600s. Furthermore, Sir Francis Drake, one of the most famous England privateering pirates, was killed in a disastrous raid against Spanish America in 1595 in front of Portobelo fortress in Panamá (Andrews, 1966: 33 and 124).

The years following the Armada or the period called "post-armada" (Rodríguez Salgado, 1993: 7-49), from 1589 to 1603, were used to prepare new military strategies for the defense of Spain's geopolitical and economic interests on three levels: on the one hand, with the design of a plan for the defense of the American Atlantic; likewise, encouraging the Armadas policy, contemplating new attacks on England (Stradling, 1992: 34-36); and lastly, taking steps to activate Spanish privateering, practiced from the bases in the north of Spain or from Dunkirk, in Flanders (Bordejé, 1992: 191-196). Indeed, decades of falling-out and confrontation in the fields of Holland and in American waters had fostered the ill will between both nations –according to some observers of the era– (CSPV, 1617-1619: 421-422) creating stereotypes and clichés which damaged the other's image and encouraged rivalries between strong enemies (Wright, 1951; 1959; Hakluyt, 1903-1905). The opinions about Spain making their way around England were not much better. Religion and politics acted, as dangerous ingredients in any conflict or discussion of identities (Dadson, 2004: 129-139). The royal divorce between Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon had supposed the separation of the Church of England from Rome's control, establishing itself as the head of the new Anglican Church. The religious differences between Catholics and Protestants which were to divide Europe in the 16th century would end up turning England and Spain into leaders of two irreconcilable positions. The anti-Spanish feelings amidst the English people were again stirred up with the marriage between Prince Philip and Queen Mary, who earned the unpopularity of the English for being believed to have opened the doors to the Spaniards' administrative and repressive machinery in the country, the Holy Office included.

This policy of intentions was not free from another policy of appeasement, as can be deduced from the correspondence between both courts in the late 1590s. Beginning in October 1599, the year following Philip II's death, the first English-Spanish contacts began to be established in order to deal with the matter of peace with England (Sanz, 2005a: 579). According to a report entitled "Apuntamientos para la Paz con Inglaterra" ("Notes for Peace with England"), delivered to Philip III and dated January 8th, 1600, the Spanish monarch was advised by some catholic sectors in Ireland and England to be wary of any peace offering on behalf of Queen Elizabeth (AGS, Leg. 2.512: docs. 88 and 89). It is not less true that the Spanish theologians who were favorable to the agreement, confronted with discordant opposing voices, hoped that an alliance with England would open the way to drawing England nearer to catholic theses, at a time when libelous anti-papal, anti-Spanish propaganda speedily made its way around the

turbulent triangle shaped by London, The Hague and Paris. As the report pointed out, the aim should be “for the peace to be useful at present for his Majesty and for his friends; and pull out the roots of war” (AGS, Leg. 2.512: docs. 88 and 89).

Lasting peace had to have the support of the English catholics, whose situation subjected to the puritanical repression of parliament was more and more delicate, and they only aspired for the susceptible generational takeover in the English court, given Queen Elizabeth I's illness, to enable them to face the future with greater hopes. “The more it was in benefit of the catholics in England, the longer peace would last”. Experience proved that dealings with heretics could not be trusted, either: “The heretics are crafty, and in many respects it is good for them to hold talks of peace with Spain, although they have no desire to ever reach it...” (AGS, Leg. 2.512: docs. 88 and 89).

England had stood out, especially after the defeat of the Armada, for the budding activity of its privateering in waters of Spanish jurisdiction, in Europe and in America. English attempts to destabilize the Portuguese empire had materialized in 1591 with the capture of Santa Elena in the Atlantic, the plundering of Espíritu Santo and some strongholds along the Brazilian coast. Brazil would suffer a new attack by England with the pillage of Pernambuco in 1595 (Sanz, 2005a: 575). The activities carried out by privateers of the likes of Hawkins, Raleigh and Drake would be occupied later on by other figures such as Sir William Monson, Sir Robert Mansell and Sir Richard Leveson (Andrews, 1966: 237). This series of interventions by English privateers in Spain's area of influence interrupted Spanish colonial trade and tacitly questioned Spain's imperial supremacy (Fernández Álvarez, 1998: 610-620).

The initiation of conversations in Boulogne, where the possibility of reaching an English-Spanish agreement was discussed, encouraged the emissaries from Spain, England and the archdukes. However, the contacts, for the time being, ignored the thorniest matters – possession of fortified cities by the Queen, free trade, and navigation through the English Channel – in order to focus on questions of priority. Spain upheld the consideration of the Dutch as rebels and its trade monopoly according to papal grants. English support of the Dutch rebels had to cease immediately while from Spain the English-Dutch trade rivalries had to attempt to be exploited which had come from time ago and continued to be buried due to the Spanish-Dutch conflict.

England, for its part, was not willing to accept pressure from Spain, and even less so in the new times when its privateering traffic was so well-established in those domains. In late July 1600, the lack of agreements on these terms led to the withdrawal of English emissaries called to London. The decree by Elizabeth I to create the English East India Company and the trade block of the Spanish monarchy in Europe and overseas put a definitive end to any hint of reaching an accord between both States. The last of the parliaments convened by Queen Elizabeth, in 1601, obtained the political backing for her measures and, following the granting of certain privileges to its members, the approval of a new tax consisting of four subsidies to confront the costly war with Spain (Hartley, 1992: 40-55).

At the end of the 16th century England and Spain had a difficult economic situation. Between 1594 and 1602, Robert Cecil, England Secretary of State, calculated that the wars in Ireland, the Netherlands, and aid to the King of France, taken together, had amounted nearly £3,000,000 in debt and had sold offices and crown lands to avoid slipping further (Sanz, 2002: 30). The shortage of English public funds in the early

seventeenth century was due to the royal system of tax collection, which was in a need of reform, and to escalating government spending to which James had added certain court extravagances (Tallet, 1992). On the other side, Spain's Philip II had declared several bankruptcies in parallel (Sanz, 2002: 30-31). Furthermore, the disappearance of Philip II from the political scene and the ascent to the throne of his son, as well as the generational takeover in England, with the rise to power of James I, created a more acceptable diplomatic climate to reach peace, as both courts knew. With this aim, making his way to London via Brussels was Juan de Tassis, Earl of Villamediana. Upon his arrival in the Flemish capital in the early summer of 1603, he stated his first impressions of the political situation in James Stuart's England. Among the secret instructions he carried with him to bring both countries nearer to the signing of peace, "in peace talks ahead", the difficulties Paris posed to any treaty had to be overcome⁶.

Lastly, by virtue of the Treaty of London, in the political-military sphere, England and Spain renounced striking up alliances or militarily or financially supporting any campaign in favor of "enemies, opponents or rebels of the other party". This clause was aimed at removing any possibility of cooperation in war between the English and the Dutch, as the treaty said: "directly or indirectly, by sea, by land, and fresh waters" (Treaty of London, 1604: Chapter 4, 250). Moreover, England's strategic position, especially in the English Channel and the North Sea, was key to the security of Flanders, besides assuring the protection of its ships at English ports. It was moreover hoped that the treaty would make it possible for the way to be opened to a military understanding by means of the recruitment of troops, especially Irish, English and Scottish Catholics. In exchange, a proportion of the silver Spain was to send to pay for Flanders' Armada through the *English Road* would remain in England (Reeve, 1989: 249-259). A military assistance also coded in England's desire to rekindle the old English-Spanish project to throw the Muslim pirates out of the Mediterranean. It was also to be expected that with the deterioration in English-Dutch relations, cracks were opened in the bosom of Protestantism, between countries with evident disagreements in the trade sphere. As if that weren't enough, the diplomatic isolation of the United Provinces had to allow the concentration of greater military resources in the wars of Flanders, forget the costly policy of armadas and develop the sea routes between Spain and the Netherlands in a climate of stability and security (Sanz, 2005a: 581).

With the Treaty of London in 1604 (Abreu y Bertodano, 1989), a new era of peace and stability in Anglo-Spanish political and economic relations was open⁷.

⁶ Likewise, the hardest stumbling blocks for a peace treaty to materialize continued to focus on the same matters: religious questions, matters of a political-military nature and trade matters.

⁷ However, English-Spanish relations in the first half of the 17th century, especially after the establishment of a new framework of understanding, with the peace treaty of London and its ratification in Valladolid, aimed to draw wills closer and create a climate of cooperation which would forget the quarrels of the past. When the questions relative to the negotiation of the wedding, which ended up being frustrated, were joined by the ordeal of the Palatinate, at least in appearance, relations with James I seriously deteriorated, and new rumors of war began to be heard.

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