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Paul C. Allen. *Philip III and the Pax Hispanica, 1598-1621: The Failure of Grand Strategy.* New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2000. xvi + 335 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-07682-0.

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Historians have used a number of terms to describe Philip III of Spain, who reigned from 1598 to 1621: "undistinguished and insignificant" [1]; "feckless" (2); "a pallid, anonymous creature" [3]. In comparison to his father, Philip II, who took an obsessive interest in the minutiae of governance, Philip III was passive and remote. More than ninety percent of the reports (*consultas*) issued by the Spanish council of state were returned by Philip III with little more than a bland *asi* [4], leading John Lynch to describe him as "the laziest king in Spanish history" [5]. Scholars have generally assumed that Philip delegated much of the responsibility for running the government to his favorite, the Duke of Lerma, who was, in turn, more concerned with his and his family's advancement than with mundane matters of statecraft. The consensus, thus, is that Philip was a cipher who surrounded himself with venal and mediocre advisors while Spain slipped into irreversible decline.

In this important new study, Paul C. Allen has taken on the formidable task of rescuing the Spanish monarch's tarnished reputation, as well as reassessing Spanish foreign policy in the years preceding the Twelve-Years' Truce of 1609. According to Allen, Philip was more involved in shaping policy than is generally assumed, and he eventually adopted a pragmatic "grand strategy" that differed from that of his father and which better suited Spain's widespread commitments and limited means.

In 1598, at the outset of his reign, Philip inherited from his father not only the Dutch revolt–a conflict that would not end until the reign of Philip IV–but also a war against England and a fragile peace that had been concluded with France that same year. Philip II tried to pursue an aggressive policy on several fronts at once, and bankrupted Spain in the process. A new grand strategy was needed, therefore, in order to conserve Spain's resources and coordinate its activities throughout Europe and the world. Philip III's solution was to obtain peace with Spain's enemies as a temporary expedient: "The idea was to proffer the laurels of peace to your opponents and persuade them to abandon their military pursuits for a time, while simultaneously maintaining your own military establishment, thereby weakening them seriously in the event of a future engagement" (p. ix). Peace, consequently, was viewed as another means of waging war, and Spain consciously sought the truce with the Dutch not as an end in itself but as a means toward eventual victory.

Philip arrived at this strategy only grudgingly. Like his father, he believed in the vital necessity of reconquering the rebellious Dutch provinces, and the first years of Philip's reign saw a renewed Spanish commitment to this arena. More money and more men, however, failed to win the war, and even the appearance of a gifted commander such as Ambrosio Spinola could not reverse Spain's military fortunes. The situation was further complicated by the policies pursued by Archduke Albert, Philip's brother-in-law, uncle, and cousin, who ruled the Spanish Netherlands as a semi-independent principality. Ultimately, Philip had to recognize that some sort of cease-fire would need to be arranged with the Dutch, if only to give Spain a much-needed respite in which to repair its finances and restore order to the army.

Peace with the Dutch was, however, a complicated affair. The Dutch insisted, as a precondition for any agreement, on Spain's recognition of the United Provinces as an independent power, something that Madrid was reluc-

tant to do. Philip was intent on recovering the provinces both for Spain and for Catholicism (pp. 96-97). As had been the case during the previous reign, religion was "one of the chief motivating factors in Philip's policy" (p. 13). Allen makes a strong case that this factor, which reflected Philip's genuine belief in the righteousness of the Catholic cause, narrowed the opportunities for compromise, and thus Spain had difficulties extricating itself from conflicts with Protestant powers, particularly England. Furthermore, the wide variety of states arrayed against Spain made it almost impossible to construct a comprehensive peace that would satisfy all sides: the Spanish, consequently, found that "they could not pull out of wars they no longer wanted to fight" (p. 57).

The first break in the concentration of powers arrayed against Spain came with the death of Queen Elizabeth I, who was succeeded by James I. The new king quickly displayed a willingness to cast aside the anti-Spanish strategy of his predecessor, and issued a unilateral cease-fire within months of his accession. Philip, who had once entertained hopes of installing a Habsburg on the English throne, came to favor peace with England, although he would never fully withdraw his support for the English Catholics (p. 115). The Spanish and English reached a final peace treaty in August 1604: Allen disputes those who believe that the peace favored the English, arguing instead that Spain gained significant military advantages from the treaty (p. 138). Freed from the need to wage war on two fronts, Spain could concentrate on defeating the Dutch.

That task, however, proved difficult. The siege of Ostend, which lasted over three years, ended in victory in September 1604. The resources that had been devoted to that monumental project could then be transferred to the main theater of war. Spinola launched a bold advance in 1605, and managed to capture several important fortresses late in the campaigning season. The next year, Spinola again attacked; despite some initial successes, however, the Spanish forces were unable to break through the Dutch defensive barrier. More importantly, two years of intense military effort had nearly emptied the Spanish treasury, without bringing Philip III any closer to victory. Madrid had already, as early as 1602, considered the possibility of concluding a truce with the Dutch; by 1606 both sides were ready to negotiate (p. 172). It would be another two years, however, before the labyrinthine negotiations produced the Twelve Years' Truce and, according to Allen, ushered in the brief Pax Hispanica.

Allen has made an important contribution to our understanding of Philip III's foreign policy, and his depiction of Spain's strategic dilemma comes as a welcome addition to the literature of international relations history, which has seen far too few recent works on this era. Allen's careful reconstruction of the peace negotiations with both England and the Netherlands is a useful corrective to other accounts that have relied heavily on non-Spanish sources, and he proves to be a thorough, even-handed chronicler of Madrid's negotiations with other powers.

Allen is less successful, however, in making his case that Spanish strategy changed in the years leading up to the Twelve-Years' Truce. In large part, this problem is due to Allen's failure to arrive at any definition of "strategy." The author uses this term without, apparently, recognizing that "strategy" is not an altogether unproblematic concept [6]. As a result, Allen states, at one point, that Spain lacked "a comprehensive strategic policy" at the outset of Philip III's reign (p. 21), but his view of Philip II's "grand strategy" (p. 239) shows that it was arguably "comprehensive" [7]. Furthermore, Allen clearly uses "strategy" to mean, at once, both longsrange "grand" strategy and temporary methods of dealing with diplomatic issues. Thus, when Allen talks of Philip's "peace strategy" as being a change in Spanish foreign policy (e.g., p. 238), it is not at all clear whether Allen is talking about a change in the overall structure of Madrid's foreign policy, or rather merely a change in Madrid's diplomatic tactics.

The resolution of this problem is critical, because Allen's thesis – that the "peace strategy" which led to the Twelve Years' Truce marked a fundamental shift in Spanish grand strategy – stands or falls on the distinction. In large part, it seems clear that Philip III's grand strategy differed little from that of his father: it is true that Spain agreed to a truce with the Dutch, but Philip had certainly not abandoned his goal of uniting the Low Countries under Spanish rule (p. 236). The "peace strategy," consequently, was not so much a change in strategy as it was a change in tactics. As Allen himself argues, the truce was "war by other means" (p. viii), which indicates that Spain simply continued its hostilities against the Dutch under a different guise, without thereby modifying its ultimate goals. This suggests that there was more continuity in Spain's foreign policy than the author is prepared to admit. Indeed, the thoroughness of Allen's research is, in the final analysis, the best argument against Allen's conclusion. This weakness in Allen's conclusion mars an otherwise admirable work of diplomatic history.

Notes

[1]. C.V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (London: 1938; paperback ed. New York: 1981), p. 55.

[2]. Richard S. Dunn, _The Age of Religious Wars, 1559-1715, 2d ed. (New York: 1979), p. 56.

[3]. J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716* (London: 1963), p. 300.

[4]. Geoffrey Parker, *Europe in Crisis 1598-1648* (Fontana History of Europe, London: 1979), pp. 55, 148.

[5]. quoted in Allen, p. 4. See also n. 4, p. 249.

[6]. Allen could have avoided this problem by consulting the large literature on strategy that has come out of political science. The only book in Allen's bibliography, however, that appears to deal directly with strategy is Geoffrey Parker's *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven: 1998), yet Allen does not explicitly accept or reject Parker's view of strategy.

[7]. Perhaps this apparent discrepancy can be attributed to the use of the term "strategic policy" as opposed to mere "strategy." Curiously, Allen chooses to define "foreign policy." He sees it as an "overarching and coherent framework within which all actions... would be fitted." N. 44, p. 255. This definition, it would seem, might be appropriate for "strategy," but there is no indication that Allen views the two terms as synonymous.

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