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A CASE IN FUTILITY: THE SPANISH EXPEDITION TO THE RIO DE LA PLATA, 1814-1820

The dissolution of Spain's vast empire in South America was not a foregone conclusion in 1814. Royalist forces controlled, however tenuously, most of the provinces. The rebels were in retreat. Only the Rio de la Plata region remained effectively outside of Spanish rule. But the «united provinces» were splitting apart. Leaders of the government at Buenos Aires were torn by divided counsels, opposed by outlying provinces, and powerless to speak for a united nation. Paraguay was independent of both Spain and Buenos Aires. In the Banda Oriental, internecine warfare continued between *porteño* forces and those under the command of José Artigas — even after the fall of Montevideo to the rebels in June, 1814.

A victory in these troubled waters could spearhead the restitution of Spanish authority throughout America. It also might help to alleviate some of the more pressing domestic and foreign problems. After spending six years in captivity in exile in Valençay, France, Ferdinand VII had returned in 1814.

He found the nation prostrate and weary. Visible scars remained from the six year struggle against the French. The country was decimated by war and debilitated by the flight of thousands of political refugees. Furthermore, the treasury was empty. The government faced problems of economic and military recovery and of flagging national morale.

In the international arena Spain now found herself a second-rate power. At the Congress of Vienna, Spain played a minimal role, participating little either in the debates or in the preparation of the articles of the Final Act. She appeared powerless, moreover, to stop the expansionist aims of the United States or to exert sufficient pressure on that government to take concrete and forceful steps to prevent United States nationals from aiding and abetting the revolutionaries.

Spain's evident weakness, coupled with conditions in the Plata region, emboldened the Portuguese-Brazilian monarchy. With its capital removed to Rio de Janeiro, where D. João VI had resided since the napoleonic thrust into the Peninsula, that government resolved to pursue a more aggressive policy.

Frustrated by this growing impotence, the government at Madrid cast about for means of strengthening its hand. Ferdinand VII and his counsellors focused their attention on the troublesome colonies across the Atlantic. Here, indeed, lay the blame for many of their difficulties. Keeping the restive colonies under control drained money, material, and manpower.

If the Americas could be pacified, these resources could be used to bolster the sagging economy at home and burnish Spain's fading image abroad. In 1815, the King ordered the Council of State, his principal advisory body, to study the situation in America. While the Council of the Indies would continue to deal with the rebellions, colonial developments had reached the point at which they affected the well-being of the Spanish monarchy. Ferdinand's top advisers were compelled to take a personal hand.

The dream of empire was not dead. The nation that had won vast overseas territories and established its claim to be a major power, turned to the task of salvaging its domain.

HISPANIC-PORTUGUESE RELATIONS

Since Portugal's forced cession to Spain of Olivenza and other territories on the Peninsula in 1801, relations were strained. To further complicate matters and increase tension, Brazil proceeded to invade the Banda Oriental in August, 1816. The attack came at the time of the nearly consummated nuptial arrangements of Ferdinand and his brother Don Carlos with their nieces, the daughters of D. João VI.

Brazil's warlike action incensed and troubled Madrid. As early as September, 1816, Spanish intelligence reported that Portugal had stationed five brigantines, two corvettes, two schooners, and a number of gunboats in the area (!). Later, that country bolstered its naval

0) Secretary of State to Minister of Marine, 14 November 1816, Museo Naval, Madrid, Salazar, MSS, 2047, fol. 144.

strength by an additional eight or nine warships of uneven military caliber ⁽²⁾. Meanwhile, at the Spanish capital, military officials demanded precise details about the ongoing diplomatic exchanges with the Luso-Brazilian monarchy over the reasons behind the invasion. Only this information could settle the issue of the size of the forces for the expedition to Buenos Aires projected for August, 1817 ⁽³⁾. If the two countries resolved their differences, ten thousand men together with a fleet of three or four frigates, some brigantines, and a number of smaller vessels would suffice. If not, the Marine Secretary, José Vázquez Figueroa, insisted on another three or four warships ⁽⁴⁾. For various reasons, to be discussed later, the expedition did not sail in August. Even by September, military and civilian personnel were unclear as to Portuguese designs in the region.

The counsellors of state doubted D. Joao's protestations that he recognized Ferdinand's authority over the Banda Oriental and that he had intervened merely out of necessity to protect his kingdom. Their anxiety caused some counsellors to push for the immediate departure of the expedition, in spite of domestic problems and the plight of the Royal Navy ^(5*).

THE RIO DE LA PLATA IN THE SPANISH PACIFICATION SCHEME

Brazil aside, the patriot government at Buenos Aires in itself, posed a serious threat. The Plata region had been of primary importance to the Spanish pacification scheme since the insurgency first

⁽²⁾ Museo Naval, Madrid, «Memorias ineditas de José Vázquez Figueroa» (hereafter cited as Vázquez Papers), MSS, 432, fols. 87-101.

⁽³⁾ Gaspar Vigodet to King, 23 June 1817; Anonymous Memorial to King, 3 July 1817, Archivo General de Palacio, Madrid, «Papeles reservados de Fernando VII», tomo 31, vol. 16, fols. 159-181.

⁽⁴⁾ Minutes of the Council of State, 20 November 1816, Archivo Historico Nacional, Madrid, Sección Estado (hereafter cited as Council of State, AHN, Estado), lib. 18d.; Vázquez to Count Abisbal, 4 July 1817, Vázquez Papers, MSS, 432, fols. 155-158.

⁽⁵⁾ Council of State, 10, 17, and 24 September 1817; 1, 8, 15, and 18 October 1817, AHN, Estado, lib. 20d. ; 28 April, 6 and 22 May 1818, AHN, Estado, lib. 21d.

broke out. During the six year struggle against the French, the interim government had exerted itself to send more than 4,000 men there (6). Yet the revolt continued.

With Ferdinand again on the throne, Madrid turned its attention to that turbulent region. In October, 1814, the Secretary of State received a memorandum from representatives of the former governor of Montevideo. This stated that in the early stages of the insurgency, royalist forces had needed only 3,000 reinforcements to repulse the rebel onslaught and cut off their supply lines. Governor Gaspar Vigodet had stressed even then that control of Montevideo could assure Spain's hegemony in South America. Because of the indifference shown to his request by the Regency at the time, the situation had deteriorated. Now the delegates insisted on 12,000 troops (7).

The government acted favorably and decisively (8). Domestic difficulties to the contrary notwithstanding, Ferdinand ordered 10,000 fully equipped men to sail for Buenos Aires. But in November, 1814, General Pablo Morillo's original orders were altered and the ships rerouted to the Tierra Firme. The King publicly acknowledged this change only in the Royal Decree of 9 May 1815. He gave as reasons the following: the delay in embarkation; the consequent passing of the best departure season; and the necessity of protecting the Isthmus of Panama, which Ferdinand called «the key to the Americas» (9).

The last minute switch in Morillo's instructions did not signal a diminishing of official interest in the Plata area. In late, 1814, Madrid dispatched a special envoy to reconnoitre. José Maria Salazar was instructed: 1) to ascertain D. João's posture; 2) to estimate the number of forces necessary to mount an offensive against Buenos Aires; 3) to locate suitable disembarkation points; 4) to report on supplies which

(6) A. MATILLA TASCON, «Las expediciones o reemplazos militares enviados desde Cadiz a reprimir el movimiento de independencia de Hispanoamérica», *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, LVII, N.º 1 (Madrid, 1951), 37.

(7) Domingo Torres and Joaquin Gomez Liano to Secretary of State, 3 October 1814, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Sección Estado (hereafter cited as AGI, Estado), leg. 98.

(8) Minute of Secretary of State, 7 October 1814, on Domingo de Torres and Joaquin Gomez Liano to State, 3 October 1814, AGI, Estado, leg. 98.

(9) ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ VILLA, *El teniente Don Pablo Morillo* (4 vols.; Madrid: Fortanet, 1908-1910), II, 437-438, 462-464.

might be procured from Brazil; and 5) to gather other relevant data (10).

Salazar went about his mission assiduously. In February, 1815, he sent details of military activities in and around Buenos Aires. The envoy indicated that the insurgents had constructed forts and had transferred artillery not only to Córdoba, where they intended to build another fort, but also to Peru. Because of the popularity of José Artigas, the dispatch continued. Madrid must win him over or at least his second in command, Fernando Otorgüese. Otherwise, any expedition, no matter how large, would fail. On the brighter side, he contended that the patriot cause had suffered a setback as a consequence of the recapture of Chile by the royalists. That victory stemmed the rebel momentum at least temporarily by choking off the flow of funds and munitions to the insurgents of Buenos Aires. The emissary concluded that Paraguay was independent of Buenos Aires and would be easy to reconquer (U).

Spain proceeded with preparations for the expedition to the Rio de la Plata. But at the same time she remained receptive to overtures for a peaceful settlement. By June, 1816, hope of any accommodation with the rebels disappeared. The journey of Bernardino Rivadavia to Madrid had produced no positive results (12).

The counsellors of state reacted to the collapse of negotiations by calling for the prompt dispatch of a sizable force as the only means to forestall the success of the rebellion. The recognized the concomitant difficulties: 1) evaluating the enemy's capability; 2) organizing land and sea forces; 3) assessing Great Britain's alternatives, who was accused of fomenting the rebellions and believed to have stationed in the area at least three ships of the line and fourteen men-of-war (13); and 4) funding the venture, a conservative estimate being

(10) Instructions to Salazar, *Muy Reservado*, 22 November 1814, Salazar, MSS, 2047, fols. 92-93.

(11) José Maria Salazar to Luis Maria Salazar, 17 February 1815, Salazar, MSS, 2047, fols. 135-137.

(12) Council of State, 6 June 1816, AHN, Estado, lib. 18d.; MARIO BELGRANO, *Rivadavia y sus gestiones diplomáticas con España. 1814-1820*. Buenos Aires : Huarpes, S.A., 1945, pp. 91-115.

(13) José Maria Salazar to Luis Maria Salazar, 13 February 1815, Salazar, MSS, 2047, fol. 133; Council of State, 23 May 1815, AHN, Estado, lib. 14d.

100,000,000 *reales*. To expedite matters and to compensate for the deterioration of the fleet, it was proposed that Madrid hire ships from foreign nations, Portugal included. The counsellors, obviously, knew little of that country's designs on the Banda Oriental ⁽¹⁴⁾.

The King took appropriate steps. The project would swell the already serious annual deficit of 453,000,000 *reales*. In order to help overcome the added financial burden, Ferdinand requested and received papal approval for use of one third of certain episcopal revenues and parts of the proceeds from cathedral chapters and monasteries in Spain ⁽¹⁵⁾. On the political side of the monarch appointed Count Abisbal as both commander of the expeditionary force and the new Viceroy ⁽¹⁶⁾. This force was to number between 10,000 and 12,000 men. The Secretary of State was directed to take all precautions to assure it success. Because of Madrid's gnawing concern over Britain's and Brazil's known sympathies toward the rebellion, Pedro Cevallos undertook to ascertain their position vis-a-vis the enterprise ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Spain had to make haste to stem the tide of the rebellion. The mother country needed to destroy the *de facto* independent government at Buenos Aires.

ORGANIZING THE EXPEDITION

The departure of the expedition to Buenos Aires, and for that matter, the success of the entire pacification scheme depended on the Royal Navy. The seas needed to be cleared of insurgent corsairs; the convoys carrying men and supplies protected; and the rebel's communications with foreigners cut. Spain could not maintain her

⁽¹⁴⁾ Council of State, 6 June 1816, AHN, Estado, lib. 18d. ; Charles Vaughn to Lord Castlereagh, n.º 70, 27 July 1816, Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office Records (hereafter cited as FO) 72/187.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Council of State, 6 June 1816, AHN, Estado, lib. 18d. ; PEDRO DE LETURIA, *Relaciones entre la Santa Sede e Hispanoamérica* (3 vols.; Caracas: Sociedad Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1959-1960), III, 113.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Vázquez to Count Abisbal, 4 July 1817, Vázquez Papers, MSS, 432, fols. 155-158.

⁽¹⁷⁾ War to State, Reservado, 10 June 1816; Minute of the Secretary of State thereon, 13 June 1816, AGI, Estado, leg. 98.

authority over rebellious and remote colonies without a powerful navy.

Ferdinand conceded the importance of a strong navy ⁽¹⁸⁾. Yet the fleet continued to decline in strength. Many ships were old and rotten. As early as June, 1816, the Minister of Marine could muster only two frigates, one corvette, and one brigantine ⁽¹⁹⁾. Two months later the King learned that of twenty-four seaworthy vessels all but two or three required a complete overhaul. But, dockyards lacked materials and qualified personnel to complete the work. Funds were not forthcoming, although allocated ⁽²⁰⁾. To aggravate matters, desertions were rife in this branch of the service ⁽²¹⁾.

The Marine Department fell victim to the Minister of Finance's endeavour to institute economy measures. Over the protests of Ministers and officials, José Vázquez Figueroa saw his request for a minimal 120,000,000 *reales* slashed to 100,000,000 ⁽²²⁾. In actual fact, the Marine Department would receive only 20,000,000 *reales* ⁽²³⁾.

The insurgents exploited the Royal Navy's impotence. Corsairs flying the flag of the revolutionaries approached the Peninsula to attack ships in the environs of Cadiz ⁽²⁴⁾ and captured rich cargoes off the Canary Islands ⁽²⁵⁾. In American waters these privateers proved more daring. With four vessels — two frigates and two brigantines — they disrupted Spanish commerce. Ships blockaded Callao. Some actually entered the Peruvian port to bombard the fort. To increase the harassment and to prepare for an assault on Lima, plans were afoot to augment

⁽¹⁸⁾ Vázquez Papers, MSS, 432, fols. 39-41.

⁽¹⁹⁾ War to Marine, Reservado, 6 June 1816, «Expedición al Rio de la Plata al mando del Conde del Abisbal (30 mayo 1816 — 4 septiembre 1817)», Archivo Bazan (Archivo General de Marina), El Viso, carpeta 8.

⁽²⁰⁾ Vázquez Papers, MSS, 433, fols. 54-61.

⁽²¹⁾ *Gaceta de Madrid*, 1 May 1817.

⁽²²⁾ Memorials in 1817 of Ministers of *Gracia y Justicia*, War, Marine, and of Manuel Lopez Araujo, AHN, Estado, lib. 60d.

⁽²³⁾ Vázquez Papers, MSS, 432, fol. 86.

⁽²⁴⁾ Council of State, 12 June 1816, AHN, Estado, lib. 18d.; Pedro Cevallos to Manuel de Lardizabal, 9 July 1816, AHN, Estado, leg. 4504; Marine to State, 31 October 1816, AGI, Estado, leg. 98.

⁽²⁵⁾ FRANCISCO PAGES Y BELLOC, *Algunas noticias de las ultimas negociaciones acerca de la independencia de la America Española continental* (Sevilla: Eulogio de las Heras, 1917), p. 6.

the rebels' Pacific squadron by bringing reinforcements from Buenos Aires around Cape Horn ⁽²⁶⁾.

The revolutionaries controlled the seaways. Spain's loss of mastery spawned a lucrative contraband trade. Foodstuffs and arms reached the insurgents. Buenos Aires' trade with Great Britain, for example, increased to such an extent that José Pizarro, Cevallos' successor as First Secretary, considered it an English colony ⁽²⁷⁾.

All signs pointed to the urgency of the expedition. The darkest years for the patriot cause had been 1815 and 1816. In 1817, the royalists were on the defensive. Simon Bolivar returned to the mainland. José de San Martín conquered Chile. The rebels prepared for an assault on Peru. There, the Viceroy's efforts were being frustrated by the lack of adequate supplies and sufficient numbers of reliable troops. An enemy success against Lima could sound the deathknell for Spain's tottering empire in South America ⁽²⁸⁾.

As late as September, 1817, no progress had been made by the Spanish government. Officials showed a reluctance to admit the seriousness and scope of the insurrections. They persisted in attacking the problem with obsolete solutions. The First Secretary's doubts as to the efficacy of military measures alone as a means to quell the rebellions and preserve the empire increased. In fact, José Pizarro seems to have held this belief even before assuming his post in October, 1816 ⁽²⁹⁾. His twenty-two point memorandum on the pacifi-

(26) Marine to War, 15 June; Reservado, 16 June 1816; Manuel Lopez Araujo to Marine, 24 June 1816, Vázquez Papers, MSS, 432, fols. 149, 341, 492-493; Marine to Srmo Sr. Infante Almirante Gral, minute, 6 July 1816, Archivo Bazan, carpeta 1880; Marine to Viceroy of Lima, 20 June 1817, Archivo Bazan, carpeta 2093, DONALD E. WORCESTER, *Sea Power and Chilean Independence* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1962), pp. 13-35.

(27) State to Marine, 13 April 1818, AGI, Estado, leg. 102.

(28) Henry Wellesley to Lord Castlereagh, n.º 78, 15 June 1817, FO 72/198; Marine to Viceroy of Lima, 20 June 1817, Archivo Bazan, carpeta 2093; Commodore Sir William Bowles to John W. Croker, 1 March 1817; 4 January 1818, in GERALD S. GRAHAM and R. A. HUMPHREYS (eds.), *The Navy and South America, 1807-1823* (London: Navy Records Society, 1962), pp. 182-185, 218-219; VICENTE RODRIGUEZ CASADO and GUILLERMO LOHMANN VILLENA (eds.), *Memoria de gobierno del virrey Pezuela (1816-1821)* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1947).

(29) ALVARO ALONSO-CASTRILLO (ed.), *Memorias de José Garda de León y Pizarro, 1770-1835* (hereafter cited as *Memorias de Pizarro*) (2 vols.; Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1953), I, 263.

cation of America, read before the Council of State on 10 September, reflected this conviction. It included such pacific steps as promises to institute administrative reforms and the possible use of foreign mediation. At the same time, the First Secretary proposed the dispatch of a sizeable force to all regions under rebel control — Buenos Aires included.

Over the next five weeks, the counsellors thrashed out the issue, using as a basis the proposals of Pizarro. They, too, urged pacific as well as martial steps, to pacify America. It was now agreed to send the expedition immediately and to forward troops to other insurrectionary areas. In order to implement these proposals, it was suggested that the Marine, Finance, and War Secretaries designate a portion of their budget allotment and that the government negotiate a loan with London firms ⁽³⁰⁾.

Little headway was made in the months to follow. As of March, 1818, officials could not find 80,000,000 *reales* to send 12,000 men to the Rio de la Plata ⁽³¹⁾. Old obstacles remained. The government had to furnish all types of supplies but the treasury and magazines were empty. Naval arsenals were depleted ⁽³²⁾. This lack of equipment was scarcely alleviated by the arrival in February, 1818, of the weather-beaten Russian squadron. The dilapidated state of the five ships of the line and the three frigates prompted one foreign observer to scoff that some would «require more expense in repairs than would be necessary for the fitting out (of) the same number of old ships laying (*sic*) at Ferrol, Cartagena, and Cadiz» ⁽³³⁾. This pessimism echoed the apprehensions of the Marine Secretary ⁽³⁴⁾.

The persistent nature of these difficulties forced Pizarro and the counsellors of state, in late April, 1818, to push for an emergency meeting of the Military Junta of the Indies. This advisory body could evaluate such anticipated problems as: 1) Spain's lack of resources; 2) the advanced state of the insurrection; 3) matters of logistics; and

(30) Council of State, 17 September; 24 September 1817; Council of State, 15 and 18 October 1817, AHN, Estado, lib. 20d.

(31) Council of State, 4 March 1818, AHN, Estado, lib. 21d.

(32) George Erving to John Quincy Adams, Private, duplicate, 1 March 1818, National Archives, Washington, D.C., «Despatches from United States Ministers to Spain, 1792-1906», Microcopy 31 / Roll 17 hereafter cited as DSS 31/-).

(33) Erving to Adams, n.º 67, 30 April 1818, DSS 31/17.

(34) *Memorias de Pizarro*, II, 286-292, citing memoirs of Vázquez Figueroa.

4) other questions, including ramifications flowing from the continued uncertainty of Brazil's reaction to the venture ⁽³⁵⁾.

The military Junta discussed the issue on the basis of three assumptions: 1) that Spain's forces should not expect any assistance from the country occupied by the Portuguese; 2) that if Brazil did not occupy Montevideo, she would remain neutral; and 3) that Spain possessed the necessary resources. With these assumptions in mind, the members examined the alternatives: to send the force directly to the Rio de la Plata; or to send it first to the Pacific, where it would unite with royalist troops and then combine in an overland march ⁽³⁶⁾.

High ranking civilians and military personnel attended the sessions. Among those present were three former Viceroys: Felix Calleja, Francisco Javier Venegas, and Fernando Abascal y Sousa (Marquess of Concordia). Representatives of the armed forces included Juan Maria Villavicencio, Captain-general of the Navy; Joaquin Gomez Liano, Quartermaster General of the Army; Pedro de la Cuesta, a Brigadier; and José Manuel Goyeneche (Count of Guaqui). Also participating were the former Governor of Montevideo, Gaspar Vigodet, and Francisco Requena, a counsellor of the Indies who had spent more than thirty years in the colonies.

From the outset serious disagreement existed among members of the Military Junta. The contrasting views of Abascal and Vigodet concerning the abilities of the gauchos is a case in point. The former Viceroy of Peru downgraded their prowess by stating that they neither possessed competent leaders nor the discipline and courage of the Cossacks. Abascal asserted that Spain's infantry, supported by artillery, could rout them ⁽³⁷⁾. But Vigodet dissented. He contended that the Gauchos were well-disciplined and capable of fighting trained soldiers. His frame of reference was the fact that three hundred of them had successfully besieged Montevideo which at the time housed 10,000 Portuguese troops ⁽³⁸⁾. This laudatory evaluation received at least tacit support from Joaquin Gomez Liano. A few years earlier the Quartermaster General had informed the Secretary of State that

(35) Council of State, 28 April; 6 May 1818, AHN, Estado, lib. 21 d.

(36) Military Junta of the Indies, 1 May 1818, AGI, Estado, leg. 102.

(37) «Memorial of Marquess of Concordia», 8 May 1818, AGI, Estado leg. 102.

(38) «Memorial of Gaspar Vigodet», 8 May 1818, *ibid*.

the Gauchos were inured to the rigors of the country and could field an army of 15,000 trained soldiers ⁽³⁹⁾.

Turning aside from the enemy's military feats, the Junta moved to the principal issue — whether to send the expedition directly to the Rio de la Plata or first to the Pacific. With slight modifications Vigodet voiced the opinions of those supporting the latter route. For them, a direct assault was fraught with difficulties. These were compounded by the continued presence of Brazil in the Banda Oriental. Among these uncertainties were the questions of disembarkation points and procurement of supplies. The former Governor of Montevideo estimated that the direct route would require a force of 12,000 to 14,000 men, sixty or seventy transports, and a number of both men-of-war and landing craft. Sailing first to the Pacific would be less expensive and more advantageous. Seven thousand men would suffice and once they landed at Arica the men could rest and receive precise information before starting overland. During the trek they could expect assistance from the Indians. Part of the force could be deployed to reconquer Chile — the two contingents uniting afterwards for an attack on Buenos Aires ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Proponents of the direct route rebutted these optimistic contentions. The target of the expedition was Buenos Aires: seat of the revolutionary government; organization point of the rebel army; treasure house of the rebels; and distribution point of arms for anti-Spanish activities throughout South America. The rebel stronghold was only a ninety day journey from the Peninsula. It contained many royalists and possessed, contrary to popular belief, suitable landing points. The alternative course would result in a larger expenditure and greater perils. The troops would be exposed to natural hazards when rounding Cape Horn to the likelihood of capture by insurgent corsairs. They would suffer deprivations while making the final overland trek of more than 1,500 miles ⁽⁴¹⁾.

The members weighed the arguments and then voted. The result

⁽³⁹⁾ Domingo de Torres and Joaquin Gomez Liano to State, 3 October 1814, AGI, Estado, leg. 98.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ «Memorial of Gaspar Vigodet», 8 May 1818, AGI, Estado, leg. 102.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Memorials of Count of Guaqui, 8 May; Marquess of Concordia, 8 May; Pedro de la Cuesta, 8 May; and Juan Maria Villacencio, 8 May 1818, AGI, Estado, leg. 102.

was a tie. Many had opted for the Pacific out of the conviction that Spain could not assemble a formidable enough force to assure the neutrality of Brazil ⁽⁴²⁾.

With the Junta's report in hand, José Pizarro returned to the Council of State on 22 May 1818. Since 28 April, the matter had lain dormant. Again, the counsellors voiced contradictory opinions. They rehashed arguments thrashed out by the Military Junta. Visibly irritated and exasperated by their squabbling, the First Secretary protested that not one member of the Junta had challenged the need for the expedition. Furthermore, he insisted that all had considered the Pacific route as an alternative — to be adopted only if Spain could not send an adequate force.

The fears and conflicting statements of the counsellors could only be allayed and reconciled by the Minister of Marine. The Royal Navy's task included escorting the troops and establishing a blockade. Jozé Vázquez Figueroa conceded Brazil to the side of the insurgents. But a formidable Spanish force could compel her to remain neutral. The remainder of his remarks coincided with the views of those members of the Military Junta who favored sending the expedition directly to the Rio de la Plata. However, in light of the job ahead, the Minister of Marine put special emphasis on the plight of the Royal Navy ⁽⁴³⁾.

The counsellors accepted Vázquez's analysis. They voted to send the expedition directly to Buenos Aires. The ultimate decision still lay with the King.

Nearly four years had elapsed since Morillo's force was rerouted to the Tierra Firme. At long last, it would seem, this burning issue moved from the plane of discussion to one of action. The government ordered troops stationed in Extremadura and Leon to march to Cádiz. In June, 1818, Pizarro presented his final memorandum to the King on the problem of the pacification of America. The First Secretary urged that every effort be made to find 100,000,000 *reales* to defray the cost ⁽⁴⁴⁾. The Marine Secretary, for his part, prepared

(42) «Votación por que se termino esta sesión en la que debia ventilarse si la expedición del Rio de la Plata, ha de ir a este Rio en derechura o dirigirse por el Mar del Sur», 8 May 1818, *ibid*.

(43) Council of State, 22 May 1818, AHN, Estado, lib. 21 d.

(44) «Exposición de Don José Pizarro al Rey sobre la pacificación de America», 9 June 1818, in Jaime Delgado, «La 'pacificación de America' en 1818», *Miscelánea Americanista*, I (Madrid, 1951), 373-380.

his estimate on a sliding scale, to be determined by the Portuguese position. If Rio opposed the enterprise then the fleet must be composed of six ships of the line, eight frigates, ten brigantines or schooners, and twenty gunboats. This would incur a total cost of 38,000,000 *reales*. But if that nation remained neutral, or even friendly, the resultant reduction in the fleet's size would pare down expenditures to 28,000,000 *reales* (45).

To keep up the momentum, José Vázquez Figueroa consulted the Council of the Admiralty in July, 1818, on the practicability of the blockade. That body reported back that to be effective, the Navy would need a minimum of three ships of the line and five frigates, all fully equipped. Half of this force would have to be on duty continuously. The vessels had to guard an area of fourteen miles in order to disrupt effectively rebel communications. These had to be of sturdy construction order to withstand the natural elements. Ships not on patrol would have to remain on stand-by alert to replace those forced into port for repairs.

Service facilities would be difficult to find. Spain should not expect assistance from Brazil, even assuming the latter's neutrality. The report concluded that the government would be taking a calculated risk on the entire venture. This was all the more apparent since there were neither ships nor money for any undertaking, no matter how small (45 46).

Initial optimism gave way to concern. The King's enthusiasm did not allay the fears of officials. José Pizarro began to have doubts about the feasibility of the expedition. In the bureaucratic bungle that had ensued, Ministers neither cooperated nor coordinated their activities (47). The First Secretary knew little about preparations. To aggravate matters, he now learned from the Junta of Pacification, a special committee of the Council of the Indies, that the size of the force would have to be above the original estimate of 12,000 men. The figures now ranged from 16,000 to 20,000 men to be complemented

(45) Vázquez Papers, MSS, 432, fols. 87-101.

(46) «El Consejo Supremo de Almirantazgo en Sala de Gobierno», 6 July 1818, AGI, Estado, leg. 102.

(47) Minute of the Secretary of State, 18 July 1818 on reply to War to State, Muy Reservado, 16 July 1818, AGI, Estado, leg. 89.

by an adequate naval force ⁽⁴⁸⁾. Fewer troops, confided the commander-in-chief, could not accomplish the mission ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Communications from the Marine Department dealt still another blow. The fleet was still undermanned and dilapidated. Yet, Vázquez strove valiantly to organize his meagre resources for the enterprise. But he continued to be bombarded with requests for a wide range of naval operations. The Navy, among its other duties, was expected to intercept filibustering expeditions from the United States and Great Britain to stave off an anticipated attack on Puerto Cabello, and to break the blockade of Venezuela declared by Luis Brion ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Ferdinand intervened to rescue the despondent Minister. So Vázquez believed. In late August, 1818, the King decided to postpone «the expedition». He claimed that the best season for departure had already passed and that preparations were not yet completed. The Marine Secretary interpreted the King's words as a signal to attend to the other requests first ⁽⁵¹⁾.

One month later, the monarch reversed his decision. Foreign and domestic considerations provoked the change. Of the former, Ferdinand saw little chance that Spain's program for the pacification of America, which could involve the use of force, would be accepted by the Allies as a basis for mediation. Their refusal to invite him to the forthcoming meeting at Aix-la-Chapelle confirmed this belief.

On the home front, his action was dictated by a collision between rival factions at Court. José Pizarro, Martín Garay (Finance Minister), and José Vázquez Figueroa contended with Francisco Eguía (War Minister), Juan Lozano de Torres (Minister of Gracia y Justicia), Antonio Ugarte (Ferdinand's private secretary), and others. According to contemporary documents, the conflict focused principally on the chronic problem of the delay in the departure of the expedition to the Rio de la Plata. The first group insisted on the impracticability of the whole enterprise because Spain lacked ships and funds. The second confided to Ferdinand that the exorbitant sum of 40,000,000 *reales*

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Consulta of the Junta of Pacification, 31 July 1818, AGI, Estado, leg. 88.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Wellesley to Castlereagh, Private and Confidential, 10 September 1818, FO 72/212.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ «Resumen», Reservado, Archivo Bazan, carpeta 3014; Vázquez Papers, MSS, 432, fols. 87-101.

⁽⁵¹⁾ *Ibid.*

had been put forward in an attempt to force the shelving of the expedition. Ironically, by late 1819, according to Pizarro and Vázquez, both of whom may have exaggerated, the Junta of Reemplazos had spent nearly 400,000,000 *reales* on the futile venture ⁽⁵²⁾. This insinuation, coupled with other prejudicial charges, such as the accusation that Pizarro, Garay, and Vázquez were «liberais», resulted in their dismissal ⁽⁵³⁾.

Immediately following on the heels of the change, the government reactivated plans for the expedition. The new First Secretary pressed the King to reject foreign mediation as a means to solve the crisis in the colonies. To the Marquess of Casa Irujo, any provision for mercantile concessions, no matter what the mediators might promise, would have dire economic and political consequences. To resolve the problem independently of such a consideration, the First Secretary called for the dispatch post-haste of the expedition on the scale and magnitude proposed ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

The Secretary's rationale convinced the King⁽⁵⁵⁾. Again the government directed its attention on organizing its resources. Madrid intended to raise 60,000,000 *reales* by offering to give eight percent interest in return for a loan, with the King even promising part of the Crown revenue as guarantee ⁽⁵⁶⁾. A tax was levied, also, on all foreign merchants in Alicante ⁽⁵⁷⁾.

Madrid buzzed with talk of the government's struggle both to outfit «the expedition» and to dispatch smaller contingents to other insurrectionary regions. Great Britain was to furnish transports. Russia had promised some frigates to compensate for the insufficiency of those vessels she had foisted on Spain. These stories proved to be just wild rumors ⁽⁵⁸⁾.

⁽⁵²⁾ *Memorias de Pizarro*, 1,274n. ; Matilla Tascon, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41 ; Wellesley to Castlereagh, Private and Confidential, 10 September; n.º 127,15 September 1818, FO 72/212.

⁽⁵³⁾ *Memorias de Pizarro*, I, 273; Wellesley to Castlereagh, Secret and Confidential, 15 September 1818, FO 72/212.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ «Exposición del Marques de Casa Irujo a Fernando VII», 21 September 1818, in Delgado, *op. cit.*, pp. 396-399.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Marginal note of Ferdinand VII on above.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ *Gaceta de Madrid*, 16 January 1819.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ John Forsythe to Adams, n.º 6, 22 August 1819, DSS 31/19.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Wellesley to Castlereagh, Private and Confidential, 10 September 1818, FO 72/212; George Erving to Adams, Private, 11 September 1818, DSS 31/18.

Other factors intervened to delay embarkation. Troops assembled in the environs of Cádiz became disgruntled and restless. Some even deserted. Throughout these years the military had been a hotbed of discontent. Various abortive coup d'états already had taken place. Now in July, 1819, the government foiled still another coup by contingents of the expeditionary forces. The commander in chief, Count Abisbal, was dismissed as a result. In addition, a yellow fever epidemic reaped havoc and increased unrest and tension ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

Disconcerting news from the colonies added to the government's woes at this crucial juncture. A stream of complaints were received from General Pablo Morillo. He told of deprivations suffered by his men and of his need for immediate reinforcements, without which he could not complete his mission ⁽⁶⁰⁾.

But the decision to send the forces to the Río de la Plata stood. The government strove to keep its destination secret. The First Secretary instructed Spain's ambassador to Russia to inform those delegates at Aix-la-Chapelle that it would go first to the Pacific because of the passing of the most favorable season for departure and the pressing need to protect Peru. Only the Russian plenipotentiary was to know the truth ⁽⁶¹⁾. Casa Irujo also ordered his minister at Rio de Janeiro to leak information that the expedition was destined for Chile and Peru ⁽⁶²⁾.

Madrid's intention soon became an open secret. News of the imminent departure and the anticipated arrival of the forces raised the hopes of Spanish sympathizers in Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro. The chaotic political situation in the region further undermined the patriot cause. In the Banda Oriental, many colonists appeared ready to join with these royalists troops against both the Portuguese and the rebels of Buenos Aires. In addition, some revolutionaries even approached the Spanish ambassador at Rio with offers of support ⁽⁶³⁾.

(59) Forsythe to Adams, n.º 7, 18 October 1819, DSS 31/19; JOSÉ LUIS COMELLAS, *Los primeros pronunciamientos en España, 1814-1820*, (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1958).

(60) Rodríguez Villa, *op. cit.*, III, IV.

(61) Marquess of Casa Irujo to Francisco Zea Bermudez, 15 November 1818, AHN, Estado, leg. 5661.

(62) JOSÉ M. MARILUZ URQUIJO, *Los proyectos españoles para reconquistar el Río de la Plata (1820-1833)* (Buenos Aires: Perrot, 1958), p. 61.

(63) *Ibid.*, pp. 60-64.

Ferdinand persisted in his desire to reconquer South America. He turned a deaf ear to all those who insisted on the impracticability of the venture. The advantages to be gained — suppressing the insurgency and retaining the empire intact, not to mention thwarting Portuguese aggression — certainly outweighed any temporary hardships imposed on the nation.

The final decision to use force turned out to be nothing short of catastrophic. On January 1, 1820, part of the expeditionary force led by Colonel Rafael Riego rebelled. The expedition, of course, was never sent. Remnants of Riego's tattered forces eventually stirred other military detachments in the country to declare for the Constitution of 1812. Ferdinand VII was forced to become a constitutional monarch. Much worse, Spain lost most of her colonial possessions, including the Viceroyalty of New Spain.

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