

The Drake-Norris expedition: english naval strategy in the sixteenth century

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With the exception of Flanders, there was probably no country with which sixteenth-century English seamen were more familiar than Spain, the destination of several of the most important branches of English overseas trade. Though by the latter part of the century the Reformation had cut off the once flourishing pilgrim trade to Santiago, which for centuries had been the only long-distance passenger traffic carried by English ships, there remained many commercial links which brought English ships to Spanish ports. These were mainly to the ports of the North and West coasts, and by the 1570s the most valuable was probably to Andalusia. Many English merchants were settled in the Duke of Medina Sidonia's port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, conveniently close to Seville and the Carrera de Indias. Either legally, through the agency of members of the Casa de Contratación in Seville, or illegally by means of false papers, many of them traded heavily in colonial imports from the Americas. Their principals and partners in England were the leading London merchants dealing in colonial goods, and the provincial exporters of wheat and other English commodities which could be sold in Spain.

This flourishing traffic necessarily passed by the coasts of Galicia. England was far behind Spain, Portugal or France in the development of ocean navigation, but by the 1570s even the most backward English skippers were competent to make the run across the Bay of Biscay from Ushant to a landfall at Cape Finisterre (the «North Cape» in contemporary English parlance), Cape Prior or Cape Ortegal, thence to coast down to Cape St. Vincent

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(the «South Cape»), and in to one of the Andalusian ports. Naturally they were familiar with the Galician coasts, and often came into Galician ports for one reason or another. In spite of the uneasiness introduced into Anglo-Spanish relations by the Reformation, in spite of the activities of English pirates and interlopers in the Caribbean, this traditional trade continued to flourish throughout the 1570s. In those days seaborne trade was more tolerant of violence than it would be to-day. The ancient legal practice of letters of reprisal, by which a merchant or shipowner who had failed to find satisfaction for piracy in the courts of the state responsible, was authorised to recompense himself by force at the expense of the fellow-countrymen of the alleged attacker, had accustomed seafarers for centuries to carry on ordinary trade in the midst of a situation which often verged on undeclared war. In the eyes of the twentieth century, it may seem that hostilities between England and Spain had reached the level of open war not later than 1580, the year when Francis Drake returned from his famous voyage round the world ballasted with Spanish silver and was knighted by the Queen; the year troops were landed in Ireland by Spanish warships to support rebellion against the English crown. Contemporaries, however, were able and willing to accept the situation as falling short of war, and offering no impediment to an ancient and profitable trade. Those many English merchants and shipowners involved in trade with Spain formed a powerful lobby against any warlike move which might disturb it.

What changed the situation for the English was the Spanish embargo of May 1585, which was arguably one of King Philip II's most serious political errors. The English merchants trading to Spain lost heavily, and their profitable commerce was interrupted. From being a force for peace, they were transformed into a powerful voice for revenge and reprisals. The London merchants involved were wealthy, with capital and ships now idle. They dealt in colonial products, which they could no longer obtain by legal means. They were familiar —personally familiar, in many cases— with Spain, her language and her empire. The result of the embargo was to give a powerful and immediate boost to English raiding and illegal trade in the West Indies, as those who had lost ships, money and friends in Spain sought revenge and recompense at Spanish expense abroad; and those who needed sugar, spices, silks and gums to supply their customers, sought by violent means what they could no longer obtain peacefully. In the medium term, the cutting-off of English trade to Spain and Portugal encouraged the English to seek their own routes to the East Indies as well. The merchants who had lost trade to Spain were prominent among those active in the new Levant Company (founded in 1580), importing oriental goods via Turkish ports in the eastern Mediterranean; and later in the East India Company, attacking directly the Portuguese monopoly of the Far Eastern trades.

Thus was constructed, or at least much strengthened, one of the main pillars of the Elizabethan naval war effort. It was characteristic of the sixte-

enth century that even the strongest and richest state —which of course was Spain— was not strong and rich enough to wage war at sea entirely from its own resources. A decayed post-imperial power like England, barely maintaining a position in the second rank of European powers, was much less able to do so. England's last overseas possession, Calais, was lost in 1558. Thirty years later, it has been calculated that Philip II's annual revenues were at least eight times those of Queen Elizabeth. It was out of the question for her to engage in a direct competition with her brother-in-law in that most expensive and complex of all undertakings of the state, naval warfare. All her foreign policy over twenty years of war with Spain was directed to avoiding confrontation with Christendom's most formidable military machine. Her priority was always to fight, if fighting were unavoidable, in circumstances in which there was least to lose and most to gain. The function of war, at sea as on land, was for her to keep danger as far away from England as possible. Queen Elizabeth and her wiser ministers had no idea of seeking victory over Spain in any grand strategic sense; for them, the first essential was survival, and there were long periods when it seemed extremely doubtful if they could preserve the three essential bases of their position: the life of the Queen, the territorial integrity of England, and the establishment of a Protestant church. It is important to emphasize that the Queens's aims were limited, defensive and realistic. Outright victory was for superpowers: England's highest ambition was survival.

To achieve it the Queen and her ministers had to direct, as far as they could, a coalition of forces and interests. From her own resources, the Queen could contribute a Royal Navy which was probably the most powerful single naval force in the western world —but that power must not be exaggerated. At a moment of supreme effort, for a few weeks in the summer of 1588, the Queen managed to keep twenty-five major warships (of 100 tons or more) at sea in home waters. Though the Royal Navy was maintained by what was certainly the most efficient naval administration of its day, it was a fragile instrument, incapable of staying at sea for more than a few months at most, or of operating more than a few hundred miles from its bases. The limitations of contemporary technology (in particular the technology of food preservation), the near-impossibility of keeping large bodies of seamen or soldiers in health for a prolonged campaign, made it extremely difficult for any sixteenth-century fleet to mount a major overseas expedition. For the Queen, an acute shortage of money made it impossible to mount any major operations whatsoever without the participation of her subjects. When open war began in 1585, she had accumulated by years of prudent management a financial reserve of something over £300,000, about equal to one year's ordinary revenues. By the end of 1587 half of it had gone; at the end of 1588 there was only £55,000 left. By comparison, Philip II's revenues over the same period were about eight million ducats a year (£2.2 million), and rising rapidly. He received from the Americas alone nearly 19 million ducats bet-

ween 1581 and 1590, and more than 25 million between 1590 and 1600. Unlike Philip II, moreover, the Queen had virtually no means of borrowing money, except small sums at very short term and ruinous cost. She had no secure, long-term revenues to mortgage. What could not be paid for in cash, could not be paid for at all.

So private interests had to be involved to make war on any scale. They could not be forced to contribute against their will, for the English monarchy did not possess powers adequate to coerce its subjects without Parliamentary consent. At a time of manifest national danger as in 1588, shipowners and seaports were prepared to contribute ships at their own expense to a fleet commanded by the Queen's officers. At other times they regarded themselves as investors in joint-stock enterprises which they expected to yield a profit. The Queen herself was the leading investor in private syndicates from which she too needed and expected to earn a dividend. Almost all the major Elizabethan naval operations outside home waters were organised in this way. The Queen appointed the commanders, issued their instructions and hoped to influence if not control their movements, but she could not alter the fact that private interests, hers as well as theirs, often diverged from interests of state. Moreover her ministers and officers, like herself, were private investors and shipowners. All the great men at court from Lord Burghley the Lord Treasurer downwards, invested in privateering and piracy. The Lord Admiral of England, Lord Howard of Effingham, not only derived a large income as Admiral from the profits of private war at sea, but himself several privateers. Many other leading noblemen and gentlemen had investments in privateering, and some were themselves sea commanders of note. The senior officers and administrators of the Queen's ships were for the most part shipowners, privateers, merchants and naval contractors themselves. Commanders like Drake and Norris combined the rôles of commanders-in-chief appointed by the Crown, and military entrepreneurs assembling syndicates of investors, shipowners and contractors. The Royal Navy was only the solid core of a national naval effort which was largely provided at private expense, and operated of private profit. From the Spanish point of view, the English were a nation of pirates, ruled by a pirate queen.

All this is very relevant to the organization of the 1589 Drake-Norris expedition. Planning for it started almost as soon as the 1588 Armada was clear of the North Sea, but it took several months before the Queen's ships were refitted after that campaign, and longer still to assemble the necessary coalition of interests and investors. The Queen and her ministers had their eyes firmly on the survivors of the Spanish fleet. It was rightly supposed that many ships had got back to Spain in a lamentable condition, and would be found in port unrigged, unmanned and more or less defenceless. It was known that the galleons of the *Guarda de Indias* had been taken to form part of the 1588 fleet, and that in consequence no *Flota* had sailed from the West Indies that year. Exceptionally rich shipments of silver could therefore be

expected in 1589. It was obvious that Spanish prestige had suffered an enormous blow, and it was hoped that Philip II's new kingdom of Portugal, occupied in 1580, might be persuaded to rebel in favour of the English-backed pretender Dom Antonio.

In the initial stages of the planning, the English assumed that the survivors of the *Enterprise of England* had returned to their port of assembly, Lisbon. On this assumption it was possible to draft a feasible plan of campaign which more or less reconciled all the major interests involved. The expedition would go first to Lisbon. With the help of a siege train which the Queen was to provide, the landing forces would take the forts guarding the Tagus and allow the ships to attack the anchorage. From Lisbon the force was to proceed down the coast towards Seville and the Azores, aiming to attack the nodal points of the trans-Atlantic trade and sweep up the incoming silver fleets, to the damage of Spain and the profit of the investors.

Given a fair measure of luck, all this might have been possible within the three or four months which was the longest time such an expedition could reasonably hope to remain efficient. But the prospect of attacking Lisbon encouraged the friends of Don Antonio, not least among them Sir Francis Drake, sure of his divine mission to undermine the Church of Rome. So the expedition's instructions were modified so that if, but only if, the Portuguese rose in rebellion, it might at this point help Dom Antonio to his throne. Many of its London backers were keenly interested in this possibility, from which they expected to gain free entry to the Indies trades. This was already a dangerous distraction from the expedition's original priority. Further problems arose when it was learned in October 1588 that most of the survivors of the Armada were not in Lisbon, but scattered among the ports of northern Spain, with the largest number in Santander and San Sebastián, well down into the Bay and far to leeward of the route to Lisbon. Any fleet which went that way was condemned to a long beat out of the Bay before it could go anywhere else. Down there lay the most urgent military objective of the force, but hardly any prospects of making money.

Thus the expedition finally sailed with instructions which provided for three different, more or less incompatible objectives. For the Queen, as her orders made absolutely clear, the priority was to destroy the Spanish galleons while they lay helpless in exposed ports. For many of the captains and some of the investors, the main objective (and for the Queen a secondary objective) was the incoming *flotas*, laden with silver, to be intercepted at the Azores. For Drake and Norris, it is clear, their hopes were more and more directed to the chance of putting Dom Antonio on the throne of Portugal. Thus they would strike a mighty blow against the King of Spain, worthy of ambitions inflamed by the triumph of the previous year. No longer content to sing the King of Spain's beard, they intended to cut off one of his limbs. For dealing with the remains of the Armada in northern ports the large landing force and siege train which had been planned to attack Lisbon were

unnecessary, and a compact naval force would have sufficed. But the Queen could not afford to provide such a force from her own resources, and the other investors, led by Drake and Norris, insisted on a substantial body of troops. In the end the fleet sailed with more than the planned 12,000 soldiers, but without the siege train. It was equipped to occupy one of the Azores, but not to attack major fortifications such as Lisbon and the Tagus forts.

It seems to be virtually certain that the two commanders had secretly decided before they even sailed that they would disobey the Queen and ignore the Spanish galleons. No doubt they flattered themselves that the stroke they about to deliver would make up for any number of lost opportunities elsewhere. But it was not wise openly to defy the Queen, even if one aimed for a resounding success which would cover many sins, so they decided on an operation which would give some appearance of satisfying her orders, without seriously diverting them from their real objective. One of the ports of Galicia was the obvious target, which could be visited without wasting any time going to leeward of Cape Ortegal. Corunna was not chosen because it was itself of much importance to any of the English leaders, nor because there were many Spanish ships there —there were in fact only three of any size— but because it was conveniently situated to make a show of obeying the Queen's orders, without wasting much time. As a show, the landing was an undoubted success. Nine thousand men were put ashore in good order and the lower town quickly taken, with a large store of provisions. Norris then wasted time in a futile attempt to take the upper town, which was of no value to them, without siege guns. In the end a fortnight was spent at Corunna, with very little achieved. The English infantry, it is true, behaved better than most people had expected. They fought well, defeating a Spanish force at Puente de Burgos, they preserved discipline, they even remained sober for some time —but they bought their fortnight's exercise at a high price.

By the time the force arrived off the Tagus, the Spanish authorities in Portugal had had sufficient warning to take every precaution. There was now much less chance of forcing the river and taking the city by *coup de main*, which might otherwise have been their best hope. Any hint of support for Dom Antonio had been ruthlessly suppressed. When the English troops landed at Peniche on 16th May and set off to march the 45 miles to Lisbon, the pretender aroused some expressions of sympathy, but no active support. They reached the suburbs of Lisbon without serious difficulty, but could make no impression on the city itself without a siege train. Having waited for a leading wind, Drake was just about to attempt to force the narrows of the Tagus with the best ships of the fleet when the army returned. On 5th June the last troops were re-embarked.

There was now nothing left to do but try for some success in the Azores with the decreasing number of men who were not yet sick, and for ten days they struggled vainly against southerly winds. By 20th they had been driven north as far as the Bayona islands, the familiar rendezvous and watering-place

of so many English squadrons. There they landed as many men as were still fit to fight (2,000) and took Vigo. Another attempt to take the best and healthiest ships to the Azores was frustrated by a gale, and by early July the whole expedition was back in England with virtually nothing achieved, and about 40% of the expedition's original total of about 21,000 men dead of disease.

This fiasco did a good deal to counterbalance Spain's disaster in 1588. If it did nothing to present Spanish arms in a glorious light, at least it showed that they had no monopoly of incompetence. England lost what proved to be her last opportunity to strike a decisive blow against reviving Spanish sea power. The ships they might have destroyed were saved to escort the *flotas* safe back to Seville for the rest of the war, and form the core of two further invasion fleets against England. In the words of an English agent at St. Jean-de-Luz, «It Sir Francis had gone to Santander as he went to the Groyne (Corunna), he had done such a service as never subject had done. For with 12 sail of his ships he might have destroyed all the forces which the Spaniards had there, which was the whole strength of their country by sea. There they did lie all unrigged and their ordnance on shore and some 20 men in a ship only to keep them. It was far overseen that he had not gone thither first».

Looking back from the twentieth century, we can see clearly how the weakness and poverty of England forced Queen Elizabeth to mount her expedition by combining public and private interests in a uneasy coalition, without having any effective mechanism to resolve strategic conflicts of interest. Neither at home nor abroad was her authority over her subjects sufficient to impose her will. If she had commanded the same formidable military discipline as the Spanish fleet had displayed the previous year, if Drake and Norris had obeyed her sound and hopeful plan with the same unquestioning submission as the Duke of Medina Sidonia had shown to Philip II's unworkable orders then, a great triumph was within her grasp. In many respects the failure of the English expedition shows to us, as it showed to contemporaries, how weak and primitive England still was by comparison with the greatest power of the age. Poor, ill-armed, peripheral in diplomacy as well as geography, crippled by the survival of an archaic Parliamentary constitution, England was ill equipped to face the great centralised monarchies of Continental Europe. So at least it seemed then, and for at least two centuries more, to many observers in Spain, France, Austria, Prussia and elsewhere.

In the short term they were probably right, but it is possible nevertheless to see in the English failure in 1589 the seeds of success far in the future. The expedition failed because it was made up of different interests with different, and as it proved irreconcilable, objectives. Nevertheless it was significant that in this expedition, as in the Elizabethan naval war in general, so many interests were involved. From the Queen through great noblemen and city merchants, shipowners and shipmasters in many ports, country gentlemen and common seamen, a very wide spectrum of the people of England learnt

to look for their private gain and their country's glory in a war at sea. Defence or offence, fame or fortune, loot or trade, gold or religion; their objectives were varied and often contradictory, but they all learnt to look the same way to achieve them. The foundations were being laid for a national coalition, agreeing for different reasons on the same policy, a policy based on supremacy at sea and expansion overseas. These foundations rested largely on a myth, the myth of profitable war, the myth of vulnerable Spanish galleons laden with silver only waiting to be ushered into English ports. It was a myth which grew up in the sixteenth century, and had not lost its power in the eighteenth. Never once did the English bring it to reality, but it helped in time to generate the climate of public opinion which really did in the end make England a great power.

In Spain, by contrast, all the wealth and power of Christendom's wealthiest and most powerful monarchy were turned in other directions. When the decision was taken to assemble the 1588 fleet, virtually all the naval administration had to be improvised. To take a single example, the post of Captain-General of the Artillery was filled by the appointment of Don Juan de Acuña Vela in March 1587, less than six months before the Armada's first sailing orders were issued. He found virtually nothing ready. Guns, ammunition, and small arms were all in acute shortage. In all Spain there was no shot-foundry and only a handful of gunfounders. Don Juan had personally to scour the fortresses of Spain and Portugal in search of guns; he himself inspected each ship as she arrived in Lisbon; he procured timber for guncarriages; he let contracts with gunfounders, powdermakers and small-arms makers all over Europe. He wrote to every country in search of guns for sale, and of copper and tin from which to cast more. He negotiated with recalcitrant local authorities in Lisbon to find sites for a foundry and a storehouse. He designed the foundry and superintended its building, he designed the guns and acted as forgemaster. One devoted public servant and his clerk, with little money, little time and little help, was left to improvise the most important single element of the enterprise. His counterpart in England was the Ordnance Board, an established administration already more than forty years old, with a large staff of clerks and artificers, with extensive stocks of guns and ammunition, a strategic reserve of over three thousand tons of gunmetal, established links and standing contracts with a considerable number of gun and shotfounders who had been casting for the Board for a generation. In spite of England's weakness and poverty, its naval administration was well in advance of Spain's.

The Spanish fleet in 1588 was found, as later fleets were found, largely from merchant shipping forced unwillingly into a service which promised no profit and many risks. Spanish shipowners and seamen suffered very severely from this and other naval efforts of the Spanish crown. In the long term, the Spanish maritime community was forced by the monarchy to bear the burden of a national effort at sea with little support. No national coalition of

interests came together to back war and trade at sea; the shipowners remained, like the empire itself, a source of resources to be exploited, rather than of interests which had to be conciliated. The result was that Spanish shipping declined steadily even as Spanish power rose. By the time another generation of naval efforts had led to the catastrophes of Guetaría in 1638 and the Downs in 1639, the impositions of the state had largely destroyed Spanish merchant shipping, especially in the once-flourishing northern ports. The English naval war was unsuccessful on the strategic offensive, but the national consensus in favour of naval war was steadily strengthening, and many of its elements prospered. Though Drake and Norris failed, and their investors lost heavily, those same investors were making money in many other, less ambitious ventures. The money they made and the lessons they learnt went in due course into the foundation of the English East India Company and another generation of profitable expansion overseas. So in a sense the very incoherence of Elizabethan naval strategy, so often marked by chaotic greed rather than sober purpose, so ill-adapted to direct overseas expeditions to success, contained seeds of future greatness which the more centralised Spanish system did not.

There is another historical irony which it is worth referring to, though perhaps it carries us very far from the events of 1589. Few if any of those involved knew enough medieval history to realise it, and not many know enough to-day, but in the broad lines of the Elizabethan English naval war against Spain we may trace a re-enactment on the grand scale of another naval war two centuries before. In the fourteenth century the most formidable military power in Western Europe maintained a great overseas empire, but for want of anything like a regular navy, it depended on requisitioned merchant shipping to sustain the imperial sea routes. As the empire was subjected to growing strains, so the merchant fleet was more and more heavily burdened. As the empire weakened, its shipping decayed with it. Meanwhile almost the poorest and remotest of all European states, backward and isolated, redeemed her military impotence and gained an influence out of all proportion to her real strength by the possession of a small but efficient navy. With this squadron she intervened against her enemies, notably against the great empire. Over many years the repeated raids of this little squadron exhausted and humiliated its enemy, contributing powerfully to her military and imperial decline abroad, rebellion and collapse at home.

The decaying imperial power of the fourteenth century was England, and the naval squadron which did so much to weaken that empire was the galleys of Castile. The officers who commanded the galleons of the *Guarda de Indias* in the sixteenth century must often have passed by the *ataranzas* of Seville whence the galleys of Luis de la Cerda, Fernán Sánchez de Tovar and Fernán Ruiz Cabeza de Vaca had put to sea two hundred years before to terrorise the Channel. We do not know if they reflected on the connections

between sea power and empire, just as we do not know if any of Queen Elizabeth's naval commanders looked back to the days when the Castilians had burnt Portsmouth and blockaded the Thames. It probably would not have changed the course of history if they had done, but it might have given them all some food for thought.

La expedición Drake-Norris: estrategia naval inglesa en el siglo XVI

(Extracto)

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Hacia 1570 existía un floreciente tráfico comercial entre Inglaterra y España, especialmente con Andalucía. Es lógico que los ingleses estuvieran familiarizados con las costas gallegas. La situación cambia con el «embargo» español de mayo de 1585, uno de los más serios errores de Felipe II. Supuso graves pérdidas para la marina comercial británica e impulsó el comercio ilegal hacia las Indias Occidentales. Esto impulsó también el esfuerzo naval de la reina Isabel.

Inglaterra era entonces una nación de segundo rango. Hacia 1588, se calcula que los ingresos de Felipe II eran por lo menos ocho veces superiores a los de la reina Isabel. La política de ésta evitaba por tanto una confrontación directa. La reina Isabel y sus prudentes ministros no pensaban en una victoria sobre España en sentido de amplitud estratégica. Los objetivos de la reina eran limitados, defensivos y realistas. Las victorias eran para las superpotencias: la mayor ambición de Inglaterra era sobrevivir.

En cuanto a marina, contaban los ingleses con la fuerza naval más poderosa del mundo occidental, pero no hay que exagerar este poder. Aunque se contaba con la administración naval más eficiente de aquel tiempo, las limitaciones de la tecnología (conservación de alimentos, enfermedades, etc.) hacía muy difícil montar grandes expediciones navales. La economía de la reina era muy limitada: a fines de 1588, sus reservas eran sólo 55.000 libras. Felipe II contaba con 2,2 millones de libras anuales. Pero en momentos de peligro, como en 1588, los propietarios de buques y puertos estaban preparados para aportar naves a sus expensas a una flota mandada por los oficiales de la reina. Los propios ministros y oficiales eran inversores privados y propietarios de buques. La Marina Real operaba por interés privado.

Todo esto va a explicar la expedición Drake-Norris de 1589, planeada a continuación de 1588 con el fracaso de la Invencible. Se sabía que los galeo-

nes de la Guarda de Indias habían intervenido en el 1588 y que en consecuencia no habría Flota de Indias en el 89.

Se creía que los supervivientes del 88 estaban en LISBOA. La expedición iría a LISBOA y luego a SEVILLA y LAS AZORES para atacar los puntos nodales del comercio americano. En LISBOA se apoyaría a D. Antonio y se alzarían los portugueses a su favor.

Pero los supervivientes no estaban en LISBOA sino en los puertos del Norte de España. Finalmente, la expedición tenía tres objetivos:

- Para la Reina: destruir los galeones en los puertos.
- Para muchos de los capitanes y algunos inversores: las flotas que llegaban cargadas de plata.

- Para Drake y Norris: colocar a D. Antonio en el trono de Portugal.

La flota sale con más de doce mil soldados pero sin tren de sitio: no preparada para atacar fortificaciones como LISBOA o las fuentes del TAJO.

Los dos comandantes deciden secretamente desobedecer a la Reina y para buscar apariencia de cumplimiento, atacar LA CORUÑA para ir luego a LISBOA.

El desembarco fue un éxito: nueve mil hombres fueron colocados en la playa, pero al final no consiguieron poner pie en la ciudad alta.

Cuando la fuerza llega al TAJO, los españoles de Portugal estaban prevenidos y poco se consigue. Algún éxito en LAS AZORES. Luego, con los dos mil hombres que podían aún combatir toman VIGO. A principios de julio regresan a Inglaterra sin haber conseguido nada prácticamente, con un 40% de los veintiún mil hombres de la expedición muertos o enfermos.

El fracaso fue una contrabalanza del desastre español de 1588 y demostró que Inglaterra era aún débil y primitiva en comparación con el mayor poder de la época.

Aunque en el fracaso de 1589 estaba la semilla del éxito más adelante. La expedición fracasó porque estaba montada con diferentes intereses y objetivos. No llevó a los ingleses a la realidad pero ayudó a crear el clima de opinión pública que acabó haciendo de Inglaterra una gran potencia.

En España, por contraste, toda su riqueza y poder se dispersa en otras direcciones, con una improvisada administración: la flota española de 1588 estaba formada ampliamente por barcos mercantes forzados a un servicio que no prometía ningún provecho y sí muchos riesgos. El resultado de la falta de coalición nacional de intereses hizo que la marina española decayese aunque el poder español creciese.

Este mismo hecho se produjo, al revés, en 1589. Inglaterra decae y los buques de Castilla crecen. Los oficiales que comandaban los galeones de la Guarda de Indias en el siglo XVI habían pasado frecuentemente por las *ata-rarchas* de Sevilla donde las galeras de Luis de la Cerda, Fernán Sánchez de Tover y Fernán Ruiz Cabeza de Vaca se habían hecho a la mar 200 años antes para aterrorizar el canal.