

Great Britain and Bourbon Spain, 1700-1808*

Prof. JOHN LYNCH
University of London

Bourbon Spain, unlike the Spain of the Habsburgs, has been forgotten by British historians. Yet paradoxically the British knew more of the Spanish Bourbons than they did of the Habsburgs. This was particularly true during the second half of the eighteenth century, when British travellers began to visit Spain in increasing numbers and to record their experiences for the reading public¹. These became valuable sources for the study of Spanish economic and social life, as well as minor classics of travel literature. Their authors included Edward Clarke, whose declared hope was to give his reader 'a fresh proof of the happiness which he enjoys in being born a Briton'; William Darlymple; Henry Swinburne; Joseph Townsend, whose three volumes are a work of rare observation and research; Arthur Young, whose visit to Catalonia was disappointingly brief; Robert Southey; and Lady Holland, whose journeys through Spain must have been observed with mixed feelings by British ambassadors².

In the Public Record Office in London British diplomatic and consular reports from the peninsula contain eyewitness accounts of events, frequent assessments of persons and policy, and expert intelligence on the power and wealth of Spain. These public records are much superior in quantity and quality to those of previous centuries. In an age of power politics and colonial wars it was a matter of vital interest to Britain to be accurately informed of the naval power, the war potential, and the colonial income of its rival, and it is this concern which gives the British material particular value and relevance. The diplomat Benjamin Keene reported in 1728, «Ever since I returned to this country, I observed with the greatest concern, the progress Patino was making towards

*. Ponencia presentada en el «Seminario Internacional sobre las relaciones hispanobritánicas en la Historia del Colegio de San Albano» en la Universidad de Valladolid, 9 y 10 de diciembre, 1989.

1. IAN ROBERTSON, *Los curiosos impertinentes. Viajeros ingleses por España* (Madrid, 1988).

2. EDWARD CLARKE, *Letters concerning the Spanish Nation: Written at Madrid during the years 1760 and 1761* (London, 1763); WILLIAM DALRYMPLE, *Travels through Spain and Portugal in 1774* (London, 1777); HENRY SWINBURNE, *Travels through Spain in the Years 1775 and 1776* (London 1779); JOSEPH TOWNSEND, *A Journey through Spain in the Years 1786 and 1787* (2nd edn, 3 vols, London, 1792); ARTHUR YOUNG, *Travels during the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789* (2 vols, Dublin, 1793); ROBERT SOUTHEY, *Letters written during a Journey in Spain and a Short Residence in Portugal* (3rd edn, 2 vols, London, 1808); ELIZABETH VASSALL, Baroness Holland, *The Spanish Journal of Elizabeth Lady Holland*, edited by the Earl of Ilchester (London, 1910).

a powerful marine»³. British intelligence kept the state of the Spanish navy under constant surveillance, noting in 1731 that it had forty ships of the line but was frustrated by manning problems and lack of trained crews, and attempted to make good these deficiencies by «debauching our sailors from on board the merchant men of our nation into the service of Spain»⁴.

Britain and Bourbon Spain began the eighteenth century at war over the Spanish Succession and ended it locked in alliance against Napoleonic France. In between these events Spain was normally in conflict with Britain and in alliance with France. The reason was not purely dynastic. Spanish foreign policy under the early Bourbons responded to a number of pressures. The ultimate objective was to restore a dismembered monarchy and to recover possessions lost at Utrecht, above all those in Italy. But Spain also had to defend an overseas empire, the source of much of its wealth and power; the struggle for mastery in Europe would be fought in the Atlantic and beyond, not Italian principalities. Spain had to work within the prevailing European system of coalition politics; she did not have the resources to proceed alone. Obsession with diplomacy, otherwise inexplicable, is explained as a means of sharing the cost of war with allies and keeping defence spending within bounds. A balance of power meant a balanced budget. For the Spanish Bourbons the obvious policy was to ally with France. Family sentiment apart, France was a great land power and could help Spain restore the naval balance against England. The War of Succession, however, taught the danger of excessive dependence on France, and Spain was determined to avoid satellite status and resist French pressure in America. From time to time, therefore, Spain looked to England. This was not an easy option, and usually drove Spain back to France and the shelter of the Family Compacts of 1733 and 1743.

War rather than peace was the normal condition of Anglo-Spanish relations in the eighteenth century, informal war or real war. For Spain Gibraltar and Minorca were losses to be redeemed, for England outposts of naval power. America in Spanish eyes was an absolute monopoly, in English an opportunity for expansion. The Spanish empire was vulnerable at various points. Portobello and Cartagena invited attack, thus exposing the rich Peru trade; Havana, a vital link in the treasure route, was always a tempting target, Central America a source of commodities and power vacuum, the Rio de la Plata an empty space and contraband route. These were the scenes of attack and counter-attack, the daily occasions of Anglo-Spanish contention. Anglo-Spanish relations, therefore, deteriorated in the decades after Utrecht, collapsed into actual warfare in 1718 and 1727, and were constantly aggravated by maritime and colonial disputes of the kind which made a folk hero out of Captain Jenkins. The War of Jenkins Ear demonstrated two things: that it was impossible to undermine the Spanish colonies from within by liberating creoles and Indians; and that Spain had the capacity to endure the delay of treasure returns while keeping those in America safe from attack.

3. KEENE TO NEWCASTLE, 23 August 1728, in William Coxe, *Memoirs of the Kings of Spain of the House of Bourbon* (2nd edn, 5 vols, London, 1815), III, 284-5.

4. KEENE TO NEWCASTLE, Seville, 2 March 1731, PRO, SP 94/107; KEENE TO CONSUL SKINNER, Seville, 12 November 1732, BL, Add. MS 43,416, f.106.

Spain's performance in this war was proof of a radical improvement in strategy and strength since 1718, and the balance sheet was not totally unfavourable. She had placed limits on British progress in America. True, Britain had taken many prizes and seriously dislocated the trade monopoly; but it had not succeeded in the longer aim of opening the Spanish empire by force. But perhaps the most promising result of the war for Spain was the termination of the Italian programme of Elizabeth Farnese and, with the death of her husband Philip V, her final departure from power. Economically the Italian enterprise had consumed national resources for dynastic ends without yielding appreciable returns. The year 1748, therefore, marked the end of a policy which gave precedence to European diplomacy over imperial defence and the beginning of a new order of priorities. Spain began to recover from the age of adventurers, vain expectations, and unnecessary wars, and to settle down to the serious business of colonial rivalry.

The years 1746-59 were a time of transition for Spain when a Spanish king and new administration were more attentive to national interests, preferring country to dynasty, neutrality to war. The priority was Spanish interest, the policy peace and neutrality. Spain for the Spaniards and independence in foreign affairs, this was the basic thinking of the regime⁵. The government of Ferdinand VI, Ensenada and Carvajal embarked on eight years of positive action, expressed in reform at home and peace abroad. The intervention of the central government to reform the tax structure, mobilize resources, and create an arms and shipbuilding industry was not only innovatory in itself but also implied changes in social and economic life. Moreover, far from seeking short cuts to success, the government planned for a stronger infrastructure and long-term gains. In particular it was anxious to close the technology gap that was opening between northern Europe and Spain. The collection of industrial intelligence in England and France, the grants for travel and study abroad, the acquisition of foreign experts, were all evidence of an active pursuit of technical skills for application to new projects in Spain. This was Spain's first modernization programme.

The navy occupied first place in Ensenada's strategic thinking and from his earliest advice to the king, in 1746, he urged its expansion «with priority over everything», for a navy was essential to a power with an overseas empire and aspirations to respect from France and England. In 1751 Spanish naval power consisted of 18 ships of the line and 15 lesser vessels, while England had 100 ships of the line and 180 smaller vessels. Ensenada argued that Spain needed 10 ships of the line and 65 frigates and other vessels. This of course could still not compete with the English navy, but in a defensive role it would be useful in the Atlantic and America, while in a Bourbon alliance it would be an asset to France, a threat to England, and for both reasons valuable to Spain. Whether this would make the Spanish king «arbiter of peace and war» was another matter; in fact the argument was flawed and was shown to be so in 1762 and 1793. But the budget for the navy moved up in priority and Ensenada obtained the money it needed; in two years alone, 1752-53, 20 million pesos were spent on dockyards and shipbuilding.

Spain did not create an original naval architecture and tended to copy French designs with a bias towards large, fast ships. In 1750, on the initiative of Ensenada, a

5. RICHARD PARES, *War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1763* (London, 1963), 523.

determined effort was made to recruit English designers and craftsmen to imitate what was called «*la construcción inglesa*», with its preference for strength and fire power. The consulting engineer, Jorge Juan, recently returned from South America, was sent to England to study naval architecture, gather intelligence on the English arms industry, and hire masters and workers for the shipyards and workshops of Spain. He was also assigned many other tasks of industrial espionage over the whole range of manufacturing and encouraged to acquire technology needed in Spain. Juan spent almost a year in England, in 1749-50, during which time he gathered material for his own treatise on naval architecture, recruited a large group of craftsmen and constructors, and despatched them more or less clandestinely to Spain along with books, training manuals and instruments.

By mid-1750 three constructors, ten assistant constructors, numerous craftsmen, carpenters, riggers and interpreters, some sixty Englishmen in all, were at work in Ferrol, Cadiz, and Cartagena, helping to build Ensenada's navy. The quality of the products was disputed. The combination of English specialists and Spanish labour gave mixed results and there were arguments over the merits of English and French models, rumours even that the cunning English has exported deliberate wreckers to sabotage the Spanish shipbuilding programme. But Ensenada brought the Spanish navy up to 45 ships of the line and 19 frigates, provided a solid base for Spanish naval power in the eighteenth century, improved the career prospects for officers, and recruited the seamen—40,000—without whom the navy could not grow. When he departed in 1754 well might the British ambassador heave a sigh of relief.

The fall of Ensenada, like that of other distinguished servants of the absolute monarchy, was abrupt and unexplained. There were obviously political reasons for his fall, his opposition to the treaty of Madrid which made large concessions to the Portuguese in South America and allowed them to invade the Jesuit missions in Paraguay, his association with the Jesuits, and his accumulation of power over the whole range of Spanish government⁶. But it was his resistance to British activities in America in general and in the Bay of Honduras in particular and his opposition to the anglophile party in Spain which proved his final undoing. In this the British ambassador played a key role and manipulated the Spanish conspirators, the duke of Alba and Ricardo Wall. And the ambassador worked exclusively for British interests, to counter the French bias of Ensenada, put a stop to his naval programme, and thwart his defence measures in America⁷.

Benjamin Keene was an experienced diplomat and the most expert English Hispanist of his day, not infallible in his judgements but a skilful agent in a country which he perceptively described as «a political country». Long residence in the peninsula, vast

6. GUILLERMO KRATZ, *El Tratado hispano-portugués de límites de 1750 y sus consecuencias* (Rome, 1954), 23-4, 26-7, 61.

7. KEENE TO CASTRES, 12 April 1754, *The Private Correspondence of Sir Benjamin Keene, KB*, ed. Sir Richard Lodge (Cambridge, 1933), 360; KEENE TO ROBINSON, 32 July 1754, BL, Add.MS 43, 432, ff.205-20; KEENE TO ROBINSON, 21 September 1754, BL, Add.MS 43,433, f.2A; COXE, *Memoirs of the Kings of Spain*, IV, 66, 127-32, 213.

experience of political and commercial reporting, fluency in the language, and an easy familiarity with Spaniards, made him virtually irreplaceable, destined to end his days not in his native Norfolk but in his embassy. His portly figure was well known in Madrid and the royal *sitios*, where he was regarded as a formidable defender of British interests, a diplomat whose secret service money could open many doors in the Spanish bureaucracy and which enabled him to produce at the crucial time the evidence —Ensenada's unauthorised instructions to the governor of Havana to evict the English from the Bay of Honduras— which the *golpistas* needed to convince the king⁸. He was specially satisfied that Ensenada's naval programme, directed solely against England, would be brought to an end and that further expansion would be halted by financial constraints. The coup was regarded as a great personal triumph for Keene; he was awarded the red ribbon of the Order of the Bath by George II and was invested with it by Ferdinand VI, whose minister he had induced him to dismiss. But it was not a long-term triumph. Anglo-Spanish relations deteriorated amidst mutual recrimination over conflicts in Central America and at sea, while France sought to capitalize by pressing Spain for support in the Seven Years War. Keene himself reported to Pitt that 'the spirit of Ensenadism' seemed to endure in the new administration⁹.

Ferdinand VI occupies a special place in the history of the Spanish Bourbons. For the first time since 1700 many of the essential conditions of change appeared to be present —a compliant monarch, ministerial leadership, international peace and booming revenue. A strong current of reform ran through the reign, driven by the state, inspired by new ideas, and fed by rising resources. Inevitably it met a wall of resistance from vested interest, but enough impetus survived to carry it into the next reign and to form an integral part of Bourbon reformism. The reign of Ferdinand VI also contained a striking paradox: a government dedicated to the promotion of national power fell victim to a flagrant exercise in destabilization carried out by a foreign interest. There were lessons still to be learned, not least that British pressure on Spain was an obstacle as well as a stimulus to Bourbon reformism.

The new king was an object of great interest to the British who recognized his seriousness, allity and integrity. British reporting on Charles III, both public and private, is a valuable source for the reign. They noted, of course, that even more than ruling he liked hunting, or more correctly shooting. Even when the Infante Xavier was dying of smallpox at Aranjuez in April 1771, the king insisted on going out on a shooting expedition; when informed that his son was dead, he replied with his usual calmness «Well, then, since nothing can be done, we must make the best of it»¹⁰. He has a curiously fatalist submission to adversity and attributed it to the will of God, a tendency which made him ultimately complacent about the state of Spain and incapable of overcoming the obstacles to reform.

8. WALL TO KEENE, 20 July 1754, *Private Correspondence of Sir Benjamin Keene*, 38; KEENE TO ROBINSON, 31 July 1754, BL, Add.MS 43,432, f.215.

9. KEENE TO PITT, 21 April 1757, BL, Add.MS 43,439, f.311.

10. TOWNSEND, *A Journey through Spain*, II, 124. For other English descriptions of Charles III see CLARKE, *Letters concerning the Spanish Nation*, 323-4; and JAMES HARRIS, First Earl of Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, ed. Third Earl of Malmesbury (4 vols, London, 1844), I, 50-1.

The British sources make it clear that Charles III did not proceed beyond the established framework of law and custom. The inequalities inherent in a society divided by estate, class, and corporate privilege left him unmoved. In the 1760s an attempt was made to revive Ensenada's project of a income tax, the *catastro*, and to impose fiscal equality but it was weakly abandoned as soon as the vested interest made their opposition known. He handled the aristocracy with care. His first government sought to recover from the *señoríos* vital revenues alienated in the past. The duke of Alba, drawing an income of near £8,000 a year in *alcabalas* was offered £80,000 in compensation. When he demurred the king increased the offer to £120,000, but so unwilling was he to offend this powerful family that he allowed Alba to continue to collect the tax until the treasury had enough revenue to buy him out¹¹. Moral cowardice or misguided caution? Whatever the reason, the limits of Charles III's vision were predictable. His basic policy was strength nor welfare: the aim was to make Spain a great power through state reform, imperial defence, and control of colonial resources. His early bias towards reform was challenged, by the *motín de Esquilache* in 1766. The British embassy in Madrid closely monitored these riots, and attributed them to manipulation by elite interest groups and French connivance¹². They persuaded Charles III to slow down the pace of change until 1773, when he opted for a government of pragmatic administrators which fulfilled many of the expectations held of it but did not significantly change the face of Spain. There were various reasons for this shift, the strength of the interest opposing change, the paucity of truly enlightened ministers, and perhaps above all the dominance of foreign policy in the thinking of Charles and his ministers. The war of 1762 was unpopular, costly and a diversion from reform. Yet foreign policy and rearmament enjoyed still greater priority in the period 1776-83, and even a major war with Britain did not satisfy the government's taste for confrontation. A regime so partial to war looked for immediate fiscal returns rather than long-term structural reforms.

One of the objects of the crown's attention, especially in financial matters, was the Church, a powerful institution with immense wealth in land and revenue, but one subject to the crown in matters of appointments, jurisdiction and revenue. The combination of an assertive monarch and a compliant hierarchy reduced the Bourbon Church to a dependency unequalled in Spanish history. Anglo-Spanish relations in the eighteenth century lacked the religious venom characteristic of the Counter Reformation, and the Spanish Church was no longer seen by English opinion as a Church militant. Even so, an institution so integrated into the society, economy and culture of Spain could not fail to arouse the interest of British diplomats and travellers, some of whom such as Edward Clarke and Joseph Townsend were themselves clergymen of the Church of England, Clarke a chaplain of the British Embassy, Townsend perhaps the most perceptive of all the travellers. While the wealth of the Church was criticised by Spanish reformers of the time, some of the English observers could see that this wealth was more apparent than real. Church revenue has a public and social function as well as an ecclesiastical one. Much of it was already siphoned off by the crown through charges on royal benefices,

11. DE VISMÉ TO SHELBURNE, 17 November 1766, PRO, SP 94/175.

12. ROCHFORD TO CONWAY, Madrid, 24 March, 31 March, 14 April, 5 May 1766, PRO, SP 94/173.

income from vacancies, share of tithes, and taxes on church property and personnel. Moreover the state used the Church as a reservoir of miscellaneous expenditure. The see of Toledo, in addition to supporting one archbishop, forty canons, a hundred other priests and a total of 600 ecclesiastical personnel, also had to maintain the Infante Don Luis, pay various pensions to privileged recipients, and an annual subvention to the monks of the Escorial; further expenditure on public buildings and works in Toledo, social projects, and its own liturgy left the archbishop little out of the see's income of 9 million reales a year and justified Townsend's conclusion that «with his vast revenues he is always poor»¹³. The crown also imposed on diocesan revenues many secular salaries, donations to hospitals, charitable foundations, and payment to such bodies as the new Economic Societies, and drew Henry Swinburne's comment, «There is not a bishopric in the kingdom but has somebody or other quartered upon it; and I believe the second-rate benefices are in the same predicament»¹⁴.

The Church took its social duties seriously. It gave abundantly and comprehensively to the poor as a matter of obligation, and while it is impossible to calculate the percentage of charity to income it would appear to be increasing in the eighteenth century at a time when the Church was increasing its own income from rents and production to keep up with inflation. The archbishop of Granada lived in some degree of splendour and kept a good table, but gave so much money to charity in regular pensions, crisis relief, orphan maintenance and daily bread distribution that Townsend could «scarcely conceive his income to equal his expenditure»¹⁵. The formula of bread and broth did not appeal to all; English observers and Spanish reformers alike criticized charity as a source of idleness and vagrancy. The enlightened argued that the Church, having enriched itself at the expense of the people, now justified its riches as necessary to assist the people, but its assistance was arbitrary and uncoordinated and worked simply because the Church had so much money. These were minority views and came from above, not below; they tended to mistake symptoms for causes and, in the case of Campomanes, to reflect his preference for the secular over the religious. Townsend, who showed and received considerable toleration in Spanish religious circles, had an ideological aversion to charity, generator of dependency and sloth, and he challenged the bishop of Oviedo on the pernicious effect of alms-giving; the bishop agreed but pointed out, «it is the part of the magistrate to clear the streets of beggars; it is my duty to give alms to all that ask»¹⁶.

Yet the religion of the people was traditional and uncompromising. English observers were astonished by some of the manifestations of popular Catholicism, the constant *fiestas*, processions, flagellations, and deference to monks and priests, and some claimed to detect a lack of true religion, as distinct from popular superstitions, mechanical devotions, and even elite indifference. Swinburne concluded «I was surprised to find them so much more luke-warm in their devotion than I expected... The unconcern betrayed by the whole nation at the fall of the Jesuits, is a strong proof of their present indif-

13. TOWNSEND, *A Journey through Spain*, I, 305-6.

14. SWINBURNE, *Travels through Spain*, 321, n.29.

15. TOWNSEND, *A Journey through Spain*, III, 15, 57-8.

16. *Ibid.*, II, 9, 374-83.

ference». Of course a wide cultural gap divided Spanish Catholics and English Protestants, and a mutual incomprehension often distorted their views of each other. The evidence available indicates a high level of Easter duties. But if faith was secure, what of morals? British observers were scandalised by the contrast between rigid beliefs and lax behaviour, and by clergy who broke their vows of celibacy. Townsend remarked that the bishop of Oviedo, a man of high principle who was «severe only to himself, but compassionate to others, made it a rule that none of his curates should have children in their families... Beyond this he did not think it right to be too rigid in his enquiries»¹⁷.

There was a British interest in the Jesuits, partly because of past prejudices, partly because the English College at Valladolid was a Jesuit institution. English Catholic opinion had reservations about the Jesuits diverted many students into their own ranks instead of returning them as secular priests to the English mission¹⁸. Charles III had an ingrained prejudice against Jesuits. As far as he was concerned they were an insidious and wealthy organization who had once defended regicide. They still retained their special vow of obedience to the pope and their reputation of papal agents, while their loyalty to the Spanish crown in the American colonies was also suspect. An order with an international organization whose headquarters were outside Spain was regarded as inherently incompatible with absolutism. In these views he had the resolute support of his ministers, some of whom, such as Campomanes and Monino, came from a class which resented the influence of the Jesuits in university education and their affiliation with the higher aristocracy.

Religious conflict became a code for political positions. Although there were obvious social and economic reasons for the discontent which led to the riots of 1766, the Spanish government preferred to believe that they had been instigated by the Jesuits and their allies who wished to change the government and block further reform. They were a convenient culprit whose guilt whitewashed the government and relieved it of the need to confront the people and the nobility, presumably the other partners to the conspiracy. So they were expelled from Spain and its dominions by decree of 27 February 1767 and the Spanish government used its influence in Rome to have the order suppressed in 1773. The king claimed that he had just and necessary reasons for his actions which he kept «locked in his soul», and public silence was imposed. In fact there was little public or clerical reaction. The measure was supported by rival orders like the Augustinians and they lost no time in laying their hands on Jesuit property. The bishops were divided and some refused to bend to official pressure to applaud the action. Nevertheless, when in 1769 the pope asked the Spanish hierarchy for its opinion on the expulsion, forty-two bishops approved, six opposed, and eight declined to answer.

There remained the question of Jesuit doctrines and Jesuit properties. The former were proscribed and the latter sequestered. The government sought to ensure that the property of the Jesuits was used for establishing new teaching centres, colleges of medicine, and university residences for poor students, while Jesuit revenues were to be

17. *Ibid.*, II, 150.

18. Edwin Henson, ed., *Register of the English College at Valladolid 1589-1862* (Catholic Record Society, Vol. XXX, London, 1930), xxxix, xlv.

assigned to hospitals and other social services. Royal decrees confined primary education to secular teachers, made school attendance obligatory, and regulated the chairs in universities. Not all of these projects came to fruition and it was the state rather than society that gained from the dissolution.

The English College too felt the weight of the Bourbon state. The Colleges of St. Gregory in Seville and St. George in Madrid were mistaken for Jesuit property and confiscated. Bishop Challoner, through the Spanish ambassador, protested that this property belonged exclusively to the English pastoral clergy. The council of Castile agreed, and Charles III issued a decree that these Colleges be restored and incorporated into St Alban's at Valladolid. The College in Madrid was indeed restored, and the Rector sold it to the duke of Alba; from the proceeds the College bought former Jesuit land then being auctioned off in the vicinity of Valladolid. The College in Seville, however, was not handed back. Contradicting his own decree, Charles III refused to restore it to the English and instead allocated it to the Medical Society of Seville, thus inaugurating litigation which was not resolved until the twentieth century¹⁹.

The contrast between the government's treatment of the Jesuits and other institutions is a guide to the policy of Charles III. In the case of the Jesuits, where royal power was at stake, policy was conclusive: they were expelled and destroyed. The rest of the Church was not treated so harshly. Even in the case of the universities and the Inquisition, both embodiments of archaism, royal policy was a curious compound of a taste for reform and a bias towards tradition. As for disamortization of Church property, the government failed to take up the challenge. Meanwhile, Spaniards fortunate enough to possess privileges continued to enjoy them. The aristocracy resisted the campaign against *señoríos*, which was so gradualist that it was still in progress the following century. The reign of Charles III was not a new age. In fact the first policy initiative was war, when Spain joined France in the Seven Years War against Britain, a costly blunder and a self-inflicted blow to reform.

Charles III's priority, as reflected in the budget, was foreign policy and defence. He inherited a relatively strong navy from his predecessors, most of it built in the rearmament programme of Ensenada. At that time the model had been the British navy, but Britain was not a favourite of Charles III, and he turned to France for technical aid. The Spanish navy had great experience of colonial wars and in American waters. The defence of transatlantic commerce was also a special task which the navy performed with adroitness and, to the relief of the Spanish treasury, with success. For its triple role, in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and America, the Spanish navy had the ships but not always the seamen. Yet the navy was not neglected by the state and it competed successfully for resources with the rest of the public sector. The number of ships of the line, 67 by the end of Charles III's reign, placed it second to England in terms of growth. The British embassy in Madrid watched and recorded its growth carefully, and the British government was concerned enough to protest to Spain that it was fuelling an arms race. The sheer size of the Spanish navy commanded respect; allied to that of

19. *Ibid.*, xlvi-xlvii.

France it looked positively menacing²⁰. The cost of course was crippling and the time came when further growth was beyond Spain's means. Meanwhile the struggle for empire forced Spain to preserve its guard against England and where possible to take the initiative; this made naval power a priority, otherwise colonial life-lines would be cut at sea. The navy was the guardian as well as the spender of *revue*.

Reform, rearmament, recovery abroad —this was the ideal order of Spanish policy and one with a logic of its own. Charles III began his reign by reversing the process and seeking a short-cut to strength and security. The temptation to strike an early blow at Britain was strong and the opportunity at hand. Charles III believed that alliance with France would supplement Spain's naval power and give the Third Family Compact (15 August 1761) which created an offensive and defensive alliance between the two Bourbon powers and took Spain into the colonial conflict when Britain reacted by declaring war in January 1762. The French alliance has been defended as a «natural» alliance, «the only logical formula for Spain's foreign policy, given the circumstances of the world»²¹. Was it not in fact a mistake, the progenitor of future mistakes, which did not serve the interests of Spain and did not preserve the balance in America? Charles III made three miscalculations in 1762. He entered the war at the worst possible time when it was already turning in England's favour; he underrated England's war potential; and he entered a colonial conflict with inadequate naval resources²². The result was a costly disaster. By the Peace of Paris in 1763 not only had Spain to allow Britain's wood-cutting claims in Honduras and renounce any rights to the Newfoundland fisheries, but she also had to return *Colônia*, her only conquest of the war, to Portugal, and cede Florida and other territory in North America to Britain.

If Spain was defeated she was not crushed, and the Bourbon allies worked to strengthen the alliance and its resources, and to prepare for the next round. The revolt of Britain's North American colonies in 1775 was not an easy field for intervention. Charles III was caught between the desire to embarrass his colonial rival, which accounts for his undercover aid to the rebels from 1776, and fear for his own American possessions, which accounts for his ambivalent attitude towards independence. Florida-blanca, the Spanish secretary of state, told the English ambassador, «such an event as Independence of America would be the worst example to other colonies, and make the Americans the worst neighbours, in every respect, that the Spanish colonies could have»²³. But this did not prevent Spain selling arms, colluding with North American privateers, and, in the course of 1777, actively recruiting and assembling army units, preparing the navy, and increasing its warships in American bases²⁴. The Florida campaign of 1780-81 demonstrated Spain's capacity as a colonial power, given the right conjuncture, and proved that she could recruit, train, assemble, transport, and land in

20. PRO, SP 94/161, 164, 172, 181, 191, 204; J. F. BOURGOING, *Modern State of Spain* (4 vols, London, 1808), II, 110-12.

21. VICENTE PALACIO ATARD, *El tercer Pacto de Familia* (Madrid, 1945), 289.

22. PARES, *War and Trade in the West Indies*, 590-5.

23. GRANTHAM TO WEYMOUTH, 26 May 1777, PRO, SP 94/203.

24. GRANTHAM TO WEYMOUTH, 7 October 1776, PRO, SP 94/202; see reports, GRANTHAM TO WEYMOUTH, 1777, PRO, SP 94/203, 204.

enemy territory diverse units from both sides of the Atlantic, join them in a combined army and, having defeated the forces of nature, defeat the resident British. Charles III, therefore, attempted to solve the dilemma of taking an imperial power into an anti-colonial war by pursuing exclusively Spanish interests without recognising American independence.

In Europe, however, he was not so successful. Gibraltar was central to Spanish war aims, and this meant defeating Britain in Europe as well as in the Americas. The Spanish planners designed a dual strategy, an invasion of England and siege of Gibraltar. Neither of these succeeded and Gibraltar continued to elude Spain. On the other hand a successful expedition to Minorca recovered the island in February 1782 and enabled Spain to end the war with something to show in Europe as well as in America. By the Peace of Versailles (3 September 1783) she regained Florida and Minorca and could consider the war a moderate success, regaining lost ground and; restoring her imperial credentials.

The balance sheet of Charles III's foreign policy showed an accumulation of gains and losses which are difficult to correlate; in many respects the account was not closed until the following reign, and then the balance would be seen to be unmissably adverse. Decisions were taken within a closed circle of advisers dominated by Florida-Blanca and answerable only to the king. Public opinion played no part; even important interest groups, such as merchants, had little influence in the absence of a legitimate or an active opposition. It is true that English foreign policy did not always benefit from party politics and change of ministries; but ministers had to defend their decisions before parliament, the opposition, even the mob. In Spain there were no such constraints²⁵. Absolutism worked when decisions were correct and needed prompt action; otherwise it perpetuated misjudgement. The first misjudgement was the Family Compact, which was built into Spanish policy in spite of its evident failure to serve Spanish interests. The strength of Spanish policy was its link with imperial defence. At a time when British territory in the Americas was contracting, the Spanish empire appeared to enter an expansive phase. The same year, 1778, which saw the Declaration of Independence in North America, saw the creation of a new viceroyalty in South America. While the British were losing Florida, Spanish religious and military expeditions were consolidating their occupation of Upper California. Charles III could be forgiven for believing that the *equilibrio americano* had not only been restored but was moving in Spain's favour.

There was a price to pay. Economically the war of 1779-83 was harmful to Spain and punishing to the mass of its people who bore the brunt of shortages and high prices. The effects of the free trade regulations of 1778 were delayed and the Spanish export trade was hit. Three years of fighting seriously strained Spain's fiscal resources. The government was even deprived, temporarily, of its income from America, for the Bourbon alliance did nothing to alter the naval balance against Spain or prevent Britain from

25. Florida-Blanca argued to the British ambassador that he too had an opposition to contend with: «our Ministry ought to remember that though he had not literally a House of Lords and Commons to satisfy, and a professed opposition to encounter, yet he had also a species of Parliament, a publick, and a discontented Party to manage, and that it was not in his power to do in every respect what his inclination might dictate». LISTON TO CARMARTHEN, 16 April 1787, PRO, FO 72/10.

cutting the trade routes. The balance of power, as distinct from territory, was moving inexorably away from Spain; it was precisely in the post-war years that Britain entered a decisive stage of industrial and commercial expansion and opened the gap still between her economic and naval power and that of Spain. In these conditions there was an air of fantasy in the strategic thinking of king and ministers in the years after 1783. Charles III, Floridablanca, and Gálvez regarded the war as incomplete and envisaged a further round to finish the colonial war and settle the account once and for all. The sticking points were trade inequality, Gibraltar, and the Mosquito Shore, and from time to time Floridablanca exploded in rage at the British ambassador over what he regarded as British duplicity but what was in truth Spanish impotence.

The foreign policy of Charles III, based on expensive rearmament and culminating by choice in a second war with Britain, was an inherent impediment to reform and destroyed any chance of structural change. In the period 1760-88 the greater part of the budget went to defence, and the army and navy received 60 per cent of total expenditure²⁶. Money spent on war could not be allocated to agrarian, social, or infrastructural projects. An active foreign policy and a programme of internal reform were incompatible. The priorities were obvious: power came before welfare. Even after 1783 a renewal of the colonial war was contemplated and the colonies examined for yet more resources to pay for it. Spain had reached a peak of power, if not in the highest range, but in the process it remained an unreconstructed society and economy. The crown continued to seek the support of nobles and clergy, to respect inherited or acquired privileges, to protect noble estates and church property, to allow *mayorazgos* to reach their maximum extension and Spain to look like one vast immobile entail, to pay very high salaries to top officials, in short to preserve the Spain of hierarchy and class, of corporate privilege and rural oligarchy. Spain was given an illusion of reform and presented with a parody of a modern state.

The crisis of the old regime, therefore, was already present in Spain even before events in France cast their shadow over the peninsula. Charles IV saw the French Revolution as a threat to the Bourbons as well as to Spain. At first he tried diplomacy and appeasement to save his cousin Louis XVI. When this failed, he dismissed the pro-French count of Aranda and replaced him by Manuel Godoy, whose rapid rise to power was widely reputed to be due solely to the favour of the queen. But there was more to his appointment than palace intrigue. The British view was that the monarchs had long been grooming Godoy for office, and the failure of appeasement at a time when counter-revolution was in the ascendant in Spain gave them the opportunity to appoint him²⁷. This corresponded to the national mood, and in accepting the inevitability of war with France Godoy had the Spanish people behind him. Yet the important factor was not what Spain wanted but what France wanted and that too was war, a war to remove another Bourbon from his throne and to carry the revolution to the Spanish people.

The Spanish people, however, did not want the Revolution, and the war of 1793-95 produced one of the most spontaneous war efforts in Spanish history. Priests preached it

26. JACQUES BARBIER and HERBERT S. KLEIN, «Las prioridades de un monarca ilustrado: el gasto público bajo el reinado de Carlos III», *Revista de Historia Económica*, 3, 3(1985), 473-95.

27. JACKSON TO GRENVILLE, 16 November, 4 December 1792, PRO, FO 72/25.

from their pulpits. Fray Diego de Cádiz hailed it as a «war of religion». Gifts of money poured into the government. The rush of volunteers came faster than the government could arm them. The Spanish people's traditional passion for their religion and their monarchy reasserted itself and they rejected the Revolution and all its implications with a militant fervour that caused a revolutionary agent writing at the beginning of 1793 to declare, «The religious fanaticism of the Spaniards is higher than ever... The people regard the war as a war of religion».

Revolutionary expansion and imperial ambition made France a difficult neighbour and posed unprecedented problems for Spain. For sixty years the Family compact had given Spain the appearance of a great power. In 1789-92, however, the Spanish government had no mind for a French alliance and remained determinedly neutral, even though this meant retreating before Britain over Nootka Sound; neutrality was adopted through aversion to the new France, but especially in her own best interest. The French Revolution destroyed the basis of the old system and brought the Family Compact to an abrupt end. It had been a Bourbon doctrine that war with France across the Pyrenees was too dangerous and too costly to contemplate. Now it was a reality and Spain urgently needed a new ally, even one who was normally the enemy. By March 1793 the Anglo-Spanish alliance was in place.

Relations were uneasy from the beginning. British strategic thinking saw Spain primarily as a naval ally who could put enough frigates to sea to protect her own commerce against France and send a fleet into the Mediterranean to act jointly with a British force and win superiority there²⁸. But Godoy would not contemplate sending a Spanish squadron to blockade Toulon until a British squadron arrived, and no argument would move him. The British became impatient at his inability to think and act for himself and the ambassador reported «his utter unfitness to conduct the affairs of a great country at a crisis like the present»²⁹. But Godoy was still learning his job, was not yet in full control of his colleagues, and was not completely confident in the Spanish navy. The real problem was the conviction held by the navy minister Valdes and many other Spaniards that Britain's true aim was to get Spain and France to destroy each other's navies and so to remain undisputable mistress of the seas. The British ambassador concluded that the Spaniards were «infinitely more intractable and difficult to deal with as friends than as enemies»³⁰. For their part Spaniards suspected that the British were no different as allies than as enemies. So the Spanish navy kept its accustomed role of convoying treasure fleets, protecting merchantment, patrolling coasts, and otherwise avoiding operations. Spain did in fact come out of the war with its navy intact, a more valuable asset than one stricken by fighting and an important consideration for a imperial power; of a total force of eighty-six ships of the line, forty-five were in commission and ready for sea³¹. But it had not covered itself in glory, and the disposition of many of its officers towards the government was equivocal.

28. JACKSON TO GRENVILLE, 1 January 1793, PRO, FO 72/26; GRENVILLE TO ST. HELENS, 8 February 1793, PRO, FO 72/26.

29. ST. HELENS TO GRENVILLE, 10 April 1793, PRO, FO 72/26.

30. ST. HELENS TO GRENVILLE, 29 May 1793, PRO, FO 72/27.

31. JACKSON TO GRENVILLE, 1 April 1895, PRO, FO 72/37.

By land Spain was no more successful, let down by its army, divided by the *ilustrados*, and failed by its own ruling class. In July 1795 when the French army took Victoria Godoy and his colleagues lost their nerve and decided to cut their losses and sue for peace. They did this unilaterally, without reference to Britain. Godoy justified the peace of Basle on three grounds: economic difficulties, shortage of recruits, and lack of money. The argument was one of the many ironies of these years. The Spanish economy was always in difficulties. The army was stronger on the eve of peace than it had been at any time during the war. And within a few years Spain was paying France a huge financial subsidy. For France did not go away after 1795. The British were convinced that peace would be followed by a spurious neutrality in which Spain favoured France, then by alliance with France and war with Britain. This is precisely what happened. Godoy signed the treaty of San Ildefonso with France (18 August 1796), an offensive and defensive alliance against Britain, but also in many respects a capitulation of Spain to France. Spain was to put at the disposal of France an army 18,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry, and a fleet of fifteen ships of the line and six frigates. This was a valuable asset to France and gave her a naval power to which she could not aspire on her own. As Edmund Burke observed, Spain became «the fist of the regicide».

The renewed alliance with France was a catastrophe for Spain. It was defended then—and now—on the grounds that there was no alternative. The principal priority was resistance to Britain, the arch enemy of the Spanish empire; as Spain could not overcome Britain alone, it was necessary to revive the French alliance, which was thus justified in terms of national and imperial interest. There are obvious flaws in the argument. In the first place, Britain did not suddenly cease to be a threat to Spain's overseas interests by making her an enemy instead of an ally. On the contrary, she became an even greater threat, and one which Franco-Spanish naval power was insufficient to deter. Spain suffered a double blow in February 1797, a decisive naval defeat at Cape St. Vincent and in America the loss of Trinidad, disasters which the alliance had been created to avoid. Worse was to come. In April 1797 Admiral Nelson stationed a British squadron outside the port of Cadiz and imposed a total blockade, while the British navy blockaded Spanish American ports and attacked Spanish shipping at sea. The result was to sever Spain from her colonies, destroy Spanish trade, and retard colonial revenue. The war with Britain became one of the most damaging in the history of the Spanish empire. In the second place, the French alliance did nothing for the Spanish navy. In fact the obligation to make a fleet available to France was one of the reasons for the final decline of Spanish sea power. There was little point now in building a national navy, as it was virtually commandeered by France under the Treaty of San Ildefonso. This deterrent, together with financial cuts, brought to an end almost all activity in Spanish dockyards. Finally, the treaty had the effect of making Spain a satellite of France, her only function to meet greater and more frequent demands from an insatiable ally.

Britain was the Achilles heel of Godoy's regime. Was with Britain, and consequent dependence on France, destabilised the government, divided Spaniard from Spaniard, and encouraged rulers to place personal and factional interests before those of the nation. Above all it was ruinously expensive. The years 1793-1808 were years of almost uninterrupted warfare, which stretched financial resources to breaking point and beca-

me one of the components of the Spanish crisis. Bourbon monarchy, which Charles III had brought to a peak of proficiency to restore the economy and the power of Spain, collapsed in 1804-8 in a turmoil of agrarian crisis and foreign invasion, unable either to feed or defend its people. At that point the Spanish people rose against the French invaders, joined the British, and re-enacted with greater confidence, stronger interests, and eventually more success, the alliance of 1793. Anglo-Spanish relation entered a new age.