The sea power of Habsburg Spain and the development of European navies, 1500-1700*

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1. International relations and the rise of the European navies

Europe is a large peninsula with several smaller peninsulas and large islands and many navigable rivers. A large part of Europe's population lives close to sea lines of communication. This is an advantage for transportation as large quantities of cargo can move easily and cheaply on water. The ability to control the sea and transport military and economic resources on it has consequently been important for economic and political relations between regions and states. Freedom to use the sea and deny this freedom to competing interests makes it easier to exercise political control over territories separated by or dependent on the sea. Control of the sea, especially its narrow passages, may be used to extract resources, either by plunder or by tolls and taxes raised in exchange for protection. It is also important for defence against superior military forces that must cross the sea for an invasion. Various interests may be willing to pay for the armed forces that are required to achieve this control. However, such armed forces must be based on advanced administrative and technical skills and must combine military and maritime competencies. It requires political skill and entrepreneurship to achieve these combinations.

   Early modern Europe saw the rise of more centralised states, which formed an increasingly integrated international system of great and medium sized powers. It also saw the formation

of permanent state-administrated armies and navies as the normal organisational pattern for armed forces. This changed domestic political conditions as such forces increased the power of the central state in relation to local societies and elites. The importance of permanent armies and navies for international relations is less obvious. Warfare was central in international politics but early modern wars were often fought without large permanent forces. This was possible as private military entrepreneurs, local elites and maritime cities could administrate armies and fleets. It is only in the later half of the seventeenth century that we may observe a general European pattern of permanent state-administrated armies and navies.

The size of the permanent armed forces was however rising since the late fifteenth century, and rulers and elite groups who maintained such forces must have felt that they gave them advantages. The fact that permanent armed forces became general after 1650 may indicate that they were right. Such forces did however develop unevenly and their advantages were not universally accepted. They were also expensive and closely connected with the rise of fiscal states with a high level of taxes. The new type of fiscal-military state had the ability both to raise taxes permanently from the local society and to transform these resources into military organisations controlled by the central political authority. It required major changes of domestic power structures to achieve this transformation and this usually took time. In several cases the origin of large permanent armed forces can be traced to the outcome of domestic power struggles, especially if this outcome had to be defended with armed force.[1]

This paper is a survey of the role of naval organisations for international political relations in Europe from 1500 to 1700. One question is if the development of permanent navies had a major influence on international relations in Europe or not and whether the mobility of naval

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[1] State formation and armed forces: Jan GLETE, *War and the state in early modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as fiscal-military states, 1500-1660*, London, 2002, esp. pp. 1-66. International relations: Derek MCKAY & H. M. SCOTT, *The Rise of the Great Powers, 1648-1815*, London, 1983, pp. 1-93 and Richard BONNEY, *The European dynastic states, 1494-1660*, Oxford, 1991.

power contributed to the rise of a more integrated international political system. Another question is the role of sea power for the Spanish monarchy. Throughout the period 1500 to 1700, this monarchy had a unique relation to sea lines of communication. It ruled most or the whole Iberian Peninsula, major parts of Italy and territories at the North Sea and the Channel. These territories were connected by the sea and they included several of Europe's largest ports and centres for international shipping and trade; the north coast of Spain, Seville, Lisbon (1580-1640), Genoa (a close ally from 1528), Antwerp and (until the 1570s) Zeeland and Holland. Spain was also the first colonial power in America and the first power for which transatlantic lines of communication were important. In 60 years Habsburg rule in Portugal and in the Portuguese maritime empire in Asia, Africa and America made the monarchy truly global in scale. From around 1500 to the latter half of the seventeenth century, the Spanish monarchy was a leading great power in Europe and for almost a century (at least 1560 to 1640), it was the strongest Christian military power in Europe.[2]

The Spanish monarchy faced far greater and more complex problems and opportunities at sea than any other European power in this period. It had many vulnerable lines of communication to protect but from its peninsular Iberian centre it also had a strategically central position in relation to the Mediterranean, north-western Europe and the new

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[2] Naval organisations and the size of navies: Jan GLETE, *Navies and nations: Warships, navies and state building in Europe and America, 1500-1860*, 2 vols, Stockholm, 1993, pp. 101-252, with an extensive bibliography. Later major works covering long periods from 1500 and 1700 are J. R. BRUIJN, *The Dutch navy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, Columbia, 1993, Jörgen H. BARFOD, *Flådens födsel*, Copenhagen, 1990, Jörgen H. BARFOD, *Christian 3.s flåde, 1533-1588*, Copenhagen, 1995, Niels M. PROBST, *Christian 4.s flåde, 1588-1660*, Copenhagen, 1996, Jörgen H. BARFOD, *Niels Juels flåde, 1660-1720*, Copenhagen 1997, N. A. M. RODGER, *The safeguard of the sea: A naval history of Britain, 660-1649*, London, 1997, N. A. M. RODGER, *The command of the ocean: A naval history of Britain, 1649-1815*, London, 2004, Alan JAMES, *The navy and government in early modern France, 1572-1661,* Woodbridge, 2004 and John B. HATTENDORF & Richard UNGER (eds), *War at sea in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Woodbridge, 2003.

transoceanic markets for trade. The political, administrative and technical ability of the monarchy to solve its maritime protection problems and develop a long-term naval policy was important for relations between various parts of Europe. Habsburg rulers in Spain had great ambitions to wage wars and they developed strong and efficient army forces controlled by the state. How did these political ambitions and military traditions shape their naval policy when they faced a multitude of maritime opportunities and problems and a complex structure of interest groups who demanded protection and promotion of their maritime interests?

2. Constraints on early modern naval power

The most spectacular influence of navies on international relations is the deployment of large battle fleets far from their bases to a strategically important region. If such a fleet changes the strategic balance long enough to influence warfare, trade and political decision-making, naval power visibly influences international relations. A fleet may open or close the sea for a power that intends to use it for defensive or offensive operations and it may open or close the sea for economically important trade. The importance of such deployments of naval forces has been easy to identify and evaluate in European and global power politics. Operations with battle fleets and the battles that are fought to achieve control of the sea have often been placed in the centre of analyses of naval warfare. A great naval power has in the prevailing Euro-American naval paradigm been equalled with a power that is able to send a fleet to any part of the world in order to influence international relations in its own favour.[3]

   The possibility to influence political and economic power relations from the sea underwent major technical and administrative improvements from 1500 to 1700. Sailing technology gave ships better ability to stay at sea and sail at long distances. The introduction of heavy guns at sea gave specialised gun-carrying warships an advantage that made it interesting for rulers to

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[3] A broad synthesis of naval history from that perspective is Clark G. REYNOLDS, *Command of the sea*, 2 vols, 2nd revised ed. Malabar, 1983.

create gun-armed navies under their own control as instruments of power. Conversely, autonomous maritime cities lost much of the advantage as sea powers that their large cargo carrying ships had given them. Heavy guns also reduced the efficiency of medieval fortifications and increased the value of mobile and centrally controlled operational forces, field armies and fleets, which rapidly could be sent to strategic areas as response to threats and opportunities. In an analysis of navies and international relations it is however important to understand that many of the limitations on naval power that existed in 1500 remained in the sixteenth and even in the seventeenth century. There were also no straight lines of development. The new combination of sailing warships and heavy guns was for a long time not superior to the equally new combination of heavy guns and oared galleys. In the Mediterranean sailing warships were used in the early sixteenth century but soon abandoned until the early seventeenth century when sailing-ship technology had been improved.[4]

The effective radius of action of early modern sea power may be deceptive. Europeans sailed to America and the Indian Ocean already around 1500 and exercised power at sea far from Europe. It is thus easy to believe that fleets could be sent as self-contained instruments of power on extended operations anywhere in Europe or on the oceans. The realities were rather different. Early large gun-armed warships were important for gaining superiority in combat but they had too little weatherliness to be risked at sea in autumn gales close to coasts. The large ship-of-the-line, which combined speed, weatherliness and endurance in the same hull was only gradually developed and reached its full maturity in the eighteenth century.[5] Galleys had no shelter for the crew and operations in anything but summer weather was difficult. Moderately sized sailing warships with limited crews (making provisions last

[4] John Francis GUILMARTIN, JR., *Gunpowder and galleys: Changing technology and Mediterranean warfare at sea in the sixteenth century*, Cambridge, 1974, esp. pp. 57-84, GLETE 1993, pp. 114-116, 139-146.

[5] GLETE 1993, esp. pp. 402-407.

longer) were often more versatile than great ships or galleys as they could operate during early springs and autumns and stay at sea for longer periods than ships filled with as many guns and men as possible.[6] Fleets of such ships were useful as cruising forces, protecting and attacking trade and making surprise raids on ports and coasts. They were less suited as battle fleets for control of enemy waters during an extended period of time. That required ability to blockade the enemy's concentrated forces and defeat them if they tried to break the blockade. In practice, it required a decisive superiority in size or quality.

Fleets were not independent of land. It is true that warships could sail from Europe to anywhere in the world but for effective operations against enemies they needed local bases. Major operational fleets with several thousand men were at a serious disadvantage when their logistical lines were extended beyond their home waters. Before the late seventeenth century most sailing fleets were only provisioned for two to three months. During long-distance operations much food was consumed before the fleet, often delayed by unfavourable winds, arrived to the operational area. The fleet would then have to return to its base before much was achieved, unless a local source of provisions was available. Operations in distant waters, such as the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean were dependent on local provisioning and the possession of a colony with agricultural production was an advantage.[7] Galleys had very limited capacity to carry provisions and required water two or three times every month. To organise continuous provisioning of the large sixteenth century Mediterranean galley fleets with their enormous crews was probably the most demanding logistical problem of any military force in that century. Problems with provisioning often delayed the concentration of galley fleets and made the effective operational season short. Galley operations were strongly

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[6] This point was made in John Francis GUILMARTIN JR., *The guns of* Santíssimo Sacramento, "Technology and Culture" 24 (1983), pp. 559-601, esp. pp. 570-571.

[7] An important discussion of this subject in Christian BUCHET, *La lutte pour l'espace caraïbe et le facade Atlantique de l'Amerique central et du Sud, 1672-1763*, 2 vols, Paris, 1991.

favoured by a network of local bases and Mediterranean strategy was often determined by the importance of capturing and defending such bases.[8]

Consequently, sea power (ability to control and use the sea) and naval power (sea power implemented by an organised navy) during most of our period was regional rather than European or global in scope. A navy might be of decisive importance in its home waters without being important for the balance of power in a distant sea where another navy had its home waters. This separation into geostrategic regions was politically and economically important. Even a rather small navy strengthened a ruler's ability to control a territory to which the sea lines were important and it gave him better ability to protect and control regional trade, especially narrow waters. Europe's geography with great inland seas, peninsulas, large islands and narrow straits created natural regions where one or a few powers might gain a decisive advantage in controlling the regional sea lines. The eastern and western Mediterranean, the waters between the Iberian Peninsula and the Atlantic isles (the Canaries, the Azores, Madeira), the Channel/North Sea and the Baltic Sea with the Danish straits were largely separate regions of operations. Even parts of these regions, like the Adriatic, the Aegean Sea, the western and eastern approaches to the Channel or the northern and southern Baltic Sea were distinctly separate sub-regions, which could be dominated from a strong regional naval base. A good naval base in a strategic position was a political asset.[9]

Regional bases provided by allied powers increased the radius of operation considerably but only if the navy was large enough to send a fleet to another part of Europe without impairing its control of home waters. The Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean were economically very important for the western maritime powers but they sent battle fleets to these seas only from

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[8] This is an important theme in GUILMARTIN 1974.

[9] The regional character of naval warfare up to the mid-seventeenth century is a central concept in GLETE 1993, pp. 102-152, 184-187 and Jan GLETE, *Warfare at sea, 1500-1650: Maritime conflicts and the transformation of Europe*, London, 2000.

the 1650s and always in co-operation with one regional power. Convoys could sail on long distances from one friendly port to another and back as they could be provisioned and repaired at each end of the voyage but convoy operations in waters dominated by a regional navy was difficult. Smaller forces of warships could be sent on cruises to distant waters, especially in the Atlantic and in American waters where water and provisions might be found locally and the risk of being trapped by a superior enemy fleet was small.

Long-distance and long-term battle fleet operations in order to change the geostrategic situation, was at or beyond the limit of European administrative and technical capability for most of the period 1500 to 1700. This was a problem of crucial importance for Habsburg Spanish grand strategy and naval policy as the Spanish monarchy was the power that had the most widely dispersed territories in Europe. This provided opportunities for creating bases and naval forces that might be politically important in several regions. The Spanish system with several different naval organisations (*armadas)* in different regions and for different purposes was a rather natural response to a unique geostrategic situation. The same geostrategy was a serious problem if large Spanish forces must be deployed from one region to another or if extended lines of communication and scattered colonial settlements must be defended against enemy cruising forces. Many of the strengths and weaknesses of Habsburg Spanish sea power are easier to understand if they are studied as expressions of the administrative and technical constraints on sea power that were common in this period.

3. Merchants, rulers and naval organisations

Why were certain Europeans more interested than others in developing permanent navies? Briefly, we may divide the interests behind them into maritime merchants and territorial rulers. Merchants wished to defend sea lines of importance for their trade but they frequently

also used violence to limit competition. They could sell their competence in maritime violence (armed ships with teams of leaders and seamen) to territorial rulers who lacked naval power. Traditionally, merchants protected shipping by sailing in convoys and by paying tolls or taxes to regional admiralties or city councils, which organised protection. Merchants could also buy licenses from rulers, which permitted them to trade with the ruler's enemy. Much of this thinking survived into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and it also provided incomes for navies in parts of Europe. The most important cases are the Dutch admiralties, which raised tolls on trade and sold licenses to trade with the enemy to finance the naval forces that protected Dutch shipping, and the Spanish escort forces for the transatlantic trade which were financed by a tax on this trade (the *avería*).

Territorial rulers had first of all an interest in defending their political power base, that is their territory and its taxpayers. Their territories might be threatened from the sea or divided and connected by the sea. To create this connection and deny it to others with naval power was a source of political power. Early modern rulers, who often were in an insecure power position, might use naval power to isolate political opponents from their allies in foreign territories. In offensive wars, rulers might wish to project power across the sea, typically by sending an invasion army on a fleet. They might also use naval power for logistical support of their army, for posing threats that limited the enemy's operational freedom and for isolation of the enemy from possible allies who might send help across the sea. Rulers might also use their geographical position to prey on trade by capturing ships or raising toll and selling licenses to trade without providing protection, except against their own violence. The North African corsairs are the most well known example that affected early modern European shipping. However, ambitious rulers might also provide protection and international political stability to trade in order to motivate toll on trade and taxes on merchants. The Danish Sound Toll had its origin in such a policy and it was of great importance for creating safe conditions for

international shipping in the Baltic Sea. The Toll financed much of the Danish navy without placing a great burden on Danish taxpayers.[10]

Merchants and rulers had partly different administrative and technical competencies when they used sea power and developed naval organisations. Merchants were often used to trade in naval stores and provisions and to administrate shipping. They had contacts with shipbuilders, shipmasters, pilots and the maritime societies where skilled seamen were to be found. Maritime societies had an inherent advantage in organising efficient sea power but it required political centralisation to turn that into naval power useful for a more general naval policy. Rulers were experienced in military enterprises and they often had arsenals with guns and other weapons. They had contacts with military leaders and entrepreneurs in warfare and they had legal rights to raise resources from their subjects in wartime. Rulers of territories with mercantile and shipping centres could use them to organise naval forces, while rulers without such subjects either had to turn to foreign shipping centres or develop a naval organisation under their own command and administration. Shipping centres in autonomous cities and republics (the German Hanse, Venice, Genoa and the Dutch Republic) could choose between using their maritime abilities to organise temporary naval forces or to create permanent navies. For attacks against enemy trade sovereign political authorities could also issue letters of marque to privateers, an option that remained important in warfare until after 1700.

Naval policy (or the lack of it) was thus dependent on the economic and social character of the various European regions and the extent to which conflicting or unconnected interests and skills could be politically and administratively co-ordinated. It was not self-evident that the outcome should be a centralized and permanent navy with warships, guns, men and dockyards administrated by the state and financed from taxes raised by a fiscal administration. Resources might be raised locally for specific purposes and the specialized skills and weapons and ships

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[10] GLETE 2000, pp. 112-130.

might be leased temporarily. A permanent navy was an innovation, a new combination of resources, which required entrepreneurial efforts to achieve. The innovators were both kings and leaders of republics and they had to combine political and administrative skills in order to finance and maintain a complex organisation. The results for international relations were important. With some simplification, it may be said that in 1500 the protection of shipping and trade was a problem for merchants and maritime societies. In 1700 it was clearly a task for the state to be solved with operational naval forces, or, in the case of neutral trade, with diplomacy supported by military and naval power.

The Spanish Habsburgs were those monarchical rulers, who had the most complicated relations to sea power. They had several ancestors: the German Habsburgs, the French Burgundian dynasty and the two branches of the Trastámara dynasty that had unified Spain. These dynasties had considerable military traditions but they had no naval tradition, and they were used to co-ordinate sea power rather than to control and administrate a dynastic navy.[11] The Habsburgs ruled some of Europe's most maritime regions: the Netherlands, northern Spain and the dynamic maritime economy in Seville, which grew up around the new trans-Atlantic trade. The Spanish monarchy also took control over or formed alliances with large parts of Italy with its strong tradition of galley warfare, organised by cities, private entrepreneurs and territorial rulers. In 1580 Philip II took over the Aviz dynasty's Portuguese sailing navy, a well-established state organisation in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.

The result of this agglomeration of maritime and naval structures and tasks in different regions and states was a complex web of ambitions, interests, traditions and skills. Habsburg rulers required a long-term naval policy to keep the monarchy together and skills and

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[11] Burgundian and Dutch naval policy and administration: Jacques PAVIOT, *La politique navale des ducs de Bourgogne, 1384-1482*, Lille, 1995 and Louis SICKING, *Zeemacht en onmacht: Maritieme politiek in de Nederlanden, 1488-1558*, Amsterdam, 1998.

resources for such a policy were available in several parts of it. The administrative and political problems of achieving a coherent naval policy were however huge as it required integration of interests and resources in large parts of Europe in an age when even rulers in small and homogeneous states faced great difficulties in developing coherent policies for defence.

Before 1700, the Spanish monarchy never attempted to create a fully integrated navy supported by centralised taxation. The several *armadas* (organisations for sailing fleets) and the galley squadrons were to a considerable extent financed regionally and often administrated by private entrepreneurs. It was not only the earlier independent parts of the monarchy (Castile, Naples, Sicily, Portugal, Flanders, etc) that had separate naval organisations. Even within Castile a system of provincial squadrons developed.[12] One idea behind this decentralisation was to increase the motivation of different parts of the monarchy to contribute to a common naval defence. All naval forces were ultimately under the command of the king and he had the power to deploy them far away from their normal bases if that was required. What originally was a politically and administratively advanced form of

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[12] Studies of Spanish *armadas*: Bibiano TORRES RAMÍREZ, *La Armada de Barlovento*, Sevilla, 1981, Pablo E. PÉREZ-MALLAÍNA & Bibiano TORRES RAMÍREZ, *La Armada del Mar del Sur*, Sevilla, 1987, R. A. STRADLING, *The Armada of Flanders: Spanish maritime policy and European war, 1568-1665,* Cambridge, 1992 and Antonio CASTILLO JUÁREZ, *El régimen juridico de las armadas de la Carrera de Indias, siglos XVI y XVII*, México, 1997. The yearly escort forces for the transatlantic trade, organised by the merchants and the king are listed in Pierre & Huguette CHAUNU, *Seville et l'Atlantique, 1504-1650*, 11 vols, Paris, 1955-59 and the period 1650-1700 is studied in Fernando SERRANO MANGAS, *Los galeones de la Carrera de Indias, 1650-1700*, Sevilla, 1985. Regional naval finance and administration in Galicia is studied in María del Carmen SAAVEDRA VÁZQUEZ, *Galicia en el camino deFlandes: Actividad militar, economia y sociedad en la Espana noratlántica, 1556-1648*, Coruna 1996. The administration of one of the galley squadrons is studied in Domenico LIGRESTI, *L'organizzazione militare del regno di Sicilia (1575-1635)*, "Rivista Storica Italiana" 105 (1993), pp. 647-678.

interest aggregation, which gave the monarchy strength, did however during the seventeenth century develop into an increasingly obsolete organisational structure. It was abolished by the new Bourbon dynasty as a part of the naval reforms in the early eighteenth century.[13]

4. International relations and control of the sea until 1560

From the late fifteenth century until around 1560 centralised state power increased in most parts of Europe. Autonomous territories were incorporated into larger states, civil wars and rebellions became unusual and cooperation between rulers and local elites improved. Rulers in France, Spain (Castile-Aragon), England, Portugal, Denmark-Norway, Sweden and Russia gained undisputed control of their territories and the provinces in the Netherlands were unified under Habsburg rule. In the Mediterranean the number of independent political units was reduced when the Ottoman and Habsburg Spanish empires conquered several states and territories. In the Baltic, earlier loose political structures like the Nordic Union, the German Order and the German Hanse disappeared or were reduced to insignificance, while dynastic rulers of more compact states gained in power. International relations became dominated by power struggles and co-operation between large and medium-sized states, which were able to centralise resources from wide territories for defence and warfare.[14]

   Did the rise of several state-organized navies in Europe have any significant role in this process of state formation and changing international relations? Warfare at sea were important, most obviously in the Mediterranean where several of the largest military and

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[13] Spanish naval administration: I. A. A. THOMPSON, *War and government in Habsburg Spain, 1560-1620*, London, 1976, pp. 106-233, 256-273, who regards administrative decentralisation as a source of weakness, Carla RAHN PHILLIPS, *Six galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial defense in the early seventeenth century*, Baltimore, 1986, who regards it as a source of strength and David GOODMAN, *Spanish naval power, 1589-1665: Reconstruction and defeat*, Cambridge, 1997, who do not regard it as an important question. A brief attempt of interpretation in GLETE 2002, pp. 126-136.

[14] Warfare at sea 1500-1560: GLETE 2000, pp. 93-102, 112-120, 131-144.

naval operations in Europe in this period were undertaken with galleys fleets. Shipping and seaborne trade became more important than ever before for Europe when the continent gained connections with America and Asia across the oceans. But was it important that some, but not all of the new centralised states had permanent navies? The answer is far from unambiguous.

In northern Europe, navies clearly mattered in power politics. For Denmark-Norway and Sweden, naval power under royal control became important instruments both for domination of the domestic territories and for a major shift of the balance of power in the Baltic region. This occurred in a series of wars between transient alliances of Nordic and German rulers, elite groups and cities from the late fifteenth century to 1536. The number of large Nordic cargo carriers was insignificant compared with the shipping resources of the German Hanse and that had made Lübeck and other German shipping cities dominant at sea since the fourteenth century. Now, even rather few gun-armed, specialised warships, owned and managed by territorial rulers turned out to be decisive. The North German cities could no longer intervene in Nordic power politics when they were unable to blockade Nordic ports and send ships with soldiers and supplies to groups who were in opposition to a Nordic ruler. Instead, organised naval power gave these kingdoms power to control the sea close to the German ports and the sea lines in the Baltic Sea, which were all-important for Hanse trade. No German city or prince emerged as an innovative founder of a permanent navy and the maritime centres in the region were reduced to insignificant powers at sea.[15]

The transformation of international relations along the Atlantic seaboard was less related to the rise of navies. Portugal's navy was important for the development of a maritime empire in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean but Portugal did hardly participate in European power politics. At sea, the important problems for contending powers were the connections

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[15] Jan GLETE, "Naval power and control of the sea in the Baltic in the sixteenth century", in HATTENDORF & UNGER 2003, pp. 217-232.

between Spain and the Netherlands, the Channel as a frontier zone between France and England and control of the east coast of England and Scotland during conflicts between these two states. To which extent were these problems solved with naval power?

From the late fifteenth century, France developed a sailing navy, partly inherited from Brittany, a dukedom united with France in a dynastic union in 1491. The French kings had increasing ambitions both in domestic and foreign politics and gun-armed warships gave them a visible presence as rulers and protectors in the coastal provinces of Normandy, Brittany and Guienne, which for long periods had been beyond their control. Across the Channel, the new Tudor dynasty from 1485 on also invested in major warships. The War of the Roses (1455-85) had shown that opponents to English rulers frequently gathered forces abroad and came by the sea. Naval power under the ruler's administration gave the usurping Tudor dynasty ability to prevent such threats without asking other interests for help. The concentration of naval forces to a region where two kings had interests in control of their coasts indicates that they were important for territorial state formation, typical for this period.

Naturally, these navies could also be used for interventions across the Channel. They were used for that during the wars between France and England in 1511-14, 1522-23, 1544-50 and 1557-59. However, they did not markedly alter the balance of power in the region. Like in the Hundred Years War, England could invade France across the Channel but it was much helped in that by its possession of Calais and the alliance with the Habsburgs, who controlled the Netherlands. France could communicate with its ally Scotland across the sea without serious interference from the English navy. A large-scale French attempt to invade England in 1545 was delayed and frustrated by the inferior but powerful English navy but it is possible that the French effort primarily failed because of logistical breakdowns. It is uncertain if the English fleet had been able to stop a landing if it had been seriously attempted.

English and French naval ambitions were not driven by the need to protect private shipping. Like in Scandinavia rulers may have felt compelled to invest in large warships because England and France had few large merchantmen suitable for conversion into warships in wartime. One of the most striking features of naval power in this period is in fact that it largely was unconnected to large-scale shipping. The major shipping centres in western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth century were northern Spain and Flanders, Zeeland and Holland, territories ruled by the Habsburg dynasty. Merchants and shipping in these regions connected southern and north-western Europe with each other and Dutch shipping was important for trade between the Baltic and western Europe. As shipping from Habsburg-controlled ports (including Genoa) also dominated in the western Mediterranean and in the new Atlantic trade, the rulers of the Spanish monarchy could rely on incomparable contacts with powerful shipping and mercantile interests for sea power. As Spain and the House of Habsburg (even before it ruled in Spain) were at war with France during most of the time from the 1490s to 1559, shipping along the Atlantic coast and the American trade and colonies clearly required protection.

Up to 1560, the Habsburgs did not create any permanent sailing navy. The rulers sometimes owned a few armed ships, either in Spain or in the Netherlands, but the main efforts at sea were administrated by the maritime societies in Spain and the Netherlands, in co-operation with the ruler's local deputies. They armed ships, organised convoys and defended coasts, trade routes and American colonies against French warships and privateers. The Habsburg rulers were not indifferent to maritime questions but they saw their role as co-ordinators and improvers of existing systems for maritime protection rather than as radical innovators. They mobilised the great maritime resources and skills of their societies for protection but they did not channel these assets through a naval organisation of their own. In this period, the Habsburg rulers and the Spanish and Dutch maritime societies were normally able to protect

shipping, trade and military transports against French attacks. They were periodically helped

by the alliance with England, which provided useful protection in the Channel, but even in the

war period 1551-56, when England was neutral and France had a powerful navy, the

Habsburg convoy system between Spain and the Netherlands worked. On the other hand, this

system was predominantly defensive. It did not provide the monarchy with much offensive

naval power, which could threaten French coasts and support army offensives into French

territory. There was no attempt to form a Habsburg battle fleet in the Atlantic in this period.[16]

The Mediterranean scene was very different in this period. In the fifteenth century, Venice

had been the only power with a permanent navy. It defended the Venetian empire in Greece

and the eastern Mediterranean and gave the great merchant city practical power to dominate

the rich trade between Asia and Europe that passed through these waters. It was a proof of

that naval power mattered in international relations. The ambitious Ottoman sultans,

especially Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) created a powerful gun-armed navy of their own as a part

of their expansionistic policy. It protected and regulated trade, controlled islands and coastal

areas and supported offensive operations against Venice in Greece (1463-79, 1499-1502,

1537-40), the Mamluk rulers in Egypt (1516-17) and the Order of St John on Rhodes (1522).

Ottoman naval power also acted as a shield against offensive operations to the east from

France or Spain. The two rapidly rising great powers in the west would with all probability

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[16] Studies of various Habsburg defensive efforts at sea from 1500 to 1560: Paul E. HOFFMAN, *The Spanish crown and the defense of the Caribbean, 1535-1585: Precedent, patrimonialism and royal parsimony*, Baton Rouge, 1980, pp. 20-108, William D. PHILLIPS, JR, *Spain's northern shipping industry in the sixteenth century*, "Journal of European Economic History" 17 (1988), pp. 267-301, James D. TRACY, *Herring wars: The Habsburg Netherlands and the struggle for control of the North Sea, ca. 1520-1560*, "Sixteenth Century Journal" 24 (1993), pp. 249-272, Esteban MIRA CABALLOS, *La Armada guardacostas de Andalucía y la defensa de la Carrera de Indias (1521-1550)*, Sevilla, 1998 and SICKING 1998.

have found the Levant a promising region for interventions and crusading activities if the Ottoman navy had not existed and discouraged such offensives.[17]

Instead, the Ottomans began to penetrate the western Mediterranean with naval power. They supported the North African corsairs and from the 1530s the Sultan's galley fleet posed a serious threat to the western coast of Italy, especially when he was allied with France. Spain and France created galley navies during their Italian wars (1494-1559). The Spanish monarchy gradually developed a permanent navy composed of the galleys of Castile, Sicily, Naples and Genoa, the latter a force run by Genoese entrepreneurs in Spanish service. This navy normally controlled the western Mediterranean and ensured the communications between the Habsburg territories around this sea. This was a success of a determined long-term Spanish naval policy. If France had been superior at sea in the western Mediterranean, Spanish lines of communication to Italy would have been endangered, Spanish military operations in Italy would have been unsupported from the sea and France, rather than Spain, would have looked like the best protector of Italy against Ottoman attacks.

State-organised navies was thus important and, arguably, the Mediterranean was the part of Europe which was most influenced by the rise of permanent armed forces in this period. The two powers that were most successful in creating such forces at sea, Spain and the Ottoman Empire, divided much of the Mediterranean into two great empires. Venice retained naval control of the Adriatic and a precarious control of Cyprus and Crete while France was left with little more than control of her Mediterranean coast. It is striking that the two new Mediterranean empires were territorial states rather than mercantile societies and that it was the organised naval power of the states that kept the maritime parts of these empires together.

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[17] The Ottoman navy is little known, but see Andrew C. HESS, *The evolution of the Ottoman seaborne empire in the Age of the oceanic discoveries, 1453-1525*, "American Historical Review" 75 (1970), pp. 1892-1919, Colin H. IMBER, *The navy of Süleyman the Magnificent*, "Archivum Ottomanicum" 6, (1980), pp. 211-282 and Palmira BRUMMETT, *Ottoman seapower and Levantine diplomacy in the Age of Discovery*, Albany, 1994.

The importance of European (including Ottoman) naval power for international political power up to 1560 was considerable but uneven. State formation in this period was not primarily the growth of large state bureaucracies, which centralised all resources used for warfare. Rather, it was better co-ordination of existing power structures under the leadership of princes, mixed with organisational innovations, such as limited permanent navies. In the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea new state-organised navies were instruments of change. They made state formation and empire building easier for territorial rulers and they reduced the international political importance of maritime and mercantile cities. In western Europe, naval power was mainly an Anglo-French phenomenon in the Channel and its importance for warfare and the international balance of power in this region was not decisive. International shipping on the Atlantic coast was predominantly Spanish and Dutch while Spain and Portugal shared a monopoly on the new transoceanic trade to America, Africa and Asia.

The Spanish control of this vast system of trade and colonies was enforced without a navy. Habsburg and Spanish policy for control of the sea was thus strikingly flexible and adaptive. When a permanent navy offered advantages the rulers were willing to spend large resources and scarce administrative competence on it. When the skills and shipping resources to create sea power were controlled and administrated by private groups the rulers were equally willing to co-operate with and co-ordinate these groups into large systems for protection of trade. Habsburg Spain was the leading sea and naval power in Europe at this time, with ability to control the sea lines of communication from the North Sea to Mediterranean and from the straits between Italy and Tunis in the east to the Caribbean in the west. No European state had up to then successfully protected sea lines of that magnitude and importance.

One important difference was that in the Mediterranean, the state-controlled galley navies could also be used to control the ruler's interests when the maritime society was indifferent or hostile to them. This was important when much of these territories (Granada, Spanish towns

in North Africa, the Kingdom of Naples and other Spanish-controlled parts of Italy) were recently conquered. In the Atlantic, the Habsburgs were powerless at sea if their maritime subjects turned disloyal. This was soon to prove fatal for their control of the sea.

5. Stalemates and dynamic change, 1560-1600

In western Europe this period saw a breakdown of internal political stability and a new agenda for international relations. In the Mediterranean and the Baltic the period started with intense warfare, which ended in draws and were followed by some decades of fairly stable international relations. From 1580, warfare at sea was concentrated to western Europe and the Atlantic. Except in the Baltic, the Spanish monarchy was a main contender in all these conflicts. Which role had organised naval power in this transformation?[18]

   In the Baltic the importance of naval power was definitely proved in the power struggle of the 1560s when Denmark-Norway and Lübeck fought Sweden at sea during the Nordic Seven Years War (1563-70). From 1563 to 1566 naval warfare was dominated by a series of battles and operations with concentrated sailing battle fleets, which both aimed at controlling the Baltic Sea. The allied started with superior but to a considerable extent improvised naval forces, which were unable to inflict any decisive defeat on Sweden. Instead a rapidly increasing Swedish fleet broke the blockade of Swedish trade and cut off Lübeck's important trade with the northern Baltic and Russia. Sweden's lack of a large mercantile marine was no serious disadvantage as it was compensated by superiority in specialised warships, guns and (initially) adequate financial resources for an expansion of the state-owned navy. From 1570 the Swedish and Danish navies were the only naval forces in the Baltic Sea. They maintained

[18] Warfare at sea 1560-1600: GLETE 2000, pp. 103-108, 120-126, 145-164. Spanish naval history in this period: THOMPSON 1976, pp. 106-233, 256-273, HOFFMAN 1980, pp. 109-212, Ricardo CEREZO MARTINEZ, *Las armadas de Felipe II*, Madrid, 1988, Magdalena de PAZZIS PI CORRALES, *Felipe II y la lucha por el dominio del mar*, Madrid, 1989 and Enrique GARCÍA HERNÁN, *La armada española en la Monarquía de Felipe II y la defensa del Mediterráneo*, Madrid, 1996.

a balance of power, and the two kingdoms claimed that they had a shared *dominium* over this sea and the right to raise tolls from international trade that passed through it.[19]

Denmark-Norway used its navy to control the southern Baltic, the Danish straits and the waters between Denmark and Norway and raised toll on foreign shipping in the Sound in order to finance the protection, which this naval control provided. The navy was also a deterrent against attacks on Denmark-Norway, a state that more than any other in Europe was dependent on control of the sea for its defence. For Sweden, the navy became an instrument of power projection and empire building around the Baltic coast, an activity that would have been more or less impossible if Russia, Poland-Lithuania or the north German princes and cities had had major naval forces. The army was the main fighting force in Swedish expansion around the Baltic Sea from 1561 to 1660 but the army would have been unable to launch offensives across the sea if the navy had not controlled. Organised naval power, and the absence of it, was a decisive element, which changed the international power relations in the Baltic.[20]

In the Mediterranean, the confrontation between the Habsburg and Ottoman galley fleet culminated in the 1560s and 1570s. It was the Ottomans who had the quantitative superiority and they were on the offensive. The balance of power for a time shifted in Christian favour when Venice was attacked and its large galley navy was commissioned for active service together with the Habsburg forces (1570-73). The logistical problems with large offensive operations with oared fleets became obvious both in 1565 when the Ottoman attack on Malta failed in spite of a great initial superiority and after the great Christian victory at Lepanto in 1571. Even a drastic (if temporary) reduction of the Ottoman fleet was not sufficient to create

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[19] GLETE 2003.

[20] Jan GLETE, "Amphibious warfare in the Baltic, 1550-1700", in Mark Charles FISSEL & D. J. B. TRIM (eds), *Amphibious warfare c.1050-c.1725*, Leiden, forthcoming.

a new strategic situation in the Mediterranean. Galley fleets were not able to control the sea for long periods close to enemy bases. Without that, the enemy could not be blockaded and the lines of communication for an amphibious offensive into enemy waters could not be secured. Consequently, it became increasingly difficult to change the geostrategic situation in the Mediterranean and by 1580 both the Spanish Habsburgs and the Ottomans were ready to make a truce which proved lasting. Naval power, its strength as much as its inherent limitations, had been a major part in this settlement. Both empires continued to maintain major galley fleets in the Mediterranean in order to defend the existing balance of power, but these fleets proved increasingly inefficient to control the sea against gun-armed sailing ships from western Europe.[21]

From the early 1560s, conflicts between rulers and societies rather than strictly international struggles dominated in western Europe. France went through more than three decades of civil wars and one of the early victims was the French navy, which ceased to exist in the early 1570s. The revolting Huguenots controlled some French Atlantic ports from which they could send out privateers and the French coast was opened for foreign interventions supported from the sea. Both Spain and England used this opportunity. The Dutch revolt against Habsburg rule demonstrated the fragility of sea power based on the ruler's co-operation with maritime interests. The rebels initially took control of the sea with privateers and there was no navy under the ruler's control, which could protect communications between Spain and the Netherlands.[22] The massive army intervention, which Philip II organised against the revolt from 1567, was sent over land from Spain, Italy and Germany.

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[21] GUILMARTIN 1974, pp. 221-273, David GARCÍA HERNÁN & Enrique GARCÍA HERNÁN, *Lepanto, el día después*, Madrid 1999.

[22] J. C. A. de MEIJ, *De watergeuzen en de Nederlanden, 1568-1572*, Amsterdam, 1972.

When the Dutch revolt started anew in 1572 it was initiated from the sea, by Dutch privateers who had operated from English and French ports. There was still no Habsburg navy in the Netherlands to stop this intervention at an early stage and by 1574 even improvised Habsburg naval forces had been defeated. There was also no navy available in Spain to send to the Channel at a short notice. When a fleet of armed merchantmen finally had been organised for that purpose in 1574 its departure had to be cancelled because of epidemic illness.[23] By that time there was also no deep-water port left under Habsburg control in the Dutch provinces to which it could sail. Lack of Habsburg ports and sea power in the Channel and North Sea made conditions almost impossible for Habsburg shipping. Spanish merchants as well as Dutch merchants loyal to Habsburg lost the initiative in these waters to the rebels. This reduced Spanish mercantile competitiveness and increased that of the Dutch. Dutch supremacy in European trade had its origin in the early decades of the revolt. It may partly have been a result of the revolt. The mercantile groups in Holland and Zeeland had not been leaders of the early revolt but gradually they realized that it favoured them if they developed a coherent naval policy to defend their trade.[24]

Furthermore, the traditional Habsburg alliance with England did no longer work. England did not wish to help to re-establish strong Habsburg power close to its coast, especially not when no strong French monarchy existed to counterbalance it. Around 1570, England rather suddenly, and without any initiative of its own, faced a new strategic situation where its navy was the only organised force for control of the Channel and the North Sea. This gave opportunities for sending soldiers across the sea to the continent in support of allies in the

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[23] Magdalena PI CORRALES, *Espana y las potencias nórdicas: "La otra invencible", 1574*, Madrid, 1983.

[24] Jonathan I. ISRAEL, *Dutch primacy in world trade*, Oxford, 1989, pp. 12-79. The long-term development of Spain's trade with north-western Europe is discussed in Regina GRAFE, *Der spanische Seehandel mit Nordwesteuropa von der Mitte der sechzehnten bis zur Mitte der siebzehnten Jahrhunderts: Ein Forschungsüberblick*, Saarbrücken, 1998.

Netherlands (from 1585) and France (from 1589) but also to send fleets and army forces on long-distance operations. English naval superiority in the Channel became a strategic cornerstone in a new policy as it gave the rather limited English forces leverage in the conflict with the Spanish monarchy. In the very long run the same policy would give the British the operational freedom to create a world empire, thus radically changing the international situation.

Around 1580 a new power structure at sea in the Atlantic emerged. The Dutch formed a new republic where Holland and Zeeland organised a navy of small warships, which controlled the Dutch coasts and inland waters and blockaded Habsburg ports. The truce in the Mediterranean released Spanish resources for warfare in other regions. Philip II took control over Portugal and with that a sailing navy and an Atlantic base at Lisbon. Spain (Castile) also established a state-controlled sailing navy for protection of trade with America. In 1582 the combined Portuguese-Spanish naval power defeated a large but improvised French fleet, which attempted to take control of the Azores with the Portuguese pretender Sebastian as figurehead. Together with the Canaries, these isles were important for Iberian communications with America and foreign control of them would have been a disaster for trade and the financially all-important flow of silver to Spain. By 1585, Spain and England were at war in Europe after more than a decade of informal fighting outside Europe. Philip II saw this as an opportunity to achieve a decisive victory against his remaining enemies by a major effort in north-western Europe where he already had concentrated Europe's largest and best army in Flanders. If his navy could take control of the Channel, this army could invade England.

The result was the Armada campaign of 1588. The Spanish attempt to radically change the balance of power by sending a large fleet from one European region to another region where a strong enemy fleet operated was an ambitious operation that never before had been attempted

by any power. The failure confirmed that long-range battle fleet strategy was at or beyond the technological and logistical limits of naval power of this period. Most of the ships sent to Channel were large hired merchantmen but the nucleus of the Armada was Portuguese and Spanish warships and the administration of the expedition was run by the state. The fleet was fatally handicapped by the lack of a deep-water port in the Channel where it might have been re-provisioned and based for a long campaign. The English fleet was similarly composed of both the Queen's warships and many private ships, most of them small. Much of the fighting power was concentrated to the royal ships. In spite of that it operated close to its own coast even the English fleet suffered from serious logistical problems.[25]

After 1588 the Spanish monarchy made a determined effort to form Europe's largest sailing navy of specialised warships, but, given the distances and the constraints on naval power, it was mainly used for defensive purposes.[26] The navy could provide adequate defence for Spanish transatlantic trade and silver transports to Europe and it was normally able to deter the English from major attacks on Iberian coasts, partly by forcing the English to keep a fleet in the Channel against possible Spanish attacks. It was however not able to successfully deploy a battle fleet or an invasion force to the Channel and this was also an obstacle for Spanish military operations in France and the Netherlands. The English navy, in co-operation with ships on private ventures of warfare, could send expeditions to the waters where Spanish and Portuguese shipping passed to and from Europe and they could attack Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, but successes were limited as Spain spent more and more on defensive

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[25] The literature about the Armada Campaign is enormous, see Eugene L. RASOR, *The Spanish Armada of 1588: Historiography and annotated bibliography*, Westport, 1993.

[26] In contrast to the ships of the Armada of 1588, the many Spanish and Portuguese warships built from 1588 to the early seventeenth century have hardly been studied at all. As shown in Jose Luis CASADO SOTO, *Los barcos espanoles del siglo XVI y la Gran armada de 1588*, Madrid, 1988, the Spanish archives are rich in sources with information about warships and a similar study of the post-1588 navy would be important.

measures. The cost of both attacks and protection at sea was forced upward and the war reached a stalemate, which no side was able to break.

Just as in the Mediterranean and the Baltic, warfare in the Atlantic had by 1600 reached a situation where both sides used organised naval power as the main instrument of power at sea. As in the two inland seas this had led to a situation where the sea and trade close to the bases were protected but where it had been very difficult to change the balance of power with fleets deployed in foreign waters. The Spanish convoy system across the Atlantic was the most ambitious naval enterprise in these years and it was normally successful. England was occasionally successful in raiding operations, such as Cadiz in 1596, but the main effect of English efforts at sea was to increase Spanish costs for protection.

Partly as results of ambitions, partly to improve defence, permanent navies had thus by 1600 become a normal part of international power politics. Navies were often strengthened by hired ships for major war efforts, but the states were now deeply involved in the administration of sea power. There were seven major naval powers in Europe at this time: the Ottoman Empire, Venice, the Spanish monarchy, England, the Dutch Republic, Denmark-Norway and Sweden. The absence of organised French naval power is especially remarkable. It shows that the most populous country in Europe still was in a deep political crisis even after the end of the civil wars in the 1590s and not a serious contender for strong international power. One effect of French absence at sea was that it made Spanish naval policy easier. France had the geostrategic position to pose a serious threat at sea against the monarchy's widespread territories, but it did not use this advantage.

Primarily the permanent navies strengthened regional power rather than acting as forces of integration of European geostrategy and politics into one single system. The regions were however rather large: the western and eastern Mediterranean, south-western and north-western Europe and the Baltic. Outside Europe, the Spanish monarchy, now also including

Portugal was the only European power that had any permanent power at sea. The Caribbean was still largely Spanish with occasional intruders from England. In the Pacific only Spanish ships sailed on long distances. In the Indian Ocean the Portuguese had an extensive base system and a naval presence that no Asian or European power had seriously challenged. The Spanish monarchy did not rule the oceans - its naval presence was too thinly spread for that - but it was the first and still the only power in the world with a global presence of organised armed force, which might implement at least limited policy goals.

6. The first global war at sea, 1600-1650

The main contest at sea in this period was the Dutch-Iberian struggle, which took place around the world and made this the first global war ever. This is not always visible in the dominating Anglo-Saxon naval historiography where the period from 1603 to 1652 often is treated briefly as an interlude between the Anglo-Spanish War and the Anglo-Dutch Wars. It is more surprising that it has attracted only limited interest in Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese naval historiography. When it is treated at all it frequently looks as if the naval efforts of all three powers in this war failed. This is obviously wrong. The Dutch navy was remarkably efficient, Spanish naval forces were on the whole competent while the Portuguese naval efforts are perplexing; a series of disasters under Habsburg rule followed by a revival when Portugal after 1640 had to fight both Spain and the Dutch at the same time. From 1635 Spain also had to fight the new French navy, a naval war that has attracted little attention in both Spain and France. The lack of modern studies of naval policy, administration and operations in this period makes it difficult to reach more than tentative explanations of what happened.[27]

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[27] Warfare at sea 1600-1650: GLETE 2000, pp. 108-111, 126-130, 165-185. Major studies about Spanish naval power in this period: José ALCALA ZAMORA Y QUEIPO DE LLANO, *Espana, Flandes y el Mar del norte, 1618-1639*, Barcelona, 1975, RAHN PHILLIPS 1986, STRADLING 1992 and GOODMAN 1997. There are no modern monographic studies of Portuguese and Dutch naval policy, administration and operations in this period. Dutch war finance is studied in Marjoleine C. 't HART, *The making of a bourgeois state: War, politics and*

The main outline of the conflict at sea is that the Dutch attacked Iberian trade and colonial possessions outside Europe while the Habsburgs attacked Dutch shipping and trade in Europe. Both sides struck where the enemy was vulnerable but the Dutch also had strong ambitions to develop profitable transoceanic trade of their own, a strategy that required both offensive operations and protection. It also required a network of bases in Asia and America but that could also be used for trade in regions where Spain and Portugal earlier had enjoyed a monopoly. This intertwined mercantile and naval policy was implemented by two large monopoly companies, chartered by the Dutch Republic: the East India Company (founded in 1602) and the West India Company (1621). Both often used their ships as warships and the West India Company was as much an organisation for war as for trade. The Spanish-Portuguese naval forces had to spend large resources on convoys and defence of colonies and the results were mixed. By the 1630s, Portugal's trading empire in Asia was in ruins and the Dutch had conquered northern Brazil. Spain's position in the Caribbean was under pressure, the convoys were frequently delayed but only once, at Matanzas in 1628, did the Dutch capture a silver-carrying convoy.

Attacks on Dutch shipping in Europe were launched from both Spain and Flanders where Habsburg forces now controlled excellent bases for small and fast warships, especially Dunkirk. From the 1620s this became a central part of Spanish strategy, as an alternative to the offensives on land in the Netherlands, which by then had been without decisive results. A

finance during the Dutch revolt, Manchester, 1994. The Portuguese naval defence of its Indian Ocean trading empire is studied in James C. BOYAJIAN, *Portuguese trade in Asia under the Habsburgs, 1580-1640*, Baltimore, 1993, see also the reinterpretation of Ernst van VEEN, *Decay or defeat? An inquiry into the Portuguese decline in Asia, 1580-1645*, Leiden, 2000. Portuguese revival: Glenn J. AMES, *Renascent empire? The House of Braganza and the quest for stability in Portuguese Monsoon Asia, ca. 1640-1683*, Amsterdam, 2000. A broad study of warfare, diplomacy and economy in the Dutch-Iberian struggle is Jonathan I. ISRAEL, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic world, 1606-1661*, Oxford, 1982.

royal *armada* and many privateers attacked Dutch convoys and the North Sea fisheries.[28] A large number of Dutch prizes were captured, especially in the second phase of Spanish-Dutch warfare (1621-48) and privateering was evidently profitable, but the total result showed the limitations of trade warfare against determined defence organised by a navy. Dutch shipping had problems but there are no clear signs of that the Dutch really suffered any setback as the dominant trading nation in Europe.[29] The Dutch Republic was after all the only power that in this period provided its mercantile marine with systematic convoy protection in Europe and this may have created economies of scale in protection that never have properly investigated. Considering that the Spanish monarchy had vastly superior resources compared to the Dutch (a superiority of around 10:1 in population) this meant a failure for one of the main parts of the new Spanish maritime strategy.[30]

From the 1620s to the 1640s, Spain and the Dutch Republic maintained the two largest navies in Europe. As the Spanish navy was partially administrated by private entrepreneurs with long-term contracts from the state, the Dutch navy was for a few decades the largest state-administrated naval force in Europe.[31] It was administrated by five regional admiralties where the Dutch mercantile interests had a strong voice and this probably focused its

[28] STRADLING 1992 and R. BAETENS, *The organisation and effects of Flemish privateering in the seventeenth century*, "Acta historiae neerlandicae" 9 (1976), pp. 48-75.

[29] A brief discussion of the problem in GLETE 2000, pp. 168-171.

[30] Spanish grand strategy: John H. ELLIOTT, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The statesman in an age of decline*, New Haven, 1986, naval policy and maritime strategy, esp. pp. 122-123, 142-150, 214-216, 507-508.

[31] The existence of a large Dutch navy of purpose-built warships in this period is usually ignored or even denied in the literature where it often is presumed that the Dutch navy mainly consisted of hired ships. See however Johan E. ELIAS, *De vlootbouw in de Nederland, 1596-1655*, Amsterdam, 1933, and the detailed lists of Dutch warships in *Staet van Oorloge te water*, 1628, 1629, 1631 and 1633, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Staten General 1550-1796, Inv. nr. 8049, 8050, 8051, 8053. Copies of these lists have kindly been sent to me by Mr Jim Bender, USA.

activities on trade protection rather than battle fleet operations. It only rarely appeared in Spanish waters but the lack of Dutch naval offensive operations in Europe was partly a result of the Dutch strategy of striking at the enemy outside Europe rather than against the centre of Spanish power. As these operations to a large extent could be financed with profits from trade and captured goods they lowered the costs of Dutch warfare. The only possibility to decisively defeat Dutch attacks on the vast Iberian peripheries would have been a blockade of the Dutch ports, the origin of all Dutch offensives. Such a policy would also have ruined the Dutch maritime economy. It proved to be beyond Spanish naval capability.

The only major battle fleet operation in Europe in this war took place in September and October 1639 when the Spanish-Portuguese fleet was concentrated and sailed northwards for a decisive offensive strike against the Dutch fleet in the Channel and off the coast of Flanders. This operation was met by a hastily gathered but powerful Dutch fleet of convoy escorts and armed merchantmen and it ended with Dutch victory in the battle of the Downs. Next year, Habsburg sea power was seriously weakened when Portugal revolted and became an enemy to Spain. It is the more remarkable that the 1640s saw a limited but important revival of Spanish naval power, which in the Mediterranean was able to resist the attacks of the concentrated French battle fleet.

The French navy was recreated in the mid-1620s under the personal leadership of Richelieu. For him naval power was initially a necessity for gaining full control over the coastal provinces and for cutting the communications between the Huguenots, especially in La Rochelle and their foreign friends, primarily England. When France and Spain went to war in 1635 the French and Spanish navies operated in support of army operations both in the Bay of Biscay and the Mediterranean. From 1640 the activities were concentrated to the latter region when France attempted to use naval power for support of the Catalan revolt and for attempts to eliminate Spanish power in Italy. A series of battle fleet operations and major naval battles

took place from 1641 to 1648. Spain was mainly on the defensive but the defence was tenacious and the French successes during eight years were limited and not decisive.[32] They were eliminated after 1648 when central authority in France was shaken by revolts. This little known naval war was the first major contest between sailing fleets in the Mediterranean but also the first prolonged battle fleet contest between two West European navies. It was also the last independent Habsburg effort at sea which ended with an at least moderate success, as the Spanish navy contributed to containing French offensives in a period when Spain underwent a period of political and military crisis.

The importance of navies and warfare at sea for international power relations in this period has been underestimated. Naval historians have paid little attention to it and historians who have studied warfare and political power have usually been absorbed by army operations in the Netherlands, Germany and on the borders between France and the Spanish monarchy. Much of the driving force behind the long Dutch-Iberian struggle was maritime and both sides turned to offensives at sea when war on land proved indecisive. A different outcome of the war at sea between Spain and the Dutch might have markedly changed the power relations in Europe both in the short and long term. The relative importance of the Spanish-French battle fleet contest at sea is increased once it is realised that earlier estimates of the size of the French army in this period are overestimates.[33] The naval part of the French-Spanish war was important, as French control of the eastern Mediterranean might have led to the loss of Italy for Spain by French occupation or successful revolts.

The permanent navies in the first half of the seventeenth century were much smaller than in the latter half of the century but so were the permanent armies. Navies had however still not

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[32] R. C. ANDERSON, *The Thirty Year's War in the Mediterranean*, "Mariner's Mirror" 55 (1969), pp. 435-451, 56 (1970), pp. 41-57.

[33] David PARROTT, *Richelieu's army: War, government and society in France, 1624-1642*, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 164-222, considerably reduces earlier estimates of French army strength in this period.

markedly shifted the geostrategic balance by long-term deployment of concentrated fleets from one region to another. By 1650 there were five naval powers in western and south-western Europe: England, France, the Dutch Republic, Spain and Portugal. None had up to then showed a marked ability to exercise control of the sea far from their own bases. Spain had no longer an exclusive position outside Europe and Spanish shipping was no longer important in Europe. Spanish naval power could however protect the transatlantic convoys and the military communications between Spain and Italy, both imperial lifelines for a state that still was one of Europe's leading political powers. In 1650 its navy of sailing warships and galleys was one of the largest in Europe, possibly only surpassed by the recently expanded English navy. The Spanish monarchy was no longer a superpower but no other European power had replaced it in that position.

The long Dutch-Iberian struggle in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean was a remarkable demonstration of the potential of early modern European maritime technology for policy implementation in any part of the world. It foreshadowed the eighteenth century European struggle about world power with large battle fleets. It was however a naval war closely intertwined with trade and to a large extent fought with armed merchantmen. European sea and naval power outside Europe was still not effective without regional bases and financial support from profits from trade and privateering. In the Baltic and Levant, regional naval power was as usual important and even decisive for regional power struggles, a fact that was confirmed during new Swedish-Danish and Ottoman-Venetian wars in the 1640s, but these powers had no naval ambitions outside their home waters.

7. The rise of the great battle fleets, 1650-1700

This period saw major changes in the political balance of power in western Europe. The most important parts of this were the dramatic rise of France to the position as Europe's most powerful state and the equally dramatic decline of the Spanish monarchy. This process, which

occurred rather suddenly in the 1660s, caused a gradual transformation of the European alliance system from a loose alliance of most European states against the House of Habsburg (Spain and Austria) to a situation where the two maritime powers England and the Dutch Republic joined Spain, Austria and several German princes in order to counterbalance Louis XIV's ambitious foreign policy. This transformation took time however, and it was slowed down by deep Anglo-Dutch rivalry at sea and successful French diplomatic efforts to gain allies. The political system became more integrated and the same war was often fought on widely different theatres of operation. A part of this transformation was the rise of large navies, strong enough to influence the political and military situation at long distances and for long periods by deployments of battle fleets from one part of Europe to another.[34]

The rise of the great battle fleet began with the Civil War on the British Isles in the 1640s and continued with the First Anglo-Dutch War of 1652-54.[35] Like the two following Anglo-Dutch Wars it was a battle fleet contest with many intense battles fought for control of the Channel and the southern North Sea. These regions were decisive for control of trade and the territorial integrity of both states. Full control of the English navy had been important for the victory of the Parliament during the Civil War and the navy expanded rapidly, when the new Commonwealth regime both wished to defend the political outcome of the conflict from the royalists abroad and use the navy as an instrument of mercantile competition. This soon led to a conflict with the Dutch, now more powerful than ever in shipping and trade but with a reduced navy after peace with Spain was concluded in 1648. The first war was a clear English

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[34] Naval warfare 1650-1700: Richard HARDING, *Seapower and naval warfare, 1650-1830,* London, 1999, pp. 59-164, the naval balance of power 1650-1700: GLETE 1993, pp. 178-252.

[35] GLETE 1993, pp. 178-187. See also Robert BRENNER, *Merchants an revolution: Commercial change, political conflict, and London's overseas traders, 1550-1653*, Cambridge 1993, esp. pp. 432-434, 551-555 for the new interest aggregation behind a powerful English navy.

victory but also a start for a major armament race at sea where the Dutch soon equalled the English in naval strength.

In the latter half of the 1650s, the two powers together had around two thirds of Europe's total naval strength, a position that made it possible for them to deploy large fleets far from their home waters when they were not at war with each other. The English began from 1655 to use this freedom of operations with an attack on Spain in the Caribbean and against the Spanish trans-Atlantic trade. Spain was no longer able to deter such attacks with strong convoy escorts but retaliated efficiently with privateers. The new Dutch battle fleet was used against Portugal but it primarily became a useful tool of intervention in the Baltic in the last phase of Swedish imperial expansion (1655-60). Dutch naval forces limited Swedish ability to formulate the conditions for Dutch trade with the Baltic and possibly even saved Denmark-Norway as an independent state.[36] In the Second Anglo-Dutch war (1664-67), the Dutch gradually gained the upper hand, as they were more politically unified behind the war efforts.

In the 1660s, France joined the naval race and built a very large fleet of ships-of-the-line. The Mediterranean galley fleet was also increased and became at least equal to that of the Spanish monarchy.[37] The motivation behind this French naval expansion has seldom been discussed, apparently because it is taken for granted that France should have a navy of the same magnitude as the two maritime powers. Louis XIV's naval policy must however also be seen in the perspective of his recent experiences and his foreign policy where aggression towards the Spanish monarchy was the most consistent feature up to 1700. France had fought a desperate war with Spain from 1635 to 1659 but had been allied in that struggle with the Dutch (1635-48) and the English (1655-59). Louis XIV continued to seek alliances with one

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[36] A major study of naval warfare in the Baltic Sea in 1655-60 is Finn ASKGAARD, *Kampen om Östersjön på Carl X Gustafs tid*, Stockholm, 1974. Due to its language it is unfortunately unknown outside Scandinavia.

[37] A survey and reinterpretation of French naval policy and achievements under Louis XIV is Daniel DESSERT, *La Royale, Vaisseaux et marins du Roi-Soleil*, Paris, 1996.

of the two maritime powers until they were unified under the Dutch stadholder William III in 1688-89. Louis XIV had clearly no intention of making the maritime powers his main enemies as long as they did not interfere with his continental ambitions. These ambitions were primarily directed against Spanish power in the Netherlands and Italy. It is therefore useful to analyse the great expansion of the French navy as a part of his policy towards Spain.

If France could cut the lines of communication between Spain, the Netherlands and Italy the Spanish monarchy would be divided and unable to concentrate its forces. In 1661, when the naval expansion started, recent French experiences of warfare at sea were operations against Spain (1635-59). These experiences showed that it required a markedly superior sailing navy for control of the sea and for support of the army in Italy and along the coasts of Biscay and Catalonia if Spain should be decisively defeated. France had not achieved that superiority and in the 1650s, the Spanish navy was larger than the French. War experience had also showed that galleys were still useful as a supplement to sailing warships in the Mediterranean, especially in amphibious operations. The size of the Spanish navy in this period cannot have determined French naval policy, as Spain was the only naval power in Europe that did not markedly or drastically increase its navy from 1650 to 1700. In fact, Spain reduced the size of its navy in this period. French policy-makers could however not know that in advance and a Spanish naval revival must have been a distinct possibility. Furthermore, it became increasingly clear that the maritime powers were interested in the future of the Spanish monarchy, the Mediterranean and Atlantic trades and the American colonies. The Dutch and the English became contenders for the future of the Spanish monarchy and their efforts to promote their interest was based on naval power, something France must counter.

The great French naval expansion under Colbert and Louis XIV is often viewed as a competition with the Dutch and the British navies, because it was with these powers it actually fought major naval wars. As an instrument of power against them it is often regarded

as a failure of French policy, because the two maritime powers won the naval wars and the French navy rapidly declined in the early eighteenth century. From Louis XIV's perspective, his great navy may however primarily have been an instrument of dividing Habsburg power in Europe into three separate spheres, as a part of his long-term dynastic goal of dominating continental Europe. It is thus logic that Louis left the navy to decline when his own dynasty in 1700 gained control over Spain and the Bourbons came to control a solid block of territories no longer separated by the sea. Control of the sea was still important for victory in Europe and for warfare in the Atlantic but not absolutely essential for his fundamental policy goals as it had been before 1700.[38]

The integration of warfare in Europe and its naval dimension became obvious in the wars that Louis XIV started in 1672 and ended in 1679. England and France fought in alliance against the Dutch Republic from 1672 to 1674 but their combined fleets repeatedly failed to defeat the Dutch fleet in battle. From 1674, the smaller Dutch navy actually took to the offensive against France and deployed squadrons to the Mediterranean in support of Spain, to the Baltic in support of Denmark and Brandenburg-Prussia against France's remaining ally, Sweden and against French colonies in the Caribbean. These operations were successful in the Baltic where the Danish-Dutch fleet defeated the Swedish fleet and took control of the southern Baltic Sea. This almost ruined the Swedish empire but Louis XIV saved it in 1679, partly because he could threaten Denmark with his navy after peace was concluded with the Dutch in 1678. Other Dutch operations were less successful but it is interesting that the much larger but less experienced French navy failed to launch offensives against the Dutch and their

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[38] This interpretation of French naval policy was briefly suggested in GLETE 1993, pp. 187-191. See also the interpretation of French foreign policy in Paul SONNINO, *Louis XIV and the origins of the Dutch War*, Cambridge, 1988.

allied, except in the Mediterranean, where it was able to open the sea for a French invasion of Sicily in 1676.[39]

In the Levant, Venice and the Ottoman Empire fought a long war from 1645 to 1669 about Crete, a war Venice finally lost. It was to a large extent been a naval war and both navies started a transformation from oared to sailing warships. This resulted in two new major sailing battle fleets, which fought another long, and little studied war about control of Peloponnesus (Morea) and the Aegean from 1684 to 1699. As Venice fought as allies with Austria and Russia in the latter war and Russia created its first navy in the Black Sea in the 1690s, it foreshadowed a further integration of European power politics when the power struggle in eastern and western Europe came closer to each other and Russia appeared as a major naval power in the eighteenth century.[40]

The apogee of naval warfare with large battle fleets in this period was the war from 1689 to 1697 where the two maritime powers fought France from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. Dutch naval power was important for the success of the Glorious Revolution in 1688-89 and naval power became important for cutting the lines of communication between England, Scotland and Ireland and the French-supported Jacobite forces. The English-Dutch defeat of the French fleet in 1692 finally settled the question of power over Britain and France started a large-scale war against Dutch and English trade instead of continuing large battle fleet operations. Victory and control of the Channel also gave the maritime powers the relative strength that enabled them to start major naval operations in the Mediterranean in support of their Spanish ally and their own trade.[41]

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[39] R. C. ANDERSON, *The Sicilian War of 1674-1678*, "Mariner's Mirror" 57 (1971), pp. 239-265.

[40] R. C. ANDERSON, R. C., *Naval wars in the Levant, 1559-1853*, Liverpool, 1952, pp. 121-242.

[41] Two important studies of naval policy and administration in this war are John EHRMAN, *The navy in the war of William III, 1689-1697: Its state and direction*, Cambridge, 1953 and Geoffrey SYMCOX, *The crisis of French sea power, 1688-1697: From the* Guerre d'escadre *to the* Guerre de course, The Hague, 1974.

This war was fought with larger navies than ever before in Europe and from now it became common to see Anglo-Dutch battle fleets controlling the Mediterranean and the Iberian coasts as contributions to the grand strategy of the anti-French alliance. The maritime powers had earlier (1656, 1658-60, 1675-77), and again in 1700, showed their ability to intervene in and even decide wars in the Baltic Sea between Sweden and Denmark-Norway. European naval power was no longer a structural factor that maintained geostrategic limits between European regions. The rise of the three great battle fleets in western Europe had been an important part of the geographical integration of warfare and political struggles in Europe. Sweden and Denmark-Norway stayed outside the west European conflict in he 1690s but their navies were powerful enough to make the two maritime powers allow large-scale neutral trade with France as a way to keep the Nordic powers friendly.[42]

It remains remarkable that Spain did not participate in the dynamic development of larger and more capable battle fleets after 1650. The monarchy still had one of Europe's largest navies in 1650 but in the two following decades it lost control of its home waters to French, Dutch and English battle fleets. It was only the fact that one or both of the two maritime powers normally supported Spain against France up to 1700 that explains why this did not turn to a disaster for the monarchy. The Spanish galley fleet apparently remained stable at a level of around 30 units until 1700 while the sailing navy declined to a much smaller force in the 1670s than it had been around 1650. In the 1680s, when Spain's largely enjoyed peace, a considerable program of new construction was undertaken. By 1690 Spain was again a naval power of some importance. The navy was at about the same level as the two Nordic states, although the three great navies were at least two to four times as large. The 1690s was a new

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[42] Danish and to some extent Swedish neutral shipping and foreign policy 1688-97: Dagny JÖRGENSEN, *Danmark-Norge mellom stormakterne, 1688-1697: Dansk-norsk sjöfart og utenrikspolitikk under den pfalziske arvefölgekrig*, Oslo, 1976.

period of Spanish decline while the other navies markedly expanded. The Spanish warships that remained were primarily used for protection of the trans-Atlantic trade.[43] By 1700 the Spanish navy ranked as number eight in Europe, after France, England, the Dutch Republic, Sweden, Denmark-Norway, Venice and the Ottoman Empire. Portugal and Russia had navies of about the same size as Spain but both were in a process of rapid expansion.

An important part of the explanation of why the administrative and technical restrictions on naval power gradually were reduced in Europe is improved political interest aggregation and better fiscal organisations. The central states gradually became more efficient in raising and centralising resources and that made it easier to pay for personnel, warships, weapons and naval infrastructure. State formation created the foundations for the large European battle fleets and made it possible to realize more ambitious naval policies. But it is important to underline that there must be political ambitions behind participation in a naval race of the type which took place in Europe from 1650 to the late 1690s. Organisational structures and economic resources do not explain everything and the existence of a competition does obviously not mean that every state join it. Spain had been an organisational pioneer as a powerful fiscal-military state in the sixteenth century and up to around 1660 it was one of Europe's most powerful states. From the 1660s the monarchy ceased to take part in the competition for European power. At sea it left to allied navies to control the European coasts and sea lines of importance for the monarchy. In a period when there was little driving force from the political centre of the monarchy, its component parts (Castile, Aragon, Valencia, Catalonia, Naples, Sicily, Milan, the southern Netherlands) showed little ambition to uphold a large navy. This indicates that the main driving force behind the navy had been a dynastic policy to keep a geographically divided conglomerate state together.

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[43] GLETE 1993, p. 211 and Pablo Emilio PÉREZ-MALLAÍNA BUENO, *Política naval espanola en el Atlántico, 1700-1715*, Sevilla, 1982, pp. 379-390.

The Spanish navy did not revive until after 1714 when Spain was no longer a conglomerate state spread over Europe. It rapidly grew to one of the three largest navies in Europe, a position it held until around 1800. This is another story, largely about colonial and mercantile competition and power struggles in the Atlantic and America, but it again shows that Spanish ability to maintain a powerful navy was closely related to political ambitions.[44]

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[44] GLETE 1993, pp. 255-293, 375-401.

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