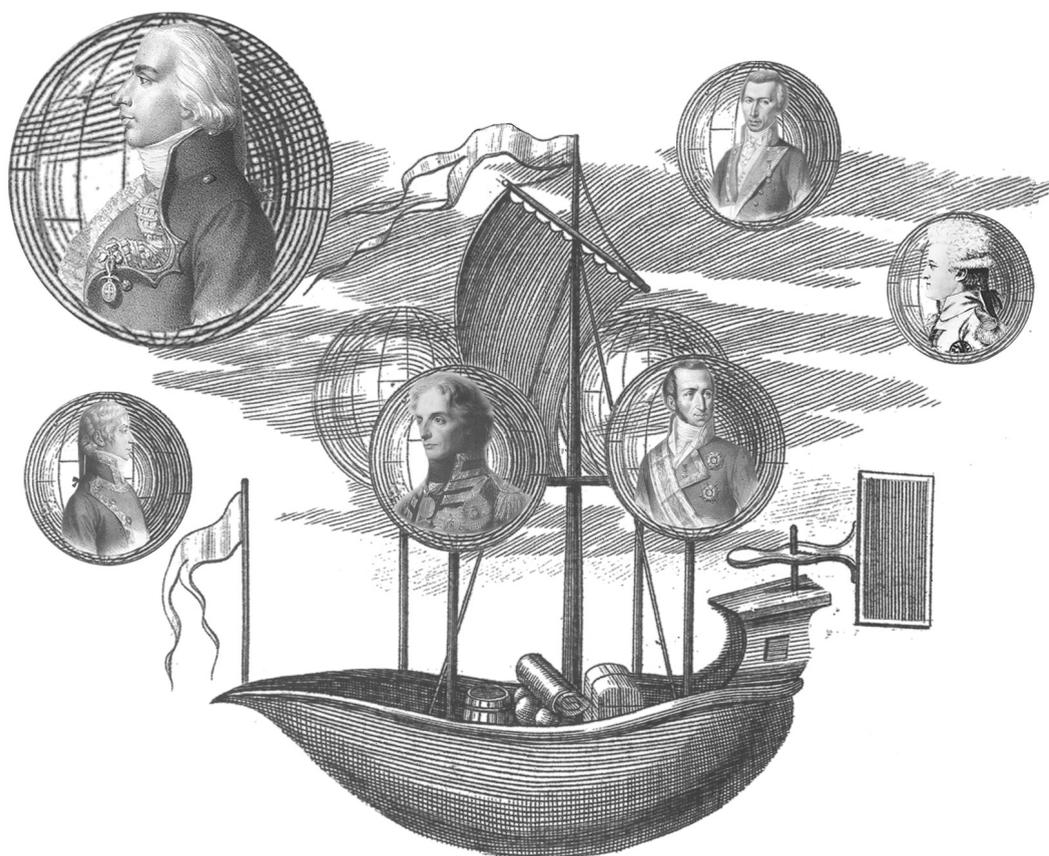


# El Equilibrio de los Imperios: de Utrecht a Trafalgar



Agustín Guimerá y Víctor Peralta (coords.)



FUNDACIÓN ESPAÑOLA DE HISTORIA MODERNA  
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# EL EQUILIBRIO DE LOS IMPERIOS: DE UTRECHT A TRAFALGAR

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# THE GENESIS OF TRAFALGAR

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## RESUMEN:

Es un hecho asumido que la hostilidad franco-española contra Gran Bretaña a fines del siglo XVIII era inevitable. Este trabajo defiende que España, en particular, no necesitaba abandonar una política exterior de neutralidad y una gran estrategia de disuasión, que había servido bien hasta 1760. Incluso si Francia y España habían de adoptar una política belicista contra Inglaterra, necesitaban reestructurar sus marinas. España lo hizo, y la última generación de navíos españoles de línea estaba muy bien diseñada para la guerra contra Gran Bretaña. Francia no lo hizo, y la inadecuación de los navíos de guerra franceses fue uno de los muchos factores que determinaron la ineficacia de la marina francesa en la acción. La debilidad de Francia malogró la estrategia naval aliada en la Guerra de la Independencia Norteamericana, y arruinó a España para siempre en las guerras revolucionarias y napoleónicas. Esta fue la consecuencia inevitable de la decisión de unir un potencial débil en una alianza ofensiva que carecía de medios para conseguir el éxito.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** política exterior; estrategia; marinas; buques de guerra; naves de línea; Guerra de Independencia Norteamericana; Guerra de la Revolución Francesa; Guerra de Napoleón Historia política y militar; siglo XVIII; Historia de España, Francia y Gran Bretaña.

## ABSTRACT:

It is usually assumed that the late-eighteenth century hostility of France and Spain to Britain was inevitable. This paper argues that Spain, in particular, did not need to abandon a foreign policy of neutrality, and a grand strategy of deterrence, which had served well until 1760. Moreover if France and Spain were to adopt a policy of war against Britain, they needed to restructure their navies. Spain did this, and the last generation of Spanish ships of the line were very well designed for war against Britain. France did not, and the unsuitability of French warship designs was one of the many factors which made the French navy ineffectual in war. The weakness of France spoiled allied naval strategy in the ships of the line, and ruined Spain for ever in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. This was the avoidable

consequence of a decision to join a weak power in an offensive alliance which lacked the means to achieve success.

KEY WORDS: Foreign politics; strategy; navy; warships; ships of the line; War of American Independence; French Revolution; Napoleonic Wars; political history; military history; Spain; France; Britain; XVIIIth century.

All modern historians will be familiar with the general outline of the events which led to the breakdown of the Peace of Amiens, the outbreak of a new Franco-British war in 1803, and the subsequent addition of Spain to the number of Britain's enemies. Likewise Napoleon's plans to invade Britain have been described in detail, and historians both British and French have agreed that they displayed to a very high degree the wishful thinking and refusal to face uncomfortable facts which marked all his naval schemes<sup>1</sup>. By the summer of 1805 these plans had collapsed so completely that even the Emperor was forced to acknowledge the fact, and the Combined Fleet finally sailed from Cadiz on 19th October in support of a peripheral part of the French army's plans of campaign against Austria. Napoleon was aware of the high risk that the fleet would be brought to battle. To throw away so valuable a strategic asset as the Combined Fleet on so trivial an objective can only be explained, in the opinion of recent French scholars, in psychological terms, as the reaction of wounded vanity determined to punish the hated navy for its failure to contribute to his glory<sup>2</sup>. He had no sooner thrown away his fleet than he realised how much he depended on it to break out of the strategic limitations of his situation, and spent the remaining years of his reign in attempting to reconstruct it, at a prodigious expense which bought almost no tangible advantage.

There is no need to rehearse the campaign again. My interest is not in the immediate causes of the battle of Trafalgar, but in the long-term origins of the naval war. I want to ask a very simple but apparently rather unusual question: why was it necessary that France and Spain in alliance should fight a series of naval wars against Britain? Clearly the answer cannot be confined to the ambitions of General Bonaparte or the aggression of the French Revolution, for the naval wars between France and Britain went back for more than a century before either, and Spanish participation began thirty years before. Historians have been surprisingly reluctant to confront this question. It seems to have been widely, but usually silently, assumed that the naval wars were the unavoidable consequence of the three countries' strategic relationship. French and Spanish histo-

<sup>1</sup> 'Nous retrouvons avec cette conception l'incroyable légèreté de ces hommes du XVIIIe siècle, et d'abord de Napoléon lui-même, refusant de se plier au faits avant qu'il y ait eu un désastre': ACERRA, Martine & MEYER, Jean: *Marines et Révolution* [Rennes, 1988], p. 254. BATTESTI, Michèle: 'Le camp de Boulogne', in *Napoléon et la mer: un rêve d'empire* ed. HUMBERT, Jean-Marcel: & PONSONNET, Bruno: pp.110-119.

<sup>2</sup> MASSON, Philippe: & MURACCIOLE, José: *Napoléon et la Marine* (Paris, 1968), pp. 188-190. MASSON, Philippe: *Histoire de la Marine* (Paris, 2nd edn 1992, 2 vols) I, 360-362.

rians, especially naval historians, tend to imply that no other reaction was possible to economic rivalry and British aggression at sea<sup>3</sup>, while an older generation of British historians, echoing eighteenth-century British statesmen, took it for granted that Louis XIV never died, and that the history of Europe over the 'long eighteenth century' could be summed up as the struggle to resist French domination. This was the spirit which led a contemporary to refer to Britain and France as 'natural and necessary enemies', and a distinguished modern British historian to sum up the century as the 'Second Hundred Years' War'<sup>4</sup>.

In a general sense we may accept that this was more or less what actually happened, but assuming that something was inevitable is not a good way of uncovering why it happened. Even if it were a satisfactory explanation for Anglo-French antagonism, it would still give us no reason to believe that Spain had to be involved. In order to discover whether France and Spain had to be allies, and whether this alliance really was condemned to repeated naval wars against Britain, it is worth beginning with the years immediately after the Treaty of Utrecht. These were the years of the War of the Quadruple Alliance, in which Britain and France were joined against Spain, and during which an Anglo-French alliance was signed which lasted until 1731<sup>5</sup>. These facts do not suggest that the pattern of the later eighteenth-century was immutable or unavoidable. This war, and this alliance, clearly flowed from a strategic situation which in fact suggests something quite different. Spain was an imperial power, whose greatness and wealth were almost universally attributed to her two overseas empires, in Italy and the Americas. Spain's naval strategic requirement was to maintain communications across the Western Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and to exclude foreign merchants and shipping from the trade of the Americas. During the War of the Spanish Succession the French, the British and the Dutch had all very fully demonstrated their interest in the wealth of Spanish America, and the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, by granting to the British South Sea Company the 'Asiento' or con-

<sup>3</sup> E.g. VILLIERS, Patrick: *Marine Royale, Corsaires et Trafic dans l'Atlantique de Louis XIV à Louis XVI* (Dunkirk, 1991, 2 vols) I, 272-274; CERVERA PERY, José: *La Marina de la Ilustración (Resurgimiento y crisis del poder naval)* (Madrid, 1986), pp. 75-76. GUIMERÁ RAVINA, Agustín: 'Godoy y la Armada', in *Manuel Godoy y su tiempo* ed. MELÓN, Miguel Angel: LA PARRA, Emilio: & PÉREZ, Fernando Tomás: (Mérida, 2003) I, 381-403, at pp. 383-385. I am indebted to Dr Guimerá for a copy of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> BLACK, Jeremy: *Natural and Necessary Enemies: Anglo-French relations in the eighteenth century* (London, 1986). *Idem*, 'Britain's Foreign Alliances in the Eighteenth Century', *Albion* XX (1988) pp.573-602, at pp.591-594. BROMLEY, J. S.: 'The Second Hundred Years War', in *Britain and France: Ten Centuries* ed. JOHNSON, D.: CROUZET, F.: & BÉDARIDA, H.: (London, 1980) pp. 164-172 & 374.

<sup>5</sup> BLACK, Jeremy: 'Anglo-Spanish Naval Relations in the Eighteenth Century', *Mariner's Mirror* LXXVII (1991) pp.235-258. HATTENDORF, John B.: 'Admiral Sir George Byng and the Cape Passaro Incident, 1718: A Case Study of the use of the Royal Navy as a Deterrent', in *Guerres et Paix 1660-1815* (Vincennes, 1987) pp.19-38.

tract to import slaves, had given Britain a valuable and dangerous foothold in the Spanish Caribbean<sup>6</sup>.

In this situation Spain's urgent requirement was a navy capable of defending trade and empire. It is clear that Spanish governments understood this need, and that a succession of intelligent ministers —Bernardo Tinajero, José Patiño, José Campillo y Cosío and the Marqués de Ensenada— developed coherent plans to meet it. These plans were based on the exploitation of Spain's natural advantages, which were distance and disease. The Western Mediterranean basin was too far from Britain for large fleets to be deployed there unless the British could be very sure that they faced no threat in home waters. Even the possession of Minorca, though unquestionably useful to Britain in a naval war against Spain (much more useful than against France) did not alter the fact that the British seldom had the strength, and almost never at the outbreak of a war, to detach a large fleet to the Mediterranean and simultaneously to face a major threat in home waters. It was the French fleet at Toulon which was the real threat to Spain's Mediterranean interests, and a British squadron in the Mediterranean had some value from Spain's point of view as a counterweight to France<sup>7</sup>.

In the Caribbean the important Spanish coastal possessions were fortified on a scale sufficient to repel all but major attacks. The development of Havana, the only naval building yard in the world outside European waters, allowed Spain to maintain at economical cost a permanent squadron in the Caribbean which made it impossible for any European enemy to contemplate any serious aggression without deploying a large fleet. Fortifications and fleet together could only be tackled by major expeditions, inevitably slow and costly, certain to encounter the acute difficulties of victualling and supply so far from home, and the inevitable attacks of tropical disease. Admiral Francis Hosier's blockade of Porto Bello in 1726 and 1727 demonstrated the extremely high cost of even a limited naval success against Spain in these waters. The shipment of South American silver to Spain was delayed, which strengthened the British position - but the admiral himself, both his successors, eight captains and more than three thousand of his men died of tropical disease<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> H. NELSON, George: 'Contraband Trade under the Asiento, 1730-1739', *American Historical Review* LI (1945-46) pp. 55-67. RICHARD PARES, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 10-28.

<sup>7</sup> BLACK, 'Anglo-Spanish Naval Relations'. MANERA REGUEYRA, Enrique: 'La época de Felipe V y Fernando VI', in *El buque en la Armada Española* ed. Manera Regueyra (Madrid, 1981) pp. 169-200, at pp. 178-190. MERINO NAVARRO, José Patricio: 'La Armada en el siglo XVIII', in *Las Fuerzas Armadas Españolas: Historia institucional y social* ed. Hernández Sánchez-Barba et al. (Madrid, 1986, 8 vols) II, 85-147, at pp. 97-100. BÉTHENCOURT MASSIEU, Antonio: *Patiño en la política internacional de Felipe V* (Valladolid, 1954).

<sup>8</sup> *Naval Administration, 1715-1750* ed. Daniel A. Baugh (Navy Records Society Vol. 120, 1977), p. 327. KEEVIL, J. J., LLOYD, C.C. & COULTER, J.L.S.: *Medicine and the Navy, 1200-1900* (Edinburgh, 1957-63, 4 vols) III, 97-100. Other authors offer even higher figures, but there do not appear to be any trustworthy statistics of Hosier's losses.

This was equivalent to a major Spanish naval victory, achieved without fighting, by the combination of fortifications, mosquitos, and the invisible menace of the Havana squadron over the horizon<sup>9</sup>.

This Spanish defensive system was formidable and generally very effective. It required a fleet of ships designed for long-range cruising and convoy escort: large, comfortable, but not particularly fast or heavily armed. To maintain such a fleet at acceptable cost was only possible if the ships had long working lives, which called for heavy investment in yards and docks, and a building policy which stressed the strength and quality of ship construction, and the regularity and efficiency of maintenance. All this is an exact description of the manner in which the Spanish navy was rebuilt in the forty years after Utrecht. I conclude that Spanish naval strategy was intelligently conceived and closely matched to Spain's true strategic requirements. Note that command of the sea was not among them. Spain had no need to interfere with other people's use of the sea so long as they did not threaten Spain's essential interests, and still less need to undertake offensive naval war against France or Britain. This was strictly a defensive and deterrent navy, whose function was to raise the price of aggression to unacceptable levels: 'mantener la paz sin claudicar y poder ejercer una neutralidad vigilada', in Ensenada's words<sup>10</sup>. It had every reason to avoid major battles, for another Cape Passaro was likely to be the only easy means by which an aggressor could neutralise Spain's defensive naval strength<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> WALKER, Geoffrey J.: *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700-1789* (London, 1979), pp. 94-113. PEREZ-MALLAINA BUENO, Pablo Emilio: *Política Naval Española en el Atlántico 1700-1715* (Seville, 1982), pp. 397-407 & 442-443. FERNÁNDEZ DURO, Cesáreo: *Armada Española desde la unión de los Reinos de Castilla y de Aragón* (Madrid, 1895-1903, 9 vols) VI, 188-189. MERINO NAVARRO, 'La Armada en el siglo XVIII', p. 101. MCNEILL, J. R.: *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain: Louisbourg and Havana, 1700-1763* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985), pp. 52-57, 68, 87 & 98-103. *Idem*, 'The Ecological Basis of Warfare in the Caribbean, 1700-1804', in *Adapting to Conditions: War and Society in the Eighteenth Century* ed. Maarten Ultee (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1986) pp. 26-42. ZAPATERO, Juan Manuel: *La Guerra del Caribe en el siglo XVIII* (San Juan, P.R., 1964).

<sup>10</sup> BORDEJÉ Y MORENCOS, Federico F. de: 'El inmovilismo táctico en el siglo XVIII', *Revista de Historia Naval* XIV (1996) 52, pp.45-66, at p.65.

<sup>11</sup> PEREZ-MALLAINA BUENO, *Política Naval Española*, pp. 397-407 & 442-443. BÉTHEN-COURT Massieu, *Patiño*, pp. 21-24. FERNÁNDEZ DURO, *La Armada Española* VI, 376-377. BLACK, 'Anglo-Spanish Naval Relations'. MERINO NAVARRO, J. P., 'La Armada en el siglo XVIII', pp. 97-101. MCNEILL, *Atlantic Empires*, pp. 52-57. MANERA REGUEYRA, 'La época de Felipe V y Fernando VI', pp. 171-186. WALKER, *Spanish Politics*, pp. 94-113. CERVERA PERY, José: *La Marina de la Ilustración (Resurgimiento y crisis del poder naval)* (Madrid, 1986), pp. 57-70. MCLACHLAN, Jean: 'The seven years' peace and the West India policy of Carvajal and Wall', *English Historical Review* LIII (1938), pp. 457-477. LÓPEZ-CORDÓN CORTEZO, María Victoria: 'Entre Francia y Inglaterra. Intereses estratégicos y acuerdos políticos como antecedentes de Trafalgar', in *Trafalgar y el mundo atlántico* ed. GUIMERA, Agustín, RAMOS, Alberto & BUTRÓN, Gonzalo (Madrid, 2004). I am most grateful to Professor López-Cordón for permission to read this paper before publication.

Who the aggressor might be was obvious. There were only two commercial powers with known ambitions against the Spanish empire, above all in South and Central America, and with the naval power to back them. The British were the stronger, but the French had been the more ruthless and successful during the War of the Spanish Succession<sup>12</sup>. Spain's obvious interest was to balance the two, and if possible to play them off against each another. The rise of Anglo-French antagonism and the end of the Anglo-French alliance in 1731 was therefore a great advantage for Spain, and it was immediately followed by her substantial Italian gains during the War of the Polish Succession<sup>13</sup>. During the Anglo-Spanish War of 1739 British naval activity was hampered by fear of French intervention, which was considerably more effective than the actual hostilities of the French fleet when it entered the war in 1744<sup>14</sup>. Against Spain the British Navy achieved very little. Vernon at Porto Bello in 1739 showed that small forces moving fast could achieve real success on a limited scale, but both the Cartagena expedition and the British blockade in the Western Mediterranean were in their different ways costly failures. In its first major test, Spanish naval strategy had been substantially vindicated<sup>15</sup>. In the 1750s, Carvajal and Wall maintained this successful policy, inclining towards Britain, which was both the most dangerous enemy and the most

<sup>12</sup> PÉREZ-MALLAINA BUENO, Pablo Emilio: *Política Naval Española en el Atlántico 1700-1715* (Seville, 1982), pp.63-76 & 126-141. LESPAGNOL, André: 'Guerre et commerce maritime durant la phase initiale de la «Seconde Guerre de Cent Ans» (1688-1713)', in *Les Européens et les espaces océaniques au XVIIIe siècle* (Association des historiens modernistes des universités, Bulletin No.22, Paris, 1998) pp.83-98. *Idem*, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo: Une élite négociante au temps de Louis XIV* (Rennes, 1997 [originally St.Malo,1990], 2 vols) II,541-646. SPATE, O.H.K., *The Pacific since Magellan: II, Monopolists and Freebooters* (London, 1983), pp. 189-192. KAMEN, Henry, *The War of Succession in Spain 1700-15* (London, 1969), pp. 150-155 & 167-184.

<sup>13</sup> BLACK, Jeremy, 'British Neutrality in the War of the Polish Succession, 1733-1735', *International History Review* VIII (1986), pp.345-366. *Idem*, 'Anglo-Spanish Naval Relations', pp. 241-248. LACOUR-GAYET, G., *La Marine Militaire de la France sous le Règne de Louis XV* (Paris, 1902), pp. 114-120.

<sup>14</sup> OGLESBY, J.C.M.: 'Spain's Havana squadron and the preservation of the balance of power in the Caribbean, 1740-1748', *Hispanic American Historical Review* XLIX, 1969, pp. 473-488. HARDING, Richard: *Amphibious Warfare in the Eighteenth Century: The British Expedition to the West Indies, 1740-1742*. Woodbridge, 1991, p. 88. PARES: *War and Trade in the West Indies*, pp.163-168. BUCHET, Christian: *La lutte pour l'espace Caraïbe et la façade atlantique de l'Amérique centrale et du sud (1672-1763)*. Paris, 1991, 2 vols, I, 282-285.

<sup>15</sup> HARDING, Richard, *Amphibious Warfare in the Eighteenth Century: The British Expedition to the West Indies, 1740-1742* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 22-42. WOODFINE, Philip 'Ideas of naval power and the conflict with Spain, 1737-1742', in *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century* ed. BLACK, Jeremy & WOODFINE, Philip, (Leicester, 1988), pp. 71-90, at pp.72-73. *Idem*, *Britannia's Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the 1739 War with Spain* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 223-224. VESME, Carlo Baudi de, 'Il potere marittimo e la guerra di successione d'Austria', *Nuova Rivista Storica* XXXVII (1953) pp. 19-43. OGLESBY, J.C.M., 'Spain's Havana squadron and the preservation of the balance of power in the Caribbean, 1740-1748', *Hispanic American Historical Review* XLIX (1969), pp.473-488.

reliable friend<sup>16</sup>. ‘La Francia’ Carvajal wrote, ‘nos ha de asesinar siempre y que nos hará mucho más daño siendo amiga que siendo enemiga’<sup>17</sup>.

We know about Spanish naval strategy, because Spanish ministers laid out coherent plans and Spanish historians have investigated them. With France the picture is more obscure. The marquis de Maurepas, who inherited the position of naval minister in 1723 at the age of twenty-two and remained twenty-six years in office, was clear that ‘Le Commerce fait de la richesse et conséquemment la puissance des Etats; les forces navales sont absolument nécessaires pour le soutien du commerce maritime’<sup>18</sup>. Though he does not appear explicitly to have declared that he was rebuilding the French navy essentially for colonial and commercial warfare against Spain, rather than to fight France’s then-ally Britain, the evidence suggests this. Almost as soon as he took office, French naval yards began building ships of the line, each to their own designs (for French naval architecture was not centralised), but all to a common plan. There were virtually no three-deckers, which all admirals agreed were essential to dominate fleet battles. Instead the fleet was composed of very large two-deckers, whose design implies that they were intended for long-range fast cruising in trade-wind latitudes. Unlike Spanish ships they were heavily armed, but their light construction was by no means well adapted either for close action, or long life. These long, highly-stressed hulls were bouyant and fast off the wind when new, but they were at their worst in heavy weather, had high maintenance requirements and short working lives<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> MCLACHLAN, Jean, ‘The seven years’ peace and the West India policy of Carvajal and Wall’, *English Historical Review* LIII (1938), pp. 457-477.

<sup>17</sup> LÓPEZ-CORDÓN, ‘Entre Francia y Inglaterra’, quoting Carvajal’s ‘Testamento político’.

<sup>18</sup> FILION, Maurice, *Maurepas: ministre de Louis XV (1715-1749)* (Montreal, 1967), pp. 49-50. This was written in 1745, but he had said similar things before. Cf *Idem*, ‘La crise de la marine française, d’après le mémoire de Maurepas de 1745 sur la marine et le commerce’, *Revue d’Histoire de l’Amérique Française* XXI (1967), pp. 230-242, at pp. 231-233.

<sup>19</sup> GARDINER, Robert, *The First Frigates: Nine-Pounder and Twelve-Pounder Frigates, 1748-1815* (London, 1992), pp. 93-117. *Idem*, *Frigates of the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2000), pp. 87-98 & 131-141. *Idem*, ‘Frigate Design in the Eighteenth Century’, *Warship* Nos.9-12 (1979) pp. 3-12, 80-92 & 269-277, at pp. 83-92. BOUDRIOT, Jean, *The Seventy-Four Gun Ship: A Practical Treatise on the Art of Naval Architecture* trans. David H. Roberts (Rotherfield, Sussex, 1986-88, 4 vols), and GOODWIN, Peter, *The Construction and Fitting of the Sailing Man of War, 1650-1850* (London, 1987), give exhaustive detail on French and British framing and fastening practices. BAUGH, *Naval Administration*, pp. 234-235. LLINARES, Sylviane, *Marine, propulsion et technique: l’évolution du système technologique du navire de guerre français au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1994, 1 vol in 2) I, 99-142, 156-168 & 177-201; II, 351-352. ACERRA, Martine, *Rocheport et la construction navale française, 1661-1815* (Paris, 1993, 1 vol in 4) II, 388-389 & III, 552-585. ACERRA & MEYER, *Marines et Révolution*, pp. 74-75. MEYER, Jean, ‘L’évolution de la guerre marine et de son matériel (1650-1815)’, in *Les Marines de Guerre Européennes, XVII-XVIIIe siècles* ed., ACERRA, Martine, MERINO, José & MEYER, Jean (Paris, 1985), pp. 123-146, at p. 141 n. 8. Jean Boudriot & Hubert Berti, *The History of the French Frigate 1650-1850* trans. David H. Roberts (Rotherfield, East Sussex, 1993), pp. 130-137. ACERRA & ZYSBERG, *L’essor des marines*, pp.79-85. James Pritchard, *Louis XV’s Navy, 1748-*

Maurepas, however, invested very little in French dockyards, so that large expenditure on shipbuilding was needed to keep up quite a small fleet<sup>20</sup>. It is unclear whether the minister, whom many contemporaries regarded as a lightweight ('De bon esprit, qui a des très bonnes intentions, mais qui ne sait pas de quelle couleur est la mer', was his secretary's verdict)<sup>21</sup>, realised this weakness of his policy.

The logic of France's strategic situation in the 1720s, and the design of the fleet which Maurepas began to build up, suggests that his naval strategy had two related aspects: the defence of French overseas commerce with the West Indies, and what we may call 'aggressive trade' designed to open up Spanish America. Very likely he, like Spanish ministers, had particularly in mind St.Malo's highly profitable voyages into the Pacific during the War of the Spanish Succession. The new French fleet was only partly a defensive and deterrent force on the Spanish model, and its new ship designs loudly proclaim an aggressive design against the Spanish empire. Nothing in France's then strategic situation called for a naval war against Britain. Such a war, were it to be fought, would have required an entirely different (and much larger) fleet of entirely different ships, heavily timbered to withstand the strains of prolonged seakeeping in northern waters, and close action with British ships. It would also have required different naval yards, and in different places.

It is therefore surprising that Maurepas consented to the French declaration of war on Britain in 1744 with equanimity, and that he made no move to adapt the French fleet to its new strategic situation<sup>22</sup>. Nor did any of his suc-

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1762: *A Study of Organization and Administration* (Kingston, Ontario & Montreal, 1987), pp.126-130. BEAUCHESNE, Geneviève, *Historique de la construction navale à Lorient de 1666 à 1770* (Vincennes, 1979), pp. 137-138. OLLIVIER, Blaise, *18th Century Shipbuilding: Remarks on the Navies of the English & the Dutch...* trans.& ed. ROBERTS, David H. (Rotherfield, East Sussex, 1992), pp.113, 136 & 161. Cf RODGER, N.A.M., 'Form and Function in European Navies, 1660-1815', in *In het kielzog. Maritiem-historische studies aangeboden aan Jaap R. Bruijn bij zijn vertrek als hoogleraar zeegechiedenis aan de Universiteit Leiden*, ed. AKVELD, Leo et al. (Amsterdam, 2003), pp.85-97.

<sup>20</sup> MEYER, Jean & ACERRA, Martine, 'La marine française vue par elle-même (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)', in *Guerres et Paix 1660-1815* (Vincennes, 1987), pp. 231-243, at pp. 231-235. FILION, 'La crise de la marine française'; & *Maurepas*, pp. 49-58, 101-148 & 157-172. PRITCHARD, James, *Anatomy of a Naval Disaster: The 1746 French Expedition to North America* (Montreal & Kingston, 1995), pp. 21-22. MEYER, Jean, 'La marine française au XVIIIe siècle', in *Histoire Militaire de la France II, 1715-1871* ed. DELMAS, Jean (Paris, 1992), pp. 151-194, at p. 155. ACERRA, Martine & ZYSBERG, André, *L'essor des marines de guerres européennes (vers 1680 - vers 1790)* (Paris, 1997), pp. 66-85. LACOUR-GAYET, *La Marine Militaire*, pp. 35-98. BERTIN, J., LAMONTAGNE R. & VERGNEAULT, F., 'Traitement graphique d'une information: les marines royales de France et de Grande-Bretagne (1697-1747)', *Annales XXII* (1967) pp.991-1004, at pp.992-993 & 1000.

<sup>21</sup> TAILLEMITE, Etienne, *L'histoire ignorée de la Marine française* (Paris, 1988), p. 152, quoting Henri du Troussel, sieur de Valincour.

<sup>22</sup> Filion, *Maurepas*, pp. 71 & 75. VERGÉ-FRANCESCHI, Michel, *Les officiers généraux de la marine royale, 1715-1774* (Paris, 1990, 7 vols) VI,2508.

cessors. Throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century, and indeed far into the nineteenth, successive French regimes continued to build ships of the same types as before, though they were strikingly ill-adapted to the strategic situation in which France now found herself. Only in the American War of Independence did France come close to imposing the sort of fluid, indirect strategy, with a minimum of fighting and a maximum of long-distance passage-making, which best suited the structure of the French fleet, and this was thanks to British mistakes which were never repeated.<sup>23</sup> As the century drew to a close, French admirals and constructors became ever more satisfied with the perfection of their designs, in spite of their steadily worsening record in action<sup>24</sup>. In just over twenty years of warfare from 1793 to 1815, the French built 133 ships of the line and 127 frigates; and lost 112 and 126 respectively to enemy action or stress of weather. On average they lost a ship a month for twenty years<sup>25</sup>. I would argue that this was in part the consequence of fighting a series of naval wars against Britain, starting in 1744, with a navy which had been designed for something quite different.

In the case of Spain, the turning point is not 1744 but 1761, when the terms of the third Family Compact committed Spain to war with France against Britain. The motive was, as before, to preserve the balance of power which Britain's overseas conquests seemed to have overturned. As Floridablanca later explained, 'El pacto de familia, prescindiendo de ese nombre, que solo mira a denotar la unión, parentesco y memoria de la augusta casa de Borbón que lo hizo, no es otra cosa que un tratado de alianza ofensiva defensiva semejante a otros muchos que han hecho y subsisten entre varias potencias de Europa'<sup>26</sup>. Carlos III and his ministers were especially shocked by the conquest of Canada, which seemed to indicate a threat to Spanish America. Nevertheless we must question whether they were wise to go to war. Spain had neither the need nor the means to mount an aggressive naval war against Britain, and faced no immediate threat so long as she remained neutral. Certainly it was in Spain's interests that British seapower should be balanced by French as far as possible, but she was running an exceedingly high risk in committing herself to the side of France after the French had been decisively

<sup>23</sup> MURPHY, Orville T., *Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787* (Albany, 1982), pp. 263-269. DULL, Jonathan R., *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1774-1787* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 97-98. RODGER, N.A.M., 'Sea-power and Empire, 1688-1793', in MARSHALL, P. J. (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire Vol.II, The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 169-183, at pp. 180-181.

<sup>24</sup> LLINARES, *Marine, propulsion et technique* I, 171-192. ACERRA, *Rochefort*, II, 361-366. ACERRA & ZYSBERG, *L'essor des marines de guerres*, pp. 75-77. ACERRA & MEYER, *Marines et Révolution*, pp. 66-72. MASCART, Jean, *La vie et les travaux du chevalier Jean-Charles de Borda (1733-1799)* (Lyon, 1919), pp. 482-483.

<sup>25</sup> ACERRA, *Rochefort*, III, 589 & 598. Acerra & Meyer, *Marines et Révolution*, p. 99.

<sup>26</sup> LÓPEZ-CORDÓN, 'Entre Francia y Inglaterra', quoting Floridablanca's 'Instrucción reservada' of 1787.

beaten at sea. The result was the capture of Havana and Manila, the first major defeats for Spain's defensive strategy. Admittedly both British victories were narrow ones, owing as much to the incompetence of the local Spanish leadership as to a shift in the strategic balance. It is hard to imagine that another Don Blas de Lezo would have lost Havana as Don Juan del Prado and the Marqués del Real Transporte did<sup>27</sup>. Nevertheless the new Spanish policy necessarily subjected the Spanish navy and the Spanish defensive system to a much more severe test than they had ever faced before. Moreover it rested on the very questionable assumption that British policy was permanently and irremediably aggressive. The war showed the dangers of this assumption, and the peace of 1763, at which a large proportion of Britain's conquests were returned, showed its weakness.

The danger of the new Spanish policy lay not only in making Britain an enemy, but in making France a friend. The Family Compact necessarily had to fight the British largely at sea, and the alliance only made sense for Spain if the two navies added up to an effective fighting force, or at least an effective deterrent. The performance of the French navy during the Seven Years War was scarcely an encouraging precedent. Many contemporaries, and almost all modern historians, estimate fighting strength simply by counting numbers of battleships, which is of limited usefulness even when the numbers are realistic. So far as crude numbers go, the combined fleets of France and Spain were more or less equal to those of Britain from around 1770. In 1805, thanks to the disastrous efforts of the Earl of St. Vincent to 'reform' British naval administration, they were considerably superior. In that year Britain had only 83 ships of the line in seagoing condition, 18 of them fit only for service in home waters, and none of them with more than five years estimated life left<sup>28</sup>. Napoleon's vanity provided the British at Trafalgar with the opportunity they desperately needed to redress the balance. Numbers, however, reveal only part of the situation. I have already argued that warships and navies are only effective when

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<sup>27</sup> FERNÁNDEZ DURO, *La Armada Española* VII, 41-70. David MARLEY, F., 'Havana Surprised: Prelude to the British Invasion, 1762', *Mariner's Mirror* LXXVIII (1992), pp. 293-305. *The Siege and Capture of Havana, 1762*, ed. David Syrett (Navy Records Society Vol. 114, 1970), pp. 151-326. BUCHET, Christian, *La lutte pour l'espace Caraïbe et la façade atlantique de l'Amérique centrale et du sud (1672-1763)* (Paris, 1991, 2 vols) I, 411-412 & 536-566. *Papeles sobre la toma de la Habana por los Ingleses en 1762* (Havana, 1948); & *Nuevos Papeles sobre la toma de la Habana por los Ingleses en 1762* (Havana, 1951), both ed. LLAVERÍAS, Joaquín; ZAPATERO, *La Guerra del Caribe* pp. 264-275. *Documentos ineditos sobre la toma de la Habana por los Ingleses en 1762* ed. PÉREZ DE LA RIVA, Juan, (Havana, 1963). CASTILLO MANRUBIA, Pilar, 'Perdida de la Habana, 1763', *Revista de Historia Naval* VIII (1990) 28, pp. 61-77. For Manila see TRACY, Nicholas, *Manila Ransomed: The British Assault on Manila in the Seven Years War* (Exeter, 1995); *Documents Illustrating the British Conquest of Manila, 1762-1763* ed. CUSHNER, Nicholas P., (Camden Society 4th S. VIII, 1971); FERNÁNDEZ DURO, *La Armada Española* VII, 85-90.

<sup>28</sup> MORRIS, Roger, *The Royal Dockyards during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Leicester, 1983), p. 16. *Letters and Papers of Charles, Lord Barham... 1758-1813* ed. LAUGHTON, Sir J. K., (Navy Records Society Vols. 32, 38 & 39, 1907-11) III, 44.

they are well designed for the right tasks. The French navy was not designed for fighting Britain, and it never evolved. The Spanish navy, arguably, was both more suitable and more flexible. The last generation of Spanish three-deckers designed by Romero y Landa provided the Spanish navy with the instruments for winning fleet battles which the British had and the French did not<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless the question remains: how far was it either possible or desirable for the Spanish navy to make up for the deficiencies of the French? Was the Family Compact a source of strength or weakness to Spain?

These questions presented themselves again in 1779 when the Family Compact was next invoked. In the face of Britain's naval and colonial crisis Spanish naval strategy was much more clear-sighted than French. French ministers looked, as they so often looked, for a painless indirect strategy which would secure victory without risk, and preferably without fighting. Spanish ministers appreciated that they had an advantage of numbers which was not likely to last, and that they needed to secure a decisive victory quickly, before Britain's greater naval resources began to tell. Hence the Channel campaign of 1779, a sound strategy wrecked by indecisive leadership, and the inability of the French navy to keep its fleet at sea, healthy and efficient, for more than a few weeks<sup>30</sup>. There was nothing wrong with the plan, but the French navy at least was not equipped to carry it into effect. Both navies suffered because their traditions were of deterrence and the avoiding of battle, but in this sort of war with Britain nothing was to be achieved without winning battles. It is perhaps over harsh to say that 'la ofensiva directa parece haber desaparecido del horizon mental español'<sup>31</sup>, but the alliance could not work without a real revolution of attitudes in both navies.

<sup>29</sup> RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ, Agustín R., 'Los Españoles en Trafalgar: Navíos, cañones, hombres y una alianza problemática', in *Trafalgar y el mundo atlántico* ed. GUIMERA, Agustín, RAMOS, Alberto & BUTRÓN, Gonzalo (Madrid, 2004). I am grateful to Dr Rodríguez for the opportunity to read this paper in advance of its publication.

<sup>30</sup> PRITCHARD, James, 'French Strategy and the American Revolution: A Reappraisal', *Naval War College Review* XLVII (1994), pp.83-108, at pp. 90-94. DULL, Jonathan R., *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1774-1787* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 97-105 & 126-158. *Idem*, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven & London, 1985), p. 109. SCOTT, H. M., *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 262-263 & 273. PATTERSON, A. Temple, *The Other Armada: The Franco-Spanish Attempt to Invade Britain in 1779* (Manchester, 1960), pp. 1-20, 59-70 & 160-215. VOLTES BOU, Pedro, 'El intento hispanofrances de desembarco en Inglaterra del año 1779', *Hispania* XXVII (1967), pp. 528-607. LACOUR-GAYET, G., 'La Campagne Navale de la Manche en 1779', *Revue Maritime* CL (1901) pp. 1629-1673. TAYLOR, A. H., 'The French Fleet in the Channel, 1778 and 1779', *Mariner's Mirror* XXIV (1938) pp. 275-288. T. MURPHY, Orville, *Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787* (Albany, 1982), pp.277-278. MASSON, *Histoire de la Marine* I, 263-266. LOIR, Maurice: *La Marine royale en 1789* (Paris, 1892), pp. 125-129.

<sup>31</sup> MERINO NAVARRO, 'La Armada en el siglo XVIII', p. 91. Cf GONZÁLEZ-ALLER, José Ignacio & O'DONNELL, Hugo, 'The Spanish Navy in the 18th Century', in *Battle of St.Vincent 200 Years* ed. Stephen Howarth (Shelton, Notts, 1998) pp. 67-83, at pp. 70-71; RODRÍGUEZ

Spain's greatest asset in this war was that she effectively controlled the grand strategy of the alliance, and for all her disappointments, she was the only European belligerent which made territorial gains from the American War. It was quite otherwise during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Then the alliance, no longer a 'Family Compact' in any sense, was driven by French interests, and by Godoy's personal hatred of the British. For Spain the relationship was at the strategic level entirely parasitic, like the War of the Spanish Succession but worse. France bled Spain white, forcing her into a war in which she had nothing to gain and everything to lose<sup>32</sup>. Trafalgar was almost the final act of this tragedy: a battle in which Spain's fleet, and consequently Spain's empire and her status as a great power, were thrown away for nothing.

So I return to my earlier question. Did it have to happen? Were the Anglo-French wars necessary at all, and was it inevitable that Spain should be drawn into them? These wars destroyed Spain as a great power, and it seems to me that the risks of participating in them were very high, and fairly obvious, given the fundamental imbalance between the means and ends of both French and Spanish naval strategy. I have already suggested that a strategy of neutrality and deterrence made a great deal of sense for Spain, and was substantially successful for almost fifty years. Why did Carlos III abandon it in 1761? A part of the answer no doubt lies in the king's personal experiences. As King of the Two Sicilies in 1742 he had suffered the humiliation of being forced out of the war by a small British squadron which anchored in the Bay of Naples in front of his palace and threatened to destroy it forthwith unless the Neapolitan army were withdrawn. This experience had given him a powerful sense of the value of seapower, and a lively hatred for the British<sup>33</sup>. Perhaps this incident goes some way to explain the abrupt change in Spanish grand strategy, but it still seems extraordinary that a successful long-term policy should have been so suddenly and completely abandoned. It is the more extraordinary since until then Spanish policy, unlike French, had visibly been based on a coherent grand strategy, rooted in the reality of Spain's situation and sustained by a navy intelligently designed to serve it. Certainly the rise of British naval power, particularly in the 1760s, seemed to present a new and more threatening situation. Certainly there were many incidents and circumstances which provided real irritants to Anglo-Spanish relations, and the-

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CASADO, Vicente, 'La política del reformismo de los primeros Borbones en la marina de guerra española', *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* XXV (1968) pp. 601-618, at p. 611.

<sup>32</sup> GUIMERÁ RAVINA, A., 'Godoy y la Armada', pp. 385-389 & 402-403. BARRIONUEVO CAÑAS Margarita & DE BLAS Y OSORIO, Juan Manuel 'La Armada y Godoy', *Revista de Historia Naval* VII (1989) 24, pp. 147-163.

<sup>33</sup> HERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ-BARBA, Mario, 'Reformismo y modernización: El ejército y la armada en el siglo XVIII', in *Las Fuerzas Armadas Españolas: Historia institucional y social* ed. Hernández Sánchez-Barba et al. (Madrid, 1986, 8 vols) I, 175-198, at p. 191. RICHMOND, H.W. *The Navy in the War of 1739-48* (Cambridge, 1920, 3 vols) I, 204-205 & 213-215.

re was a long-term commercial and colonial rivalry between the two countries - but I am still unconvinced that war was Spain's best answer. It is instructive in this case to consider another imperial power which faced a similar dilemma and took the opposite decision: Portugal, which chose to ally with England in 1703 precisely because England as an enemy represented the most dangerous threat to the Portuguese empire. As allies, on the other hand, the English only wanted trade and not conquest, and offered protection in return. Portuguese ministers were well aware that the relationship would be unequal, but they were clear that a degree of economic and political dependence was the price which had to be paid to safeguard the empire. 'The preservation of our overseas colonies makes it indispensable for us to have a good intelligence with the powers which now possess the command of the sea,' commented José da Cunha Brochado, Portuguese minister in London; 'the cost is heavy, but for us such an understanding is essential'<sup>34</sup>. On any reckoning, this policy was an outstanding success. The Portuguese empire (admittedly shorn of Brazil) was the last of all the European colonial empires to survive. The Spanish empire was the first to collapse, and it seems to me that its fall followed directly from Spain's decision to ally with France in a policy of open confrontation with Britain. It is easy to understand why Spanish ministers felt that circumstances left them no choice, but with hindsight one cannot help doubting if they were right. Certainly Godoy's insistence on alliance first with the French Revolutionaries and then with Napoleon seems to owe much more to his personal hatred of Britain than any rational analysis of Spain's interests, and his incompetent management of the Spanish navy completed her ruin<sup>35</sup>. It is difficult to believe that it was all inevitable. The Spanish navy was a powerful strategic instrument by the late eighteenth century. In wiser hands it could have done far more than to perish gloriously.

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<sup>34</sup> FRANCIS, 'Portugal and the Grand Alliance', p. 93, to Diogo de Mendonça Cortes Real, 12 Aug 1710.

<sup>35</sup> GUIMERÁ RAVINA, 'Godoy y la Armada', pp. 386-403.