

# ENGLISH NAVAL STRATEGY IN THE 1590s

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Until quite recently, the Anglo-Spanish "War" in the period after the Armada of 1588 was one of the least studied subjects of the reign of Elizabeth. For many years, the standard narrative account of the 1590s was that published by the American historian E.P. Cheyney in two volumes in 1914 and 1926 (1). In the past decade, however, this situation has been transformed. Professor Wernham's edition of the *List and Analysis of State Papers Foreign Series* (2) has been followed by his detailed study of military operations and diplomacy in the years 1588-1595 (3), and then by his edition of the documents relating to the "Portugal Voyage" of 1589 (4). Within the past two years, Professor MacCaffrey has published the final volume of his trilogy on Elizabeth's reign and Professor Loades his monograph on the Tudor Navy, while Dr. Hammer has completed his dissertation on the most controversial of the political figures of the decade, the 2nd Earl of Essex (5). Much therefore is a good deal clearer than it has been. Yet wider questions remain, particularly over the manner in which Elizabeth's government conducted the war with Spain.

In their most recent work both Wernham and MacCaffrey argue from positions they have established earlier: Wernham for a careful and defensive foreign and military policy, MacCaffrey for an essentially reactive one (6). This is a debate essentially about the queen herself, a particularly difficult

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The place of publication is understood to be London unless otherwise noted.

(1) E. P. Cheyney, *A History of England, from the Defeat of the Armada to the Death of Elizabeth* (2 vols., New York, 1914-1926).

(2) R. B. Wernham (ed.), *List and Analysis of State Papers, Foreign Series, Elizabeth I* (6 vols., 1964 to date). This series is a continuation of the older *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series of the Reign of Elizabeth* and commences in August 1589. The latest volume (VI, published in 1993) covers the year 1595.

(3) R. B. Wernham, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe 1588-1595* (Oxford, 1984). A second volume, covering the period 1595-1603, is forthcoming.

(4) R. B. Wernham (ed.), *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589* (Navy Records Society, CXXVII, 1988).

(5) W. T. MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics 1588-1603* (Princeton, 1992). D. Loades, *The Tudor Navy: an Administrative, Political and Military History* (Aldershot, 1992). P.E.J. Hammer, "The Bright Shining Sparke": The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, c. 1585-c. 1597" (Unpub. Cambridge University PhD thesis, 1991). I am grateful to Dr. Hammer for his kindness in sending me a copy of this thesis.

(6) Cf. R. B. Wernham, *Before the Armada: the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1485-1588* (1966), and "Elizabethan War Aims and Strategy" in S. T. Bindoff *et. al.* (eds.), *Elizabethan Government and Society* (1961), pp. 340-68. W. T. MacCaffrey, *Queen Elizabeth*

subject because Elizabeth —unlike her councillors— has not left much written evidence of her views and intentions. About the council, however, there has been more general agreement: during the 1590s Elizabeth's council and court was factionalised to an unprecedented extent (7). To this factionalisation debates over the conduct of the war made a major contribution. One faction, led by Lord Burghley, supported the queen's attempt to conduct the war as safely and cheaply as possible; the other, whose spokesman by the middle of the 1590s was the Earl of Essex, sought to conduct it more ambitiously, and, by implication, more decisively. Given that Burghley and the queen shared a common strategy, the isolation of Essex, which led to his ultimate fall in 1601, was to some extent inevitable.

The basic problem with such a neat explanation is that it is too neat. Essex's political prominence was very much Elizabeth's creation: why she would raise so apparently disruptive a figure to such influence? Explanations have usually relied on psychology, on the attraction of the flamboyant young man to the aging woman, in which the queen's emotions outweighed her intellect. Thanks to Elizabeth, Essex was placed in a position where he could conduct military operations, but he was unable to do so effectively. His repeated failures in turn raised the question of whether he had been promoted beyond his ability through the queen's indulgence or whether he was prevented by her parsimony from conducting operations on sufficient scale to be decisive. However, the association of the "war party" with Essex was not exclusive, for the political balance at the court was more complex than that. Nor were the strategic issues the Elizabethan government faced necessarily such as to allow of simple offensive or defensive alternatives. All foreign and military policy is, after all, to some extent a reaction to events. The issues were both complex and shifting, and consistent sides were by no means easy to take.

What has not attracted the attention it deserves in any of the recent scholarly accounts of the Anglo-Spanish "War" is the fact that the war itself was an undeclared one. This was not an academic issue. The absence of a declaration was raised in both Houses of Parliament in 1589, and the Queen was petitioned specifically to declare war. It arose again in the debate on the subsidy in the 1593 session, when it was noted that in the absence of a declaration there was doubt as to whether captured Spanish ships were lawful prizes or not. A fresh request to the Queen to issue a declaration was to be included in the preamble to the subsidy bill, but it was lost in committee. Despite recent attempts to see debates in the House of Commons as inspired

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*and the Making of Policy, 1572-1588* (Princeton, 1981). The debate over Elizabeth's foreign policy is surveyed in E. I. Kouri, "For True Faith or National Interest? Queen Elizabeth I and the Protestant Powers", in E. I. Kouri and T. Scott (eds.), *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (1987), pp. 437-451.

(7) See S. Adams, "Eliza Enthroned? The Court and its Politics", in C. Haigh (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (1984), pp. 44-78, esp. 67-8.

Voyage of 1577-80. The Circumnavigation Voyage deserves to be considered one of the major turning points of the later sixteenth century, for by apparently demonstrating the vulnerability of the Spanish Empire to maritime attack, it supplied the evidence to show that Walsingham's strategy could work. From 1580 it was assumed on both sides that a confrontation between England and Spain would involve an English naval attack on the Spanish empire and a general privateering assault on Spanish maritime commerce in the Atlantic. This, it should be noted, was not simply a paper strategy formulated by a councillor of outspoken views, but one that received the full concurrence of the leading English seamen of the day. It also caused considerable alarm to Philip II (17).

The immediate circumstances of the outbreak of hostilities in 1584-5 need not be rehearsed here in detail. The English decision to intervene in the Netherlands was taken in the autumn of 1584 as a consequence of the assassination of William of Orange the previous July. This decision was taken in the full understanding that it would probably precipitate hostilities with Spain. In the course of taking it the privy council reviewed the course of Anglo-Spanish relations from the beginning of the reign and reached the conclusion that a conflict was inevitable and that it would be wiser to conduct such a war with the Dutch as allies, rather than to allow the Dutch to collapse and be left to face Spain in isolation. This conclusion appears to have been a general one. In these debates it was taken as understood that offensive operations would be conducted at sea following the outbreak of hostilities. In the immediate term the queen should offer military assistance to the Dutch if their present negotiations with Henry III of France failed. This was precisely what was done; once the refusal of Henry III was known (the beginning of March 1585), the English counter-offer was made. The ensuing delay (until the end of June) in making the treaty was the result of accident and slowness of communications (18).

Before the commencement of the actual negotiations for the treaty of Nonsuch, Philip II's embargo of English shipping in Spain in May 1585 precipitated hostilities at sea (19). These took the form of Sir Francis Drake's West Indies Voyage, the licensing of the merchants whose shipping had been seized to take compensation in prizes (a licensing that became general by the end of the year) and a specific attack on the Spanish Grand Banks fishing fleet—an idea proposed by Walsingham several months before. The limited nature of these initial naval operations reflected Elizabeth's limited aims as they were spelt out in the pamphlet *A Declaration of the causes mooving the Queene ...*

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(17) C. Martin and G. Parker, *The Spanish Armada* (1988), pp. 90, 92.

(18) Discussed further in Adams, "Outbreak of the Elizabethan Naval War", pp. 52-3. I am preparing a detailed monographic study of the circumstances of the English intervention in the Netherlands in 1584-5. Dates given here and elsewhere are those of the Julian (Old Style) Calendar.

(19) "Outbreak of the Elizabethan Naval War", *passim*.

to give Aide to the Defence of the People ... in the Lowe Countries, which was published in October 1585. This dealt specifically with the intervention in the Netherlands, which it justified on three grounds: the appeal of the Netherlanders to Elizabeth to save them from the tyranny of foreigners; the historic connection between England and the Netherlands which gave Elizabeth a right to intervene; and the history of Anglo-Spanish relations since 1559 (outlined in a manner similar to that undertaken by the council in the previous year) which led to the conclusion that despite Elizabeth's attempts to resolve the Netherlands crisis peacefully, Philip was so hostile to England that aid to the Dutch could be seen as an act of self-defence, similar to the English intervention in Scotland in 1560 (20).

The tract also adumbrated several further themes, which were to some extent contradictory. It attributed Spanish policy to the Imperial design of the house of Habsburg and a Spanish penchant for tyranny (21). But on the other hand it left open the possibility of a peaceful settlement if Philip would accept Elizabeth's compromise plan of local government in the Netherlands and a degree of religious toleration. In arguing that a settlement was still possible, it then made a concession somewhat at odds with its earlier propositions. King Philip himself was not to blame; he was still the queen's "brother and allie". Spanish policy had been the work of "bad instruments", the implication being that once Philip appreciated the true position a peaceful resolution could quickly be reached (22). In seeking such a compromise, however, Elizabeth was also making an ambitious claim. Since the Act of Abjuration of July 1581 the Dutch States-General had been behaving as an independent state, and there was no reason to suppose that they would now settle for anything less. Elizabeth had never formally recognised their claims of independence, but by making the treaty of Nonsuch with them she was treating them as such, albeit the English justified the treaty on the precedent of the medieval negotiations with Burgundy. Moreover, the elaborate arrangements made for the future repayment by the Dutch of Elizabeth's expenses in their defence implied that the States-General would be in a position ultimately to do so. But how Elizabeth would be able to force the Dutch to negotiate on her terms was unclear. Her attempts to do so in 1587-88 nearly wrecked Anglo-Dutch relations (23).

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(20) *A Declaration of the Causes mooving the Queene of England to give Aide to the Defence of the People Afflicted and oppressed in the Lowe Countries* (1585). Latin, French, Dutch and Italian translations also survive, though not Spanish. It is reprinted in A. F. Kinney (ed.), *Elizabethan Backgrounds* (Hamden, Conn., 1975), pp. 197-211, and in Spanish translation in J. Calvar Gross et al. (eds.), *La Batalla del Mar Océano*, I (Madrid, 1988), pp. 512-16. Reference here is made to the Kinney edition. For the above see pp. 197-8, 203-6.

(21) *Elizabethan Backgrounds*, pp. 200, 202.

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 201.

(23) For a good discussion see F. G. Oosterhoff, *Leicester and the Netherlands 1586-1587* (Utrecht, 1988), pp. 167-9, 174-5, 178-9.

Two further aspects of this tract are worth noting. Firstly, it played down the religious issue. Secondly, it said little about the wider conflict between England and Spain. An important aspect of the latter was spelt out in a letter to the Hanseatic League at the end of October 1585 in answer to their request for clarification of the English position regarding their commerce with Spain. The queen referred only to “occassions of discord” with the king of Spain, but then went on to state that “if it grow to war” she would not allow Philip’s dominions to be supplied with “corne and provisions for warre” (24). If this statement is taken together with the *Declaration* it would suggest that Elizabeth did not consider that a full-scale war had yet begun, and that the door to a compromise settlement was being quite deliberately left open. There is one last relevant aspect to the *Declaration*: its potential audience. The absence of a Spanish version suggests that it was not aimed at Spain itself, so much as wider European, and in particular Catholic, opinion. By playing down religion and by emphasising specific “occasions of discord” between herself and Philip II, Elizabeth was clearly trying to limit the war and to woo Catholics distrustful of Spain to her side.

Elizabeth’s search for a compromise settlement culminated in the negotiations at Bourbourg in 1588. The failure of these negotiations and then the arrival of the Armada led to an important change of policy. In November 1588 the Hanseatic League were warned that a blockade of peninsula Spain would commence in the following June and that cargoes of war *matériel* and foodstuffs would be seized. Elizabeth’s language changed significantly too: she now referred to “this heavy warre entered into with the Spaniard, whereof no small but huge summes are of necessitie required, and wherein the quarrel is not in her owne behalfe onely, but for the safetie of all kings, kingdoms and dominions of Europe that professe the sinceritie of true religion” (25). This statement marks an advance on those of 1585 on two grounds. It now referred to a “war” with Spain, in which Elizabeth was fighting on behalf of all Protestant countries, and announced a formal blockade of the Iberian peninsula. Although this statement was specifically directed to a Hanseatic audience, to whom the religious appeal was aimed, it is clear evidence that after the summer of 1588 Elizabeth regarded herself as being in a formal state of war with Spain.

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(24) Published in *A Declaration of the Causes, which mooved the Chiefe Commanders of the Navie of her most excellent Maiestie the Queene of England, in their voyage and expedition for Portingal to take and arrest in the mouth of the River of Lisbon, certaine shippes ... [on the] 30 day of June in the years of our Lord 1589 (1589)*, pp. 8-9. The version sent to Hamburg, and dated 5 November 1585, is printed in E. I. Kouri (ed.), *Elizabethan England and Europe: Forty Unprinted Letters from Elizabeth I to Protestant Powers* (Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, Special Supplement, XII, 1982), pp. 49-50. The Latin text refers to “quae discordiarum semina inter nos et Hispaniarum regem”. See also G. D. Ramsay, “The Foreign Policy of Elizabeth I”, in *Reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 164-5.

(25) The warning is published in *Declaration of Causes which mooved the Chiefe Commanders*, pp. 10-11. The passage quoted is found in the *Declaration* itself, p. 17.

By then, however, the naval strategy of 1585 was already in ruins. Without going into the details, three main reasons can be advanced, all of which would remain relevant in the 1590s. The first was English over-confidence at sea after 1580 and their failure to appreciate that Philip, who had drawn similar conclusions about the potential weakness of his empire, would take defensive counter-measures, which would become increasingly effective. The first evidence of the new Spanish policy was revealed by the marginal success of Drake's West Indies Voyage in 1586. Drake's second West Indies Voyage (1595-6) was even less successful. Only one English raid in the Caribbean — the earl of Cumberland's attack on Puerto Rico in 1598 — achieved its aim.

The second was the inadequacy of English naval administration for such an ambitious strategy. Since 1551 the Navy had been based on the two royal dockyards at Woolwich and Deptford and the fleet anchorage at Gillingham (Chatham) in the Thames and Elizabeth did not expand its logistical base. The dockyard that Henry VII created at Portsmouth was hardly used. Although Plymouth played a prominent role in the Armada battle, this was essentially an accident. Plymouth was never a major fleet anchorage for the Tudors, merely the last deep water port in which a fleet could take in fresh water before a western voyage. No attempt was made to create a forward base for operations in the Atlantic and English naval expeditions faced an initial and frequently interrupted outward voyage against the prevailing westerly winds in the Channel, which regularly consumed their supplies. A good example is provided by the "Portugal Voyage" of 1589. The queen's final instructions to the commanders was dated 23 February 1589 and the fleet assembled off Dover on 16 March. It had a quick passage of three days to Plymouth (which it reached on the 19th), but was then trapped there by unfavourable winds until 18 April. The combination of the delay plus over-manning reduced its "searations" from a planned four months to six weeks (26). A longer delay, for which three were a number of potential (and still unexplained) causes, was encountered by the Drake and Hawkins Voyage to the West Indies of 1595. Although their commission was issued on 29 January 1595, and they were expected to depart at the beginning of May, they did not leave Plymouth until 28 August (27). The fleet sent against Cádiz in 1596, first organised in January, did not assemble in the Downs until April and bad weather kept it there until the end of the month. Although it reached Plymouth on 2 May, it did not depart for Spain until the 3rd of June (28).

Nor was any attempt made to expand the navy for a major confrontation with Spain. The navy had undergone two recent periods of expansion: the first

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(26) Wernham, *After the Armada*, pp. 74, 75; *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. XXIX-XXXVI.

(27) K. R. Andrews (ed.), *The Last Voyage of Drake and Hawkins* (Hakluyt Society, 2nd Ser. CXLII, 1972), pp. 12-18.

(28) S. and E. Underwood, *The Counter-Armada 1596: The Journal of the Mary Rose* (1983), pp. 125-131.

in the last years of the reign of Mary which was extended into the initial years of Elizabeth's, and the second (although at a slower pace) in the 1570s. But the period initiated by Sir John Hawkins' famous contract in 1578 had seen no construction of major warships, only the rebuilding of some of the older ones (29). After the outbreak of hostilities in 1585 two "galleases", the *Rainbow* and the *Vanguard*, were constructed, but both were designed specifically for operations off the Flemish coast (30). The only other major warship added to the fleet prior to 1588 was Sir Walter Raleigh's *Ark Raleigh*, which was purchased by the queen in 1587 and renamed the *Ark Royal*. Only five galleons were constructed during the whole of the 1590s: three in 1590 (the *Merhonour*, *Garland* and *Defiance*), and two in 1596 (the *Due Repulse* and the *Warspite*) (31).

The third reason was the practical difficulty of waging economic warfare on the necessary scale. To be effective, economic warfare, whether conducted by maritime blockade or other means, must bite; it must cut off either essential military supplies, commodities vital to the economy as a whole, or the supply of foodstuffs to the population. Conversely it could threaten export trades upon which the economy depended. This was not the first English experience of economic warfare. Apart from medieval examples, Henry VIII had attempted it against Scotland in the 1450s, and Elizabeth against France (briefly) in 1563. The English themselves had been the targets of embargoes in 1563-4 and 1569-74. But never before had they undertaken it on such a scale. Furthermore, as studies of modern conflicts have shown, effective economic warfare depends on reliable intelligence of the structure of the enemy's economy, and this the English did not possess. The Elizabethan intelligence service is something of a myth. It was chiefly concerned with the activities of the English Catholic exile community against whom it scored its only real successes. For information about Spain the English were dependent on merchants and such dubious characters as the French double-agent Châteaumartin (32).

The Elizabethan blockade of Spain did not become extensive until 1589. Initially it was based on the widely-held belief in Philip II's dependence on the American silver fleets, which encouraged the repeated attempts throughout the war to intercept the *flotas*. The English were unaware of Philip's decision to

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(29) See S. Adams, "New Light on the 'Reformation' of John Hawkins: The Ellesmere Naval Survey of January 1584", *English Historical Review*, CV (1990), 96-111.

(30) See British Library, Cottonian Ms Galba C VIII; fo. 41. Lord Howard of Effingham to the earl of Leicester, 26 February [1586].

(31) Taken from R. C. Anderson (ed.), *List of English Men of War 1509-1649* (Society for Nautical Research, Occasional Publications VII, 1959). A number of smaller warships were launched during the 1590s and the existing policy of rebuilding older vessels was continued.

(32) On Châteaumartin himself see G. Ungerer, *A Spaniard in Elizabethan England: the Correspondence of Antonio Pérez's Exile* (2 vols., 1974-76), pp. 4-6, and Wernham, *After the Armada*, pp. 448-9. His reports are abstracted in the various volumes of the *List and Analysis of State Papers*.

ship bullion by *zabras* after 1587 (33). The blockade was also inspired by a belief in Spain's dependence on imported foodstuffs and naval stores. An immediate target was the loyal Netherlands, who were believed to be particularly vulnerable to such a blockade. However, this blockade ran into Dutch opposition when the earl of Leicester attempted to impose it in 1586 (34). The refusal of the Dutch to cooperate in a full-scale blockade was a major issue in the growing tension between the English and the Dutch during the 1590s. In the parliament of 1593 Sir Walter Raleigh made a sharply anti-Dutch speech, claiming that while England was doing all the fighting, they were simply making money (35).

The full-scale blockade of the Iberian peninsula scored its first major success in the arrest by Drake of a large fleet of Hanseatic ships off Lisbon in May and June 1589 (36). Although many of the ships were later released, the Hanseatic reaction to the seizure inspired the second of Elizabeth's *Declarations* (37). Much of this tract was taken up with the specific issue of the claim of the Hanse to an absolute neutrality in any European war, but it also rehearsed Elizabeth's earlier warnings to the League, and reviewed the history of Anglo-Spanish relations in a similar manner to the 1585 *Declaration*. It announced that the equivalent of a state of war existed between England and Spain and Philip II was directly accused of being "transported with a mortall hatred against the Queenes Maiestie of England" as evidenced by his attempted invasion of 1588 (38). The queen again emphasised her peaceful intentions and declared the aim of the blockade to be defensive, in that it was to prevent Philip from amassing the means to attack her.

The wider context of the blockade also needs to be taken into account. As Dr. Gómez-Centurión has shown, the economic war between England, the Netherlands and Spain cut across one of the main trading arteries of Europe, the reciprocal commerce between North and South (39). It was initiated by Philip after 1572 in an attempt to undercut the carrying trade of the Dutch rebels. However, owing to its need to maintain its commercial connections with northern Europe, Spain turned to alternatives. One was England itself, and the expansion of Anglo-Iberian commerce after 1574 was a direct consequence of

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(33) Wernham, *After the Armada*, p. 243.

(34) Oosterhoff, *Leicester and the Netherlands*, pp. 89-97.

(35) D'Ewes, *Journals*, p. 508.

(36) On this incident, see Ramsay, "Foreign Policy of Elizabeth", p. 165, and "The Settlement of the Merchant Adventurers at Stade, 1587-1611", in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe*, pp. 465-6.

(37) The full title is given in n. 24 above. Ramsay, "Settlement of the Merchant Adventurers", p. 466, attributes it to Robert Beale, clerk of the privy council. Only a Latin translation appears to have been published, which suggests that it was intended solely for a German audience.

(38) *Declaration of the Cavses which mooved the Chiefe Commanders*, p. 2.

(39) C. Gómez-Centurión Jiménez, *Felipe II, la empresa de Inglaterra y el comercio septentrional (1566-1609)* (Madrid, 1988).



the blockade of the Netherlands (40). However, the tension between England and Spain made this trade an insecure one, and by the early 1580s Spain turned instead to the Hanseatic League. The hostilities between England and Spain eliminated direct commerce between Spain and England and after 1589 the English blockade frightened off the Hanse. In the 1590s Spain was therefore forced to tolerate a considerable amount of semi-licit Dutch commerce, while an elaborate system of trans-shipment grew up round the southern French ports.

As a result the English blockade was never completely effective. Moreover economic warfare cuts both ways, and the English themselves were not unaffected. England did have certain advantages; it was to all intents and purposes self-sufficient in foodstuffs, and if dependent on Russia and the Baltic for some naval stores, the supply of these commodities could not be effectively interrupted by Spain (41). The English cloth export, the target of the Spanish embargoes of 1563 and 1569, was relatively safe owing to its staples in the Netherlands and Germany, though the reaction of the Hanseatic League to the English blockade of Spain did threaten to disrupt its German markets (42). However, the Iberian trade was brought to a halt by the hostilities, with severe immediate consequences to the western ports, though these were to benefit later in the 1590s by the supplying of the English campaigns in Ireland (43). The East coast suffered from the attentions of privateers operating from Dunkirk. Although the Dunkirk privateering campaign did not begin in earnest until 1596, as early as 1586 Great Yarmouth was requesting escorts for its fishing fleet (44). The need to protect English waters thereby forced Elizabeth to retain a section of her fleet, the "Channel Guard", in Home Waters.

One of the attractions of the blockade of Spain was that it could be carried on by privateers, at little direct expense to the crown. It thus became an extension of the privateering war begun in 1585. However, the small size of most of the privateers meant that they were unable to take on major or defended targets. To make the blockade more effective they had to be supported by squadrons of the queen's warships. This form of blockade was

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(40) See P. Croft, "English Commerce with Spain and the Armada War, 1558-1603", in *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, pp. 238-40.

(41) For the importation of cables from Russia for the equipment of the Navy see T.S. Willan, *The Early History of the Russia Company* (Manchester, 1956), pp. 185-6.

(42) See Ramsay, "Settlement of the Merchant Adventurers", pp. 466-7, and "Foreign Policy of Elizabeth I", pp. 165-7.

(43) Croft, "English Commerce", pp. 242-3.

(44) On the Dunkirk privateering campaign of the 1590s see R. A. Stradling, *The Armada of Flanders: Spanish Maritime Policy and European War, 1568-1668* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 9-15. Stradling sees the systematic privateering campaign as a consequence of the arrival of Archduke Albert in 1596 (see p. 10), however, his account of the effect of the campaign on England is cursory, and more detailed research in English sources may reveal an earlier impact. For the response of Great Yarmouth in 1586 see Norfolk Record Office Y/C/19/4 [Great Yarmouth Assembly Book D, 1579-98], fos. 103v-104.

proposed by Sir John Hawkins, always an advocate of ambitious maritime warfare, in 1589. The ultimate target of these squadrons was the *flotas*, but two expensive cruises in 1590 and 1591 were unproductive and the interception of the *Revenge* in 1591 by a larger Spanish squadron suggested that further operations on this scale might lead to a major disaster (45).

The blockade therefore was not an adequate strategy in itself and the more decisive employment of the Navy became an issue from 1588 onwards. Here two alternatives emerged. The earlier of the two was an expedition to Portugal to raise a revolt for Dom Antonio, a scheme circulating in English naval circles from the early 1580s, and one in which Drake took a particular interest (46). The other was suggested by the unexpected success of Drake's raid on Cádiz in 1587, and became the queen's favoured strategy. This was the deliberate attack on a section of the Spanish fleet in one of its home ports, which would cripple any attempt to mount a further invasion of England. The difficulty of reconciling the two strategies was revealed in a dramatic manner in the "Portugal Voyage" of 1589. This has been studied in detail by Professor Wernham, yet many of its mysteries remain (47).

The failure of the "Portugal Voyage" led to the queen's disillusion with more ambitious naval schemes, but it also sparked off a debate over strategy that simmered throughout the 1590s. Here the protagonists were military officers in the Netherlands who opposed the employment of the limited numbers of trained troops in what they regarded as wasteful naval expeditions at the expense of the potentially decisive struggle in the Netherlands. Yet this debate remained muted between 1589 and the middle of the decade because 1589 also saw the diversion of the Elizabethan war effort into intervention in France. The course of the English campaigns in France between 1589 and 1594 need not be discussed in detail here. One or two of the implications do deserve our attention, however. The Spanish occupation of Blavet in October 1590 created a naval dimension to the intervention for it stimulated fears of a direct Spanish naval threat in the Channel. Elimination of the Blavet base thus became Elizabeth's central military objective in France (48). It was not, however, a priority of Henry IV's and over this strategic disagreement many of the controversies surrounding the English intervention arose. No less significant was the way in which the war in France reshaped the war as a whole. When hostilities broke out between England and Spain in 1585,

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(45) See Wernham, *After the Armada*, chapt. XI.

(46) Discussed briefly in Adams, "Outbreak of Elizabeth Naval War", p. 53, and Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. XV.

(47) Apart the *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, and *After the Armada*, chapt. IV-VI, there is also his earlier essay "Queen Elizabeth and the Portugal Expedition of 1589", *English Historical Review*, LXVI (1951), 1-26, 194-218. A particular difficulty is posed by the planning of the expedition during the winter of 1588-89, of which little evidence has so far been uncovered.

(48) Wernham, *After the Armada*, pp. 268-72.

France was at best a neutral. Indeed, Walsingham saw in the actions of Henry III and the Catholic League evidence of the imminence of the war for religion (49). After 1589, however, England was dealing with an allied king of France, moreover one who sought to win over his Catholic subjects as a "patriot king" (50). In this context the war between England and Spain was no longer primarily one for religion. Once Henry IV declared war on Spain at the beginning of 1595, the war was once again declared to be the struggle against Habsburg Imperialism (an established theme of French foreign policy), with a particular focus on the liberation of the Netherlands. With the decline of religion as an issue, the context of the Anglo-Spanish war also changed.

However, the conclusion of the civil war in France also saw the revival of an ambitious naval campaign against Spain in the form of the Drake and Hawkins Voyage of 1595, the Cádiz Voyage of 1596 and the "Islands Voyage" of 1597. These were not new strategic proposals, indeed they had been in circulation for some time. Their revival at this point, given Elizabeth's earlier disillusionment with ambitious naval operations, is, therefore, all the more curious. Part of the explanation may lie in the fear that freed of his French commitments Philip II might turn again to a direct invasion of England, a fear to which the raids on Cornwall in 1595 gave substance (51). More important, however, were two new political influences on the making of Elizabethan strategy, the earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh. The bitter personal antagonism between the two, which went back to 1587, is the clearest evidence that there was no united "war party" (52). After the death of Hawkins in 1595, Raleigh was the most outspoken advocate of an ambitious war at sea. He was also only leading Elizabethan both to see the war as a struggle for empire and to support an English colonisation effort. He was also notoriously unconventional in his religious views (53).

Essex's approach is the more complex of the two, for although he had taken part in the "Portugal Voyage" in 1589, he was otherwise far more closely associated with the military campaigns on the continent. Indeed, part of the antagonism between Essex and Raleigh can be seen as a strategic clash between a naval and a continental war. However, such was their antagonism, and such was Essex's obsession with being the unrivalled leader of the Elizabethan war effort that he could not allow another to take command, even of a voyage at sea. Thus Essex's command of both the Cadiz and the Islands

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(49) C. Read, *Mr. Secretary Walsingham and the policy of Queen Elizabeth* (3 vols., Oxford, 1925), III, p. 104. Adams, "Outbreak of Elizabethan Naval War", p. 63.

(50) See D. Buisseret, *Henry IV* (1984), pp. 18-21.

(51) Hammer, "Bright Shining Sparke", pp. 192-3. Underwood, *Counter Armada 1596*, pp. 16-17. MacCaffrey, *War and Politics*, pp. 113-114, notes that while a major expedition against Spain was being prepared in 1595 the precise reasons for it and its aims are less clear.

(52) The history of the antagonism can be traced in Hammer, "Bright Shining Sparke", pp. 30ff.

(53) Cf. The recent assessment of Raleigh in K. R. Andrews, "Elizabethan Privateering", in J. Youings (ed.), *Raleigh in Exeter 1985: Privateering and Colonisation in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (Exeter, 1985), pp. 11-13.

Voyages was largely inspired by jealousy, not by a conversion to a naval strategy (54). There was, however, a further, and largely under-appreciated, aspect to Essex's advocacy of a more decisive war against Spain in these years. This was the influence of Antonio Pérez, who spent the years 1593-1595 as a central figure in Essex's household. Gustav Ungerer, in his detailed study of Pérez's exile, has concluded that Pérez "had no influence in shaping Elizabeth's foreign policy" (55). This may be true in a literal sense, but there is also a wider influence that should not be overlooked. Pérez offered the Elizabethans something that they had previously lacked: intelligence from the heart of Philip II's court. Here was someone who knew, or claimed to know, all the king's secrets. Pérez was also a man with a vendetta to pursue against Philip. The Philip he described, for all the distortions of his portrait—or possibly because of these distortions—appeared to confirm what the English had suspected all along. Firstly, Philip's ambitions of world-conquest made him a threat to the liberty of Europe; therefore, to protect Europe, Spain should be reduced to its former size. Secondly, Philip was a tyrant, and hated by his subjects, as the Aragonese Revolt of 1591 had shown (56).

Although Pérez could not claim to be an architect of the "Triple Alliance" of 1596, it was certainly what he wished to see and he undoubtedly helped to create the atmosphere in which it was formed. But more important was his claim that Philip was weak and Spain ripe for revolt, if a major blow was struck. He had tried (and failed) to persuade both Henry IV and Elizabeth to aid the Aragonese in 1592, and his aim thereafter was to inspire the allies to mount a direct invasion of Spain. This was initially to be by land through Aragon, but he was converted by Essex in 1596 to support the voyage to Cádiz. It may be further suggested that Essex's plan to remain in Cádiz permanently and to use it as a base for further attacks on Spain was based ultimately on the inspiration of Pérez (57). The queen's *Declaration* that accompanied the Cádiz Voyage, although ostensibly issued over the names of the commanders, is, on the other hand, the briefest of the series. It is primarily a warning to neutrals to withdraw their ships from Spanish waters as otherwise they would be liable to seizure if carrying supplies or war *matériel* for the king of Spain. The purpose of the fleet is described as defensive, its aim being to

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(54) Discussed in Adams, "The Protestant Cause: Religious Alliance with the West European Calvinist Communities as a Political Issue in England, 1585-1630" (Unpub. Oxford University D. Phil. thesis, 1973), pp. 136-7, 141-2.

(55) Ungerer, *Spaniard in Elizabethan England*, I, pp. 73-4. However, MacCaffrey, *War and Politics*, p. 113, assigns some significance to Pérez.

(56) See, esp. Ungerer, *Spaniard*, I, doc. 53, Pérez's notes for an interview with Elizabeth in January 1595.

(57) On Essex's proposed occupation of Cadiz, see L. W. Henry, "The Earl of Essex as a Strategist and Military Organiser", *English Historical Review*, LXVIII (1953), 363-93, and Hammer, "Bright Shining Sparke", p. 196. The occupation only made sense on the assumption that Philip was on the verge or collapse.

disrupt the king of Spain's preparations for another attempt invasion of England (58).

Cádiz was at least a nominal success, and this inspired the ambitious "Islands Voyage" of 1597, where, as in 1589, disputes over its purpose and dissension among its commanders led to dispersion of effort and failure. Once again the queen in her *Declaration* announced an ultimately defensive purpose. This time it was to disrupt a Spanish fleet being prepared at El Ferrol to support the Irish rebellion. On this occasion Elizabeth expressed the pious hope that Philip "may by the chastisement of the Almighty God of Hosts bee induced to live in Peace with his neighbours" (59). The reference to Ireland introduces the main strategic theme of the final years of Elizabeth's reign. As had been the case with France, Ireland had not been an issue in the outbreak of hostilities with Spain. However, the deterioration in relations with the earl of Tyrone and the "Nine Years War" caused (as France did earlier) an unplanned diversion of the English war effort. As Ireland absorbed military resources at a dramatic rate between 1599 and 1603, so ambitious naval expeditions came an end to be replaced by more limited attempts to prevent Spanish intervention (60).

The similarities between Spanish policy in the Netherlands and Elizabeth's in Ireland were certainly noted in Spain. The small Spanish force that ultimately landed at Kinsale in 1601 was an attempt to divert Elisabeth from the siege of Ostend (61). However, by 1598 the English were reasonably confident that the Dutch could survive on their own with only moderate assistance. Spanish inability to intervene effectively in Ireland found its parallels in the command of the sea that enabled the English and Dutch to maintain their garrison at Ostend. Since the Dutch were no longer in danger, once the Irish rebellion had been brought to an end the major barrier to peace had been removed, an argument Sir Robert Cecil advanced in the Privy Council in May 1602 (62).

The Anglo-Spanish "War" of 1585-1603 had two unusual features. One, a subject we have discussed earlier, was its undeclared nature; the other was its

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(58) *A Declaration of the Causes moving in Queenes Maiestie to send a navy to the Seas* (1596), pp. 1-2. Translations into Latin, Dutch, French, Spanish and Italian survive.

(59) *A Declaration of the lust Causes mooving her Maiestie to send a Navie and Armie to the Seas, and toward Spaine* (1597), p. 6. This is the rarest of the series, only one or two copies survive.

(60) See Loades, *Tudor Navy*, pp. 268-70. J. J. N. McGurk, "A Levy of Mariners in the Cinque Ports, 1602", *Mariner's Mirror*, LXVI (1980), 137-44.

(61) J. J. Silke, *Kinsale: The Spanish Intervention in Ireland at the End of the Elizabethan Wars* (Liverpool, 1970), pp. 49-50.

(62) H. S. Scott (ed.), "The Journal of Sir Roger Wilbraham... 1593-1616", *Camden Miscellany X* (Camden Society, 3rd Ser. IV, 1902), p. 50.

length. The latter deserves a few comments. A leading reason for the length of the war was undoubtedly the fact that it was in the main conducted at arms length with neither side being able to do decisive damage to the other. Military and naval operations were conducted on a relatively limited scale. After the Armada there were no more major pitched battles at sea to cause either side substantial losses. One consequence of the length of the conflict was obviously the increased opportunity for the diplomatic and strategic context to change, the obvious examples being the campaigns in France and Ireland. It follows from this that the strategy of the war at sea could also change. I have suggested here that the war at sea was essentially a secondary concern: that it was conceived of as the one way in which England could threaten the Spanish war effort in the war that would follow an English intervention in the Netherlands. Given that the independence of the Netherlands was obtained (whatever the ultimate English contribution) the war at sea did achieve its end.

If the war at sea was defensive in its aims, there were phases, 1589 and the mid-1590s, when more ambitious plans were expounded. Moreover, it was a peculiar type of defensiveness, and one very much bound up with Elizabeth's refusal to declare war. As we have seen, from 1588 she regarded herself as being in a state of war, but this she claimed was at Philip II's instigation. The limited way in which Elizabeth conducted the war was not simply financial in inspiration, for when she saw her own interests directly threatened, as in Ireland after 1598, she was prepared to spend generously. Rather it was part of a deliberate attempt to keep the war limited, which I would trace back to the fears of an imminent religious war. By playing down, as much as possible, the religious issue and by emphasising the specific and defensive nature of her "quarrel" with Philip, Elizabeth was playing to a wider Catholic audience and attempting to prevent a real Catholic alliance from forming. In France, her main target, events unexpectedly achieved her aim for her. Yet by emphasising in her propaganda the theme of the Habsburg Imperial design as an alternative to the religious confrontation, she created a trap for herself, for this also provided the justification for an offensive war against Spain. This unresolved dilemma between a secular and a religious conflict lay at the heart of Elizabethan policy. If the effects of Elizabeth and her councillors' failure to resolve it can be seen most dramatically in the conflicts over the major naval expeditions of 1589, 1596 and 1597, they also conditioned her strategy as a whole throughout the Anglo-Spanish conflict.