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## **The Spanish Armada: The Worst-Kept Secret in Europe**

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The necessity for secrecy in planning and launching the Armada was considered imperative by the Spanish government. Yet news and rumors of it were common throughout Europe even before it was assembled. That those reports were so divergent and contradictory not only underlines the fact that much inaccurate information was given out but also that there was considerable confusion about the nature and purpose of the Armada at the highest planning levels. This can be attributed in part to the personality and governing style of the king himself, but even more to the kind of advice he received from his chief military commanders and to drastic changes in the external conditions affecting the Armada, including the weather. Nevertheless, recognizing the investment and commitment that had already been made and the more limited objectives Philip II had for the Armada by 1588, his conduct was not so inconsistent after all.

RELATIONS BETWEEN SPAIN AND ENGLAND had been generally cordial the first two decades of Philip II's and Elizabeth I's reigns. There were times of tension, especially when Spanish, French, or papal adventurers plotted to overthrow the Elizabethan regime, or when English privateers were allowed to raid Spanish ships and shores. But on the whole, both monarchs desired peace and were willing to overlook momentary misunderstandings as well as the importuning of their more impetuous ministers. Nevertheless, by the late 1570s the atmosphere was deteriorating. Elizabethan harassment of Spanish shipping and clandestine aid to Spain's Dutch rebels were becoming more frequent and more flagrant. At the same time, Spanish maltreatment of English merchants in Spain, and Spanish willingness to aid the Irish rebels against Elizabeth, tended to exacerbate the ill feelings growing out of their religious differences.

In each of Spain's most valuable and vulnerable arenas of activity the English were becoming more menacing after 1580. When Dom Antonio, the pretender to the Portuguese throne (inherited by Philip in January 1580), was defeated and fled to England, he was not only cordially received, he was

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given financial and military support in his bid to gain the throne.<sup>1</sup> Philip resented the part Elizabeth played in this matter, which he considered to be not only a violation of their friendship, but a threat to Spanish security and an open challenge to Philip's rule. Only slightly less serious was the way the queen received Francis Drake after his marauding and plundering of the Spanish Main and the coasts of Peru on his three-year circumnavigation odyssey. Instead of punishing him as a pirate, as the Spanish ambassador Bernardino de Mendoza demanded, she knighted him. Drake's personal vendetta against Spain was fast becoming a thinly disguised government policy of aggression against the Spanish empire. The third area of tension was the Low Countries where, by an Act of Adjunction on 22 July 1581, the States General renounced their allegiance to Philip II. They then added insult to injury by offering the sovereignty to the duke of Anjou, younger brother of the king of France, who was concurrently campaigning against Spanish forces in Flanders and courting Queen Elizabeth. Shortly thereafter, with the help of thirty thousand pounds furnished by Elizabeth, Anjou besieged and captured Cambrai from the Spanish. Philip's frustration mounted. In December 1581 he stated openly for the first time his intention to gather a great armada "para algunos efectos de nuestro servicio."<sup>2</sup>

Twenty months later, after two resounding victories over French fleets supporting Dom Antonio's bid to control the Azores, the Marquis of Santa Cruz wrote to the king proposing that the time was ripe to strike a decisive blow at England.<sup>3</sup> However, Philip had done little toward preparing such an armada. "The time has not come to discuss this," he scribbled in the margin of the marquis' letter, and filed it away with the thousands of other communications that were regularly accumulating from around the empire.

<sup>1</sup>Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon: Arquivo de Dom Antonio, MSS 19, 22, 23, 25, 30, 32. Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid (hereafter cited BNM): MSS 430, fols. 572-82; MSS 994, fols. 22-24; MSS 1749, fols. 47-201. Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid: Envío 5, Carpeta A, fols. 8, 42; Envío 90, Carp. D, fol. 642. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (hereafter BNP): Fonds Portugues, 66, fols. 29-30. British Library, London (hereafter BLL): Cottom MSS, Galba, C.VII, fol. 142; Nero, B.I, fol. 201; Vespasian, C.VII, fol. 382, *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup>*Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España*, 112 vols. (Madrid, 1842-95) 50:519-20, Philip II to Licenciado Antolinez. In his August 23 instructions to Diego Maldonado, Philip had mentioned beginning some sort of enterprise against England, but it is unclear exactly what he had in mind. Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS): Estado, K.1447, fol. 68. For more details on English intervention in the Low Countries, see Charles Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth and the Revolt of the Netherlands* (London: Macmillan, 1970), and on Anjou's activities, Mack P. Holt, *The Duke of Anjou and the Political Struggle during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), chap. 5. Students of the period are all deeply indebted to Garrett Mattingly's seminal *The Armada* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), a model for the way history should be written.

<sup>3</sup>Cesáreo Fernández Duro, *La Armada invencible*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1884-85) 1:241-43, Santa Cruz to Philip II, 9 August 1583. Dom Antonio escaped from the Azores and, supported by both England and France, continued to be a thorn in Philip's side for many years. Mendoza's almost continuous reporting of D. Antonio's whereabouts and activities is evidence that he was considered a real threat to Spanish security. AGS: Estado, legajos K. 1560-68.

In his reply to Santa Cruz, however, the king did note that he was ordering some provisions of biscuit from Italy and hiring ships in Viscaya.<sup>4</sup> There was no point in discouraging a man as eager and capable as Santa Cruz, even though he understood very little about international politics. Philip was ready to think about an enterprise against England and to listen to proposals, but he was not ready to act—yet.

Before abandoning the admiral's proposal, however, Philip wrote to his nephew in the Netherlands, Alexander Farnese, prince of Parma, seeking his advice as to the feasibility of an assault on England.<sup>5</sup> Parma replied that he preferred a quick surprise attack from Flanders rather than a major sea-borne expedition from Spain, although circumstances being what they were, he thought it would be wiser still to finish the job in the Netherlands before making any move against England.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the duke of Guise and Juan Bautista de Tassis, Philip's ambassador in France, were pestering the king with plans to invade Scotland, which could be expanded into a combined operation with the Scottish Catholics against England;<sup>7</sup> and Pope Gregory XIII was proposing a secret confederation of Catholic states to depose Elizabeth and place Mary Stuart or her son on the throne.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the plans, Philip cautioned that strict secrecy be maintained.

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If secrecy was to be the key to the success of the English enterprise, it was doomed from the start, for by 1583 news of a Spanish Armada was already buzzing all over Europe. Everybody seemed to know about the gathering of Philip's great fleet even before the first orders were drafted for its preparation. But what is equally remarkable is the variety and contradictory nature of the information. Even the best informed sources were not really sure of the purpose, nature, size, time, or destination of the Armada.

As early as January 1581, Roger Bodenham had written to Lord Burghley of the great preparation the king of Spain was making, but thought "the fame of it was much greater than the thing itself." He stated rather categorically that it was being outfitted for Portugal and "there is no cause much to fear any army that Spain can make from hence against England"

<sup>4</sup>Fernández Duro, *La Armada invencible*, 1:243, Philip II to Santa Cruz, 23 September 1583.

<sup>5</sup>AGS: Estado, 2217, fol. 75, Philip II to Parma, 12 September 1583. The best study of Parma is still Léon Van der Essen, *Alexandre Farnèse, prince de Parme, gouverneur générale des Pays-Bas*, 5 vols. (Brussels: Librairie Nationale d'Art et d'Histoire, 1933-37).

<sup>6</sup>AGS: Estado, 586, fol. 182, Parma to Philip II, 30 November 1583.

<sup>7</sup>AGS: Estado, K.1561, fols. 57, 72, 78, 100; K.1562, fol. 86, *passim*. Alexandre Teulet, ed., *Relations politiques de la France et de l'Espagne avec l'Ecosse au XVIe siècle: Papiers d'Etat* (Paris, 1862), 5:328, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup>*Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice* (London, 1894) (hereafter *CSPV*), 8:70, Matteo Zane to the Doge and Senate, 26 October 1583. The pope had designated the duke of Guise to lead the expedition.

because of the uncertainty of a harbor and the strength of the queen's navy.<sup>9</sup> Some time later, writing from Rapamat, Turkey, the English agent William Harborne echoed the same confidence when he wrote, "We hear from Christendom that the King of Spain 'pretends' the invasion of England and the conquest of Ireland . . . His swellings with Portugal's sweet figs may be purged with hard and sharp English pills, to restore his former health of mind."<sup>10</sup> Sir Edward Stafford, in Spain, advised more cautiously that "it is good to provide for the worst, and neither fear them too much nor set by them too little."<sup>11</sup> The English merchant, Roger Howe, reported from Seville that "the King will make ready a hundred sail of ships, but what to do [with them] the Lord knows."<sup>12</sup> Until as late as 1586 most English opinion seemed to hold that there was a greater chance that the Armada would come against Ireland than against England. In March 1586 Elizabeth sent one of many secret agents to investigate the status of the Armada preparations and determine whether it would invade England, Ireland, or Scotland.<sup>13</sup> Nothing conclusive was discovered, however, and by the next year Elizabeth still thought Ireland was the most likely destination.<sup>14</sup>

By that time, with the repeated damage being done by Drake and Hawkins in the West Indies, many believed the Armada preparations were intended for a major expedition across the Atlantic. "I do not conclude that an assault is to be feared in England or Ireland," wrote Elizabeth's roving ambassador, Horatio Palavicino, from Germany, "because I think it certain that the King of Spain will first try to chase away Drake from the Indies."<sup>15</sup> But after the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, English observers increasingly suspected that the Armada was headed for Scotland,<sup>16</sup> while the French ambassador in Rome, Jean de Vivonne, feared it might be intended for a raid on Marseille.<sup>17</sup>

The best informed observers in Europe during the sixteenth century were the Venetian ambassadors, yet even they had difficulty agreeing on the intentions of the Armada. After all, they were also dependent upon what they heard and saw. Matteo Zane wrote from Madrid in March 1582, "The

<sup>9</sup>*Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth* (London, 1927- ) (hereafter *CSPF*), 15 (1581-82): 17, Bodenhams to Burghley, 10 January 1581.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 19:314, Harborne to Walsingham, 1 March 1584.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 20:419, Stafford to Walsingham, 6 March 1585.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 19:528, Roger Howe to George Bond, 15 June 1585.

<sup>13</sup>AGS: Estado, K.1564, fol. 30, Mendoza to Philip II, 6 March 1586.

<sup>14</sup>*CSPF*, 21:pt. 2, p. 419; pt. 1, pp. 357, 372-73, 589-91. The talk in Rouen was that it would land in Scotland, "but of this there is no certainty," pt. 1, p. 578.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 20:635, Palavicino to Burghley, 16 May 1586.

<sup>16</sup>AGS: Estado, K.1565, fol. 55, Avisos de Londres. *CSPF*, 21: pt. 1, p. 652; pt. 4, pp. 421, 532.

<sup>17</sup>BNP: Collection Brienne, 354, Pisany to Henry III, 19 May 1587.

preparations for the war which are being made in Spain appear to be far greater than would be required for an expedition to the Azores, and so people say that his Majesty intends to attack England. . . . But the undertaking is more difficult than is generally supposed, and therefore many people believe that his Majesty's intentions are directed to the defense of Flanders, and the suppression of the French if they attempt to support Don Antonio."<sup>18</sup> By January 1586, Lorenzo Priuli in Rome doubted that there would be an attack at all.<sup>19</sup> Priuli's successor, however, Giovanni Gritti, was certain by 1587 that the Armada would sail, but thought it would not attack England without French support. "The preparations in Naples, Sicily, and Milan, as well as in Spain," he wrote, "make people say that the King of Spain is about to attack Geneva,"<sup>20</sup> a project favored by the pope. Three weeks later he reported that "the French here think that the sole object of these preparations is to protect Spanish dominions, and to secure the safety of the Spanish flotillas, which are said to be very rich this year, without any design to attack England."<sup>21</sup> By May, Gritti believed the Armada was meant for an invasion of France. This was also the opinion of Cavriana, the Florentine ambassador in France.<sup>22</sup>

The most capable of the Venetian career diplomats, Hieronimo Lippomano, was assigned to the Spanish court in 1586, where he was in an advantageous position to observe the Armada preparations. His information is unusually accurate and current, yet even in Madrid—or perhaps especially in Madrid—rumors ran rampant. In February 1587 Lippomano wrote, "Some say the Armada is destined for England, others for Ireland, many for Zealand and Holland, nor are there wanting those who maintain that the whole force may be suddenly turned upon Africa at El Arish [Larache]."<sup>23</sup> But Lippomano was quite sure of the primary objective of the Armada, even though he had doubts as to the Spanish ability, or frame of mind, to carry it out. He had seen the procrastination in its preparations and the hesitation in its deployment, and wrote, "The King and his Ministers are extremely anxious to avenge themselves on the Queen of England, but two considerations of great weight present themselves, the questions of how and when. The

<sup>18</sup> *CSPV*, 8:31, Matteo Zane to the Doge and Senate, 5 March 1582.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-33, 11 January 1586.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 239, Gritti to the Doge and Senate, 24 January 1587.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 246, Gritti to the Doge and Senate, 14 February 1587.

<sup>22</sup> Abel Desjardins, ed., *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane* [Collection de documents inédits, Ser. I, Tome 4] (Paris, 1872), 4:737, Cavriana to Belisario Vinta, 22 November 1587.

<sup>23</sup> *CSPV*, 8:241. G. Mayra Gamazo, *El Designio de Felipe II y el episodio de la Armada Invencible* (Madrid: Javier Morata, 1957), 90. Larache was the Moroccan port threatening the safety of southern Spain and the Canaries. On its importance to the Armada, see M. J. Rodríguez-Salgado, "Philip II and the 'Great Armada' of 1588," in *Armada, 1588-1988* (London: Penguin Books in association with the National Maritime Museum, 1988), 14-15.

French, from thinking too little, often fail; the Spanish, from thinking too much, often miss their opportunity.”<sup>24</sup> By May 1587 Lippomano was convinced—long before the Spanish government was—that there would not be an expedition that year, and that “all the preparations for an Armada are constructed merely with a view to frightening the Queen of England, and to divert her attention from operations against Spain.”<sup>25</sup> Yet in July he again restated the possibility that the Armada might go to Africa or to Ireland, or maybe to Flanders or Scotland.<sup>26</sup>

As late as January 1588, M. de Longlée, the French ambassador in Madrid, still seemed uncertain as to the Armada’s destination, although he believed it *would* sail before the end of March.<sup>27</sup> He vacillated between the notion that it was intended to protect the Indies fleets, attack the Netherlands, or remain in Spain as a defense against an expected English attack. He incited Paris with the fear that Philip intended to use it for an invasion of France or to recover Cambrai. He thought this because he couldn’t bring himself to believe that Philip would attempt a direct attack on England without French assistance, or at least approval, especially since they had reason to expect Turkish action in the Mediterranean. “I do not wish to affirm that this is their decision,” he wrote to Henri III in April 1588, “but I do not know how they could have resolved to go to England without declaring themselves to Your Majesty.” or “without being assured first that Your Majesty would not stop these plans.”<sup>28</sup> At the end of May he observed that the Armada “is going to be used against the queen of England to recover the territories that she holds from this king, and it is not easy to believe that he will use it elsewhere before having completed this affair with the queen.”<sup>29</sup>

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What, then, was the real purpose of the Armada, and why were opinions and reports about it so diverse? As for the latter, it was mainly because the messages coming out of Spain were diverse. There were many plans and many projected armadas during the 1580s. In a sense, most of the rumors circulating around the courts and political marketplaces of Europe were

<sup>24</sup>CSPV, 8:223, Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, 3 December 1586.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 271, Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, 6 May 1587.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 291, Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, 2 July 1587; 294, Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, 11 July 1587.

<sup>27</sup>*Dépêches diplomatiques de M. de Longlée, résident de France en Espagne 1581-1590*, ed. Albert Mousset (Paris: Plon, 1912), 340, 345, 10 January 1588. The French king was always anxious for information about the Armada, see AGS: Estado, K.1565, fol. 153.

<sup>28</sup>*Dépêches de M. de Longlée*, 368, Longlée to Henri III, 30 April 1588; 370, 6 May 1588.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 376, 28 May 1588. Filippo Pigafetta commented in July that the Armada may be bound for Scotland. BNM: Varios, 979, “Descrittione di porti et fortezze del Regno d’Inghilterra.”

correct. The plan to attack Scotland rather than England *was* intended from time to time, just as was the strategy of landing in Ireland, or reinforcing Parma in the Netherlands, or invading England from Flanders. On one occasion the Armada was dispatched to intercept Drake, and once to escort the plate fleet back from the West Indies. The rumors were not so far from the mark after all. They reflected the reality of the Armada planning. Everyone involved with the enterprise had his own idea of its purpose and plan, yet the one person who held the key to the operation kept vacillating from one plan to another.

If Philip II had had his way from the beginning there probably would not have been an Armada. It was an expensive, inefficient, and risky way to achieve his goals of consolidating control of the Netherlands, protecting the Indies and the Indies fleets, and guaranteeing his rule in Portugal. As a deeply religious man, he also hoped for the return of England to the Catholic fold, but he still thought this might be accomplished through less costly means. For years he had resisted the many voices around him clamoring for war. Like Elizabeth, he equated peace with prosperity, but neither monarch was completely a free agent, and the policies of each impinged on and, in numerous ways, impeded the other. From Philip's point of view, the Netherlands had to be defended at all costs. As Elizabeth increased her financial aid to the Dutch rebels, and allowed English soldiers of fortune to assist them, Philip found himself obligated to take preventive action. Thus, tensions escalated as relations between the two powers worsened. When Elizabeth signed the Treaty of Nonsuch with the Dutch, on 20 August 1585, it not only greatly increased her monetary contribution and committed six thousand English infantry and one thousand cavalry to their support (more than that were actually sent), it also allowed those troops to occupy several key strongholds and placed the Dutch rebels under her protection. It was in effect a declaration of war on Spain. When Philip learned of this open intervention he began serious planning for an enterprise against England.<sup>30</sup>

To zealous Catholics everywhere the overthrow of the heretic queen was long overdue. Pope Gregory XIII had advocated it for years, and had given material support as well as his blessing to several abortive attempts. In May 1585 Gregory was succeeded by Pope Sixtus V, who also wanted to undertake some spectacular enterprise for the faith.<sup>31</sup> But, from the beginning, Philip and Sixtus had serious differences. The pope was contemptuous of the Spanish king's lethargy, and Philip resented the way the pontiff belittled the

<sup>30</sup>BNP: Fonds Espagnole, 182, fol. 212, Parma to Zúñiga, 16 September 1585. AGS: Estado, 946, fol. 247, Philip II to Sixtus V, 24 October 1585. *CSPV*, 8:70-71, 118-19. On the pope's negotiations with the grand duke of Tuscany for a Spanish invasion of England, see Colin Martin and Geoffrey Parker, *The Spanish Armada* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988), 110-11, and notes.

<sup>31</sup>AGS: Estado, 946, fol. 43, Olivares to Philip II, 4 June 1585.



things he was already doing for the faith. Hopefully, Philip appealed to the pope to assist the Armada project.<sup>32</sup> In France the duke of Guise was the most committed to military action against Elizabeth's regime, particularly through Scotland, where adherents of the captive queen were ready to rise against the Protestants and restore her to the throne.<sup>33</sup> After Mendoza's expulsion from England for his complicity in the Throckmorton plot against Elizabeth, and his subsequent replacement of Tassis in France, Guise and Mendoza were in almost continuous communication, proposing, promoting, and planning Scottish and English enterprises for which heavy Spanish and/or papal backing would be needed.<sup>34</sup>

The straw that finally broke the camel's back, as far as Philip was concerned, was the news of Elizabeth's treaty with the Dutch, and word of Drake's most recent outrages. In October Drake had sailed for the Indies, pausing on the way to attack Vigo and Bayona on the Spanish coast. After that, he raised havoc in the New World, plundering San Cristobal in the Leeward Islands, capturing Santo Domingo in January 1586 and holding it for ransom, then sacking Cartagena a month later, and burning St. Augustine, on the Florida coast, for good measure. Juan Martínez de Recalde was sent out to find him, but without success. In May Philip ordered Santa Cruz to take his fleet in pursuit. Before this proto-armada could sail, Drake was home again. The increasing bravado of the English aggression convinced Philip that something had to be done soon.

By the close of 1585 there was talk of a joint venture against England involving not only Spain but France as well, with the pope and other Catholic allies giving support. Indeed, as early as June of that year, Henri III made two separate proposals to the Spanish ambassador for a Franco-Spanish operation. This sudden inclination of the French king toward Spain is anticipated in the reconciliation between the crown and the Catholic League, in the Treaty of Nemours, in July,<sup>35</sup> and in the replacement of the Protestant-leaning Michel de Castelnau, sieur de Mayvissière, as ambassador to Spain

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., fol. 229, Philip II to Olivares, 22 August 1585; fol. 247, Philip II to Sixtus V, 24 October 1585; Estado 947, fol. 102, Philip II to Olivares, 2 January 1586; fol. 15, Olivares to Philip II, 24 February 1586. For details of Philip's negotiations with the pope, see Jules Martin, "La préparation de l'Armada," *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 24 (1910): 564-607.

<sup>33</sup>On these schemes involving Tassis and Guise, see especially AGS: Estado, K.1561, fols. 57, 72, 78, 82, 90, 100, *passim*; K.1562, fols. 86, 114, 124; K.1563, fols. 11, 17bis. Guise had ambitions to lead the invasion, but Philip did not fully trust him. See Martin, "La préparation," 184-233.

<sup>34</sup>See Joseph de Croze, *Les Guises, les Valois, et Philippe II* (Paris, 1866), 1:349-417, and 2:291-388. AGS: Estado, K.1563, fols. 59, 78; K.1564, fols. 9, 19, 157, etc.; K.1565, fols. 5, 14, 79, 94, etc.; K.1566, fols. 11, 24, 33, 47, etc.; K.1567, fols. 21, 27, 30, 41, etc.; K.1568, fols. 15, 37, 43, 47, etc. De Lamar Jensen, *Diplomacy and Dogmatism: Bernardino de Mendoza and the French Catholic League* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 73-92.

<sup>35</sup>This agreement between Henri III and the League might have been a threat to Philip because it made Guise less dependent upon Spain. Ibid., 70-71.

with the leaguer Guillaume de l'Aubespine, baron de Châteauneuf. Philip responded cautiously to these overtures, fearful that Henri had ulterior motives or was simply speaking rashly without first consulting his mother (since Catherine de Medici still carried great weight in foreign policy decisions), and asked his ambassador to obtain more information.<sup>36</sup> Mendoza had an audience with the king and queen mother, followed by an interview with Secretary of State Villeroy, after which he concluded that the French were more interested in learning about Spanish plans than they were in contributing materially to the enterprise themselves.<sup>37</sup>

Philip now turned to his most trusted military commander, the prince of Parma, for his opinion on a possible invasion of England. Meanwhile, Santa Cruz volunteered his views again, urging the king to prepare a large naval expedition.<sup>38</sup> Philip asked for details and on 22 March 1586 Santa Cruz supplied the king with a lengthy relation that must have caused the king to wince. The marquis wanted no less than 510 ships, including 150 galleons and other warships, 40 heavy transports, and 320 auxiliary craft, 30,332 seamen to man them, and 63,890 soldiers, including 1,200 cavalry with mounts, 4,290 artillery men, and 55,000 Spanish, Italian, and German infantry. The total cost he calculated at nearly four million ducats.<sup>39</sup> The king thanked him for his work and promised to "look into it all to see when there might be a place for it, and I will advise you of the decision I make, when I make it."<sup>40</sup> Soon thereafter orders were issued that began the formation of the Armada in Lisbon, Seville, Cadiz, and in several northern ports.<sup>41</sup>

On April 20 Parma finally submitted his recommendation, which was for a very different kind of operation, less costly and quicker to prepare, but in its own way equally as difficult to carry out. He proposed sending a force of 30,500 troops on flat-bottomed river barges directly across the Channel from Flanders to England during a single night. He would only need a fleet from Spain in case something went wrong, or to decoy the English navy.

<sup>36</sup>AGS: Estado, K.1448, fol. 22, Philip II to Mendoza, 9 July 1585; also fol. 28, 17 August 1585.

<sup>37</sup>AGS: Estado, K.1563, fol. 178, Mendoza to Philip II, 29 November 1585.

<sup>38</sup>Fernández Duro, *La Armada invencible*, 1:244-47, Santa Cruz to Philip II, 13 January 1586.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 247, Idiáquez to Santa Cruz, 24 January 1586. See Santa Cruz's relation on 250-319. This does not count the 286 galleys and smaller oared vessels he recommended. Rodríguez-Salgado, "Philip II and 'Great Armada,'" 17-18, and cf. Martin and Parker, *Spanish Armada*, 112-14.

<sup>40</sup>Fernández Duro, *La Armada invencible*, 1:320, Philip II to Santa Cruz, 2 April 1586.

<sup>41</sup>AGS: Estado, 2218, fol. 43, Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas, 2a, 120b. Mayra Gamazo, 145-50. In my opinion, the best critical discussion of both Spanish and English strategy is found in Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Spanish Armada: The Experience of War in 1588* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 72-134.

He estimated the cost at approximately three hundred thousand escudos a month. To make his plan work he required three conditions: first, absolute secrecy, and to be carried out by the Spanish only, not a joint venture with other states; second, a guarantee of safety against French interference; and third, security in the Low Countries after his departure.<sup>42</sup> How he planned to launch his boats past the patrolling fleet of Justin of Nassau and surprise the English is a little hard to understand. But first he needed money—lots of it. With these conditions he set a tentative invasion date of October 1586.

How long Philip considered these two ambitious plans before he decided to combine them into a single coordinated effort is hard to say. Perhaps it never was clearly thought through. It was certainly not subjected to the critical scrutiny that it would receive today by military experts, although it was discussed by the Council of War and repeatedly by Philip and his most intimate advisors, Don Juan de Zúñiga, comendador mayor de Castilla and Philip's senior consultant, who was at the same time a member of the Council of State and the Council of War; Don Juan de Idiáquez, his Basque secretary of state and also a member of the Council of War; Don Cristóbal de Moura, advisor on Portuguese affairs; and the Count of Chinchon. This ad hoc council, known as the *Junta de Noche*, had been functioning since October 1585. The Council of War itself was reorganized in early 1586 to more effectively oversee and coordinate the vast Armada operation.<sup>43</sup>

Zúñiga appears to have been the first to advocate the combining of the two proposals, gathering money, men, and ships for the Armada, which he thought could not be ready before August or September 1587, while at the same time readying Parma's forces under the pretext of conquering Zealand. According to Zúñiga's plan, the Armada would first go to Ireland, where it would land sufficient troops to make a successful foothold there, then sail on to the Channel to rendezvous with Parma, whose army would be augmented by the soldiers aboard the Armada and escorted to their landing on the English coast. Zúñiga recommended that after the overthrow of Elizabeth, Mary Stuart be placed on the throne, and that she marry the prince of Parma. The main difficulties he envisaged were maintaining secrecy and

<sup>42</sup>AGS: Estado, 590, fol. 125, Parma to Philip II, 20 April 1586. A modified version of Parma's plan was given by his confidant and courier, Giovanni Battista Piatti, in fol. 126. Cf. Rodríguez-Salgado, "Philip II and 'Great Armada,'" 19-20, and Martin and Parker, *Spanish Armada*, 116-18.

<sup>43</sup>Secretary Mateo Vázquez was also a participant in the "Night Committee." The best analysis of the reorganization of the Council of War is I.A.A. Thompson, "The Armada and Administrative Reform: The Spanish Council of War in the Reign of Philip II," *English Historical Review* 82 (1967): 698-725. R. Pollitt, "Bureaucracy and the Armada," *Mariner's Mirror* 60 (1974): 119-32.

keeping the French occupied so they would be unable to interfere.<sup>44</sup> During the next two years Philip was hot and cold about the landing in Ireland,<sup>45</sup> but for his part, Parma thought any diversion of the Armada to Ireland would be a great mistake,<sup>46</sup>

Whatever the strategy he favored at this point, the king now dipped deeper into the treasury, seeking loans and other means to raise money, both for Parma and for acquiring ships, providing crews and soldiers, victuals, supplies, powder, guns, and equipment necessary for the Armada.<sup>47</sup> Philip assured Parma in a letter of May 14 that France would not be a problem. Mendoza would see to that.<sup>48</sup>

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In the meantime, a new development relating to Scotland cast a somewhat different light on the budding invasion plans. On 20 May 1586 Mary Queen of Scots wrote a now famous letter to Bernardino de Mendoza in Paris advising him of her intention to disinherit her son if he refused to return to the Catholic worship, and granting to Philip II by formal will her rights to the throne of England.<sup>49</sup> If Mary followed through with this promise it would provide an additional justification for an invasion of England. Not that Philip needed more justification than he already had, but he was a legalist, and such a document, although sure to be contested by both the English and French crowns, not to mention James himself, would lend

<sup>44</sup> AGS: Estado, 590, fol. 127. Van der Essen, *Alexandre Farnèse*, 5:176-78. Martin and Parker, *Spanish Armada*, 116-17. Parma was very nervous about the French at his back, despite Philip's assurances that they would be taken care of, and his confidence in Mendoza, because rumor had it that Henri III intended to make peace with the Huguenots, then aid the English.

<sup>45</sup> First he opted for a full-scale naval expedition to Ireland, see G.P.B. Naish, ed., "Documents Illustrating the History of the Spanish Armada," *The Naval Miscellany* 4 (1952): 8, then he decided that Santa Cruz should escort the plate fleet leaving for New Spain. After that he thought of empounding the Andalusian ships destined for the West Indies and using them in the Armada, Fernández Duro, *La Armada invencible*, 1:325-29. The duke of Medina Sidonia, who supervised the outfitting of the Indies fleets, protested this idea strongly, arguing that Philip should send a smaller fleet against England and a separate one to the Indies. *Ibid.*, 161-74.

<sup>46</sup> AGS: Estado, 592, fol. 135, Parma to Philip II, 30 October 1586, misfiled in the 1587 legajo. Zúñiga's influence on Armada planning would certainly have been even greater had he not died in November. After that, Philip's most influential advisor was Idiáquez.

<sup>47</sup> AGS: Estado, 2218, fols. 92, 142, 237; Estado, 1261, fol. 87; Guerra Antigua, 189, fol. 119, *passim*. BNP: Fonds fr., 16110, fols. 130-36, 23 August 1586, "Relacion de las naos, galeras," etc. On the procurement of supplies, see Martin and Parker, *Spanish Armada*, 128-29.

<sup>48</sup> For Mendoza's role in occupying the French, see De Lamar Jensen, "Franco-Spanish Diplomacy and the Armada," in *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: Essays in Honor of Garrett Mattingly*, ed. Charles Carter (New York: Random House, 1965), 205-29; and *idem*, *Diplomacy and Dogmatism*, 153-59.

<sup>49</sup> AGS: Estado, K.1564, fol. 72, Mary Stuart to Mendoza, 20 May 1586 printed in Alexandre Labanoff, ed., *Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Marie Stuart, reine d'Ecosse*, 7 vols. (London, 1844), 5:309-11. Cf. her letter of 17 July, in fol. 119.

further legitimacy to his actions against Elizabeth. This letter did not cause Philip to alter his plans nor accelerate them—he had already committed his resources and energies to the Enterprise of England—but it did provide some new possibilities. Philip tried desperately to obtain the “Phantom Will” after Mary’s execution, but it always eluded him—because it almost certainly never existed. The will was not a Spanish invention to give Philip a claim to the English throne, however, as some have thought,<sup>50</sup> but a desperate attempt by Mary to prod the sluggish Spanish king to action in her behalf.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Philip was not easy to prod, even with the promise of another crown. He believed he already had a legitimate claim through the house of Lancaster back to John of Gaunt, but he was hesitant to press the point too far.<sup>52</sup> And he was not that interested in having another state to govern. What he did want was enough clout to cause Elizabeth to back down from her intervention in the Netherlands, and to call off her obstreperous “sea dogs.” Of course, as the Most Catholic King, he was committed to trying to restore Catholicism to England, and this might be easier if Mary’s will were in hand. For the remainder of the year, plot after plot was proposed by the duke of Guise and others for Spanish intervention in Scotland. Philip’s response was always “we’ll wait and see.”<sup>53</sup>

But the Spanish king was not allowed the luxury of waiting very long. On 18 February 1587 Mary Stuart was beheaded. This did not alter the general Armada strategy, but it did give it a new justification and urgency. More important, from the tactical point of view, was the duke of Aumale’s revolt against the royal French garrisons in Picardy, seizing Doullens, Peronne, and Le Crotoy, a useful distraction to keep Henri III occupied and, if Boulogne were also taken, might give the Armada a valuable place of

<sup>50</sup>J. D. Mackie, “The Will of Mary Stuart,” *Scottish Historical Review* 11 (1913-14): 338-44; and “Scotland and the Spanish Armada,” *Scottish Historical Review* 12 (1914-15): 1123.

<sup>51</sup>De Lamar Jensen, “The Phantom Will of Mary Queen of Scots,” *Scotia* 4 (1980): 1-15, and notes cited.

<sup>52</sup>AGS: Estado, K.1564, fol. 96, Mendoza to Philip II, 26 June 1586; K.1566, fols. 120, 124, Mendoza to Philip II, 3 May 1587; K.1565, fol. 120, Mendoza to Philip II, 28 November 1857; K.1448, fol. 14, Philip II to Mendoza, 4 April 1587; fol. 119, Philip II to Mendoza, 12 May 1587. Mattingly, *Armada*, 80-81.

<sup>53</sup>One of these plots centered around Claude Hamilton and the earls of Huntley and Morton, who were planning a rebellion in Scotland. Another was the more famous Babington plot, which included kidnapping or murdering Elizabeth to bring Mary to the throne. Documentation in AGS: Estado, K.1564, fol. 105, Guise to Mendoza, 16 July 1586; fol. 114, Mendoza to Philip II, 23 July 1586; fol. 135, Mendoza to Philip II, 13 August; fol. 153, 6 September, *passim*. On 28 September, Philip inquired of Parma what he thought of these projects (Estado, 2218, fol. 71, Philip II to Parma). Parma didn’t like the idea at all, since it would require a great outlay of men and money that could be better used for the “principal endeavor.” Mendoza favored the Scottish venture because there was already a sizeable body of Catholic supporters there. He recommended using the Armada for defensive purposes only, and sending a small military force to Scotland to assist the Scottish Catholics. K.1564, fol. 191, Mendoza to Parma, 15 October 1586; fol. 247, Mendoza to Philip II, 24 December, 1586, etc.

refuge on the Channel coast.<sup>54</sup> Both of these events might signal that the time was ripe for action. But was it the best time? Parma's anxiety over the situation in France where the wars of religion seemed to be at a stalemate, and the duke of Guise was continually begging for more money but not giving commensurate service to the cause,<sup>55</sup> was echoed in Rome where the pope received Philip's Armada plans with a certain disdain, passing off his claim to the English throne with equanimity, and refusing to grant a jubilee indulgence for the Armada until he was sure it was ready to sail.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, there was increasing talk in Paris of a possible alliance between France and England.<sup>57</sup>

The French were not the only ones playing diplomatic guessing games. Early in 1586 Elizabeth had initiated talks with the prince of Parma to explore possibilities for an agreement in the Netherlands, and maybe even a general peace with Spain. At least it might delay the Armada. Philip and Parma accepted the challenge and pursued the negotiations as willingly as did the queen and her representatives.<sup>58</sup> Of course, for the Spanish, the peace talks helped mask the intentions of the Armada and opened doubts in the minds of the Dutch as to Elizabeth's sincerity with them.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, there was enough hope of success that the negotiations continued right up until word came of the first encounter of the two fleets off Plymouth.

<sup>54</sup>On this action, see Edmund H. Dickerman's brief but insightful "A Neglected Phase of the Spanish Armada: The Catholic League's Picard Offensive of 1587," *Canadian Journal of History* 11 (1976): 19-23.

<sup>55</sup>AGS: Estado, 592, fols. 2 and 47, Parma to Philip II, 22 March 1587; fols. 62-63, 12 April 1587; and fol. 87, 31 May 1587.

<sup>56</sup>*Calendar of Letters and State Papers, Relating to English Affairs, of the Reign of Elizabeth, Preserved Principally in the Archives of Simancas*, 4 vols. (London, 1895) (hereafter *CSPS*), 4:54-55, Olivares to Philip II, 30 March 1587.

<sup>57</sup>But signals from Paris were contradictory. Sometimes the French seemed willing to cooperate with Spain, more often they courted the favor of England. AGS: Estado, K.1566, fol. 129, Mendoza to Philip II, 20 May 1587; K.1567, fol. 25, Mendoza to Philip II, and K.1448, fol. 122, Philip II to Mendoza, 20 June 1587. At the same time Elizabeth was actively seeking the support of James VI. Jensen, "Franco-Spanish Diplomacy and the Armada," 208-13.

<sup>58</sup>AGS: Estado, 590, fol. 47, Parma to Philip II, 29 April 1586; fol. 123, 30 May; fol. 68, 11 June; and fol. 132, "Instruccion que se envia a Guillermo Godenan. Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels (hereafter *AGRB*): Papiers d'Etat et de l'Audience, no. 587<sup>2</sup>, "Documents diplomatiques concernant la conference de Bourbourg entre les députés de Philippe II et d'Alexandre Farnese et ceux d'Elisabeth reine d'Angleterre. Also BLL: Cotton MSS, Galba, C.XI, fol. 81; and Public Record Office, London: SP 77/2, fol. 7.

<sup>59</sup>AGS: Estado, 590, fols. 47, 130; Estado, 592, fols. 1, 15, 19. *AGRB*: Papiers d'Etat et de l'Audience, 189, fols. 153, 161; 396, fols. 10, 12. The papal nuncio in Madrid, Cesare Speciani, bishop of Novara, thought there was a good possibility of peace in 1588. *Archivo Segreto Vaticano* (hereafter *ASV*): Nunziatura Spagna, 34, fol. 214, Speciani to Cardinal Montalto, 18 January 1588. For an analysis of Parma's role in the negotiations, see Francisco Fernández Segado, "Alejandro Farnesio en las negociaciones de paz entre España e Inglaterra (1586-1588)," *Hispania* 45 (1985): 513-78.

The event that finally solidified Spanish opinion, and converted a hitherto dilatory governmental policy into a concerted wartime effort, was Drake's audacious raid on Cadiz in April 1587. The Council of War unanimously urged the king to take action.<sup>60</sup> Parma reminded him of the lost honor and reputation if measures for retaliation were not taken immediately.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, Philip ordered Santa Cruz to assemble all the seaworthy vessels he had at Lisbon and sail for the Azores without delay. But the marquis was not able to leave for another two months. The men, guns, and victuals he needed were either still spread out from La Coruña to Naples, or else destroyed at Cadiz. Early in July he departed with his Armada of thirty-seven ships, totaling fourteen thousand tons and carrying almost eight thousand men, "to clear the sea of English corsairs" and escort the Indies fleet back to Spain<sup>62</sup>

Hope began to rise for the success of the English enterprise when word was received that at the end of July Olivares had succeeded in reaching an agreement with the pope for a subsidy of one millilon *scudi*, if the Armada sailed before the end of the year. Half of the money would be paid when the Spanish landed in England, the rest when it completed the conquest. Sixtus had little respect for Philip or his Armada, but this was an incentive that might move the king to action.<sup>63</sup>

Prior to the treaty with the pope, Philip favored a preemptive attack on Ireland, since it would have native support and thus run fewer risks than a direct invasion of England, and might have the added advantage of dividing the English strength, perhaps even forcing them to withdraw from the Netherlands. It would also provide a base for the subsequent conquest of England. Another possibility was an attack on the Isle of Wight and the establishment of a base of operations there.<sup>64</sup> Parma disagreed emphatically with both plans, asserting that the primary objective should be maintained, that is, a direct invasion of England. Again he reiterated the conditions for a successful operation, insisting that if these were not met they could not

<sup>60</sup>AGS: Guerra Antigua, 208, fol. 343, Consulta, 15 May 1587. Enrique Herrera Oria, *La Armada invencible* (Valladolid: Casa Social Católica, 1929), 18-21, Consejo de Guerra to Philip II, 26 May 1587.

<sup>61</sup>AGS: Estado, 592, fol. 20, Parma to Philip II, 6 June 1587.

<sup>62</sup>AGS: Guerra Antigua, 221, fol. 6. What remained of the fleet from Cadiz, the Andalusian squadron, four galleasses, and eight ships from Naples and Sicily, as well as thirty transports laden with supplies and victuals, set out for Lisbon to join Santa Cruz when he returned. Fols. 2, 5, 21, 23, 39, etc.; and K.1448, fol. 136, Philip II to Mendoza, 28 July 1587. Rodriguez-Salgado, "Philip II and 'Great Armada,'" 23.

<sup>63</sup>AGS: Estado, 949, fol. 87, Olivares to Philip II, 30 July 1586. Text of the treaty in ASV: Borghese, 3:124c, fols. 140-41, and printed in A.O. Meyer, *England and the Catholic Church under Queen Elizabeth* (London: Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1916), Appendix, 520-23.

<sup>64</sup>AGS: Estado, 2218, fol. 80, Philip II to Parma, 17 December 1586; fol. 92, 28 February 1586; fol. 126, Philip II to Parma, 5 June 1587; Estado, 592, fol. 32; and K.1448, fol. 122, Philip II to Mendoza, sent with a new cipher, 20 June 1587.

even think of succeeding: secrecy, having the French occupied, and security in the Low Countries.<sup>65</sup> He pleaded again for money, informing the king that he had spent all he had received and still needed more.<sup>66</sup> Outside of that, everything was ready and waiting for Santa Cruz's arrival.

But Santa Cruz did not arrive. His fleet failed to return to Lisbon until the end of September (Recalde's squadron not until October), after being badly mauled by Atlantic storms, and with a heavy loss of life. Philip had hoped for an immediate embarkation, and ordered the marquis to move quickly, but Santa Cruz protested that he could not go without repairs, food, and more men.<sup>67</sup> Persuaded by Parma to abandon the Irish and Scottish ventures for the present, Philip again ordered Santa Cruz to "sail in God's name for the English Channel" as soon as possible, where he should advise the duke of his arrival, then anchor off Margate Cape. Some six thousand of the Spanish infantry carried by the Armada would be delivered to Parma to augment the Flanders army, as Parma had requested, and the rest would remain on board to fight when needed. Detailed strategy would be worked out later between the two commanders. This was God's work and he would guide it to victory.<sup>68</sup> Yet the more Philip importuned the more Santa Cruz delayed; the ships were not ready, food supplies were still short, cannon and powder were inadequate. He also complained about being subordinated to the duke of Parma, whom Philip placed in overall command of the enterprise once the two forces met.

All through October and early November the king repeatedly ordered Santa Cruz to sail; if he was unable to get the whole fleet ready, then send out as many as he could.<sup>69</sup> But Philip's efforts were unsuccessful. The Armada was clearly in no condition to proceed to England. The marquis had serious logistical problems, but he also seems to have lost much of the enthusiasm for the project that he had shown a year before. Now he brought up new objections: it was almost the heart of winter; the fleet may become scattered

<sup>65</sup> AGS: Estado, 592, fol. 117, Parma to Philip II, 17 June 1587, "Se propusieron tres puntos principalissimos . . . que faltando en lo menos dellos no se podra pensar poder salir con el. A saber, el secreto; el estar franceses ocupados contra si de manera que no pudiesen dar estorno notable; y el dexar tan assegurados estos estados."

<sup>66</sup> This despite the fact that he had already been sent five million ducats during the first nine months of 1587. Martin and Parker, *Spanish Armada*, 125.

<sup>67</sup> On the procurement of supplies and stores for the Armada in 1587, see AGS: Guerra Antigua, 196, fols. 166-67, 170, 173; Guerra Antigua, 197, fols. 62-65, 86, 127-29; Guerra Antigua, 198, fols. 41, 118, 131; Guerra Antigua, 199, fols. 70-71; Guerra Antigua, 200, fols. 30, 126, 191; Guerra Antigua, 201, fol. 272; Guerra Antigua, 202, fols. 124-33, 205-10, etc. Herrera Oria, *La Armada invencible*, 9-11.

<sup>68</sup> Herrera Oria, *La Armada invencible*, 33-37, Philip II to Archduke Albert, 14 September 1587. Naish, "Documents . . . of the Spanish Armada," 9. Mattingly, *Armada*, 81.

<sup>69</sup> AGS: Estado, 165, fols. 6-7, 12-16, 23-25, Philip II to the Cardinal Archduke, October 1587; fol. 29; Estado, 2218, fol. 152. Enrique Herrera Oria, *Felipe II y el Marques de Santa Cruz en la Empresa de Inglaterra* (Madrid: Instituto Historico de Marina, 1946), 36-39.



by storms; some ships may fall into enemy hands; in England during the winter there is no more than six hours of daylight, and even then “the sky is usually clouded with a thick and dense mist.” Above all, “during the winter certain winds blow which are deadly to foreigners, and so even without fighting there is a great danger of losing many soldiers and sailors.”<sup>70</sup> Philip was not convinced, and set a new departure date for the end of November. But before the fleet could assemble it was struck by a sudden storm and the embarkation had to be postponed again.<sup>71</sup>

In desperation Philip wrote to Parma on November 14, advising him that the Armada would sail soon, but he wasn't sure just when. Therefore, he told the duke, go without it! “When you see a favorable opportunity you must take care not to lose it, even if the Armada has not appeared, because you may be certain that it will not be long in arriving at your side and give you assistance in one way or another.”<sup>72</sup> But by the middle of November, Parma too had become disenchanted. Where was Santa Cruz? Why doesn't he come? How long could Parma keep his men poised for the assault and nothing happen? On the same day Philip had written to Parma, the duke wrote no fewer than nine letters to the king, reminding him of the need for money and supplies, and describing in detail the rapid deterioration of his situation. His troops were not only becoming restless, they were dying from exposure, bad food, bad hygiene, and they were deserting in large numbers. He needed more German mercenaries but couldn't afford to pay them; besides, Elizabeth and Henri of Navarre were already recruiting them. The time required to bring more Italian and Spanish units made the invasion impossible this year. But even more damaging, he complained, was that everyone knew and talked about the Armada. It was the worst-kept secret in Europe.<sup>73</sup>

Parma's situation had, indeed, deteriorated but, like Santa Cruz, he was also backing down from his optimistic declarations of a year, or even six months, before. He was beginning to realize, now that D-Day was at hand, that he was not in fact ready, despite all of his earlier assertions. He didn't have his troops in position, he hadn't acquired enough barges, and he was

<sup>70</sup>Letter from Santa Cruz to the king enclosed in the packet from Lippomano to the Doge and Senate, *CSPV*, 8:321, 4 November 1587.

<sup>71</sup>AGS: Guerra Antigua, 221, fol. 141; Estado, 429, fol. 32, Santa Cruz to Philip II, 15 October 1587; fol. 33, 29 October 1587.

<sup>72</sup>“Para q viendo buena ocasion procureys de no perderla aunque no aya llegado la armada . . . siendo cierto q la armada no dexara de yros a hazer espaldas y ayudaros de una manera o de otra.” AGS: Estado, 2218, fol. 168-69, Philip II to Parma, 14 November 1587.

<sup>73</sup>AGS: Estado, 592, fols. 140-45, 148, Parma to Philip, 14 November 1587, also Estado, 2218, fols. 145, 160, 168-69.

now effectively blockaded by the Dutch shallow-water fleet that controlled the estuaries. Unless the Armada cleared the way he could not move.<sup>74</sup>

Desperately trying to meet the pope's deadline to avoid losing the needed papal subsidy, Philip once more altered the plan of attack by forming two armadas. In December he ordered Santa Cruz to detach thirty-five ships from his fleet and send them immediately with the six thousand Spanish infantry requested by Parma (this he referred to as the "first armada"). Santa Cruz was to stay in Lisbon and get the "principal armada" ready to sail as soon as possible.<sup>75</sup> But again, "the best laid plans . . ." went awry. It took until the end of the month before Santa Cruz had the "first armada" outfitted and ready to move (and that only by pirating the guns from the "principal armada") and a commander chosen for it.<sup>76</sup> By then the situation had changed once more. News from England that Elizabeth had ordered an embargo of all shipping along her coast and was raising a large army caused alarm in Spain. Santa Cruz assumed that she was preparing not only to defend the English coast against Parma's landing, but was likely to overpower the smaller Spanish fleet and possibly launch an attack on Spain. It was also learned that Parma was not ready to move his troops after all. Therefore, on Santa Cruz's recommendation, the sailing of the "first armada" was cancelled. Philip returned to the plan of a single large fleet, to rendezvous with Parma and escort his army across the Channel. A new date was set for 1 February 1588.

By the beginning of the year Parma's situation was still deteriorating. Of the thirty thousand men he had prepared to move in September, now he could count on no more than eighteen thousand.<sup>77</sup> When he received the king's letter of December 24, which had assumed that he had already landed in England, Parma expressed amazement and irritation that the king would make such an assumption in direct contradiction of his own plan, a plan (Parma now affirmed, despite his previous disagreement with it) that was "based on such sound and prudent thought that it is evident that it came from the royal breast of Your Majesty."<sup>78</sup> Parma again reminded the king of the conditions required, not all of which had been met, then set forth in a

<sup>74</sup> AGS: Estado, 592, fol. 141, 147, 149, Parma to Philip II. Van der Essen, *Alexandre Farnèse*, 5:200-2. Fernández-Armesto, *The Spanish Armada*, 85-88.

<sup>75</sup> AGS: Estado, 165, fol. 19, Philip II to Santa Cruz, 10 December 1587.

<sup>76</sup> AGS: Estado, 429, fol. 39. Philip also wanted a detailed report from Santa Cruz of who would be on the first Armada and exactly what arms it would carry, fol. 41, Santa Cruz to Philip II, 29 December 1587.

<sup>77</sup> AGS: Estado, 592, fol. 152, Parma to Philip II, 29 December 1587; Estado, 594, fol. 38, Parma to Philip II, 5 April 1587. Van der Essen, *Alexandre Farnèse*, 5:214. It is worth noting that Drake was having some of the same problems with sickness and desertion as a result of his long wait. K.1567, fol. 46.

<sup>78</sup> AGS: Estado, 594, fol. 8, Parma to Philip II, 31 January 1588. Also Rodríguez-Salgado, "Philip II and 'Great Armada,'" 27.

lengthy epistle his continuing concerns.<sup>79</sup> Philip sympathized with the duke's dilemma, and complimented him on the way he had surmounted so many difficulties in the past, expressing confidence that he would overcome these as well. He must hold his army in position, using whatever pretext he thought best to keep his real purposes secret, and be ready to move the moment the Armada arrived.

Then the king gave a surprising order—keep up the talks with Elizabeth's envoys and, if conditions are favorable, arrange an armistice.<sup>80</sup> It is significant that at this late date Philip was willing to accept a peaceful settlement if he could thereby achieve his objectives, namely the recovery of Flushing and other cities in the Netherlands occupied by the English; compensation for damages inflicted by English attacks; religious toleration for Catholics in England. The Armada could always be used for defensive purposes.

One more setback occurred on February 9 when the marquis of Santa Cruz died. The green light was still on, but the installation of a new commander for the Armada necessitated further delays. The duke of Medina Sidonia soon found that the fleet was still sadly short of money, manpower, food, and especially guns, powder, and water.<sup>81</sup> Attention now focused on Lisbon, where the seemingly endless task of repairing leaking hulls and rotted rigging, assembling ships, building up needed armaments, and taking on food and other supplies was centered. Like Santa Cruz before him, Medina Sidonia asked for more time, but the king insisted that the Armada must sail, the final strategy was set.<sup>82</sup> Yet despite Medina Sidonia's impressive organizing skill, it was almost six months before the Armada finally appeared in the English Channel, after being scattered by another Atlantic storm.

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Several conclusions seem justified from the Armada preparations. First, although the Spanish had every intention of keeping the Armada's mission a secret, the very size and complexity of the enterprise prevented that from happening. Conscious misrepresentation, especially by Mendoza (who was the information broker of the diplomatic community) and by Parma, was only partly responsible for the contradictory intelligence. More significant is the frequent changing of strategy and its being subjected to many interpretations. The fact is, there was no single Armada plan; there were many, both consecutive and simultaneous.

<sup>79</sup>AGS: Estado, 594, fol. 6, Parma to Philip II, 31 January 1588; Estado, 592, fol. 19, Parma to Philip II, 22 February 1588. ASV: Nunziatura Spagna, 34, fol. 214. CSPS, 4:211.

<sup>80</sup>AGS: Estado, 2219, fol. 36; Estado, 165, fols. 128, 165, 175, 181.

<sup>81</sup>AGS: Guerra Antigua, 220, fols. 7, 9, 49; Guerra Antigua, 222, fol. 4.

<sup>82</sup>Naish, *Documents . . . of the Spanish Armada*, 7-13. Rodríguez-Salgado, "Philip II and 'Great Armada,'" 29-30.

It is this vacillation on the part of the Spanish government—Philip II to be more exact—in developing and carrying out a consistent strategy that seriously impeded the Armada. It has also caused some scholars to generalize that Philip was unable to make decisions himself and was unwilling to let others make them. There was, indeed, a good deal of lethargy in the king's demeanor. But it can be argued that this was not so much due to an inability to make up his mind as to his conviction that all sides of an issue must be considered before a decision is made. That is why he always took note of the opinions and advice of his counselors (which he preferred in writing). He solicited differing views, and read contrary opinions with patience and attention before reaching his own conclusions. This took time. But he could hold to a decision as stubbornly as anyone. He could also be persuaded that a policy being followed was mistaken, and alter it to conform with better judgment, as the pre-Armada years give ample evidence. The problem, however, was that he usually kept his decisions to himself instead of submitting them to further scrutiny or even informing his subordinates what he had decided. Yet to expect too many executive insights and managerial skills would be to expect him to live in 1988 rather than 1588.

It is widely held that the king's administrative style changed drastically during 1587-88, from being cautious, dilatory, or tentative to suddenly becoming impetuous, unyielding, and irrational. His actions in the later phases of the Armada preparation have been described as inconsistent and blind, like the movements of a sleepwalker. There was, to be sure, a certain mesmeric mysticism in Philip's religious character. His commitment to the Armada enterprise was a reflection of his total faith in God, whose will the king believed he was fulfilling. If the Armada project was indeed God's work, then He would prepare a way for it to be accomplished. This is not the stumbling of a somnambulist; it is the straightforward faith of a devotee. It is the kind of faith that would expect that God would make up for men's failings, to fill in the details of human attempts to carry out the divine will.<sup>83</sup>

But Philip's decisions and actions during the crucial Armada episode were not determined by religious zeal alone. They were reasonably consistent with the foreign policy he had been pursuing all along. The rebellion in the Netherlands had to be suppressed. Chances of a Spanish victory there grew slimmer the more England intervened. By early 1586 that intervention had taken the form of a sizeable English army, heavy monetary subsidies, the occupation of several key strongholds, and the presence of an English governor general in the Netherlands. Trade between Spain and her colonies also had to be protected against increasing English piracy. Colonial cities

<sup>83</sup>Mattingly, *Armada*, 74-75. Most scholars have overlooked Philip's serious illnesses between 1585 and 1588 as a factor in his alternating lethargy and dogmatic inflexibility, but see Martin and Parker, *Spanish Armada*, 135-36, 142, 148, 161.

were no longer safe from English marauding, nor were Spanish coasts themselves. Furthermore, English aid to the Portuguese pretender gave constant cause for concern in Madrid. When Philip became convinced that none of these problems would end until Elizabeth were persuaded or forced to change her course, he accepted the challenge and pursued it to its conclusion. His frequent changes in strategy were not entirely dictated by religious faith, nor by indecision, but by the needs of constantly changing conditions.

Philip's pressuring of Santa Cruz during the fall and winter of 1587, and his continued exhortations to Parma and Medina Sidonia in 1588, were not the result of the king's losing contact with reality but rather his coming to grips with it. Spanish credibility could not withstand more delays and false alarms; and the Spanish economy could not survive a continuing outlay of resources at the 1586-88 rate. The Armada build-up had preempted everything else, and was staggeringly expensive. It had cost over ten million ducats for the Armada preparations up to October 1587, and every month it delayed cost another seven hundred thousand ducats.<sup>84</sup> It was imperative that the Armada sail, despite Parma's complaints and Medina Sidonia's misgivings. Philip's insistence that it move, even if not fully ready (when is such a huge project ever completely ready?), was not blind obsession but inescapable reality. For better or for worse, the Armada could not be called off nor postponed again. It may well be that by spring 1588, after so many setbacks and mishaps, Philip would be content with no more than a grand parade of his strength, "to sail up the Channel and beat its chest before England's gates,"<sup>85</sup> although he certainly hoped for more than that in 1587. Now what mattered most was that he prove to Elizabeth, and to the world, that Spain was capable of such an enterprise, whether it was completely successful or not.

The king's April instructions to Medina Sidonia were that the Armada was not to diverge from its assigned role of sailing up the Channel and guarding the passage of Parma's army. It was not to go out of its way to encounter the English fleet, and only if attacked was it to engage in combat.<sup>86</sup> The secret instructions to be delivered by Medina Sidonia to Parma after he landed in England, or in case the landing should fail, advised the duke to

<sup>84</sup>AGS: Guerra Antigua, 221, fols. 143, 158, 181. CSPV, 8:312, 336. Herrera Oria, *La Armada invencible*, 35. Martin and Parker, *Spanish Armada*, 283, n.3 gives a final figure of sixty thousand ducats per day!

<sup>85</sup>I.A.A. Thompson, "The Appointment of the Duke of Medina Sidonia to the Command of the Spanish Armada," *The Historical Journal* 12 (1969): 201. This contains some thoughtful insights on Armada objectives. Also Peter O. Pierson, "A Commander for the Armada," *Mariner's Mirror* 55 (1964): 383-400, and Fernández-Armesto, *The Spanish Armada*, 120-25.

<sup>86</sup>AGS: Estado, 165, fol. 29; Fernández Duro, *Armada invencible*, 2:5-13; Naish, "Documents . . . of the Spanish Armada," 13-20; CSPS, 5:245-50, Philip II to Medina Sidonia, 1 April 1588.

capitalize as much as possible on the *prestige* of the Armada, and try to procure three things from the queen: (1) the free exercise of the Catholic faith in England and permission for English Catholic exiles to return to their homeland; (2) the restitution to Philip of all places in the Netherlands held by the English; and (3) financial compensation for the injuries inflicted upon Spanish dominions and subjects.<sup>87</sup> This was the bottom line, the purpose of the Spanish Armada in 1588. If its mobilization and preparation were the secret, it was indeed the worst-kept secret of the time. But if the real secret was its limited purpose, then we must conclude that it not only eluded most observers at that time, it has escaped the scrutiny of scholars almost to the present.

<sup>87</sup>AGS: Estado, 165; CSPS 4:251, Philip II to Parma.